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WORLD

BY YOU:

AN UNCONDITIONAL, WARM, PAINFUL,  
WEIGHTED, SLAP-IN-THE-FACE REALIZATION

# MASTHEAD

February 18th, 2021

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# CONTENTS

03

*A Professor Professes Love*

BY MARY JULIA KOCH '23

04

*Competing with COVID*

BY GRACE VON OESTE '24

05

*Why Educate Generally?*

BY MICHAEL KIELSTRA '22

07

*Loving Yourself*

BY ACHELE AGADA '23

08

*Love?*

BY ARSH DHILLON '23

CARLI COOPERSTEIN '24

10

*Chocolate & Love*

BY NOAH TAVARES '24

MARY JULIA KOCH '23

11

*Facetime Love*

BY YASMINE BAZOS '24

12

*Talking Bouquets*

BY KATE TUNNELL '24



# A Professor Professes Love

*Harvard English Professor Elisa New reflects on her marriage to Larry Summers*

by MARY JULIA KOCH '23

Professor Elisa New and Larry Summers are very different people. “Larry is an extrovert and I’m an introvert; he likes sports and competition and I do not,” New tells the *Independent*. “We are in many ways a dramatic illustration of how opposites attract.” Summers was President Emeritus of Harvard University from 2001 to 2006. He served as the Director of the National Economic Council for the Obama Administration, and as Secretary of the Treasury of the United States, among other senior public policy positions. He now teaches classes on the evolution and influences of globalization at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government.

New, on the other hand, is a professor of American Literature. She teaches courses bearing the titles “Poetry in America” and “Humanities in the High School Classroom,” where students read not the textbooks of economists, but rather the poems of great American writers like Ralph Waldo Emerson. New notes the disparity between her and her husband’s academic interests: “Economics and English are fields based on very different assumptions and methods.”

Nevertheless, nearly 15 years of marriage have prevailed over all that difference. Indeed, difference is what brought the couple together, for New wouldn’t have met Larry

without help from Natasha Lance-Rogoff and Ken Rogoff of the Economics department—the department perhaps overlapping the least with the field of English.

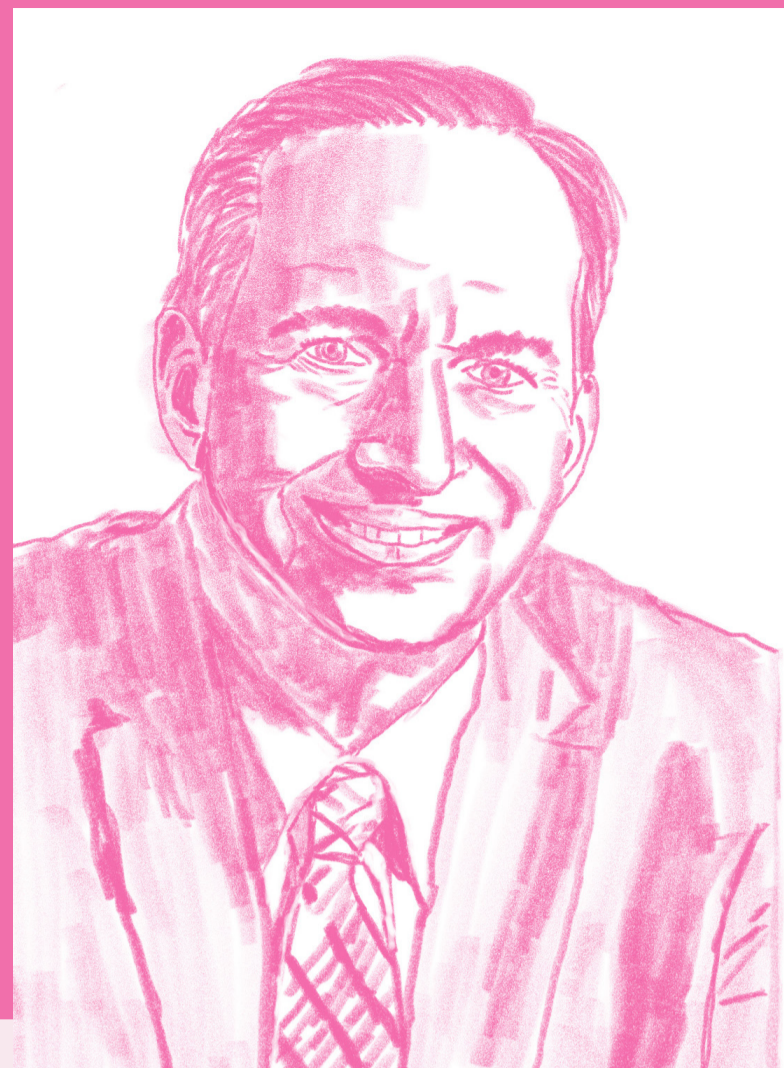
According to New, their meeting was a product of serendipity and a bundle of discovery. New had bumped into Lance-Rogoff, and a conversation ensued. “She knew that I had three children, so did Larry, and we’d both gotten separated in the last several months,” describes New. “She told me I’d find him funny and irreverent and warmhearted and she was so right. She predicted our children would end up liking one another—they love one another.”

After Lance-Rogoff’s encouragement, New sent Summers an email to ask him out. “Though he was not my direct supervisor, he was the President and I was a faculty member,” remarks New. “It is an interesting question whether we’d have dared to date today. I’d hope we could have managed that.”

New and Summers spoke for several nights on the phone before meeting at a Persian Restaurant on Beacon Hill, called Lala Rokh. This was in 2001, the week after 9/11, and the first fall of Summer’s Presidency. The date got off to a rocky start: “He was quite late; I chose a restaurant he never in a million years would have chosen—and that also had no convenient parking,” describes New. But over the course of dinner, the sparks of an emerging romance rendered these troubles inconsequential. “We liked each other enough that I realized lateness was not a dealbreaker for me, and he accepted I might ask him to eat at inconvenient restaurants,” she remarks.

*Like* turned into *love*, and in 2005, New and Summers married. “Both of these discoveries [from our first date] continue to be a daily feature of life together,” says New, offering a poetic drop of wisdom: “Anything one discovers about a person in the first month, or even on a first date, is probably never going to change.”

New and Summers currently reside in Brookline with their six children, and their yin and yang personalities continue to complement each



other. “Larry and I are both really passionate about the work we do,” she says. “We both work long hours and have big goals and we support each other in those.”

As a professor of poetry, New shared one of her favorite poems about love: William Carlos Williams’s “This Is Just To Say,” in which the speaker confesses to having surreptitiously eaten a box of plums from an icebox. They were “delicious / so sweet / and so cold,” and he simply could not resist. Believed by some readers to originally be a note from Williams to his wife, the poem “bundles essential wisdom for people in relationships,” says New. For life and love are precious, like a box of plums—or, in the case of New and Summer, like Persian food at an inconvenient restaurant, the small discoveries marking the moment when love begins.

*Mary Julia Koch '23 (mkoch@college.harvard.edu) took Professor New's course "Poetry in America" last semester, and fell in love with poetry.*

“For life and love  
are precious,  
like a  
box of  
plums”





# Competing with COVID

*How Harvard's varsity athletes are finding the silver lining in modified seasons*

by GRACE VON OISTE '24

**P** practice social distancing. Limit in-person contact. Zoom as much as you can. For the past year, health experts have advised us to fly solo. But for those who have spent the greater part of their lives on a team—such as Harvard's varsity athletes—the concept of self-isolation has proven exceptionally difficult.

In the fall, the College welcomed first-years to campus. Newly minted athletes patiently waited to take their first steps onto the field. While they anticipated some restricted practice time, athletes were unaware of when these practices would start or what they might look like. By October, all 42 of the College's varsity programs attained some level of in-person practice, in line with Massachusetts's Phase II of reopening. According to the Associate Director of Athletics, Timothy Williamson, permissible athletic activity included group sizes of ten or less and a limit of two hours of athletic activity per day, while in-person team meetings were prohibited. Harvard's varsity programs also complied with the general Ivy League playing and practice season regulations for fall sports.

For Binney Huffman '24, a member of the varsity squash team, these guidelines completely transformed her sport. "Squash is usually played with others on court, but with the COVID-19 restrictions last semester, we couldn't do that," she told the *Independent*. "Practice mainly consisted of us soloing on court by ourselves." Similarly, the men's Varsity Lacrosse team looked different last semester, according to George Alvarez '24, whose first team experience at Harvard consisted of only nine freshmen and four coaches. "We had a ton of one-on-one time with the coaches which doesn't normally ever happen when the whole team is there," he said.

Adapting to the new normal was not an easy feat for freshmen on campus. Andrew O'Berry '24, another member of the men's varsity lacrosse team, described initially struggling with the absence of older teammates to pave the way: "It was hard for the first couple weeks because we were trying to figure things out without any leadership from older teammates." In regular times, the burden of navigating life as a first-year college athlete is eased by the guidance of upperclassmen. First-year athletes last semester also contended with the fear of contracting COVID-19. "One of the hardest parts was worrying about getting COVID-19 and having to stop practicing for the minimal amount of time that we were allowed to practice in the first place," Alvarez '24 recounts. If someone on a team tested positive, players and coaches would have to subsequently quarantine.

However, amid all of the difficult adjustments last semester, first-year athletes were able to find the good in their new normal. Practicing with such a small group afforded players the valuable opportunity to receive individual instruction from their coaches. "It really gave me a chance to just get better," said Alvarez, who was able to build his technical skills as a goalie this fall in such an intimate and focused environment. "The ability to have one-on-one time with our coaches really allowed us to better ourselves."

But the best part of practicing last semester was simply getting to play. After months of quarantine, Harvard's athletes were eager to walk on the field again. "Getting to play some sort of organized lacrosse after not being able to play since March was awesome," O'Berry reflected. "Everyone was just really excited to be back out on the field and part of a team."

Huffman, who struggled to find court time in the early months of quarantine, was grateful for the opportunity to practice: "After quarantine, where most of the squash courts have been closed for so long, it was just nice to get back on the court and play. Especially on campus with some teammates." The opportunity for first-year athletes to play their sport again seemingly outweighed any hesitation about modified practice.

This spring semester, seniors are back on campus, in addition to juniors who enrolled last semester and a small group of sophomores approved to stay in Harvard housing. Practices will follow the same guidelines as they did last semester. There are three upperclassmen and three freshmen on campus from the men's varsity lacrosse team. "There are only six of us," said Alvarez. "We are working hard without instant gratification but knowing the hard work will pay off in the end when we really play again."

The *Independent* reached out to several varsity coaches who did not respond by press time.

*Grace von Oiste '24 (gvonoiste@college.harvard.edu) considers herself a varsity spectator and looks forward to getting back on the sidelines.*

**"BEST PART OF PRACTICING LAST SEMESTER WAS SIMPLY GETTING TO PLAY"**



# Why Educate Generally?

*A petition reveals a disagreement over the purpose of the Gen Ed program*

by MICHAEL KIELSTRA '22

Harvard's General Education (Gen Ed) program's website invites its students to "Explore new ideas. Expand your horizons. Engage with the world." It instructs faculty that their proposals for course claims should be "geared toward non-specialists" and "not an introduction to a scholarly discipline." In short, Gen Eds are orthogonal to the main thrust of anyone's concentration or secondary, and seek to build well-rounded people rather than just effective workers.

In practice, though, the Gen Ed program

On January 28, Meaghan Townsend '21, Allison Pao '21, and Nina Elkadi '22 submitted a petition "to Renew Gen Ed 1076 for the 2021-2022 Academic Year." The course in question, "Equity and Excellence in K-12 American Schools," has been taught at least once every academic year since 2011, occasionally more than once. However, it will not be offered this coming academic year, which Harvard College spokesperson Rachael Dane claims is due to budget constraints which have caused Gen Ed courses taught by non-FAS

aged them, do not see it this way. Katherine Merseth, the main force behind and co-teacher, with Fay, of Gen Ed 1076, called the rotation policy "unfortunate and short-sighted" in an email to the *Independent*. The writers of the petition itself, which boasts dozens of pages of signatures from students, faculty, and others, expresses that they are "deeply disappointed." Townsend, in an interview with the *Independent*, explained the rationale behind this: "There is no education department at Harvard [College] ... this course is ... universally



becomes a catch-all for those courses which do not sit easily within a concentration or secondary, and the boundaries between Gen Ed and departmental courses can blur. In the 2019 academic year, the Gen Ed SLS 20, "Psychological Science," became PSY 1, "Introduction to Psychological Science." (Before 2019, Gen Ed courses had many prefixes, depending on the requirement they fulfilled. SLS, "Science of Living Systems," was one.) The course was at the time, and has remained, a requirement for the Psychology concentration. More recently, a student petition drive has again underscored the difficulty of defining what it means to be a Gen Ed, and has brought to light the resultant precarity of courses that cannot find a home in a department.

faculty to be put on two-year rotations.

Given the College's description of the Gen Ed program, this decision can be seen as a way to encourage students to step out of their comfort zones and explore courses that they otherwise would not plan to take. Jacob Fay, who co-teaches 1076, told the *Independent* that he saw the policy as "an opportunity for students to explore a wider range of the exciting offerings from the Gen Ed program," while Peter Bol, who teaches Gen Ed 1136, "Power and Civilization: China," said the decision "makes sense once you understand salary and teaching load differences between the schools."

The students who signed the petition, however, and the professors who encour-

known and understood as the foundational course for undergraduates to study K-12 education specifically and education more generally." Between the classes of 2019 and 2022, Townsend said, 62 out of the 73 students who graduated with a secondary field in Educational Studies took Gen Ed 1076 at some point. "More broadly," she stated, "this [petition] is about a larger undervaluing of education at the College as a field of study." The petition aims not to keep the wider Gen Ed program from being reformed in a potentially damaging way, but rather to maintain the status of a course which has been crucial to a sizable portion of the Harvard community.

In an email to Townsend, Pao, and Elkadi obtained by the *Independent*, Dean Rakesh



Khurana wrote that “The committee [on General Education], along with the College as a whole, is thrilled to offer courses on education. That specific course is loved by students, as are all the courses which FAS purchases from other faculty.” Gen Ed 1076’s importance to the Educational Studies community does not give it significant additional weight; it is simply another Gen Ed. “All of us at FAS are aware that any course which cannot be offered for budgetary reasons leads to an enormous amount of student disappointment,” wrote Dean Khurana. However, he concluded by reiterating that “the General Education Committee determined that courses that are taught by non-FAS faculty members will of necessity need to be offered on a rotational basis.”

The fundamental question here is over whether the Gen Ed program is, as it claims, a way to inject the liberal arts in general into every student’s concentration, or whether it is

more. If the former is true, then the loss of any given course would be inconvenient but survivable, but Townsend, Pao, and Elkadi argue instead that Gen Ed 1076 has functions beyond providing breadth of knowledge.

The curriculum in this course “can’t be offered through a department at Harvard [College], through FAS faculty, because we don’t have an Education department,” Townsend noted. According to her and the other petition authors, the Gen Ed program allows professors to teach courses which do not currently fit within an existing faculty department rather than waiting for the establishment of a committee years down the line.

Townsend described the existence of the secondary in Educational Studies as “a step in the right direction.” Pao told the *Independent*, “The issue here isn’t necessarily the lack of a Gen Ed on K-12 education. The issue is that the college decided to not renew its only

introductory course on K-12 education for the following year.” Perhaps the Gen Ed label is immaterial.

This petition, then, can be seen as a test case for the soul of the Gen Ed program. Nobody who spoke to the *Independent* questioned the nobility of the Harvard College administration’s stated liberal-arts mission. But many asserted or simply assumed that the Gen Ed program should stretch beyond this mission, as it provides opportunities for professors to offer serious letter-graded courses outside of Harvard’s fifty concentrations and fifty secondary fields. The outpouring of student and faculty support for Gen Ed 1076 reveals just how effectively departmental Gen Eds fill the gaps in the Harvard College curriculum.

Nothing that the College administration has done is apocalyptic: Gen Ed 1076 will return next year, and it was never mandatory for the Educational Studies secondary in the first

place, so students interested in studying education at a higher level can take a different course instead. However, the incident has brought to light a deep tension between students and administrators over whether the Gen Ed program is the right space for teaching individually important courses outside of concentration lines. If it isn’t, the questions emerge about what could replace it and whether that sort of space should exist at all.

Professors David Cutler and Brendan Meade, Co-Chairs of the Standing Committee on General Education, did not respond to an interview

request by press time.

*Michael Kielstra ’22 (pmkielstra@college.harvard.edu) has never actually been told to get educated.*

*Photos by Rivers Sheehan ’23*





# Loving Yourself When No One Else is Around

*Remembering love in a time of social isolation, self-care, and wellness days*

by ACHELE AGADA '23

It's hard to exist in this semi-digital reality without hearing of "strategies to avoid Zoom fatigue" and "the importance of daily walks." The self-care suggestions come from our family and the news, and they are all over the internet—even TikTok recommends you take a break and get some fresh air when you've been scrolling for too long. These suggestions make sense considering the CDC reports "markedly elevated" mental health issues across the US: the stress and isolation of a new virus is getting to us all, and people are taking defensive measures.

Until last year, it was easy to rely on others for support, and love could be given and received in more visible ways. Before COVID-19, I would turn to my friends or potential romantic partners for validation and reassurance, but from my bedroom with strict rules to avoid others, this option seemed less reliable. It took a global pandemic forcing us all to be apart for me to realise that I had to take responsibility for caring for myself. Maybe Ari Lennox was right when she sang, "Self-love is the best love..."

But what does self-love even look like? Is it as simple as saying daily words of affirmation, or treating yourself to a lazy day after a tough week? Can these small acts really fulfill us? Maybe it's growing up in a Christian, Nigerian household, where marriage is placed on a pedestal, or maybe it was all the cheesy rom-coms I watched as a child, but I can't recall a time when the love I gave myself ever felt like it was enough. I've lived believing love is something I had to find and didn't already possess.

For decades, society has been subliminally signalling that we are inherently inadequate. Social media tells us we aren't attractive enough, school systems tell us we aren't smart

enough, and we tell ourselves we aren't worth loving because we are not yet everything we want to be—or at least everything we think we should be. After years of absorbing messages of self-insufficiency, I appear to have lost sight of the fact that I am actually worthy of my own love and respect without changing how I look, what I know, or who I am.

But now, during this time of loneliness, we have remembered self-love. My friends and I have been embracing our emotions and letting ourselves feel all the feelings through group cry sessions (over Zoom) where we ask both each other and ourselves personal reflective questions. It's a work in progress, but if nothing else, there is now more discussion

as an alternative to spring break. As the President of Harvard College, Larry Bacow, wrote in an email to all undergraduates, these wellness days should be "as restorative as possible," with the goal of "contributing to campus-wide well-being." Realistically, these Wellness Days are a sub-par solution to the problems arising from the lack of spring break—I wonder how successfully a single day amongst weeks of stress is for unwinding, and if with so little time they can truly provide relief for students dealing with the increased pressures triggered by online schooling. Still, what if these circuit-breakers are exactly the reminder we need right now to press pause? There's not much you can do in an isolated 24-hours, so why

not utilise these random days off to rediscover self-love?

Whether through participating in laugh therapy yoga offered by HUHS's Center for Wellness and Health Promotion, or laying in bed a little longer, sipping on peppermint tea, and reading a book (strictly for fun, if that is at all possible anymore), we need to do things just because we love ourselves. I'm reading *All About Love* by Bell Hooks in an attempt to radically rethink what love means to me. Though I haven't exactly got it all figured out—sometimes I find myself completely overwhelmed, wallowing in a pit of loneliness—I am now able to identify

these moments when I need a little love, and look for small ways to provide it all on my own. I think with each Wellness Day I will become better at caring for myself, and over time the reminders to participate in wellness will start to come from within. Maybe that's what loving yourself is all about.

*Achele Agada '23 (oagada@college.harvard.edu) is focusing on self-love.*



Marina Zoullas '23

around self-care and wellness than there was before the pandemic. We have all had to find ways to enjoy being in our own presence, for there's less pressure to adapt to external forces when the only person around is yourself.

Even the institutions that have always rapidly pushed us forward are now telling us to slow down to take a moment for ourselves. This spring, Harvard College introduced five Wellness Days, spread evenly throughout the term,



# Love?

*Answered directly by you.*

by ARSH DHILLON '23 & CARLI COOPERSTEIN '24

The *Independent* asked you, Harvard students, to start off your week by answering the over-simplified question: what is love? There was, however, a caveat: your response could only be one word.

To answer this question, respondents had to ask themselves a multitude of other questions first: what does it feel like to be loved? What does it mean to love? To whom would I say I love? When was the last time I said, “I love you”? When did I know I loved or was loved? Regardless of whether love is “give or take,” what encapsulates this feeling, action, force, state of mind? The responses, *Weighted-blanket*, *Pain*, *Warm*, *Comfortable*, *Completeness*, *Home*, and *Quiet*, described love as a feeling, an experience. *Dedication*, *Unconditional*, *Everything*, *Growth*, *Value*, *Caring*, and *Fulfilling* stated love as an action. *Freedom*, *Endless*, *Peace*, *Complicated*, *Real*, and *Unstoppable* generalized love as a force.

The most striking aspect of this poll is every response displayed a belief in love. No one questioned its existence or diminished its power. Maybe it had to do with the matter-of-fact way we posed the question, maybe only those who believe in love answered the poll, or maybe, love is something or someone we know, but can't universally define. So, when given the opportunity, we do what comes most naturally: we tell stories.

Our next question elicited these stories. We asked: if you've ever been in love, when did you know?

“While writing in my journal and realising I'd written I loved him”

“When I realized I wanted to spend every minute of everyday with this person”

“He put on a ridiculous hat, and I couldn't stop laughing. I realized I had been in love for a while”

“When I realized my best friend was the one I wanted to tell all my secrets and insecurities”

Love tends to evade us, sneaking around in the background, growing larger and brighter, until that sudden, seemingly random, slap-in-the-face moment. The one we all know as so jarring, it almost hurts; so fleeting, you can get away with pretending to miss it; and so tongue-tying, your only response is action, “When I realized I might lose her.” Suddenly, we find ourselves taking ownership over what or whom we love: *My boyfriend*, *My mom*, *My dad*, *My family*, *Myself*, *My team*, and *My best friend*. A form of self-preservation, our “my's” make us believe love is fragile—either we protect it or we never touch it—like carrying a case of eggshells that must stay intact, “When I thought about them more than I thought about myself.” For how could we ever let go of love? It arrived shaking us, even breaking us down, to our cores, so wouldn't it do the same once it departs?

Loving is like knowing when and how you'll die. Some will spend their life worrying, harnessing all their energy to make sure the day never comes. Others will do everything in their power to make sure each day up until then is unforgettable. And lastly, a few will do nothing but



Ellie Hamilton '23

live peacefully through their days as if the very knowledge of it gave them life.

How we process and respond to love informs how we give it. There's one day devoted for us to speak in, even show off, our languages of love: Valentine's Day.

What's it like to be in love on February 14th? Fancy dinners, ice skating, flowers, and chocolate that tastes like cardboard. A day devoted to you and yours, to reminisce over your “firsts.” You told us about your first kiss:

“On a picnic blanket around twilight on the lawn at my California boarding school”

“A mama bird feeding her baby”

“Underneath a lunch table”

“Post In-N-Out Burger in his backyard with his mom watching through window”

“On a lifeguard chair at the beach during summer”

“Cute, awkward, and braces”

“Very sloppy, but very fireworks”

The thrill of new love consumes our peripherals, creating heart-shaped tunnel vision one only finds in *Looney Tunes*. Then there are those not in love, observing the others from a distance. For them, Valentine's Day is less a reminder of love, and more so a spotlight on one's lack or loss thereof. Especially during this isolating time, what people see on social media distorts their images of reality, for we don't know what's happening behind the scenes because we can't see them anymore.

This V-Day, all couples expressed their love as publicly as possible, flooding our feeds with

“Loving is like knowing when and how you'll die.”

plenty of PDA. Yet, don't be fooled. 68% of people we polled are not currently in relationships. Even this category of “relationships” is somewhat misleading since it doesn't mandate “my's.” The loaded term relationship throws a heavy, somewhat overblown weight on Harvard students, so it makes sense that 71% of respondents oppose the school's hookup culture.

But, how did our culture behind hook-ups, relationships, and love become so hated? We got too possessive, too far on each extreme of loving, too fearful of living each day with the knowledge of death.

Ultimately, what we found showed us that in between the starts and ends of love, we swim in murky waters. We have no idea what we're doing, and even when we take action, doubt sneaks in and grows: what if someone else could love me better? What if I could love someone else better? Thus, our non-committals, our premature break-ups, our mindless teetering in the middle.

So, The *Independent's* advice for the upcoming year? Remember there is no end to loving yourself. No one will ever love you better than you. To recognize and experience the love that's always existed inside yourself—no matter how deeply buried—will allow you to share it back, fully, with unwavering belief.

Arsh Dhillon '23 (asekhon@college.harvard.edu) misses being your sexpert...until April!

Carli Cooperstein '24 (carlicooperstein@college.harvard.edu) spent V-Day with her dear friends, Ben & Jerry.



# I Wish You Could See These Now

A collection of ~~unset~~ poems and notes by ARSH DHILLON '23  
poems by Abigail Koerner '21  
notes by YOU

Dinner and a movie?  
That's how it starts  
First the popcorn...  
Then my heart.

→ *It's more casual to have love.*

Love feels like  
All the ~~F~~FUCKING time  
I want to need you  
And keep you on my mind

→ *Confess! Already!  
No more games!!*

I love you like  
Swimming through oceans  
Weightless! and free!  
And I want to say thank you  
For loving me hard  
And enough to set me free

→ *I thought I would never love anyone after you, and now I don't know why I ever loved you in the first place.*

Remember when  
We took that one walk  
It was raining hard but I didn't notice  
I could only see you with my heart  
*I wish we stayed in touch.*

*Can we talk?*  
I tried to say "~~I love you~~"  
All that came out was a squeak  
You make me feel like water  
And when I'm liquid, I can't speak!

Seasons change like people do  
in one life's strange phases  
I found a season for you  
To laugh and love  
And learn and smile  
I loved loving you  
For that endless little while

*I think I fell in love with you the first time I saw you, and I wonder if it was the same for you.*

Hate is that strong word  
I have to use now  
When love couldn't hold us  
When we started to drown  
Sinking feels awful  
But that love feels so great  
And I cry when I remember  
This hate was our fate.

*You look miserable and bored in your new relationship.*

Love and fear  
and keeping you near  
This love is boundless!  
But I can't feel free when  
You are the only place I can be me.

*I lied when I said, "It's me, not you." It's always you.*

*You take up so much space in my head sometimes I wish I'd never met you.*

When I see you  
It all fades away  
The years and the hours  
The pain and the dismay  
And I forget disappointment  
Betrayal and everything worse  
I love you so much  
And so, I forget the hurt

*ok, so are you still in love with me or not?*

*I'm breaking up with you because you're bad at sex.*

If I wrote you a love poem,  
What would you do?  
Would you read it out loud?  
Pretend it wasn't about you?  
Would you rip it to shreds?  
Or frame it on the wall?  
I'm scared to find out...  
If you love me at all.

→ *I'm not in love with you anymore but I do love you too much to break up. Selfish of me?*



*“Our impulse to buy chocolate on February 14<sup>th</sup> is a result of centuries of clever marketing.”*

## Chocolate & Love

*Brownish cubes and romance  
are an old pair*

by NOAH TAVARES '24 & MARY JULIA KOCH '23

If you've ever rushed to CVS to buy a box of chocolates on Valentine's Day, you're part of a generations-long, world-wide chocolate obsession. The impulse is not your fault: chocolate manufacturers massively marketed chocolate into a household staple and transformed the way people expressed love. To help unravel this history, the *Independent* spoke to a leading authority on all things chocolate: Dr. Carla Martin '03, the founder and executive director of the Fine Cacao and Chocolate Institute, and a lecturer for the course “Chocolate, Culture, and the Politics of Food” in the Department of African and African American Studies at Harvard University.

What are the origins of society's chocolate craze? Imagine it's 2600 B.C.: you're in a tropical forest in Central America and stumble upon a mysterious green pod—the cacao bean! This bean was culturally valuable to the ancient Maya civilization, says Dr. Martin: “It was common practice in many Mayan communities in Mesoamerica that people exchange a cacao-based beverage as they cemented an engagement between man and woman, or as they engaged in what today we would call romantic practices,” she says.

Why cacao? The bean contains theobromine, a stimulant similar to caffeine. Cacao was fermented into chocolate, becoming the Mayan equivalent of a Starbucks coffee you might share with a romantic interest. In fact, according to Dr. Martin, Mayans associated chocolate with feeling “romantically inclined.” Like saffron or honey, chocolate is an aphrodisiac, or as Dr. Martin eloquently states, “chocolate holds power over our bodies.”

Imparting such impressive natural powers, chocolate was originally reserved for the elite. “We're talking the queens and kings of this time,” Dr. Martin says. “The super elite also came to really debate what place it held in society: was it a medicine? Was it something that could be consumed if you're a religious person?” It wasn't until thousands of years later that chocolate was “democratized” and made accessible to a wider market. Throughout the late 1800's and into the early 1900's, manufacturers in Europe, North America, and East Asia began to sell chocolate-based gifts, such as heart-shaped chocolate boxes and Valentine's Day cards with accompanying bonbons, which we still see today.

This democratization was rooted in an understanding of the psychology of consumption. Food competes with other food: if you buy more broccoli, you'll likely buy less cauliflower. With this reasoning in mind, chocolate manufacturers began to embed chocolate into our daily thoughts. “[The public] needed to be convinced that chocolate should become something of a staple, either in their pantries, or in their gifting practices,” says Dr. Martin.

This was the beginning of “Big Chocolate,” akin to “Big Pharma” or “Big Oil.” When we eat chocolate today, it's most likely a product of Hershey, Mars, Ferrero, Cadbury, or Nestle. These are the “Big Five,” the multi-national chocolate producers controlling 50% of the global chocolate supply. By purchasing scores of family-run chocolate companies all around the world, these corporations came to “massively control the power and the wealth in the industry,” says Dr. Martin. They publicized their products at events such as the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, and campaigned through home economics and domestic science programs, “where people [were] given cookbooks or samples of products to be introduced to something relatively new to them,” explains Dr. Martin. One such campaign has had a lasting impact on consumption to this day: the creation of “chocolate holidays,” a category in which Valentine's Day reigns supreme.

Thus, our impulse to buy chocolate on February 14th is a result of centuries of clever marketing. In addition to manipulating us, chocolate producers may also be hiding something from us. “Today, consumers are more or less set up to fail,” warns Dr. Martin. “That's because most of the cocoa that goes into chocolate that ends up on shelves we can access is anonymized,” meaning that information about the context in which chocolate is grown is hidden from public knowledge. This omission is problematic: “Labor abuses or deforestation practices, the kinds of social, environmental and economic challenges that exist in all of tropical agriculture, might be involved in the production of that product,” Dr. Martin suggests.

While we might not be able to fight the desire to eat chocolate, we can at least take steps to ensure that we feel better about the particular chocolate we buy. Dr. Martin recommends two approaches: firstly, to check the ingredients list on a chocolate product.

If the number one ingredient is cocoa, consumers will be buying “a very different type of product and experience different health implications,” as compared to chocolate in which the number one ingredient is sugar. Dr. Martin also advises that “if the ingredients list is relatively small, you might consider that it's going to be a higher quality product.”

Secondly, she encourages consumers to find de-anonymized information on product packaging that reveals the country in which the chocolate was produced, as well as any certifications stating that it is Fairtrade certified or Rainforest Alliance certified. “If you're able to access that kind of information, you can also make some different assumptions about that cocoa” and the ways in which it was produced, says Dr. Martin.

Though the history of chocolate may be riddled with deceit, its flavor is undeniably delicious. Becoming a chocolate snob might even provide “an incredible opportunity to be curious about your food and where it comes from,” encourages Dr. Martin. To help answer the ethical questions surrounding chocolate production and consumption, she urges people to “look for governments, for NGOs, for academics, for others who are working on these problems. Reach out and get involved. We can only address some of those big bad problems ... through collective action. And if that's not romantic, I don't know what it is.”

*Noah Tavares '24* (noahtavares@college.harvard.edu)  
*can eat pure sugar.*

*Mary Julia Koch '23* (mkoch@college.harvard.edu)  
*can eat 99% cocoa dark chocolate.*



# Facetime Love

*Navigating long-distance relationships during a global pandemic*

by YASMINE BAZOS '24

The trials and tribulations of long-distance relationships are nothing new, but what do you get when you mix them with a global pandemic? COVID-19 has tested couples in unforeseen ways, causing a sort of “make or break” mentality for their relationships this past year. Couples have been forced to either quarantine together or remain distanced and adjust to seeing each other at a record low rate. These challenging circumstances, combined with the ubiquitous fear of physical affection—elbow taps have replaced hugs—have put relationships to the ultimate test.

For some people, the pandemic proved uniquely strengthening to their relationship. “You are sort of forced into living with your significant other for an extended period of time,” says a student who quarantined with her boyfriend last spring. “That can make a relationship a lot more serious, which was definitely my experience.” But if that time ends and they are forced to move away from each other, new challenges may add to preexisting long-distance difficulties. “I haven’t seen my boyfriend since September,” she explains. “He lives in a different country and isn’t sure when he will be able to come back to the U.S., so COVID-19 is definitely putting our relationship into the two extremes as an eighteen-hour time difference isn’t exactly what I anticipated when we started dating.” While her boyfriend has chosen to take a gap year and stay home, she has continued to take classes in Cambridge.

In my own life, I have experienced an “absence makes the heart grow fonder” effect

induced by a long-distance relationship and further magnified by the pandemic. Quarantining with my boyfriend in a time of hardship gave me a new sense of appreciation and love for him. But now that we’ve each returned to our respective colleges, it isn’t a question of when we’ll be able to see each other again—it’s a question of making it work during a time when thousands of people aren’t able to see those they love. When nothing is certain and flying across the country isn’t feasible, it’s nice to have your one constant, even if it’s on FaceTime.

But this also prompts the question of whether one is truly in love or simply seeking consistency. The “safety net” of having a significant other is common in college relationships. Kate Tunnell '24 remarks on her previous relationship: “it felt like something safe when everything else seems so unsafe.” Could long-distance relationships pose as an excuse to feel like not everything in our lives had to change during a global pandemic? Will people “manufacture” their affection in hopes of preserving consistency and comfort in a time of transience and uncertainty?

Looking beyond the Harvard College community, couples in the broader world are facing new challenges, too, whether they are stuck in the same household or communicating across disparate time zones. COVID-19 is prompting an increase in the terminations of long-distance relationships, according to BBC research. Break-ups and divorce applications have skyrocketed across the world, and online searches for “how to end a relationship” have spiked. Divorce lawyer Carly Kinch de-

scribed the pandemic as “the perfect storm” for couples, as well as a catalyst for break-ups. It seems COVID-19 has taken its toll on just about everything; love is suffering, too.

However, not all light is lost. The *New York Times* dedicated a piece to “Couples Who Found Romance in a Year of Tragedy,” detailing stories of those who have stumbled into unanticipated love stories of their own during the pandemic. In a random shared taxi ride in Egypt, a woman and a man met, began chatting, and spent the next nine months speaking over the phone. Once they were able to travel to meet each other properly, the couple began a long-distance relationship which they remark on today. “We have lasted because we always tried to be thankful for having met, instead of questioning that we were separated.” For some people, dating long-distance during the pandemic didn’t tarnish their relationship, revealing that time and space can, in fact, contribute to love.

*Yasmine Bazos '24 (yasminebazos@college.harvard.edu) hopes to visit her boyfriend in Virginia once COVID-19 is under control.*







# Talking Bouquets

*The love language of flowers*

by KATE TUNNELL '24

**I**n the Victorian Era, lovers used flowers to tell each other what they couldn't say out loud. People would send bouquets filled with meaningful flowers for their romantic interests to read, like a glamorous letter but without the words. For example, a woman might know a man "fancied" her through a particular flower left upon her doorstep. In this alluring, enigmatic way, the rules of "Floriography" allowed the rules of Victorian culture to be broken, and the term "talking bouquets" arose.

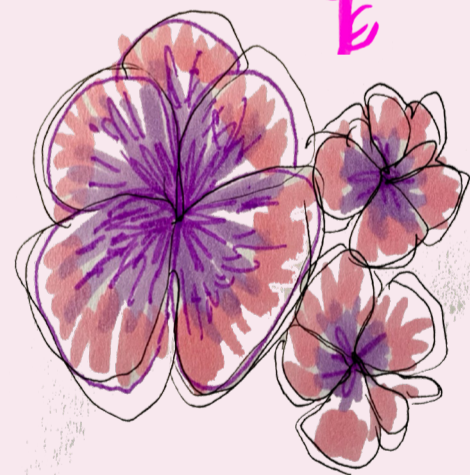
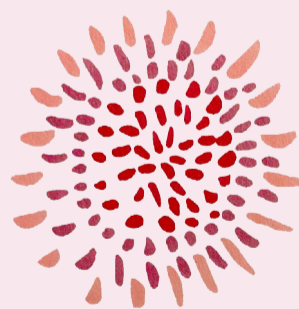
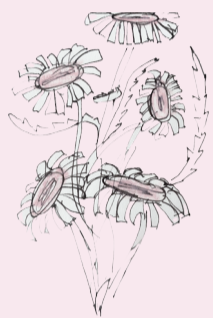
The Old Farmers Almanac, a reference book from 1792, gives us insight into the language of hopeless romantics from centuries past. Different types of flowers held different meanings, conveyed through the colors and shape of the plants: sensitive flowers represented chastity; deep, red roses symbolized the passion of love; white flowers were associated with virtue; and yellow flowers, with friendship. Each flower's meaning has gone through transformations throughout history, based on varying cultural values across time and places. Thus, the symbolism of particular flowers today depends on the recipient's geography.

This language largely originates in religion and mythology. The meaning of the white daisy, for instance, derives from its association with the Virgin Mary, as well as the story that God dotted white daisies over the land as tribute when an infant died—hence, innocence and purity. The passion and deep

love associated with tulips arose from a Persian tale of a royal couple. Farhad was in love with a princess, Shirin, but she died before he could confess his love to her, leading him to kill himself in sorrow. The legend says red tulips bloomed from his blood on the grass where he fell. Lilacs are linked to new beginnings and the feelings of a first love, as they bloom in the spring, the season of renewal. According to mythology, the lilac was born from a beautiful nymph who turned herself into the flower after being frightened by the overt affection of her suitor, Pan. This first demonstration of love produced the purple lilac in place of this nymph.

Perhaps the idea of flowers as a symbolic language deserves a 21st century rebirth. Today, public displays of affection are not disdainful or forbidden, but there is something special about the secret seduction of the flower language—and the lusciousness of holding nature in your hand—that warrants a place in our increasingly online lives. Imagine a carnation instead of heart eyed emojis, white daisies instead of a digital angel face, and real roses instead of the cartoon equivalent.

Think about what message you'd like to send your special someone, and browse the flower store instead of the emojis on your iPhone.



*Illustrations by Kate Tunnell '24 & Yasmine Bazos '24*

## BLUEBELLS

Constancy, for an everlasting love story.

## WHITE DAISIES

Innocence, the blossoming of sweet, new love

## IVY

Fidelity, the link between a married couple

## LILY

A modest interest

## PEONY

Bashfulness and a happy, prosperous marriage

## TULIP

Passion, love rages

## PURPLE LILAC

Little sparks, the first emotions of love

## YELLOW ACACIA

Shhhh, a secret love

## PANSY

Thinking of you...

## HIBISCUS

A delicate beauty

## PINK CARNATION

I love you lots, xo Mom



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TO NO ONE  
BUT  
OURSELVES

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