

that independent students receive an exceptional amount of aid.)

Some attendees expressed dismay at the extent to which the University administration has thawed toward ROTC. Harvard pushed the program off campus in 1969, forcing students to train at MIT instead, and withdrew its funding in 1993 because of the military's ban on homosexuals. (Alumni donors have since paid MIT for the cost of training the Harvard recruits.) But the program continued to hold a commissioning ceremony for College cadets on campus during Commencement week, and in 2002, Lawrence H. Summers became the first president since 1969 to speak at that ceremony. After the September 11 terrorist attacks, Summers also persuaded *Harvard Yearbook* editors to change their policy so students could list ROTC among their activities, even though it is not a recognized student group.

President Faust followed Summers's lead this past June and spoke at the ceremony (see "Principles We Must Strive to Extend," July-August, page 53). Although reunion attendees didn't press her on this point during the Q&A, several said during panels and informal conversation that they wished she had used the occasion as a bully pulpit for criticizing "don't ask, don't tell." (See "Matters Military," September-October, page 81, and "ROTC, Continued" in this issue, page 10.)

But Harvard appears to be more tolerant than the wider society in the United States—and *much* more so than some other countries. Panelist Chai Feldblum, J.D. '85, a law professor at Georgetown, noted continuing challenges at home: for example, the Employment Nondiscrimination Act, which she helped draft, passed this year without protected status for gender identity. And during a panel

featuring filmmakers, Sandi L. DuBowski '92—whose most recent film, *A Jihad for Love*, explores the Islamic world's complicated and often hostile attitude toward homosexuality and gay people—said the organizers of a film festival in Sarajevo that agreed to show his movie received death threats.

For better or for worse, gay undergraduates at Harvard face the same social disappointments as straight students, Eva Z. Lam '10 reported during a panel on the undergraduate experience. Mainly, that means a choice between a pervasive "hookup culture" and a relationship akin to marriage, with no middle ground of casual but meaningful dating. For his part, fellow panelist Marco Chan '11 said, "I don't feel self-conscious" when holding hands with his boyfriend in public. "I feel just like any other couple walking in the Yard. It's not an issue."

## THE UNDERGRADUATE

# Youthful Dreams

by BRITTNEY MORASKI '09

THE DAY Harvard sent out its admission decisions, I conveniently found myself at a church. The volunteer group that I had just been to Honduras with had regrouped for a photo-swapping event in St. Thomas's bingo hall. Before I left, I ducked into the darkened church itself. "Please God please God please God please God," I repeated silently, over and over, praying for an acceptance that would lead to experiences I couldn't anticipate and opportunities I couldn't name—but wanted so badly to be mine. My leg shook as I held down the gas pedal on my drive home. Upon opening and then comprehending the e-mail that welcomed me into the class of 2009, I broke into fat and sloppy tears.

It's hard to imagine how I would have reacted if I had been rejected. Getting

into Harvard was the only dream I had for myself; if I got in, I figured, other successes would follow. If I didn't, they might not. Being accepted also seemed something like a personal success insurance policy: if all else failed, and little

I prayed for an acceptance that would lead to experiences I couldn't anticipate and opportunities I couldn't name.

came of my life, at least I could say I went to Harvard. Not getting in seemed to me a failure that would forever deny me confidence in my own abilities.

I BEGAN MY JOB as an admissions-office tour guide at the end of my freshman year, quickly learning that we work hardest

during the summer. Waves of families come to Cambridge then, visiting the school as one of several stops along a son or daughter's junior-year college-tour circuit.

The tour moments that I enjoy most arise from the simplest of questions. "Why did you choose Harvard?" I'm often asked. I try to give the same answers to parents and to students alike. "Looking back now," I say, "I really don't know how I could have made anything but a gut decision, given that all the things I like about college—my friends, my classes, my professors—are things that I couldn't have anticipated in advance." I follow

with an admission that has only recently become clear to me: "So I wonder if I would have been happy anywhere, but I chose Harvard because it seemed like the place where I most wanted to spend four years of my life."

Parents latch onto what I'm trying to hint at, even if it escapes their children:

that Harvard is a great school, of course, but it is also just like any other school in the sense that my experience at Harvard has been defined by the friends I've made, the classes I've taken, and the ways I've spent my time, rather than by Harvard's reputation. Parents seem to appreciate this approach—I'll see a few of them nod in agreement—and I like being in cahoots with them. I just wish I'd thought this way four years ago.

IN AUGUST, I spent a week in Shanghai teaching *The Great Gatsby* to four groups of high-achieving, English-speaking Chinese students. One of my goals for my students was to have them understand that dreams are not inherently good and that their value instead depends on their influence on the person pursuing them. In the spirit of the Olympics, gold-medal swimmer Michael Phelps was my example of someone with

a "good" dream. I read to my students a *New York Times* report that Phelps's third-grade teacher had recently written to him, proud that he had so clearly found the right goal to focus on despite having struggled in school. Because Phelps had a "good" dream, I told my students, he was able to do something truly great.

Jay Gatsby, of course, was my example of someone with a "bad" dream. I explained to my students that his desire to win Daisy led him to make his money illegally and, once reunited with her, refuse to see her as any different from the young girl he once fell in love with. Gatsby's dream skewed his perception of success and dictated the course of his life.

But as I began this lesson on dreams for my third seminar group, a new thought came to mind. It didn't fit so well into my

established lesson plan as Jay Gatsby did, but I thought it might make more of an impression on my students. "Actually," I said, "you know what? I think I know of another bad dream. My dream of going to Harvard was a bad dream because it meant more to me than any dream should."

I elaborated: My dream to go to Harvard was a bad dream because I had staked my self-esteem and my hopes for my future on an external situation I had little control over. For the first time, I realized that I was little different from Gatsby but for fortunate treatment in the college admissions pool.

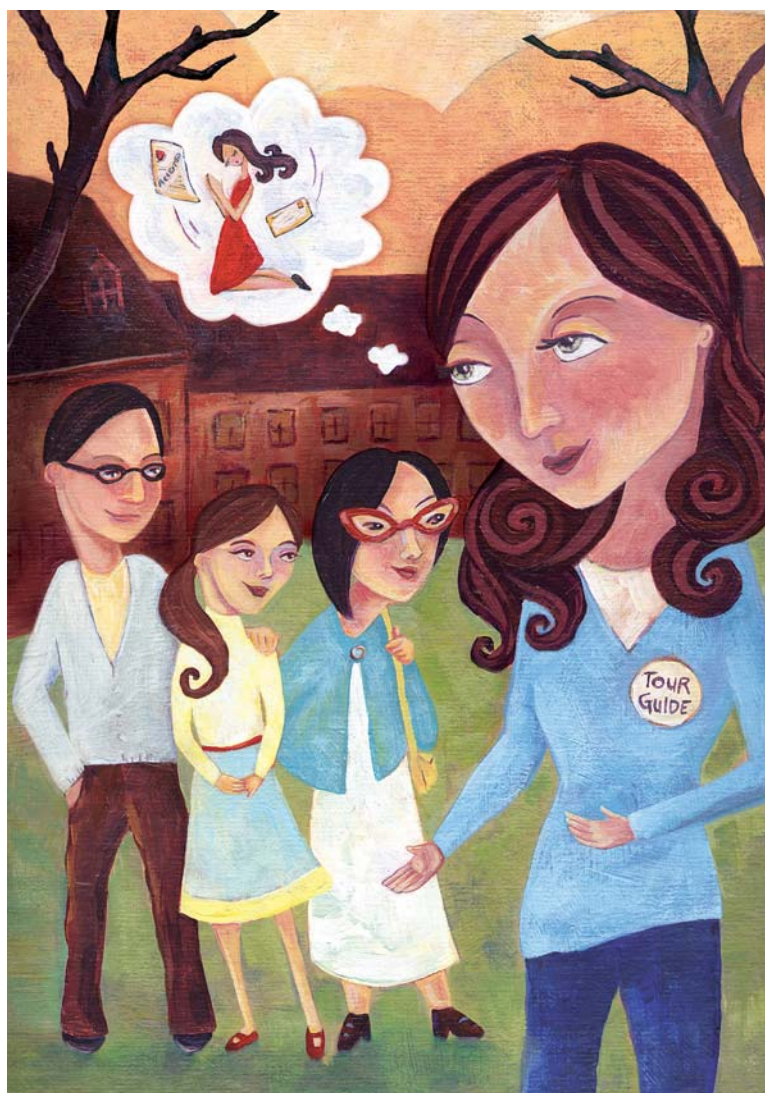
I used myself as an example because it was hard not to see something of myself in some of the students, and I was worried that they were beginning to define themselves, as I had done, by their prospects of

going to a good school. Sometimes the reminders of my younger self were jarring: while helping one student make sense of the format of the college admissions Common Application, I showed her my own "Activity List," prepared for my college applications and still on my computer. Hearing another student explain how she learned English by playing a tape each morning and reciting along with it as she got ready made me think of the Great Courses tapes I checked out of my community college's library and listened to as I drove home. "Please apply to Harvard," I begged after a long conversation with her. Just don't, I thought to myself, want to get in as badly as I did.

THIS SUMMER, as young girls in my tour group singled me out to ask questions about journalism on campus and I met Chinese students whose lack of opportunities in their hometowns made them all the more determined to seek

new challenges in a new place, I've had the opportunity to rethink my own path to and experiences at Harvard. I understand completely how the students who arrive at the admissions office feel—shy, terrified, and entranced by Harvard—because I, too, once was an 18-year-old who could barely say "Harvard" aloud. And I think I can relate to the Chinese students who believe that the reputation that comes with going to Harvard—or any school in the United States—will provide them with a safety net of success should life ever prove difficult for them in the future.

Three and a half years since issuing my urgent—and fervent—pleas to a higher power from the nave of St. Thomas church, I've discovered many of the opportunities going to Harvard brings and





the experiences it offers. But just as three years of Friday-night outings with my roommates, intercession trips, lectures in Sever 113, and conversations in the Barker Center have become the Harvard experience I speak of fondly and enthusiastically during my tours, late-night tears over a project started too late, a heart too easily hurt, or other, smaller, dreams not realized have also made it easier for me to speak of Harvard critically, even dismiss-

sively. Though I now know the joys of a Harvard education, I also know its occasional sorrows and frequent frustrations. And just as I certainly understand having an unrelenting desire to go to one's college of choice, I also now see a certain pointlessness in such passion.

This is why I wanted my Chinese students to think about both Michael Phelps and Jay Gatsby, and why I give admission tours—I want to share with these 16-, 17-,

and 18-year-olds what it's taken me three years to learn. Getting into Harvard turned out to be easy and, in a sense, unimportant. It's growing up that's been the challenge. ▽

*Berta Greenwald Ledecy Undergraduate Fellow  
Brittney Moraski '09 is working on her history and literature senior thesis, about mental health in post-World War II America, and starting her job search.*

## SPORTS

# Seeing the Field

*A worldly player in a global game*

**F**IELD HOCKEY, though relatively unknown in the United States, is a global game, and Francine Polet '09—who grew up in Malaysia and the Netherlands before going to high school in Hong Kong—has seen styles as diverse as the people who play them. Europeans favor a quick game, with hard shots and fast passing. Asian players, particularly those from India and Pakistan, boast unparalleled stick skills and deadly trick shots. The American game is based on fitness: outrunning and outlasting the competition.

Despite picking up inflections from around the world, says Harvard head coach Sue Caples, Polet remains identifiably Dutch in her style—especially in the zip she puts into her passes. “I have a hard hit,” says Polet, “so distributing the ball has always been one of the things I feel is my strength.” She plays sweeper, the final defender in front of the goal—a “lock on the back door,” as she puts it. (In addition to a sweeper, Harvard's starting

lineup includes a goalie and three defenders, midfielders, and forwards apiece, a relatively common formation.) From Polet's deep vantage point she can survey the whole field and pass to open teammates, ideally defusing the offense's pres-

sure and jump-starting a counterattack.

Polet is also responsible for marshaling the defense in front of her. She uses what Caples calls her “good game-sense and vision” to assign teammates to opposing forwards. “You're constantly thinking and communicating and also trying to play your own game,” says Polet. “It's a lot at the same time, not just for me, but for everybody. Even when I step up, I expect the next person behind me to be telling me, ‘Go to the ball,’ or ‘Stay on your man.’” The Crimson defense has been the Ivy's third stingiest during the past two years, allowing only 19 goals in 14 league games. (The team tied for fourth in 2007, and for second in 2006.)

Polet sometimes finds herself ahead of her defensive line because, given the opportunity (such as an intercepted pass), she dashes up the field. “I like attacking,” she says. “My coach always tries to pull me back. She thinks I press too high.” Caples concurs in part, but at other times encourages her sweeper's aggressiveness because it gives the team a temporary advantage in midfield. In the past two years, Polet has scored three goals and dished out six assists, making her the second-highest-scoring defender on the team.

Polet also plays a vital role on “short corners,” scoring chances that arise when the referee calls a minor foul near the net. Major fouls result in point-blank penalty shots, but short corners are trickier af-



Francine Polet

*Photograph by Jim Harrison*