

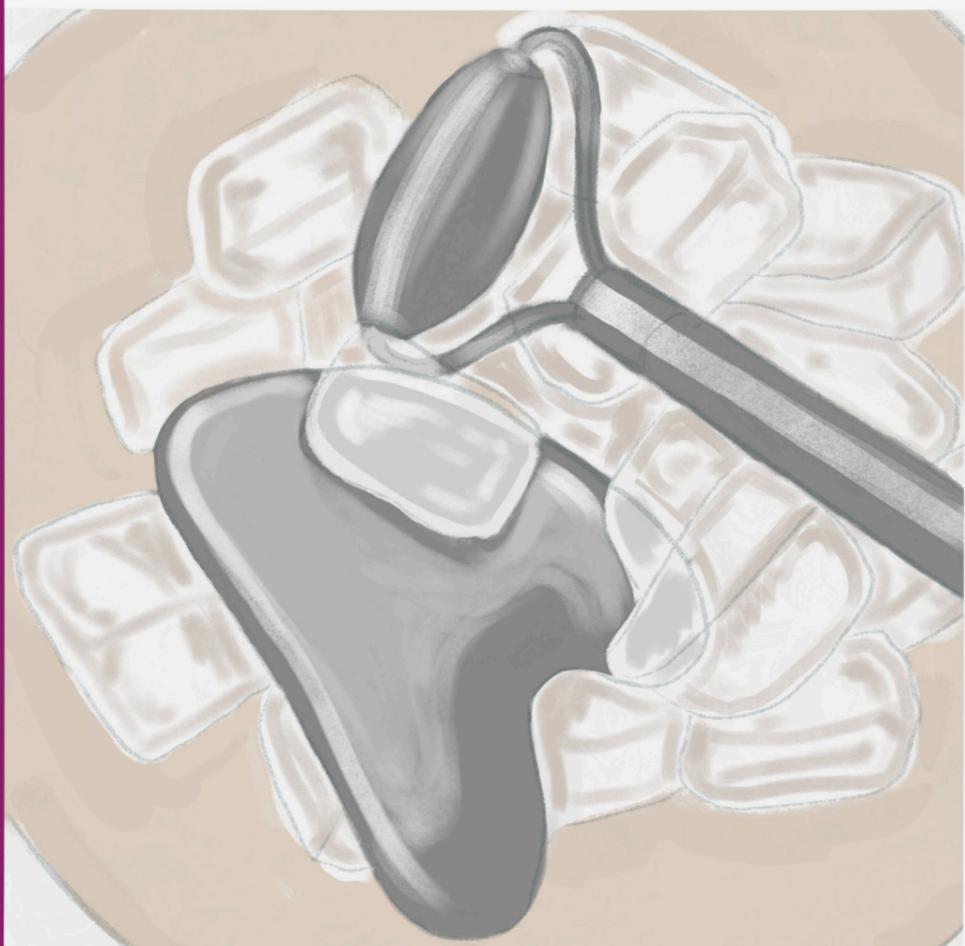
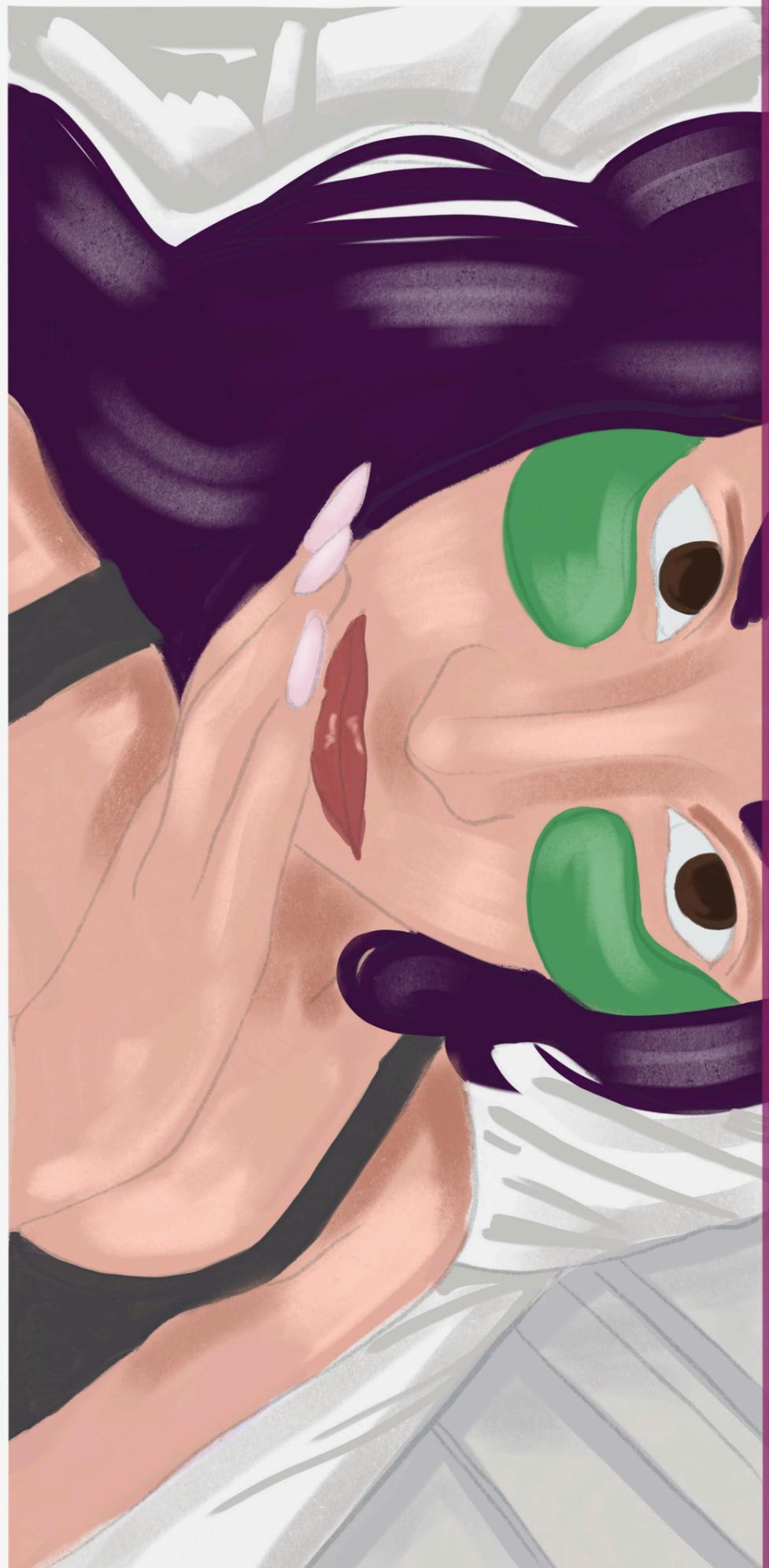
FEBRUARY 19, 2026

HARVARD

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INDEPENDENT

THE STUDENT WEEKLY SINCE 1969



CONTENTS

3. To Sleep or Not to Sleep

by Elle du Pont '29

4. Q&A with Dr. Robert Waldinger and Dr. Ellen Langer

by Julia Bouchut '29

6. Red and Blue, Back in the Yard

by Simon Farruqui '29

7. Emma Gray and the "Sober Party Girl"

by Mia Wilcox '28

8. At My Khala's House, We Eat Banana Bread

by Rania Jones '27

9. Wellness in a Hopeless World

by Katherine Chung '29

10. The "New York Times" is Wrong About Cannabis Legalization

by Erik Stauffer '29

11. Selling Self-Care

by Miriam Tsegay '29

12. Wellness Warrior

by Miranda Chao Hwang '28

14. Always a Bridesmaid, Finally a Bride

by Rania Jones '27 & Sara Kumar '27

16. Giddy Up for the Hasty Pudding Theatrical's 177th Production 177

by Adedoyin Adebayo '26

19. Exploring Worldwide Hometowns: Campbellton, Canada

by Lucy Duncan '28

19. Kitchen Sink No. 4

by Jonah Karafiol '26 & Luke Wagner '26

20. Dining Hall Tea Connoisseurs

by Ellie Guo '29 & Cloris Shi '29

21. Bad Bunny's Unforgettable Dance: The 60th Super Bowl Halftime Show

by Olivia Le '29

22. No Days Off?

by Tyler Dang '28

23. In Case You Missed It: Men's Basketball Harvard-Yale!

by Megan Legault '28

24. Wellness Checklist

by Chao Nguyen '29 & Riley Cullinan '27

About the Independent

As Harvard College's weekly undergraduate newsmagazine, the Harvard "Independent" provides in-depth, critical coverage of issues and events of interest to the Harvard College community. The "Independent" has no political affiliation, instead offering diverse commentary on news, arts, sports, and student life.

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To Sleep or Not to Sleep

On Harvard undergraduates' circadian rhythms and what classes like Gen Ed 1038 "Sleep" are trying to do about it.

BY ELLE DU PONT '29

As midterm season draws closer, sleep can be the last thing on many students' minds—except for those taking Gen Ed 1038 "Sleep." This classic Harvard College course has been running since 2009, reaching around 400 enrollees each semester. Taught by Dr. Charles Czeisler '74 and Dr. Frank A.J.L. Scheer of the Harvard Medical School Division of Sleep Medicine, the course is one of the most well-known on campus, providing students a comprehensive look at everything from the biology of sleep to cultural attitudes surrounding it.

Throughout the semester, Czeisler and Scheer discuss everything from the problems with snoozing alarms to the science of circadian rhythms. For them, the real-life effects of sleep matter just as much as the science behind it.

"Gen Ed 1038 'Sleep' is really designed to provide students with a foundational understanding of the science underlying our understanding of why we sleep, and how we can use the benefits from research on sleep to apply that to our lives," Czeisler explained to the "Independent" in an interview alongside Scheer.

The course, which provides the "foundational understanding" Czeisler describes, was prompted by student interest—and ignorance—of the science behind sleep.

After Harvard University Health Services invited Czeisler, alongside other sleep experts, to give a one-time lecture in Boylston Hall, the sheer number of student attendees surprised the College's faculty and administration. "As we talked about the importance of sleep for memory consolidation, some of the students were angry—" Czeisler said.

"—That they weren't told this before," Scheer interjected.

"Sleep" is now one of the most popular General Education courses on campus.

Instead of a midterm exam, students track their own rest patterns through their "Sleep Tracking Case Report."

"It's for the students to really get a feel of their own sleep habits and how their behaviors impact it. This makes the theory they learn concrete," Scheer explained.

"What is sleep, how do we study it, and what are the consequences? ... How does it impact one's physiology, including in real life? How does it affect your alertness in school and occupational settings?" Scheer continued.

Most enrollees voiced positive feedback about the course, with 79% of 240 respondents disclosing that they would either "recommend with enthusiasm" or were "likely to recommend" the class to prospective peers. Primary critiques about the course stemmed from the large quantity of assigned readings, though the consensus nonetheless stressed that the work was very manageable and enjoyable.

Avery Mizrahi '28, a neuroscience concentrator, took Gen Ed 1038 last spring. "I think the teaching staff was really passionate about their work, but I wouldn't call it a remarkable class," she explained. "Overall, I did not find lectures particularly engaging, but there definitely were takeaways to apply to one's life," Mizrahi noted.

Dr. Tony Cunningham, a former teaching fellow of "Sleep" and now the Director of the Center for Sleep and Cognition at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, emphasized how valuable Czeisler's teaching was in an interview with the "Independent." "One of my favorite parts

about Chuck is he always has some really good anecdotes. He teaches through stories sometimes, and he's full of them. There are still stories of his that I now use in my teaching, in my seminar," Cunningham explained.

But despite the course's popularity, its lessons have not reached many Harvard undergraduates. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends at least seven hours of sleep per night for adults aged 18 to 60. Most college students fall short; according to the University of Georgia, the national average is just six hours.

Many professionals in the field recognize the issue. "I think there's an awareness that sleep is important, but not necessarily a knowledge of what to do about it," Cunningham said.

Jia Michel '29 shared how she usually gets five to six hours a night. "If a test is coming up, I make sure to prioritize sleep so that I have at least eight hours," she said. "I think less sleep has been fine for me, honestly ... If I sleep, I won't be able to study enough."

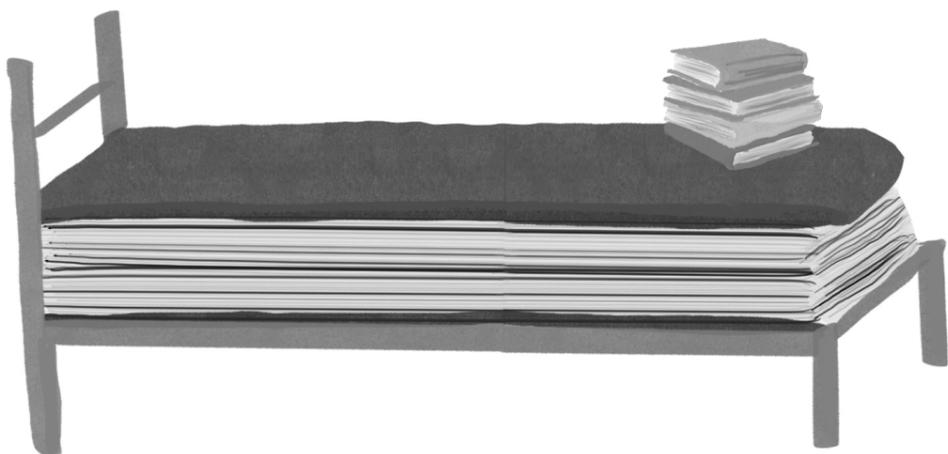
Czeisler critiques getting different amounts of sleep each night, however. "Many students are squandering the time they spend sleeping because it's so inconsistent that the brain can't anticipate when they will be sleeping," he added.

Sleep is just one factor of wellness in students' lives, but it has a big impact on everything else.

"It's not just a sum gain, it's a multiple gain," Cunningham said. "Let's say you're worried about your physical health, and so you want to diet and exercise. Well, not only does getting good sleep help maintain your hunger levels better and optimize your recovery from workouts, it also increases your motivation to engage in both of those things."

ELLE DU PONT '29 (EDUPONT@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WRITES FOR THE "INDEPENDENT" AND HOPES TO FINISH THIS ARTICLE SOON SO SHE CAN GET TO SLEEP AT A REASONABLE HOUR.

GRAPHIC BY SOPHIA RASCOFF '27



Q&A with Dr. Robert Waldinger and Dr. Ellen Langer

A conversation with Harvard psychologists on how to live a good life.

BY JULIA BOUCHUT '29

"How should I lead a happy and fulfilling life?"

This question has plagued humanity for centuries, including many of the ambitious students who have called Harvard College home. Luckily for us, prominent figures in psychology have been developing answers to this mystery since the 1930s. To gain some insight, the "Harvard Independent" spoke with two subject-matter experts: Dr. Robert Waldinger '73 and Dr. Ellen Langer, both of whom shared important takeaways from their many years of research.

Robert Waldinger

Waldinger is a psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, Zen teacher, and the Director of the Harvard Study of Adult Development. Beginning in 1938, the study has tracked the lives of 456 men from low-income neighborhoods in Boston and 268 Harvard graduates. More recently, Waldinger has begun studying the children of the initial participants. According to the project's website, the goal of the study is to examine the "psychosocial variables and biological processes from earlier in life predict health and well-being in late life (80s and 90s), [and] what aspects of childhood and adult experience predict the quality of intimate relationships in late life." In addition, they look into "how late life marriage is linked with health and well-being." The study also questions how late-life experiences, including marriage, impact the above-mentioned factors.

The "Independent" asked Waldinger about what he learned from his research:

What is happiness to you?

RW: There's research on this that there are two big categories of happiness. One is called hedonic well-being. It comes from hedonism. And it's really that question of "Am I having fun right now? Am I happy now?" ... That's the kind of happiness that goes up and down all day long for some of us. And then there's another kind of happiness called eudaimonic well-being. It's from eudaimonic, from the Greek, and it's that sense that life is basically good, and it's basically good even when I'm having a bad day. So it's that kind of ongoing, enduring quality, different from the up and down quality of hedonic wellbeing.

So when we think about happiness, we really want to think about both kinds.

Most of us want some of both kinds, and some of us prioritize one type over another.

What do you think are the most important takeaways from the research or work that you've done?

RW: One is, and this won't be a surprise, really take care of your body like you're going to need it for 100 years. Really take care of your body. And what that means is getting preventive health care, not becoming obese, not abusing alcohol or drugs, and getting exercise regularly. All this sounds like something your grandmother would tell you, but it's really true, and it makes huge amounts of difference in how you feel throughout your life, but also how healthy you stay. So taking care of our physical health is essential.

And then the second one is this finding that we've had over and over again in our study, that relationships are so important to health as well as happiness. So good relationships, healthy relationships, relationships that aren't filled with conflict, that those [attributes] are essential for helping us both weather the hard times that life brings to everybody, and to bring a lot of joy into our lives and a lot of opportunities into our lives.

How would you describe a good relationship, beyond one in which there isn't a lot of conflict? How would you characterize that dynamic?

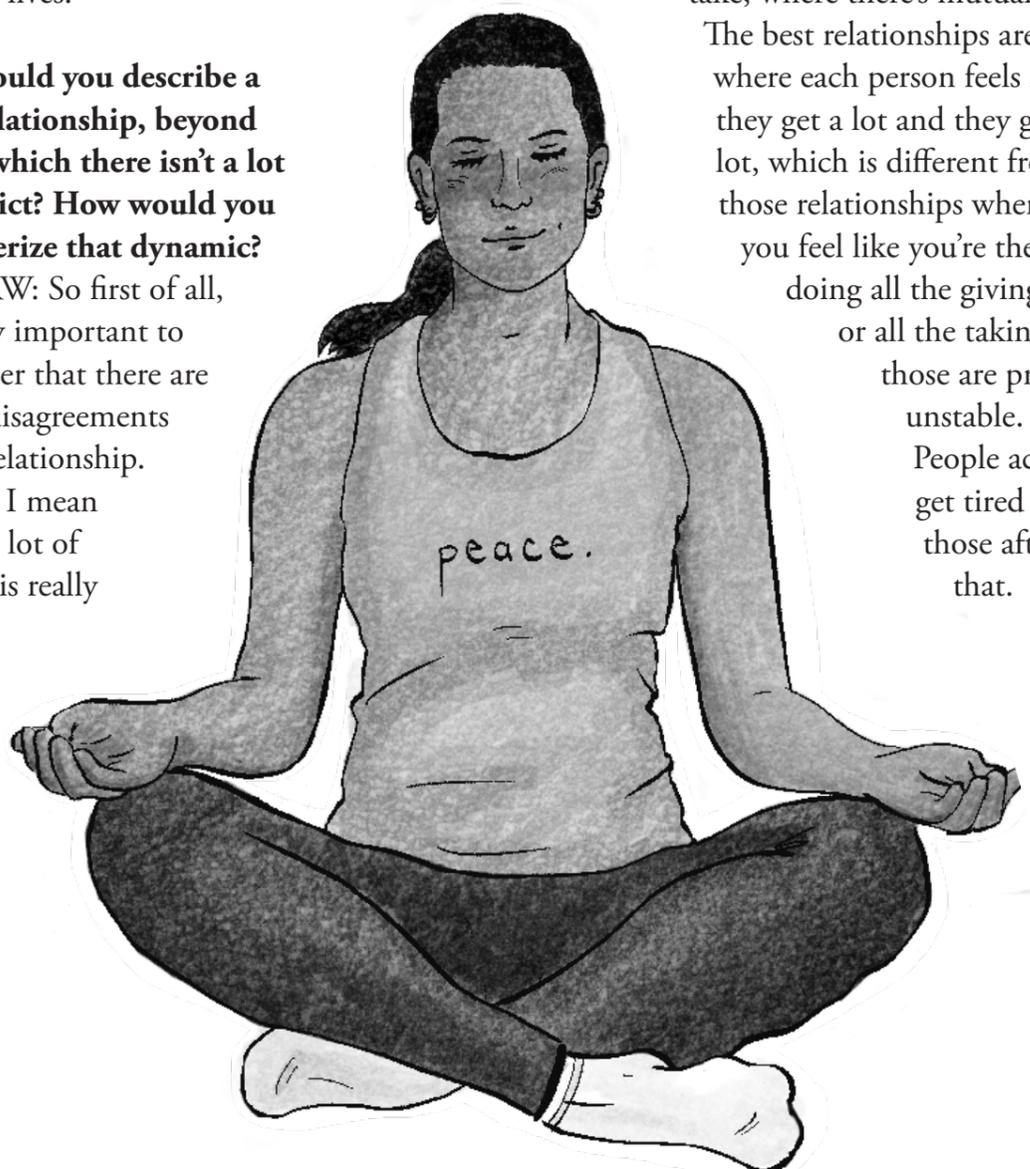
RW: So first of all, it's really important to remember that there are always disagreements in any relationship. So what I mean by not a lot of conflict is really

acrimonious conflict where people are really fighting and being mean to each other, and people are feeling like I have to win and you have to lose. Those are the kinds of relationships that really break down our health as well as our happiness. But the best relationships are relationships where there's conflict, and we figure out how to work with conflict. How to work things out so that neither person feels disrespected, and we find a way to go forward with a disagreement.

But those are the best things, and ideally relationships where there's give and take, where there's mutuality. The best relationships are where each person feels like they get a lot and they give a lot, which is different from those relationships where you feel like you're the one doing all the giving or all the taking; those are pretty unstable. People actually get tired of those after that. But the best relationships are relationships where there's conflict, and we figure out how to work with conflict. How to work things out so that neither person feels disrespected, and we find a way to go forward with a disagreement.

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Ellen Langer

Langer is a professor in Harvard's Department of Psychology and the first woman to receive tenure in the Department. She is recognized as "the mother of mindfulness," having authored the bestselling book "Mindfulness" and conducted extensive research on the subject. Langer's most notable research includes The Counter Clockwise Study, in which Langer tracked whether a retreat that mimicked the conditions of 1959 could positively physiologically affect men in their seventies and eighties. The results found that the participants' performance in both physical and mental tests had improved after just one week, suggesting that aging is more complex than simply the passage of time.

You talk a lot about mindfulness in your work. So what is mindfulness?

EL: Probably the best way to understand mindfulness is to start with mindlessness. After decades of research, it's become clear to me that virtually all of us are mindless ... When you're mindless, you're no different from a robot, and robots don't have choices. Robots can't be happy. None of us should be robots. So how do we become robots? ... I believe it's because we're taught to seek certainty, and once you think you know something, you no longer pay any attention. If you knew what I was going to say next, why would you listen to me? But it turns out, since everything is always changing, everything looks different from different perspectives. Everything is new. When you know you don't know, then you naturally tune in.

So the best way to become mindful is there are two steps to either top down or bottom up. Top down is to appreciate uncertainty ... If you know you don't know, then you pay attention. Another way to get to this is bottom up. So if you actively notice new things about the things you think you know, you'll see that, gee, you don't know them as well as you thought you did.

So if you just look around your room, for instance, and notice three new things, and you walk outside and notice three new things, and notice three new things about somebody you think you know well, and all of this will lead you to that same place of realizing everything is always changing. So what we need to do is learn how to exploit the power of uncertainty, which goes against the way most kids, most students, study to learn absolute facts.

Now it turns out that as we're actively noticing new things, which is the essence of being mindful, the neurons are firing. And decades of our research has shown that's literally and figuratively enlivening. So in early studies, we teach elderly people to be more mindful, to notice new things. They live longer.

When you're noticing new things, people find you more trustworthy. You seem more authentic and more and more attractive. When you're mindful, you bring something special to the things that you're doing. So the products that you're creating seem to bear the imprint of this mindfulness. Everything is better. And if you think about it, if you're going to do it, why do it if you're not there for it? So this is the, essentially the key to our health and well-being.

What do you think are the most important takeaways from the research you have conducted?

EL: To be the kind of person you want to be, to be happy and healthy in many ways, is a lot easier than most of us assume.

What is mind/body unity?

EL: Most people were brought up implicitly, not explicitly—I don't think your parents said to you, "So you have a mind and a body"—but everything that you learn suggested this dualism. And when you have this dualism, then you're stuck with the problem of how do you get from this fuzzy thing called a thought to something material called the body? And everybody has experienced this. You see somebody regurgitating, and then all of a sudden, you yourself feel like you're going to vomit.

Nothing's happened. Or a leaf blows in your face. And before you realize it's just a leaf, your pulse and blood pressure increase because you're a little frightened, and say, "Oh, it's only a leaf." So your thoughts are affecting your body, and so to me, I said to myself, "Mind, body, these are just words, and even if it's just for heuristic purposes, let's put the mind and body back together as a single unit." Now, all the control becomes available.

We have many, many studies, one of the most recent was done with my graduate student Peter Aungle, and we inflict a wound, a minor wound, because I'm not a sadist, nor is he, and even if we were, the IRB [Institutional Review Board] wouldn't let us do it, but it's a minor wound, and people individually are in front of a clock. Unbeknownst to them, the clock is rigged. So for a third of the people, it's going twice as fast as real time. For a third of the people, it's going half as fast as real time. For a third of the people, it's real time.

Now, most people would assume that the wound is going to heal when the wound heals, but that's not what we found. The wound healed based on clock time and perceived time. So we have many, many studies, most of them are described in my last book, "The Mindful Body: Thinking Our Way to Chronic Health," and in study after study, we find that our minds are far

more powerful in bringing about the outcomes that we seek than most people realize.

What do you think are some easy ways we might improve our lives daily?

EL: What we need to do is become more mindful to not run from not knowing, but to understand that, since everything is always changing, we can't know. Nobody really knows, and then everything becomes potentially interesting ... I believe that what we're pursuing is a happy life. And as I said, now it's not that hard to be happy. Stress is psychological. Events don't cause stress. What causes stress are the views we take of events. If we open up those views and are more mindful, we have many different ways of understanding things. The stress will dissipate.

...

Waldinger and Langer both challenge the notion that physical well-being and happiness are fixed. Instead, they propose that humans have much more control over their lives through the choices they make on a daily basis. Waldinger's research focuses on the impact of human relationships: by developing healthy relationships, people can increase their happiness. Langer, on the other hand, has found that humans can reclaim control by realizing that their mindset has physical outcomes. She explains that in shifting from mindlessness to mindfulness, individuals can improve how others perceive them, as well as increase the length and quality of their lives.

JULIA BOUCHUT '29 (JULIA_ BOUCHUT@COLLEGE.HARVARD. EDU) HAS NOTICED THREE NEW THINGS IN HER ROOM TODAY: THE PEELING WALL, A SCUFF MARK, AND THE CREAKING FLOOR. SHE REGRETS NOT FILING A DAMAGE REPORT IN THE FALL.

GRAPHIC BY MADISON KRUG '27

Red and Blue, Back in the Yard

Buttigieg and McCarthy Headline IOP's Spring 2026 Fellows Cohort.

BY SIMON FARRUQUI '29

Former U.S. Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg '04 and former Speaker of the House Kevin McCarthy will join the Harvard Kennedy School's Institute of Politics as Spring 2026 Visiting Fellows, the organization announced on Jan. 21. These fellowships are part of the IOP's Fellows and Study Groups program, which brings public leaders to the University's campus for small-group discussions with undergraduates.

The fellowships come at a time when the University has been involved in ongoing discussions with federal officials, situating this semester's programming within a broader national conversation about higher education. Most recently, the Trump administration filed a lawsuit on Feb. 13, seeking admissions records as part of a Justice Department investigation into whether Harvard has complied with the Supreme Court's 2023 decision barring race-conscious admissions. The presidential administration has demanded extensive applicant-level data, including race, academic metrics, and internal evaluation factors, arguing it is necessary to assess compliance with civil rights laws. Harvard has claimed to respond "in good faith" while defending what it describes as unlawful government overreach.

Against a backdrop of federal scrutiny and national debate over higher education, applications to IOP programs have surged, and students continue to pack the JFK Jr. Forum for high-profile speakers. Since 1966, the IOP—and FSG in particular—has convened public servants, political operatives, journalists, and policymakers for weekly, small-group conversations with undergraduates, offering students direct access to the people shaping national life. Students sit around a table and ask the fellows direct questions about what worked, what failed, and what they would do differently in their respective careers.

This spring, these discussions will span a wide ideological divide. Students who have followed Buttigieg and McCarthy through campaign speeches, cable news clips, and social media posts will now have the opportunity to engage with them face-to-face. Rather than watching politics unfold from a distance,

undergraduates will be able to hear directly from the figures impacting national politics.

Buttigieg returns to Cambridge with both a national profile and deep Harvard roots. As a History and Literature concentrator from the Class of 2004, he was active at the IOP, where he chaired the Student Advisory Committee and worked on the IOP's national survey of youth attitudes toward politics. He later earned a degree in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics from Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar.

Before entering the Cabinet, Buttigieg served two terms as mayor of South Bend, Indiana, first elected at age 29 and then deployed to Afghanistan as a Navy Reserve officer. He later went on to serve as U.S. Secretary of Transportation from 2021 to 2025, where he oversaw the rollout of tens of thousands of infrastructure projects tied to federal investment packages, expanded airline passenger protections, and became a leading public voice on supply chain disruptions during the pandemic recovery.

For some students, Buttigieg's appeal lies not only in his national profile but in his roots—words that ring true for Krishnaan Vadia '29, who will serve as a liaison for Buttigieg's study group.

"I think the best part of FSG is connecting with people that you have shared experiences and interests with," Vadia said in an interview with the "Independent." "As a fellow Hoosier involved in Indiana state-level and gubernatorial politics, I felt a strong connection to both Pete Buttigieg's early political career and many of our shared identities and lived experiences."

Vadia, who has worked with Indiana mayors and conducted policy research related to economic development, said Buttigieg's time as mayor of South Bend was particularly compelling. While many focus on his rise to national prominence, Vadia is more interested in Buttigieg's beginnings, he explained.

Beyond participating in discussions, Vadia hopes to take on a more active role this semester. After serving as an associate for Fall 2025 Resident Fellow and former Indiana Governor Eric Holcomb last semester, he will now help coordinate and shape the logistics of Buttigieg's time on campus. "Last semester, my role was more learning and absorbing a lot of information," he noted. "But

as a liaison this semester, hopefully I can take a more active role in shaping some of his time here."

In a statement released through the IOP, Buttigieg reflected on his own time as a student engaging with the Institute's programming. "The IOP has played a vital role inspiring countless

students, including me, to believe in the value of public service," he said. "Empowering young people to participate in politics has never mattered more, and I'm thrilled to be returning to a place where I learned so much." His visit also coincides with his role as a Spring 2026 Hauser Leader at Harvard Kennedy School's Center for Public Leadership.

McCarthy's path to the Yard was different but no less consequential. As the 55th Speaker of the House, he secured the gavel after a historic 15-ballot vote in Jan. 2023, an event that underscored the ideological fractures within his own party. During his speakership, McCarthy touted efforts to secure deficit reductions while keeping the federal government funded and emphasized long-term competition with China, including the creation of a Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party.

Tea Shouldice '29, who will serve as a liaison to McCarthy's study group, explained that part of the draw was the opportunity to engage with a leader who navigated internal party conflict firsthand. "He had a position very high up in our government and had interesting interactions with the more radical wing of the Republican Party," Shouldice said in an interview with the "Independent."

For Shouldice, the appeal is not ideological alignment but intellectual expansion. "It's definitely a way to challenge my views and expose myself to a wider range of perspectives," she said. "They're all just different versions of looking at the same idea. How can I broaden my mindset?"

She added that McCarthy's leadership experience during moments of instability particularly interests her. While government courses often focus on theory, she said, real-world politics rarely follows a script. "Government classes can teach you the expected outcome very easily," Shouldice continued. "But when things don't go as planned on the ground, how you recover from that—I think that will probably be a focus of our study group."

Describing his previous visits to the IOP, McCarthy emphasized the role of students in shaping the next phase of American politics. "Every time I've visited Harvard's Institute of Politics, I've been inspired by the students' commitment to understanding and engaging with the political system as it exists today and how it can evolve in the future," he said. "I'm looking forward to spending a week on campus this spring to share my experiences with this next generation of leaders."

SIMON FARRUQUI '29 (SIMONFARRUQUI@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS EAGER TO JOIN THE CONVERSATIONS IN THIS SEMESTER'S FELLOWS AND STUDY GROUPS.

GRAPHIC BY ANNEISE FISHER '26



FORUM

Emma Gray and the “Sober Party Girl”

A conversation on sober living, and why Generation Z is drinking less overall.

BY MIA WILCOX '28

“I’ll come out, but I’m not going to drink tonight” has become an increasingly familiar refrain as I find many of those around me falling in line with reported generational decreases in alcohol intake. While these words are not quite a commitment to full-fledged sober living, the physical and mental benefits of decreased drinking are certainly present.

In January, Lauren Mechling of “The New York Times” published “The Sober Party Girl Revolution,” exploring how Gen-Z influencers have given sobriety a hot-girl makeover. It cites the emergence of dry members’ clubs like The Maze NYC alongside a growing community of young, chic, abstaining influencers as revelatory of a new era of partying.

The marked decrease in alcohol consumption in young adults is attributed to a variety of factors. A 2025 “Time” article pointed to increased usage and accessibility of other substances like marijuana, as well as increasing awareness of the adverse health effects of alcohol—previously held beliefs like the so-called health benefits of moderately consuming red wine are being debunked.

To learn more about this cultural shift, I spoke with Harvard alumna Emma Willoughby Gray '19, author of the Substack channel “Uncurated Chaos,” who trademarked the term “Sober Party Girl.”

For me, influencers like Gray are the clearest indicator of this generational shift: a growing emphasis on mental and physical fitness over peer pressure and a move away from a Baby Boomer culture that framed alcohol consumption as a means of relaxation.

Gray described her personal journey, beginning as an undergraduate at Harvard College in 2012, then taking a two-year leave of absence after struggling with addiction through her freshman year. After facing family intervention, trying various rehab facilities, and overcoming relapses, Gray finally saw the light of sobriety, giving her the resources and confidence to return and graduate from the College.

“I think I was perpetually 16, and when I was using and drinking, my behaviors were very much the same of this 16-year-old Emma. So it’s definitely like a rebirth when you get sober and try and figure out who you are again,” she explained. “It was amazing and terrible all at the same time: there was a lot of loss and heartbreak ... So much of my identity was substances.”

After working in corporate finance for six years post-grad, Gray decided to change career course last summer, delving into her interest in fashion and social media influencing. When I first came across her platform—without realizing our similar New York upbringings or her connection to Harvard—I was struck by her embrace of sober living as simply an element of her youthful, adventurous lifestyle. I found it a refreshingly true-

to-life style of influencing that feels rare these days. Her content, a conglomerate of hot Real-Real finds, storytimes, parties, and AA sayings, reads to me as both fun and lighthearted and also truly down-to-earth.

It is from this truthful expression of her identity that “Sober Party Girl” arose: “I never had an intention of making ‘Sober Party Girl’ a brand, or doing anything like that with it, but I always wear my sobriety on my sleeve,” she related. “I tried to not do that [but] for me, it was too similar to lying, or too similar to hiding such a big part of my identity that it never made me feel good.” In embracing this identity, Gray still enjoys all the facets of an active social and party life, choosing only to forgo the drinking.

She explained that in the height of her addiction, substance use was deeply intertwined with her deteriorating mental health. “It felt like everyone I was around was really heavy, and I was heavy, like, I was dark and depressed and heavy,” Gray said. “Now it’s like, everything I do is light and everyone’s silly and there’s so much whimsy. It’s not that heaviness anymore.”

Gray’s story is reflective of many who suffer from addiction, turning to substances as a coping mechanism for emotional pain and social stressors. The National Institute on Drug Abuse highlights the wide variety of causes: “People use drugs for many reasons: they want to feel good, stop feeling bad, or perform better in school or at work, or they are curious because others are doing it and they want to fit in.” The latter rings especially true for young people, particularly college students, who often feel peer pressure to conform, as the fear of stepping off the beaten path can be powerful enough to keep them in line.

For Gray, the combined effects of anxiety and being surrounded by other users became fuel for her addiction. “The problem with using any substance for anxiety is that it’s a really good solution. It really does help. But what you don’t realize is that it only helps when you’re doing it, and it makes it worse at any other time,” she explained. “There’s never going to be a world in which I am never anxious,” she said. “It’s really about how I tolerate anxiety, and how you can sit in the discomfort, and how you best calm your nervous system. Sometimes it’s dumb ... sometimes it’s reality TV, and that’s how I do it.”

In finding sobriety, Gray returned to Harvard, finished her degree, and built a life she felt happy and proud of. “Harvard in general—at least my experience—was that it was incredibly accepting around this. There weren’t a lot of sober people, I’m not gonna lie, but people were really, really supportive of it, and that was really amazing,” she said.

She described the confidence Harvard’s acceptance gave her in continuing her journey

post-grad: “When I came back to New York and started to create a social life for myself here, I already knew that I could do it,” she said.



Through her journey, Gray also found friendship and community. “They say connection is the opposite of addiction for a reason, like addiction is really, really isolating,” she explained. “I think once you find your people, you don’t feel any pressure to do anything. You just can all exist together as you want to be.”

The concept of the Sober Party Girl seems antithetical at first glance, but Gray, along with other influencers in the sober community, is redefining the conditions of “partying” and what makes life fun. Sober partying may not be everyone’s cup of tea—or glass of wine—but that’s the point.

For those quick to criticize Gen Z for skipping the bar-crawl blackout, I ask: what exactly is the problem with going out and having two drinks instead of ten? Or none at all? Partying does not have to be a monolith. If anything, what defines this cultural shift is not abstinence but intentionality and destigmatization. It offers the freedom to decide what kind of night and what kind of life feels good to you.

In Gray’s words, “I think it’s an incredible direction that we’re going in. And I think that the more normalized it becomes, the better.”

MIA WILCOX '28 (MWILCOX@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WILL SEE YOU AT THE NEXT INDY RAGER.

GRAPHIC BY CALEB BOYCE '29

At My Khala's House, We Eat Banana Bread

What survives can still be sweet.

BY RANIA JONES '27

Tuesday, Feb. 6, 2024

I hear a rustle from outside our college dorm door, and I know that my roommates, Ella and Mia, are back from class. Together, they burst in, throw down their bags, and sprawl themselves on the couch. Ella complains about her upcoming sociology paper, and Mia gets started on her next Organic Chemistry problem set.

From my desk chair in the next room over, I hold in my hands the one thing I know they need most: my Khala's banana bread. Quietly taking the loaf out of the Ziploc bag, I walk into our common room, beginning to peel back the layers of the foil.

"Girls, guess what I have..."

In unison, they shriek in the way only 20-something-year-old girls can: "THANK GOD FOR YOUR AUNT!"

For three years now, the loaves of banana bread have come one at a time, roughly every three weeks. It's become a ritual. I collect the bread from the mail room, while my roommates arrange crumpled paper towels on the floor to catch the crumbs. By the time I carry it upstairs, they are gathered and expectant.

The loaves are always wrapped in layers of miscut, fraying tinfoil, and I can see the corners of the bread poking out through the tears. Together, we fight over the extra-baked corners of the bread, and our room becomes a cacophony of affectionate arguing. We nibble using chopsticks and other assorted pieces of plastic cutlery. Each loaf is gone in just a day or two, leaving us anticipating the arrival of the next.

Sunday, April 5, 2013

"Ranno, I'm about to put the bread in, and it should be ready in around an hour. Capeesh?"

Sitting across the kitchen island from my Khala, my brother and I twist and spin on our barstool chairs. The chipping black leather from the barstool seats clings to the back of our sticky arms and legs. We laugh and sip our Shirley Temples, intently focused on our Khala's mixing and folding. I hear the clatter of her metal spoons, the rustle of flour and sugar bags, and the oven door shutting with a certain finality. My Khala's lip gloss cracks along the plastic rim of my cup as she steals sips of my drink.

I am eight, but I don't feel that way.

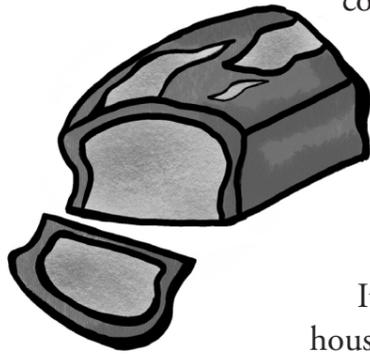
She makes me feel like a real adult, slipping me her "Princess Number One" bites of banana bread batter from a plastic spoon for approval.

In her kitchen, I know where everything lives: the chipped Miami Ohio mug on the second shelf, the drawer under the sink with the good scissors, and the pan on her stove that sticks no matter how much oil she uses. There's something deeply intimate in knowing where a person keeps their pots.

I swing my legs back and forth from the stool. And my brother, beside me, copies.

My Khala has always been my ally. She took me to the malls my parents wouldn't and read me the books they never had the patience for. But when my mom passed away three years ago, the foundation of our relationship fundamentally altered. It lost its sort of gritty innocence—the plastic raincoats, the Shirley Temples, the brittle laughter. My feet could touch the floor from her barstools, and she no longer lived down the block, but across the country, and had for eight years.

Distance drew a gap between how we each experienced our grief, though I imagine it took a similar shape. After all, the mother-daughter relationship isn't so different from the big sister-little sister relationship. They were each other's compass throughout life, just as my mother was mine.



It was at my Khala's house that I first learned how to crack an egg and turn on a stove. She was the one who showed me that vanilla extract doesn't actually taste as good as it smells and that too many chocolate chips can, in fact, be a bad thing for a batch of cookies. We frosted cupcakes on her kitchen island and drew smiley faces on each other's cheeks with the excess flour. She picked me up so I could look at the microwave to watch the butter melt and sat on the hardwood floor beside me while we waited in front of the oven for the cookies to rise. It was these moments

that I missed most when she moved to California in 2014.

My phone buzzes roughly every three weeks at school with a message along the lines of: Ranno, I went to the grocery yesterday and bought overripe bananas for bread this weekend. I'm old and like to bake you bread.

Since my freshman year, just a year after my mother's passing, week by week, the loaves arrive from across the country—California to Cambridge. It's a unique form of warmth to open homemade banana bread in the mail room of a college dorm building.

Banana bread is what you make when fruit goes soft—when time has turned, and you can't stop it. It's a salvaging of sorts. I'm unsettled with what it tells me about survival, though: that we will always be expected to make do with what is left. I did not think compromise would taste like banana and nuts and half-melted chocolate chips.

To lose a mother is to lose the principles of care. My Khala, my mother's sister, has been teaching me a new language. I eat banana bread because it is part of how my Khala and I communicate now. It's how she communicates her care. "Have I told you lately how proud I am of you? I feel so lucky to be your Khala. You are an amazing human, Ranno." And how I respond back. "I'll be okay, I promise." Those same hands that once painted my nails over ripped newspaper clippings now hold space for my grief. My aunt, in so many ways, is what is left of my mother, just as the bread is what is left of the banana.

I'll spend the rest of my life tiptoeing around the jagged hole my mother's death left. But my Khala is stitching it back together. Thread by thread, loaf by loaf. We're still figuring out what this should look like together. And as we do, the bread remains. It's a ritual, a form of care. It's the impossible manifestation of carrying on.

To knead, to wait, to rise again.

RANIA JONES '27 (RJONES@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) NEEDS TO LEARN HOW TO MAKE BANANA BREAD.

GRAPHIC BY CHRISTIANA ZEMBROWSKI '28

Wellness in a Hopeless World

A message to you.

BY KATHERINE CHUNG '29

In 2021, just after the peak of COVID-19 had subsided, I started high school at a small boarding school in northern Massachusetts. Before leaving home, I didn't have to think much about who I was, what was happening in the world, or what I owed to it.

My first disorienting memory came the night of the 2022 Buffalo supermarket shooting, which targeted a predominantly Black neighborhood, amid a period of heightened racial violence across the country. My school hosted a vigil for the victims of the tragedy. Though I didn't know much about the shooting at the time, I followed my friend to the chapel anyway.

A handful of upperclassmen members of my school's Black community went up to the podium to share their thoughts, but ended up in tears. As an Asian, I will never know exactly what they were feeling at that moment, but I recognized the fear and grief in their voices. The world suddenly felt confusing—way bigger, more dangerous, and hopeless. I remember how my heart physically ached, and my hands were clammy.

My friend and I walked back to our dorm in silence. Later in the evening, they opened up to me about their experiences growing up Black in America, and all the tears that they had held flooded out. Something in me shifted—my fear turned into anger.

But that was just the beginning. The following days, months, and years were riddled with police brutality, racial violence, ongoing debates and legislation restricting identities and controlling bodies, increasing book bans across states, rising public rhetoric on immigration, continued acts of antisemitism, and more.

In 2023, the Israel-Hamas war escalated, becoming a deeply sensitive, personal, and frightening issue for many of my friends. I am still trying to learn more about it and understand it as best as I can.

Then came the 2024 election cycle, which intensified polarization, fear, and hostility. Rhetoric rooted in white supremacy, legislation targeting LGBTQ+ people, federal grant cuts, expanded immigration enforcement, and renewed debates over who is allowed to belong consumed me.

After Buffalo, I thought, selfishly, that my anger would harden into something numb and manageable. But it never did. Every incident hurt, and I watched people I cared about suffer, feeling powerless to help or change anything.

Discourse around the turmoil was not an outlet; instead, it suffocated and further repressed my feelings. There were times I argued loudly and regretted the things I said. There were times when I said nothing and regretted my passivity. I kept working to listen and understand others, but the weight of those disagreements couldn't help but linger inside me.

And all of this existed alongside my personal life and my friends' personal lives. When the world keeps hitting you, and the parts of your own life that you thought you could control begin to slip, you start losing hope. You feel tired, wondering why you should keep trying when patterns suggest things won't get better.

There was a recent suicide in my life, one that is not my story to tell, but has compelled me to write this article and speak up. I knew this person through the diversity, equity, and inclusion work at my high school; we tried to shift the school's rhetoric and make even one more person feel safer in their own skin and in our community. It was work sustained almost entirely by hope because real change and meaningful engagement so rarely followed.

I remember nights when I sat at the edge of my bed, feeling helpless, small, and afraid. I had resources, therapy, friends, teachers, and still, I felt alone in that darkness.

I didn't know this person closely, but they were the kind of person who, just by being themselves, brought a smile to people's faces. I never would've guessed they were battling with such deep hopelessness. I think about them. Even with all the support I had, I still felt lonely and scared; I can't begin to imagine what it would feel like to face that kind of darkness without support. It made me realize that even being able to ask for help is a privilege.

When I think about the forces in the world that make someone feel that giving up is the only way out, I long for a clear way to "get back" at the world. But the truth is that we can't dismantle systemic violence, resolve geopolitical conflicts, and undo the harm that's already been done overnight. What I can do is speak from where I stand.

There was a time I wasn't sure I would make it through high school, and now I'm in college—a very well-resourced, appreciated, and validating college like Harvard. I worked very hard in high school, but some things can't be explained by anything other than luck. I was very lucky. And luck always feels relative—like something only a few get to have.

Because of that, I know how it can feel to hear "mental health advice" from someone who, on paper, has "made it." It all sounds like, for lack of a better word, bullshit. So this isn't meant to be a solution; I am not speaking on behalf of any agenda or program. I'm using the space I've been given by the "Independent" to say something I genuinely believe and mean. Take it as you will.

You and I, we won't be able to find the answers to most of our anger and confusion. Loneliness is a monster that we can't control. Shit is going to keep happening. So much of it, too. That's the truth.

What changes is us, and we change simply by living and growing older. Over time, we learn how to name what we feel and build tools to survive moments that once felt impossible. We begin to understand the world with more nuance and learn how to exist inside of that complexity without letting it consume us entirely. One day, we'll look back and recognize how far we've come. With that comes a little bit of hope, and hope is powerful in any quantity.

Today, "wellness" is often reduced to self-care checklists and therapy buzzwords; it can feel pretentious and commercial. Those things matter, but they aren't the whole story. Wellness, to me, means allowing yourself to rest when you need to, but returning and showing up again when you can. Sometimes, it's being able to say, "I'm doing okay," and actually mean it. Other times, it means being able to say, "I'm not okay," and letting yourself be supported.

I know that when we feel scared, angry, and lonely, other people's words don't always come through. I've come to realize that the people who stay—those who keep telling you they care—really do mean it. I can now see this only because I kept on going.

We should lean on each other, no matter how cliché this sounds. But we also must recognize that there are cultural, political, financial, and other barriers that make it harder for some people to trust others and ask for help. If we're serious about care, we should name those barriers and talk about them openly.

I have learned that I am strong, worthy, and capable of getting through challenges and being in control of my life. And so are you. We have power in how we move through the world, how we care for ourselves, how we show up for others, and how we fight for the changes we hope to see. The state of the world doesn't have to control us. I wish I could've said this to the person, and I want to say it to you now: you are powerful. Even in a world that can feel so hopeless, you give it a reason to hope.

**KATHERINE CHUNG '29
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FOR THE "INDEPENDENT."**

GRAPHIC BY JUSTIN MA '29



The “New York Times” is Wrong About Cannabis Legalization

Despite legalization, anti-marijuana bias lingers.

BY ERIK STAUFFER '29

Since Colorado legalized recreational marijuana in 2012, cannabis dispensaries have multiplied nationwide, turning the once-distinct smell of weed into an everyday reality. But despite state policies, the American populace continues to question legalization. Some claim that the principles of liberalism and freedom—so fundamental to America’s identity—should apply to marijuana access and use. Others are concerned about the use of psychoactive substances and their potential harmful effects.

In a recent article, the “New York Times” Editorial Board has taken a new, increasingly skeptical stance on marijuana legalization, marking a shift away from their longstanding position of full support as outlined in a 2014 article. As more U.S. states lift their bans on cannabis, the Editorial Board cites three primary concerns: exponential increase in “excessive use,” surges in cannabis-induced hospitalizations, and detrimental effects on families and innocent bystanders.

These concerns are valid, pointing to a current market for marijuana that is less than ideal. However, backtracking on the progressive legislation that has led us to this point would be chaotic, given the overwhelmingly positive impact of legalization on the economy.

This issue isn’t as black-and-white as pro- or anti-prohibition; the “NYT” isn’t arguing for a federal ban on marijuana—instead, they support a federally imposed tax on marijuana. There are two faulty components to this proposal. State governments are more closely connected to their communities than the federal government. Policy can be tailored to meet constituent needs through state legislation. Furthermore, these states can then spend tax revenue on projects that are needed most—scaling this process on a federal level isn’t pragmatic because different states have distinct needs.

As Americans, we are constantly questioning the extent to which the federal government can infringe upon our individual rights. Of course, there are many important instances where prohibitions or excessive regulations are exercised to protect common interests.

But marijuana is different. It is not a drug that incites violence, and compared to cigarettes or alcohol, it is far less addictive.

The “NYT” Editorial Board is especially concerned with a demographic of weed smokers known

as “heavy users,” described as people who use cannabis daily. Of course, chronic pot consumption isn’t likely to lead to productive lifestyles. But there is a clear anti-marijuana bias trickling through when compared with other, more harmful drugs.

Let’s take cigarettes, for example. Cigarette smoking remains the leading cause of preventable deaths in the United States. If the “NYT” cared this much about health, it would propose a universal ban on cigarettes. But they don’t, because cigarette smoking is culturally ingrained; though extremely harmful, cigarette consumption is widely accepted as an unchangeable, monolithic reality of American life. Odds are, someone on the “NYT” Editorial Board—and even more likely their grandparents—were smoking cigarettes at some point in their lives. The cultural attitude of acceptance towards tobacco products is a product of their longstanding accessibility to the public.

Beyond the fiscal impact of legalization, public health is another important factor. Concerns about increased rates of psychosis are especially relevant to children and teenagers whose brains are in the process of developing. Studies on health and public safety indicate that marijuana legalization has caused no measurable increase in adolescent use.

However, the risk of developing a psychotic disorder from cannabis is substantially higher for adolescents than for adults. Psychosis should be taken seriously, but the main point of concern is with underage users, not adults who can exercise free will more rationally and make choices according to their own risk tolerance.

The “NYT” article also fails to properly attribute legalization with economic gains. The Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City found that, in states with legalized marijuana,

most needed. Other states like Illinois and Missouri use these tax dollars to fund drug prevention and substance abuse programs. Legalization allows states to install stronger safeguards against the rampant use of more dangerous, addictive substances compared to drugs like marijuana.

With all this being said, the “NYT” is right to advocate for some degree of government paternalism.

Adults who use cannabis daily are five times more likely to develop a psychotic disorder than non-users. If people are overusing, then that’s a problem—tax and regulatory policy needs to strike a balance between a thriving free market and a mentally healthy population.

Regardless, by providing people with the option to use cannabis legally, they may feel less inclined to use illegal, more dangerous drugs that pose even greater risks of psychosis than marijuana.

The “NYT” acts as though malicious, large corporations are behind the increased usage of marijuana, along with the negative side effects that follow. “As the industry has grown, it has increased lobbying of state and federal lawmakers,” the “Times” writes, noting the increased “power of Big Weed” as a catalyst for overconsumption.

But in reality, 98% of cannabis companies are small businesses. For-profit cannabis companies aren’t anything like Big Tech or other industries consisting of trillion-dollar multinational corporations that enjoy unchecked lobbying power. If the cannabis market were heavily concentrated, then taxing these companies would make more sense. But, in an economy where small businesses struggle to compete with massive conglomerates and income inequality is on the rise, we should be cherishing the overwhelming success of small businesses following legalization.

Marijuana legalization comes with its ups and downs. Some people love sparking up a joint after a long day of work, whereas others can’t stand the skunky smell. College students have often been depicted as stoners in pop culture. Now, they are using marijuana in record numbers, and this percentage is only growing. Around half of the students at Harvard College are old enough to legally use recreational cannabis under Massachusetts law—it’s unlikely that legalization has had a negligible impact on weed’s growing popularity among the undergraduate demographic.

Legalization efforts have brought about positive change, reducing racial and socioeconomic injustices, creating economic gain, and enabling state governments to provide citizens with transformative services and welfare programs. While no policy is without imperfections, the early evidence suggests that regulation is more effective and equitable than prohibition. The debate was never whether or not to regulate psychoactive substances (we must), but how to refine and expand legalization in ways that maximize public health, economic opportunity, and social justice.

ERIK STAUFFER '29 (ESTAUFFER@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS COMPING THE “INDEPENDENT.”

GRAPHIC BY CLARA LAKE '27



the average income per capita grew by an average of 3%. Polls show that economic issues are consistently a top priority for voters—legalization is creating new markets and providing communities with upward mobility. The massive amounts of revenue that state governments rake in from taxes, fees, and license revenue can fund social programs that benefit communities across the country—a net gain for society despite potential health harms.

In California, the 15% marijuana excise tax revenue is allocated towards public K-12 education and early literacy programs. This is a major upside to legal cannabis; states can tax sales as they please and redirect the extra tax revenue to programs that are

Selling Self-Care

Our wellness is for sale, and it's time to stop buying in.

BY MIRIAM TSEGAY '29

When did wellness stop being a habit and start becoming a trend? When I was younger, it meant staying home with a mug of tea when I had a sore throat, or eating the fruits and vegetables my mom set out with dinner. Now, those small, quiet acts feel insufficient.

Ever since the pandemic, it feels like personal choices are determined by what is trending on social media. Even beyond the highly-curated Instagram posts that plague our screens, the feeds we see regularly impact our time away from screens as well—I know the fated “doomscroll” has shaped my lifestyle.

Especially during the pandemic, when the world shrank to the size of my phone screen, it felt easy to adopt whatever wellness trend appeared on my feed. A morning bowl of ice to depuff my face? Sure. Two-week Chloe Ting workout right before the start of summer? Definitely going to work. I was convinced that I would stick it out, making these “trends” daily habits that would help me become a better version of myself. But sure enough, just a few days in, I would abandon icing my face in the mornings or be too tired to do my 15 minutes of abdominal workouts, bringing my short-lived streak of society-approved wellness to an end.

This nasty habit of capitulating to ever-changing trends under the guise of self-care extends beyond me. It's ingrained in the capitalist nature of our society and has existed long before we were scrolling on TikTok.

In a podcast on “NPR,” author of “How to Be Well: Navigating Our Self-Care Epidemic, One Dubious Cure at a Time,” Amy Laroocca notes that wellness has been sold to us since the 1800s. Rooted in industries' desire to turn a profit, Laroocca explains how wellness is marketed the same way luxury goods are: as an accessory to the perfect woman who is pure, whole, and seemingly effortless. In looking through the diaries of young girls throughout history, she finds a recurring theme: a constant need for self-improvement. It's clear that toxic wellness culture is embedded in our society—it has been from the very beginning.

However, with the digital connectivity of our world, the enduring idea of wellness culture has been exacerbated. Our algorithms make us question whether we're eating in the “right” ways, doing

the “correct” routines, and matching the socially accepted definition of wellness. But instead of making us feel better, our fixation on this constantly evolving trend culture makes it impossible for us to be truly well, both on and off camera.

In this way, wellness culture asks us to perform for ourselves even when others aren't watching. I have caught myself doing that on more than one occasion, feeling the need to look effortless and put together when all I'm doing is spending a Saturday morning cleaning my dorm. “The idea of wearing a matching set at home is a part of the capitalist construct that asks us to perform in our own homes,” Harvard first-year Hafsah Khan '29 said in an interview with the “Independent.”

Being at home should mean being your true self and not feeling pressured to put on an appearance for others. For me, that looks like having makeup and jeans off, sweatpants and a baggy shirt on.

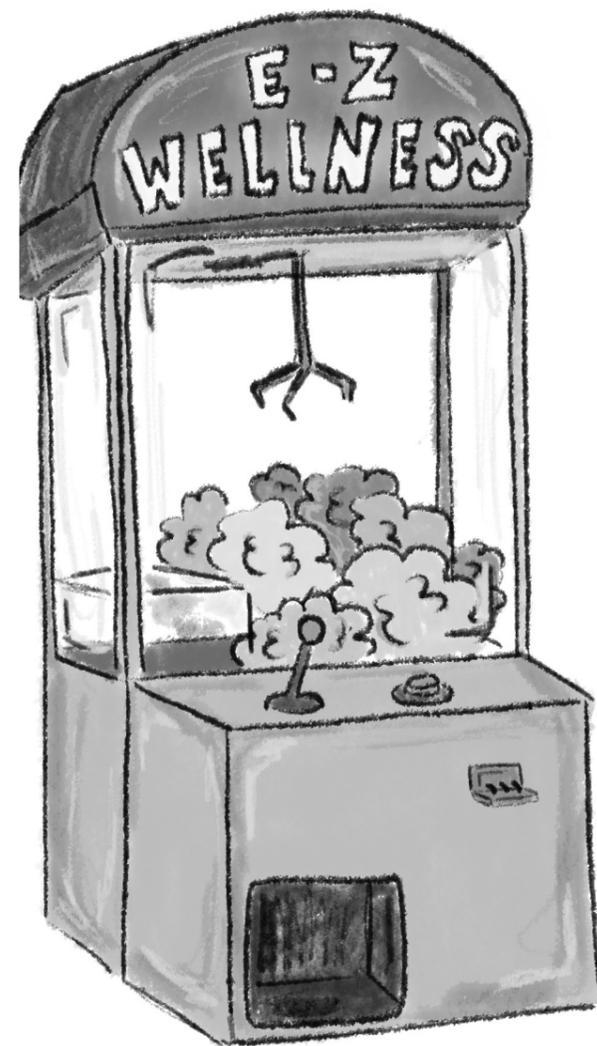
The pressure to embody a socially constructed version of our “best selves” reflects the constant messaging around us. And our collective desire to perform perpetuates the wellness culture that none of us can catch up with.

Wellness is so much more than juice cleanses, multi-step skincare routines, and workout fads. All of these are idealized concepts, sold to us by the industries that profit from our need to buy into what is trendy. But what is trendy doesn't really do much for us. Buying the next gua sha or making the newest green juice again and again isn't necessarily making us feel better and is impossible to maintain in our everyday lifestyles. And the influencers who sell me their various products don't know who I am or what I do daily. They have no understanding of what is essential to me and, therefore, what wellness looks like for me. So how could they ever know what makes me feel my best?

I've realized that the best way for me to practice wellness is to find time in each day to do something for myself. I have found that it is really easy to get sucked into the workaholic culture that tends to define our campus. Instead of letting it control me, I make conscious choices to support my own wellness. Whether that's by spending a day in Boston or reading a book that isn't required for my next section, making time for these things is a small but simple way I can take care of myself.

Spending time with people for whom I don't feel the need to perform is self-care, too. My family, roommates, and closest friends are living reminders that wellness does not require me to be the perfect woman that Laroocca describes. They remind me to do what is best for me.

And wellness is just that—what is best for you. It is the cup of tea when you're sick and a comforting movie when you're sad. I've found, on my many trials of wellness fashions, that the best things for me aren't what everyone deems as flashy and cool. Instead, I find comfort in the things I know will make me feel good: afternoon naps, cafe study breaks, and walks outside as spring (hopefully) approaches.



MIRIAM TSEGAY '29 (MIRIAMTSEGAY@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS FINDING WELLNESS IN JOURNALING AND DANCE PARTIES THIS SEMESTER.

GRAPHIC BY CLARA LAKE '27





ARTS

Always a Bridesmaid, Finally a Bride

The Hasty Pudding Theatricals honors Rose Byrne as their 76th Woman of the Year.

BY RANIA JONES '27 AND SARA KUMAR '27

“W hose idea was it to go and talk to the teenagers? We could’ve had a toddler who doesn’t have opinions and thong underwear.”

No, Rose Byrne, the 76th Woman of the Year, did not say this to the cast, crew, and business staff of Harvard’s Hasty Pudding Theatricals. Thankfully, most are merely opinionated twenty-somethings. The line comes instead from the 2018 film “Instant Family,” in which Byrne plays an overwhelmed foster mother to three. This performance, along with her many others, ultimately led to her invitation to Cambridge this winter.

The Hasty Pudding Theatricals, the oldest theater company in the United States, honored Academy Award-nominated and Golden Globe-winning Rose Byrne as its Woman of the Year on Feb. 13. Amidst the day-long celebration, Byrne led the cast parade, endured a roast from HPT’s President Daisy Nussbaum ’26 and Cast Vice-President Isabel Wilson ’26, participated in a press conference, and attended a performance of HPT’s 177th production, “Saloon Tunes.”

Dating back to 1951, WOY is HPT’s oldest honor, annually awarded to female performers who have made commendable contributions to the world of entertainment. Past recipients include Meryl Streep, Julia Roberts, Scarlett Johansson, and, most recently, Cynthia Erivo.

In Feb. 2026, Byrne received her first-ever Academy Award nomination for “Best Actress” for her performance in the 2025 film, “If I Had Legs I’d Kick You.” The role has already earned her the 2025 Golden Globe for “Best Actress in a Musical or Comedy.” Other notable performances of Byrne’s include Kelly Radner in “Neighbors,” Helen in “Bridesmaids,” Renai Lambert in “Insidious,” and Ellie Wagner in “Instant Family.”

Being honored as WOY includes an entire day of Harvard-centric celebrations, starting with a tour of Harvard Yard and a subsequent parade through Harvard Square at 2 p.m. With zealous fans, eager students, and Cambridge locals alike, Byrne rode down Massachusetts Avenue in style, waving and taking in the crowd’s enthusiasm from the back of a Bentley convertible alongside Nussbaum and Wilson.

Other characters in the parade

included Miss Massachusetts; Miss Cambridge; a Ghosts and Gravestones trolley; and student performance groups such as Harvard’s premier improv comedy troupe, Immediate Gratification Players.

Fans cheered along as Byrne participated in the time-honored kickline with the HPT cast on the steps of Farkas Hall to close out the procession and afternoon.

Later that evening, Byrne took the stage at Farkas Hall for the storied WOY roast, or as Nussbaum and Wilson joked, a “Byrne.”

Nussbaum and Wilson began by paying tribute to Byrne’s expansive and decorated career: “[Rose], we are so lucky to have you here. Really. Your accolades speak for themselves. I mean, a Golden Globe, a BAFTA, and MTV Best Kiss award, and MTV’s Most WTF Moment award,” Wilson said.

“For more than two decades, [you have] proven to be one of Hollywood’s most versatile performers. You know, equally adept in comedy and drama, from blockbusters to independent film, [you are] by far the most talented Australian-accented actress,” Nussbaum added.

Pivoting to Byrne’s most recent role as Linda in “If I Had Legs I’d Kick You,” Nussbaum and Wilson referenced the character’s therapy sessions with a mental health professional played by Conan O’Brien ’85. However, the HPT pair suggested that Linda’s

continued reliance on drugs and alcohol meant that even O’Brien’s efforts were insufficient.

“Lucky for you, Izzy and I have one Psychology class total under our belt. So I guess the question is, ‘How are you today, Rose? How are you really?’” Nussbaum probed as she, alongside Wilson, sat on stage pretending to be therapists.

Faux glasses on and notepads out, the pair presented a variety of blurred images, intended to resemble the Rorschach test, widely used in clinical settings to identify mental illnesses. These self-indulgent ink blots included a promotional poster of “Bridesmaids” and a picture of Byrne herself.

The two then returned to Byrne’s Australian roots, cracking many jokes about the stark cultural differences between the United States and Australia: “You know, they have kangaroos; we have horses. They eat Vegemite. We eat ketchup. They call you ‘Rose Byrne,’ and we call you after Margot Robbie and Nicole Kidman have already said no.” (And don’t worry, Byrne was laughing along with these jests.)

Wrapping up the roast segment, Nussbaum and Wilson brought Byrne’s relationship status to the forefront of their conversation, noting how she refers to her long-term partner Bobby Cannavale as her husband, though the pair never officially got married.





Nussbaum cracked an almost-too-perfectly set-up joke. “I guess what you’re saying is, always a bridesmaid, never a bride,” she said, paying tribute to Byrne’s iconic role in the seminal romantic comedy “Bridesmaids.”

The pair brought out HPT members Bernardo Sequeira ’26, Jackson Coombs ’26, Arwen Zhang ’26, and Matt Chen ’26 to play Byrne’s bridesmaids as she was to be wedded to the one true love of the evening—her gold Pudding Pot. Presented by writers of HPT 177 Benjamin Langman ’26 and Gunnar Sizemore ’27, Byrne recited a series of vows to the pot, including a promise to shout out the Hasty Pudding Theatricals in all future speeches of hers. Byrne christened the marriage and evening with a long-awaited kiss to her Pudding Pot.

Nussbaum shared with the “Independent” how incredible Byrne was to work with in person: “With such an iconic resume and amidst an exciting awards season, [Rose] was so generous to spend the day with us. Friday was truly a celebration of both Rose’s impressive career and the work of the undergrads of HPT 177.” She also emphasized the immense coordination and dedication required to bring the event to life: “Our company puts in a herculean effort to make the show and the Woman/Man of the Year events possible. Watching Rose marry her Pudding Pot on our stage made the months of planning and rehearsal well worth it.”

Following the roast, Byrne was ushered into the event’s press conference, where she was accompanied by HPT Press & Publicity Manager Chaelon Simpson ’26, band Vice-President Weston Lewin ’26, and HPT 177 tech crew member John Kulow ’26. Simpson, leading his third and final press conference,

opened the event acknowledging the room’s attendees for their kindness during his career at the Theatricals.

“Thank you so, so much for all the support that you’ve given not only the Pudding, but also me over the years. It’s meant the absolute world, and it’s been such a blast and pleasure getting to know and work with all of you,” he said.

Following the event, Simpson shared with the “Independent” how being a part of the Pudding over his time at Harvard has been the experience of a lifetime. “The real, personal relationships I’ve formed with the press have matriculated because of our shared love for art. There was no one better to celebrate my last press conference than with Rose,” Simpson shared. “She has by far been my favorite honoree, extending kindness and grace the entire time.”

Sitting in the middle of the press table alongside her brand new golden Pudding Pot, Byrne described her day at Harvard with the Hasty Pudding Theatricals as magical and inspiring to be alongside students: “It’s been so special to be here and amongst all the youth ... the future.”

The “Independent” had the opportunity to ask Byrne which character of hers has impacted her career in the most lasting way, either personally or professionally, to which Byrne named her most recent role in “If I Had Legs I’d Kick You.” “[The role] really stretched me, technically and emotionally, and really every aspect as a performer really challenged me in a way that I had not had before, particularly in the format of a feature film,” Byrne responded.

“It’s meaningful that the work is being recognized. You know, the character is really the film, and the film is the character. So for me, the acknowledgement of that is of the film,

because I just think it really will live on, and it’s very fearless and kind of radical, and so very, I’m really proud of that,” she continued.

In keeping with the theater’s signature live performance style, Byrne joked that HPT’s roast served as fitting preparation for an upcoming project of hers—returning to the stage for the first time in five years to join the cast of Broadway comedy classic “Fallen Angels.” “It was actually fun being on stage and doing a little scene,” she said.

Returning to the theater, Byrne took her seat for the evening’s showing of “Saloon Tunes.” The show revolves around two partners in crime, Robin YaBlind, played by Will Jevon ’27, and his lesser-known sidekick Wyatt AintMe, played by Amelia Sipkin ’29. The pair conspires alongside evil mayor, Gerri Mandarin, to steal the town’s newly found gold. Underdog Wyatt AintMe splits from boss Robin YaBlind to become the town’s most wanted criminal, earning him long-sought-after infamy. Ultimately defeated by a collection of locals, including pregnant sheriff Carrie N Twins, Bart Ender, Sarah Problem, Anna Fivesix-Fivesixseveeight, Tilda Cowscomehome, Gideon Up, and Dustin Myeyes, the show is chaotic, humorous, and extravagant in true Pudding fashion.

The crowd roared with laughter throughout the show’s many political jabs, wild plot points, and sexual innuendos.

“Saloon Tunes” is entirely student-created, with writers Benjamin Langman ’26 and Gunnar Sizemore ’27, composer Christian Liu ’26, and Olivia Data ’26 as Principal Lyricist. For those interested in seeing the production, the show is currently running at Farkas Hall from Feb. 6 to March 8, with special performances in New York City on March 13 and 14 and Bermuda on March 18, 19, and 20.

Tickets for HPT 177 are available for purchase on the Hasty Pudding website.

**RANIA JONES ’27
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KUMAR ’27 (SJKUMAR@
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WISH THEY COULD HAVE
BEEN BRIDESMAIDS IN
BYRNE’S HPT WEDDING.**

**PHOTOS COURTESY OF JAY
CONNOR**

Giddy Up for the Hasty Pudding Theatrical's 177th Production

The Pudding's newest show is a can't-miss performance.

BY ADEDOYIN ADEBAYO '26

As one of the most highly anticipated events on Harvard's undergraduate calendar, a Hasty Pudding Theatricals show can sometimes feel like a school-wide reunion. Ticket-holders crowd into Farkas Hall well before the 8:00 p.m. curtain, filling the lobby with students, families, alumni, and longtime community members. When I took my seat, I was struck by the range of ages in the audience—all watching eagerly as the lights dimmed and the curtain rose.

In what can best be described as a combination of country western and satire on current political events, HPT's 177th show, "Salooney Tunes," is, in my opinion, their best production since the 174th show, "Cosmic Relief." Following a pair of outlaws as they hunt for gold in a secluded southern town teeming with kooky residents, student writers Ben Langman '26 and Gunnar Sizemore '27 masterfully create a classic cast of 10 characters with puns for names and touching development. Resident director, Larry Sousa, and producers Ellie Tunnell '27 and Cate Schwarz '27 brought this plot to life in tandem with the rest of HPT's business, tech, band, and cast members.

As a whole, the script is unique amongst other HPT productions. Though most shows also included subtle quips towards current events, "Salooney Tunes" has a keen awareness of when to break the fourth wall and involve the audience in its commentary on the status quo. In other words, it delivers exactly what the audience hopes for from a drama-filled outing.

One unforgettable element of the show is its use of evocative sounds. The show begins with the sounds of gunfire, instantly drawing attention to the gunman Robin YaBlind, played by Will Jevon '27, a vagabond who has already robbed hamlets like the one in "Salooney Tunes." YaBlind is accompanied by his sidekick, Amelia Sipkin '29, also known as Wyatt AintMe.

The fearful townsfolk are assured by the intelligent investigator and expecting mother Carrie N Twins—played by Danny

Denenberg '26—that she will catch these thieves.

From this opening note, "Salooney Tunes" throws its audience into a series of twists and turns. Viewers discover that the town's mayor, Gerri Mandarin, brought to life by Brady Rafferty '27, is secretly colluding with Robin and Wyatt. Mandarin works to throw her constituents off the scent from the first scene. She tells the townsfolk, following the initial robbery attempt, that the nefarious pair were attracted by gold hidden in the hills. She believed this information would keep community members—including cowgirl, Tilda Cowscomehome (Hannah Alexis '27); saloon owner, Bart Ender (Chloe Chao '27); and aspiring performer, Sarah Problem (Bernardo Sequeira '26)—distracted.

But as this is a show with a happy ending (spoiler alert!), the townsfolk end up encountering the friendly, colorblind prospector, Dustin Myeyes (Cruz Allison '28), who joins them in discovering that there actually is gold up in those hills.

Gerri Mandarin's character—and name—likely takes inspiration from common critiques of countless politicians, including Donald Trump and other modern-day politicians. In a few of her lines, Mandarin equates abortion to treason and claims (ironically) that she would never be untrustworthy with money collected from taxes. When her daughter, Anna Fivesix-Fivesixseveineight (Isabel "Izzy" Wilson '26), inquires about the hidden gold, Mandarin responds saying that if gold were really in the hills, she would have already hired immigrants to extract it.

This year's production leaned more deliberately into audience engagement than in years past. On Feb. 10, members of the Brazilian Students Association were introduced before the curtain rose. Later, after a jab at the Hasty Pudding Band, a pit

musician emerged to announce that the band would no longer tolerate such disrespect. Within moments, the rest of the band climbed out of the pit, proclaiming they were off to Brazil. Thankfully, for the sake of the show, the band covertly snuck back into the pit and resumed playing.

Another moment where the cast engaged directly with audience members came during the iconic HPT closing dance routine. This year, cast members perform in matching prospector-style short overall dresses with yellow construction hats. Each wears a sash bearing their name: Miss Fit, Miss Tique, Miss Anthrope, Miss Stress, Miss Cast, Miss Led, Miss Demeanor, Miss Behave, and Miss Issippi. When the three finalists, Anthrope, Demeanor, and Behave, are announced, audience members are encouraged to clap as each contestant steps forward, as if the loudness of the cheers can determine who ultimately wins.

The show does not shy away from incorporating potentially controversial quotes in its script. After the townspeople find gold, they decide to organize a parade to celebrate. The gold is transported in a carriage drawn by a talking horse with a ketamine addiction, Gideon Up (Elianna Carvalho '29). Unfortunately for Gideon Up, he is kidnapped by the newly independent (no pun intended) outlaw, Wyatt, to make a name for himself as a criminal by stealing the gold. Afterwards, when the townspeople are overcome by panic, Tilda proclaims "Quiet Piggy!" referencing Donald Trump's infamous response to a female Bloomberg reporter, Catherine Lucey.

"Salooney Tunes" also comments on current issues on campus. For example, the fear YaBlind and AintMe had of being caught and imprisoned was partly due to the possibility of having former university president, Lawrence H. Summers, as a cellmate.

Although YaBlind opens the show, truestar power comes from AintMe, whose character growth makes him especially endearing. While most viewers may not identify with his desire to become an infamous criminal, many can empathize with AintMe's desire to feel recognized and appreciated. It is difficult not to cheer for him when he decides he is done being unappreciated by YaBlind and independently steals gold from the townsfolk. Later, he realizes that what he truly wants is to feel loved—and he can achieve this by doing good, not evil.

Overall, the 177th edition of the Hasty Pudding Theatricals' show, "Salooney Tunes," demonstrates the troupe's ability to adapt its comedy and performance to changing times while keeping audience members of all demographics engaged.

**ADEDOYIN ADEBAYO '26
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SENTIMENTAL ABOUT
SEEING HPT FOR THE LAST
TIME (AS AN UNDERGRAD).**

GRAPHIC BY ANGIE LI '28



Exploring Worldwide Hometowns: Campbellton, Canada

Discover a tiny bilingual town in the Canadian Appalachians!

BY LUCY DUNCAN '28

When I step off the train, I am immediately struck by a certain stillness. Despite it being the middle of the day, barely any shops are open—unlike the rest of Canada, Campbellton still shuts down for Sunday church.

I've made this trip dozens of times, chaperoning my little brothers back and forth across the 20-hour trip from our dad's home in Toronto to our mum's house in Atlantic Canada. With the closest major airport a four-hour drive away, the train is the most efficient option. At nearly minus 22 degrees Fahrenheit, the cold bites at every inch of our exposed skin as we sprint from the platform towards the warmth of mum's car.

As we jump in, "Sur Mon Épaule" by Les Cowboys Fringants plays over the radio. To my right, the snow-powdered Appalachian mountains (yes, the Appalachians go into Canada) rise against the horizon. One in particular, Sugarloaf, is painted with two white crosses commemorating a duo of young women who fell trying to climb it in the 1950s. To my left, icebergs float lazily across the Restigouche River before sinking into the grey Atlantic. The roads are lined with 10-foot-high chain link fences interspersed with signs warning of moose crossing.

Everything moves slowly here. Traffic moves 10 km/h below the speed limit: nobody is ever in a rush to get to their destination. Drivers routinely yield the right of way at four-way stops. There's no such thing as a quick trip to Le Dep, the convenience store, without getting pulled into a 20-minute conversation with the cashier about the weather and how your parents are doing.

Walk into any local shop or restaurant, and you're met with a standard "Bonjour, hi," gracefully allowing you the choice between English and French for the remainder of the conversation. Between friends, a less formal "allo" may be used before transitioning into chiac, our quirky English-French hybrid that would make a Frenchman wince. In New Brunswick, c'est totalement normal de mixer entre les deux langues. We speak French with an English accent and English with a French accent until we're completely incomprehensible to outsiders.

Winters here tend to drag on. Clouds hang low in the sky, the sea is grey, and the sun sets at 4:00 p.m. As I step out of the car, I am immediately knee-deep in snow—and no, this is not an exaggeration. Good winter boots are a must. If this winter's storm in Cambridge scared you, try being in Campbellton from November to April. Coal and wood-burning furnaces are, in most homes, the only respite from frostbite.

In the summer, though, the city comes alive, especially leading up to Aug. 15. La Fête nationale de l'Acadie is the biggest day of the year—Acadians are the French-speaking people on the East Coast of Canada, and no, we are not Quebecois! In August, tourists from across Canada congregate in Campbellton and other Acadian cities to celebrate our history and culture. The Acadian flag flies above most homes, French-Canadian songs are sung, and everyone gathers downtown to eat donair, the national dish of Acadie: round beef wrapped in a pita with mixed vegetables and donair sauce, which provides a sweet-tangy flavour.

Earlier in the summer, we celebrated Campbellton's other renowned event: the Salmon Festival. Campbellton's only "landmark" is a statue of a salmon because fishing is our biggest historical industry. "SalmonFest" is the only ten-day stretch of the year when the city's only hotel is completely booked out. Despite the name, the festival itself offers few activities related to salmon, instead resembling a typical small town carnival—live music, comedy shows, dirt bike expositions, and bilingual children's events.

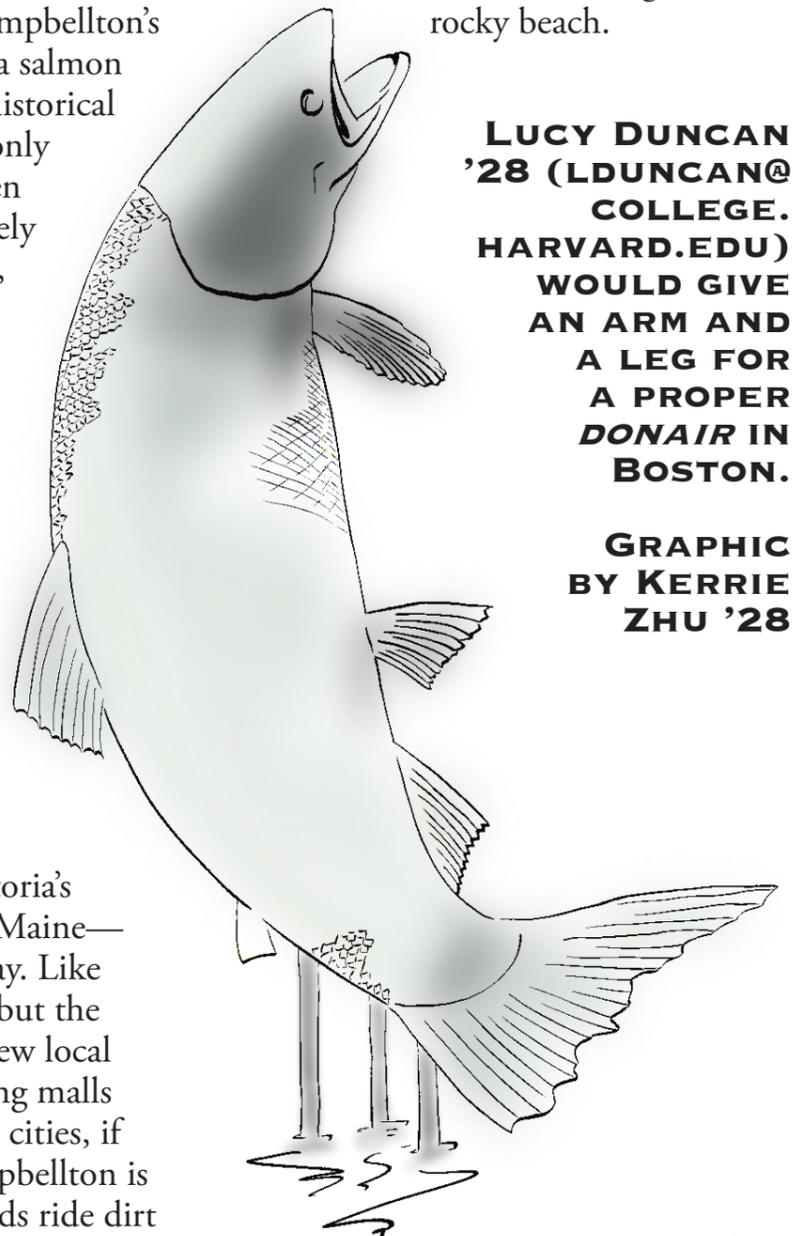
Aside from these two festivals, though, Campbellton is far from a tourist destination. Last summer, I wanted to go to Victoria's Secret to buy a new swimsuit. The only problem? The closest Victoria's Secret to Campbellton was in Maine—more than a 10-hour drive away. Like many small towns, we lack all but the most basic chain stores and a few local businesses. Without the bustling malls and restaurant scenes of bigger cities, if you're not a nature-lover, Campbellton is not for you. In the summer, kids ride dirt

bikes and ATVs through the mountains or sneak on private beaches, where my four-year-old sister has a habit of trying to poke at washed-up jellyfish. In the winter, we ski, snowboard, or taunt other kids with the threat of a snowball fight.

Of Campbellton's approximately 6,000 residents, most are young children or retirees. Young adults tend to flee to bigger cities in New Brunswick, like Fredericton or Moncton; to hubs like Toronto or Montréal; or, like me, out of the country entirely. Those who choose to stay are met with the options of working for the government or the local cannabis plant—some even start their own businesses.

Walking through my front gate, I'm immediately greeted by my brother's pet ducks, Ham and Cheese, and our 160-pound sheepdog. My half-sister has gotten even bigger since the last time I saw her, somehow, but my mum hasn't changed much.

Despite its flaws, going home feels like a sigh of relief after the bustle of Boston living. The stillness in the air permits me to slow down: nothing makes for better meditation than watching the Atlantic waves crash against the rocky beach.



LUCY DUNCAN '28 (LDUNCAN@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WOULD GIVE AN ARM AND A LEG FOR A PROPER DONAIR IN BOSTON.

GRAPHIC BY KERRIE ZHU '28

Kitchen Sink No. 4

BY LUKE WAGNER '26 AND JONAH KARAFIOL '26



had been watching her for six days.

This was not unusual. I watch most things. But I had been watching her with a specificity that surprised me—the way she replaced books on the shelves, for instance, running two fingers along the spine before releasing it, as though verifying it was properly returned. The angle at which she held her head when reading. The restraint—no wasted motion—of her movements, which suggested either training or temperament, and I found myself constructing histories to account for her grace: a governess, perhaps, or a mother who did not tolerate fidgeting. I noted when she arrived and when she left. I noted which aisles she favoured and how long she lingered in each. I noted how her amber hair glistened in the afternoon light. Everything about her seemed practiced, and I couldn't tell what for.

On the sixth day, she was not at her post.

I immediately noticed and resented myself for it. I stayed an hour longer than necessary, copying the lines when Troilus hides and watches Cressida turn towards Diomedes. The words refused to hold their meaning. I underlined a sentence, looked back at it, and found it had already gone inert—marks on a page signifying only themselves. I closed the notebook and sat with my hands flat on the table and breathed and waited for the agitation to pass. It did not pass. By evening, I needed air.

The town received me without comment. I walked without direction, though I noticed my feet carried me toward the public houses, and I didn't correct them. The King's Arms was louder than the hour warranted. I paused at the door, still deciding whether to enter, before it swung open and the noise spilled out—warm and sour and irresistible—and against my better judgment, I stepped inside. My eyes adjusted.

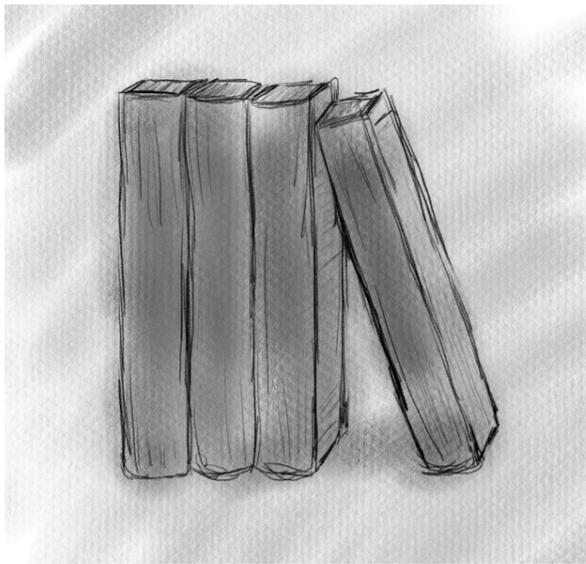
She stood near the hearth.

The fire behind her made it difficult to see her face clearly, but I knew her immediately by the posture: by the particular stillness I'd been cataloguing for days. She held a glass but was not drinking from it. She was watching the room with the expression of someone conducting an inventory, and when her gaze reached me, it did not slide past. It stopped. You again, she said, and there was no smile attached to this remark, nor was there hostility—only recognition, as though we had already established terms I could not recall agreeing to.

I closed the distance. Have we met properly, I asked, and she repeated the word properly as though testing it for cracks. You were in the library, she said. So were you, I replied. You were measuring things, she said,

and I told her I measure most things, and she said not tonight, and the observation irritated me and pleased me at once because I wasn't aware of having altered my method, and yet she sounded certain—she had, apparently, been watching me with something like the attention I had been paying her. The symmetry was satisfying. I examined it for flaws and found none.

We stood closer than the noise required. Someone dropped a glass across the room. The fire shifted and resettled. I found I did not wish to look away from her, and I did not examine why.



She asked what I was studying, and I told her it didn't matter. She nodded as though I had confirmed something she had already suspected. And do you believe it, she asked. When I asked, believe what, she responded, Any of it. I told her I wasn't certain what she meant, and she said, That is not the same thing as no. I agreed that it wasn't. Her gaze didn't waver.

The conversation moved without effort, and this fact alone should have warned me, but I wasn't in a condition to heed warnings. I spoke of Hendricks and his contempt for coherence. I spoke of the way tragedy flatters its audience by pretending that suffering concludes. The words arranged themselves without my supervision. I was, I realized, attempting to impress her, which was not unusual; what was unusual was the fluency of the attempt—the sense that I had stepped outside my habitual hesitations into some more capable version of myself. The self-consciousness that typically accompanied speech had simply vanished. I spoke, and the words were correct, and I didn't have to watch myself speak them.

At some point, she asked my name.

The question arrived without weight. Edward, I said without flinching. It felt precise. Correct in its proportions. She repeated it once, and the repetition sealed something, made it true in a way it hadn't been before she spoke it.

We left together without declaring that

we would.

The night air had sharpened, and the gas lamps held their small territories along the street. Between them, the dark remained intact, not threatening but indifferent, and she didn't ask where we were going, and I didn't explain. I couldn't have explained. The walk to the college felt wrong in its brevity, as if the town had offered us a passage it didn't offer in the daylight.

Room fourteen carried the cold of an open afternoon, the particular freshness that arrives when a room has been emptied of itself for a few hours and not yet filled back in. The window admitted a sliver of moonlight. The desk stood where it always had, though it appeared somehow altered, angled slightly as though it had been reconsidering its position and had frozen when I opened the door.

I closed the door behind us.

The click of the latch felt disproportionate to its size.

She removed her gloves first. Slowly. The fabric withdrew from each finger with a kind of obedience that struck me as obscene—not because it was indecent, but because it was so willing, so entirely without resistance, as though even the gloves had already agreed to what would happen. She laid them on the desk beside my notebook. Then she turned to me and asked if I was certain.

I said yes at once—too quickly—before I had even granted myself the dignity of examining the question, as if speed could make it innocent. And what is that, certainty? A word we use when we are tired of thinking. A shortcut, an abdication. I knew this; I have always known it. Yet the yes came out of me like something physical, something that did not consult my mind at all.

The rest doesn't submit to the sequence. There were hands and breath and the temporary loss of distance. The temporary collapse of distance. At some point, the desk chair struck the wall. A book slid from its stack to the floor with a sound like a single syllable of protest. The lamp tilted but didn't fall.

And beneath it—beneath all of it—there was a sensation I hadn't anticipated: the experience of occupying my own body without commentary, without the constant interior narration that typically accompanied my movements through the world. I wasn't watching myself. I was simply there. And the relief of this was so profound—so humilatingly profound—that I might have wept, had I been the sort of person who permits himself that kind of honesty.

She said my name at one point. Edward. It sounded different when spoken aloud in that room, in that context. It sounded—terribly—like it belonged to someone else.

Afterward, the lamp burned lower. The sheets lay disordered in a manner that suggested enthusiasm rather than accident. She lay on her side and regarded me with an expression that was neither romantic nor triumphant, merely assessing. For a moment, I had the impression that she was somewhere I could not locate—present in the room but oriented toward something I couldn't see, some interior calculation she had not suspended even here.

You are calmer now, she said. I told her I had always been calm, and she said, No, before you were watching yourself. I denied this, though I knew she was right. Perhaps I have mistaken you for someone else, she said, and her voice contained something I couldn't identify—some knowledge or suspicion that hovered at the edge of articulation and then receded.

When she rose, she dressed without haste. Buttons restored symmetry. Gloves returned to her hands with the same slow compliance. She paused at the door. Goodnight, Edward, she said, and the name sounded correct in the room, and then she was gone, and the silence that followed did not feel empty. It felt adjusted. Rearranged around an absence.



I stood for several minutes.

The desk leaned at a subtle angle. The fallen book lay open as though stunned mid-sentence. Then I turned toward the sink. There was nothing visible on my hands. I washed them anyway. The water grew warmer and then hot and then hotter still, and the skin reddened, and I did not withdraw. In the mirror above the basin, my face appeared composed. Alert. There was a brightness in the eyes that did not belong to fatigue. Behind it, faint but discernible, a narrowing. A calculation. For a moment, I had the impression of having stepped aside, of having

allowed something forward that had been waiting in me, unlit, assembling itself. The impression passed. The pipes clicked within the walls. The chapel bell struck once and then twice, and I counted and then stopped counting.

Only afterward did it occur to me that I could not precisely remember deciding to bring her upstairs.

...

Three days later, I saw her across the quad.

She stood beneath the oak tree, the one whose branches held their configuration with such constancy that I had begun to suspect it of deliberate composure. She was not alone. A man stood planted beside her, his back to me, and they were speaking with an ease that suggested familiarity. I stopped on the path with my books beneath my arm. I did not decide to stop. My feet simply ceased their forward motion.

The distance was considerable. I could not hear them. I could not see his face. But I could see the angle of her body toward his, the slight incline of her head, the way she laughed at something he said—a laugh I hadn't heard from her. One I hadn't known she was capable of producing. I found myself cataloguing the particulars of this laugh as I had catalogued everything else about her. It wasn't the laugh of polite conversation. It was the laugh of someone surprised into genuine pleasure. I hadn't made her laugh like that. I was certain of this. I searched my memory of our evening together and found nothing that would have produced such a sound, no moment of levity that had escaped my attention, and the absence felt suddenly like an indictment.

The man bent and leaned closer. His hand rose and touched her arm just above the elbow, a gesture so casual and proprietary that I understood at once they had touched before. The hand knew where it was going. It didn't hesitate or negotiate. It simply arrived. She did not flinch or withdraw; she only continued speaking, and the intimacy of this—the way his touch didn't interrupt her sentence, the way it didn't even register as an event—was worse than if she had kissed him. It suggested history. It suggested habit.

I became aware that my hands were trembling.

I told myself to walk on. I told myself that it did not matter, that she owed me nothing, that a single evening did not constitute a claim. These arguments were sound. I believe them. I didn't believe them.

The trembling migrated upward into my chest, where it became something tighter, more dangerous, and I thought of her saying my name in the dark of my room—Edward—and of the way the word had seemed to belong to someone. I wondered, now, to whom.

The man turned slightly. I caught the edge of his profile: the shape of his jaw, something familiar in the architecture of his face, though I couldn't place it. He didn't

turn far enough for me to see him fully. It was as though he knew I was watching and was denying me the satisfaction of confirmation.

My mind began constructing narratives. They had been lovers before I arrived—had quarreled, had returned to one another in cycles I was only now witnessing. Or they had not been lovers yet, but would be soon, and I had been nothing but a preliminary, a rehearsal, practice. Each story was worse than the last. Each demanded revision even as I built it—the addition of details that made it more painful and therefore more plausible, because pain has always seemed to me like evidence, like the surest sign that one has arrived at the truth. I could feel my pulse in my throat.

She laughed again. The sound reached me across the quad, thin and bright, and I thought I'd be sick. I thought my body might simply reject the morning, might purge itself of everything I had consumed since waking, and I pressed my books harder against my ribs and breathed through my nose and waited for the nausea to pass. It didn't pass. It transformed. Cold clarity. I was no longer trembling. I was very still.

I was watching them with an attention that felt almost surgical, noting every flicker of expression that crossed her face, and I understood that I would remember this. I would remember all of it. I would carry it with me like a shard of glass lodged somewhere inoperable, and it would cut me every time I moved.

The chapel bell struck the hour.

The man stepped back from her. He said something I couldn't hear. She nodded, and then he turned and walked away across the quad, and still I couldn't see his face—only the back of his head, the set of his shoulders, the particular rhythm of his gait. Something in that rhythm nagged at me, something almost recognizable, but before I could place it, he had disappeared around the corner of the library. She was alone beneath the oak tree. She hadn't seen me.

I don't know how long I stood there. The bell had finished its tolling. The quad had emptied. She gathered her things and walked toward the north gate without looking back. I remained on the path with my books beneath my arm and my hands now perfectly steady, my mind running through the catalogues I had been compiling since I first saw her, searching for discrepancies—for evidence of duplicity I might have missed. I found nothing conclusive. I found only the ordinary opacity of another person, the way she had withheld herself even in moments of apparent surrender, and I understood. I hadn't known her at all.

I walked back to my room.

WRITTEN BY LUKE WAGNER '26 (LUKEWAGNER@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) AND JONAH KARAFIOL '26 (JONAHKARAFIOL@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU).

GRAPHICS BY TRISCHELLE AFIHENE '27

Dining Hall Tea Connoisseurs

A completely serious and professional review of nine Bigelow teas.

BY ELLIE GUO '29 AND CLORIS SHI '29

The story goes that tea was invented in 2737 B.C.E. by the Chinese emperor Shen Nong when a few leaves accidentally floated into his boiling water. Since then, it has been a quintessential part of Eastern and Western life, whether it's a cup of black tea to start the morning or an herbal concoction to fall asleep. In Harvard College's dining halls, students can enjoy an assortment of Bigelow-branded teas from breakfast through Brain Break.

For us, tea is an important part of wellness, essential for unwinding after a long day of classes, particularly during these chilly winter months. As such, we—two expert tea connoisseurs—joined together one afternoon to sample all nine types of tea. But first:

What is our authority on tea?

Ellie Guo: My grandfather was born in a region of China adjacent to a tea-producing province.

Cloris Shi: Coffee no longer works for me.

Cinnamon Apple

EG: As I began steeping this tea, I was immediately concerned by the bright red color emerging from the tea bag. "Julius Caesar" would have been a fitting name for this tea, as it began to look like it had been stabbed 23 times. As for the taste, I was left wondering what they did to the apples to generate the flavor in this tea.

CS: It's long past the season to drink this tea, if there is a right season at all. Cinnamon Apple has a quintessentially fall flavor profile, but with the shade of maraschino cherries and the scent of overpoweringly sweet apple juice, it's freakishly off-putting.

Orange & Spice

EG: I love to drink tea while reading, and this one reminded me of a line from one of my favorite novels, "The Great Gatsby." Inspired, I felt that its flavor could be perfectly summed up in one of F. Scott Fitzgerald's iconic lines: "It eluded us then, but that's no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther." Indeed, the flavor eluded us—I could not discern any particular taste, but I don't particularly mind that. It is truly the La Croix of teas.

CS: When melted orange-scented Yankee candle meets DayQuil, you probably get something like this tea. There was nothing natural about drinking this. Steeping it for just a couple of minutes yields water the shade of Sunny-D or Emergen-C.

Sweet Dreams

EG: If this tea had a food counterpart, it would be SPAM, because it's just an amalgamation of various plants and herbs shredded beyond recognition. In fact, the tea itself resembles livestock feed. The taste is unremarkable, except for a slight sour note.

CS: Don't you dare insult Sweet Dreams! Chamomile tea helps me relax and rewind, and there's a comforting, soothing, tummy-warming effect. These days, as I am trying to wean myself off caffeine, this tea has accompanied me back from office hours in the Quad to the Yard, and from the Northwest Laboratories to the Barker Center, among other egregious treks one must make in the middle of the academic day.

Mint Medley

EG: Usually with mint teas, I feel some cognitive dissonance from its cooling sensation coupled with hot water. However, the reduced mint flavor in this blend prevents any psychological confusion. But perhaps I should refrain from being so passive-aggressive, because this tea has been a lifesaver for soothing sore throats.

CS: Hmm, this is similar to Sweet Dreams but ... more awake? There's a similar flavor profile, but mint tea does leave a chilling effect.

Raspberry Royale

EG: Tea has always been a source of relaxation for me, but the pleasant aroma of this one is painfully misleading. The raspberry scent is not overpowering and seems natural, but once I dropped the bag into hot water, I had a gut feeling that something was about to go terribly wrong. This tea has all the bad parts of a raspberry without any of the benefits—the sourness, the fuzziness, and the raspy-ness.

CS: To borrow a term from wine connoisseurs, this tea tastes—for lack of better words—"cooked." With a smoky black hue, an acrid aftertaste, and unexpected hints of sweetness, Raspberry Royale seems to be overwhelmed by the different flavor profiles it attempts to achieve. Overall, a normal black tea ruined by an artificially fruity alter-ego.



"Constant Comment"

EG: This tea is absolutely foul. As CS and I continued sampling teas, I was struck by a lyric by The Cranberries that encapsulates my experience with the unpleasant aftertaste: "Do you have to let it linger?"

CS: Stay away from this tea. EG could do nothing but constantly comment on how terrible it is. I agree, though. It felt like someone wanted to Harvard-ify orange juice and dress it in a suit, and so fittingly, it did nothing but constantly insert itself into all our conversations.

Lemon Lift

EG: Scarred by "Constant Comment," I dreaded Lemon Lift. However, I had made a grave miscalculation. Lemon Lift is cozy and delightful, like a warm Arnold Palmer to cheer you up during the gray winter months.

CS: Lemon Lift really does make me happy after the horror of these past teas. With a slightly acidic aftertaste and sweet scent, I'd gladly take another cup.

English Teatime

EG: After the debilitating experience of "Constant Comment," the rich color and pleasant smell of this tea allowed me to empathize with the founding members of the American Revolution. I, too, would declare independence if this delightful breakfast blend were unjustly taxed. Though I did perceive a slight bit of astringency, it would be a shame to let it go to waste by dumping it in the Boston Harbor.

CS: Not to be all "natural and organic" (I'm from L.A.), but this tea tops my list for a simple reason: its sole ingredient is "black tea." I like to pair this with iced vanilla oat milk for a simple milk tea. Makes a charming little morning or mid-day pick-me-up.

Earl Grey

EG: I might be biased towards this tea because it shares initials with me. In the Chinese classic novel, "Dream of the Red Chamber," one of the main characters says, "A cup of tea is for tasting, two cups of tea is for quenching thirst, and three cups of tea is for cows and mules to drink." Though this character might associate me with livestock, I would still drink three cups of this tea—perfectly versatile and easygoing.

CS: It's hard to mess up Earl Grey, and Bigelow somehow found a way. It's a bit slick, a bit oily, and incredibly mediocre.

Final Thoughts?

CS and EG: We would now like to present our rankings and crown the best dining hall tea.

1. English Teatime
2. Lemon Lift
3. Earl Grey
4. Mint Medley
5. Sweet Dreams
6. Raspberry Royale
7. Cinnamon Apple
8. Orange & Spice
9. "Constant Comment"

In conclusion, HUDS provides a respectable variety of teas. We hope that, in shedding light on all nine teas, we can guide you in choosing which teas to add to your daily wellness routine, and which ones might just as well exacerbate your worries. Though some may have a dubious flavor profile, the ritual of waiting for tea to steep and then drinking it slowly is nonetheless a moment of reprieve in our busy lives. Whether as a hand warmer or a throat soother, tea plays a critical role in making winter a kinder season for all of us.

ELLIE GUO '29 (EGUO@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) AND CLORIS SHI '29 (CLORISHI@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) ERRONEOUSLY BELIEVE THEY ARE FUNNY.

GRAPHIC BY ANGIE LI '28

Bad Bunny's Unforgettable Dance: The 60th Super Bowl Halftime Show

A celebration of Puerto Rican culture becomes a call for a more united people of the Americas.

BY OLIVIA LE '29

The only thing more powerful than hate is love.” Bad Bunny’s final message for over 130 million viewers at Levi’s Stadium in Santa Clara, California, was simple.

On Feb. 8, Benito Antonio Martínez Ocasio, known to the world as Bad Bunny, headlined the 60th Super Bowl Halftime Show. The Puerto Rican King of Reggaeton made football history as the first Super Bowl headliner to perform almost entirely in Spanish, defying critics who questioned whether a predominantly English-speaking audience would embrace it.

As the camera panned across the field, viewers were first transported to Puerto Rico, following Bad Bunny’s walk past sugarcane workers and street vendors. He opened with one of his most popular hits, “Tití Me Preguntó,” while holding a football with the words “Together, We Are America.”

The symbolism was hard to miss: at one of the most quintessentially American events, and at a time when immigrant belonging is under scrutiny, Bad Bunny delivered this message unmistakably. The message appeared to be that, in his eyes, the values of inclusion and acceptance are at the heart of what it means to be American.

After strolling through the streets of Puerto Rico, Bad Bunny appeared on the roof of a pink house singing “Yo Perreo Sola” as dancers filled the field below. Modeled after a real home in Humacao, La Casita’s porch embodied the communal core of Puerto Rican culture. The guests on this porch illustrated diversity and pride in Latin American representation by featuring Cardi B, Jessica Alba, Pedro Pascal, and Karol G.

Bad Bunny then fell through the living room roof and literally intruded on the model American family. In shock, viewers watched as Bad Bunny brushed himself off and got back up to dance. In that moment, he embraced his role as an agent of reggaeton—aware that millions of Americans remain unfamiliar with the genre’s roots, yet asserting his music as central to American pop culture.

For the next scene, he took his place on top of a “Bumpside” Ford pickup, where he sang a cover of “Gasolina” by Daddy Yankee, a fellow Puerto Rican singer. On a large screen above the field was an endangered Puerto Rican crested-toad, also featured in the DeBÍ TiRAR Más FOToS short film. The toad is thought to symbolize memory loss due to gentrification and the departure of locals from the island.

At this point, the singer introduced himself, saying, “Hoy estoy aquí en el Super Bowl 60, y es porque nunca dejé de creer en mí. Tú también deberías de creer en ti” (Today I am here in the 60th Super Bowl, and it is because I never stopped believing in myself. You must also believe in yourself). Paired with this dialogue, the image of the toad marked a transition from popular old hits to his newest album, “DeBÍ TiRAR Más FOToS.”

He goes on to say, “Dime, esto es lo que tú querías,” which could be interpreted as “Tell me, is this what you wanted?” The relevance of this phrase was not immediately apparent as the camera panned to Thomas Wolter and Eleisa Aparicio’s wedding in a courtyard on the

field. The couple initially invited Bad Bunny to perform at their wedding, and he instead invited them to be part of one of the most widely watched performances in history. The legal ceremony served as another reminder to enjoy the thrill of life and love.

The couple then stepped aside, revealing Lady Gaga performing “Die with a Smile” alongside Los Sobrinos, a Puerto Rican salsa band with whom Bad Bunny has collaborated several times. Bad Bunny likely directed his initial question (“Is this what you wanted?”) to the portion of the audience that preferred the Super Bowl headliner to be a white, English-speaking popstar.

Many people missed this subtle critique, spurring continued confusion over Lady Gaga’s role in the show, especially since record-breaking Latina artists Cardi B and Karol G were left partying in the back. Nonetheless, Bad Bunny created an image of merging cultures as well as a celebration of American diversity. The lines “If the world was ending, I’d want to be next to you” were fitting for the wedding context, but also addressed the importance of standing together amidst panic and division in the United States today.

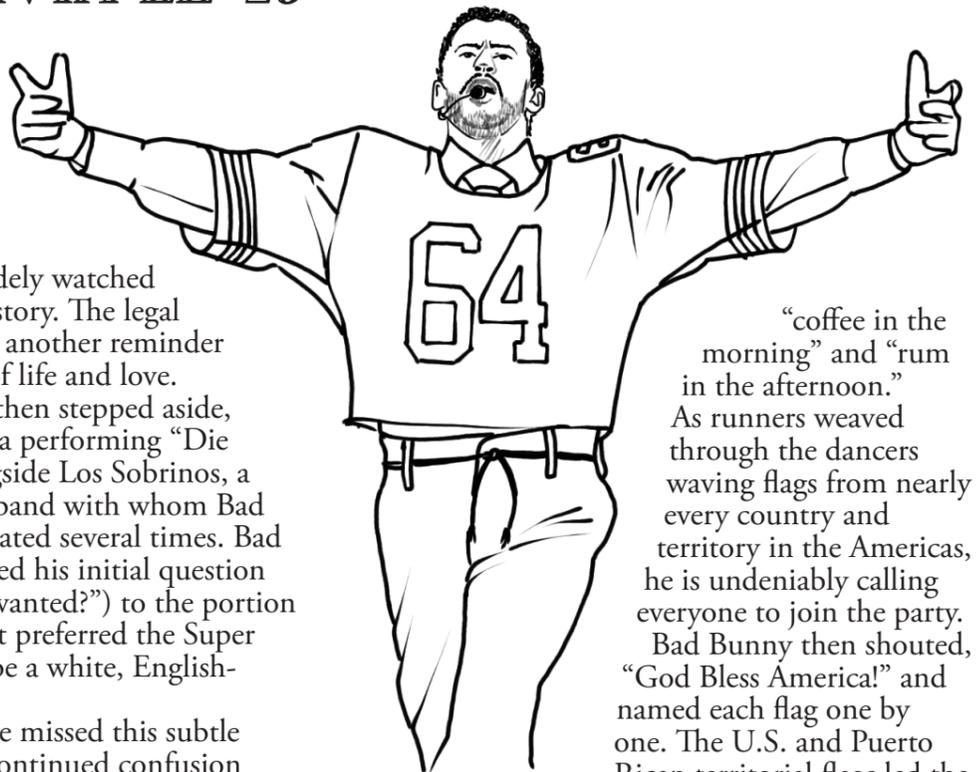
As Bad Bunny took Lady Gaga’s hand, he said, “Mientras uno está vivo, uno debe amar lo mas que pueda” (While one is alive, one should love as much as they can). Then they partied to “BAILE INOLVIDABLE” (Unforgettable Dance), a sweet yet vibrant song of nostalgia and appreciation.

Among the softest and most treasured moments of the performance was when Bad Bunny gave his Grammy to a young boy representing his younger self. Airing on a box TV in the living room set is one of his acceptance speeches from the week prior. He tells the little boy, “Cree siempre en ti” (Always believe in yourself).

The next scene included Puerto Rican star Ricky Martin sitting on a white plastic lawn chair singing an acoustic cover of “LO QUE LE PASÓ A HAWAII.” Common on the streets of Puerto Rico, these chairs appear empty on the “DeBÍ TiRAR Más FOToS” album cover to symbolize the emigration of locals to the mainland. The lyrics further underscored the United States’ legacy of colonialization.

Bad Bunny then emerged from behind the grass with a Puerto Rican Independence flag (denoted by the lighter color of the blue), singing “El Apagón” (The Outage). The track was depicted clearly with electric poles spitting out sparks. Through the chorus, he described the experience of Puerto Rican citizens enduring frequent power outages and their frustration with government neglect of the issue. What’s striking is that “El Apagón” is a track from the album “Un Verano Sin Ti,” which came out in 2022. Four years later, Puerto Rico is still fighting the same battles.

The cameras then panned to bring viewers back to the party with “CAFÉ CON RON,” a song that invites neighbors to come out on their balconies for a shared



“coffee in the morning” and “rum in the afternoon.” As runners weaved through the dancers waving flags from nearly every country and territory in the Americas, he is undeniably calling everyone to join the party. Bad Bunny then shouted, “God Bless America!” and named each flag one by one. The U.S. and Puerto Rican territorial flags led the parade side by side—a

proud testament to his own identity.

The party resumed with “DtMF,” his current No. 1 track on the Billboard Global 200. The dancers, musicians, and runners shouted only a short phrase from the chorus: “Debí tirar más fotos de cuando te tuve. Debí darte más besos y abrazos las veces que pude. Ojalá que los míos nunca se muden” (I should’ve taken more pictures when I had you. I should’ve given you more kisses and hugs whenever I could. I hope my people never move away). The beloved track is both a sweetly nostalgic love song and a reminder of the challenges of migration and change, memories that many Americans share in one way or another.

Bad Bunny’s performance strikes at an urgent moment in American history. While not explicitly condemning ICE raids as he did at the Grammys, he nonetheless took a stance against exclusionary efforts by the current presidential administration. “We need to be different. If we fight, we have to do it with love,” he expressed the week before. This celebration is proof that pride in one’s culture and undying faith in unity are what define the people of America.

His final words of the halftime performance were “Seguimos aquí” (We are still here). The statement could be in defiance of recent exclusionary measures against Latin Americans, yet throughout the performance, Bad Bunny referred broadly to all Continental Americans. Together, we are still here for one another.

OLIVIA LE '29 (OLIVIALE@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS TAKING PHOTOS WHILE THERE'S STILL TIME.

GRAPHIC BY EMMA CRAGO '28

SPORTS

No Days Off?

The real genesis of load management in the National Basketball Association.

BY TYLER DANG '28

On Oct. 20, 2018, the Toronto Raptors faced the Washington Wizards. Led by new signee Kawhi Leonard, the Raptors were anticipating a breakout season. Injuries had plagued the star, but when healthy, Leonard was an MVP-caliber player—as seen with his previous team, the San Antonio Spurs. Though the Wizards hosted the game, there were countless Leonard jerseys in the crowd. At tip-off, however, Leonard didn't make an appearance on the court. In fact, he wasn't even in uniform. No, the star player many fans were excited to watch was out, listed as “Rest — Kawhi Leonard, load management.”

The National Basketball Association is plagued by “load management.”

In other words, players deliberately sit out games to minimize the physiological strain that accumulates throughout the season. Often, these games are missed without any injury at all—only the fear of one. Sure, players may occasionally miss a few games to ensure they are prepared for postseason action, but there are instances in which load management is abused to the point that athletes regularly sit out healthy. While a player's health is important and minimizing the risk of injury should be paramount, is the practice of load management fair to fans?

Perhaps Leonard really did need the break, in just the third game of the season, to the point that he could not play without risk. Does that fan who traveled, who knows how far, and paid, who knows how much, just to watch their favorite player, find comfort in that fact? For a sport that relies on sponsor and fan attention to be profitable, shouldn't the players who generate that attention be expected to play?

This simple clash between meeting expectations and preserving the team's investment is the core of the discussion. Teams have struggled to find the right balance, and while there are many opinions on why load management has become an issue, it is more systemic than is often assumed.

Players Aren't as Durable

Some fans argue that past players were tougher than modern players, so previously, load management was simply not a thing. These athletes didn't need a rest, unlike the players in today's game. Michael Jordan, aside from a season in which he broke his foot, missed only seven games over his 12 seasons with the Chicago Bulls. LeBron James, on the other hand, sat out 57 in his 12 seasons. In Jordan's scrappier era, when more aggressive fouls were accepted, one would expect those players to miss more games than the players in James's; why, then, did James miss so many?

However, this line of thinking is inaccurate. There have been stars from every decade who are very injury-prone, racking up a sum of missed games. During his 14-year tenure, center Bill Walton missed 680 games:

192 more than the games he actually played. Despite this, Walton is still considered a star from the 70s and 80s.

Conversely, there are plenty of modern players who are consistently on the court. Mikal Bridges of the New York Knicks has played every single game since being drafted in 2018. With 610 games, Bridges is top 10 all-time in consecutive contests. James, despite missing those games in his first 12 seasons, sits second all-time in games played. Load management, therefore, is not a product of a sudden influx of weaker, injury-prone players.



It's a Business

With advances in health science, perhaps athletes are more aware of the strain from playing 82 games a season. As such, load management arises to avoid injury. This argument holds much more merit than the previous one: naturally, athletes whose livelihoods depend on their ability to play the sport will want to take every precaution to prevent injuries. Otherwise, they lose out on potential wages.

No. 1 overall pick in 2007, Greg Oden, had a career derailed by persistent injuries. Despite a shortened stint in the NBA, the center earned 24 million dollars in total earnings. Who knows how much he might have made if he had been able to stay healthy?

The next pick in that same draft, Kevin Durant, has made 457 million dollars in earnings. While many confounding factors can explain the difference in their time in the NBA, anyone would prefer to have Durant's earnings over Oden's. Even then, maybe Oden could have made more money by practicing load management, further increasing the number of missed games but extending his career.

The reality is, for players, the NBA is simply their job. While, of course, creating a legacy and competing to be the best is of personal importance, playing basketball is also their source of income. Why would these players not do everything they can to prolong their careers and thus their cash flow? Especially with financial incentives for further postseason journeys, there is little reason to strain one's body throughout the entire season. However, these reasons do not make load management fair to the fans who support every game.

The Systemic Issue

With NBA stars incentivized not to play every game, whether for financial or

health reasons, have we found the reason load management has become such a problem? Not entirely. While the claim that earlier players were inherently tougher doesn't hold up, it is undeniable that far fewer of them engaged in load management than players do today. And while past stars were similarly heralded as global celebrities, today's players nonetheless have much more leverage.

Yes, players like Magic Johnson or Jordan were near-worshipped, but there was a certain level of expectation tied to it. These stars needed not only to play, but to shine. It wasn't enough that they were NBA players. It wasn't enough that they were playing consistently. They needed to constantly wow spectators with high-quality play.

Today, these players are something more. Given how much money some stars bring in, power has shifted from ownership to the players. Alongside his longevity, James has a reputation for controlling his team's trades, a power that no player should have. But as a front office, how can you say no? How do you tell LeBron James that he can't always have his way? With the constant threat of players leaving in free agency, franchises must appease their players. With that appeasement comes an acceptance of the terms the player sets for load management.

Perhaps the rise of social media, which gives players the ability to talk directly to fans instead of working through the news outlets, has contributed to the evolution of a player's expectations. Players have a greater ability to make their voices heard. Instead of a private conversation between players and coaching staff, the whole world is now involved. In any case, players have a monumental amount of control.

Is Control a Problem?

But is player control actually a problem? Is it an issue for these stars to prioritize their own health over grinding for a playoff berth or the best record? For that fan who traveled from who knows how far and paid who knows how much, yes.

At the end of the day, the NBA and other professional sports provide entertainment to fans. When players sit out games without any injury, the fans lose out. The star that they came to watch is no longer playing. That is a problem. If these players are going to be paid so much, they should earn their salaries rather than sit out games.

Load management and player empowerment benefit athlete health. But when these two are abused, it is not the star who loses; it is not the team or even the NBA that loses: it's the fans.

**TYLER DANG '28
(TYLERDANG@COLLEGE.
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A HEALTHY MEMPHIS
ROSTER.**

**GRAPHIC BY NESHAMA
RYMAN '28**

In Case You Missed It: Men's Basketball Harvard-Yale!

The sports column where I attempt to single-handedly increase fan attendance at games by giving Harvard students FOMO.

BY MEGAN LEGAULT '28

It finally happened! What, you might ask? Bekuo Uzo-Menkiti '28 had absolutely no excuse not to skip the basketball game. I had been trying to convince her to go with me for months! Genuinely, months!

The first thing you should know about Uzo-Menkiti is that she is, if nothing else, busy. When she turns my invitation down, it is typically for a good reason: a rehearsal for the Harvard Opportunes, an upcoming Chem 27 exam, or a late-night shift for ECHO. The second thing you should know is that she doesn't watch sports—a fact that aligns her with the majority of the Harvard student body.

The stars happened to align so that she would be singing the national anthem on the very night that a media badge awaited me at Lavietes Pavilion. What could be a better game than a Valentine's Day Harvard-Yale match-up! Both she and I knew that, even if it took an extra-strength roll of duct tape and public humiliation, she was going to watch this game with me—not to spoil the whole article, but I want to clarify that she had a great time, don't worry!

On the way over, I joked about the double role I would be playing that evening: of course, the respectable Associate Sports Editor of the "Harvard Independent," but more importantly, Uzo-Menkiti's enthusiastic stage mom. Unsurprisingly, she delivered a stunning performance. But this article is about sports, not her ungodly talent or the 50 audience members that complimented her during our post-game walk to Felipe's.

Like any good sports fan, I am extremely superstitious. Every home basketball game, I sit in the same spot: 5B, seat 16, center court, close enough to hear what's being said by players and coaches, unobstructed by the media table. As we sat, Uzo-Menkiti pointed out that these were purchased seats and we should probably sit in general admission. I laughed. She doesn't know that turnout is usually so low that seating arrangements follow the same rules as a Southwest Airlines flight. I had sat there just the night before during the Harvard-Brown game, giggling to myself as the students behind me yelled "Kobe! Kobe!" as Michael Jordan's face flashed on the jumbotron for a game of guess that celebrity. I find it ironic that the smartest students in the world couldn't identify Michael Jordan, even at a basketball game.

What I didn't know was that this game was sold out. I met her courtside following her performance, humbled, because she was right: I had been asked to move by a family who purchased my seat. Although this was more positive than inconvenient, it meant that there was a full audience in attendance. I stepped back and looked around the gym. Lavietes was PACKED—the navy blue was contained to a small section in the upper left corner of the room instead of dominating as it did at the Yale Bowl in November.

At tip-off, I took on the responsibility of telling Uzo-Menkiti everything she

needed to know. The obvious baseline was an introduction to the players of Harvard's starting roster in terms she could understand: "Ok, so that's No. 15 Thoman Batties '27, who is pretty much like King Midas, but instead of everything he touches turning to gold, it turns into points." Batties has a near 50% three-point accuracy on the season and did not embarrass me, scoring 23 points in the game.

"Then we have No. 4 Robert Hinton '28: all you need to know is he's pretty much goated."

"No. 5 Ben Eisendrath '28 kinda plays like if Tom Holland manifested into a 6'2 basketball player instead of Spider-Man."

"No. 8 Tey Barbour '28 is sort of a human metronome: consistent, doesn't miss a beat." In addition to rounding out the scoring strength of Harvard's perimeter, I told her you can count on him for rebounds, with 122 on the season.

"That brings us to No. 13 Chandler Piggé '26, who, despite how utterly terrifying he seems now, is genuinely the nicest and friendliest person you will ever meet the second he steps off the court." I told Chandler once that I edited his "Independent" spotlight article. Since then, we have regularly chatted about the team's games during brain break at Dunster House. Needless to say, he's a great team captain.

As the game began, we scanned the crowd, found the two remaining seats in Section Six, and sat down. Having interviewed some of the members in attendance, I chose to selectively withhold the information from Uzo-Menkiti that we had just sat down sandwiched between the Harvard Football team. If I had learned anything from attending Harvard athletics games, it was that this was the most entertaining place for us to be. The only thing I did not consider was that sitting behind the 6-foot-something O-line is quite possibly the worst place imaginable for a free t-shirt toss.

Being the good friend I am, I wanted her to have the full sports-watching experience: heckling, that is. The football team undoubtedly delivered. Within the first half, the team collectively decided that their "MVP" for the match was Yale's No. 14, referred to by them as "SIMMONS, I know you hear me Simmons;" "Simmonon' Stick;" and the endearing "That's my boyfriend" reserved only for words of affirmation during his free throw attempts—how romantic on Valentine's Day!

The heckling was so intense and unrelenting that Uzo-Menkiti became concerned for Simmons's mental health. "These athletes have therapists, right?" she asked, to which I responded, "Remind me to never take you to a hockey game; your kind heart won't survive."

If it is any testament to how great this game was, within the next hour, Uzo-Menkiti went from complaining that the football team was being too mean to standing on the bleachers with them. She screamed every time Harvard scored a point and even

yelled "Bullshit" in unison at the referees, who evidently cost us the game with lousy calls in overtime. She got so into the game that with every whistle, I received a "What happened? What was that? Who fouled?"

By the end, I felt convinced that I had transformed her into a full-fledged sports fan. She even took great excitement in pointing out the score to me with five seconds left in regulation. The game was hilariously tied 66 - 66—one point away from the infamous 67.

Despite the pain it inflicted to lose this game by one point because of a bad call, let alone against Yale, let alone single on Valentine's Day, it was hands down one of the best games I have ever been to. For a moment, I forgot about the paper I had due at 11:59 p.m. (not an exaggeration: I actually forgot and barely submitted it on time). For a moment, we escaped the stress and the strange meritocratic social division between Harvard students and Harvard athletes and did something simple that most other college students get to do all the time: just had fun.

My best friend, who goes to Duke, couldn't tell you the first thing about basketball, yet she was willing to sleep outside in a tent for a week to secure tickets to the Duke vs. UNC game. Why? Plain and simple: because it's fun.

I think it's high time that Harvard students stopped viewing sports as a frivolous waste of time. After all, the Ivy League was formed from an athletic conference. Sure, we could have spent the time "more efficiently" by completing a p-set, writing a paper, or building a start-up company. But what's the fun in that? Three words: Live a little.

I probably won't remember the topic I wrote my paper on in a few months, but I will always remember forcing Uzo-Menkiti to sit with the football team after she sang the national anthem.

**MEGAN LEGAULT '28
(MLEGAULT@COLLEGE.
HARVARD.EDU) STILL
THINKS THE TEAM LOST
BECAUSE SHE DID NOT SIT
IN HER USUAL SEAT.**

**GRAPHIC BY NESHAMA
RYMAN '28**



OPINIONS OF FORUM PIECES BELONG ONLY TO THE
WRITER AND DO NOT REFLECT THE VALUES
OF THE "HARVARD INDEPENDENT."

down

1. Will (someday) show Mulan who she is inside?
2. Set of habits, or, how one may summon an eldritch being.
3. Keep your hand on the _____!
5. Location at airport where one gets their boarding pass.
6. Top of your to-do list.

across

4. Looking after yourself?
7. I'll think on it?
8. Number of recommended hours of sleep for an adult.

*wellness
checklist*



Rania Jones

Mia Park Tavares