



Inside: Congratulations to the Class of 2017!

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independent



The Indy begins a new era.

Cover design by Audrey Effenberger '19.

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You may notice that this issue's number seems to have skipped one. We recently realized that "The Short Issue" (03.23.17) was misnumbered 17 instead of 18, so we've chosen to give this print edition its true number. Digital archives of all issues will reflect the true numbering.

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INDY FORUM



This is HARVARD

The first time I experienced the joy of Harvard was when I received an email congratulating me on my acceptance four years ago. Like many others, I hugged and cried with my parents. And I don't doubt that many other high school students also had the same immense feelings of joy in the face of what seems to be a miraculous event in our lives.

As I reflect back on this moment, I can only conceive of one immutable, significant fact that my own and my fellow classmates' feelings of joy were directed toward as we celebrated with our families: it doesn't have to be this way.

Putting it this way is so close to saying "I am so lucky to be at Harvard" that the immutable fact almost becomes mundane and obvious and cliché. I mean, how often have you heard people say that they are lucky to be here? A lot, I bet. I also bet you tell yourself all the time that things could have been different, too, and that many other people don't have the same luck and, therefore, you should make the most of Harvard.

But luck doesn't cut it for me. It doesn't get at the tireless work and little, unsexy sacrifices people have made to put me on my way to a place with uniquely immense resources that I wouldn't have access to otherwise. Luck also misses the ways in which Harvard doesn't live up to expectations for many people who come here. I don't find many people saying that Harvard could do better to serve its students while also saying they are lucky to be at Harvard in the same breath.

In short, luck doesn't really describe the immutable fact which applies however you look at Harvard: there are many ways in which Harvard doesn't have to be.

For one, Harvard doesn't have to be the place where I went to college. Frankly, the admissions file I saw a few weeks ago confirmed my suspicion that I only got in here by a hair. Both readers of my file wished that my school supported me more but also found that I had potential — further consideration of my application would depend on how my interview went.

For all Harvard's good and bad, it doesn't have to be this way.

BY DAN VALENZUELA

Apparently my interview went well enough that they thought extending an offer to attend Harvard was a good idea. But I still have little clue as to what the readers meant when they said they wished I had a more supportive school. Being from a family of little means, I don't know if I would have been able to go to Russia and Singapore for cultural exchange trips without generous funding and support from my school and school district. It's also hard to think I would have been in the position to successfully apply to an internship at the

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INDY FORUM

This is Harvard, continued.

National Institutes of Health without the rigorous scientific training my magnet school provided. To take the logic even further, I don't think I would be anywhere without my family's strong support and the habits and genes I inherited from them.

All of this should-have-could-have-would-have can seem self-indulgent and beside the point, but there is reason to it. I truly believe that I would have been fine and happy at a state school. The education I received in high school and the support of my family would have been enough to let me do very well there. Yet, as noticed by the readers of my admissions file, these things aren't necessarily enough for Harvard.

Perhaps it was the case that whatever was lacking in my education and my background I made up for in other ways. But I never intentionally did so. I was just going along my merry way until two readers and other admissions officers decided to take a chance on me. It just seems like a happy coincidence.

Now that I have experienced more of Harvard, its happy coincidences are interspersed with rather unsavory ones; the irony of Harvard admissions officials saying that they wished my school supported me more is not lost on me.

I had a tough time transitioning to Harvard like many other low-income, first generation students here. My first semester I ended up with a 2.67 GPA as a result of being overwhelmed with the numerous responsibilities of making friends, cultivating relationships with professors, and committing myself to extracurricular activities.

I don't think I was particularly stupid or inept. But I certainly felt like it. I just didn't know how Harvard's world worked and a lot of my world in high school was just taken for granted. High school was wasn't all that different from middle and elementary school, which meant that I didn't have to juggle too many new expectations.

Eventually, I was able to regain my footing at Harvard, but not all of it. There are many

things I am still not great at, like going to office hours or making time for friends despite my other responsibilities.

But I recognize that it doesn't have to be this way. And I am still making small steps to make up for the things I lack.

Not only do I not have to be the person that has no hope of improving, Harvard doesn't have to be the college where low-income, first generation students lack the support they need to do well. A bridge program has potential to help orient students like me who didn't know what they didn't know. It's not going to fix all first generation students' problems in adjusting to Harvard as they'll have to put work in, too, but it's a step that they don't have to twist their ankles over.

I think every student experiences a way Harvard doesn't have to be when they consider the people they've met here. Harvard doesn't have to be the place where we have made very good friends. In dating, people like to say there are plenty fish in the sea. But with friends like these it's hard not to consider each of them special for all the little coincidences that have led them to be at the same place as you with personalities that allow you all to continuously enjoy each other's company despite your differences.

Lately my good friends and roommates and I have been talking about the importance of all the ceremonies surrounding commencement. To a large extent, my friends would rather not deal with worrying about sweltering heat, rain ruining our nice clothes, the logistics of getting family to the event, begging for extra commencement tickets for said family, or wearing black polyester caps and gowns. I think it's a poor attitude given the immensity of Harvard which commencement celebrates.

Every damn moment we're here at Harvard doesn't have to be this way. It's a small miracle. So many little things that each of us has control over have added up to this big thing that none of us entirely has control over.

This thought is a source of great happiness when Harvard's immensity is pleasurable and good. I am filled with joy at the thought that my family will be at my graduation, and that my friends will be right next to me and that

our educators will be overlooking us and that big elms and oaks we have walked under for years will enclose us together, along with the classrooms we frequented in Sever and Emerson flanking us and with Widener and its stacks upon stacks of books having our backs and with the freshman dorms in which we began to know each other in the corners of our eyes. Very little of these things were directly under each of our control and yet there they will be, each contributing to a happy whole.

And this thought is a source of great comfort when Harvard's immensity is painful and bad. Freshman year is just chock-full of moments which make us feel the pain of loneliness and homesickness, the embarrassment of not knowing the norms of academia which others seem to already know, the envy of another student being offered that internship you wanted but you failed to get, the rejection that results from comping every organization under the sun, and the self-doubt to which all of these things inevitably lead. Yet, again, very little of these things were directly under our control. It really isn't any one person's fault that a student was never prepped for college in ways that other, seemingly well-adjusted students were. But that doesn't mean it can't be any different. It just means that many other things have to go right to make it better, including the small decisions that each person has control over.

All of this is not to say that I am simply content in what Harvard has given us, good and bad, or that I think Harvard is capital-u Unique. Harvard is a place like any other place. It's a locus of coincidences, many of them peculiar. But that mere fact doesn't make Harvard any less special.

What I am saying is that if we don't appreciate Harvard for what it is, if we don't see it as a place that has already brought together people — with all their intelligence, personality, feeling, history, and action — in joyful and painful ways, and as a place that can bring people together in infinitely different ways for the better, then we will have lost a place. And the world will be poorer for it.

Dan Valenzuela '17-'18 will graduate from Cabot House with a degree concentration in Philosophy.

INDY NEWS

The harvard independent

SEASON

Looking back on our inaugural podcast season.

By KELSEY O'CONNOR

A mong the changes witnessed by the Class of 2017 is the addition of a podcast series to the Harvard Independent. It is called Tell Me More and aired its first season this spring! Podcast Editor Kelsey O'Connor interviews undergraduate students about the people who inspire them. Five episodes have been released so far featuring undergraduates from all different backgrounds and with





different perspectives on their inspiration, from James Baldwin to Emmylou Harris, to coaches and moms. There has been a very positive response to Tell Me More and the staff has worked very hard to get the word out! We've been heard on 5 continents and in nearly 20 countries.

Thank you very much to our editors, staff, compers, and of course the guests on our very first season. We look forward to hearing more about who inspires Harvard next semester with season two and new features! Keep an ear out for summer episodes.

From Tell Me More, congratulations to all of the commencing seniors! We wish you the best and if you're ever feeling Harvard-sick, tune in to keep in touch.

That's all for now, you'll hear us soon.

You can listen to all Season One episodes of Tell Me More by visiting

harvardindependent. com/podcast!

All episodes are available for streaming on Soundcloud and iTunes.

Striving for Tmperfection

By PEYTON FINE

Scrolling through Facebook while riding the shuttle from Mather to Maxwell Dworkin, I was struck by a typical Huffington Post article. It was one of those articles about a scientific study that Huffington Post summarized, placed a title on the article, and a friend of mine had liked, so it showed up on my newsfeed. The article was titled, "If you're a nail-biter, you're probably a perfectionist."

"Thank God," I thought as I was riding this shuttle. If you've seen my nails, you know I am a nail-biter through and through. I've tried to kick the habit for years thinking the nail-biting was probably contributing to the fragile nerves that come with papers, psets, and projects. According to Huffington, that wasn't the case, HALLELUJAH!! My nail-biting wasn't stress. I really just wanted my psets to be perfect despite my putting them off for the night before. Again, Huffington Post had come through to solve my problems.

I went on with my life satisfied that I could continue my disgusting nail-biting habit until one day I found myself like so many other nail-biters biting my nail right as I locked eyes with someone I didn't want to see me in this state. For me, it was a crush. A crush will make you do crazy things like in this case trying to stop biting your nails for the first time in four years. But, I knew I couldn't just stop biting my nails cold-turkey. I needed to find and address something deeper than just the habit. So, I thought if I wanted to stop biting my nails, I needed to go to the root of the cause—my perfectionism. Maybe, I needed to accept some imperfection.

As soon as I opened that portal that told me I had been accepted to Harvard, I had expected perfection from this new college experience. I had a picture in my mind of a perfect world in which I would visit Harvard during Visitas,

fall in love with my preferred department of study—the economics department, and easily decide to attend Harvard. Well, we know how Visitas turned out for the Class of 2017, and for me, when I finally made it to campus and sat in an econometrics lecture with Jeffrey Miron, I was so bored that I fell asleep. My inner perfectionist started going through all of the things that were wrong with Harvard. By the time I had worked myself up over all of Harvard's imperfections, I had told my parents that I just couldn't go to school here and proceeded to bite off most of my nails. Thankfully, my parents convinced me that Harvard must not be all bad, and that I should give it a chance.

And, I did. With my rude awakening to economics, I decided to study engineering and fell asleep less, but quickly ran into more imperfections. Professors who were better at researching than teaching, psets that seemed to always overlap, and final projects that left my mother asking "what had the cat drug in" when I returned home in the fall and spring left my nails in a worse state than when I was deciding whether to come to Harvard. But, while focusing on all of these imperfections, I was missing all of the perfect moments: professors like Evelyn Hu and Chris Lombardo who asked me about my extracurriculars or family before I could ask questions about a pset, psets that gave me pset groups who became lifelong friends, and final projects that made me all warm and fuzzy inside when the circuit turned on when it was supposed to. Every time I focused on the imperfections, I was missing the perfection that was also present.

This all came to a head over the last year. The night before housing day during junior spring, a professor, who taught me two classes at the same time assigned a pset in each of the two classes, and those two psets added to another pset I had already been given. It was three psets due on housing day all without

being able to work on them before Housing Day Eve due to the ever-present midterms before Spring Break. Our pset group gathered in the Lamont media room and did not leave until the sun came up. After finishing the psets, I fell asleep on the table of Leverett dining hall as housing day merchandise flew around me, and it was the worst of all the Harvard imperfections I had experienced to date. I ended the junior spring and senior fall mostly just ready to begin the next chapter of my life until a few months ago when a friend from that pset group in Lamont asked me if I remembered that night. I said I did and added in a few choice words for the professors who had assigned those psets. My friend had a different outlook. She said she loved that night. It brought us so close together. She said we wouldn't be friends, and I got to thinking. Without that night that seemed so imperfect, I would not have so many perfections like my friendships with Alex, Janey, Yang, Daniel, Brian, and many others.

Every time I allow ever-present imperfections to bother me and send my eyes straight to my nails to bite, my eyes can't look up and see all of the perfection that is around me. There's nothing wrong with striving for perfection, and I don't know if I ever will stop biting my nails, but I hope all of us don't fixate on the imperfections so much in our lives moving forward from Harvard. Whatever you do when you see those imperfections in your life, let's stop and pay a little more attention to the perfections in our life. Maybe it'll make our fingers look nicer, or cause us not to embarrass ourselves in front of a crush, or maybe it will just make us all a little happier, a little more loving, and a little closer to true perfection.

Peyton Fine '17 is graduating from Leverett House with a degree concentration in Electrical Engineering.

As someone who can neither drive nor even ride a bike, walking (with some occasional help from the Mather shuttle) has by necessity become my main mode of transport around Harvard throughout my four years here. And while some might deride the slow pace walking necessarily imposes as a limiting factor in the endless hurly-burly of Things to be Done and Places to Be that Harvard can often seem like, I for one have come to rather enjoy these walks. Indeed, they've become so much more than a simple means of getting around; rather, they have offered the mental breathing room for contemplation of these four years, of the trials and travails of undergraduate life and of nebulous considerations of that which lies beyond these hallowed gates and ivied walls.

Most of all, however, I will remember all these walks for the views they have afforded me of this wonderful and rich campus in all its glory. Diagrammed from above, the Harvard campus at first seems to resemble a crazy spider-web of tangled streets and aged names: the Yard and the main campus is the large and powerful corpus of the spider itself, and it casts its threads northward past Northwest Labs to the Quad and southward through the variegated river houses to its southern-most outpost, its solemn concrete crow's-nest on Cowperthwaite Street. But in pounding these streets, I have come to know the many threads of this constellation of a campus in closer detail: the wonderful shadowplay of the stonework of Widener's flanking walls on a sunny morning, the bricked-up windows



BioLabs, a northward but not northernmost outpost of Harvard's Cambridge campus. *Francesca Cornero*

These Walked Streets

A very broad meditation on certain tidbits of the Harvard experience.

By ANDREW LIN

of the Fogg and the grey grid of the McKay laboratories, the perched-on-stilts look of the SOCH.

Four years ago, these places would have seemed alien to me, mere geographical markers on Google Maps or a lab group website. But the memories that live within these walls and paths, the exams to which I have rushed and experiments I have crafted and Indy articles whose inspiration has flowed from the paths I have trod – those now imbue these once-meaningless place names with a Proustian memory all their own. Like that madeleine's callback, the sights and sounds and smells of the campus invariably now are callbacks of their own to four tremendous and fascinating years. And as I plod my way along these walks in my twilight years on this campus, I find myself still building on these experiences, adding brick by brick another memory recalled, another conversation at these steps or at that gate, another connection made or idea realized.

For you, my hitherto-unaddressed readers, these memories might be something different altogether; I shan't speculate on these, for

These Walked Streets, continued.

perhaps the most precious quality of memory is the personal and individual imprint it offers, an imprint that is singular to you and the experiences and decisions that have brought you here to this campus and maybe even to reading this article. But in a broader sense, we all share the same basic experience: across the concentrations and secondaries and extracurriculars, we have all shared in the experience of this campus and its glories and foibles. And we have seen it change as well: whether in the snaking extensions to Allston or the loss of Greenhouse to a shiny and new Clover outpost, we do see the future marching into the time that is left of our experience here.

But to contextualize this change, to consider how Harvard has evolved via changes little and large, is beside the point: notionally this is a meditation on people, not on the institutions in which they operate. Yet considering these institutions is an essential part of understanding how people live and operate, especially at the undergraduate level: four years as an undergraduate is bound to leave the imprint of a place on anyone. So to the institution we look, and there is something comforting to see: though we change once we leave these walls, the institution we leave behind shall endure, for Harvard has been and will continue to be long after we have all graduated and gone on to our varied futures.

And yet this institution does offer an individual flavor to each of its students, a flavor that shall like that madeleine linger onwards as an imprint in our pliant minds. Certainly this imprint finds some measure of its permanence in the oft-spoken impact Harvard students may notionally have. And

indeed it is a valid statement: the memories we take from Harvard enrich us not only as individuals but as members of a wider community, ready and willing to take the lessons that we have learned throughout these years and apply them to a nation and a world looking for questions and answers and solutions and ideas. But at the individual level, not merely in terms of this one individual who

has penned this little reflection but for of all us graduating seniors, those memories shall walk with us wherever we go, keeping stalwart company and bearing gifts all their own.

Andrew Lin'17 is graduating from Mather House with a degree concentration in Chemistry & Physics.



These streets – not just Mount Auburn – show off their good looks in the spring.

Francesca Cornero

"Be humble." - Kendrick Lamar.

If only that song had come out in the fall of 2013. For my naïve, high-achieving freshman year self, anything less than a 4.0 GPA, multiple published papers, countless leadership positions, several top-tier medical school acceptances, a burgeoning social life, and a square-jawed, 6'4" genius for a boyfriend would be considered a complete and utter failure of a Harvard experience. Having grown used to the golden child status I had enjoyed during high school, I had set some crazy-high expectations for myself, and seemed to think I would meet them all with ease.

Sure enough, the vast divide between my expectations and reality has characterized my Harvard experience. If I have learned anything at all during my time here, it is to let Harvard humble you.

When I reflect on my time at Harvard, I think about my experiences in terms of how freshman me would have thought about them, and how senior spring me would approach the same situation. Take, for example, my first college exam: the notorious Dan Gilbert SLS 20 mindfu- I mean, midterm. After countless hours of poring over the textbook and rewatching lectures, bright-eyed, bushy-tailed freshman Caroline was ready to slay that exam, and fully expected to get an A. I left the exam post-mortem in tears after scoring a 28/50. Even though this curved out to a gentleman's B, I still stress-ate an inordinate amount of ice cream, convinced that all of my hopes and dreams were dashed.

After a few more subpar test scores and some colossally unsuccessful forays into the world of college dating, the next "tragedy" that struck freshman Caroline was sorority rush. Throughout freshman fall, I had made a small, close-knit group of female friends, and we all decided to rush together. On Bid Day, we stood together in a circle, expecting to all open up our envelopes to see bids from the same sorority. But when we all ripped open the envelopes, I was the only one with a bid from a different sorority. I was crushed. I thought that my only friends at Harvard would ditch me for their new pledge sisters, while I was stuck, friendless, in a sorority in which I did not know anybody.

Over the next few years came my failed attempts to be a DAPA, a PAF, a FOP leader, and an ECHO counselor. I got cut from a club sports team I tried out for. The Office of Student Life rejected my proposal for a new student group the first time I applied. It took me two years to get one paper published, I got scores on Orgo exams that were lower than I had ever thought possible, and I did not even get an invitation to interview at my dream medical school.

Being in this kind of environment has been absolutely necessary to my personal growth.

In short, these past four years were nothing how I expected them to be. And yet, despite all of the rejection and failure to meet my freshman-year expectations, I would not have it any other way. Outcomes that I thought were dismal in comparison to my expectations have actually been blessings. Some of the classes in which I got less-than-stellar grades have been the classes that I've found most interesting because they challenged me. The sorority I joined without knowing anybody helped me make a whole new group of friends in addition to my original friend group. The rejections from countless extracurriculars led me to other organizations that I have truly enjoyed being a member of. While I did not get into my dream med school, I was lucky enough to have been accepted somewhere else.

Though I came to Harvard expecting to be the best at everything I set my mind to, I have learned that there is always someone

Humbled by Harvard

By CAROLINE GENTILE

smarter, harder working, better-looking, more athletic, more empathetic, and more successful. It is Harvard, after all. Of course, being in this kind of environment has been demoralizing at times, but it has also been absolutely necessary to my personal growth; it has shown me that the only things I can control are my own actions and perceptions, and to try to control and compare myself to the actions and perceptions of others is a waste of both time and energy. My freshman year self would probably look on these past four years with more than a tinge of disappointment, but senior year me is proud of all that I have accomplished here, and is thankful for the opportunity I've had to even attend Harvard and join the Indy, of course.

Caroline Gentile '17 is graduating from Kirkland House with a degree concentration in Neurobiology and a secondary field in History of Science.

INDY ARTS

Lost & Found

Things you cannot get back...

By HUNTER RICHARDS

By the end of your four years at Harvard, you'll grow as a person and gain quite a lot. But you'll lose even more. Here are some of the things you will lose around campus during your undergraduate career:

Sleep

You'll hit the "snooze" button more times than you've swiped on Tinder, and you're roommates hate you for it. The amount of all-nighters you've pulled is starting to outnumber the amount of lectures you've been to this spring semester. In four years, you learn how to accessorize those under-eye bags and own them. Yeah, you're exhausted but that is a LOOK and you're pulling it off.

Canada Goose Jacket

We've all seen the posts in the "Class of" pages. If you didn't lose your Canada Goose jacket at a final club, did you even really go to a final club? Dean Khurana's distaste for single-gender social organizations all stem from the winter he was especially cold because someone grabbed his jacket by mistake, and we all see how that turned out.

Track of Time in Lamont

You know that part of Percy Jackson & the Olympians: The Lightning Thief when they walk into the Lotus Resort and Casino, only to realize that time doesn't exist inside and you can be trapped for decades? Yeah, that's



That freshman innocence, for one. Francesca Cornero

Lamont but the Café's ambrosia is shitty coffee that you can't complain about because on what else are you going to use your BoardPlus?

Food

You'll learn how to live with your trust issues of sharing a fridge. Whether you left that pint of Ben & Jerry's in a common room fridge in your house or whether it was in the tiny freezer compartment of your mini-fridge in your double, it's long gone by now.

Goals

You'll have switched your concentration at least once by the end of freshman fall. You were never a fan of commitment and immediately started itching at the collar after declaring, which is probably why you've

bounced between departments multiple times before settling back down where you started. That thesis you thought you were going to get honors with? Yeah, that went up in flames when you realized how much you hated writing. Feel old yet?

Virginity

You'll probably hold onto that bad boy until junior year or so, but by then you know virginity is a social construct and It's Not That Deep, Fam™. Unlike your jacket or socks, you can't exactly send over your house list looking for this. Especially since you likely have fallen trap to House-cest and your virginity is in a paper bin next to his desk 2 floors above you right now, and it'll probably still be there for a solid month because he's gross and never takes out his trash.

INDY ARTS

Dignity

Whether this is from those countless hours in the depths of Lamont, the number of times you've swiped into a single meal, or how much clothing you've lost, it happens. And it's okay. Just because you lose a couple leaves doesn't mean you won't grow back some new ones and take off on a new branch.

The "Best Friends Forever" bracelet from High School

You haven't even texted your best friend from High School since you told her you'd be coming home for winter break. Even then, you didn't actually make plans to "catch a meal sometime," regardless of the fact that you're next-door neighbors. You did, however, fly across the country to hang out for a weekend with your freshman roommate. But it's nothing personal.

Sanity

You got really great at keeping track of who last took the garbage out, but at what cost? The amount of problem sets you juggled, along with the recruiting you did just to get rejected from the jobs you hoped for, can really take a toll.

Multiple Pairs of Socks

No matter how hard you try, you'll never come to one-up the washing machines in your dorm for all your four years here.

Keys

Taping the door has become your brand. The security guards know your name and room number by heart after all the late-night lock-outs you had before you realized you had a roll of packing tape lying around. Yeah, you'll get term-billed but it's about the friends you made along the way.

Lost & Found,

continued.

Weight

Just kidding, those Freshman 15 keep hitting you where it hurts (your ass). Just like your student loans, the weight starts gaining interest and you're looking for ways to default on this, too.

Hunter Richards '18 (hrichards@college. harvard) is not quite done with Harvard, and is still searching for things lost and things not yet found.



We really miss those socks during the Cambridge winter...



...but sometimes, it's not so bad.

Francesca Cornero

year in *review*

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Congratulations to our graduating seniors, and thanks for another amazing year! See you in the fall!