

AU alumnus Peter Jenkins to deliver commencement address

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Thirty years ago, Peter Jenkins, newly minted Alfred University degree in hand and accompanied by Cooper, his dog, set out to walk across America, hoping to discover his country and himself. Along the way, he became one of the top travel writers in the United States today, with seven books beginning with *A Walk Across America* that chronicled the first leg of his journey, from Alfred to New Orleans. The book became a New York Times best seller, as did its sequel, *The Walk West*. His journey will bring him back to Alfred University May 17, when he delivers the commencement address for the Class of 2003. The ceremony, during which Jenkins will be awarded an honorary degree from Alfred University, begins at 10 a.m. in McLane Center on the AU campus. "We are pleased that Peter Jenkins, who has had such a notable success as a writer and photographer, has agreed to deliver our commencement address this year," said AU President Charles M. Edmondson. "Peter Jenkins demonstrates to all of us that a passion for learning and discovery leads to both personal and professional fulfillment." Of his journey that began in Alfred, Jenkins said he, "set off searching for America, wondering about my country. I lived with and listened to people from every kind of life. I learned a great deal." The story of his travels appeared first in *National Geographic*, and then in book form. Jenkins has also written *Across China*, *The Road Unseen*, *Along the Edge of America*, *The Untamed Coast* and his most-recent, *Looking for Alaska*, about which *Kirkus Reviews* said, "On an Alaskan high, (Jenkins) is unmatched by Jack London or Robert W. Service, and the result is as persuasive as an avalanche." *Looking for Alaska* was selected by *Booklist* as one of the top 10 literary travel books of 2001, and Barnes and Noble also named it one of its "Best Books for 2001." It has been a New York Times bestseller as well, and has twice been selected for honors by the independent booksellers of America. Jenkins, who grew up in Greenwich, CT, a suburb of New York City, came to Alfred University's School of Art and Design to earn a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in sculpture and ceramics. When he arrived in Alfred, he remembers thinking, "'There are not many people around and how will I find anything to do?' But the opposite was true." "I had more friends, knew more people, found all kinds of things to do, and most importantly was able to concentrate on the education and creation of Peter Jenkins," he said. "I got to be friends with my professors, as opposed to some of the bigger schools where one is lucky to even have a senior professor until later in their school career. There were no gigantic classes where the professor was a tiny speck down at the bottom of some huge hall." "I believe my broad training in art at Alfred prepared me to reach out and attempt with confidence all kinds of creation: writing, TV, photography, radio and more." He's enjoyed remarkable success in all those fields, winning numerous awards, including prestigious National Geographic "Picture of the Year" honors, and an EMMY for a television series he created. He's a frequent guest on nationally broadcast radio and television shows, and a popular speaker at college and universities across the nation. He was a writer-in-residence at the University of Alaska during the time he was working on *Looking for Alaska*. Through his travels, Jenkins said he has also learned that what he found in Alfred has been confirmed in his treks across the country since then. "In my travels I have found the same thing about small towns. People are brainwashed to think that everything that is happening is in the big cities that this is where to be because this is where all the people are. I have found because of the more human pace and less stress of a small community, humans interact better and are more open to each other. They are less threatened. "For these reasons, among others, I think Alfred and its 'rural' environment offers an excellent incubator for the development of the a person as they transition from young adult to adult," Jenkins added. When not traveling, Jenkins lives with his wife, Rita, and his six children - Aaron, Brooke, Rebekah, Jedidiah, Luke and Julianne - on a farm in middle Tennessee.