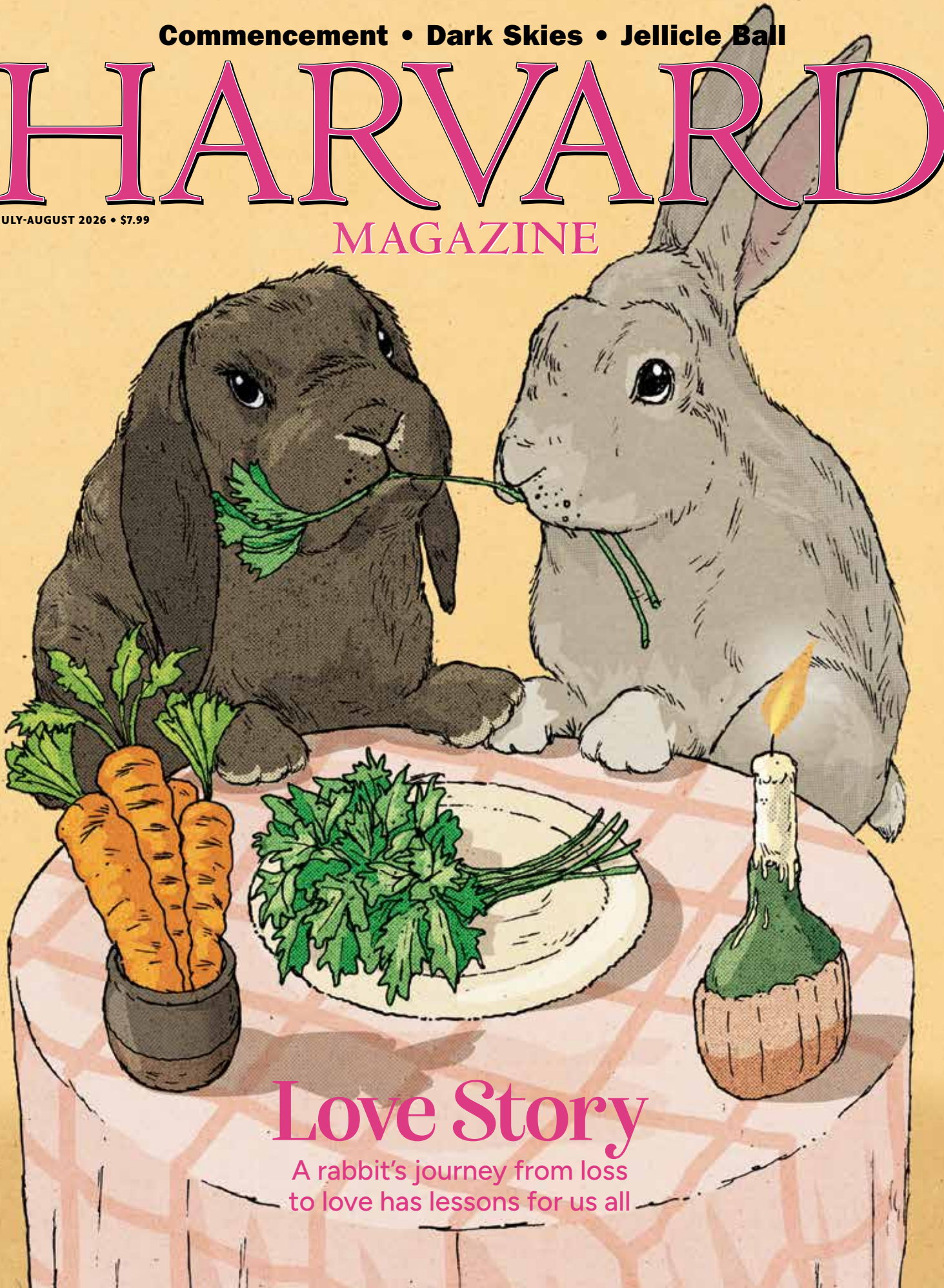
Commencement • Dark Skies • Jellicle Ball

HARVARD MAGAZINE

JULY-AUGUST 2026 • $7.99



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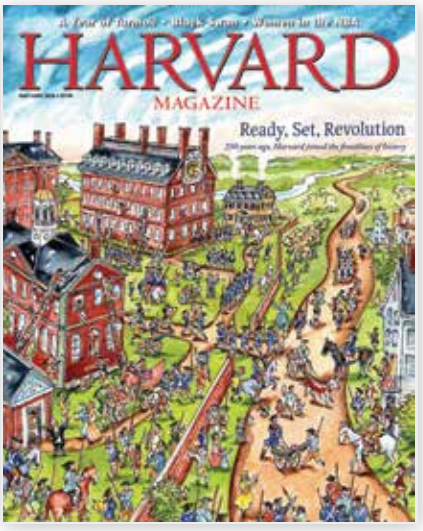
On the cover: *Illustration by Wesley Merritt*

FROM TOP: STU ROSNER; JEFF SULLIVAN; MARIA FRANCESCA MELIS; WESLEY MERRITT (2)

Cambridge 02138

Harvard and the 250th, a year of turmoil, Mark Twain



HARVARD AND THE 250TH

As a liberal-leaning resident of southwestern Ohio's politically conservative Warren County, I was surprised to learn that this county was named in memory of "the greatest incendiary in all of America": major general and physician Joseph Warren, A.B. 1759, A.M. '62 ("'The Greatest Incendiary in All of America,'" May-June 2026, p. 30).

Your page-turning profiles of Harvard revolutionaries on the eve of America's 250th birthday—and your casual reference to Revolutionary War veterans naming "streets and towns in his honor, as they settled the frontier as far west [!] as Ohio"—sparked this reader's curiosity. Major General Warren's death at the Battle of Bunker Hill did not end his memory or his cause, thanks in part to *Harvard Magazine* writer Daniel B. Cunningham's profile in courage.

So often my incendiary junior high history students ask, "Why are we learning this? How does this help us?" With revolutionary fervor, they, too, challenge contemporary tyrannous teachings. Fortunately, you've answered their militant inquiries. The places we inhabit today bear the marks of heroes who still inspire. Thank you, brave Major General Warren, for taking one for the Revolutionary team. Your liberating legacy lives on in this conservative Ohio county.

Christopher Kraus, M.T.S. '85

Major General Joseph Warren might have been described by one British lord as "the greatest incendiary in all of America." But it was Joseph Hawley of Northampton whom Massachusetts Lieutenant Governor Thomas Hutchinson blamed for the American Revolution. Hawley was selected to go to the Continental Congress, but declined from ill health, so John Adams, A.B. 1755, was sent in his place. Adams wrote Hawley regularly for advice once there. But when histories were written in the 1790s, the younger generation (like Adams) left the older generation (like Hawley) out of them.

Did I mention writing my revisionist Harvard senior thesis on Joseph Hawley, graded and praised as "important" by Professor Bernard Bailyn?

James Berkman '77, J.D. '82

This magazine is to be commended for its issue highlighting Harvard's role in the American Revolution. The articles skillfully blend historical fact with whimsical illustrations by Mark Steele. However, I have one quibble and one observation about those illustrations.

Quibble first: In the illustration accompanying the article, "A Revolution in Their Midst" (May-June 2026, page 28), I object to the expulsion from the famed Tory Row of its most historically Georgian home, the Vassall-Craigie-Longfellow House, from its central position to an outlying street. I could also express dismay that the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House, built in 1685 and until recently home of the Cambridge Historical Society, which I ran for a brief period in the 1980s, is not depicted. But that is being unnecessarily picky.

Observation: I strongly suspect that the artist knows of the similarly whimsical illustration of Harvard (and Radcliffe) drawn almost 70 years ago by my godmother, Alva Scott Garfield. A Southern lady from Montgomery, Alabama, she

came north to Wellesley College and in the mid-1950s drove me there in her convertible to convert me into considering attending. I did, and I still fondly remember driving back through Sudbury with the radio streaming Sibelius's Symphony No. 6. My late husband, John Merrill Norton '56, and I spent our honeymoon at her summer home in Madison, New Hampshire. "Auntie" Alva also drew maps of Boston and Concord, Massachusetts.

Bettina A. Norton

IN A LETTER TO Thomas Jefferson in 1815, John Adams asked, "What do We mean by the Revolution?" He then answered: "The War? That was no part of the Revolution. It was only an Effect and Consequence of it. The Revolution was in the Minds of the People, and this was effected, from 1760 to 1775, in the course of fifteen Years before a drop of blood was drawn at Lexington."

Shortly after Great Britain's parliament passed the notorious Stamp Act in 1765, Adams's second cousin, Samuel, A.B. 1740, A.M. '43, organized the Boston Sons of Liberty to oppose the stamps as an unconstitutional tax. For the next 10 years, as British hostility to the Americans' rights hardened, Samuel's activism progressed from resistance to rebellion to demands for independence. That, according to John Adams, was the revolution. The War for Independence that began in 1775 and led to the Declaration of Independence 250 years ago is best understood as the result of the revolution in the minds of the people.

It is sometimes said that history is an argument without end, but this issue is not quibbling about words. It poses profound questions about causation and context as July 4, 2026, approaches.

Steven S. Berizzi '73

LEST WE HURRY to congratulate ourselves for our support for the American Revolution, consider the following: many years ago, touring Nova Scotia, Canada, we came across a public plaque that commemorated "the 50 percent of then-living Harvard graduates who emigrated to Nova Scotia in the wake of the American Revolution." Clearly, they were Tories. Shades of "Evangeline"?

Marc Hertzman '65, M.D. '69

HARVARD
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Harvard Magazine (ISSN 0095-2427) is published bimonthly by Harvard Magazine Inc., a nonprofit corporation, 7 Ware Street, Cambridge, Mass. 02138-4037, phone 617-495-5746; fax 617-495-0324. The magazine is supported by reader contributions and subscriptions, advertising revenue, and a subvention from Harvard University. Its editorial content is the responsibility of the editors. Periodicals postage paid at Boston, Mass., and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to Circulation Department, Harvard Magazine, 7 Ware Street, Cambridge, Mass. 02138-4037. Subscription rate $48 a year in U.S. and possessions, $65 Canada and Mexico, $85 other foreign. (Allow up to 10 weeks for first delivery.) SUBSCRIPTION ORDERS AND CUSTOMER SERVICE INQUIRIES should be sent to the Circulation Department, *Harvard Magazine*, 7 Ware Street, Cambridge, Mass. 02138-4037, or call 617-495-5746 or 800-648-4499, or e-mail harvard_magazine@harvard.edu. Single copies $7.99, plus $5.00 for postage and handling. MANUSCRIPT SUBMISSIONS are welcome, but we cannot assume responsibility for safekeeping. Include stamped, self-addressed envelope for manuscript return. Persons wishing to reprint any portion of *Harvard Magazine*'s contents are required to write in advance for permission. Address inquiries to the address given above.

7 WARE STREET

Summer of Love

More reasons to cherish your connections

If you are wondering why the dating life of a pet rabbit should matter in a troubled world, you haven't met Petunia.

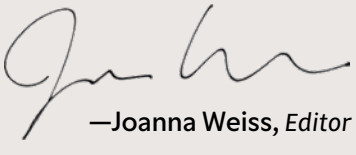
Senior editor Lydialyle Gibson's lop-eared bunny has been a hot topic in our office for months, ever since we learned that, after losing her rabbit companion, she went speed dating. (It's a common pet-rabbit ritual, it turns out, facilitated by some dedicated humans.) But Petunia's story (page 23) isn't just a quirky look at the animal world. It's a window into themes that all of us face throughout our lives: grief and life after loss; the challenge of meeting someone new; the primal, physiological need for companionship.

Lydia delves into scientific research to explore how relationships actually make us healthier—including the findings of the longitudinal Harvard Study of Adult Development, commonly known as the Harvard Happiness Study. Through the lens of biology, psychology, and (let's face it) gossip, she shows us how her highly opinionated rabbit has worked through the process of losing and finding a partner. I encourage you to share your own stories of love in the animal kingdom (see page 64 for details) and to follow Petunia through disastrous first dates, tentative meetups in a bathtub, and new romantic rituals involving salad greens. When you read about her search for a new "husbun" after the death of her beloved Oliver, I guarantee you'll think about the humans in your life.

It felt especially meaningful to focus on Petunia at the time of Commencement and reunions, when so many gathered to celebrate not just the knowledge they've acquired, but also the relationships they've built. It's always a joy to learn how classmates have taken the tools of a Harvard education—knowledge, experiences, connections—and used them to make a positive impact. Some Harvard graduates are acting on the world stage; many are making a difference in their states, their cities, their neighborhoods, and their communities.

Harvard Magazine wants to celebrate all of those efforts, so we're seeking nominees for our inaugural *Harvard Magazine 36* list. This isn't a lifetime achievement award, but rather, a look at the work of Harvard graduates *in medias res*—pardon the Latin—as they create meaning everywhere, on every scale. We're looking for artists and athletes, doctors and educators, people engaged in business, politics, philanthropy, and more. Please look out for our online nomination form and stay tuned for more in the coming year.

In the meantime, best wishes for summer reading, meaningful snuggles, and ample salad greens.



—Joanna Weiss, *Editor*

A YEAR OF TURMOIL

"A YEAR OF TURMOIL" (May-June 2026, p.14) opens its timeline on January 21, 2025—Trump's first day. Start four days earlier and the story changes.

On January 17, Harvard signed a resolution agreement with the Biden administration's Office for Civil Rights, finding the University had failed to protect Arab, Muslim, and Palestinian students. On January 21, Harvard settled two private federal lawsuits over anti-Jewish discrimination—one brought by the Brandeis Center and Jewish Americans for Fairness in Education, another by Students Against Antisemitism. None of this appears in the article.

When the story begins with Trump, Harvard's antisemitism problem becomes a partisan flashpoint. That framing lets the community off the hook. Harvard's own Presidential Task Force said it plainly in June 2024, months before any Trump pressure: the situation of Israeli students was "dire," and the complaint process was broken. Those findings belong to Harvard, not to any administration.

Antisemitism on this campus is a civil rights issue. It was one before January 20, 2025. It will remain one long after the current political moment passes.

JASON E. KLEIN, M.B.A. '86

You Answered

IN THE MAY-JUNE ISSUE, WE ASKED YOU:

What is your favorite adaptation of a story from one art form to another?

Turn to page 64 for a sampling of responses—and a question about animal love stories from this issue's cover story, "The Love Bunnies" (page 23).

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LIFE ON THE MISSISSIPPI

THE SECOND PARAGRAPH of The College Pump (May-June 2026, p. 63) ends by describing *Life on the Mississippi* as "Twain's 1883 memoir of his time as a steamboat captain." He wasn't a captain—the position he eventually reached was that of pilot. And just one page, the one-page Chapter XXI of the book, is devoted to his being a pilot. Then, "Time drifted smoothly and prosperously on…"— but then the Civil War broke out, and he had to seek other occupations. (The rest of the book concerns a trip on the Mississippi River he took as a passenger, 21 years later.)

GEORGE BERGMAN, PH.D. '68

DEAR PRIMUS MCPUMPUS,

Most of what [Mark Twain] described in *Life on the Mississippi* was the skill and apprenticeship of being a pilot. Which I think is quite different from being a captain. I don't know if he ever became a captain per se. But I am too lazy to go look into the book again (actually I listened to it, and you can't easily scan for the key info on CDs played in the car). So, I'll prime your pump and you can go look it up.

ROB HAMM, PH.D. '79

A RABBI'S JOURNEY

TIM MURPHY'S ARTICLE, "A Queer Rabbi's Very Long Journey" (March-April 2026, p. 43), refers to Rabbi Amichai Lau-Lavie's rather exotic religious practices as "progressive." Fair enough. However, the headline of the article alludes to "the tension between ancient and contemporary Judaism." I wonder if the term "ancient" is appropriate here, as those practices were essentially universal during the first 15/16ths of Jewish history and continue apace today. Murphy's article does give insight into (some) contemporary Jewish people, but of the Jewish religion, not so much.

RICHARD S. LAUB

THE GRADE INFLATION CONVERSATION

TWO LETTERS in your May-June 2026 issue (pages 4 and 8) identify a major source of grade inflation: student evaluations of faculty. So why not go to the heart of the matter and separate entirely the teaching and grading functions? Oxford and Cambridge have been doing this for two centuries or more by basing a student's graduation status not on course grades (there are none) but on a formidable set of examinations—often six hours a day for several days—graded by a faculty board.

There are drawbacks, of course, to judging academic performance on just a few days of examination. Nevertheless, a great merit of this arrangement is that it transforms the relationship between teacher and student from one of natural adversaries into one of allies, intent on defeating the examiners.

Until several decades ago, Harvard made a restrained effort to follow this example by requiring students to pass a comprehensive exam in their concentration. The effect was twofold: it encouraged students to choose courses broadly enough so that they would be ready for the exam, and it gave departments insight into the quality of course grading so that the profligate awarding of A's might, over time, be caught out. Isn't this an opportune moment to consider something similar?

CHARLES C. NICKERSON '61

I BEG TO DIFFER with two letters in the last issue of *Harvard Magazine* [that cited faculty evaluations as a contributor to grade inflation]. In my years as a student, the professors I admired the most were those who were tremendously demanding and made me work hard. Achieving good grades in their classes filled me with pride. They are the ones for whom I would give highly positive evaluations.

I particularly dislike this sentence: "I'll pretend that you're a good student if you'll pretend that I'm a good teacher." Good professors have their standards and stick to them. As a high school science teacher, I considered an A to mean perfection. My students and their parents could tell you that an A in one of my classes was rare.

JUDITH PIERCE LIVINGSTONE, M.A.T.'61

SPEAK UP, PLEASE

***Harvard Magazine* welcomes letters on its contents.**
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ERRATA:

IN "A YEAR OF TURMOIL" (May-June 2026, p. 14), the text should have stated that Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 "prohibits discrimination based on race, color, and national origin." Religion and sex fall within the scope of Title VII.

In "'The Greatest Incendiary in All of America'" (May-June 2026, p. 30), the provided date for the Battle of Bunker Hill was incorrect. The battle was fought on June 17, 1775.

Harvard Takes Action

On grade inflation and campus culture, the University argued this spring that it's taking real steps to change.

by Joanna Weiss

It's a sign of the white-hot attention on Harvard—always, but especially now—that a faculty vote to cap A's at 20 percent of grades at the College made international news for weeks.

The concept of too many A's at Harvard proved to be an irresistible story. (And it was the repeated butt of jokes in speeches at this year's Commencement.) But Harvard's move also came at a time of self-reflection and a bit of self-flagellation across higher education, spurred by government pressure and broad public skepticism. In April, Yale released a report of its committee on trust in higher education, which urged the university to address a litany of issues from soaring costs to opaque admissions practices. At Harvard, leaders of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS) have been arguing that grade inflation undercuts the academic experience and the University brand; this spring, they urged their colleagues to do something about it.

"For once, the question isn't whether Harvard is going to follow someone else's lead," Gates professor of developing societies Alisha Holland told colleagues at one faculty meeting. "The question is whether we're going to take our own."

Holland was a member of the FAS

Photograph by Niko Yaitanes/Harvard Magazine

subcommittee that developed the grading proposal, which dominated campus conversations this spring—in town hall meetings, email threads, dueling op-eds, and faculty meetings so well-attended that they were moved from University Hall to the Science Center.

Students largely hated the idea: a Harvard Undergraduate Association survey in February found that nearly 85 percent of students opposed a cap on A's. Some professors, too, argued in op-eds and faculty meetings that the cap was arbitrary and blunt, and that it would undercut professors' autonomy and discourage students from helping one another.

But there turned out to be a quiet groundswell of faculty support for the grade inflation plan. The 20 percent cap passed by an email vote of 458 to 201—nearly 70 percent in favor. (Technically, the rule allows four additional A's to be given in any course on top of the 20 percent cap to encourage students to take small, challenging seminars.) A vote to calculate internal honors based on average percentile rank,rather than grade-point average, was even more lopsided: 498 to 157. The faculty rejected a third proposal to augment pass-fail classes with a "satisfactory-plus" designation.

Scattered comments at faculty meetings this spring help explain the overwhelming vote in favor of a cap. Some professors complained about the ritual of students begging for higher grades. Some noted that grade inflation hurt faculty advancement: realistic grades beget negative course evaluations, which can hurt a tenure bid. Some suggested that cutting A's would actually make students happier—that the pressure to keep up a perfect record is currently making students more anxious, not less.

After the vote, faculty leaders cheered their colleagues for taking action. Dean of undergraduate education Amanda Claybaugh called the cap "an important step toward ensuring that our grading system better serves its central purposes: giving students meaningful feedback, recognizing genuine distinction, and sustaining the academic mission of the College."

But the true effects of the vote won't be known for some time. Per an amendment approved at the faculty's April meeting, the new policy won't take effect until the fall of 2027. At that point, by dictate, there will be fewer solid A's at Harvard College. But there will be no limit on A-minuses.

How much Harvard has acted to change its internal culture was also a theme in the courts this spring, as the federal government's ongoing assault on the University played out in a slow-motion volley of briefs and procedural moves. A fresh round of court filings focused on the Trump administration's continued efforts to cut off Harvard's access to the unspent portion of more than $2.2 billion in federal research grants.

A fresh round of court filings focused on continued efforts to cut off Harvard's access to federal research grants.

In December, the Trump administration appealed a court ruling that had restored Harvard's federal grants on First Amendment grounds. In April, the government filed its brief in that appeal, with a new argument that sidestepped the question of free speech. Federal grants, the government said, are contracts that can be broken if they no longer align with "agency priorities," so the case belongs in the U.S. Court of Federal Claims, instead. It's a novel tactic that, if it succeeds, would have implications for federal contracts anywhere. Harvard's response is expected this summer.

In March, meanwhile, the Trump administration sued Harvard, seeking to cut off those same grants with a more familiar argument: that by showing "deliberate indifference" to antisemitism on campus, the University had violated Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and forfeited its right to federal funding. "Harvard fostered and continues to foster a campus climate where hostile antisemitism and anti-Israel conduct thrives," the government wrote in its complaint, putting much of the blame on "student-on-student harassment."

But in their motion to dismiss, Harvard's lawyers argued that the government had completely ignored a year's worth of University actions to change the campus climate. The suit is "a snapshot in time that does not exist today," they wrote, noting that it drew nearly all of its evidence from the University's own report on antisemitism, published a full year earlier.

Spurred by the self-reflection in that report, Harvard's lawyers wrote, the University has since made palpable changes: issuing new guidelines for protests and demonstrations, imposing discipline on policy violators, promoting viewpoint diversity, and incorporating the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism into non-discrimination policies and trainings.

It also made confronting antisemitism—as it rises worldwide—the subject of official events, most notably a Harvard-sponsored symposium on antisemitism and universities, held in May at the Rubenstein Treehouse. (An earlier conference on antisemitism at the Treehouse in April, sponsored by the Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law, had been mandated by a 2025 legal settlement between Harvard and that group.)

Has Harvard acted enough? Too much? It depends on who you ask. Changing rules isn't the same as changing minds. And because everything Harvard does is scrutinized, critics have viewed every hiring move and honor bestowed at this decentralized University as a signal of its conviction or lack thereof. Still, the campus mood was indisputably quieter than it has been in recent years. At Commencement, a smattering of pro-Palestinian signs and keffiyehs popped up, visible but largely unacknowledged.

At the main Commencement ceremony, undergraduate orator Noah Eckstein '26, a Jewish student from a multireligious family, spoke emphatically about the need, not for agreement, but for respect and understanding. In a complicated world, that feels like a universal goal. Achieving it will be a messy and ongoing process—because universities are complicated, and expression is free.

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Sneak Preview: The A.R.T.'s New Home

The Goel Center in Allston will open for performances in the fall of 2026.

by Schuyler Velasco

Walking up to the new home of Harvard's American Repertory Theater, the first thing that stands out is the wood—a pale cedar that covers huge swaths of the 70,000-square-foot complex on North Harvard Street in Allston. During a visit in mid-February, it gave the partially completed site the feel of a gigantic barn rather than a state-of-the-art performance facility. Wood is also predominant inside the David E. and Stacey L. Goel Center for Creativity and Performance, where it is combined with a few strategically placed brick walls and movable acoustic paneling to optimize the sound throughout the complex's big and small performance rooms.

"In the final finished space, we will have a load of acoustic paneling on the ceiling, and areas of the wall will be perfect for acoustic absorption," said chief architect Tom Gibson, walking through the area that would become the center's communal lobby. "It creates a deader space, which allows amplified music to be played and people to bounce around."

After 47 years in the Loeb Drama Center in Cambridge, the A.R.T. will make the one-mile move across the Charles River into the Goel Center in October. The new space, a few blocks from Harvard Stadium, was designed by the London-based architecture firm Haworth Tompkins as a self-sufficient structure—both environmentally, and in terms of creating and mounting live productions.

The buildings are constructed with sustainable materials, including cedar, timber laminate, and 190 tons of reclaimed brick. More than 2,000 individual mass timber structures make up the complex's columns, beams, floors, walls, stairways, and elevator shafts, and a glass roof will let in natural light.

Water and electric utilities will come from Harvard's lower-carbon District Energy Facility, according to the A.R.T., and the roof will be outfitted with solar pan-

Renderings of the exterior view (above), the lobby (below), and the courtyard space of the Goel Center (right), opening in the fall of 2026

Renderings courtesy of the American Repertory Theater

els. The Goel Center's builders are aiming for a Living Building Challenge Core accreditation from the International Living Future Institute, given to sustainable development projects.

"The surfacing and the ventilation strategy has informed the silhouette of the building," Gibson said, describing a labyrinth of airways through which outdoor air travels from the building's courtyard into its performance spaces in the milder seasons. "That's not every month, but spring and fall, we will minimize our electrical use naturally."

There's an artistic benefit to that, Gibson added: "If you're bringing fresh air into a space, with oxygen levels going up and CO_2 levels coming down, that really helps with the audience alertness." There's science to back him up: a 2025 study from the Harvard Chan School of Public Health found that students in classrooms with higher ventilation rates were more alert and performed better on cognitive tests.

The complex is tailored to the many phases of the theatrical process, too. There

are two interior performance spaces: the 700-seat West Stage for large, mainstage productions, and the 300-seat East Stage for more intimate shows, both with retractable seating to accommodate bigger, standing crowds. An open-air lobby, with tables, communal seating, and a small cafe, will open to a large courtyard out front, where the A.R.T. anticipates holding both ticketed and free outdoor performances and events.

For performers, writers, producers, and directors, the center also includes several soundproof rehearsal studios, big or small enough to replicate the actual scale of the productions in the Goel's two theaters. (For Loeb productions, rehearsals were held offsite.) In another major upgrade, there's a fully functional prep kitchen for prop food—something that, one imagines, would have been a dream for the creators of the A.R.T.'s pie-centric musical *Waitress* a decade ago.

Harvard According to Harvey

Retired professor Harvey C. Mansfield on grade inflation, speech, and the University's role

by Joanna Weiss

In his 60 years on the Harvard faculty, Kenan professor of government Harvey C. Mansfield was a rare and reliable conservative voice—an outspoken opponent of grade inflation, affirmative action, and the dearth of conservatives on the faculty. "It doesn't seem to occur to those who demand more diversity in the universities," he wrote in 1990, "that the most important diversity is not in sex or class but in opinion."

Today, affirmative action in admissions is barred by the Supreme Court; curbing grade inflation is a faculty priority; viewpoint diversity is a Harvard watchword. And Mansfield, who retired in 2023, has published the book *Where Harvard Went Wrong: Fifty Years of Commentary That Fell on Deaf Ears* (Encounter Books), a collection of speeches, essays, and recaps of his contributions to faculty meetings, where his pointed questions were politely received.

Over email this spring, Mansfield, who is now 94, answered *Harvard Magazine*'s questions about his views on Harvard (past and present), his philosophy of higher education, and the differences he sees between free speech and free expression. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Universities have lately been reckoning with their position in American culture—most recently, in Yale's self-critical report about how it lost the public trust. What would you diagnose as higher education's number one problem?

Yale's self-critical report is a welcome surprise. In brief, universities have lost public trust through the partisan behavior that they should have avoided. The way to regain public favor is not to pretend to be nonpartisan but rather to see to it that the one dominating party—the left—is brought to agree to the active presence of the other side. This needs to happen in the admission of students, the selection of

Photograph by Erin Clark/The Boston Globe *via Getty Images*

deans, and especially in the hiring of faculty. Yale has the right idea, and Harvard should sign on to it.

You have argued for changes in Harvard's undergraduate curriculum—such as more instruction in American history, religion, and the military. How do you think that would change the way students approach the world?

The undergraduate (and graduate) curriculum is a hodgepodge of partisan certitudes. Of course, I think that Harvard students would do better under the general curriculum I propose in my book.

Let's take Homer and Shakespeare, present but not featured in Harvard's curriculum. What do they have to teach us? They speak to us of human greatness, a conservative topic that liberals love to make light of. Greatness is scientifically unproven, covered over by the averages of social science, and resolutely ignored by the theorists in literature. Conservatives, who like to admire what they think is above them, would bring back greatness to be studied at Harvard. The curriculum should impart a sense of respect for our inheritance and wonder that our great thinkers should so remarkably disagree, suggesting that our problems are clearer than our solutions.

Harvard students should leave the College with a certain pride mixed with humility, their minds a notch above the ideas they came with.

"Belonging" has become an important term for universities, and a concept that has survived their public retreat from DEI. It implies that a community has a special obligation to make its members feel welcome. In your view, does belonging have any place in a university?

Belonging to what? A noun is needed. Belonging to a community devoted to the cultivation of the mind, both the theoretical mind that raises one's sights and the practical mind that makes one mindful of necessities. Don't despise the mind of a quarterback.

This academic year, Harvard implemented the Chatham House Rule, an honor system of anonymity inside the classroom, to encourage students to speak without fear of public shaming. Would you have found that rule useful in your own classes, especially after the advent of social media?

It's better to take personal responsibility for one's ideas. Chatham House is for fearful politicians.

For decades, you tried to persuade Harvard to curb grade inflation. (You famously gave students two grades: one earned grade and one "ironic" grade that was sent to the registrar.) This spring, the faculty voted to cap A's at 20 percent of letter grades. Is this the kind of solution you were imagining?

Our present action on grade inflation is, if it proceeds, better than nothing. But it fails to recapture the notion of average—the Harvard average—in order to reveal what we take to be "extraordinary," the official description of an A. A's should contrast with B's and C's.

"It's better to take personal responsibility for one's ideas. Chatham House is for fearful politicians."

You wrote a book called *Manliness*, and you've been clear about your opinions on feminism and women and gender studies. Do you think universities are equipped today to interrogate the differences between men and women?

Harvard should contain both partisans and opponents of feminism, which generally denies sex differences. Women's studies should contain both camps. Honest interrogation of that question is not easy, perhaps because everyone has an opinion, and we all have a stake in the answer.

In a speech in 2023, upon receiving the Claremont Institute's Henry Salvatori Prize, you mapped out the differences between free speech and free expression. Speech, you said, is externally focused, designed to argue and persuade, while expression is internally driven, a statement of your own preferences. What do you think this means for a university?

A university should encourage speech rather than expression, because the reasons you give in speech can be examined and studied. The gestures, shouts, and slogans of expression do not supply reasons. Protests of this kind should be denounced rather than indulged.

Unfortunately, through a 1943 Supreme Court decision (*West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette*), expression has come to be confused with speech. Expression, using irrational means, seeks to impress others with one's noise and power; speech tries to convince them with arguments. In general, but not always, protests in universities knowingly violate the rules and the spirit of academia.

Encouraging diversity of opinion is now a stated goal of Harvard's administration. How would your experience here have been different had you not been one of the few conservatives around?

Ah, there is a pleasure in being one against many when one thinks the many are wrong, but it is ever too easy to become self-righteous. I do think I would have had a better chance at academic honors if I had not been outside the company of eligibles. Yet I have had honors from conservatives that my liberal friends probably held to be good enough for me.

Universities are struggling now with defining their mission. What do you think is the purpose of a university today? To educate students? To conduct research? Do universities still have a broader civic role to play outside of their narrow function?

Universities have a broader function than does society. Society is always based on official opinions that universities question and do not take for granted. Universities ask whether our ways are as sound as we in our societies think. Universities at their best are skeptical but still cautious. They need to remember that the peoples they live among can get angry at them. Don't forget the experience of Socrates.

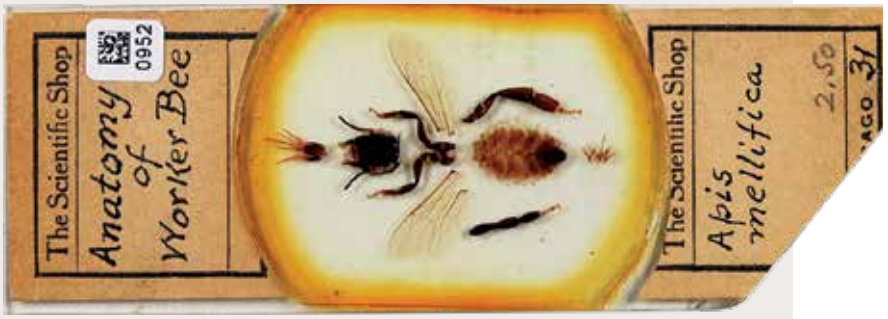
We need to explain to our fellow citizens that what we do is worthwhile. Our science can enable them to live longer—but how about living better? ▽

TREASURE

Anatomy in Detail

The Harvard Museum of Natural History offers a microscopic look at tiny, beautiful creatures.

by Nell Porter Brown



For the last two years, curators have scoured the dusty corners and cabinets of Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology (MCZ), collecting about 50,000 microscope slides featuring tiny specimens. Some, like the translucent wings of a true bug (*Heteroptera Latreille, hemiptera*) and segments of a Western honeybee (*Apis mellifera*), are more than a century old.

Professor of organismic and evolutionary biology Mansi Srivastava, one of the MCZ's curators of invertebrate zoology, especially likes a series of slides of squid embryos, collected in 1880 by marine biologist William Keith Brooks, Ph.D. 1875. "It's the first time that the detailed anatomy of squid embryos is captured at different stages," she says. "It's just amazing—the fact that we have the actual objects, the actual tissue of those squid embryos that became the basis of our understanding of how nature makes a squid."

Srivastava has led the continuing curation project to restore, catalog, and digitize the MCZ's slides. The goal, she says, is to make this "meaningful data available to anyone anywhere on the planet." Meanwhile, anyone can see a small selection of these historic treasures, artful in their own right, at the Harvard Museum of Natural History. *Making the Invisible Visible: Digitizing Invertebrates on Microscope Slides* highlights eight slides visitors can view through a microscope, among them a butterfly proboscis (through which the insect draws fluids) and a snail radula (a flexible ribbon of thousands of microscopic teeth by which the mollusk grates up food). Fifteen enlarged digital-print photographs on a nearby wall reveal the intricacy of a caterpillar's skin, an ant's head, and a veined dragonfly wing.

Historically, the slides also reflect how scientists communicated their findings. See the image of soft coral tissue on which pioneering zoologist Addison Emery Verrill, S.B. 1862, etched the words, "sent to James Dwight Dana by Charles Darwin." Professor of entomology William Morton Wheeler (the "ant man" who predated Harvard's late Pellegrino University Professor E.O. Wilson) illustrated embryonic forms of the praying mantis (*Stagmomantis carolina*) for his 1893 thesis—based on the use of a microscope. The revolutionary instrument, invented in the late 1500s, enabled scientists to see the minutest of creatures and describe the anatomy and morphology that helped explain whole new species. In this sense, says Srivastava, the MCZ's slide collection evokes an age of discovery, offering an "incredible glimpse into things that you couldn't have really imagined beforehand."

Photographs courtesy of the Harvard Museum of Comparative Zoology

News in Brief

Legacy of Slavery Project Launches Database

In may, as part of the Harvard and the Legacy of Slavery Initiative, the University released a publicly accessible database of 1,613 individuals who were enslaved by Harvard affiliates between 1636, when the University was founded, and 1865, when the Civil War ended slavery in the United States. Harvard's search for its connections to slavery goes farther than some other universities' by working to identify not only enslaved people with direct ties to the institution itself or the campus, but also all those who had been enslaved by Harvard leaders, faculty, and staff, including in the Caribbean. Researchers have so far identified roughly 600 living descendants, although they expect the numbers of both the enslaved and their descendants to grow exponentially as research progresses. The University says it will update the database periodically with new findings.

Harvard Management Company to Change Leadership

N.P. "narv" narvekar, who manages Harvard's $57 billion endowment, told the board of the Harvard Management Company (HMC) that he plans to retire in late 2027, according to *The Wall Street Journal*. During his tenure, Narvekar outsourced more investments to external managers, replaced a siloed asset class approach with a generalist model, increased the portfolio's exposure to private equity, and changed the compensation structure. Separately, the Harvard Corporation has appointed Patrick Healy '89, M.B.A. '94, to the HMC board of directors. Healy is the CEO of private equity firm Hellman & Friedman.

Crime Strikes in Cambridge

Two unrelated criminal actions subverted the sense of safety around campus this spring. Midday on May 11, a gunman opened fire on Memorial Drive, wounding two motorists before being shot and subdued by a State Police trooper and a former marine. The shooter, who had recently been released from a psychiatric hospital, was on parole after serving a five-year sentence for shooting two Boston police officers in 2020; he was charged with eight counts including assault with intent to murder with a firearm.

Eight days later, in an unrelated incident, an unknown assailant gained entry to Lowell House and tried to force a female student into her room. Her screams brought neighboring students into the hall, and the suspect fled. A man fitting his description was later reported entering a residence hall at MIT, but evaded capture. On May 27, Massachusetts State Police arrested a 31-year-old New Hampshire man in connection with the incident, identified using surveillance video. He is charged with assault and battery, kidnapping, and breaking and entering with intent to commit a felony.

College Expands Language Offerings

Harvard will collaborate with other Ivy League colleges on an initiative to teach less commonly taught languages, joining Yale, Columbia, and Cornell in the effort on a trial basis. The Shared Course Initiative will allow Harvard to expand its language offerings through teleconferenced classes. Harvard classes will still meet in person, and students will receive full course credit. Harvard is expected to contribute languages including Uyghur and Chagatai. About a third of the languages offered through the initiative are not currently taught at Harvard.

Faculty Leaders Named

Aetna professor of the practice of public policy Jason Furman has been named Weil director of the Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Business and Government at Harvard Kennedy School. He replaces

Grad Student Strike Breaks Records

On April 21, members of Harvard's graduate student union walked off the job in what became the longest strike in the union's history. For six weeks, teaching fellows and research assistants disrupted University operations, shuttering laboratories and sending faculty members scrambling to cover union members' teaching and grading duties. Striking workers picketed events throughout Commencement, persuading Boston mayor Michelle Wu '07, J.D. '12, to withdraw as the keynote speaker for Harvard Law School's Class Day ceremony.

LYDIA LYLE GIBSON/*HARVARD MAGAZINE*

Members of the graduate student union picketed at the side of the stage during the Law School's Class Day ceremony.

The 4,000-member Harvard Graduate Student Union-United Auto Workers has called for higher wages (especially for lower-paid teaching fellows) and improved benefits. They also demanded enhanced protections for noncitizen graduate workers, who are more likely to face immigration hurdles in the current political climate, and stronger grievance procedures for harassment and discrimination complaints. The union's previous contract expired in June 2025, and negotiations for a new contract first began in March 2025.

The strike ended on June 1, 2026, without a new contract, but union leaders said that they were "hopeful" of reaching an agreement with the University after a particularly productive May 29 bargaining session. Two additional bargaining sessions have been scheduled in June.

YESTERDAY'S NEWS

Room Service

Harvard's maids were once the only women routinely allowed in the dorms.

by Nell Porter Brown

For more than two centuries of the College's existence, professional maids tidied up after the Harvard boys. Known on campus as "goodies," "sweeps," and "biddies," the crew of female workers scrubbed floors, made beds, and dusted dorm rooms. They also fought for better working conditions. A campus union formed in 1936 won the maids a six-day workweek and 41 cents an hour. By 1952, they were working 20 hours a week at 96 cents an hour, "as well off as any other college maids in the country," a *Crimson* story noted. But within a few years, the University began phasing out deluxe dorm service, replacing it with a student porter system, a precursor to Dorm Crew.

The shift came at a time of post-World War II budget measures—and as maids were reportedly requesting another pay hike. On campus, according to another *Crimson* story, reactions to the change ranged widely. Some students were nonchalant. One applauded the addition of needed student jobs, while another thought that hiring some students to clean up after others could foster an undemocratic caste system. A proctor voiced concern that eliminating the maids was the College's answer to their request for higher wages. At least one student archly lamented the loss: "One of the best things of living at Harvard is the elimination of that menial task of bed-making. The one last remnant of gracious living is in serious proximity to death."

Illustration by Mark Steele

Eliot University Professor Lawrence H. Summers, who resigned from the position amidst furor over his connections to convicted child sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. Lee Rubin, professor of stem cell and regenerative biology, has been named faculty co-director of the Harvard Stem Cell Institute. He succeeds Doug Melton, who co-founded the institute in 2005.

Five Faculty of Arts and Sciences members were named Harvard College professors, recognized for their contributions to education, research, and mentoring: Daniel Carpenter, Freed professor of government; Jeff Lichtman, Knowles professor of molecular and cellular biology; Hannah Marcus, professor of the history of science; Samantha Matherne, professor of philosophy; and Ariel Procaccia, Lin professor of computer science.

Harvard Awards 2026 Cambridge Scholarships

Four members of the College class of 2026 have won Harvard-Cambridge Scholarships to study at the University of Cambridge during the 2026-27 academic year. Ella Foulkes, of Lowell House, has been named the Lt. Charles H. Fiske III Scholar, studying at Trinity College. Sachiko Kirby, of Lowell House, has been named the John Eliot Scholar, studying at Jesus College. Makanaka Nyandoro, of Leverett House, has been named the Lionel de Jersey Harvard Scholar, studying at Emmanuel College. Austin Wang, of Lowell House, has been named the Gov. William Shirley Scholar, studying at Pembroke College.

Harvard Names 2026 Centennial Medalists

The Harvard Griffin Graduate School of Arts and Sciences awarded its highest honor to four alumni who have made contributions to society that emerged from their graduate studies: poet Frank Bidart, A.M. '67; molecular and cellular biologist Anjana Rao, Ph. D. '78; nature solutions leader at the Bezos Earth Fund Cristián Samper, Ph. D. '92; and international authority on gender in science and technology Londa Schiebinger, Ph. D. '84. ▽

2026 Election Results

On May 28, the University announced the newly elected members of the Board of Overseers—one of the University's two governing boards—and directors of the Harvard Alumni Association (HAA).

New Overseers, who assumed their roles on May 29:

Teresa Hillary Clarke '84, J.D. '89, M.B.A. '89, of Miami; chair and executive editor, Africa.com; former managing director, Goldman Sachs & Co.

Arti Garg, Ph.D. '08, of Hayward, California; EVP and chief technologist, AVEVA

Nadine Burke Harris, M.P.H. '02, of Sebastopol, California; pediatrician and former surgeon general of California

Philip L. Harrison '86, M.Arch. '93, of Atlanta; CEO, Perkins&Will

Alfredo Gutiérrez Ortiz Mena, LL.M. '98, of Mexico City; former justice, Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation (Mexico)

Two additional Overseers were elected to finish the terms left by Sylvia Mathews Burwell '87, who resigned in anticipation of joining the Harvard Corporation in July, and Vikas Sukhatme, M.D. '79:

Salvo Arena, L.L.M. '00, of New York City; partner, Chiomenti (elected to serve a three-year term)

Clive Chang, M.B.A. '11, of Miami; president and CEO, YoungArts: The National Foundation for the Advancement of Artists (elected to serve a two-year term)

New HAA elected directors, who began their terms on July 1:

Mia Esther Alpert '99, of Los Angeles; founder and president emerita, Harvardwood

James P. "Jimmy" Biblarz '14, J.D. '21, Ph.D. '23, of Los Angeles; attorney, Hueston Hennigan; lecturer in law, UCLA School of Law

Allison Charney Epstein '89, of New York City; opera singer and producer

Medha Gargeya '14, J.D. '19, of Washington, D.C.; senior associate, Wilmer-Hale; lecturer on law, Harvard Law School; captain, U.S. Air Force Reserve

David G. Lefer '93, of New York City; director of the Innovation and Technology Forum; industry associate professor, New York University

Jeffrey H. Tignor '96, of Washington, D.C.; attorney-advisor, Federal Communications Commission; senior lecturing fellow, Duke University School of Law

Research & Ideas

Masters of (Octopus) Sex

Behind the chemosensory cues octopuses rely on to find mates

by Schuyler Velasco

Octopuses are solitary animals that don't mate very often. So it was a surprise, initially, when two of them hooked up in a lab on Harvard's campus.

"This was kind of accidental," says Pablo Villar del Rio, a postdoctoral fellow in Harvard's molecular and cellular biology department. "We didn't plan to study octopus mating. We were studying chemosensation in the octopus in general."

Villar del Rio works with professor of molecular and cellular biology Nicholas Bellono, whose laboratory focuses on the evolutionary impact of chemical and sensory mechanisms in the natural world, particularly in sea animals. The octopus liaison transpired during a study initially meant to observe how the cephalopods make sense of their environments more broadly, and the ways they rely on chemical signals to hunt food, seek shelter, and identify threats.

But the resulting paper, published in *Science* in April, sheds light specifically on how octopuses use those signals for sex.

"This was an unexpected observation," Bellono says, "and it's led to new understandings of some really important biology concepts."

The paper details how female hormones—progesterone, in particular—help male octopuses recognize potential mates, even in the absence of other environmental signals.

"Male octopuses use a specialized arm called the hectocotylus to identify females and navigate their internal organs to reach the oviduct and deliver sperm,"

Illustration by Maria Francesca Melis

the paper explains. Villar del Rio (the paper's first author) and his collaborators discovered that one of the octopus's eight arms, used specifically for mating and protected during activities like hunting, has receptors that are activated by female progesterone.

To confirm that, the researchers worked with pairs of wild-born California two-spot octopuses (*Octopus bimaculoides*), a small, hardy species native to the Pacific Ocean. "They're pretty robust octopuses," Bellono says. "It's hard to have [octopuses] happy enough in a lab setting where they're not stressed and they actually want to mate, so this species is very useful."

During the observation, pairs were placed in a dark, shallow tank separated by an opaque barrier with a small hole in the middle. Octopuses prefer to be alone and may get violent with each other under the wrong circumstances, so controlling the environment was critical for their safety. The octopuses, however, didn't let the separation stop them.

"We saw the male so confident going and mating with the female through a wall," Villar del Rio says. The *Science* paper elaborates: "To our surprise, even with minimal visual information, the male extended the hectocotylus through the barrier and carefully maneuvered toward and subsequently inserted the specialized appendage within the mantle. After insertion, the hectocotylus extended deep within the mantle and eventually stopped."

The pair then went still for an hour or so, during the transfer of sperm into the oviduct. The research team saw repeat results across "numerous male-female pairs," but not in same-sex pairings, a finding that suggests the cue is female-specific.

From there, the researchers drilled down on the molecular underpinnings of the octopuses' encounters. The hectocotylus, while similar in physiology to the male octopus's other arms, is more specialized, with more tightly packed receptors and different metabolic responses to its surroundings.

A bait-and-switch confirmed it: when the female octopuses were replaced by "conical tubes that were coated with [progesterone]" and attached to the holes in the experiment's original tank barriers, the male octopuses tried to mate with them anyway. Experiments with other chemical signals octopuses encounter in the wild, given off by steroid derivatives, bile acids, terpenes, or bitter molecules, didn't elicit such behavior.

The findings build on the Bellono lab's prior research on how octopuses use chemical receptors to move through their environments. "We first discovered and published about this receptor class in 2020, and we didn't know at first what it did," Bellono says. "Pablo showed [with this research] that they [have] a range of functions, including, it turns out, driving reproductive behaviors."

This insight has broad implications for biodiversity, he adds. In the study, similar but separate species of octopuses displayed parallel mating behaviors, but they would not mate with each other. This suggests the chemosensory reactions also help the octopuses mate with their own species, though how that works is still unclear. "Specifically, we don't know what type of progesterone allows females of different species to tell apart their mating partners," Villar del Rio says.

> "This was kind of accidental. We didn't plan to study octopus mating."
> —PABLO VILLAR DEL RIO

Moving forward, Villar del Rio would like to use the lab's research on chemosensation as a basis to further investigate octopus reproduction, many aspects of which are still a mystery. Two-spot octopuses live for about two years, and females mate multiple times during that period, carrying sperm packages of different mates. Once fertilization is triggered and the female lays and nurtures eggs, she dies.

"There is one event that triggers the fertilization of eggs and possibly the competition between sperm cells from different males in the female. And that is completely unknown," Villar del Rio says. "We don't know how it works."

Humans Haven't Stopped Evolving

A new analytic technique reveals hundreds of genes under selective pressure.

by Monique Brouillette

During the last 50,000 years, human beings have transformed from nomadic hunter-gatherers roaming savannas to a species that traveled to the moon, invented the internet, and created an artificial form of intelligence. Yet many scientists believed that, during the same time frame, human DNA hadn't changed much. Most research during the past two decades hinted that human evolution has largely slowed or changed so subtly that existing tools couldn't detect it; evidence seemed to suggest that civilization put humans beyond the reach of natural selection.

"It's like we had in our heads that a few hundred thousand years ago we had reached some kind of evolutionary optimization," says professor of genetics and human evolutionary biology David Reich.

That changed with Reich's latest work. Using the largest collection of ancient human DNA samples ever compiled, paired with new statistical methods, Reich and his colleagues discovered that the human genome has actually evolved rapidly during the past 10,000 years. The study, published in *Nature* in April, showed hundreds of genetic shifts in 16,000 individuals who lived in modern-day Europe across an 18,000-year period. The longer timespan provided a baseline that allowed the researchers to see how genes evolved during the most recent 10,000 years.

What's more, the findings demonstrate that the pace of evolution is accelerating, with more intense natural selection occurring in the past 5,000 years than in the 5,000 years that came before. "Natural selection has not slowed down," says Ali Akbari, a senior scientist at the Broad Institute and the paper's first author. "We were just missing the signal."

By collaborating with roughly 250 archeologists from around the world, Reich and his team amassed a collection of bones and teeth from more than 5,836 ancient humans. They extracted and analyzed ancient DNA from the samples and built a Genetic Relationship Matrix—a chart showing how genetically similar each person is to each of the other people studied. A common challenge in population genetics is the difficulty of filtering out "noise." People migrating, mixing, and having children can produce large shifts in gene frequencies that can obscure small changes in their DNA that result from natural selection alone. For instance, certain traits, such as brown eyes, may rise in a population, but it's hard to know whether that is because a wave of brown-eyed families migrated in or because having brown eyes confers a survival edge.

Using the matrix allows the researchers to cancel out this background noise so they can see the signal of evolution clearly. If a gene's frequency trended upward consistently over diverse places and times (even just a little bit), Reich and Akbari could be confident it was due to the forces of natural selection.

Breaking with the pattern followed in many previous studies, the researchers did not focus on the genetics within individual demographic groups, such as "early European farmers" or "nomadic hunter-gatherers." Instead, they looked for genetic variants that occurred within multiple populations at multiple time points, including in modern populations, letting the data tell the story of evolution without forcing it into categories.

The end result was the identification of 479 genes that showed evidence of natural selection. The sheer number of these genetic variants—which represent

Illustration by Luisa Jung

small changes in the DNA sequence of the gene—was staggering, even to the study's authors. "It was a crazy result," Reich says.

Genes involved in immunity were most likely to show evidence of selective pressure, and consequently, their prevalence rose and fell dramatically over time. A gene linked to an increased risk for multiple sclerosis, for example, emerged roughly 6,000 years ago in a region south of the Caucasus Mountains, and within 4,000 years it settled into 16 percent of the population. Then, 2,000 years ago, it began to recede. A gene linked with tuberculosis risk followed a similar arc, appearing 9,000 years ago and climbing to 9 percent during the next 6,000 years before reversing course. Today, it's found in 3 percent of the population.

Other genes, such as those for male-pattern baldness and skin pigmentation, have also evolved. Interestingly, the baldness gene has diminished under selective pressures during the past 7,000 years, plummeting in frequency from 50 percent to 20 percent. There have also been shifts in blood type, with Type B rising from 0 to 10 percent during the past 10,000 years, while Type A simultaneously declined.

The study also contradicted some long-held beliefs. The genetic risk factor for cystic fibrosis, for example, was long thought to persist in European populations because carrying it confers protection against cholera. However, this study found no evidence of selection during periods when cholera was a persistent threat, suggesting that the explanation may need to be revised.

The results are fascinating, but Reich cautioned against drawing conclusions from individual genetic changes. The function of a gene thousands of years ago might be different from its role today: in a phenomenon called pleiotropy, a single gene can control seemingly unrelated traits, such as the gene that causes both white fur and deafness in cats.

"Each one of these variants needs a whole Ph.D. [dissertation] to understand what they do in their different contexts," he says. He adds that genes take on new functions over time, and researchers can't just assume that the functions of ancient genes are the same as those of their modern counterparts.

Akbari adds, "These results do not necessarily mean that people who are living today are healthier or smarter or sicker." Because genes interact with the environment, it is difficult to draw conclusions about ancient populations, he explains, because "we don't have this result in context."

Next, Akbari and Reich want to gather data from additional populations, perhaps those that were geographically isolated, to gain a broader view of evolution worldwide; they also hope to probe the variants they identified in this study to better infer what their function may have been in the past. Regardless of how the individual traits have shifted, the takeaway from this work is that the human population is far from done evolving.

"Evolution is happening constantly, and it's rapidly responding to the cultural, economic, and environmental changes we've imposed on ourselves over the last 10,000 years," says Reich.

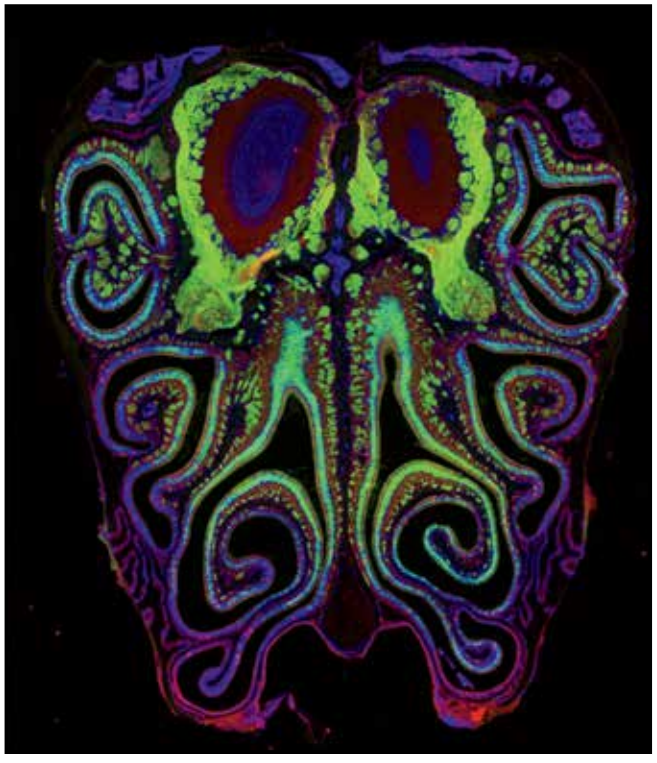
Discoveries

Short takes on cutting-edge research

by Jonathan Shaw

Mapping the Sense of Smell

Scientists at Harvard Medical School have created the first detailed "map" of how the sense of smell is organized, helping to solve a longstanding mystery in biology. By studying millions of cells in mice, professor of neurobiology Sandeep Robert Datta and colleagues discovered that the 1,100 smell receptors in the nose are not randomly arranged, as once thought, but precisely positioned: as immature smell cells in the nose develop, their location helps dictate which receptors they select and wires them to corresponding locations in the brain. The result is a coordinated olfactory network linking the nose to neurons, much like those already known to link eyes and ears to the brain. The discovery clarifies how smell works at a fundamental level and provides a framework for understanding—and potentially treating—loss of smell.



DAVID BRANN/DATTA LAB

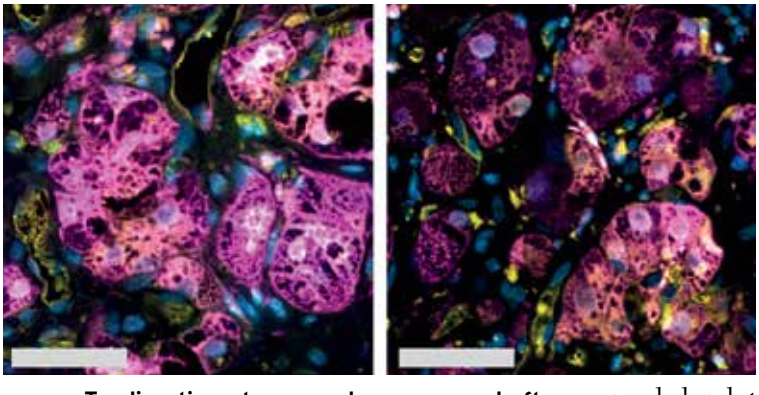
Scientists have mapped olfaction in a mouse nose: smell neurons in this microscope image are tagged green.

The Dual Assault on Journalism

Independent journalism is at risk in "fragile democracies" such as Turkey and Hungary, Emre Kizilkaya, NF '19, argues in a working paper developed at Harvard Kennedy School's Carr-Ryan Center for Human Rights. Kizilkaya shows that in such countries, dual forces—the governments' multipronged actions to control the media and the algorithms that determine what news people see online—make truth-based journalism economically unsustainable. It's a system where political power and digital platforms synergistically reshape the marketplace of ideas, leaving the public with misinformation and propaganda. The solution, he argues, is to treat journalism as a public good, like clean air or public infrastructure, and to hold tech platforms accountable by creating rules to protect the information ecosystem.

ISTOCK

Political power and digital platforms synergistically reshape the marketplace of ideas.

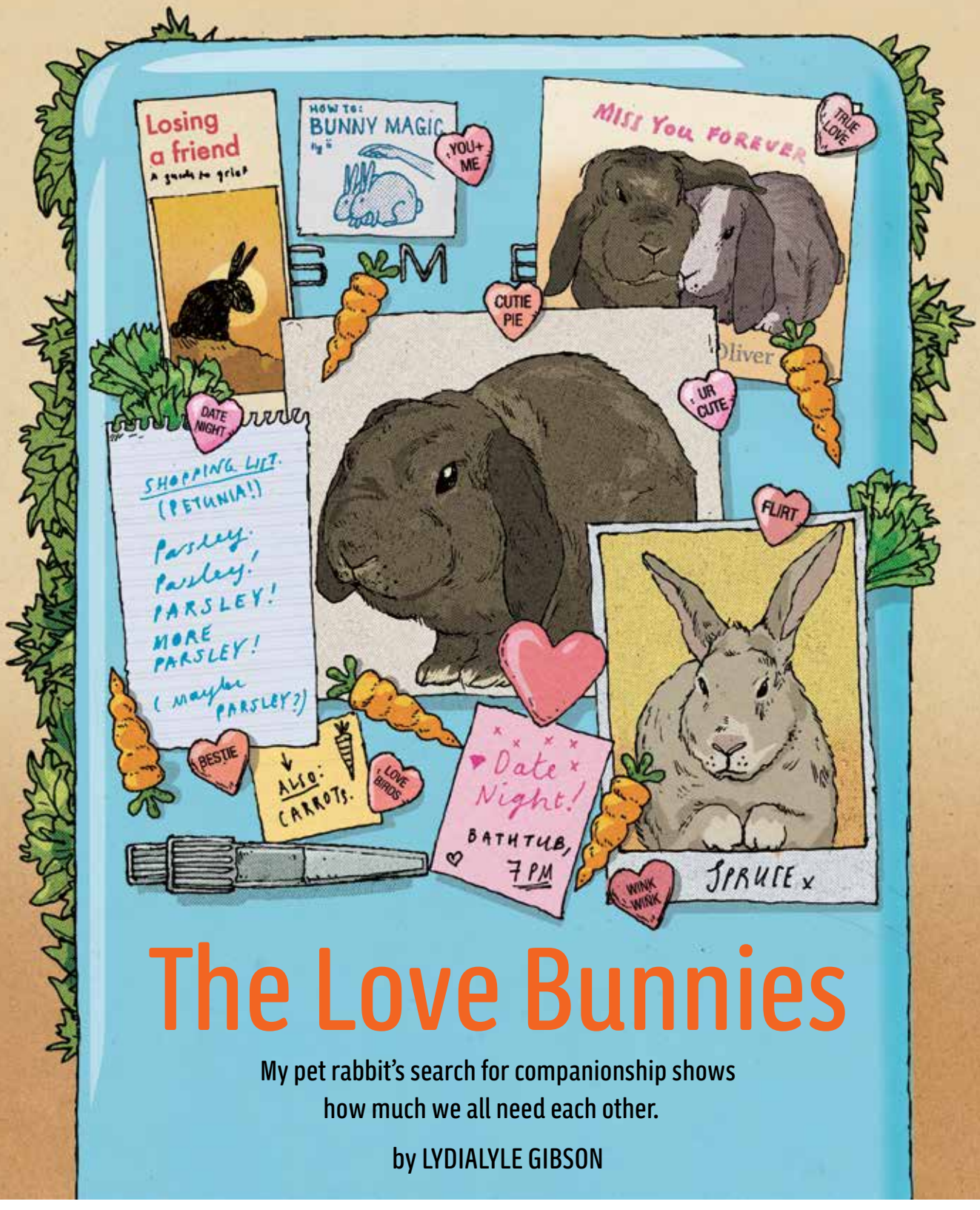


CHRISTOPHER CHEN AND AMY STODDARD

Two liver tissue types are shown, one week after induced growth. Stains reveal human blood vessel and liver cells, enabling researchers to compare the tissues.

An Implanted Liver That Grows

Scientists at Harvard's Wyss Institute have developed a way to grow liver tissue *in vivo*, which could help patients waiting for transplants. The liver—critical for sustaining life—is the largest organ in the body, weighing more than three pounds. In animal tests, instead of trying to build a full liver in the lab, Christopher Chen '90, M.D. '99, and colleagues implanted a small piece of engineered liver tissue and then triggered it to double in size once inside the body. They used a common drug to control two growth signals, allowing the tissue to expand when needed and stop growing when either signal was removed. The temporary liver functioned without causing harm. Eventually, this approach might enable small human liver implants to expand to therapeutically useful sizes.



The Love Bunnies

My pet rabbit's search for companionship shows how much we all need each other.

by LYDIALYLE GIBSON

On an icy morning a year and a half ago, my boyfriend, Carlos, and I pulled into the parking lot of the House Rabbit Network, an animal rescue shelter outside of Boston. In the back seat, crouched in her carrier, was our pet rabbit, Petunia. Newly single after the sudden passing of her rabbit companion, she was in the market for a new beau (or, in rabbit-world parlance, "husbun"). And although she didn't know it yet, she was about to go speed dating.

Yes, that's right: speed dating. Mostly out of vogue these days among humans (although dating app fatigue has fueled a recent revival), speed dating has long been the go-to matchmaking tool for domesticated rabbits. Shelters hold daylong events where people bring their rabbits for rapid-fire meetups with adoptable bunnies. Other times, the process is smaller and more

Illustrations by Wesley Merritt

targeted: a scheduled set of dates with a chosen handful of furballs. That's what we'd signed Petunia up for.

"You're here!" exclaimed Lauren Swank, opening the door when we rang the buzzer. She was holding a small black-and-white rabbit and wearing a hoodie with the words "Bunny Mom" printed across the front. Until recently, Lauren was the communications manager for the House Rabbit Network, a nonprofit that rescues about 400 domesticated rabbits every year in Massachusetts and is run almost entirely by volunteers. "Come in, Petunia!" she said. Petunia, a huddle of dark brown fur and floppy ears, did not look up.

From the outside, the shelter looks like a cinderblock warehouse, but inside it's more like an unusually tidy and cheerful barn. Dozens of rabbits lounge in little "condos," each outfitted with soft blankets and toys and a name tag clipped to the front of the pen. Volunteers rush around with brooms and litter boxes and armloads of hay. Lauren led us down a hallway, where a small room had been set up for Petunia to receive her suitors, with a blanket on the floor and a big circular pet pen in the center. Waiting for us there was Rosie Malsberger, M.P.H. '14, who volunteers at the shelter as a "bonding counselor," helping lonely hearts bunnies find love.

It might seem like rabbits wouldn't need any assistance in this department. After all, they breed like, well, rabbits. But this isn't mating in the wild. It's something much trickier—a lifelong bond between domesticated (and surgically fixed) rabbits, who eat, sleep, and play together every day. Bonded bunnies almost never stray more than a few feet from each other, and they spend hours cuddling. Sometimes they even poop side by side.

Understandably, they can be pretty finicky about who they choose for that kind of closeness. And yet, they need it. Like humans, rabbits are social animals. Petunia's ancestors lived in groups in vast underground warrens, and her wild cousins still do. And bunnies don't just thrive on companionship; they require it on a biological level. Because rabbits are so often used as laboratory animals, scientists have studied the effects of caging them alone or in pairs and have found that rabbits kept together are not only happier, but healthier. Their body temperatures are higher and their heart rates are lower; they're less susceptible to illness and stress. And a growing mountain of research suggests that all kinds of animals, including rabbits, have rich social, emotional, and cognitive lives that we are only just beginning to fathom. Increasingly, veterinarians and animal rescue organizations recommend rabbit owners get their fuzzy creatures a friend. In Switzerland, pet welfare laws actually forbid keeping social animals like rabbits without a same-species companion.

If this concept resonates with you, it's probably because it feels so much like the human condition. Loneliness is a recognized health crisis. A flood of dating apps and matchmaking services speak to our desire for companionship. And when we lose someone, we grieve and also wonder how to go on, how to honor the loss and still find the intimacy we crave with someone else. I went on this journey because I wanted to help Petunia. But her story also showed me how inseparable love is from grief and how profoundly our relationships shape who we are. Without the people we love, we are not ourselves.

One reason I was so intent on finding a companion for Petunia was because I'd seen what she was like when she had one. In August 2024, Carlos and I adopted Petunia and her then-"bondmate," Oliver, as a pair. They'd been rescued from a home in the suburbs, where they'd been turned out of the house and left to run loose in a driveway, with dry food and a bowl of water by the door. It's likely they were out there for weeks—neighbors saw them darting underneath cars for shelter from the heat and predators. The shared ordeal seemed to intensify their attachment ("trauma-bonded," as a veterinarian put it). Lauren told me that when they first arrived at the shelter, Oliver was so protective of Petunia that he didn't want anyone to touch her.

At home with me and Carlos, the rabbits settled in quickly, following each other around the apartment, flopping side by side under the front window, and playfully stealing parsley and cilantro from each other's mouths during breakfast. Then, one day a few months in, Oliver suddenly fell ill, losing his appetite and his energy. As prey animals, rabbits instinctively hide sickness until it's often too late, and despite multiple trips to see veterinarians and antibiotics that seemed to be working against what was ultimately diagnosed as a respiratory infection, Oliver was gone within two weeks. He died overnight, with Petunia next to him, at the vet clinic where they were staying together while he was being treated. She was with him for hours before the staff arrived in the morning.

I've had pet bunnies since childhood (we were never a dog-and-cat family), so I have grieved many rabbits. But until Petunia, I had never seen a rabbit grieve. It was clear her loss was profound. She avoided spots in the apartment where she and Oliver used to hang out, and she seemed unable to relax for more than a few minutes at a time. She stopped eating certain foods, and I started feeding her pieces of carrot every day (a sugary treat, not a staple, despite popular belief) just to keep her di-

I was intent on finding a companion for Petunia because I'd seen what she was like when she had one.

gestion moving. Obviously lonely, she sought out extra affection from me, and there were nights when I slept on the couch near her pen, just so she'd have another heartbeat in the room.

Mostly, though, what I remember was her rage. She didn't seem confused by Oliver's absence—she seemed absolutely furious. In her enclosure, she constantly pushed things around, shoving her litter box and food bowls with an almost violent force. Other times, for no discernible reason, she would stomp her back feet, a signal that typically means danger, or anger.

When I described all this recently to primatologist Christine Webb, she wondered if Petunia had experienced some form of PTSD. Now at New York University, Webb spent six years as a researcher and lecturer at Harvard, where she wrote *The Arrogant Ape* (2025), an encyclopedic critique of the "myth," as she calls it, of human exceptionalism. Gathering scientific evidence from across the animal kingdom—from songbirds, to honeybees, to beavers, to chimpanzees—the book argues that humans aren't the only species to think and feel in complex ways. When Oliver died, Webb said, Petunia was likely traumatized.

"That's a word that's becoming less taboo" in scientific circles, she explained, as research piles up on animals' responses to trauma (there's a particularly vivid, heartbreaking study of donkeys forced to work in Egyptian brick kilns). "PTSD requires a kind of memory of what happened," Webb said, "which is something that we denied to other animals."

Rosie Malsberger sits with Spruce (left) and Petunia during their speed date at the shelter (above). The rabbits eat breakfast together at home early in their courtship. After an initial spark, they bonded slowly over months, by simply being near each other every day (below).

If any person can possibly know what Petunia went through, it might be Stephanie Cacioppo. A neuroscientist at the University of Oregon, Cacioppo is an expert on the effects of human connections on the brain. She has also endured shattering loss.

Cacioppo and her husband, the pioneering social neuroscientist John Cacioppo, met and married in 2011, after a whirlwind, love-at-first-sight romance. For several years, they both taught at the University of Chicago, working side by side at a desk they shared and collaborating on research. John Cacioppo's work focused on loneliness and its devastating consequences for both the brain and the body, all the way down to the cellular level. Without companionship, he found, people fall apart: our cardiovascular and immune systems, cognitive function, mental health, even gene expression, begin to falter. Chronic loneliness is so corrosive that some researchers have described it as more dangerous than obesity, smoking, or alcoholism.

Then, in 2018, John died from complications of a rare, aggressive form of cancer. In her 2022 book, *Wired for Love: A Neuroscientist's Journey Through Romance, Loss, and the Essence of Human Connection*, Stephanie recounts the night John died in her arms and describes the grief that followed as a "cyclone." "I was shocked by how much John's death *hurt*," she writes, "not just psychologically but physically. My heart literally burned for weeks."

For animals and humans alike, "there's a very strong neurobiological tie between love and grief," Cacioppo told me when I reached out to talk about Petunia. Cacioppo is perhaps best known for mapping the human brain's "love network," a group of 12 regions that light up when we are in love, including the emotion and reward centers and the cognitive system. One area she found especially responsive to romantic love is the angular gyrus, a U-shaped region located behind the ear, involved in conceptual thinking, metaphorical language, and abstract rep-

All photographs by Lydialyle Gibson

One of the many standoffs early in the relationship: by lowering his head to hers, Spruce is asking Petunia to groom him. In this case, she refused.

resentations of the self. Love is not simply a feeling, she writes, but "a way of thinking."

In acute grief, she says, that love network powers down. The brain's alarm center, the amygdala, fires up, putting the body in a perpetual fight-or-flight state. Meanwhile, the prefrontal cortex, the region responsible for planning, organizing, and decision-making, dims. That's why people who've recently lost a loved one may forget to eat, or miss their turn on the highway, or struggle to make a cup of coffee.

Some of the higher-level cognitive areas that Cacioppo sees lighting up in human brains don't exist in rabbits. But many responses to love and grief in the brain's emotion centers are shared among social species, she says, and rabbits exhibit mimicking behaviors that suggest they have a cognitive mechanism similar to humans' mirror neuron system, which helps people anticipate a companion's intentions and actions. When couples finish each other's sentences, that's the mirror neuron system at work—and this, too, goes dark after a death. "The brain rewires itself when you fall in love," Cacioppo says, "and it has to rewire itself again in grief."

After a couple of months, Petunia began to emerge from her sorrow and anger—her agitation subsided and her appetite returned. But she still remained more subdued than before, quieter and less social. That's when we started making plans for speed dating.

By the time we arrived at the shelter for Petunia's first series of dates, I had been emailing with Rosie, the rabbit bonding counselor, for more than a week, gaming out which of the House Rabbit Network's eligible rabbits might make a good match. A data engineer who works in insurance technology, Rosie studied epidemiology at the Harvard Chan School of Public Health. Caring for shelter rabbits is perhaps a different public health challenge from the one she imagined pursuing, but it's clearly a calling. She adopted her first rabbit—whom she named after the Spanish Formula 1 driver Carlos Sainz Jr.—in 2021, after a knee injury ended her days as a competitive runner and the pandemic's social isolation left her feeling rudderless.

Five years later, she shares her home with nine rabbits, almost all of whom she has bonded into pairs and trios. Since 2023, she has supervised the House Rabbit Network's hotline, which handles everything from adoption inquiries to surrender requests to rabbit care questions. Most weekends, Rosie is at the shelter chaperoning speed dates, and she receives texts and emails almost every day from people seeking advice on bonding their rabbits. Sometimes she makes house calls.

Looking through the online profiles of the shelter's single, adoptable rabbits—a bunny version of Tinder, with photos, backstories, and personality quirks—Rosie and I settled on five suitors who seemed friendly and easygoing, and who might be capable of balancing out Petunia's sassy intensity. (As

Where Are They Now?

During two speed-dating sessions, Petunia met—and soundly rejected—seven suitors for her affections. They were all soon adopted into other homes. Here are four of their stories.

Grigio: This fun-loving Flemish giant was found abandoned along a roadside with his siblings when they were a few months old. Able to "roll with the punches," he's now called "Meatball" in his new home, and although he's the only bunny there, he's become best friends with the family cat.

Blizzard: A social butterfly with a big personality packed into three tiny pounds, Blizzard took a wallop when Petunia lunged at him during their date, but

my boyfriend and I had quickly discovered, Petunia is full of opinions.) First up was Gigi, a sweet-tempered female lop who looked like Petunia's doppelganger: chestnut fur, a white-trimmed nose, and luxurious, floppy ears. (Same-sex pairings are less common in rabbits, but not unheard of.)

Lauren placed Gigi in the pen a couple of feet from Petunia. Rosie was on the floor next to them with a bag of treats, in case things got testy. For a few minutes, the two rabbits hardly engaged at all, just a few sniffs in each other's direction. Both seemed nervous, especially Gigi. Finally, Petunia approached Gigi and lowered her head, a signal that she wanted to be groomed. For rabbits, grooming is a sign of affection, but also a way of establishing dominance—the rabbit who receives it the most is usually the one in charge. But Gigi, perhaps too anxious, didn't respond to Petunia's demand. So Petunia nipped her.

A bit of conflict early on is not a bad thing, and Rosie separated the bunnies to reset the interaction, but by then Petunia's mood had shifted. She hunched into a ball and sat there, glaring.

Next, Lauren brought in Grigio, a five-month-old Flemish giant. He was goofy and big (full-grown Flemish giants average 15 pounds) and not easily rattled. "He's going to roll with the punches," Lauren said. "And if she bites him—"

Before she could finish the sentence, Petunia bit him. And unlike Gigi, Grigio bit back. A melee ensued, and Grigio was whisked back to the safety of his condo. The date lasted all of six seconds.

At this point, we threw out the carefully curated list of suitors and started improvising. Lauren chose a little guy named Blizzard, with eyes that matched his silver-gray fur. A veteran speed-dater, he had a knack, she said, for charming sour bunnies.

Petunia glowered as he sniffed the floor of the pen, exploring. When he approached her, she lunged, flipping him onto his back, his legs flailing. In one seamless motion, Rosie scooped him into the arms of another volunteer, and he clung to the woman's shoulder with a look of terror and surprise.

By now, it was clear that no new rabbit would be coming home with us that day, but Lauren wanted to end the speed-dating session on a positive—or at least neutral—interaction. She fetched Zephyr, an extremely docile white rabbit with brown splotches on his nose and ears, and sat on the floor outside the pen with him in her lap. A few inches away, Petunia coiled herself into the shape of a bullet. After 20 minutes of stillness and head rubs, with Zephyr nearby but out of reach, she finally unclenched.

A few days later, Lauren sent me an email. There was a rabbit she wanted Petunia to meet, and like her, he was recently widowed.

Bunnies don't always find a match during the first speed-dating session, so three weeks later, we brought her back for another try. But it was more of the same: bites, lunges, angry hunching. A rabbit named Weasley took a kick to the face. A second date with Zephyr was decidedly meh. "Maybe she's not ready yet," Rosie said. "I think she just wants to be alone," my boyfriend said. We decided to suspend the matchmaking for a while.

But a few days later, Lauren sent me an email. There was a rabbit she wanted Petunia to meet, and like her, he was recently widowed. "He just lost his bondmate last night," she wrote. She sent photos: he had khaki-colored fur, upright ears, and a cautious, plaintive expression.

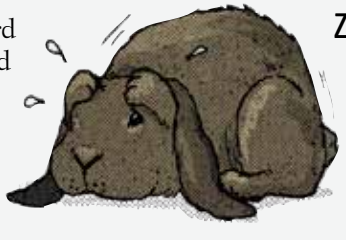
His name was Spruce.

Whenever I tell people—friends, colleagues, strangers at dinner parties—about Petunia's saga, they always want to know more. "Tell me everything," Cacioppo said almost as soon as we got on the phone. For months, Carlos's coworkers demanded updates on Petunia's love life.

At first, I was surprised that people were so interested—and not just interested but *invested*. Part of the fascination with Petunia's story is that it's just so unexpected (speed dating? for rabbits?), but I think it's also that it's so relatable. "Dating is hard," my sister texted, after I told her about Petunia's disastrous first round of meetups. "I sympathize," a friend wrote. "I'm on Team Petunia." It's easy to see ourselves in Petunia's place: hungering for connection yet struggling to find it.

For humans and rabbits alike, the search for love can be difficult—and for some of the same reasons. Just like people, bunnies are picky. "We assume that animals' social relation-

he shook it off and soon afterward went home with a family who had recently lost a bunny.



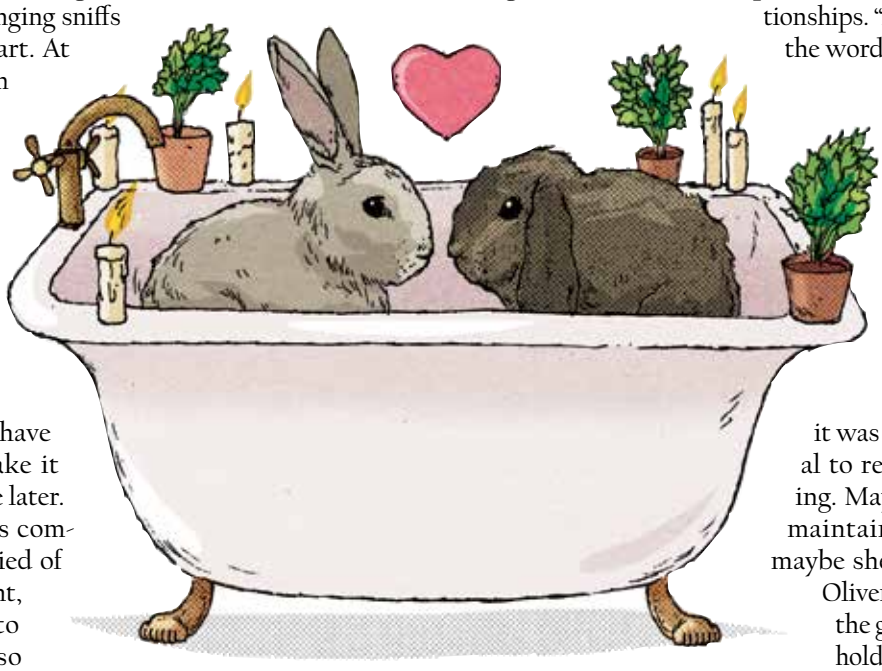
Gigi: Sweet and shy—and especially attuned to human affection—Gigi, who looked like Petunia's twin, found a quiet home with a couple who now post photos on social media of their "pretty girl" nibbling on cardboard boxes and lounging among her toys.

Zephyr: Part of an accidental litter rescued from an abusive, overcrowded home, Zephyr was exceptionally calm and gentle—traits that helped him find a companion, after a House Rabbit Network volunteer adopted him to bond with one of her bunnies.

ships and group formations are more fluid and indiscriminate than ours," said Webb, the primatologist. "But every animal is an individual, with all sorts of idiosyncrasies and personality traits." And many of the issues they must navigate—territory, power struggles, trust—show up in human relationships, too.

I'm not sure what sparked the chemistry between Petunia and Spruce, but from the first moment, their date was different than the others. When he hopped out of his carrier and into the pen where she was sitting, she didn't stiffen. Instead, she seemed to pretend he wasn't there and continued munching a pile of hay that Rosie had put down. "Oh, she definitely knows he's there," Rosie said. It was meaningful, she added, that Petunia was willing to eat with her back to him, a vulnerable position for a rabbit. "She feels safe with him," Rosie said.

For nearly half an hour, the two rabbits carried on a delicate ballet, neither quite touching, both clearly curious, exchanging sniffs from a few inches apart. At one point, Spruce began to groom himself; then Petunia did the same. "That's mirroring," Rosie said. A very good sign. Spruce came home with us that day to begin the next phase of their courtship.



"I think he would have done anything to make it work," Lauren told me later. Without his previous companion, Berry, who died of cancer—also overnight, with Spruce next to her—he'd become so depressed he stopped eating. Lauren was worried. Without intervention, rabbits sometimes simply die after losing a mate.

Petunia and Spruce are very different bunnies—she's the go-getter who's always scheming how to reach the treat shelf, and he's a shy worrier who chews his toenails—but Lauren guessed that their shared experience of grief might make them compatible. And not just for touchy-feely reasons: rabbits who have been in relationships before tend to have better social skills, she said. They're more adept at picking up on behavioral cues—and Petunia had shown she had no patience for any rabbit who couldn't read her signals.

After we brought Spruce home, it took another four months for them to fully bond. Spruce slept in a separate pen next to Petunia's, and we held at-home dates in the bathtub and the hallway next to the kitchen. Rosie came over to help a couple of times, and the shelter staff emailed me a 50-page instruction booklet on bonding, filled with detailed dos and don'ts. It explained that a certain amount of conflict is inevitable—and healthy—as rabbits sort out their hierarchy but warned against the dangers of a "bunny tornado," a fight so intense it can doom a budding relationship. I learned what a degloving wound is (don't look this up) and about the mesmerizing power of a trick called "bunny magic," which involves holding two rabbits side by side while rubbing both their heads simultaneously. It gives each rabbit the impression of being groomed by the other, which can help bickering bunnies build trust and connection.

Mostly, though, we let Petunia and Spruce get acquainted by simply being near each other. We'd let one roam freely while the other stayed in the pen. This kept them physically separated while allowing them to see, hear, and smell each other. They could touch noses through the bars. "Rabbits are always communicating," Rosie had told me. Even the way they breathe is a form of language. Stephanie Cacioppo had mentioned something similar about the importance of touch in human relationships. "A lot happens between the words," she said. One of the neurochemicals that spikes when couples cuddle or look into each other's eyes is a powerful peptide called oxytocin—or, as it's also known, the "bonding hormone."

When Petunia and Spruce squabbled, it was usually over her refusal to reciprocate his grooming. Maybe she was trying to maintain her dominance, or maybe she was just tired: with Oliver, she'd done almost all the grooming. Finally, after holding out for months, she relented. The first time she licked Spruce's ears, he closed his eyes and his whole body seemed to melt. A few days later, we consolidated their enclosures into one.

A YEAR LATER, the two rabbits are inseparable. In the morning, after a shared breakfast of salad greens, they usually retire to a corner of the living room and take turns grooming each other until they doze off. At night, Spruce sometimes chases Petunia playfully, while she sprints ahead of him, almost—but not quite—allowing herself to be caught. More than once, I've seen him accompany her to their water bowl, just to lie next to her while she drinks.

These gestures of affection sound familiar to Robert Waldinger. A professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and a practicing psychiatrist at Massachusetts General Hospital, he is the current director of the Harvard Study of Adult Development, which since 1938 has explored what makes human lives flourish. The Harvard Happiness Study, as it's informally

"Rabbits are always communicating," Rosie had told me. Even the way they breathe is a form of language.

known, began with 724 participants, a mix of Harvard undergraduates and boys from troubled Boston neighborhoods. Eventually, the researchers incorporated the men's spouses, and, as that original generation passes away, the study continues with nearly 2,000 of their descendants.

The survey's resounding conclusion, after nearly a century of gathering evidence, is that good relationships are the single most essential ingredient in healthy, happy lives, outweighing other factors like wealth, fame, and intelligence. To a degree that stunned even the study's researchers, strong emotional bonds were a powerful predictor of longevity and long-term health. "Like, how could your feelings about your partner make it more or less likely that you'll get coronary artery disease, or Type 2 diabetes?" Waldinger says. "But it does." Relationships "get into our bodies and shape our physiology."

That benefit holds for all kinds of relationships, he adds, not just romantic ones. "It's really about the quality of the connection," he says. Cacioppo, too, has found that the brain's "love network" is activated not only by romance but also by close friendships and even identification with a sports team, although the pattern and intensity are different. "It's about expanding yourself into something bigger," she says: a feeling of connectedness so strong that the self grows to include someone else.

This past winter, Carlos and I took Petunia and Spruce back to the shelter for a Valentine's Day-themed photo shoot, where they shuffled tentatively among heart-shaped props on a pink-and-red blanket, finally settling down together next to a cartoonishly oversized "love meter" with its arrow set to "true love." Petunia's bond with Spruce seems as close as the one she once shared with Oliver, but it's not exactly the same. There are different habits, different gestures, different rhythms. One rabbit is not simply a replacement for the other, and yet, for both Petunia and Spruce, the new relationship fills a hole left by a previous companion.

Sharing parsley, *Lady and the Tramp*-style

There's a story Cacioppo tells in *Wired for Love*, about stumbling across an unexpected profundity from her late husband on the day of his funeral, in a YouTube video of a lecture that she hadn't seen before. The talk was about caring for people who've lost a loved one, and John was describing what he'd learned from one of the Caciopposs' research collaborations, a longitudinal study of elderly people in Chicago, many of whom had suffered the loss of a longtime spouse or best friend. Paraphrasing his insight in her book four years later, Stephanie writes, "It's not time that heals grief but *other people*." Or, for Petunia and Spruce, other rabbits.

Lydialyle Gibson is the senior editor of Harvard Magazine.

Animal Love Stories

Tell us how the animals in your life share romance and companionship.

Go to **harvardmagazine.com/bunny-love** to share your thoughts.

And turn to page 64 for answers to last issue's question.

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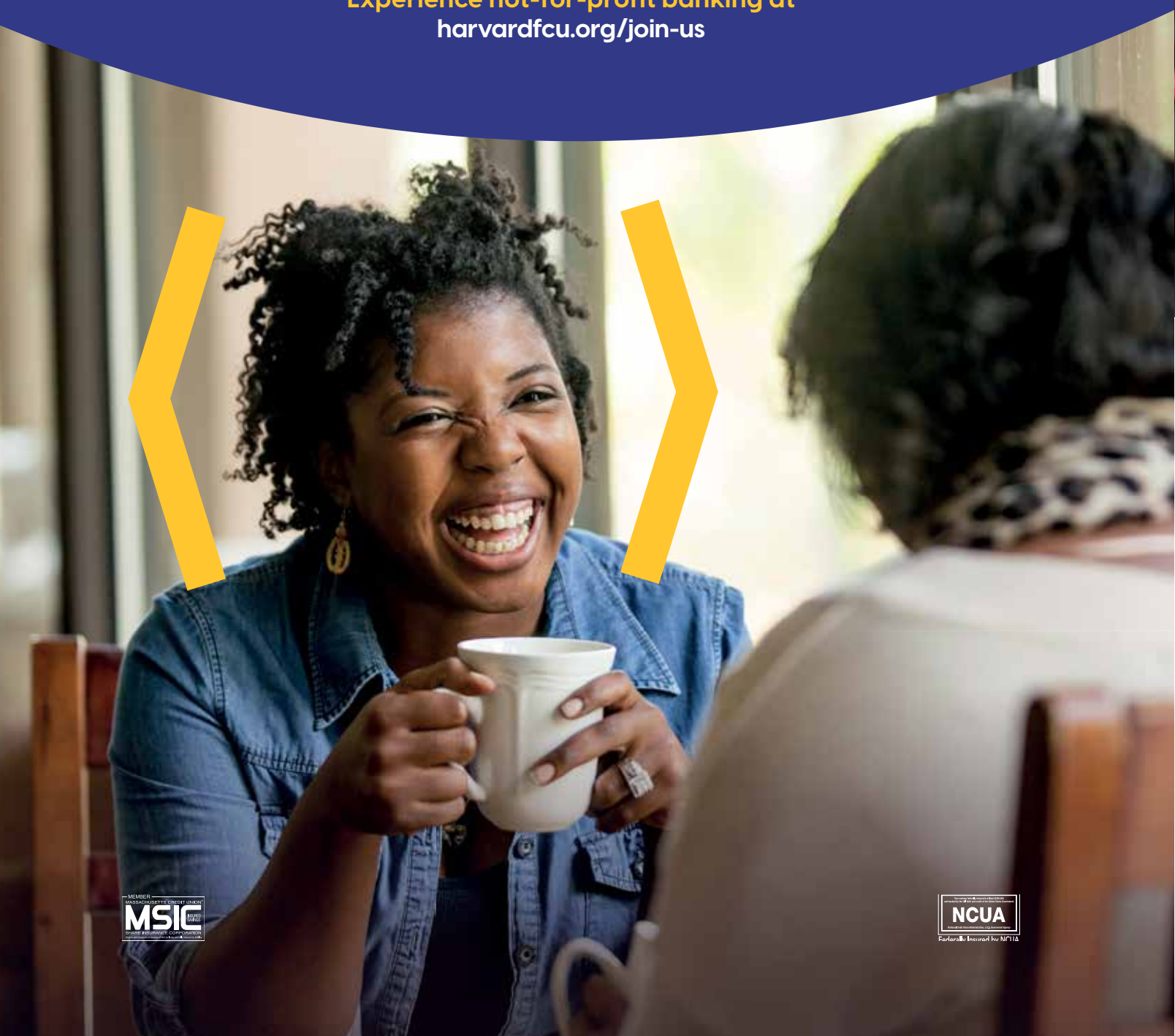

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Harvard's 375th Commencement

Conan O'Brien headlined a star-studded cast. ✦ *by* JONATHAN SHAW

Harvard's 375th commencement coincided with the nation's 250th birthday—a semiquincentennial, as President Alan M. Garber noted—and a natural occasion to celebrate beginnings, for students and the nation alike. The event also marked 250 years since Harvard awarded an honorary degree to General George Washington for driving the British from Boston in the spring of 1776. Honoring that history, members of the Middlesex County Volunteers Fifes & Drums led the procession into Tercentenary Theatre this year, playing "Yankee Doodle."

There were other references to Washington in the days leading up to Commencement. Speaking at the Harvard Chan School of Public Health, Rochelle Walensky, M.P.H. '01, noted that in 1777, Washington ordered all Continental Army troops inoculated against smallpox. It was the country's "first vaccine requirement," Walensky said, and "a move that likely changed the course of history."

But most of the talk during the week focused on the challenges of the present and future. And the festivities ended with a dose of laughter, as Conan O'Brien '85, newly bestowed with a doctor of arts degree, gave an address that poked gentle fun at the University's fame and glory—and advised graduates to make a mark on the world that transcends the Harvard name on their degree.

"So, maybe my wish for you is...that Harvard becomes the

least important thing people know about you," O'Brien said. "Because your real education starts now."

Many of the speeches during Commencement week advised students on how to approach a world in which artificial intelligence plays an increasing role. Garber used his Baccalaureate address to remind students that "there will always be value in 'toiling laboriously' to reach new levels of understanding. When you do so…you elevate the meaning of your singular existence."

"My wish for you is…that Harvard becomes the least important thing people know about you." *—Conan O'Brien*

Comedian Ronny Chieng elaborated on that theme as the College's Class Day speaker, urging graduating seniors not to outsource their creativity to AI. The journey of making and learning something is "the point of all of this," he said. "When you have clarity of purpose and you're doing something you love, every day can be a joy."

The Commencement week humor also included nods to one of the biggest stories on Harvard's campus this year: the debate over grade inflation. O'Brien, in his speech, praised Garber's stewardship: "Fantastic job, sir. Really nice, really nice. Normally, I would give you an A-plus, but in keeping with upcoming Harvard policy, I'm adjusting your grade to a C-minus. Trust me, it's for the good of the school."

Graduates and their guests also learned about the University's financial strains and the looming potential for more administrative layoffs. Members of the Harvard Union of Clerical and Technical Workers held a rally outside the Smith Campus Center, protesting the prospect of future cuts. And striking Harvard Graduate Student Union-United Auto Workers—whose demands for higher wages intersect with those financial strains—were impossible to miss. Harvard Law School's scheduled keynote speaker, Boston mayor Michelle Wu '07, J.D. '12, cancelled plans to speak, citing an unwillingness to cross their picket line.

The week also brought reflection on the nationwide retreat from formal diversity, equity, and inclusion programming. For the second year in a row, student groups organized affinity-based graduation celebrations without institutional support or access to Harvard-owned facilities.

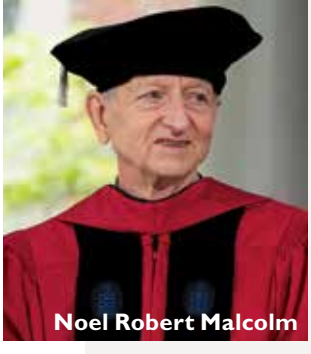
At the affinity celebration for LGBTQ+ graduates, Ricardo Martinez, the executive director of GLAD Law, acknowledged Harvard's public resistance to federal pressure on higher education but criticized the University's move to collapse diversity offices last year. "Pride and anger can coexist," he said. "Institutions are complicated, even the ones that are trying their hardest to live their values against a federal government that has targeted universities for what they teach, who they admit, and what they stand for."

The traditional student Commencement speakers also brought up real-world challenges, light and serious. Latin salutatorian

Honoris Causa

The 2026 honorary degree recipients

Five guests received honorary degrees on May 28. Provost John F. Manning introduced the honorands in the following order, and President Alan M. Garber read the citations. Learn more about each at **harvardmagazine.com/honorands-26**.


Noel Robert Malcolm

Noel Robert Malcolm, historian, journalist and public intellectual. Doctor of Laws: *A polyglot polymath of arresting erudition, he has illuminated the labyrinths of* Leviathan, *elucidated the interplay of Islam and the West, and plumbed the Balkans' tempestuous past.*


Margaret Ellen Noonan

Margaret Ellen "Peggy" Noonan, columnist, author, and speechwriter. Doctor of Laws: *A bountiful fount of felicitous phrases who'd rather our nation be kinder and gentler; a canny opiner with an eye to what's right whose declarations embrace patriotic grace.*


Geoffrey Everest Hinton

Geoffrey Everest Hinton, computer scientist, professor, and "godfather of AI." Doctor of Science: *Perseverant progenitor of transformative technology, now a herald of its myriad hazards, he has both enabled neural networks and warned of their powers with a deep intelligence not at all artificial.*


Audra McDonald

Audra McDonald, actress, singer, and recipient of the National Medal of Arts. Doctor of Arts: *With her heavenly voice and her will to lift every voice, she has climbed every mountain in stage, song, and screen; an inspiriting performer, with the toniest of résumés, whose artistry and ardency propel the wheels of dreams.*

Conan Christopher O'Brien, comedian, writer, and television host. Doctor of Arts: *A humane Harvardian hybrid of harlequin and highbrow whose reverence for irreverence is irrepressible and irresistible; long a late-night luminary, now a decorated doctor, for whom the best of medicine is a dose of laughs.*

Photographs by Stu Rosner, unless otherwise noted

KENT DAYTON/HARVARD CHAN SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Clockwise from top left: President Alan M. Garber and Conan O'Brien on Commencement Day; Rochelle Walensky speaking at the Harvard Chan School of Public Health; and Ronny Chieng lambasting AI on Class Day

Kiesse Nanor '26 poked fun at the disconnect between the Harvard experience and the perceptions of people outside the institution. Senior English orator Noah Eckstein '26 recounted his multifaceted family background, which made it impossible to fall into rigid, polarized thinking. Graduate orator Andrew O'Donohue '18, Ph.D.'26, spoke of the threat to democracy as it plays out on university campuses—and how students and institutions can, and do, fight back.

There were the usual traditions and memorable moments, too, from the call to order by Peter J. Koutoujian, M.P.A. '03, the sheriff of Middlesex County, to a dulcet rendition of "America the Beautiful" by vocalist Sanjna Rajagopalan '26, to the president's formal awarding of degrees "by virtue of the authority delegated to me." Among the musical selections was the anthem based on Psalm 78 (St. Martin's), a tradition dating back to the inception of Harvard Commencements.

"She has climbed every mountain in stage, song, and screen."

Toward the close of the ceremony, the University celebrated the accomplishments of five honorary degree recipients (see opposite page).

Then O'Brien launched into his speech, which made fun of everything: the format of graduation speeches, academic robes, the architecture of his own undergraduate house, Mather, and, characteristically, himself: "As I look upon this gathering of tomorrow's greatest minds, I'm confident saying there is no less flattering outfit than the cap and gown. We all look like the

Confetti

Postgraduation Plans, Grade Inflation Revealed

This year's *Crimson* senior survey (with 680 respondents, or 40 percent of the class) questioned graduates about their post-Harvard plans. Their job prospects remained largely in line with previous classes: careers in finance (19 percent), consulting (17 percent), and tech (15 percent) drew most of the class, while fewer students opted to immediately pursue careers in healthcare (7 percent) and academia (6 percent). Perhaps tracking career plans, economics continues to be the most popular concentration, accounting for 16 percent of respondents. Double concentrations, introduced in 2022, continue to rise in popularity: 17 percent of the class reported having one.

The survey also asked seniors about a faculty proposal—since approved—to cap A grades at 20 percent of any class. Only 18.4 percent of seniors supported the proposal, even though 45 percent of them said they believe students systematically receive inflated grades, and nearly half said they felt they had personally received a higher grade than they deserved in a course. More than 20 percent of graduating seniors had a grade-point average that rounded to a perfect 4.0, and 85 percent reported a GPA greater than or equal to 3.65.

O'Brien Wins Twice

Immediately after receiving an honorary doctor of arts, Conan O'Brien was accorded a second distinction. Provost John F. Manning noted that O'Brien was many things while in college, but not a varsity athlete—and referenced O'Brien's first late-night gig, taking over from David Letterman—when he presented O'Brien with a white varsity-letter sweater with a

crimson "H" on the chest. "Dr. O'Brien," said Manning, "to recognize your stature as one of the Ivy League's all-time most voluble players, we hereby confer on you the title of Harvard's own honorary late-night Letterman."

Students Stage a Musical Tribute

Actress and singer Audra McDonald knew she would be awarded an honorary doctor of arts on Commencement Day. She didn't know that Gabrielle Greene '27 and Samuel Hines '29 would perform a duet from the musical *Ragtime*, "Wheels of a Dream," accompanied by Kiesse Nanor '26 on piano; McDonald had sung the part of Sarah in the original Broadway production and won a Tony Award for her performance. Visibly moved, McDonald embraced the students after their rendition.

Radcliffe Awards 2026 Fay Prizes

The Harvard Radcliffe Institute's Fay Prize, given annually for the top theses in Harvard College's graduating class, was awarded this year to three seniors: Jessica Lynn Jenkins, Mira Hu Jiang, and Arundhati Oommen. The topics they addressed include a study of New Zealand households that demonstrated that where you live can determine how you live; a study of disorders in gut-brain interaction; and work at the intersection of statistics and philosophy that measured legal responsibility in situations that involve luck. "Two people can commit the same crime with identical prior choices and face radically different punishments based on nothing but outcome," Oommen wrote in that thesis—an "inch of positioning, a millisecond, a gust of wind" could be the difference between freedom and imprisonment.

Fifes and Drums Lead the Way

To celebrate the nation's semiquincentennial, and to mark 250 years since Harvard awarded General George Washington an honorary degree for driving the British from Boston, a fife-and-drum corps led the way into Tercentenary Theatre during the 375th Commencement. Drum Major John Nichols, of the Middlesex County Volunteers Fifes & Drums, headed the procession as his compatriots played "Yankee Doodle." Nichols—who stands over six feet two without the hat and feather—works for the University by day, as a stormwater compliance officer in the environmental health and safety department.

JENNIFER BEAUMONT

Clockwise from top left: Harvard Divinity School graduates waving streamers on Commencement Day; the sea of degree candidates seated in Tercentenary Theatre; undergraduates celebrating; students taking a selfie with Conan O'Brien, soon to receive his honorary doctor of arts degree

potions professor at Hogwarts up here on stage. It feels like an AA meeting for druids."

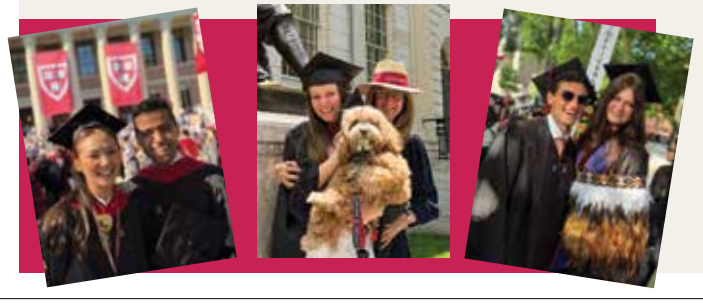
Wrapped inside his comedy, though, was stealth, sharp commentary on the political climate and federal actions, including lawsuits against Harvard, that have challenged the University community. "Many people think I've come today to defend Harvard. Well, sorry, those people are wrong," O'Brien said.

He continued:

"Not only am I not against these lawsuits, I'm here to announce that I am joining them. I, too, am suing Harvard. I'm suing Harvard for my less than spectacular undergraduate sex life...I'm suing Harvard, because—and this is absolutely true—in the spring of my sophomore year, while trying to grab a quick lunch at Adams House, I was served a meal called Captain Ben's Fish Spaghetti...

I'm confident that my claims will have more merit than those filed by the president of the United States. Yes, as you are aware, the current administration feels Harvard admits too many foreign students, and who knows, they may have a point. After all, what has any foreigner ever added to our American culture—with the possible exception of music, literature, art, cuisine, fashion, architecture, dance, scientific breakthroughs, and the core of our moral codes and ethical beliefs?" ▽

Visit harvardmagazine.com/commencement to read about the week's events and celebrations, and to view photos of familiar faces.



Head Toward the Darkness

There's a growing movement to recapture the night sky. It starts on your front porch.

by MATT CROSSMAN

THE DORMANT volcano Haleakalā climbs 10,023 feet into the sky, high above Maui and the Pacific Ocean. As it stretches through the clouds, the summit emerges as one of the darkest and clearest places on earth. That makes Haleakalā National Park an ideal setting for Serena Wurmser '23 to lead astronomy tours.

Wurmser's love for the stars runs deep. She wrote her Harvard admissions essay about the Big Dipper and now spends hours crafting her nighttime talks, mixing science and stories, history and legends. As the end of her tour draws near, she lets quiet drape over her guests, lets them lose themselves in the infinity above Puʻuʻulaʻula—Red Hill—as the summit is known.

Finally, she speaks again. "Think about someone you miss," she tells them. Someone you wish were here. Wherever that person lives or lived, they once looked up at these same stars. "The stars connect us all," she says.

But outside of rarefied locations like the top of a volcano, we are losing that connection. Ninety-nine percent of Americans live under skies dimmed by light pollution. The spread of light is like suburban sprawl, only worse because the light keeps going—up and out—when the suburbs stop. The eastern seaboard from Boston to Washington, D.C., seen from space, is a ribbon of light. On the ground, thousands of lights

Stars and the Milky Way as seen from Haleakalā National Park on the island of Maui, Hawaii; photograph by Serena Wurmser

collectively shine so bright that it never gets truly dark. Sharp stars are fading and dull stars are disappearing. One study published in the journal *Science*, based on thousands of reports from citizen scientists, suggests the sky is getting 10 percent brighter every year.

One study in the journal *Science*, based on reports from citizen scientists, suggests the sky is getting 10 percent brighter every year.

And light pollution travels far beyond city borders. Las Vegas lights "are the dominant cause of light pollution in Death Valley National Park, 93 miles from the city," according to DarkSky, an international organization whose mission is "to restore the nighttime environment and protect communities and wildlife from light pollution."

Man-made light reaches even Pu'u'ula'ula—though admittedly not very much, it is measurable. "It's pervading natural areas that we would think are undisturbed," says Avalon Owens '13, a research fellow at Harvard's Rowland Institute who has studied the effect of light pollution on fireflies and other bugs.

Light has always and forever been a metaphor for good. The Bible says God's first spoken command created light. The Enlightenment redeemed the Dark Ages. Light stands for knowledge, for clarity, for purity. We can never have too much of any of those.

Serena Wurmser

COURTESY OF SERENA WURMSER

But when light is a real thing and not a metaphor, too much of it is just that: too much. And light pollution does far more than just make it hard to see stars. There are long-term and wide-ranging health consequences up and down the food chain.

Dark is good. Dark works. We need more of it, not less. On top of Haleakalā, in urban parks, in state capitols, in architectural designs of urban landscapes, and in astronomy conferences across the country, Harvard professors, scientists, and graduates are working to make that happen.

The dangers of light

Light pollution is still a relatively new field of study. Researchers trace the term to an article in *Science* in 1973, and for years it seemed that only astronomers cared about it. To the extent the public paid attention, the reaction was to shrug and say the astronomers just need to go where it's darker.

Dark sky advocates have a name for this problem or, rather, an acronym: ALAN, which stands for "artificial light at night." It's increasingly clear, they say, that many places we think are dark actually aren't, with far-reaching health consequences for humans and animals.

Road glare causes thousands of car accidents every year. A 2024 story in the *AMA Journal of Ethics*, "We're All Healthier Under a Starry Sky," says artificial light at night has "been associated with sleep disturbances, depression, psychiatric disorders, and obesity, with a subsequent increased risk of diabetes."

In 2017, researchers from Harvard and several other institutions released a landmark study that followed 109,672 nurses for 24 years. They separated the women into five groups based on lighting in their home ZIP codes. Women who lived in areas with the highest levels of exposure to ALAN had a 14 percent increased risk of breast cancer compared to women who lived in areas with the lowest level of ALAN.

Early this century, scientists began asking what light pollution was doing to animals—and found challenges "impossible to ignore," Owens says. The key problem is what scientists call "an evolutionary trap": behavior that has worked forever to help an animal survive suddenly kills the animal, instead.

For most of history, nocturnal animals saw only the lights of the moon and the stars, which are, for all practical purposes, infinitely far away. Animals drawn to that light would never get there. But now lights are right there on the side of that building or on the top of that pole, and animals seemingly don't know the difference between a light bulb and a light in the sky.

Before artificial light at night, for instance, a sea turtle fled from predators by scooting toward the brightest light, which was the moon and stars reflecting off the sea. Now, the sea turtle sees a hotel sign, thinks it's the moon, and runs toward it. He steps off the beach, puts his little reptilian flippers on the highway…and finds out cars exist when one runs him over.

Credit goes to Serena Wurmser for the setup and nightmare ending of that story. She tells it during stargazing tours, slowly teasing out the details before dropping the hammer of the poor squished turtle at the end.

Not all ALAN-related animal problems end in heartbreak. Some are just weird. Consider dung beetles, or *Scarabaeidae*. They make balls out of poop and roll them like they're building the world's grossest snowman.

And that's not the weird part. At night, these dung beetles navigate by the stars (humans call this wayfinding, and it's one more thing we lose when we lose darkness). With no stars to follow,

the dung beetles roll their poop willy-nilly, as if they're following bad GPS. In addition to not going where they should, they sometimes run into each other and get into fights.

Scientists file these nighttime brawls between poop-rolling *Scarabaeidae* under the heading of "temporal disorientation": not knowing where you are in space and time. That's part of why some scientists theorize that light pollution contributes to an ongoing bug apocalypse—massive recorded drops in the volume of insects.

COURTESY OF EUROPEAN SOUTHERN OBSERVATORY

COURTESY OF DARKSKY

The Bortle dark sky scale (above), developed by amateur astronomer John E. Bortle, measures the impact of light pollution at different locations. A graphic from the organization DarkSky (below) suggests best—and worst—practices for outdoor lighting.

Repeating the same mistakes

Tucson, Arizona, is widely considered the astronomy capital of the world. High elevation and light pollution ordinances make for dark skies, and the region has a handful of astronomy sites and attractions.

In 2013, Tom Reinert '75, J.D. '80, visited Kitt Peak National Observatory, 50 miles southwest of Tucson. There he gaped at "the darkest sky [he]'d ever seen." That visit rekindled Reinert's boyhood love of astronomy, and ever since, he's been casting his eyes to the heavens.

And also at legal documents.

A lawyer for 40 years, Reinert worked with DarkSky on policy and law issues and eventually became the president of its board of directors. Still a board member today, Reinert speaks often about astronomy and light pollution issues. It's a common misconception, he says, that light pollution is the inevitable result of a growing population—as if more people equals more light and less dark, and there's nothing else to talk about.

The truth, Reinert says, is that we have far brighter light than we need, in places we don't need it and at times we don't need it, and the growth in light pollution far outpaces the growth in population.

But it's not as if the pro-darkness forces are battling Big Light, an evil corporate cabal bent on ruining the night for everyone. In fact, the opposite might be the problem. Outdoor lights are installed with no plan at all, whether they are streetlights, park lights, stadium lights, or house lights. The enemy is a million points of light in a million locations all over the industrialized world, put there by a million decision makers, all repeating the same mistakes.

Owens puts it this way: "The people installing lights aren't lighting experts."

If you can see a light bulb from anywhere except directly below it, that light is inefficient, says Dan Green, an astronomer and solar system researcher in Harvard's Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences. Unshielded lamps shoot light all over, like an unattended kitchen hose shoots water.

And the problem isn't just bright lights; it's also bright lights that are on at the wrong times and in the wrong places. (Not everything is worth seeing, and certainly not all night long when no one is there to see that which is not worth seeing.)

When Green first started making the case against light pollution in the 1990s, he wanted to understand the origin of the problem and amassed a library on the history of lighting. He read and read and dug and dug and couldn't find any reason why outdoor lighting is the way it is.

"In the late 1800s and early 1900s, if you had a light bulb on your street, you were civilized, right? It was a big deal. Nobody cared whether it was shielded or not," he says. "But if you go into a house, people have lamp shades. Why do they have lamp shades? Because they don't want a bare bulb, right? And for some reason, historically, there's been this huge disconnect in the general public between shielding a light in your house and not shielding a light outside the house."

Even now, massive changes in the practice of lighting take place without much thought about the consequences. The most obvious example is the transition from incandescent light bulbs to LED bulbs earlier this century. We replaced 60-watt incandescent bulbs with 60-watt LED bulbs. But LED bulbs are 10 times as bright as incandescent bulbs.

And if you really want to get a dark sky advocate fired up, bring up "wall packs." They're the square-shaped fixtures attached to the exterior of hundreds of buildings, shooting far too much light toward nowhere in particular. Lighting experts derisively call them "glare bombs," says Dan Weissman, the

associate principal and director at the design firm Lam Labs.

To be clear, nobody is suggesting that we turn off all the lights—or try to turn New York, L.A., or any other city into a stargazing hotspot. But advocates say there are ways to reduce light pollution and slow down its spread. DarkSky offers five principles for proper outdoor lighting:

Useful. Lights should have a clear purpose.
Targeted. Lights should be shielded and pointed toward where they are needed.
Low level. More is not better.
Controlled. Motion sensors and timers should be used to trigger lights.
Warm-colored. Too many lights are on the blue end of the spectrum. Blue light suppresses melatonin, and lack of melatonin has been tied to increased cancer rates.

Weissman, who teaches lighting design at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, recently won approval for an "outdoor light at night" class for the fall 2026 semester. He has already put some of his ideas into effect: lighting the façade of a building in Lowell, Massachusetts, with indoor lights; getting rid of all the outdoor lights at his condo; and inventing a device that renders all wall packs powerless while also covering them in black tar. (OK, that last one is a running joke between Weissman and a friend, expressing what they *really* want to do to end light pollution.)

Weissman is also active in the Illuminating Engineering Society of North America (IES), founded in 1906. Last year, after years of publishing guidelines for minimum levels of brightness, the IES for the first time published guidance for maximum levels of brightness, too.

Weissman says this new policy has the chance to make an enormous impact. "The best thing that can happen is municipalities adopt that," he says.

Some countries in Europe, along with assorted states, cities, and towns, have adopted lighting ordinances. But that's been a slow slog. Green got so fed up with his yearslong attempts to get Massachusetts to adopt a light pollution law that he walked away from the issue before it drove him crazy.

Still, if problem No. 1 of light pollution is ignorance, as Green, Owens, Reinert, and Weissman describe, dark sky advocates can counter that with education and lobbying.

But even as they fight that battle, they face another that is more primal: fear of the dark.

Myths and anxieties

On her Haleakalā tours, before she talks about sea turtles or how stars connect all of humanity, Wurmser first makes her guests feel safe in the darkness that swallows them atop the volcano. She has compassion for those who fear the dark because she once feared it herself. She grew up in New York City, where it's never dark, and she had to learn not to be afraid of it. Otherwise, she couldn't be an astronomer, or at least not the kind who leads tours on top of volcanoes.

She overcame her fear by immersing herself in darkness. She confesses, almost sheepishly, that when she worked at Glacier National Park in Montana, she had to steel herself for the nighttime walk from the office to her car. Who could blame her? Bears and mountain lions live there. "It was a 20-foot walk," she says. "And I had my bear spray ready."

Humankind has wrestled with fear of the dark since we realized that animals want to eat us, and they hunt at night. "Walking out in the dark is not something that made a lot of sense for survival," says Kerry Ressler, a Harvard professor of psychiatry who has focused on the pathophysiology of fear-related disorders.

Today, when we arrive at a place that feels pitch-black, Ressler says, our amygdala, the part of our brain sensitive to novelty and threat, turns on. We fear being robbed or mugged or worse. The amygdala's fight-or-flight response drowns out our ability to discern real danger from unlikely nightmares.

Many parks, college campuses, and other public places glow all night long, all year long, because we think light keeps us safe.

But it isn't true.

In his book *The End of Night: Searching for Natural Darkness in an Age of Artificial Light*—considered a

Humankind has wrestled with fear of the dark since we realized that animals want to eat us, and they hunt at night.

The desert outside Las Vegas, photographed in the spring of 2023; the glow in the center is Los Angeles, located 150 miles away.

classic among dark sky proponents—science writer Paul Bogard cites numerous public and private studies conducted all over the world, none of which found a causal relationship between lighting and a decrease in crime. He quotes Australian astronomer Barry Clark, who reviewed the existing research on the topic: "Advocating lighting for crime prevention is like advocating use of a flammable liquid to try to put out a fire."

That's because too much light might have the opposite effect of what is intended. "Studies bear this out," Bogard writes. "Light allows criminals to choose their victims, locate escape routes, and see their surroundings."

To illustrate that point, Reinert has given speeches dressed as Batman. "Batman said criminals are a cowardly and superstitious lot," he says. "And his thing is, he used to jump out of the shadows and get them, right? And now, criminals can see Batman coming three blocks away because the city's overlit."

The beauty of darkness

Wurmser likens the loss of the night sky to draping cloth over items in a museum. Owens says light pollution needs its *Silent Spring* moment, a reference to the 1962 book by Rachel Carson that ignited the environmental movement. Maybe scientists will find the light pollution equivalent of DDT, the pesticide Carson wrote about that caused widespread damage to animals, agriculture, and humans. Maybe the public will start to care more when enough people venture out to see the stars, only to find they can't.

Until then, dark sky advocates will lament the ever-shrinking and dimming celestial show.

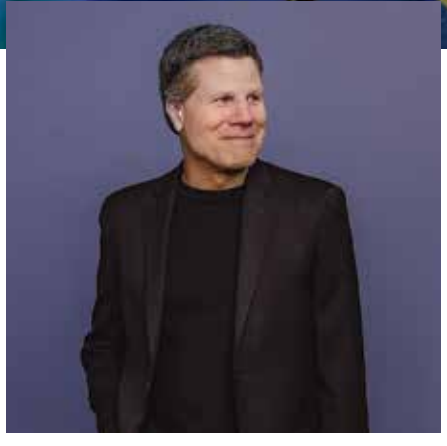
Even as scientists and advocates involved in the issue report frustration about the lack of improvement, there has been growing interest in dark skies in recent years. "Astrotourism" has soared in popularity. Travelers appear to be realizing anew that a dark and clear night is art, pure and unadulterated, unedited, the source of endless myths and stories. They are willing to spend money to go see that, and DarkSky works with local governments to make sure that where they go is indeed dark—and to make the case that there is beauty there worth saving.

"As we lose access to the night sky, we're losing access to quite a few pieces of what makes us human," Wurmser says. "More than anything else, we're losing access to a piece of beauty and joy. I love the night sky, mostly because I think it's beautiful." ▽

Matt Crossman is a writer based in St. Louis. He interviewed surgeon and NASCAR driver Patrick Staropoli '12 for this issue of Harvard Magazine.

Photograph by Jeff Sullivan

Arts & Culture



Bill of the Ball

A director's bold, beloved Cats *revival reflects a lifelong philosophy toward theater.*

by Schuyler Velasco

The Broadway cast of *Cats: The Jellicle Ball* onstage at the Broadhurst Theatre (above); Bill Rauch '84, co-director of the production and winner of the 2026 Harvard Arts Medal (below)

Bill Rauch '84 has wanted to set *Cats* in a gay bar for 30 years. Sometime in the 1990s, the theater director says, a vision popped into his brain of Grizabella, the aging, forlorn Glamour Cat in Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical, as an older gay man singing "Memory" in a seedy watering hole.

"I just thought it would be so melancholy, so revealing. In a queer context, the way in which that song romanticizes lost youth and beauty would be really powerful," Rauch says. "I also thought, 'I will never, ever get the rights to do that.'"

Three decades can change things, though. In March, *Cats: The Jellicle Ball*, co-directed by Rauch and Zhailon Levingston, opened on Broadway, reimagining the behemoth 1982 musical hit as a competition in New York's Harlem ballroom community. There are hip hop beats thumping under Webber's score, drag queens, death drops, voguing, and tight neon tracksuits and lush furs replacing the literal cat costumes (ears, tails, whiskers) of the original. "Tempress" Chasity Moore, a transgender woman, sings "Memory."

Based on a collection of T.S. Eliot poems, *Cats* has long polarized musical theater lovers: the original production had the fifth-longest Broadway run in histo-

Show images by Matthew Murphy and Evan Zimmerman

ry, but the synth-heavy orchestrations, threadbare plot, and a widely loathed 2019 movie adaptation have made for easy mockery over the years.

There are "people who love the musical *Cats* and know every word, and people who hate the musical *Cats* and swore they would never see it again in their lives," Rauch says.

Yet the reception for the new revival has been ecstatic. The show has racked up roundly glowing reviews and garnered nine Tony Award nominations, including Best Revival of a Musical and Best Direction of a Musical for Rauch and Levingston. (Winners were announced on June 7, after this publication went to print.)

And the combination of *Cats* and ballroom culture has come to seem, to many, almost inevitable in hindsight; both are products of 1980s New York, organized around competitions to be fabulous and fierce.

"Cats has always been a ballroom: distinct personalities enter the floor, presenting their style and story, and a community watches to see who commands the room," Betty Buckley, who originated the role of Grizabella on Broadway, wrote in a *New York Times* guest essay in April.

By May, *The Jellicle Ball* had extended its planned Broadway run three times due to high ticket demand. People frequently tell Rauch that the ballroom iteration of *Cats* "makes more sense of *Cats* than *Cats* made before," he says.

"That's important to me, because although we're doing this radical resetting, we always wanted to excavate what was already there," he adds. For Rauch, there's always been a lot to love about *Cats*; the revival respects the original immensely, both in its orchestrations and preservation of Eliot's text.

That instinct—to unlock fresh dimensions of familiar works and open them up to broader audiences—has driven Rauch's theater career since his days at Harvard. When he arrived on campus in 1980 at 17, he wanted to be an actor. But "before my freshman year was done, I had directed my first full-length play, and I realized I was a director," he recalls. "And once I realized that, I went crazy."

It was a fertile era for theater in Cambridge. The American Repertory Theater was founded in 1980; Peter Sellars '80, the famed opera director who would become a mentor, was a few years ahead of Rauch in school. As an undergraduate, Rauch studied English and American literature and directed 26 shows, including a staging of *Romeo and Juliet* with the famous balcony scene literally turned upside down (Juliet was on a mattress, Romeo standing over her) and a soundtrack including songs from avant-garde musician Laurie Anderson. One summer, he directed resident patients at the Massachusetts Mental Health Center in a one-act play by Molière.

"I am as extreme a case of your college years shaping your life as could be offered," says Rauch, who received the 2026 Harvard Arts Medal in May. He notes that he met his most important early collaborators on campus—along with his husband of 42 years, the actor Christopher Liam Moore '86. "It was an incredibly rich four years," Rauch says.

After graduating, Rauch remained interested in the ways classic works of theater could speak to the current moment. He also wanted to "[bring] people together [in an audience] who might not normally be in a room together," he says. In 1986, he co-founded Cornerstone Theater Company, a traveling troupe that mounted shows for rural communities across the U.S., often starring locals, with playwright Alison Carey '82. Rauch served as the company's director for 20 years.

One production set Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* on a California naval base shortly after the U.S. military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy was enacted in 1993. The staging toyed with the play's already-complex gender dynamics by having Moore play the roles of both Viola and Sebastian, brother-and-sister twins.

In projects like these, Rauch says, he doesn't want to blow up sacred texts; he wants to highlight elements that are often hiding in plain sight. "My job is primarily an interpretive one," he says. "I want to show what's already there, always in service of telling the story with more passion and clarity."

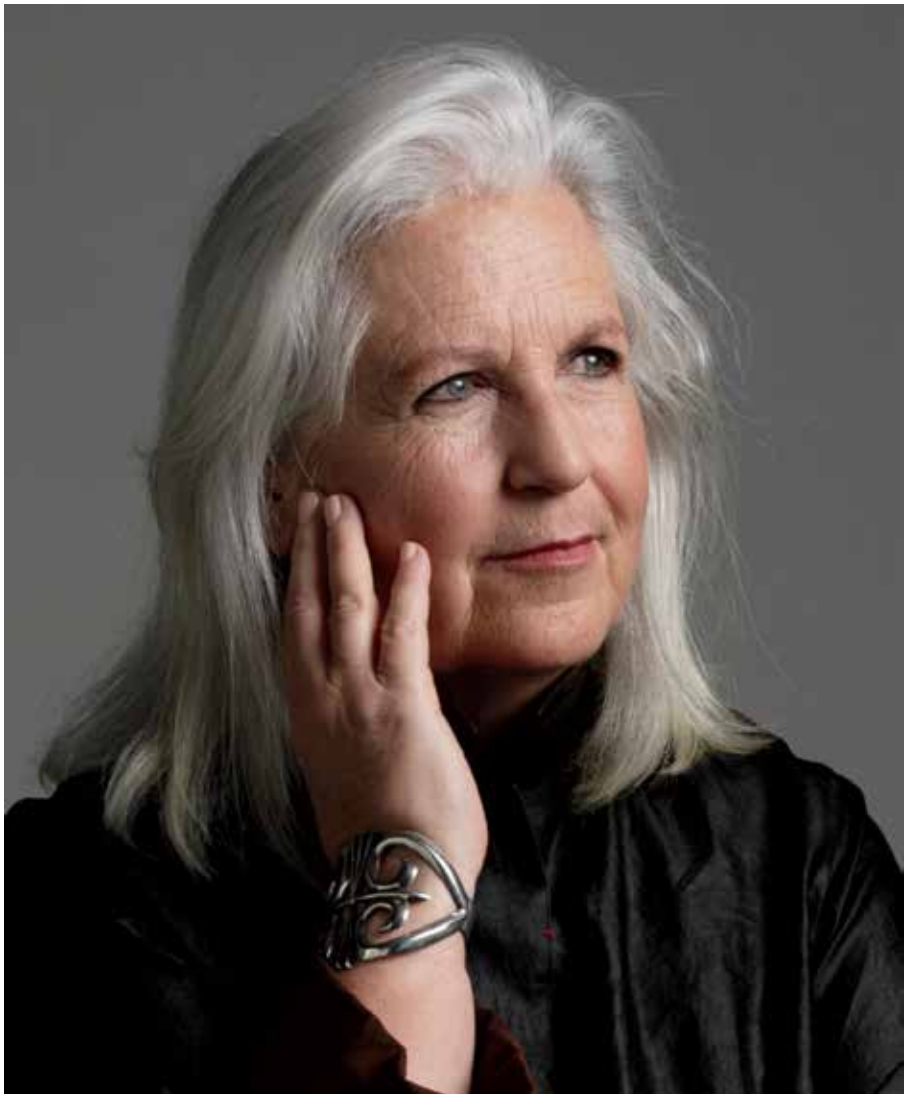
For example: at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, where he was executive director for 12 years, he staged *Oklahoma!* with the four romantic leads recast as lesbian and gay couples.

"Take Laurey and Curly singing 'People Will Say We're in Love,'" Rauch says. "That whole song is, 'We've got to be careful.' By the time they get to the reprise, they're saying, 'Let people say we're in love. Let's not hide it.' When you put that in a queer context, that unadulterated acceptance, and wanting the world to know and celebrate the love, it has a different weight."

Junior LaBeija (left) as Gus the Theatre Cat and Bryson Battle (right) as Jellylorum in *Cats: The Jellicle Ball* on Broadway

Rauch hopes the success of *Cats: The Jellicle Ball* will allow the show to carry its own themes of joy and acceptance to far-reaching corners of the country. At Harvard, a professor once told him that only 2 percent of Americans attend theater regularly. Rauch has spent a lot of time since trying to reach the other 98 percent.

"It's most important to me that we reach as many young queer people as possible," he says. "If we are lucky enough to have this on Broadway for a little while, and then we're able to tour it, that would be my dream come true."



Among the Glorians

Author Terry Tempest Williams on the holy ordinary and Harvard's "Divinity Tree"

by Salomé Gómez-Upegui

On friday, March 20, 2020, writer and environmental activist Terry Tempest Williams had a catalytic dream. After climbing a spiral staircase, she met a female professor who reminded her she had once made a vow "to create the epic documentation of the Glorians." Williams had no idea what a Glorian was, but she was convinced of the solemnity of her vision.

She thought back to the day three years earlier, when she began her tenure as writer-in-residence at Harvard Divinity School (a role that concluded this spring). "The first thing Dean [David] Hempton asked me when I first walked into his office was, 'What question are you bringing with you?'" Williams says. "And what came out of my mouth or my heart was, 'What are the spiritual implications of climate change?'"

That's one of the questions Williams explores in her new book, *The Glorians: Visitations from the Holy Ordinary*. Oscillating between her life in the red rock desert of southeastern Utah and her time at Harvard, Williams invites readers to witness and delight in the beauty of the world around us. She says that, though she never found a true definition of a Glorian, she had an epiphany outside her home one day, watching an ant carry the magenta blossom of a coyote willow plant.

"I thought, that is a Glorian," she says. "An ant ferrying a blossom across the desert is a Glorian."

In this conversation, edited for length and clarity, Williams reflects on the Glorians and how her time at the Divinity School shaped her as a person, teacher, and writer.

• • •

You chose not to define the word "Glorian" in the book. Why?

It was probably the most important decision I made in the book. I had a definition I thought would help the reader, and then at the last minute, I thought, "Who am I to define the ineffable?" And the truth is, I still don't know what a Glorian is. To me, that's the mystery of it, the grace of it. Because how do we define God? How do we define Earth? I felt that it belonged to the realm of the imagination. Now it belongs to the readers.

Your practice of spotting Glorians seems rooted in deep attention. How do you cultivate that?

When I'm at home, in the red rock landscape of Utah, it's easy to pay attention because your life depends on it. How hot is it? Do you have water? Do you have the right shoes? When I'm at Harvard, it's a landscape of distractions, but I would find my focus with the students. I always taught in the Divinity Chapel, where Emerson gave his landmark address in 1838. That speech got him banned for 30 years, so one of our assignments was to write a sermon that would get you banned from Harvard for 30 years. When we're in those kinds of conversations, we are absolutely present. Our minds are fluid, not fixed. And if we are present, we will know what to do.

How do you reconcile your belief in both the earthly and the divine, while maintaining credibility as a scholar who is taken seriously?

First of all, I'm not sure my scholarship is taken seriously. Second, and perhaps

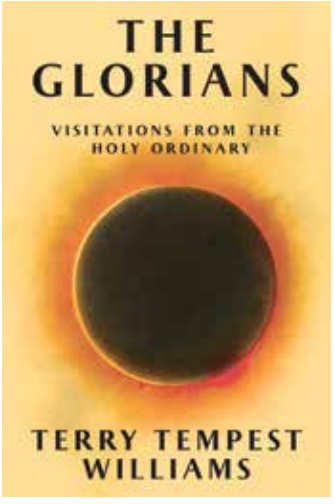
Photograph by Barb Kinney

"I still don't know what a Glorian is. To me, that's the mystery of it, the grace of it. Because how do we define God? How do we define Earth?"

most importantly, being at the Harvard Divinity School, I finally felt like I had come home. When I was in environmental studies programs, I had to hold back. Even in literature and creative writing programs, I often kept [some] parts of myself private. But when I came to the Divinity School, that language was taken seriously. There is no physical evidence of God, one could argue, but through the rigorous study of theology and religious thought, one encounters a different kind of evidence: evidence of faith, devotion, and a language centered around the ineffable. Our students are encouraged to embrace uncertainty because, in many ways, that is all there is.

Central to the book is the story of the Harvard Divinity Tree, an oak believed to be about 150 years old and cut down in 2019 to make way for the school's expansion, after much protest. You write about sleeping beside the tree the night before it was cut down and hearing the message: "My absence will be my presence." Years later, how do you interpret that message?

I think the absence of the Divinity Tree has become its presence. [This April] we [brought] home three benches [made from the tree] to the Divinity School. In December, we brought back this beautiful round table made from the tree. People can see how big it was, how beautiful it was, and how two opposing truths can live within the same structure. You can see evidence of the carpenter ants on one side, and on the other, the healthy tree rings.



It reminds us that we do not have to look away from our difficult histories, but that there can be a cohesive conversation that settles in. Was it difficult? It was. Did we know what the outcome would be? No. We were in the middle of the story during that crisis. Now, I think it is a beautiful story that students can carry with them through generations: that there once was a tree that allowed us to grieve, that allowed us to love, to act, to trust, and to have faith in a future we cannot yet see.

Off the Shelf

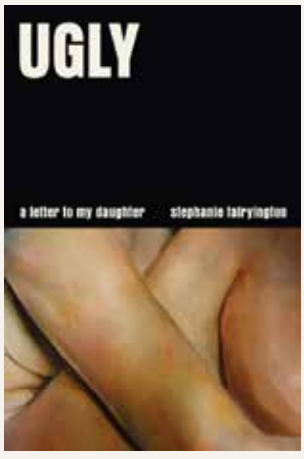
Recent works by Harvard authors

by Gabriella Gage

"Know thyself"—it's one of the Delphic maxims inscribed on the Temple of Apollo and a sentiment that resurfaces over the centuries, in everything from philosophy and the self-help aisle to attempts to solve today's problems by revisiting the patterns of history.

It's also easier said than done. The self is evasive, shifting, never quite complete—and continuously informed by the structures that surround it.

Books like those gathered here serve as emissaries of self-reflection: a stark medical diagnosis, a democracy seemingly on the precipice of collapse, a motto carved above a university gate. Each offers a vantage point to what it means to live deliberately.



Ugly: A Letter to My Daughter by Stephanie Fairyington, Ed.M. '01 (Pantheon, $28)

"What looks like agency is often submission"—this subtle provocation permeates the pages of *Ugly*, where authenticity and identity remain fickle friends. Part cultural unpacking of "ugliness" throughout history, part memoir of queer motherhood, *Ugly* is still figuring it out, and that's the point. Writing as much for herself as for the daughter whom she's addressing, Fairyington invites readers to self-interrogate, but to do so with empathy.

Only a Little While Here by María Ospina, Ph.D. '09, translated by Heather Cleary (Scribner, $28)

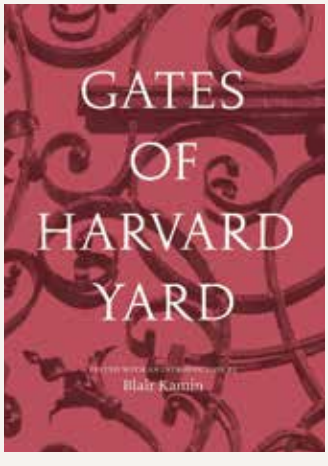
Two dogs, a songbird, a beetle, and a porcupine—these are the intimate lives that *Only a Little While Here* bears witness to. Winner of Colombia's National Novel Award, Ospina's novel takes us on lyrical, interwoven journeys of migration and abandonment in this work of ecological fiction. Somewhere along the way, we start to see ourselves a little better, too.

Coding Capitalism: Computers and the Remaking of the Postwar US Economy by Devin Kennedy, Ph.D. '19 (Columbia, $30 paperback)

Kennedy, who teaches history at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, places the pursuit of economic order at the heart of early developments in computing. The book begins in the aftermath of World War II and the first attempts to stabilize the U.S. economy using computers and ends with the 1987 Black Monday stock market crash, recording many political, economic, and cultural shifts in how computers were viewed along the way. *Coding Capitalism* provides a complex but illuminating prologue to the digital age and the current entanglements of Big Tech, politics, and capitalism.

Gates of Harvard Yard, edited by Blair Kamin, NF '13 (Harvard, $22.95)

"Enter to grow in wisdom." "Depart to serve better thy country and thy kind." The inscriptions on either side of Harvard Yard's Dexter Gate feel equal parts aspiration and contractual obligation. Built between 1889 and 2020, the Yard's 25 gates emerge here as time capsules of shifting architectural styles and ideologies that interact with the present around them. Kamin, a former Nieman fellow, supplements this new edition with an essay on the children's literature-themed Peter J. Solomon Gate, erected in 2020, and a new afterword.



Liar's Dice: A Novel by Juliet Faithfull '83, Ed.M. '86 (Random House, $30)

This story of identical twins separated by circumstance unfolds against the vivid backdrop of 1970s Brazil under military dictator Emílio Garrastazu Médici. For Dolores, uncovering her sister Mita's fate becomes inseparable from her own coming of age. Inspired in part by Faithfull's own life, her debut novel beautifully captures the disorienting interplay of family secrets, memory, and identity.

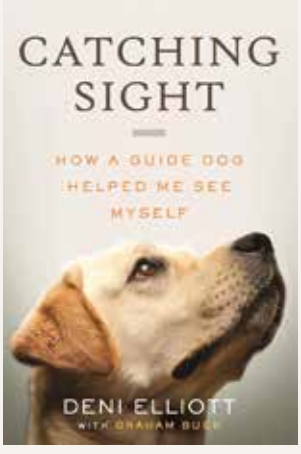
Fed Up: What Evolution Reveals About Food, Diet, Health, and Eating Well by Daniel Lieberman (Knopf, $35)

"What should I eat?" It's the eternal question that makes monsters of us all. Lieberman, Lerner professor of biological sciences and professor of human evolutionary biology, argues that evolution has not prepared us well to answer that question in an age of abundance. Rejecting prescriptive answers, he surveys dietary lifestyles and fads—from

vegetarianism to paleo and intermittent fasting—equipping readers to navigate them with curiosity rather than dogma.

Catching Sight: How a Guide Dog Helped Me See Myself by Deni Elliott, Ed.D. '84, with Graham Buck (Beacon, $30)

"This is a book about taking personal responsibility and about how people should treat other people and dogs," Elliott writes, setting a broader expectation for a narrative that blends memoir with an introduction to the guide dog training world. *Catching Sight*'s narrative does not quite achieve the synergy that Elliott and her guide dog Alberta do. But its strength resides in the tensions between self-knowledge and authenticity: a scholar of ethics confronting her own blindness after years of adaptation and denial.



Reboot: AI and the Race to Save Democracy by Beth Simone Noveck '92, A.M. '92 (Yale, $32.50)

Intentional design helps separate democracy from, say, mob rule. According to *Reboot*, it's also the key to harnessing AI to enhance information gathering, expand participation, and increase government transparency, strengthening collaborative democracy rather than accelerating its demise. Noveck, the former U.S. deputy chief technology officer and the first chief AI strategist for the state of New Jersey, offers a cautiously optimistic yet urgent blueprint.

Homesick for a World Unknown: The Life of George B. Schaller by Miriam Horn '85 (Penguin, $40)

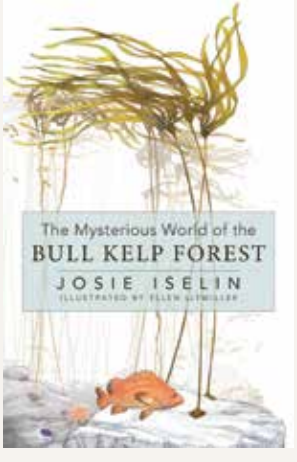
What possesses a 26-year-old graduate student to abandon the human world to study gorillas in the deepest wilderness? Access to field journals spanning 70 years and six years of subject interviews help illuminate the fascinating life of leading field biologist and naturalist George B. Schaller, who is now 93. *Homesick* reads like a well-executed magazine profile thanks to Horn's ability to capture the quiet intensity of Schaller, a subject known for his "world-class taciturnity."

The Making and Breaking of the American Constitution: A Thousand-Year History by Mark Peterson '83, Ph.D. '93 (Princeton, $29.95)

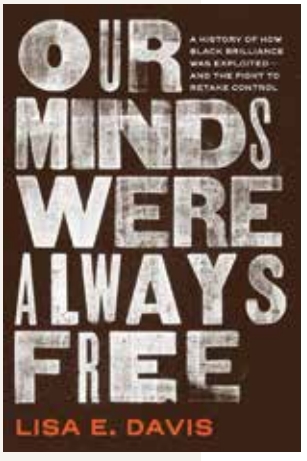
On the 250th anniversary of American independence, Peterson invites us to examine the roots of the nation and the ways it might persevere, tracing the Constitution's ideas back to British political traditions and the "Domesday Book" (the eleventh-century manuscript record of the Great Survey of much of England and parts of Wales). His sweeping history reveals how inherited structures now sit uneasily within modern political realities, sharpening the sense of an ongoing constitutional dilemma.

The Mysterious World of the Bull Kelp Forest by Josie Iselin '84, illustrated by Ellen Litwiller (Heyday, $26)

This book is dedicated to "the growing cadre of kelp forest enthusiasts." If you don't currently count yourself among them, fear not. Writer Iselin and illustrator Litwiller hope to capture the main-character energy of bull kelp, a fast-growing seaweed described as "surprising, opportunistic, undervalued, foundational, resilient, and vulnerable." Through profiles of 13 interconnected species that live in these ecosystems, such as otters and urchins, Iselin establishes the rapid decline of bull kelp forests as an important piece of a broader ecological puzzle involving biodiversity and climate change.



Our Minds Were Always Free: A History of How Black Brilliance Was Exploited—and the Fight to Retake Control by Lisa E. Davis '81 (Simon & Schuster, $29)



In this fascinating legal and cultural history, Davis, an attorney specializing in intellectual property law, confronts how the handling of copyrights and patents in the U.S. have often both appropriated and devalued Black creativity. From household names such as Thelonious Monk to lesser-known innovators such as Onesimus, an enslaved West African who introduced Cotton Mather to smallpox inoculation in eighteenth-century Boston, Davis exposes how failures to acknowledge and compensate Black creators legally and historically have also sustained cultural myths of Black inferiority even as music, art, and technology have relied on Black ingenuity for profit and inspiration.

Alt-Country by Another Name

Elisa Smith brings a subversive twang to Boston bars.

by Claire Zulkey

When country artist Elisa Smith writes new music, she usually does it on the Takamine acoustic guitar she received as a gift from Garth Brooks in 2015. Brooks and his wife, Trisha Yearwood, were speaking at Harvard, and Smith, a master's student at the time at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, asked for his advice on overcoming stage fright during a Q&A session. When she revealed that she was a country musician herself, he invited her onstage to perform for the 400 people in the audience. "This is what we call being baptized by fire," she remembers him saying. "Get on up here and play us a song!" Afterward, as a kind of benediction, he told her to keep the guitar he had loaned her onstage. When she released her first full-length album, in 2022, she titled it *Baptized by Fire.* This summer, she is releasing a new album, *Perfume.*

Smith—whose real name is Leah Waldo, Ed.M. '15—has built a musical career in Boston, a place some might consider an unlikely home for a country artist. But Smith says Boston actually "loves country music"—partly because the city loves drinking and dancing, two of the genre's major themes, and partly because the music itself has shifted, adopting new influences from pop and hip hop that make it more appealing to urban audiences. There's a cultural element, too, Smith says: for many people country music is associated with warm weather and parties. "Rebranding itself as this carefree, summertime, barefoot, blue jeans, bro country kind of thing," she says, "really catapulted it into the mainstream."

These days, country stars like Kenny Chesney, Luke Combs, and Megan Moroney regularly sell out TD Garden and Gillette Stadium. Some of the city's smaller venues also cater to the country scene. One of Smith's favorite spots is the legendary Paradise Rock Club near Boston University. "I've been doing country music in Boston for a really long time," she says. "When I first started, there [were], like, no country artists here. And now, Zach Bryan is selling out the stadium where the Patriots play, and the Zac Brown Band is selling out Fenway Park multiple times a year."

A graduate of the Berklee College of Music, where she studied music production, Smith grew up in a musical family in Mokena, a small town outside Chicago. Illinois has its own country music history: it's the birthplace of stars like John Prine and Alison Krauss, as well as the influential 1990s alt-country group Uncle Tupelo. Smith remembers sitting in her father's guitar case while he practiced gospel songs for church and listening to her grandmother's stories of seeing country stars perform at the Grand Ole Opry while honeymooning in Nashville.

"Elisa Smith"—pronounced "Eliza"—is taken from Leah Waldo's real middle name (Elizabeth) and her maiden name (Smith); away from the microphone, she is a Boston educator and mother of two young children. Having a stage name, she says, "gives you a character to step into, and it helps you get your mind right for when you're about to perform." It also provides a bit of protection, she adds: "If people want to say, 'Elisa sucks,' it's not like they're criticizing me, who is a mother, wife, and an educator. The music industry is hard, and you get battered quite a bit."

Smith gained experience in giving and getting feedback while at Harvard, particularly in a course called "Models of Excellence" with Ron Berger, Ed.M. '90, who founded an organization for school improvement called Expeditionary Learn-

Photograph courtesy of Elisa Smith

ing. "He created a framework for giving feedback: it should be specific, helpful, and kind," Smith says. She applies Berger's teachings when she's co-writing, rehearsing, or recording in a studio.

Smith describes her sound as "Loretta Lynn meets Led Zeppelin." When she plays with a full band, the fiddle and pedal steel guitar ramp up her country sound; an electric guitar gives other songs a more rock or bluesy feel. Smith doesn't have a Southern twang, but her voice is whiskey-soaked enough to sound like it was meant to be heard from the back of a well-loved dive bar. The songs feel familiar, even the new ones. "I often get folks saying, 'I remember that song from when I was a kid!" Smith says, "And I say, 'Do you now? That's funny 'cause I just wrote it last month.'"

One of Smith's goals as a songwriter and performer is to continue the subversively feminist tradition that has long existed in country music. Lynn, her musical hero, "wouldn't necessarily call herself a feminist," Smith says, "but I would, with the songs that she wrote about the pill, and 'Rated X.'" She describes Lynn's songwriting as simple but powerful. "That's why country is so popular, and why people continue to go back to it over and over again," she says. "You know that joke, that it's 'three chords and the truth?'"

When Smith writes, she typically starts with a title, often a phrase borrowed from a book or a movie. She works that into a melodic hook, which then anchors the verses, chorus, and bridge. "Smut," a track on *Perfume*, was inspired by steamy romance novels. "I wanted it to be visceral, very heavy on the storytelling," she says. "Your mama sneaking downstairs, reading a Danielle Steel romance novel." Another track, "Angels Who Take No Shit," is an homage to role models like Lynn and Dolly Parton: "Women with loose lips who took aim and sank your ships/They smiled nice, but made you think twice/Of all the dumb shit you said."

Smith still gets nervous on stage at unpredictable times. "I actually do what Garth told me back then," she says. "You get on stage, you take a breath, you focus on the chords that you're playing, and then you settle into a groove. Also, I usually take a shot of whiskey, which helps." If you're buying, she likes Blanton's.

People & Passions

Emilee Hackney (left); Hackney as a kid, fishing with her grandmother and brother Erik (above) and taking a spin with Erik on the four-wheeler a few years later (below)

ALUMNI

Writing Home

Emilee Hackney's memoir spans Appalachia and the Ivy League.

by Nina Pasquini and Nell Porter Brown

In the spring of 2020, Emilee Hackney '20 was sitting with an old friend in the parking lot of a Dollar General in her hometown of Tazewell, in the Appalachian Mountains of southwest Virginia. They had met a few years earlier while working at Subway but lost touch after Hackney left for Harvard. When she saw him walking along the road, she picked him up and pulled into the lot so they could catch up. "We're looking at each other and talking to each other," she says, "and we're like, 'What are we doing here? What are we going to do with our lives?'"

Hackney had been living with her parents in Tazewell since Harvard had shut down its campus in March because of the COVID-19 pandemic. In college, she'd often felt homesick and missed her family. But home felt different after being at Harvard. Her internet cut out five to six times an hour, making remote classes—let alone remote work—nearly impossible. Life back in Cambridge seemed increasingly distant, she says: "I had moments where I was like, 'Did that even really happen?'"

Still, she'd been lucky compared to her friend who had never left. He was an intelligent, sensitive, sweet-natured person who had also been to jail, struggled with addiction, and survived an overdose. He

Photographs courtesy of Emilee Hackney

was "one of those people who could do anything, if he'd been able to get out of Tazewell," Hackney says. "I think about all the people [who] could achieve so much had they been in my position."

In Tazewell, Hackney was also working on her senior thesis, a series of essays about growing up in Appalachia and going to Harvard. Her advisor, the bestselling author and then-professor of the practice of nonfiction Michael Pollan, helped Hackney get a literary agent, and those essays eventually became a book, *All That's Unseen: An Appalachian Memoir,* to be released on July 28. In it, Hackney explores what it means to be an eighth-generation Appalachian, with an extended family that has lived, worked, and died within 50 miles of each other. Tazewell, she writes, is "a dying little coal town, deeply isolated even by Appalachian standards," and "my favorite place on earth." She bristles at stereotypical depictions of Appalachians as "some kind of backward hillbillies who, you know, drink moonshine and play the banjo." Yet she also delves into some cultural realities—the poverty and addiction, the enduring impact of the coal mining industry, and the sometimes-doctrinaire social structure—and recounts her emerging need for a radical personal change.

Comparisons between Hackney's book and U.S. Vice President J.D. Vance's 2016 bestselling memoir, *Hillbilly Elegy,* seem inevitable. Like some other critics of Vance's book, Hackney takes issue with Vance's use of his own success story as evidence that hard work alone can overcome hardship, ignoring the more systemic economic and political issues that have affected Appalachia. Vance's bootstrap narrative, she says, assumes that "people know how to escape systems that have been in place for generations. Not a lot of people in my family, in my school, knew what opportunities were out there."

Fortunately for Hackney, a few did. Her mother, who grew up with a raging alcoholic father, never drank—and married a man who didn't, either. She earned a college degree, became a teacher, and created a family, Hackney says, "that was much more stable than the one she grew up with." Hackney's father became a West Virginia State Police officer and

SPECIAL INTEREST

Morgan Smith's Stories of the Border

A photographer captures the "other face" of a dangerous city.

by Lydialyle Gibson

Sixteen years ago, Morgan Smith '60, a retired lawyer and government official turned photographer and writer, made an impromptu visit to a Mexican border town amid intense cartel violence. What he saw prompted him to begin documenting the living conditions there, and the project quickly became a consuming mission. Until this year, when health concerns forced him to stop, Smith made the five-hour drive across the border at least once a month from his home in Santa Fe, New Mexico, to visit with locals, humanitarian workers, and migrants passing through.

Smith has made more than 200 trips. His most frequent destination has been Ciudad Juárez, the notoriously dangerous city south of El Paso, Texas. The stories he has captured in photographs and essays—of suffering, hope, and heartbreak—are often stark. He has written of a Colombian-born U.S. citizen who places handmade crosses in the desert where migrants' bodies have been found (more than 1,400) and of schoolchildren recruited by cartels.

Often, he wrote about people trying to help: the priest who runs a migrant shelter, the cooks and caregivers at mental health facilities, the patients in those facilities (pictured above) who look after one another. "The violence makes the news," Smith says, "but there are extraordinary people helping the needy, often at substantial personal risk."

Many of those people have become his friends, and before every trip, Smith would load up his car with clothing, shoes, toys, medical equipment, and cash, as well as printed photos to give to people whose pictures he'd taken. Now 87, he says he must finally give up the grueling journey but adds: "This has become a part of me."

Photograph by Morgan Smith

Hackney and her grandfather, "Poppaw," exploring Breaks Interstate Park (in Kentucky and Virginia)

was later an administrator in a coal mine. Together, Hackney says, "they never really wanted to settle for the status quo."

Still, Hackney had no plans to leave Tazewell; she intended to marry her boyfriend, a fellow member of her Pentecostal church whom she began dating when she was 14 and he was 18. The church promoted the idea of men as leaders and women as followers; some congregants even believed that women should obey their husbands. Hackney, at the time, believed this was God's will; in her book, she describes submitting to being spanked by her boyfriend for "sinful" thoughts or feelings as part of a "domestic discipline" practice.

Then in 2016, when Hackney was a year out of high school and enrolled at a community college, she received shocking news that suggested her fiancé was not who he appeared to be. Everything she had trusted as good seemed to vanish. Spurred by anger at her fiancé, who, she said, had undermined her educational endeavors, she applied as a transfer student to several Ivy League schools a few hours before the deadline. Harvard said yes.

When she arrived in Cambridge as a sophomore assigned to Cabot House, Hackney found the academic load difficult and realized she had never learned how to study. The northeastern social culture was foreign, and she opted out of joining religious groups on campus, upset that the church back home had made her feel "small" and afraid to speak up. The transition to Harvard "was just culture shock on steroids," she says. "I never felt at home with anyone or anything there. Part of it was my fault; I didn't try hard to integrate into any groups. I would walk the streets and explore, and spend a lot of time running along the Charles. It was very solitary."

Hackney sank into depression and almost dropped out. Eventually, though, she got psychiatric help, made friends, found a supportive boyfriend, and pulled up her grades. Creative writing classes became a sanctuary, especially a workshop led by Pollan. "Writing was what I knew I wanted to do and what I was good at," Hackney says, "and that helped me find direction."

Her post-graduation plan had been to settle in Tazewell. "I wanted to go home, and I missed it so much," she says. But after the start of the pandemic and her virtual 2020 Harvard graduation, she felt uneasy in her hometown. The dearth of substantive jobs and growth opportunities didn't help. So, in the fall of 2021, she moved to Nashville to pursue a master of fine arts degree at Vanderbilt University. Then, in November, her father died suddenly, and she was brought back to Tazewell again.

The following spring, Hackney tried to return to Vanderbilt, but her grief made it too hard to concentrate, so she left the program. Instead, she decided to follow through on an idea she and her father once shared: to hike the Appalachian Trail together. Despite a lack of experience backpacking or camping, she set out in March of 2022 and soon found relief in the consuming experience: "I was so exhausted by the end of the day," she says. "I just wanted to sleep. I had no mental energy left for anything."

The journey also provided time to reconfigure what "home" meant. At first, her father's death made her feel even more disconnected from Tazewell, but as she hiked, she began to realize that home wasn't a static concept. Some events also broke open her understanding of what spirituality could encompass. "That oneness with nature was a different kind of relationship to religion that I had never conceived of before," Hackney says.

At night she always heard owls—sometimes seemingly right outside her tent—even when fellow hikers didn't. She remembers a day a few months before her father died: "We were sitting out on our front porch, and there was an owl in the forest across the road," she says. "And it was hooting, and he was kind of hooting back at it, and he was talking to it." On the trail, she began to feel like the owls were "kind of my dad, in a way."

While hiking, Hackney met her future husband, Charles Lacy, who was from a town near Tazewell; in 2023, she moved with him to Charlottesville, Virginia. She worked as an administrative assistant at the University of Virginia while weaving her essays into a larger memoir. That writing process led to reflecting more deeply on Harvard memories—like when, during those dark and difficult early months, she found solace in a statue she stumbled upon on the Harvard Business School campus. *Inés*, by Jaume Plensa, is a 23-foot cast-iron head of a woman with her eyes closed. At night, Hackney spent time with the figure, whose features shifted depending on where she stood. "Something about that distortion really interested me," she explains. The full picture of the woman was fluid; it was never wholly present, nor could it be.

It seems a fitting metaphor for the project of her memoir. "No matter where I was," Hackney says, whether at home or Harvard, "I was kind of caught in this in-between." When in one place, she longed to be in the other. As she writes: "It was a confusion I'd wrestle with over and over: reconciling a person's sins with their enduring kindness; or the abuses of religion with its many comforts; or the strangeness and loneliness of Harvard with its transforming powers." Contradictions, she has found, just endure. She loves Appalachia; she loves to be away from Appalachia.

This January, Hackney gave birth to a daughter, Della. So, she laughs, there's not "a whole lot of writing going on at the moment." But ideas and notes are percolating around stories of her Appalachian Trail hike. Or maybe, one day, she'll write more about religion. Her world religions class at Harvard, she writes in the memoir, had offered the idea of a "universal quest for morality and, opposite of what I'd once believed, many paths to achieve it."

As of right now, she has no plans to return to Tazewell through words or in person—"too many bad memories," she says. The church she was part of is still influential, and she doesn't want to see, or hear about, her ex-fiancé. "It's still a town where everyone knows everyone and gossip gets passed around," she says, "and I just want to keep my distance." But she might return to Appalachia. She's always been awed by the landscape, the mountains—"confining and comforting, ancient and noble...I feel as if I was born from them, as if my bones were formed from their dirt," she writes.

The people there helped shape and encourage her, too. She thinks of the old friend she reconnected with while home during the pandemic, to whom she dedicates her book, calling him "Jeremy." After she left her fiancé and her church, Jeremy was the first friend she made outside of that religious structure; he represented a different kind of devotion and freedom. In the book, when she tells him she got into Harvard, he's happy for her, eager to see what happens next and how she'll fare. "Hell yeah," he tells her. "Get the hell out of here. Go do something big." ▽

INTRODUCTIONS

Race Car Driver and Doctor Patrick Staropoli

by Matt Crossman

As a retina surgeon, Patrick Staropoli '12 fixes "anything that goes wrong inside the eye." As a racer in NASCAR's O'Reilly Auto Parts Series, he has to ignore what his eyes tell him and drive 180-plus miles per hour. Those skills are intertwined. (This interview has been edited for length and clarity.)

What skills do you need to both drive a race car and perform surgery?
In racing, we say smooth is fast. You want to be smooth with the steering wheel and with your inputs on the gas and brake. When we operate, it's the same thing. In retina surgery, you have two pedals—for the microscope and the vitrector, a small instrument that we use to fix retinas. How smooth you are on those pedals determines how well your surgery goes.

What's your best "I wrecked that guy on purpose" story?
I was 15, racing a short track in Florida with one of my now-best friends, Drew Brannon. I led the entire race, and with two laps to go, he did a "bump and run." That's when the car behind you rolls into your bumper, they pick your back tires up off the ground, and you don't crash, but you slide up the track just enough for that car to get by. I tried to pull the same move on him, and he ended up spinning out. I won the race, then they disqualified me and him for driving too rough.

Race car driving is about managing information. What's that like in real time?
The faster you go, the faster your processing speed has to be. Your crew chief is talking to you about the car. Your spotter is in your ear telling you where the other cars are. You're trying to listen, focus on what you're doing, process it, and then give them feedback.

Your philosophy is to drive deep into a corner, and if you hit the wall, you hit the wall. A normal person might hear that and think, "What is the matter with you?"
You just have to unplug your amygdala. You have to have no fear. If you stay five or six feet off the wall your whole career, you're never going to make speed.

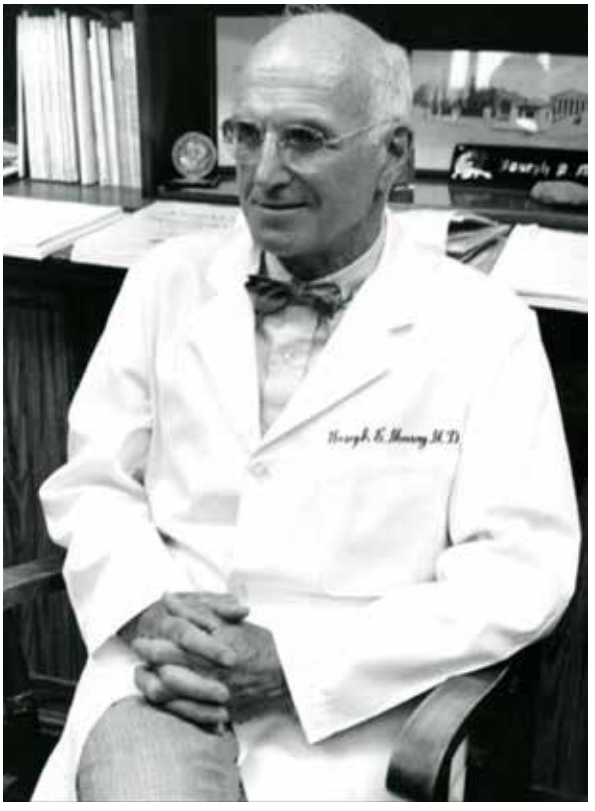
Photograph courtesy of Patrick Staropoli

VITA

Joseph E. Murray

Brief life of a transplantation surgeon: 1919-2012

by Diane Speare Triant

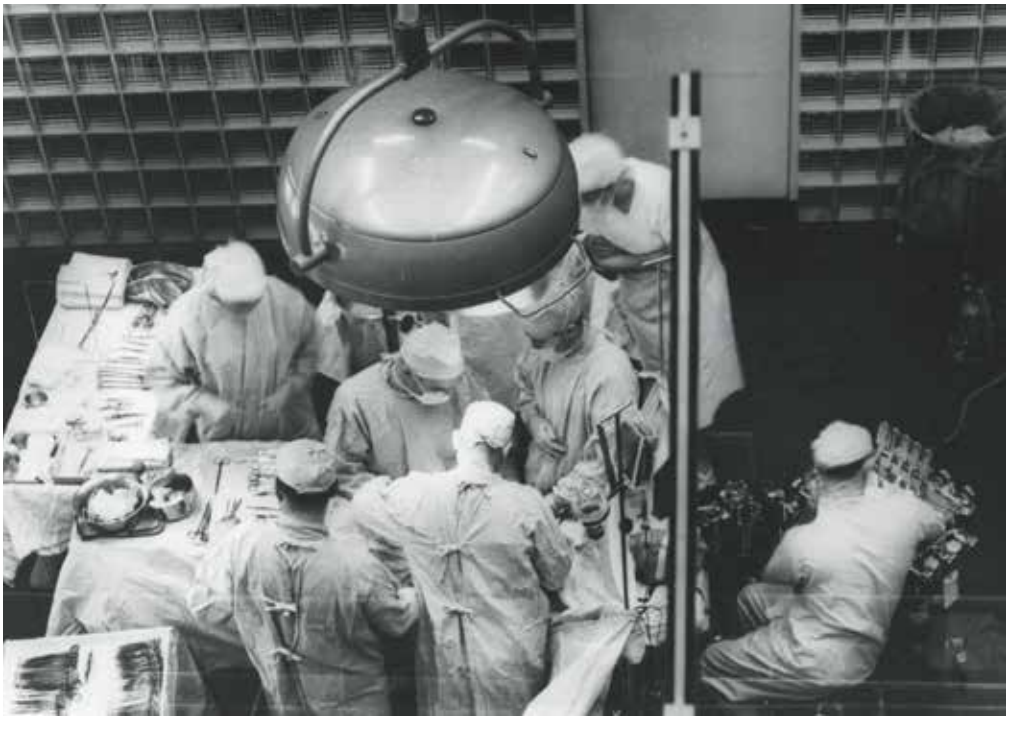


Joseph E. Murray (above) and at Peter Bent Brigham Hospital (third from left, below) performing the first successful organ transplant on December 23, 1954

The night before Joseph E. Murray, M.D. '43, took on a revolutionary surgical challenge, he prayed. It was Christmas week in 1954 and, as a practicing Catholic, he thought it an auspicious time to give a patient the chance for renewed life. Yet the pending operation, the first-attempted live-kidney transplantation, had plenty of critics. It was a radical surgery and risks ran high for both patient and donor.

Murray and the other Harvard-affiliated doctors who brought medicine to this juncture had encountered a wall of moral and religious outrage. Many viewed operating on the donor—a healthy person—as unethical. But Murray argued that scientific, religious, and ethical beliefs could dovetail by exercising one's God-given attributes of "curiosity, imagination, and persistence."

Raised in Milford, Massachusetts, Murray graduated in Harvard Medical School's abbreviated World War II class of 1943B, with all members drafted into military service. After a nine-month surgical internship at Boston's Peter Bent Brigham Hospital, the U.S. army assigned him to Pennsylvania's Valley Forge General Hospital, a center for battle injuries. "We saw many burns and were using skin grafts to save lives," Murray explained in a later interview. "I was interested in the biology of transplants, and why it was that a piece of skin grafted from one's own self would live, but from another person wouldn't." He was intrigued by a lone case where the expected tissue rejection did not take place; it was a skin graft between homozygous (identical) twins.



Hoping to utilize this scrap of data, Murray, by then married with children, returned to Peter Bent Brigham Hospital. Setting aside his budding talent for plastic reconstructive surgery, he joined the new transplant team of visionary medical chief George Thorn, Hersey professor at Harvard Medical School, and his young colleagues, surgical chief Francis Moore '35, M.D. '39, S.D. '82, and nephrologist John P. Merrill '42, who helped perfect the dialysis machine.

Following a century of attempted transplants from animals and cadavers to humans that yielded minimal survival rates (save one lasting for six months by team member David Hume '40), the group was determined to crack the code of sustained organ viability. Murray revealed in his autobiography that despite hospital support, many outside professionals considered it a "fringe project" run by "a bunch of fools." Yet the team persevered.

"We started with kidney transplants between unrelated persons," Murray said of his early operations using deceased donors, "but they were rejected [by the

Photographs courtesy of Brigham and Women's Hospital Archives

body's immune system]." So, he began experimental transplants on living dogs, mice, rabbits, sheep, and horses, honing his surgical technique. (Murray would remove a kidney from a dog, see how the animal fared with one kidney, and then transplant back the removed kidney to see if it still functioned.)

In 1954, in a plot twist that would have been derided as overly contrived in a work of fiction, a 23-year-old named Richard Herrick arrived at the hospital suffering from final-stage renal failure. However, he disclosed remarkable information: he had a healthy identical twin, Ronald. Murray, recalling the army skin-graft success between twins where "genetic immunological compatibility" existed, eagerly endorsed a twin-to-twin kidney transplant attempt. Excitement mounted, with Murray designated as surgeon.

"We wanted to get the consensus...and to 'do no harm.'"

But enthusiasm soon soured to consternation. After Murray visited a police station to verify Richard and Ronald's identicality through fingerprinting, word of the proposed transplant leaked and radio newscasts warned of "a daring operation." Disapproval escalated among concerned scientists and doctors, and in religious circles. Murray wrestled with the moral dilemma and consulted clergy members, jurists, and outside medical specialists. "We spoke with the family many times," he affirmed. "We wanted to get the consensus...and to 'do no harm.'" This inclusive approach eventually garnered uneasy approval. As Richard Herrick neared death, Murray, understanding the importance of a flawless transplantation, conducted a "dry run" on a cadaver.

On December 23, 1954, the simultaneous Herrick surgeries commenced in adjacent operating rooms. Chief of urology J. Hartwell Harrison (later the recipient of a 1965 honorary master's degree from Harvard) completed the donor nephrectomy and within 90 minutes Murray implanted the new kidney. Soon, to everyone's profound relief, Ronald's kidney, now attached to his brother, was pink and engorging. "We knew it was a success," said Murray. "The next day the kid was hungry, with a sparkle to his eyes." Ronald's continued stability doubled the team's gratification. (Richard lived for eight more years, becoming a husband and father; Ronald suffered no ill effects, dying at age 79.)

Accolades rained down and the pioneering surgeon pressed forward with dozens more successful kidney transplants, still between twins. Finally, experiencing a "eureka" moment, Murray achieved the holy grail of viable transplantation between unrelated individuals in 1962. He administered a new cancer-fighting drug with immunosuppressive properties to the kidney recipient; it disabled the patient's immune rejection response, enabling organ survival. This breakthrough was foundational across the globe, the key to transplant advances that today grant extended life to 173,000 organ recipients annually.

By 1970, Murray, still drawn to plastic reconstructive surgery, had ceased performing transplants to institute a cranial/facial program for children with congenital deformities at Children's Hospital. He retired in 1986 as chief of plastic surgery emeritus at both Children's and Brigham and Women's Hospitals.

In retirement, the amiable surgeon enjoyed attending transplant survivor gatherings, "getting revivified" on Martha's Vineyard with his family of eight, finding beauty in William Blake's poetry, and "swapping ideas" with medical students. Heralded internationally as "the father of transplantation," he welcomed to his Wellesley, Massachusetts, home distinguished admirers and aspiring researchers seeking a primary-source account of history's groundbreaking transplant. Murray consistently downplayed his role. "It was just another day," he'd say. "A part of our lives." But the humble doctor's peers begged to disagree. In 1990, they awarded him the Nobel Prize in Medicine. ▽

Diane Speare Triant, Ed.M.'71, is a nonfiction writer in Wellesley Hills, Massachusetts, where she conducted three interviews with Joseph E. Murray before he passed away in 2012 at the very hospital where he made medical history.

THE UNDERGRADUATE

Speaking My Language

We all grow in college. Some of us can mark the change in words.

by Andrés Muedano

I KEEP FORGETTING certain words in my mother tongue. The problem is not that I can't remember them in Spanish, but rather that now they will come to me in English first. Where my sentences were once as tame and rigid as they were monolingual, living in the United States for three years has turned me into a more hybrid speaker. Even when talking with my friends in Mexico, I'll now regularly switch back and forth between languages—*así, sin pensarlo*—often without thinking.

I hadn't paid much attention to this linguistic habit until earlier this year, in January, when my friend Ale from high school made fun of me for it. The two of us were hanging out in La Condesa—a highly gentrified neighborhood in Mexico City, increasingly populated by American and European digital nomads—when Ale interrupted me mid-sentence. "When did you start talking like that?" she said in Spanish. "*¿De cuándo acá hablas así?*"

"*¿Cómo?*" I asked before switching. "What do you mean?"

Ale replied by performing her meanest, though admittedly funny, Andrés impression, mimicking my Spanglish in a highly caricatured *tono fresa*—the Mexican equivalent of a Valley Girl accent.

I tried to shrug it off, telling her I didn't know she was a language purist—using the Spanish "*no sabía que eras una*" and the English "language purist." (The Spanish term, *purista lingüística*, felt strangely foreign and overly formal, especially for a conversation with a close friend.)

Still, something about Ale's comment stuck with me. I would think about it back in Cambridge after the winter break, especially whenever I'd have dinner with my blockmates. Even though five of them are fellow Latin Americans, we rarely speak a "pure" Spanish. With a Chilean, a Dominican, a Puerto Rican, a Nicaraguan, a Guatemalan, and myself, our conversations are conducted in a shared language that might best be described as "Chile-Domini-Currican," interspersed with English connectives and fillers.

Speaking on the Spanish-language podcast *El Invitado de RFI* eight years ago, Mexican-born writer Valeria Luiselli noted that the richest and most enjoyable Spanish she knows is that which is spoken among Mexicans in the United States. Later, in a 2020 interview with the magazine *Infobae*, Luiselli said that speakers who start sentences in one language before ending them in another may be linguistic polluters, but that very act of pollution—*contaminación linguística*—is what brings about changes in how we communicate with each other. Those of us who exist between two worlds come to inhabit and reproduce a third language.

Yet navigating this third language is easier for some than others. Those of us who were raised in Latin America experience it differently, I believe, from Latinos who grew up in the U.S. Before living in Cambridge, for instance, English was a language I only spoke in certain classes at school; it wasn't the language of real life, of everyday experience. To have English (and Spanglish) become the languages I speak more regularly has thus entailed, at least for me, a very subtle kind of loss. Living away from home, I have lost my grip, even if only slightly, on Spanish. But Spanish, I must admit, has lost its grip on me, too.

I enjoy living in English, after all—perhaps more than I ever did in Spanish. To be myself in a new language has offered me the chance to start anew, to self-fashion differently. Yet the opportunity for reinvention is not something exclusively lent to us international stu-

Illustration by Jennifer Dahbura

dents. When I asked some of my American friends whether their way of speaking had changed since coming to college, they all intuitively answered in the positive. But when I asked them to describe these changes with greater detail, they all replied by telling me how they had changed *as people*: becoming more confident, less judgmental, and more analytical.

Their answers made me appreciate how personal transformation is more readily evident to those of us who are constantly crossing national and linguistic boundaries. We can hear ourselves changing based on the words we use and the sentences we thread. But all of us—international or American—change when we leave home for college.

IN HIS ESSAY "Translating a Person," Chilean poet Alejandro Zambra describes his experience speaking English for a year while on a fellowship at the New York Public Library. "Very soon I wasn't translating myself," writes Zambra, describing how experiencing himself in English could sometimes feel as though he were mimicking some stranger. "I aspired to know, at the very least, whom I was imitating." A Mexican friend must have thought the same of me one night over dinner at Annenberg Hall during my freshman year. Sitting at table B-11 (*Be-once*, or Beyoncé, the table that we international Latinos would frequent), she told me that I sometimes felt like a stranger when I spoke English. I don't remember how I responded, but I do remember thinking the same of her.

Some of my international peers who grew up speaking other languages similarly feel that their behavior changes whenever they switch to English. Faseeh, a friend from Pakistan, recently told me that speaking in English forces him to slow down to find the right words to communicate his thoughts and feelings, something he doesn't do when talking in Sindhi. "It's like I'm switching between different persons," he said. "I see myself being more introspective, which turns out to be nice. It gives me more time to think about things." Perhaps for similar reasons, I have found English to be a much better language to write about myself. To do so in Spanish would feel incredibly self-absorbed, even solipsistic. But English, in its foreignness, provides me with a certain detachment: a necessary and much-appreciated psychological distance.

This detachment hadn't been a problem for me until this semester, when my creative writing professor tasked our class with a daunting exercise: writing the story of our lives in under 15 minutes. Even as the sound of scribbling around me intensified, I couldn't bring myself to start answering the prompt. How could I write about the beginning of my life—my childhood in Mexico—in a language other than Spanish? I started to realize that, although my writing education has been largely conducted in English, I will always need my mother tongue to make sense of my history.

When I shared this experience with a close friend, an international student from China, I asked her whether she had a favorite language. She told me that, even

though she now feels more comfortable communicating and arguing for herself in English, especially in academic contexts, she still prefers Chinese. "It's the language I grew up with," she explained. Her response, coupled with my experience in the creative writing workshop, made me see that the questions I had been pondering were only superficially about language. What truly worried me was the process of becoming a different person from the one I was before Harvard, back home in Mexico City.

GROWING UP can sometimes feel like an exercise in self-estrangement, especially when that process is happening away from home. We push ourselves to abide by the codes and rules of the new places we inhabit, and this can make for a tiring performance. But then that strange self we create becomes newly familiar. We shed who we once were to discover who we have become, and though the shedding can be a source of anxiety, it doesn't cease to be necessary. It *is* growth.

"When I think of how I've grown," my friend Summer recently told me, "I don't only think about how I've grown since high school. I implicitly compare myself to how I think I would have grown had I stayed on the road more traveled." Summer was raised in Chico, a small city north of Sacramento, and when she was choosing what college to attend, she opted to leave California because she wanted to follow the path that would allow her to change the most. "California will always be waiting for me," she said.

It is difficult for me to think of the person I would be today had I stayed in Mexico. I would probably be studying biomedicine at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, doing research in the same laboratory where I worked as a high school student, and speaking the "purer" kind of Spanish I spoke just three years ago. Living in Cambridge has radically changed me: I am a humanities concentrator, I write for magazines like this one, and I constantly oscillate between Spanish and English. You could say I've grown a lot. *He cambiado, he crecido.*

Andrés Muedano '27 is a Berta Greenwald Ledecky Undergraduate Fellow at Harvard Magazine.

Photograph by Stu Rosner

SNAPSHOT

Katie O'Dair

Rolling out Harvard's red carpet

by Schuyler Velasco

Katie O'Dair's office has hosted luminaries at Harvard for hundreds of years. Literally. George Washington briefly set up shop in the blue-walled room in Wadsworth House in 1775, making plans for the battles of Lexington and Concord.

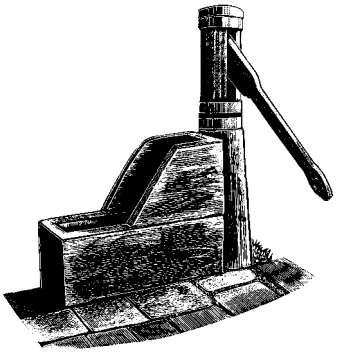
As University marshal, O'Dair, appointed in 2022 after six years as Harvard's dean of students, has continued that tradition of rolling out the red carpet on Harvard's behalf. "A good part of our work is coordination for offices who want to bring in special guests," O'Dair says, flipping through a guestbook near her desk that has been signed by King Charles III, Conan O'Brien, and Ken Burns—a small sampling.

But her job is less about celebrities and more about ensuring that everyone passing through Harvard Square feels that sense of welcome, including loved ones who visit each year for Commencement. It's easy to see how: walking through Wadsworth House, she's warm and chatty, pointing out the building's low eighteenth-century doors (she's too tall to fit through them) and showing off her favorite artifacts, including a framed copy of Washington's honorary degree. It's almost as if O'Dair is giving an informal tour of her neighborhood. In a sense, she is; she lives a few blocks away.

Among its many other functions, which range from running Harvard's gift program to arranging security for dignitaries, the Marshal's Office is the central point of contact for planning Commencement exercises. During the main ceremony, O'Dair emcees the program and leads the president's delegation in its procession to the stage, carrying a scepter outfitted with the Harvard crest and engraved with the names of marshals dating back to the 1800s.

"It's the best day at Harvard," she says.

Assertive Architecture



"Your wooden arm you hold outstretched to shake with passers-by."

Peabody Terrace

When the renovated Harvard Art Museums reopened in 2014, a Crimson sage disapproved of the boxy face it presents to Prescott Street. Why, he asked Primus, did the University hire stellar architects (in this case, Renzo Piano)—and then, in his opinion, get mediocre results? That led to musings about review committees' deadening effects, design compromises, and other dark mutterings.

As Harvard nears a likely long pause in new edifices (fiscal constraints suggest a hiatus once the Allston theater complex and the new Cambridge home for the economics department are completed), it's timely to consider which of the University's commissions have measured up.

Sentimental votes might go to Charles Allerton Coolidge, A.B. 1881, and colleagues. As successors to the firm of H.H. Richardson, A.B. 1859, and then progenitors to the firm now known as Shepley Bulfinch, they were the house architects during A. Lawrence Lowell's presidency. They created the beloved red brick, neo-Georgian everything: River Houses, Business School campus, and so on. But in succeeding decades, they segued to mid-century modern and the International Style: Lamont Library (1949); featureless boxes from Aiken Computation Center to the Mason Music Building (1972); and the gussied-up Leverett House towers (1960).

Harvard engaged a wider range of architects beginning in the late 1950s, when President Nathan M. Pusey's capital campaign bankrolled a building bender. The University erected structures by starchitects Le Corbusier (Carpenter Center), Minoru Yamasaki (William James Hall), Hugh Stubbins (Loeb Drama Center, the Medical School's Countway Library), and Philip Johnson '30, B.Arch.'43 (Burden Hall).

Each has its merits, but Primus is inclined to award laurels to a different talent, Josep Lluís Sert—a judgment reinforced by Bainbridge Bunting and Margaret Henderson Floyd's magisterial *Harvard: An Architectural History* (1985).

More than anyone else, the firm of Sert, Jackson and Gourley sensitively modernized the University. Their modest Center for the Study of World Religions (1960) at the Divinity School hardly prefigured the high-rise Harvard that followed: Peabody Terrace (1964); Holyoke Center (1964-1967, now the Smith Campus Center); and the Science Center (1973).

Each is huge, but their concrete exteriors defer to their neighborhoods' fabric. The Science Center is stepped back, like the bellows of a Polaroid camera, deferring to Littauer Center and the magnificent Memorial Hall. Holyoke Center was built like a giant capital I, inset to lessen its impact on the narrow side streets. Each is identifiably a Sert project, with white vertical framing elements and dashes of red detailing that enliven their gray masses.

Most crucially, each project embraces passersby. A plaza and fountain soften the Science Center's entry. Even after Holyoke's modification into the Smith Center (dedicated in 2018), it maintains a sense of transparency similar to the Science Center's. And Bunting and Floyd called Forbes Plaza, "with its benches and shade trees...an eddy, a refuge of just the right size to relieve the crowded, narrow sidewalks and automobile-clogged streets of Harvard Square." Similarly, they wrote, Peabody Terrace is "masterful" in tying 21-story towers to their site with intermediate-sized structures laid out in an engaging pattern that "is never repetitious, never predictable." Overall, Bunting and Floyd judged each program successful when built. They still are.

What was Sert's secret? Born in Barcelona, he honed his aesthetics among his friends Pablo Picasso, Joan Miró, and Alexander Calder. In Europe and later the United States (where he fled from fascism), he undertook many urban planning assignments. His Harvard designs melded taste, practicality, and sensitivity to context. It could not have hurt that Sert was, in effect, eating his own cooking: his campus projects coincided with his service as Graduate School of Design dean from 1953 to 1969.

It would be impossible to clone those ingredients today. But Sert's work models what could be accomplished come Harvard's next building boom—perhaps spurred by a quadricentennial campaign in 2036.

—PRIMUS

Photograph by Wangkun Jia/Alamy

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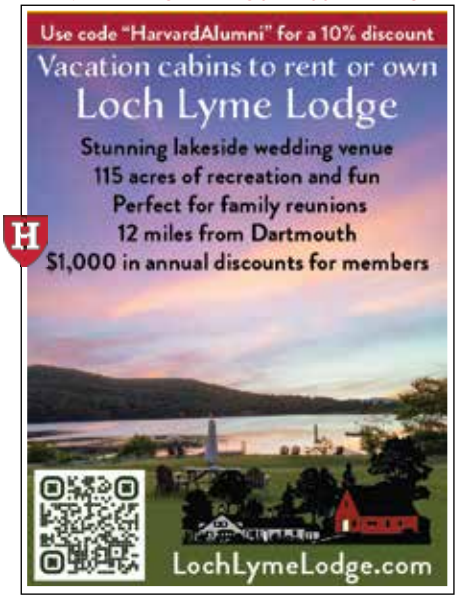

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Paris—Marais. Historic 17th-century, 500 sq. ft. apt. on first floor, renovated, 1 bedroom, sleeps 4, brand new kitchen & bath, 2 private courtyards, high-speed internet access. 978-505-8300, asluder22@gmail.com.

Paris Furnished Rentals—Weekly/Monthly/Yearly—by PerfectlyParis, since 2001. Browse our website or complete our online form and we'll see what we have available: www.perfectlyparis.com/apartmentsearch. info@perfectlyparis.com. We look forward to welcoming you!

Paris—5th, Haussmann style, 3BR, sleeps 6, elevator, modern appliances, washer & dryer, Métro Maubert-Mutualite, Harvard Alumni-owned, info@reservewithpaula.com.

Paris 7th—Eiffel Tower. Haussmann stone building. Elegant 5th-floor, 1,000 sq.ft. two-bedroom apartment. Fully equipped. Contact: www.theraffel.com, mimihaas@hotmail.com.

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ITALY VACATION RENTALS

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TUSCANY: Luxury private villa for 8, beautiful pool and gardens, www.LuxuryVillaTuscany.com.

Todi, Umbria: Luxury villa. 8 bedrooms, 7.5 baths. Smaller groups-large gatherings/reunions. Infinity pool. Stunning views. AC, WiFi, housekeeper included. Cook available. www.luxuryvillatodi.com. MarilynGasparini@aol.com. Discount for Harvardians.

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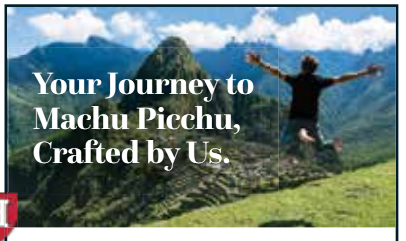

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PERSONALS

Our client is an adventurous, intellectually curious woman based in the Boston area. A retired biotech executive with degrees from the University of Maryland and MIT, she is warm, grounded, and deeply values growth, connection, and living life fully. A devoted mother, she enjoys rock climbing, skiing, travel, yoga, science fiction, jazz clubs, and meaningful conversation. Equally comfortable at a five-star resort or sleeping in a tent, she values experiences over materialism and brings warmth, humor, and energy to the people around her. She seeks an emotionally secure, intellectually engaging man (43–59) who values fitness, curiosity, personal growth, and authentic partnership. Someone socially aware, adventurous, and excited by both deep conversation and new experiences. Respond confidentially to Lindsey@threedayrule.com.

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Our client is a warm, witty, and accomplished gentleman living in Saddle River, NJ. Originally from Brooklyn, he is a retired dentist who enjoys an active, comfortable lifestyle filled with fine dining, golf, theater, travel, good conversation, and time with his beloved standard poodle. He seeks a meaningful long-term companion grounded in warmth, honesty, humor, and shared values. He seeks an educated, worldly, health-conscious woman (63–74) who is dog friendly, financially independent, and enjoys an active yet relaxed lifestyle. He prefers someone local to the Bergen/Rockland County area who appreciates companionship, culture, and life's everyday pleasures. Respond confidentially to Kelly.Joy@threedayrule.com.

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Bay Area Gem: Brunette, slender, and extraordinary, our private client is based in Mill Valley and open to meeting smart interesting men in the Bay Area as well as well as the East Coast. She presents beautifully at 5'5", fit, with great energy, charm, and emotional intelligence. Currently a top-level consultant and angel investor, her educational pedigree includes Smith College, Stanford, the University of Chicago, and MIT. We are searching for gentlemen (65-78) who are equally accomplished, selective, and comfortable in any setting. Her current interests include sailing, skiing, languages, politics, and family time. Her ideal match values kindness, has a deep sense of humanity, and honesty. You both have great careers, launched and accomplished children, and a passion to live your best life with a partner you respect and adore! Bio & photo to: sandy@therighttimeconsultants.com, 212-627-0121.

This gorgeous, well-educated woman resides in Manhattan and leads a successful real estate company. She's 5'4", athletic, and adventurous; she enjoys skiing, yoga, biking, hiking, tennis, pickleball, and golf. She embraces travel, live music, theatre, and all the culture New York has to offer. A sports fan, she roots for the Knicks and attends the U.S. Open and Art Basel. A foodie who loves entertaining, she is equally comfortable at home hosting a casual dinner or an elegant evening out. Her children are grown and thriving. She's open to Jewish men in the Northeast aged 54-68 who are intelligent, cultured, funny, thoughtful, and successful. Text: 917-836-3683 or email: Bonnie@bonniewinstonmatchmaker.com.

DC-based stunner: Our slender, fit, attractive, Ivy-educated, and very private client, a "woman for all seasons," talented, charming, and accomplished enjoys a man with a brilliant and purposeful career. Her match is a confident, 5'8" and above, fit, attractive gentleman, 68-78, accomplished, kind, good values, love of adventure and travel, family-oriented, and genuine. Contact: sandy@therighttimeconsultants.com. Office: 212-627-0121. Personal cell: 917-301-1689.

Our handsome New England private client, fit, athletic, cultured, and charming, is seeking his female match, 62-72, slender, fit, who also loves Boston, New England, the outdoors, romance, and appreciates a true gentleman. Bio & Photo: sandy@therighttimeconsultants.com, 212-627-0121.

Our client is a vibrant, energetic, and socially engaged woman currently spending time between NJ, Texas, and Florida. Recently retired after a successful career as VP of Sales in rug manufacturing, she also held extensive leadership roles in civic and philanthropic organizations and is known for her warmth, energy, and ability to connect with anyone. She is a proud mother and grandmother with family across the U.S. While deeply family-oriented, she is not seeking marriage again—rather a meaningful, committed life partnership. She enjoys travel, pickleball, entertaining, and staying active in her community, thriving in a social, engaged lifestyle. She seeks an active, kind, financially secure man (70–80) who enjoys travel, conversation, and family, and who is socially and intellectually curious. Someone with good health, warmth, and a full life of his own, who values companionship and shared experiences. Open to NJ, NY, CT, and surrounding areas. Respond confidentially to Stacey@threedayrule.com.

Our client is a sophisticated, creative, and contemplative woman who thrives in the beauty and tranquility of Big Sur. She enjoys peaceful surroundings, the forest, the beach, and her private pool on 10 acres of wilderness. A lifelong learner and artist, she paints weekly, reads extensively, and loves visiting museums. Carolyn values deep, intimate conversations, humor, and a partner who is mentally and emotionally active, with a strong inner life of his own. She seeks a kind, thoughtful gentleman (75–90) who is healthy, spiritually open, and comfortable in serene, natural surroundings. Someone who can enjoy quiet moments as much as intellectual or cultural pursuits, share laughter, and bring depth and peace to a meaningful partnership. Respond confidentially to lindsey@threedayrule.com.

Our extraordinary Asian private client is based in the Pacific Northwest, but her work and travels take her all over the country as well as internationally. This search includes both West and East coasts. Thoughtful, kind, and feminine, she earned a doctorate from Brandeis and a post-doctoral degree from MIT. Athletic, stylish, and fun, her background is both international and bi-coastal. Our client balances her life with a healthy lifestyle, a thirst for culture and the arts, great travel, good friends, and close family. We are seeking a wonderful, world-class gentleman with excellent character and an equally interesting and rich life (50-60s) to contact us confidentially for possible introduction in this curated search. sandy@therighttimeconsultants.com or phone private cell: 917-301-1689.

Gentle and kind widower seeks a fit, loving lady with an inquiring mind, 63-74, who enjoys film, theater, and outdoor activities. Retired after notable careers in technology and journalism, he's an avid nature photographer who publishes satire, dabbles in writing song lyrics, and enjoys family time at home as well as cultural and adventure travel. He divides his time between his homes in northern NJ and Sarasota, Florida. The lady he seeks shares his liberal perspective, love of adventure, joie de vivre, and lifelong curiosity. Bio & photo: sandy@therighttimeconsultants.com. Confidential. Call: 212-627-0121.

ATTENTION GENTLEMEN: Our team is looking for eligible bachelors who are interested in real relationships. I am a highly reputable matchmaker who privately represents beautiful, smart, and accomplished women. Women pay our fees, so there is no charge for men. Complementary inclusion in our database. Join now: Bonnie@bonniewinstonmatchmaker.com.

Based in the DC area, our client is a passionate, kind, and accomplished physician, (Yale B.S., Stanford, M.D.) with a heart of gold. Born and raised in Cambridge, MA, with strong New England roots, she is based in Washington, DC, travels easily and often up and down the East Coast with trips out West to see family and friends. Deeply passionate about kids, healthcare, and giving back, our client enjoys the outdoors, the arts, photography, and wonderful travel. Her match is a highly accomplished family man, 5'9" and above, with excellent "work-life balance," an optimist with a kind heart, and a big-picture life. Both East/West Coasts are fine! Bio & Photo: sandy@therighttimeconsultants.com, 212-627-0121.

Our client is an elegant, energetic, and globally minded woman based in Coral Gables with additional homes and strong ties to Barcelona and North Carolina. A longtime entrepreneur who recently sold her investment management firm, she previously worked closely with clients and professional athletes and now enjoys a more flexible, travel-rich lifestyle. She enjoys pickleball, European travel, cruises with friends, and spending time between Miami, Spain, and the East Coast. Spain holds a particularly strong personal connection for her, and she is open to a partner based in the U.S. or abroad. She seeks a loyal, financially stable, active man (60–75) who is dependable, emotionally grounded, and open to faith or spirituality. Someone who enjoys travel, has a full life of his own, and values building a steady, connected partnership. Respond confidentially to Erica@threedayrule.com.

Our client is an intellectually curious gentleman splitting his time between Boston and NYC. A professor and academic leader, he is thoughtful, warm, and quietly charismatic, with a deep appreciation for meaningful conversation, humor, culture, and lifelong learning. He is ready to build a new chapter grounded in connection, companionship, and shared joy. He enjoys jazz, travel, football, great restaurants, British mysteries, and evenings with his goldendoodle. He seeks an upbeat, thoughtful woman (mid-40s to early 60s) who is intellectually curious, emotionally available, and left of center politically. Someone with a good sense of humor, quiet confidence, and an interest in building a deep, meaningful partnership. Respond confidentially to Lindsey@threedayrule.com.

Our client is a driven, accomplished, and globally minded woman based in San Francisco. Originally from China, she built an impressive career spanning strategy consulting, startups, and leadership roles at top tech companies including Google and Slack. Intelligent, warm, and socially balanced, she values meaningful connection, ambition, and emotional maturity. She enjoys an active professional and social life and is looking for a long-term relationship grounded in compatibility, partnership, and shared values. Friends describe her as confident, thoughtful, and engaging, with a strong sense of self and curiosity about the world. She seeks an educated, financially stable, emotionally mature man (40–53) in the Bay Area who is liberal, professionally driven, and interested in a meaningful relationship. She is open to men with older children and values confidence, self-awareness, and a balanced lifestyle. Respond confidentially to Kelly@threedayrule.com.

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You Answered...

Our May-June story "Black Swan in the Flesh" explored the transformative power of adapting a work from one art form to another. We asked readers and Harvard arts experts to weigh in on their favorite adaptations.

Here's a sampling of the answers we received.
Find more online at **harvardmagazine.com/adaptations**xsx

To Kill a Mockingbird
book to film

"This is the only transition from book to film that did not diminish the book, in my opinion...The movie is still in my list of top 10 favorites." —CATHERINE B.

"It was so true to the book, every single character, bad or good, was perfectly cast, and the creators stuck to the language and spirit and rhythm of the story." —HOPE C.

The Joy Luck Club
book to film

"It helped the viewers understand the history of China, the Chinese diaspora, and the challenges faced by women as they become second- and third-generation Americans." —JACQUELINE G.

M*A*S*H
book to film to TV

"The TV adaptation was perfect for the medium, slowly evolving from running jokes and cardboard-thin characters into a strongly scripted antiwar statement from complex people, one brief episode at a time." —P. STAHL

The Wizard of Oz
book to theater to film

"It is a magnificent work of genius, immensely entertaining." —WILLIAM H.

Bridget Jones's Diary
book to film

"It takes a pithy comedy and turns it into a charming and even funnier film... It doesn't overcomplicate the story." —JANELLE M.

The Outsiders
book to theater

"Stays true to [S.E.] Hinton's story... Fight scenes with blood, the fire, cars, etc." —JOHN G.

HARVARD EXPERTS

Masquerade
theater to theater

"It's an immersive production of Phantom of the Opera. *I've seen it twice already, and I was within inches of actors who are at the peak of their craft, singing that score."* —BILL RAUCH '84, DIRECTOR AND 2026 HARVARD ARTS MEDALIST

She-Ra and the Princesses of Power
TV to TV

"Nate Stevenson and a team of writers and animators turned a big ball of cheese from 1980s children's TV and (before that) a line of toys into one of the great longform stories of our era, in any genre."

—STEPHANIE BURT, LOKER PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH

Guys and Dolls
book to theater

"The humor, the character, the élan: it's all there in [Frank] Loesser's lyrics, just like in [Damon] Runyon's stories. That's Broadway, baby."

—DEREK MILLER, PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH

Next question

Our cover story, "**The Love Bunnies**," (p. 23) describes a rabbit's journey from loss to love (with some speed dating in between).

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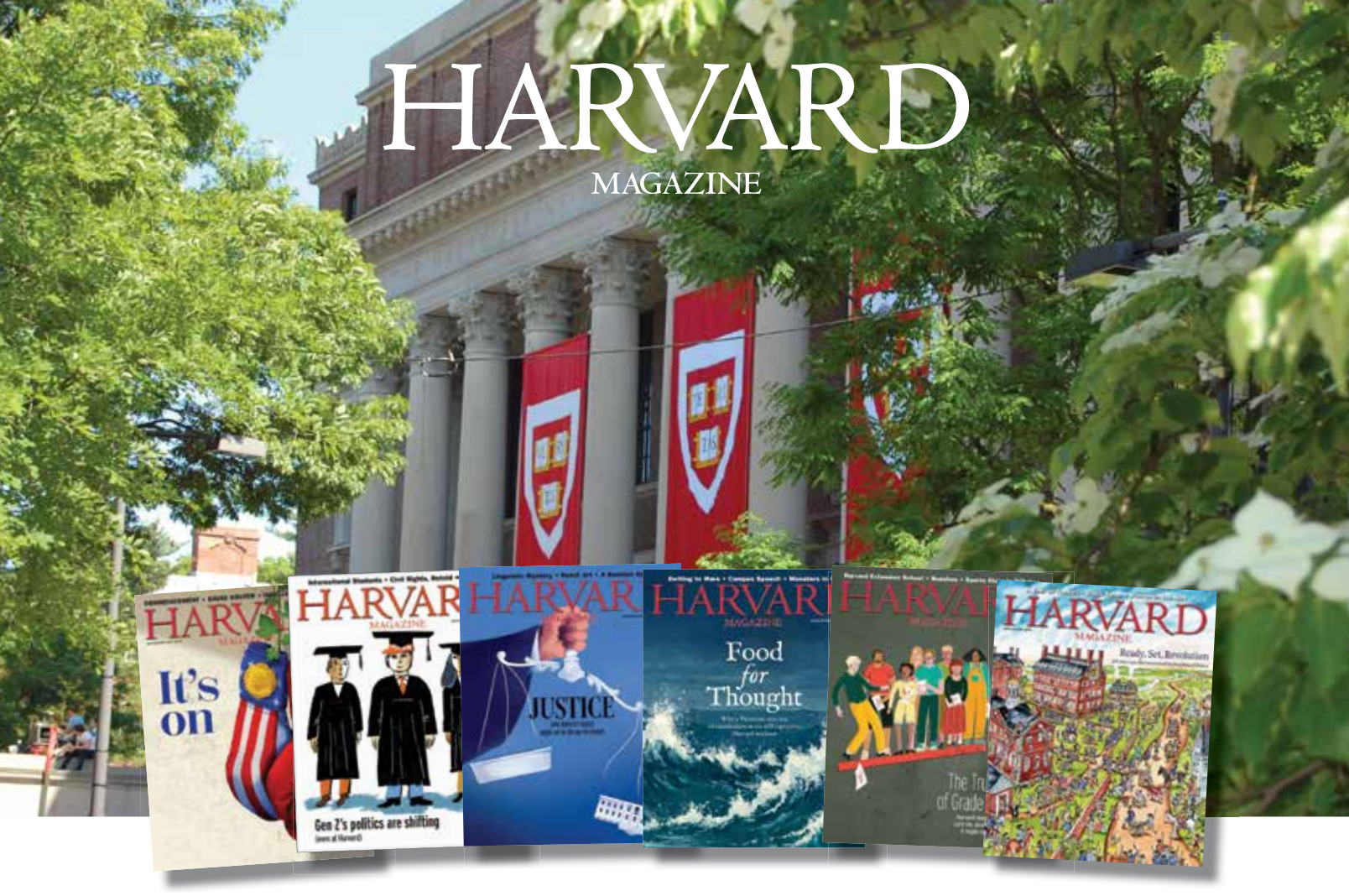
Illustrations by Megan Lam/Harvard Magazine



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— Will Makris, EdM '00, Harvard Alumni Association President, 2025-26

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