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HARVARD

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# INDEPENDENT

THE STUDENT WEEKLY SINCE 1969



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# 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.

For general or business inquiries, contact [president@harvardindependent.com](mailto:president@harvardindependent.com). Address Letters to the Editor, op-eds, or comments regarding content to [editorinchief@harvardindependent.com](mailto:editorinchief@harvardindependent.com). To subscribe to bi-weekly mailed print issues, email [subscriptions@harvardindependent.com](mailto:subscriptions@harvardindependent.com).

**We belong to no one but ourselves.**

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# Letter from the Editor: Through the Looking Glass

Reflecting on the semester behind us and anticipating who and what the “Harvard Independent” will continue to be.

BY RANIA JONES '27

**D**ear Readers,

With the Commencement Issue—and the final Indy Thursday of the semester—approaching, it felt only right to reflect on the past five months in this extraordinary, challenging role.

I’ve loved to write for as long as I can remember. Something goes right? Pick up the pencil. Something goes wrong? Open the Google Doc. Writing has become a true extension of the way I think, understand, and feel. But this role has required more than just a longing and love to write; it’s required a deep-seated conviction in the power of the printed word.

Since our founding in 1969, when Harvard student protests during the Vietnam War sparked a wave of political and social involvement on campus, the “Harvard Independent” has been a platform in Cambridge and beyond for students and writers to share their perspectives unabashedly. Over fifty years later, the “Harvard Independent” remains a place where counterculture ideas are heard—a space for every voice in the room.

Our writers, editors, and staff alike continue to enjoy the fruits of this one-of-a-kind publication as they defend the issues, ideas, and subjects that drive them. This is a privilege and a platform that is not representative of most news and media outlets around the country.

It is my responsibility, then, as Editor-in-Chief, to ensure that our coverage is as widely accessible as possible, regarding both readership

and contributions. The development of our website, social media presence, subscription system, and on-campus distribution continues to develop and broaden the scope of our reach. By continuing to invest in each of our four editorial sections—News, Forum, Sports, and Arts—we represent a diverse, evolving collection of student voices across Harvard-affiliated schools, from student-athletes to writers across concentrations in the humanities, STEM, and social science departments. Our writers embody this campus’ diversity of backgrounds, political beliefs, and interests.

Since we hit the ground running with our first issue on January 29, “Turning the Page,” the “Harvard Independent” has been published weekly since. We have stayed true to signature Indy issue themes, like the “Counterculture” issue and the “Weed” issue, and brought in new staples of our own: the history issue, “Roots,” and our first “Pop Culture” issue.

We’ve launched three new columns: “Kitchen Sink,” “John Harvard’s Left Foot,” and “Exploring American Hometowns.” We’ve introduced a weekly comic strip into our Arts section, diversified content within the Sports section, fielded guest Forum submissions from writers at the Harvard Kennedy School, and continued to cover Harvard breaking news.

The “Harvard Independent” is evolving in exciting, unpredictable ways, reaching more and more members of our broader community. Over the past ten years, our annual membership has grown by 150 members, the number of issues published in a given semester has tripled, and our semesterly website visits are reaching close to 1 million. The “Harvard Independent” is developing rapidly.

In our first Letter From the Editors, “The Next Chapter,” President Mia Tavares ’27 and I committed to audaciously trying, spectacularly failing, and ultimately succeeding, over and over again. Whether it’s integrating comics into the design editorial workflow, brainstorming ways to revitalize weekly meetings in our office space, or solving layout crises late Wednesday night, this past semester has been a crash course

after crash course in taking risks, sorting the chaos, and watching this publication succeed time and time again.

**To our graduating senior writers**—You have shaped this community and publication in indelible ways: Layla Chaaraoui ’26, Jonah Karafiol ’26, Luke Wagner ’26, Adedoyin Adebayo ’26, Alejandro Sanchez ’26, Heidi Heffelfinger ’26, Kate Oliver ’26, Kayla Reifel ’26, and Franny Connors ’26. Your commitment to this paper, dedication to showing up, and courage to write every week are what make the “Harvard Independent” the enduring institution that it is. You will all be missed so dearly.

**To our new class of Indy writers and members**—Welcome! Carry with you our 57-year legacy of being the voice of the counterculture. Let this promise shape the way you write, show up, and contribute to this space. The content we see hit the newsstands every Thursday does not happen by accident. We make and sustain it.

**And lastly, to our readers**—Continue to read the Indy. Flip through our pages, challenge your preconceived point of view, and expand your ideas—of yourself, the world, and the community we inhabit. And if you ever have something to write or say, you know where to find us.

As I look ahead to our final issue of the semester, three summer editions, and next fall, I am excited for what is to come—the messiness and the magic. This chaos is something wonderful.

Always changing, always growing, always Indy,

Rania Jones

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**GRAPHIC BY SOPHIA RASCOFF '27**



## Looking Ahead: What the Newly Elected HUA Co-Presidents Have in Store for Harvard Undergraduates

Zach Berg '28 and Daniel Zhao '28 outline their plans to increase funding, create more meaningful events, and recenter the HUA on the student experience.

BY SONIA SINGH '29

After a week of campaigning and outreach across Harvard's campus, Zach Berg '28 and Daniel Zhao '28 were elected the Harvard Undergraduate Association Student Body co-presidents on April 18. They will serve during the upcoming 2026-2027 academic year. As they step into this role, Berg and Zhao have plans to increase funding to student clubs, improve the quality rather than the quantity of school-wide events, and find ways to make HUA events feel more relevant to all students. "The thing that we always want the spotlight to be on is the students," Berg said in an interview with the "Harvard Independent."

The HUA serves as Harvard College's student government, tasked primarily with representing student interests and distributing funding to student organizations across campus. As co-presidents, Berg and Zhao will regularly meet with the Dean of Harvard College, the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, and the Harvard President, Alan Garber, to advocate on behalf of undergraduates.

Berg and Zhao each bring a different background to the role. "I have never been involved in student government in any form before ... So I think it did come a little bit out of left field," Berg said. However, he does not intend to let this hinder the efficacy of his leadership. Given ongoing tensions between Harvard and the Trump administration, including the April 2025 freeze of \$2.2 billion in federal grants, Berg explained that he wants to be a voice for the students. "Now is a uniquely important time for higher education. Academia across the world is under threat. Specifically in the United States, we've seen funding cuts. We've seen a large push that higher education is no longer as important as it once was," Berg said.

"It's also deeply concerning to me that the way in which the University has oftentimes responded has been to protect the institution and not necessarily to protect the people who make the institution, who Daniel and I believe very strongly are the students ... It's why I decided to run," he continued. "I want to be a voice for students at a time when it seems there are very few voices for undergraduate students across the country, and specifically at Harvard, which I think is the city on a hill when it comes to higher education."

In contrast, Zhao entered the race with more direct HUA experience. As HUA treasurer last year, he noticed that student organizations often struggled to meet their needs due to limited funding. "Even if the HUA was to give all of its money to club organizations, we would still not be able to fund all the needs of clubs at the moment," he explained. This became one of the central focuses of their campaign.

Student organizations at Harvard primarily receive funding through HUA grants, which are drawn from the Student Activities Fee. SAF is a voluntary annual contribution from undergraduates, which many students opt out of. Beginning in the 2026-2027 academic year, however, Harvard

College Danoff Dean, David Deming, has said that the fee will be increased and made mandatory, with exceptions for students on financial aid. Student organizations and clubs apply for funding each semester, but because the total budget is limited, not all requests are fully met.

"When I came to Harvard, I was anticipating all these clubs to be super well-funded, to have all these glorious experiences and whatnot. I know being part of these clubs that, generally speaking, there is this lack of capacity that is primarily created by a lack of capital," Zhao continued.

To address this gap in funding, Berg and Zhao said they plan to increase outreach to alumni. "The people that we are asking to give money were ultimately once students here," Berg said. "They understand the power of a Harvard experience."

They also emphasized the importance of allocating funds to student organizations that have been under-supported by the HUA. From religious and affinity groups to student organizations in the arts, Berg and Zhao want to provide the resources necessary to allow these clubs to live up to their potential. "These are spaces that we think are very critical to the Harvard experience. They're critical to making people feel safe on campus. They're critical to making people feel fulfilled on campus," Berg said.

Through their goal of increased funding, Zhao emphasized a clear goal. "I hope club leaders ... especially in the fields that we think are traditionally underrepresented, can feel more supported by the HUA, [and] can feel like they're able to meet the needs of the club members," he said.

Beyond funding, Berg and Zhao said they want to rethink how the HUA approaches events throughout the year. According to Zhao, many events currently offered do not foster community or engagement in the way he would hope.

"We offer food to people. They just come, take the food and leave," he said. Instead of these kinds of events, Berg and Zhao plan to shift toward fewer, more intentional, and better-marketed events. "We want to have a higher quality, rather than a higher quantity of events," Zhao said.

Their goal is to create experiences that bring students together in a more meaningful way. Zhao pointed to existing traditions such as Housing Day, River Run, and the Harvard-Yale game as examples of moments when the campus feels like a collective. "Our goal is really to bring Harvard together," he said.

To build that sense of community, Berg

and Zhao proposed more targeted events. "A gala during Jam Week for a capella groups is something that Daniel and I want to do," Berg said, adding that involving students directly will be the key to increasing student engagement with the HUA. "We especially want the voices of those who are in a capella groups about how we can make this the best celebration that it can possibly be," he continued.

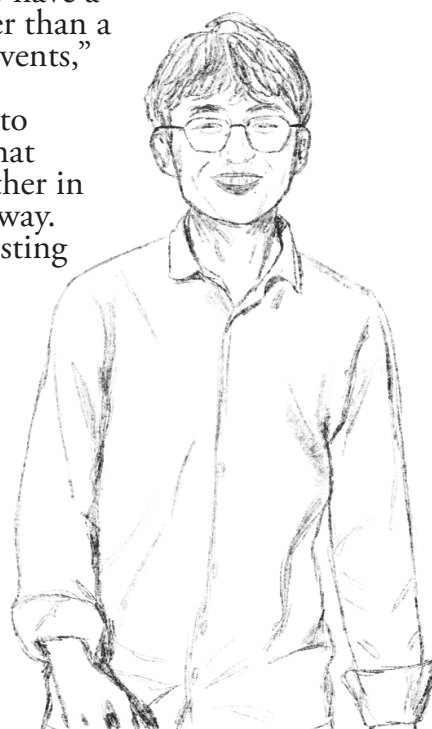
"And hopefully that does increase buy-in, because people feel that they are not necessarily just attached like the HUA as an abstract name, they're attached to the very specific, tangible things that we are doing."

At the same time, with over 450 student organizations, Berg acknowledged the challenges of representing a student body as large and diverse as Harvard College's. "Nothing we will do will represent 100% of students," he said. "The goal of our campaign is not to serve those who voted for us or to serve the specific people who might agree with what we want, but to make sure that we are forwarding nuanced solutions that help everyone."

As they prepare to take office, Berg has one hope for how their presidency will be remembered: "I want people to think that we listened, that we led with grace and humility, and did everything that we could to try to improve the student experience."

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**GRAPHIC BY TRISCHELLE  
AFIHENE '27**



# Graduate Student Union Strike Continues Through Visitas Weekend

Graduate students continued to strike as Harvard College welcomed its incoming freshman class.

BY BRENDA LI '29

The Harvard Graduate Students Union–United Auto Workers picketed in Harvard Yard on April 26 and 27 in the midst of Harvard College’s Visitas weekend, shifting the College’s atmosphere for prospective students and families. Some strikers circled outside the Science Center with signs and megaphones while other union members offered informational flyers to passers-by, urging admitted students to consider the labor dispute before choosing Harvard. For many prospective students, the strike was the first sign that Harvard was navigating an active labor dispute—one that had already disrupted classes, sections, and the daily routines for current undergraduates.

“It wasn’t until someone handed me a flyer that I realized these were Harvard graduate students advocating for fair pay,” Rella Wang ’30 told the “Harvard Independent.” Still, she said the experience added something to the weekend. “In a way, I think it gives the weekend more complex dimensions when I see people actively negotiating issues like labor and equity.”

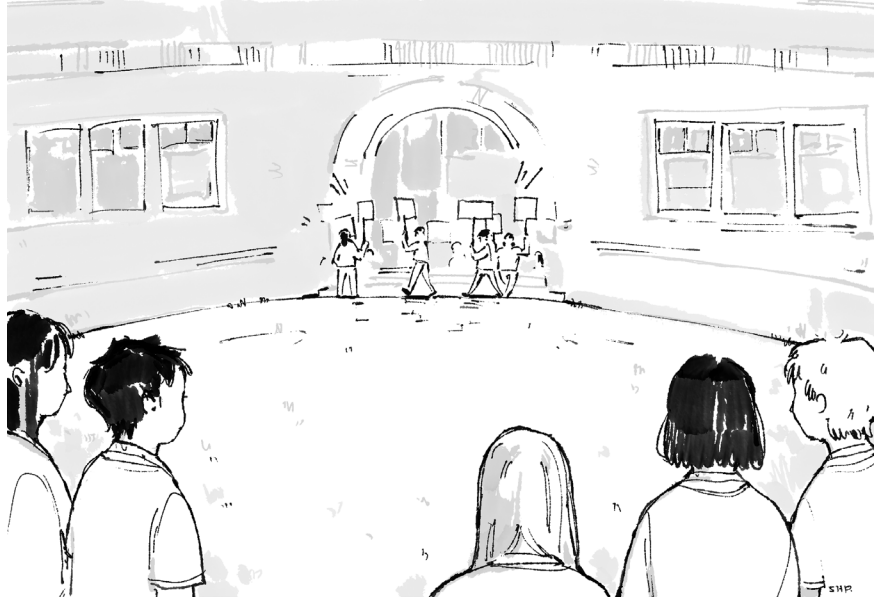
Wang, who had already committed to Harvard before attending Visitas, said the demonstrations did not affect her feelings about enrolling. Still, she noted that some of the strike’s messaging may have landed differently for students still weighing their higher education options. “I do feel like some of the messaging was saying that maybe you should go to MIT or Yale or Stanford,” she said. “I’m guessing that message could have influenced other students who were still deciding.”

The demonstrations began on April 21, 2026, after negotiations with the University stalled following 14 months of bargaining. The Union, representing 4,900 graduate student Teaching Fellows and Research Assistants across Harvard, has been pushing for four demands: higher wages, stronger protections for non-citizen workers, meaningful recourse in cases of workplace disputes, and union fees. At the center of the conflict is compensation: many graduate workers report earning about \$26,000 during the academic year—an amount that, in Massachusetts, can qualify them for public assistance programs like SNAP benefits.

For striking workers, low pay also represents a failure to recognize the value of their contributions in a University that depends heavily on their labor. Leading discussion sections, grading assignments, and holding office hours are just some examples of how graduate students often serve as the most consistent point of contact for undergraduates. Yet many of these striking graduate students say that they are struggling to meet basic living costs in one of the most expensive cities in the country.

Though the Union has clearly outlined its concerns, the strike has had mixed reactions from on-campus affiliates—undergraduates, professors, prospective students, and the strikers themselves.

While some Harvard College students have experienced disruptions to their courses amid end-of-semester midterms and finals, not all undergraduates have graduate-student teaching fellows. Madison Kang ’29 expressed that her coursework has remained consistent,



but recognized that her experience is not universal in an interview with the “Harvard Independent.” “Some of my friends’ finals got canceled, or they haven’t really had any sections,” she said. Kang also noted that one of her professors canceled class in support of the strike.

For others, the effects of the strike have been more immediate. One first-year undergraduate in Apley Court, who requested anonymity to speak candidly about her academic experience, said the absence of teaching fellows has significantly affected her classes. Without regular sections, she described the course as less structured and more difficult to navigate. Questions that would normally be addressed in smaller group settings now go unanswered, and the lack of consistent guidance has made it harder to keep up with the material, especially as the semester reaches its most demanding point.

“You don’t realize how much [the teaching fellows] do until they’re not there,” she said.

Even among students who are impacted, many support the message behind the strike despite complicated feelings about its influence on the Harvard community. Kang believes the workers’ demands are reasonable and that graduate students deserve better working conditions. “I think the school needs to do a better job of listening to their staff and their students,” she said.

At the same time, she acknowledged the tension of experiencing the strike as a student. “It’s unfortunate that it’s toward the end of the school year,” Kang said. “I would imagine people who want to go to office hours might be a little frustrated.”

For organizers, timing the strike during Visitas and at the end of the semester was no accident. Denish Jaswal, a graduate student organizer with HGSU-UAW, explained that the Union chose to emphasize its presence during the admissions weekend because of the audience the weekend reaches.

“Visitas was designed to showcase the University at its best,” Jaswal said. “But prospective students deserve an accurate picture of Harvard before committing to the formative years of their education here.”

Jaswal framed the strike as an effort to make visible what she sees as a gap between Harvard’s public image and its internal realities. While the University highlights its academic excellence and commitment to students, those values are not fully reflected in the conditions faced by the graduate workers who sustain

much of its teaching and research, she said. “[The University] publicly praises the contributions of its non-citizen students, workers, and fosters a safe, educational, and working environment. However, we’re not seeing that at the bargaining table,” she explained.

“We are the ones that teach the courses,” Jaswal said. For her, the issue is not only about wages, but about the quality of education itself: financial insecurity limits the time and energy graduate students can devote to teaching, ultimately affecting undergraduates.

“If someone is seeing Harvard for the first time, they should take away that Harvard is not living up to its values, but that it has the opportunity to do so,” Jaswal added. “I think it’s squarely the responsibility of the University. They could have easily avoided a strike at any point. They can avoid the strike continuing on tomorrow. And so I really hope that undergraduates will see that. It’s not us that have the power to stop the strike.”

Some undergraduates believe that the choice to strike on Visitas was necessary. “It’s interesting that the University didn’t really care too much about it, since they usually place such a big emphasis on their public image,” Kang said. “It’s just crazy to see how little attention the school carries towards these kinds of causes.”

“Students should be aware and exposed to what’s actually going on,” Kang said.

For the anonymous undergraduate, however, that distinction does not fully resolve the immediate impact. “Right now, it’s an inconvenience to me,” she said. “Getting in the way of undergraduate education is not the best way to garner support from the undergraduate population. A lot of the Visitas students were stopping and watching, [they] didn’t know what to make of it.”

The overlap between Visitas and the strike placed these competing perspectives side by side. As admitted students toured the school and attended panels, they also encountered a campus in active negotiation over the conditions of teaching and research.

For now, according to Jaswal, those negotiations remain unresolved. The University does not plan to return to the bargaining table until May 14—after final exams—meaning the strike’s disruptions and visibility may continue through the end of the academic year.

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**GRAPHIC BY SAM PARK '29**

# FORUM

## Pictures in Pockets

An exploration of family.

BY NOAH BASDEN '29

I, like many other teenagers, spend far too much time on TikTok, consuming copious amounts of AI slop and content so mind-numbingly stupid it almost makes my lectures seem interesting ... almost. However, amongst all the OOTDs (Outfits-of-the-Day) and food reviews, some gems make you stay beyond the 0.2 seconds it takes to scroll. I stumbled across one such video the other night when, at 2 a.m., instead of sleeping, I found myself on a certain Heather Kinsey's profile. The video that struck me captured her husband's vows, National Football League player Mason Kinsey, in which he said: "When I die, don't bury me with a football, a jersey, or a whistle, but with a picture of you in my pocket so I can show everyone in heaven who made me a better man."

Aside from being a beautiful sentiment, it got me thinking about who I would put in my pocket to show all the angels in heaven who made me a better man. I haven't even lived a quarter of my life yet, so the number of candidates is pretty low; even still, it's not a question I could easily answer. I thought about it and thought about it and thought about it some more (I had a pretty free schedule this week) and kept on returning to the same answer—my father.

Naturally, I hope I don't precede him in meeting Saint Peter at Heaven's gates and hearing the words "Well done, good and faithful servant! [...] Come and share your master's happiness." However, as we all know, living into our old age is a blessing, not a guarantee, so just in case, I'll keep his photo in my pocket so if I get there first, people will know who to expect.

I, like many others, was raised with the idea that parents aren't supposed to be best friends with their children. Even the word parent, at its etymological roots, hints at something more than what friendship can offer. The Latin root of parent, *parens*, comes from the present participle of *parere*, meaning "to give birth, bring forth, or produce." As much as I love my friends, not one of them brought

me into existence, nor spent the painstaking hours molding me into the person I am today and aspire to be tomorrow. The parental bond is something unquantifiable, and to have a truly strong one is something I don't take for granted. Unconditional love is a rare commodity these days, and Lord knows I don't deserve it a lot of the time, especially when I wake my dad up at 5 a.m. (forgetting the time difference), calling about something I could easily do myself. Yet, after every call, the final words we say to each other are "I love you, goodnight."

We don't really say "goodbye" in my family; a superstition started by my grandmother as she advanced into old age, perhaps as a coping mechanism to distance herself from the reality of life's natural next step, or perhaps an allusion to the idea that you're never really going anywhere in life or in death. I firmly believe this superstition comes from the latter; even in death, one isn't saying goodbye but just a "see you later." This past year has been the longest time I've spent away from home, and the time between the in-person "see you later" seems to grow larger and larger with every holiday. In some way, I fear I've grown slightly homesick, not out of a burning desire to see my parents—I've got FaceTime for that—but for the little things that even they might not notice.

Each morning, I wake up to the painfully robotic standard iPhone alarm jingle and miss my father's customary knock on the door and his daily introductory phrase of "Up and at 'em." Funnily enough, as a child, I always thought he was saying "Up and Adam." I spent many mornings confused about why he kept mentioning this Adam guy, despite never having met him or knowing he existed. Clearly, I wasn't the brightest toddler.

I also miss his creativity when it came to food. My father's a vegan (yuck, I know), and many dinners would be, and still are, experiments of what he could make for us to try from our vegetable supply. It sure beats the classic rotation of rice and chicken, which I always seem to end

up eating at Berg. I miss the music that would echo around our hallways. I'd share breakfast with Aretha, and Donnie Hathaway would join us at dinner, but now it's whatever music is playing in Berg when I show up—though it's usually good, it doesn't quite hit the same.

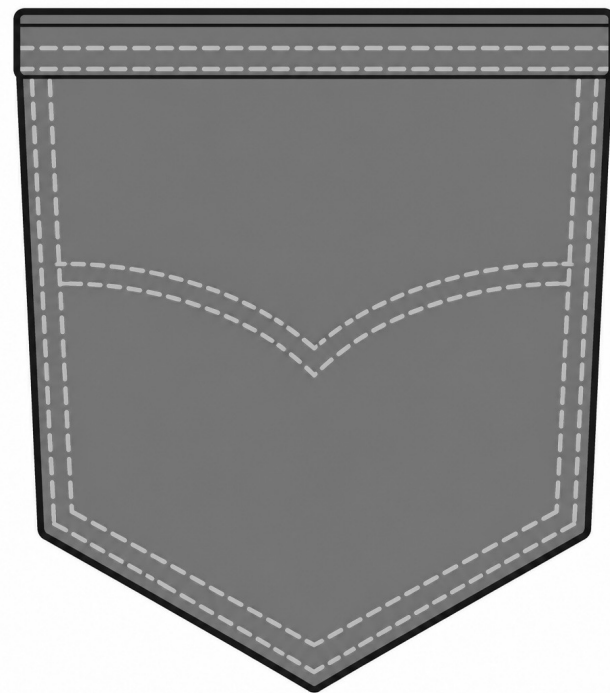
Sidenote, just in case you, like my father, were thinking of being vegan: EVERY RESTAURANT YOU GO TO DOESN'T NEED TO BE VEGAN! YOU MADE A CHOICE. WHY SHOULD WE HAVE TO SUFFER? Anyway, you can tell I have strong feelings on the topic.

I think it's abundantly clear that I love my family a lot, and I am blessed to have one that loves me back in a similar way, though I am aware that this isn't the case for many people. Though I may put my father in my pocket, you might put your mother, your best friend, your girlfriend, or whoever you choose in your breast pocket, so you can show everyone who made you the best version of yourself.

That's the beauty of "family": it's what you make of it.

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**GRAPHIC BY ANGIE LI '28**



# I Hate the Word “Grief”

The aftermath of my Dad’s death.

BY ANONYMOUS

I hate the word “grief.” What is it supposed to mean? Am I meant to be crying every single day, an uncontrollable emotional mess, angry at the world? Grief carries a pressure to mourn in a “correct” way.

Immediately after my Dad’s death, I felt absolutely nothing. Nothing at all. No intense sadness or anger. I just felt completely normal. I kept waiting for something to happen, just like in the movies. Sometimes I even forget that he is dead. But the people around me don’t. The word “death” is scary. It is so unexpected that no one knows what to do. And neither do I.

I don’t feel it, but I see it in the people around me. The worried glances between my roommates when I get out of bed, the concerned words professors offer after I ask for extensions on assignments, or even the constant “I’m here to talk if you need to.” Death is terrifying. It’s paralyzing. But it feels normal now.

My Dad taught me how to ride a bike, how to swim, and how to do algebra. He would drive me to swim practice and explain how to improve my technique on the way home. Every Saturday for six years, he would commute two hours to and from London with me to conservatoire. He would always take part in my adventures in the kitchen, stomaching raw cake with a smile. We would watch “University Challenge” every Monday, competing to see who would get more answers right (it was always me). We would go on runs around the park in the evening. But when I go back home this summer, he won’t be there.

I feel like I am on a different side of life. It feels like I’ve crossed a line where my rose-tinted sunglasses have been snatched from my face. I see others who have lost loved ones, and I finally understand. The dead Dad jokes flow right out of my mouth. It’s one of the only things I find funny at the moment. I can no longer banter like I used to—it takes effort to make a joke that isn’t dark.

Maybe grief is the sleepless nights filled with walks by the Charles River and Justin Bieber blasting through my

headphones. I force myself through problem sets, midterms, and essays when all I want to do is stay in bed. Days blur together—I can’t remember what I did yesterday or who I talked to. By the time my head hits the pillow, I’m too tired to dream.

Each day I wake up and try to be the person I was before his death. Everyone else around me carries on like normal, sitting outside on the red blankets from orientation week, laughing with their friends, enjoying the end of their time in the Yard. But, for me, everything feels like a haze. I hate that when I talk to people, pity fills their eyes. When they say, “I’m so sorry for your loss,” I just say, “Don’t worry, it’s okay,” because somehow, it is. Sometimes I think about the girl throwing snowballs in the Yard, laughing uncontrollably in our dorm after our toilet broke, chatting for hours in Annenberg Dining Hall. But now, conversations feel harder than they used to; everything moves too fast around me. Walking out of the dorm feels like a performance. I smile, I laugh, I act like everything is fine. I don’t know if the old me is coming back, and I’m too scared to find out who this new person is. It makes me realise that maybe I’m mourning the girl I used to be just as much as my Dad.

Scrolling online, I’ve tried to make sense of these feelings. Articles about the five stages of grief fill my feed. Again, the word grief. What’s that supposed to mean? Denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance. What stage am I in? Normal? No emotion? Nothing I feel at the moment feels like it can be categorised. I read stories about people who lost mothers to cancer, siblings to suicide, grandmothers to old age. The sudden heart attack stories are hard to find, though.

But through all of this, I’ve seen the most beautiful acts of kindness. Words will never fully capture the gratitude I feel for all those around me right now. From my roommates who take me out for ice cream every day, to my friend who sacrifices sleep to walk with me at night, to those who push their problem sets back to sit and talk. I want them to know how much I love



them, how grateful I am for them, and that I will be there for them as well. I remember these small things more now.

It’s strange what stays. The way he always napped on a Sunday afternoon. The way he loved eating hummus. How he always had a copy of “The Economist” on his desk. It would arrive in the post every week, and we would pick out the bits and pieces we found interesting or disagreed with. Back then, I would always skip the obituaries. But my Dad loved reading them. It was his favourite section.

I don’t think a life can ever be synthesised like that. Not the chicken stew he cooked when I had a bad day, or the times we raced our bikes on the way back from school, or the way he told me off for not cleaning the dishes properly.

I can’t read the obituaries anymore.

It was his subscription.

**ANONYMOUS IS A GUEST WRITER FOR THE “HARVARD INDEPENDENT.”**

**GRAPHIC BY KERRIE ZHU '28**

# ARTS

## Blooming With Time

Lessons learned and moments made in freshman year.

BY MIRIAM TSEGAY '29

### April 2026

A week after Harvard College's 2026 admitted students weekend in April, dubbed "Visitas," I found myself at Boston's Museum of Fine Arts' "Art in Bloom" exhibition. Flower arrangements were displayed throughout the museum, mimicking the curated pieces displayed in each room. The artistry in the flowers reflected that of the paintings, sculptures, and assortment of artwork: the textures and pops of color—all the way down to the vase—each bouquet a careful selection made by MFA volunteers and New England garden clubs.

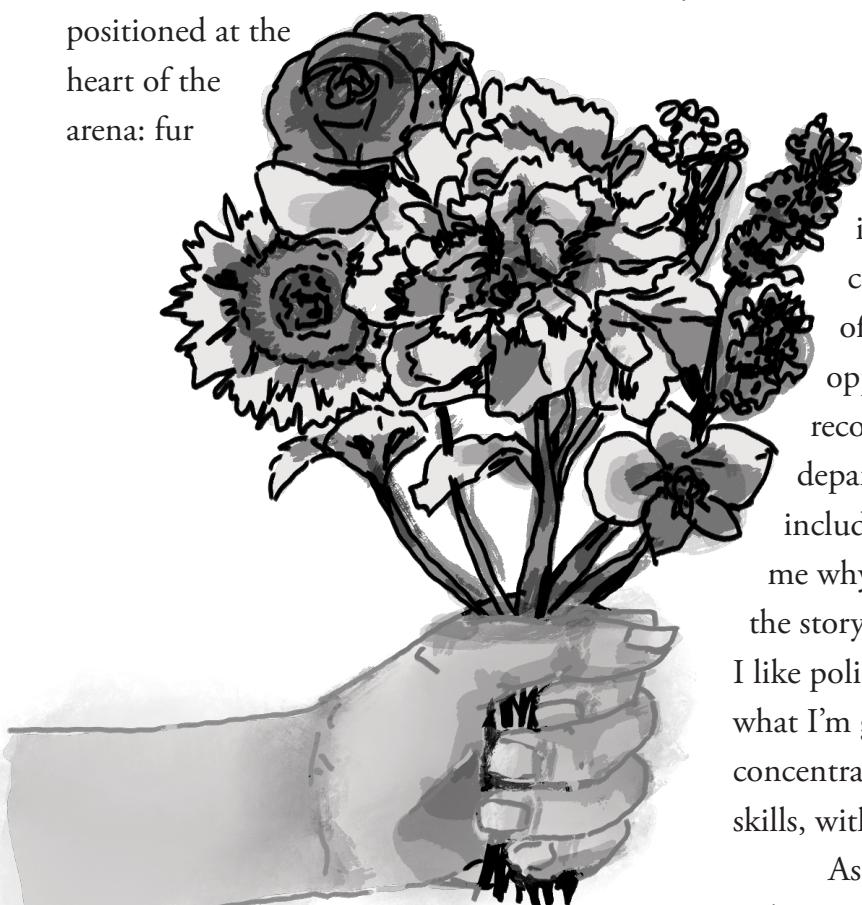
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The MFA's pairing of typical museum artifacts with freshly arranged flowers comes only once a year, during April, and it found me at the end of my freshman year. As I made my way through the museum, admiring each uniquely assembled arrangement, I could not help but think about my own bouquet of first-year experiences that have made Harvard more like home.

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### April 2025

As the lights dim in the Bright-Landry Hockey Center and the crowd around us is bathed in purple light, music fills the silent air, and the audience of undergraduates begins to cheer. Student models strut down the runway positioned at the heart of the arena: fur



jackets, bedazzled tops, stiletto boots galore. All of a sudden, they start dancing, perfectly synchronized as the beats direct them through each move. I am in awe as my Visitas host points out dancers they are close friends with and classmates they've spent hours with in Lamont Library. We dance in the pit with the crowd, a moment of shared human joy with strangers I've never met before.

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I began my Visitas weekend at Harvard's largest student-run fashion and dance performance, known as "Eleganza"—my first impression of Harvard. It was something so at odds with my perception of life here on campus. I had been told that students were always studying, locked in 24-hour libraries I felt I was supposed to know by name. Having heard of the lack of social life and noting the obvious absence of Greek culture, I had little hope for a student body that had the capacity to have fun.

Now I know that Harvard is nothing if not a balance of hard work and joyful occasions. My first year has been filled with nothing but a vibrant group of people with stories I could never have conjured myself. Just as much as I have learned about Spanish conjugation and European history in my classes, I have also discovered so much about who I want to be and what I want to do from the people I have met this year.

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### October 2025

"I'm planning on concentrating in Government and Economics," I confidently tell my professor during office hours. I'm sitting in an armchair opposite him while I ask for class recommendations in the Government department. He lists some courses, including some of his own, before asking me why I've chosen Government. I give him the story I've recycled many times over—that I like policy because that's what I understand, what I'm good at. It felt natural to choose a concentration that so explicitly focused on my skills, with Economics for practicality.

As I've exhausted all my questions, I go to leave, grabbing my newly thrifted handbag

from the chair next to me, but my professor leaves me with a parting anecdote: "Don't be so sure. Take the time to explore."

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Since that office hours session in my first semester, I've found myself oscillating between Government, Sociology, and Social Studies—a Harvard rite of passage for potential Government and Economics concentrators, I know. Looking back now that the spring semester is almost over, I wish that I had heeded my professor's advice and taken a class outside of the sphere of my intended concentration. There are so many classes here that are so worth taking, each offering something new to consider. I've realized now that I should deviate from the path I've set out for myself more often.

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### September 2025

*Rahus Hāduš Āmat!* I read the text my mom sent me on this bright, sunny September afternoon. It is the Eritrean New Year, my first one away from home. I don my favorite pink zuria, embroidered with zigzags of golden thread, and walk over to the Lowell Junior Common Room. Immediately, I am greeted with the smells of home: sweet himbasha freshly baked, pan-fried beef with onions, and spicy red stews made to stain cream-white zurias. Guayla music plays in the background, and it feels as if I am in the kitchen with my mother, sitting on a woven rattan stool while I watch her cook.

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I have found so much comfort in the Eritrean and Ethiopian, or Habesha, community on campus. I was one of the few Eritreans in my hometown outside Chicago, and while there was a big Habesha diaspora in the city, my family was often too busy to make the drive up to the North Side for weekly gatherings. It had never crossed my mind that I might find my cultural community in college, always having been lumped into larger affinity groups. Their stories and skin tones mirrored mine, but they were never quite the same.

It is a lovely thing to walk around campus and see features that resemble mine, knowing that their experiences are ones I can relate to. More than that, I've found friends who share similar cultural traditions, celebrate the same holidays, and understand the comfort of shiro on a cold, rainy day.

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### March 2026

*BANG, BANG, BANG.* The moment we've been waiting for is here—Harvard College Housing Day. I can hear upperclassmen's voices on the other side as my future roommate and I reach for our dorm door. Our other roommates anxiously wait nearby, phones up, ready to catch our reactions. Together, we turn the knob, and we are swarmed by a sea of red and black—Matherites with signs and bright yellow blow-up bananas. We scream with them, their excitement contagious as we look ahead to our next three years in this new home.

Moments later, leaving our room for the Yard to celebrate with peers, we pass rooming groups whose feelings about their new House are written all over their faces. We find friends rejoicing as they sport the

green bunny ears and big smiles of Leverett House. Others shed tears after they heard “C-A-B-O-T. You just won the lottery.” Bubbles float through the air, and students from each House chant as they fight to be heard over each other. I want to stay in this moment of pure chaos and undergraduate camaraderie.

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Harvard traditions are moments I know to cherish, moments unique to my time here. I love the way they bring everyone together, uniting us for a moment in the midst of our overwhelming Google Calendars and commitments. Sometimes it feels as though Harvard is a pre-professional bubble that avoids the stereotypical college experience at all costs. But moments like Housing Day, River Run, and Harvard-Yale bring back that sense of whimsy that you might find at a state school, reinjecting the student body with a sense of all-encompassing joy.

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This year, I went back to Eleganza, now with my roommate and the prospective freshman I was hosting for

Visitas. As I walked into Bright-Landry, the purple lights washing again, I ran into my hosts from last year, and it felt like no time had passed. But once I sat down, I realized everything was different. I was the one introducing the incoming undergraduate to my friends, pointing out the dancers I knew, and answering her questions—a true full circle ending to my first year.

All of these experiences—these moments that have shaped me and my freshman year—are purely out of luck. My decision to attend Visitas came out of sheer curiosity about what Harvard was like. In fact, I vividly remember stepping onto campus with no intention of attending: I won't be ending up here. And oh, how that has changed. How lucky I am that it did.

**MIRIAM TSEGAY '29  
(MIRIAMTSEGAY@COLLEGE.  
HARVARD.EDU) IS SO GLAD  
SHE CHOSE HARVARD.**

**GRAPHIC BY SAGE  
WILEY '29**

## A Harvard Man

**WRITTEN AND DESIGNED  
BY ELLIE GUO '29 AND  
SAM PARK '29**



*“That’s the Sergeant Major, but he prefers to be called Sergeant Concentrator.”*

**It's Time To**



Some people can

**The Harvard**

Let us know how you

Send a

**The Harvard**

**7 Prescott St.**

Maybe you'll see y

**Bring The Day!**

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**Independent**

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letter to:

**Independent**

Cambridge

your name in print

# I Went to the Woods to Live Deliberately

On conformity, anti-intellectualism, and seizing the day.

BY THE REFUSER OF THE CALL

**"C**arpe diem. Seize the day, boys. Make your lives extraordinary."

These words are spoken by John Keating, an unorthodox English teacher, in the 1989 film "Dead Poets Society." At my dad's recommendation, I watched it for the first time in the fall of my junior year of high school. It was the best and worst time for me to do so.

For starters, being 16 years old is probably one of the worst times in a modern human's life—it's when one is just conscious enough to be disillusioned with the world, but not enlightened enough to cope with it. Getting a driver's license at 16 exemplifies this, as one realizes that the majority of people should never be allowed behind the wheel.

For me, I felt oppressed by the hustle culture of my school and deeply resented everything about it. It seemed that everyone around me had planned out their entire careers, had stronger extracurriculars, and was fiercely competing for that coveted Ivy League acceptance letter. I watched as my classmates backstabbed each other amid a series of schoolwide academic-dishonesty scandals. But I was part of the culture, even though I hated it. I worried that my 4.0 GPA was in jeopardy and felt a dangerous amount of ego and superiority when I scored well on a test. My friends only spoke about school; it was barely in our vocabulary to do something fun on the weekends.

No wonder "Dead Poets Society" resonated with me. I watched Neil Perry, a top student at his boarding school whose parents were pressuring him to go to Harvard, find passion and love through poetry in Keating's English class. I romanticized every scene in which he and his tight-knit group of friends snuck out into the woods to escape academic pressure.

The movie was everything I wanted my life to be.

I suddenly realized what I wanted to pursue in college and beyond. Keating's words—"Poetry, beauty, romance, love, these are what we stay alive for"—became my mantra. I leaned into the humanities and became completely horrified that I once aspired to go to medical school. I became increasingly disillusioned with the peers I associated with. I became aware that my life was painfully ordinary.

How would I make my life extraordinary? I gathered a group of

people who weren't so-called "mindless conformists"—theater kids and creative writers—to start my own "Dead Poets Society," backed by my eccentric English teacher. It was thrilling, it was exciting, it was everything a student taking five Advanced Placement courses shouldn't have been doing.

Every Friday at lunchtime, while my English teacher warmed up his meal in his illegal classroom microwave, I would begin our meeting by reading an excerpt from "Walden" by Henry David Thoreau '37—the same passage used in the movie.

Then another Dead Poet or I would present a work of poetry. Over the club's two years, we discussed anything from songs and movie scenes to our own work. My personal favorites were strangely insightful internet shitposts, such as "this whole thing smacks of gender," by X user @dril. We would analyze these texts as if they were as serious and legendary as Shakespeare, commenting on meter, motifs, and syntax under the assumption that everything was an intentional poetic choice. Who was I to tell anyone what was or wasn't poetry?

One night, we gathered by what we thought was the outlet of a stormwater drainage pipe, a concrete tunnel about five feet in diameter. The only water was a shallow puddle with disintegrating leaves in it. Single file, we shuffled a few feet into the pipe, where a ladder led to a manhole cover. Here, we could stand upright and read our poems (or write them on the walls). Our voices echoed down the pipe in both directions, words traveling underground at the speed of sound.

When I graduated, I decided not to recruit freshmen to continue the club. Perhaps it was cynical of me, but I wanted to preserve my particular vision for the Society. I was afraid future members might want to expand its size or make it an official school club, only to add it as another bullet point at the bottom of their Common Application activities section. I was also worried it would become too radical, crossing the boundary from literary analysis to conspiracy theory.

My English teacher supported my choice. He described the two years of the club as a "safe haven." I remember him telling

me something to the effect of: "It's a bunch of smart people getting together and saying 'No, we're not doing that today. We're going to be stupid, and we're going to have fun.'"

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I look back on this time and acknowledge its quixotic nature. I couldn't recreate a movie in real life. It was also immature of me to hate my peers and friends for desiring conventional success. The danger of creating a "safe haven," like the cave the boys escape to in "Dead Poets Society," is that its tight confines can quickly become an echo chamber. For a while, I became obsessed with being different, expressing my individuality at the cost of important relationships. I should have seen it coming—the film warns of this danger. Charlie Dalton, enamored by the idea of seizing the day, gets himself expelled from school and jeopardizes his future in pursuit of an idealistic liberation.

Yet I don't regret the time I spent with the Dead Poets Society. It was brave, reckless, spontaneous—whatever you want to call it. I cannot erase it from my past or mitigate its effects on my values and judgments now.

Oscar Wilde wrote in his poem "Apologia": "I have not made my heart a heart of stone, / Nor starved my boyhood of its goodly feast, / Nor walked where Beauty is a thing unknown."

**THE REFUSER OF THE CALL HAS CROSSED THE THRESHOLD.**

**GRAPHIC BY CALEB BOYCE '29**



# Sisyphus at Harvard

Looking at Harvard through an absurdist lens.

BY JULIA BOUCHUT '29

Imagine a world with no meaning—where our lives have no purpose, and we are meant for nothing greater.

The average Harvard student might reject this notion, as it implies that our hard work amounts to nothing. After all, we have made innumerable sacrifices to get to this College, whether it be our social lives or our health, often at the cost of one too many late nights studying. By attending Harvard, society would have us believe we are special: we have achieved the nearly impossible in a pool where approximately

96% of applicants are rejected.

Our alumni community boasts highly accomplished figures, including Supreme Court justices, Nobel Prize laureates, and presidents. The world tells us that through Harvard, we have started down one of the best paths to fulfilling the formula for a successful life.

The College reinforces the idea that the Harvard student is exceptional and serves as a model for society.

Displayed in the Beren Hall

Common Room of Winthrop House is a quote that John Winthrop delivered in a sermon to the Puritans of the Massachusetts Bay Colony: “We must always consider, that we shall be as a city upon a hill—the eyes of all people are upon us.”

With society offering a blueprint for a meaningful life—and with our constant efforts to follow it—how is it possible that we have no purpose in the universe?

For humanity, the potential meaninglessness of life can feel suffocating. It is from this starting point that philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche wrote about nihilism in the late 19th century. He argued that neither the individual nor humanity writ large has an objective purpose; structure and order are human constructs with no truth value.

“Every belief, every considering

something true, is necessarily false because there is simply no true world,” he wrote. Nihilism is a crisis humanity must confront, as people work to dismantle the notion of cosmic truths and objectives, leading to a collapse of contemporary values and moral foundations. Nietzsche diagnoses nihilism as an inevitable consequence of the fraudulent purpose humans assign themselves, which may lead to despair.

But what if instead of hopelessness we embraced this meaninglessness? This is where Albert Camus enters, nearly 50 years later.

Camus identified a tension between humanity’s desire for purpose and the world’s apparent lack of meaning, which he called “the Absurd.” According to Camus, humans must resolve this contradiction, and the only viable way to do so is to embrace the absurd. He believed humans should realize their freedom by not being bound by some greater meaning, and, in doing so, be free to define their own purpose on their own terms.

Camus drew on “The Myth of Sisyphus” as an analogy to make his point. In Greek mythology, Sisyphus is condemned to roll a boulder up a hill for eternity, only for it to roll back down upon him as he reaches the top. This task is considered a meaningless effort—it will forever yield the same result.

In absurdism, our lives are meaningless and filled with obstacles, much like Sisyphus’ punishment. Still, we should find happiness in the process. The lack of purpose should not be a cause for despair. Instead, it allows each person to make their own meaning, without believing that a higher power has predetermined their purpose. It frees us all.

What does this teach us about our time at Harvard? How can we draw on these teachings to make the most of our lives and “seize the day?”

As Harvard students, we often get caught up in what we should do or should strive for: success, excellence in our fields, status, and money. We follow the herd—a time-tested path that offers safety and comfort.

Yet these expectations may cloud what makes us happy and gives our lives meaning. We all came to Harvard with unique passions to contribute to the College community. Common career paths and social pressures can pull us away from what we love. Sure, each of us has to be realistic

in the careers that we pursue, and we cannot ignore essential needs for survival, such as financial stability. It is hard to drown out societal expectations that tell you what you should prioritize and value lest you be cast as an outsider.

Still, we should be careful not to lose sight of our passions. We should feel free to pursue our interests, even if we fear the lack of practical applications, since we live in a world where nothing has intrinsic value. In the moments when we feel lost, it is what we love that grounds us and gives us meaning. There is no recipe for creating a perfect life. Absurdism tells us to abandon constructed rules, which have no meaning in the grander scheme of the universe, and create our own paths.

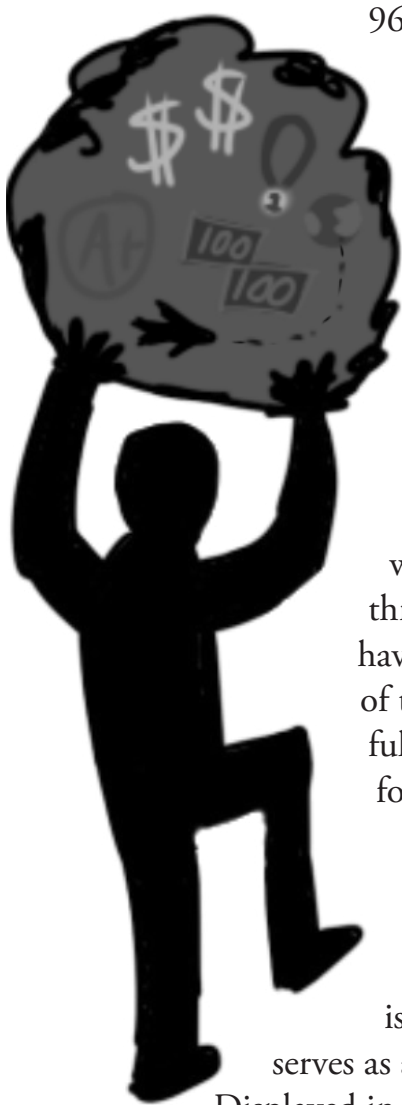
However, absurdism is also not as easy as just saying, “Abandon everything and do what makes you happy right now.” The meaning and happiness we pursue do not derive from instant gratification. Instead, it comes from awareness of our futile existence and intentional action: being fully conscious and finding enjoyment in our passions, even if we struggle along the way. We should not take absurdism as an excuse to avoid life’s challenges. There is still value in hard work, and Harvard students should continue with the same grit and determination that they always have.

Daily, we should not let ourselves be limited by social norms or what others think of us. We should look to enjoy the moment for what it is: self-contained, requiring no greater meaning. So I encourage you to take that spontaneous trip to Rhode Island or make a fool of yourself in public with friends. After all, I know I have found the most joy when I feel present and free from all the other pressures in life. An absurdist outlook tells us that we should prioritize what we love rather than what we are expected to achieve.

In the end, Camus teaches us that the boulder is worth pushing. We just have to be present enough to see it.

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**GRAPHIC BY MIA STEWART '29**



# Kitchen Sink No. 14

BY LUKE WAGNER '26 AND JONAH KARAFIOL '26

A man opposite the bunk had been talking since before dawn. Not to anyone. The words came out of him in a low, steady pour, the way water comes out of a tap left slightly open—not enough pressure to arc, only enough to run. He was talking about a horse. He had been talking about the horse for three days. The horse was brown. The horse was in a field. The field was in Lincolnshire. These facts arrived and arrived and did not accumulate into anything, and the men in the nearest bunks had stopped hearing him the way you stop hearing rain, and I had stopped hearing him too, until this morning, when I heard him say the horse's name.

The name was not important. What was important was that he said it with tenderness, and for a moment, the talking was not the talking of a man who has lost his mind, but the talking of a man who has lost his horse, and the difference between those two things is smaller than the distance between his bunk and mine.

I was already dressed. I had been dressed since dark, sitting on the edge of my mattress with my shoes on and my hands between my knees. The laces were tied. The coat was buttoned. I was not waiting for Ruddock. I was sitting in the way that a man sits when he has nowhere to go and has prepared to go there.

The ward came into its morning. Feet on the floor. The scrape of tin. Someone at the far end retched dryly into a basin, the sound muffled by the curtain they had put up around Gibbs after the incident with the window. The curtain was green canvas and did not reach the floor, and beneath it I could see Gibbs's feet, bare, very white, the toes curled under in a way that made me look away.

Ruddock came at seven. The keys announced him. He stopped at the end of my bunk and looked at me, already dressed, and said nothing about it, because Ruddock said nothing about most things, and the nothing he said was always the same nothing, which was the nothing of a man who has seen enough that seeing more does not produce speech.

Up, he said. I stood.

We went into the corridor. The corridor was long and turned once, at the place where the old building met the new, and the turn was marked by a change in the stone—limestone to brick, pale to dark, the older wing giving way to the one built after the fire in the year no one could agree on. The floor was wet. An orderly had mopped it recently. The mop had left arcs on the stone, broad and overlapping, and my shoes printed a trail into the wet that would dry before anyone thought to read it.

We passed the day room. The door

was open. Inside, four men sat at a table with nothing on it. One of them was holding his hands out in front of him, palms up, examining them with the focus of a man who has been asked to identify something and is not certain he has found it. His fingers were long and very clean. He turned his hands over, looked at the backs, and turned them again. The examination was thorough and unhurried. He was still examining them when we passed the door, and I understood that he would be examining them when we passed again on the way back, and that the examination would not be finished, because the examination was not looking for something that could be found.

Ruddock walked ahead of me. His belt creaked. The leather strap swung at his hip with each step, a small pendulum. We went down the stairs—twelve steps, a landing, twelve more—and at the landing I put my hand on the rail, and the cold iron burned my hand.

At the bottom, the corridor opened into the hall where the consulting rooms were. The smell changed. Above the lye, above the carbolic, there was something else—paper, tobacco, the dry warmth of rooms where fires were lit for men who were not patients. Whitmore's door was the second on the left. Ruddock knocked. A voice said come in. Ruddock opened the door, and I went through, and behind me the door closed, and the key turned.

...

He was standing at the window with his coat still on, which was unusual. His coat was wet at the shoulders. He had been outside. His shoes had left a partial print on the stone where he had come in from the garden, and the print was drying at the edges, the thinnest parts slowly evaporating into the air heavy with silence.

On the desk, beside the file, there was a book. Small. Green cloth cover. Ruddock left. The key turned. I sat. Whitmore took off his coat and hung it on the hook by the door. He crossed to his chair, sat down, and placed his hands flat on the desk on either side of the file. His fingernails were clipped very short.

He did not open the file. He looked at me for some time. Then he moved the green book from beside the file to the centre of the desk, between

us, and left it there. He did not say what it was. He did not need to. I knew the book by the crack in the spine. I knew it because the spine had cracked from being opened to the same page too many times, and the page it opened to was a page I had read aloud to the girl on a Tuesday in her room while she sat on the floor with her back against the radiator and her knees pulled up and her pencil in her teeth, and the sound my voice made reading the Greek was a sound I did not know my voice could make until I heard it in her room, which was small and full of her and empty of everything else.

I did not touch the book.

This was found in her room, Whitmore said. Among her effects. The college sent it with the report. It is a library copy. It should have been returned.

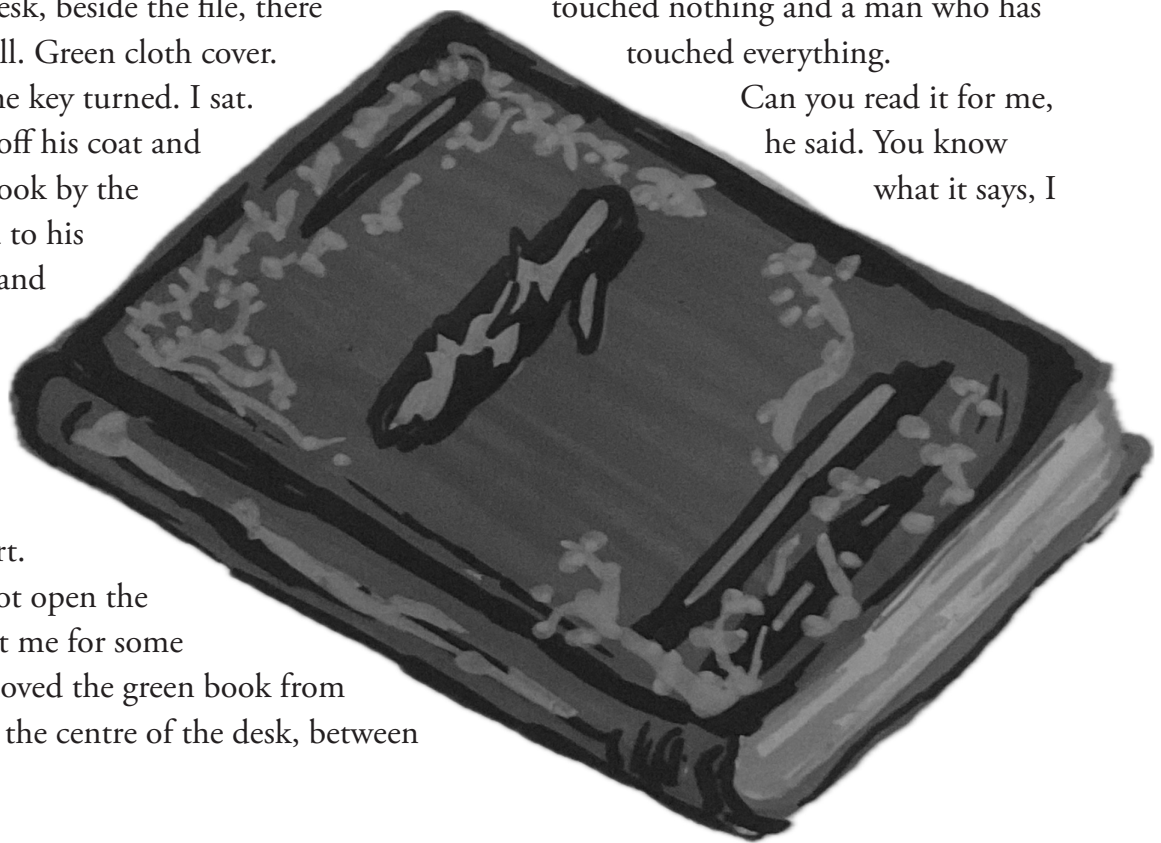
I said nothing.

I noticed the spine, he said. It falls open to a particular passage. The passage has been marked in pencil. In the margin, there is a second mark, in a different hand, and beside it a note. The note is in Greek.

I knew the note. I had written it. I had written it on the Tuesday with her pencil, leaning over the page while she held the book steady with her palm flat on the opposite leaf, and the pencil was warm from her teeth, and I had not thought about the warmth until now, in this room, with the book on the desk between us, and the memory of the warmth came in with the force of something that has been held shut and has broken its hinge.

Whitmore opened the book to the marked page. He turned it so that I could read it. I did not look down. I looked at his hands on either side of the open book, and his hands were steady, and my hands were in my lap, and I could feel the distance between his hands and mine as a physical measurement, specific, countable, the distance between a man who has touched nothing and a man who has touched everything.

Can you read it for me, he said. You know what it says, I



I did not read it. I sat in the chair and looked through the paper to the wall behind Whitmore's head, where a water stain had spread since the last session, a new shape on the plaster, darker at the centre and feathering out at the edges, the kind of stain that comes from a pipe weeping inside the wall where no one can see it.

Whitmore waited. The waiting had a different quality than before. In the earlier sessions, the waiting had been professional, a tool, the silence deployed to make me fill it. This waiting was not that. This waiting was the waiting of a man who has arrived at the edge of what he knows how to do and is standing there, looking at what is past it.

Tell me about the night, he said. I sat there for a second, then responded.

Edward went to her room. He went up the stairs. She opened the door. He stood by her desk and looked at the book she was reading, and he turned it toward him without picking it up, and his mouth moved with the reading.

His mouth, Whitmore questioned.

His mouth, I said. He read the passage to himself. The lamp was on the desk, and the ring of light was on the desk, and she was standing by the door. She said he was not himself. She said he was the other one. She said she had wondered when he would come.

I stopped.

Whitmore was watching me with an expression I had not seen before. It was not clinical. It was not the attention of a man writing a paper in his head. It was closer to the expression of a man who is watching a building crumble but cannot pry himself away.

How do you know what she said.

I did not answer.

How do you know the lamp was on the desk? How do you know where the ring of light was? How do you know she was standing by the door? Edward told you these things.

He said this carefully. He said it the way a man sets down the last card in a patience game, knowing the card but waiting to see whether the table knows it too.

Edward told me, I said. Whitmore asked me when. And I could not answer, because there was no when. There was no conversation between us in which Edward had sat down and recounted the evening to me in detail. There was no report from the other side. There was only the knowledge, whole and specific, of the lamp and the light and the door and her voice and the Greek on the page and the pencil warm from her teeth, and the knowledge was not told to me. It was in me. It was mine, the way the counting was mine. It had always been mine.

The room was quiet. Outside, a sound I had not heard before—a bird, or a gate, something metallic and brief, gone before it could be placed. The water stain on the wall behind Whitmore's head had a shape that I now saw was the shape of a hand, fingers spread, pressing out from inside the plaster.

She said the room was a room, I responded. She said if it kept him out, that was a property of him and not of the room.

Whitmore said nothing.

She was wrong. The room did not keep him out. Nothing kept him out. He came in because there was no door between us. There was never a door between us. He was behind me on the stairs, and he was not behind me. He was at my shoulder, and he was not at my shoulder. He was on my legs on the stairs. He was in my hand on the doorframe.

I stopped. I was aware that I had said my hand. I was aware that the sentence had changed, that the space I had been maintaining between us—the space of he and I, of Edward and Thomas, of the breath that was mine and the breath that was not—had closed in the grammar before it closed anywhere else, and I could feel Whitmore's attention on the closing, and I could not take it back.

Whitmore did not repeat it. He did not say, You said my hand. A lesser doctor would have. Whitmore left it in the air where it had been said and let it do what it would do.

I looked at the book on the desk. It was still open to the marked page. The pencil note in the margin was in my handwriting. It had always been in my handwriting. There was no other handwriting. There was the handwriting that was mine and the handwriting that I had called not mine, and they were written by the same fingers, which were attached to the same hands, which were in my lap, open, still, as though the stillness could undo the fact of what they had done.

I went to her room, I said. The sentence was quiet. It fell into the room and lay there. Whitmore did not move. The fire was not lit. The window let in the grey of the afternoon, which was the grey of a day that has spent its light early and has nothing left.

I went up the stairs. I stood at her door. I knocked. She opened the door, and I came in, and she closed it behind me. I stood by her desk, and I looked at the book she was reading, and I turned it toward me without picking it up.

Whitmore closed the green book on the desk. He closed it gently, the way you close something that has served its purpose. He placed his hand on the cover for a moment. Then he moved it back to the file

and made a note, a single line, and the pen moved quickly, and the note was brief.

That is enough for today. His voice was flat. He said it the way a man says it when he believes there will be a tomorrow in which the work will continue, and the belief is steady, and the steadiness is the thing he is offering, and I took it, because it was there, and because taking things that are offered is a habit I have not lost.

\*\*\*

Ruddock walked me back. The corridor. The lye. The keys. The ward.

I went to my bunk. The evening light was thin and came in at a low angle, and did not reach the far wall. I sat on the edge of the mattress. The bunk across from mine was empty. The impression in the mattress had almost gone. Another week and it would be level, and the bed would be a bed that nobody had slept in, and the room would forget that it had ever held two men, because the room had never held two men, and forgetting was the room catching up to what had always been true.

I unlaced my shoes. I set them at the foot of the bunk, side by side, the laces tucked inside. I pulled the blanket up to my waist and lay back. The wool was coarse and smelled of the cupboard it was kept in, cedar, dust, and a faint trace of carbolic.

The ward settled. Someone coughed. A door closed. The gas in the corridor went down, and the light narrowed, and the narrowing was gradual, and I watched it until the watching became the only thing I was doing.

I did not go to the sink. My hands were in the blanket, dry, folded, and I did not unfold them. The tap across the room dripped once and then did not drip again. The sound was brief and solitary, a single note, and then nothing.

I was not tired. I was the thing that comes after tired, the thing that has no name because naming it would make it a feeling, and it was not a feeling. It was a fact.

It was the fact of a man lying in a bed in a ward in a building that would outlast him, and the fact did not require anything of him, and he did not require anything of the fact, and between the two of them there was a settlement, which was quiet, and which held.

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

**GRAPHIC BY LINDEN MCCARL '28**

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# SPORTS

## Bye-Bye, Blue?

An argument against the removal of umpires.

BY TYLER DANG '28

**B**eginning in the 2026 season, Major League Baseball implemented a revolutionary technology: the Automated Ball-Strike system. Instead of umpires exerting full control over what constitutes a ball or strike, players can now challenge calls for a real-time, accurate ruling. The ABS ruling is precise to a sixth of an inch. With some umpires renowned for their sketchy strike zone calls, many question the need for these umpires at all anymore.

The modern game of professional baseball has undergone significant changes. To the chagrin of purists, rule changes have focused on reducing game length, which has increased to around three hours over the past decades. With the introduction of the pitch clock, ghost runners, and much more, the average length is back down to two hours and 45 minutes. The goal of these changes is to make baseball more appealing to younger audiences less willing to spend three hours on a slower-paced game.

Despite its advances, challenging an umpire's calls takes time. Arguments between players or coaches and umpires, while providing entertainment, also derail the pace of the game. The suspect strike zones and unwritten rules can be confusing (or even infuriating) to newer fans. So why not replace the umpires? The technology is there. What would we really be losing?

To answer this, we first must establish why we are drawn to sports. Naturally, fans are attracted to skill. Watching elite players compete on the biggest stage showcases the limits of athleticism and human capability. Maybe I can't do a scorpion kick in soccer, but watching a professional perform the impressive act cultivates respect for the player and provides entertainment for the crowd. After all, that is the (supposed) appeal of All-Star Games: the best competing against the best.

Aside from skill, competition is a necessary component for fans to be engaged and entertained. Few fans enjoy a blowout instead of a tight, contested game. All-Star Games have seen declining fan interest because they are not seen as competitive showcases but rather as trivial exhibition matches. Despite the increasing accessibility of streaming for All-Star Games, viewership has noticeably decreased.

Umpires and unwritten rules also bring an enhanced level of competition extending beyond the outlined rules and official zones of technology.

While ABS promises a consistent strike zone, umpires often have slightly different perspectives: what one umpire calls a strike might be called a ball by another. Some may

argue that this inconsistency is frustrating; these differences prompt skilled pitchers, catchers, and batters to adjust from game to game. This variability allows for an extremely high level of skill, with the best pitchers able to acclimate to any umpire's strike zone. If we are interested in highlighting these athletes' best proficiency, this variability is essential to showcasing the mental aspect of the game.

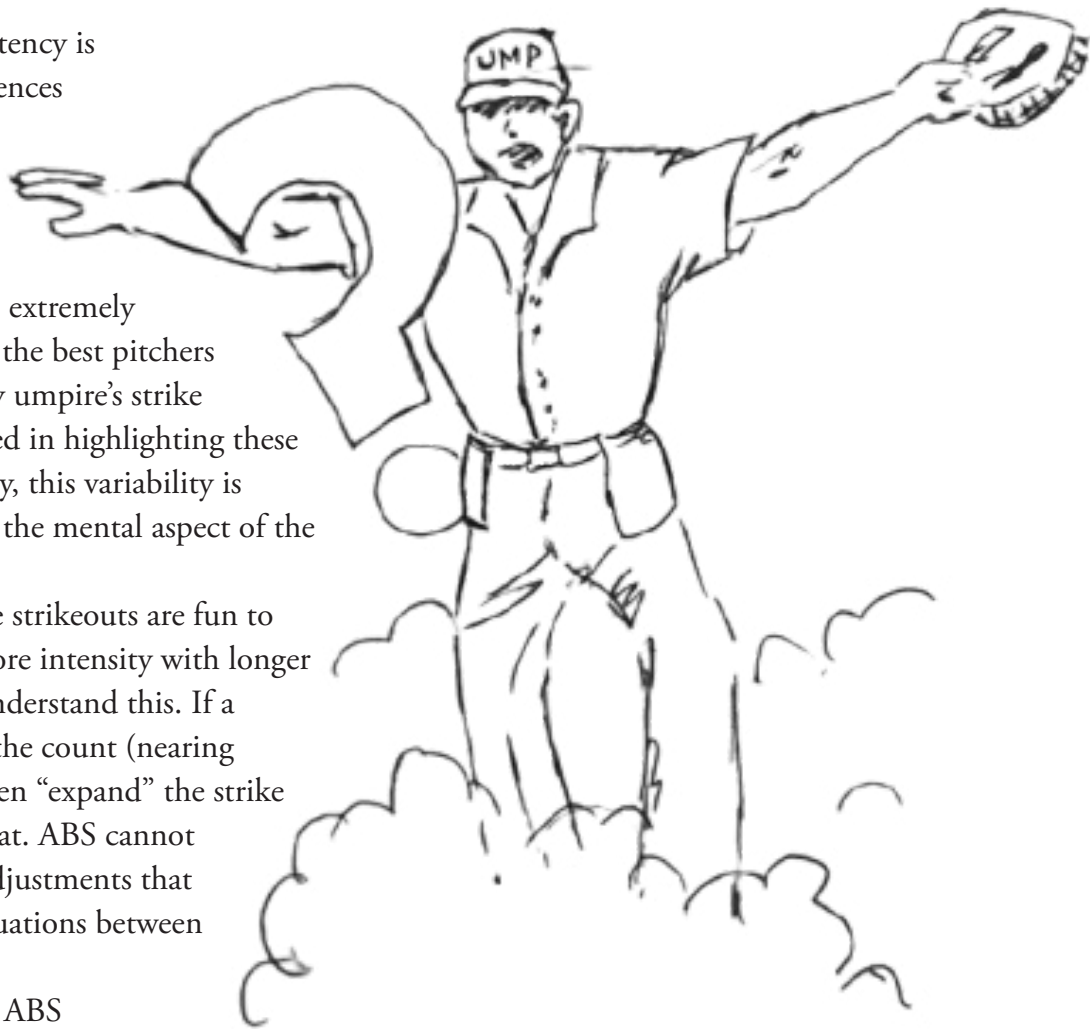
Moreover, while strikeouts are fun to watch, there's much more intensity with longer at-bats, and umpires understand this. If a pitcher falls behind in the count (nearing four balls), umpires often "expand" the strike zone to extend the at-bat. ABS cannot replicate these subtle adjustments that create high-leverage situations between pitchers and batters.

The addition of ABS alongside umpires, on the other hand, reinforces sport as an exercise in and a showcase of talent. Winning a crucial challenge can jump-start a crowd and fuel a comeback. Removing umpires eliminates this suspense in favor of regulated calls of "STRIKE" and "BALL."

Using ABS exclusively in the MLB also removes an element of skill demonstration for players. A player challenging a call is taking a gamble that requires enormous skill and plate vision. ABS challenges succeed about 50 percent of the time. Thus, players who are better at determining where the ball crosses relative to the strike zone are more likely to succeed on challenges. Replacing umpires entirely means these players lose this advantage.

These competitive advantages make sports entertaining: players have different strengths and weaknesses, and the most skilled players use their talents to overcome their weaknesses. Players like Jose Altuve or Isiah Thomas are so entertaining because they are so adept despite being much shorter than the average baseball or basketball player. They have found ways to make up for their "disadvantages" by being even stronger and smarter in other areas.

Aside from entertainment or competitive reasons, umpires shouldn't be replaced solely for safety reasons. When baseballs are getting hurled at speeds in the high 90s miles per hour, people can fear that they might get hurt. It is not uncommon for batters to physically respond when seemingly endangered by the associated pitcher. Umpires are responsible for defusing



these often-heated situations. No computer system has the human capacity to calm these emotions in the same way.

Sure, detractors will argue that the rules are rules and the subjectivity that umpires introduce diminishes the prestige of the sport. However, the definition of the strike zone is completely dependent on the batter. How ABS measures a batter's strike zone does not take into account slight differences in the batter's stance or any shifts made before the swing. An umpire is better equipped to notice these quick changes.

Unfortunately, umpires can be horrendous. They can miss blatant calls or let their ego get in the way of the game. But that's what ABS challenges are for: to keep the umpires in check. Despite their inherent flaws, umpires are still necessary to the game. For baseball to be entertaining, competitive, and safe, while still honoring a fan's time, a happy medium between ABS and umpires is required.

Truly, there is no easy solution to this debate. Purists will vouch for umpires, while modernists will argue for more technology. To remain relevant, baseball must adapt to technological changes, but it should not sacrifice its identity.

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**GRAPHIC BY ANNABELLA BURTON-BOONE '29**

# No Varsity, No Problem

A reflection on my four years of non-varsity athletics at Harvard.

BY FRANCES CONNORS '26

Sports have always shaped the seasons of my life. In middle school, every change of temperature brought a new team. Fall was soccer and tennis season. Winter featured basketball, ice skating, and indoor soccer. Spring was filled with lacrosse games and more soccer. And summer had horseback riding. I used to resist the idea of youth sports specialization, instead trying everything. But by the time I got to high school, time constraints forced me to narrow the list, leaving the other activities I once loved as mere recreation.

However, the real shift came when I got to Harvard. Having forgone the recruitment process—I knew my smarts would get me further than my stick skills—I arrived on campus as a non-athletic regular person. It felt odd not to have practice five days a week or a team of people to hang out with. I longed for my varsity athletic days as I watched my friends go off to team mixers, don their new Department of Harvard Athletics crewnecks, and listened to them recount the tales of big conference wins.

As fun as it all sounded, walking on to a team was out of the picture: I was not at the Division I level, and the 6 a.m. practices scared me from trying the novice crew program. I quickly realized, however, that my sports career did not need to end in Cambridge. In my past four years here, I've played three different club sports, picked up a fourth as a hobby, and stayed active in many ways.

When we're in a new environment, we often turn to the familiar to seek comfort, and so was the case for me and my sports career at Harvard. The first club sport I joined was the Harvard Women's Lacrosse Club, and it instantly became a new part of my personality. Every week, I looked forward to trekking across the river,

being back on the field, fighting for ground balls, and scoring goals. I made some of my closest friendships on the team as we battled other schools at games and later celebrated at our own club sport mixers.

One of my favorite memories was a game against Brown my sophomore year. I was still learning the ropes of being captain, having earned the spot at the end of my first year, but I managed to get a good turnout for our first game of the season (like other Harvard clubs, commitment was a problem). The game was tight, and we matched every goal that Brown scored, but at the end of the third quarter, we trailed by one. As my first game as captain, I could not let our team lose. I summoned up all the energy I had left to deliver a fiery team speech and implored my teammates to leave it all on the field. And leave it there, we did. We won the game by three goals.

As much as I love lacrosse, college did not kill my liberal arts-esque need to play multiple sports at once. When I realized that a club sport was nowhere near the 20-hour minimum commitment of a varsity sport, I decided to add another to my schedule. Sophomore fall, I picked up a squash racquet for the first time and joined the club team. Walking into practice with players who had a decade of experience on me was intimidating, but I quickly realized my fear was unwarranted. Although every 11-1 loss stung, the beauty of a fast-moving sport is that you can quickly move to a more skill-appropriate partner after each match. I discovered that I was not the only person new to the sport, and I made many friends who learned alongside me. Each week, I watched myself progress and proved that I could learn new things.

The sport pushed me out of my comfort zone, and a few months after starting, I got to join the team at club squash nationals in Philadelphia. While I lost both my matches as a fill-in, the tournament allowed me to get closer to the team and see how far I'd come in the sport. At practice, I no longer preface matches by discounting my skill level, and squash has become one of my favorite sports to play both at club practice and with friends.

The most unique of all my club-sport experiences was my brief foray into the world of polo. I spent many summers riding horses growing up, but as I got older, it became too logistically difficult to continue. When I got to campus, I realized that I could pick it up again—unfortunately, it took two years for me to come to this conclusion. In my junior fall, I joined the Harvard Polo Club junior varsity team and spent about six hours a week in South Hamilton. It was exhilarating to get back on the horse and play such a high-intensity sport. I had never cantered horses so fast and been surrounded by so many people while also trying to hit a ball. Polo was a combination of all of my favorite sports, and each practice left me blissfully exhausted

if not awed by the natural beauty of the New England countryside.

While it's a little harder to schedule a casual polo match than a casual squash match, I still learned many valuable lessons from the sport, most importantly, time management. I almost joined polo in my sophomore year, but backed out due to the long commute and time commitment. I talked to one of my pre-med friends on the team later that year and asked how he managed to disappear from campus for six hours twice a week without falling behind. His answer was simple: priorities. If you care enough about something, you put it on your schedule and make everything else work around it. When I took his advice that junior fall, it worked, and suddenly I was out riding horses every week and still turning psets in on time.

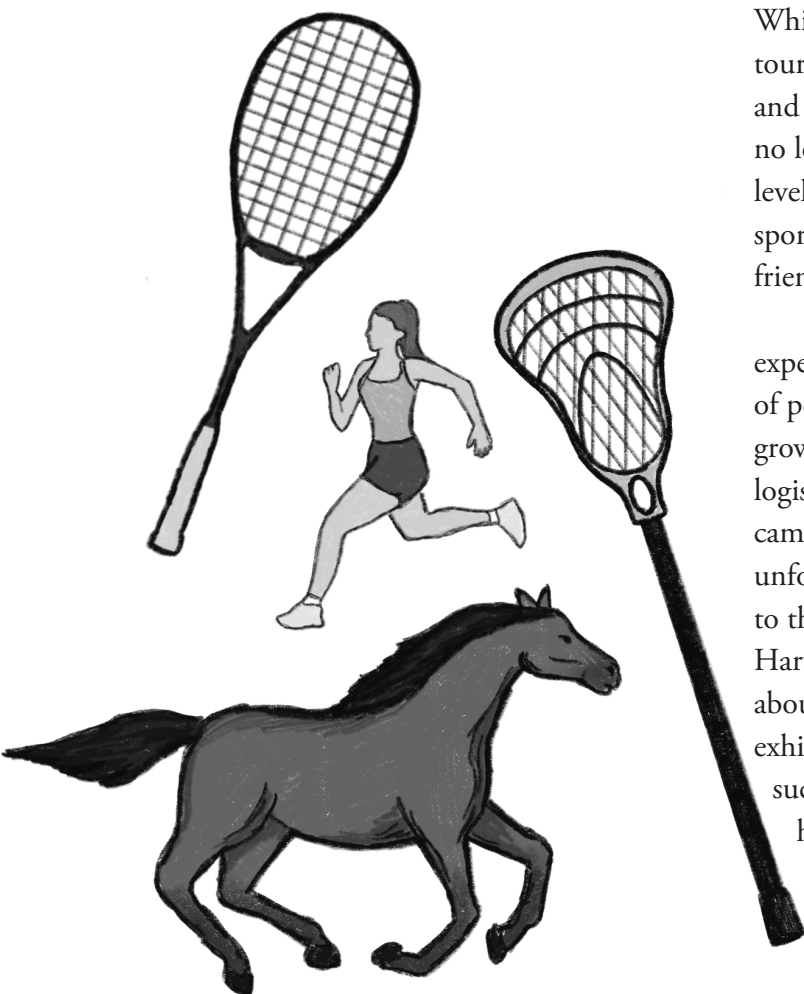
The final sport I've picked up in college is running. While I hated any distance past two miles in high school, I resolved to get better in college precisely because it was so hard for me. After two years of attempting to get into the sport, I finally got hooked when I joined a run club in my junior spring. The social pressure not to stop kept me going and launched a love of the sport. I finished my first half-marathon this past fall in Cambridge and my first full marathon in Newport, Rhode Island, in April. While running is an individual activity, my favorite moments are always with other people. I've loved the times when I've had consistent partners to do long runs with every week, and nothing tops the feeling of crossing milestone distances like 10 kilometers or 10 miles for the first time in run clubs.

Although I was never a Division I athlete, my four years at Harvard have still been filled with lots of athletic fun. Sports have not only been a way for me to stay active and make new friends, but they've also taught me a lot about myself. The unique goals and challenges of each sport are a way for me to prove that I can do hard things and accomplish the seemingly impossible. Both physically and mentally, sports make me stronger, and I plan to stay an athlete for the rest of my life.

Often, there is a disconnect between what we think we can accomplish and what we can actually do. A common phrase in the endurance sports world is "the mind gives out before the body does." I hope my college athletic career illustrates that you can do anything, especially at a place with such incredible opportunities. So if you're considering trying a new sport or adding a new club to your schedule, do it. Now is the time to take risks and prove to yourself just what you're capable of.

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THE NEXT SPORT SHE SHOULD  
PICK UP.**

**GRAPHIC BY NESHAMA  
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COVER ART BY MADISON KRUG '27  
LAYOUT BY CAMERON BERNIER '29 AND  
NUALA MERNIN '29  
OPINIONS OF FORUM PIECES BELONG ONLY  
TO THE WRITER AND DO NOT REFLECT THE  
VALUES OF THE "HARVARDVINDEPENDENT."

# Hey Seniors

Mia Park Tavares Rania Jones



## Congratulations, Layla!

I am beyond proud of everything you've accomplished at Harvard. You have inspired me with your hard work and dedication through these four years. As you step into this next chapter, know that I will always be cheering you on.



## You did it, Katie!

Four years and countless memories -- you're a Harvard grad! I always knew you were smarter than me, but this really proves it (and now you can finally brag properly). Congratulations. The world better be ready.



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Send in a picture or have our team draw a portrait for you!

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¼ pg: \$175 picture | \$225 drawing

½ pg: \$350 picture | \$400 drawing

Full pg: \$500 picture | \$550 drawing

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