

Pride, Elation...and Relief?

Families gather to see their children graduate. • Nell Porter Brown



COMMENCEMENT—the culmination of so much hard work, financial planning, and even anguish—has special meaning for the parents of seniors. We asked five families for their views on what their children's graduation connotes, and how they are planning to celebrate this momentous event.

Mary and Willie Luntao

Stockton, California

Parents of **Lange Luntao**, second marshal of the class of 2012

THANKS TO A feasible tuition-aid package, it wasn't the money that led to familial sacrifices for the Luntaos. It was their son's choice to go to college on the East Coast. "My heart was a little broken because I knew he would be so far away. That's been the biggest sacrifice of all," Mary Luntao says of her only child. "But I knew it wasn't about me, that's what I kept telling myself. And coming east has been very eye-open-

ing for him." Every fall, she has stayed for a week in Kirkland House's guest suite, enabling her to spend time with her son and his friends—having dinner and going to concerts and other events on campus. "He is one of those kids who doesn't mind my coming," she adds. "It's been wonderful for our family to have him here and wonderful for us to explore Boston and New England. It's just a very different way of life from central California" (where she is a second-grade teacher and her husband, whose family moved to America from the Philippines when he was five years old, is an assistant principal).

That traveling is not likely to end after Lange graduates. A social studies concentrator, with a minor in modern Middle Eastern studies, he has learned Arabic and is a finalist for the Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant Program. He wants to spend a year in Malaysia teaching Arabic-speaking children. "We get to visit him," his mother adds, "wherever he goes! He's a very ambitious young

man and I give him all the credit for doing things in life. We might have suggested something, but he takes the ball and runs with it."

They credit the University's financial aid with making it possible for their son to benefit from a Harvard education. "Harvard paid about 50 percent of his tuition," she reports. "Without that, it would not have been in the cards. We could've sold the house, but that probably wasn't the best thing to do."

Nearly 20 family members and friends will attend Lange's graduation. Many plan to stay for about a week at a townhouse they found online through VRBO.com (Vacation Rental By Owner). As for the restaurant? Lange is looking for reservations at a casual place, perhaps a spacious pub: "any place that can hold 20 people, with a special emphasis on Irish pubs because my mom's German-Irish family would love that," he reports. "It's a very exciting time," Mary concludes. "That young man has been working hard since he was 12 years old—he has always pushed himself and we're very proud of everything. This will be a very special week for our family."

Jill Colombosian and Jay Hachigian

Weston, Massachusetts

Parents of **Lea Hachigian**

LEA HACHIGIAN HAD some qualms about choosing a college so close to home. Her mother asked, "What are you afraid of? That I will stand outside your classroom door and call your name?" Despite that initial hesitation, four years later the proximity appears to have worked out for everyone. The two women, along with Lea's younger sister, Amy, a student at Boston



Lea Hachigian

College, have had dinner with each other about once a week at a fun, new restaurant. “I wanted to keep in touch with both of my children and their friend group and hear what they are doing and share what’s happening at home,” Jill Colombosian explains. “This was a way for them to see each other, too—and yet they felt that their space was being respected.” Colombosian has also hosted her daughters and their friends at their Weston home, a manageable commuter-train ride from both their campuses.

As a volunteer with the Harvard College Parents Fund (<http://alumni.harvard.edu/give/college/parents>), Colombosian had her own reasons to be in Cambridge. At one point, she also took an evening marketing class at the Harvard Extension School, which made dinner meetings even more convenient, and a break for her daughter from lab work. Hachigian is a neurobiology concentrator getting a certificate in mind, brain, and behavior. “I would like to elucidate the mechanisms behind dysfunction in disorders like autism, and hopefully in the future schizo-

phrenia, bipolar disorder, depression, et cetera,” Hachigian notes. “For a little while I was a bit scared to leave Harvard,” she adds, “but now I’m just incredibly excited to go out and begin putting my education to use. I feel like we are at this amazing point where we have so much potential and now we’re about to take everything we’ve been given and start making a real impact.” Colombosian calls Harvard “a wonderful growing experience” for her daughter, “with all the different types of people she has met from all over the world. She has had access to wonderful labs and has had great mentors there.”

Commencement signifies a move forward into the professional world. What’s truly important, Colombosian says, is “finding your place, finding your happiness. I want my kids to find something that’s right for them. Does

it give you satisfaction? Pleasure? Does it make you feel good at the end of the day? I want them to do something they want to get up for every day, that they think is important.” By mid March, Hachigian had narrowed her graduate school choices to MIT, Stanford, and the University of California, San Francisco; should a West Coast school prevail, Colombosian has made her peace with that. Will she continue working for the parents fund? “I tried not to get too attached to the place because this is her thing, not mine,” Colombosian answers. “I believe and support the work they do to enrich the students’ experience and I found all

the folks there truly wonderful. I wouldn’t have traded the experience for her or us, and I look forward to remaining involved.”

As for Commencement plans, the family is thinking of two celebrations: one for family members and one for the new graduate and her friends. Hachigian favors Ten Tables or Oleana in Cambridge—although dim sum with friends and family in Chinatown also appeals. “That’s her day,” Colombosian explains. “Whatever Lea wants, that’ll be what we do.”

Wenqing “Wendy” Tang and Liansheng “George” Cao

Arcadia, California

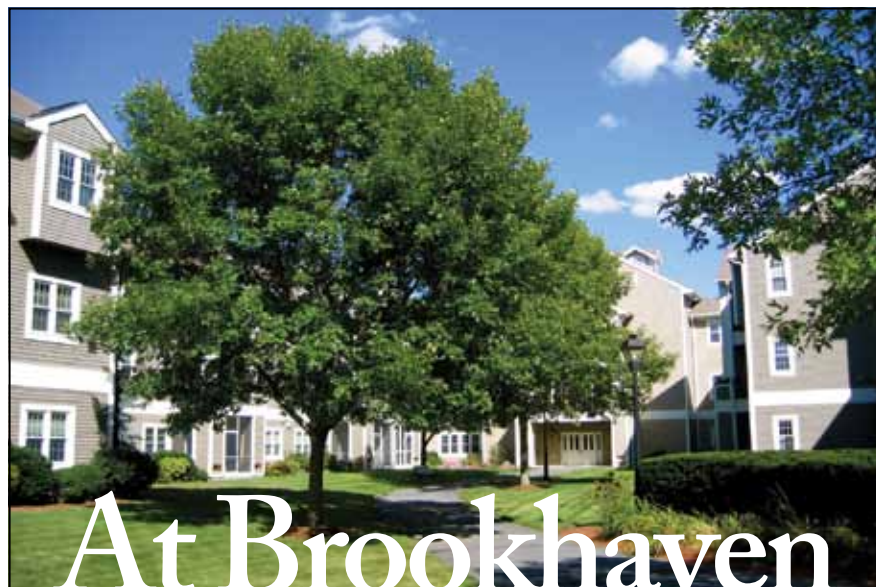
Parents of Bonnie Cao, first marshal of the class of 2012

• FOR WENDY TANG, Commencement means spending time with her daughter’s friends—and saying thank you. “I have known a lot of them through stories Bonnie has told me, or through my own Facebook stalking,” says the trained physicist, a research staff member at NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory. “But this is my chance to say thank you because I know Bonnie has had many ups and downs in the past four years and she has been surrounded by excellent friends who always gave her a hug” when her mother could not.

Aside from this lack of physical closeness, Tang never felt her daughter was too far away because of what she herself experienced while growing up in China. “I left my parents after high school and went to



Bonnie Cao



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the countryside to be re-educated during the Cultural Revolution," she explains. "I always valued leaving my family early because of the positive side: we learn society better." The bigger worry was whether "Bonnie would fit in and do well at school and live up to the high standards. I didn't know," she recalls. "But she immediately was involved in everything. And as part of the dorm crew cleaning bathrooms—it's very tiring work—she made a lot of friends even before school started." Tang has not only kept in close touch with her daughter, she has also learned about Bonnie's world on campus through reading *The Crimson* online every morning. Last September, Tang was in Shanghai for her mother's funeral when she read that her daughter had been elected first marshal of the senior class.

Though Commencement signals Cao's entry into the world—a government concentrator with a secondary focus in computer science, she will be working as a business analyst for McKinsey & Company—it also means Tang's departure from Harvard. "It is hard for the parents; I feel I have become part of the big Harvard family," she explains. "It is really hard to say good-bye now."

Cao's parents and family friends who have known her since she was born will all come to Commencement—but not before they stop off to explore Niagara Falls. (Tang has been there and wants the other couple to see it.) They will spend three days in Cambridge after that. As for gifts? "It's the other way around in our culture," Tang notes. "It's the people who are graduating, meaning Bonnie, who give gifts to the family and relatives—something small and meaningful. I know she has been thinking about it. I just hope she has saved enough money."

Miles and Suzana Karabasevic

Palm Beach Gardens, Florida

Parents of Aleksandra Karabasevic, senior class gift co-chair

THE KARABASEVICS plan to celebrate their daughter's achievement with a trip to London or Rome, combined with traveling to see all their family members in Serbia. "We are just the four of us in the

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U.S.," says Miles Karabasevic, an IT expert in database management (who also enjoys the chickens and ducks on his five-acre farm near Palm Beach). "We'll all spend a few weeks together this summer. It is a good time to go and it helps the kids keep their roots." He recalls dropping his older daughter off in Cambridge for her new adventure four years ago, and says the news that she had been accepted "was amazing, unbelievable, especially at a time when so many kids are applying. She was accepted at top places, but Harvard was a remote dream. So we were all very happy—we're still very happy!" He has not been back to Cambridge since, although his wife and younger daughter, Sofia, a high-school senior who has applied to the College, have visited several times. "Harvard does a great job of making parents feel welcome during Junior Parents weekend," Suzana Karabasevic says. "We were able to explore so many of the sights and museums the area has to offer. We sat in on some lectures as well, and it was amazing to see for myself the academic resources available to the students."

Her husband credits Harvard's new financial-aid initiative with making tuition affordable without huge familial sacrifices. Aleksandra herself says, "I think there are a lot more first-generation Americans at Harvard over the past few years, mainly

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because of the initiative. Harvard is so unique with its financial-aid program, since it reaches out to middle-class families that often get overlooked by other schools.” An economics concentrator, the senior will work after graduation in investment banking at Barclays. (On campus, she has been involved with the Charles River Growth Fund and the Harvard Investment Association.)

The family will stay through much of Commencement Day, but will not sleep over because Sofia receives *her* high-school degree on May 25. “It would be wonderful if we could go back to Cambridge to drop Sofia off for freshman year,” Miles Karabasevic adds. “We hope this is not the last time we will visit Harvard!”

Greg Rosenbaum '74, J.D.-
M.P.P. '77, and Marti (Radlo)
Rosenbaum '74

Bethesda, Maryland

Parents of Eve and of Elliott, senior class
gift co-chair

HARVARD GRADUATION is old hat—or should that be “old top hat”?—to the Rosenbaums, who have attended almost every Commencement Day (and class reunion) since proceeding down the Tercentenary Theatre aisles themselves. “We’re

among that small group of people who come back for random-year reunions,” says Marti. Greg is also a proud member of the Harvard Alumni Association’s “Happy Committee,” whose duties include donning top hats and tails (or crimson sashes, for the women) to usher imminent graduates’ family members and friends around on the big day. “Commencement is a tremendous event generally for us,” Greg says, “but it is squared, or cubed, when it’s our own kids.” (Their older son, Eli ’05, earned his J.D. and M.P.P. in 2009; his wife is Meghan Haggerty ’06, M.P.P. ’10.)

Marti has opted not to usher this year, because she wants to focus on her kids. But Greg still plans to engage fully in the morning exercises: he enjoys helping families find seats, assuring them that the best photo opportunities come at the Houses, where the actual diplomas are awarded, and showing them the glory of Harvard's pageantry. "I do appreciate it all the more because I understand the singular sensation of having a child graduate from Harvard," he explains. "I try to be a good host because I am representing the whole University and I want the memory that these parents take home to be that it was a great experience!"

No degree of passion, however, can overcome the several logistical challenges presented by this particular Commencement



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day. The twins are in different Houses and their extracurricular activities—Eve is on the softball team, Elliott is a member of the Krokodiloes—have their own respective fetes. “When it comes to getting the diplomas, we hope to get one of them moved forward in the lineup so that we can be at both of the ceremonies,” Greg notes. “Fortunately, they’re at Mather and Quincy, both river Houses. The only difficulty is that they won’t be able to see each other.” They will all reconvene in the late afternoon and go on to a restaurant, although where and with whom has yet to be decided.

After graduation, Eve plans to move to New York City to work for the National Football League’s sports-management training program while Elliott heads to the opposite coast to work in global business development for Walt Disney Parks and Resorts. “For us this will be the *real* change,” their mother says. “This will be the first time they will live apart.”

College is “a four-year continuation, in most cases, of the academic pattern they’ve followed for the past several years,” Marti explains. “They are still kids and in many ways have some connection/dependence on you as parents.” But moving to a new city, with jobs and new colleagues, at a time in life when timelines and plans are unpredictable, means that parents have a much weaker sense of where their children really are and what they are doing. “Many parents feel this way,” she says, “although we have it perhaps more so because we have had all of our kids in the same place.” And it is their parents’ *alma mater*.

As for leaving Harvard, “It’s not going to be saying good-bye in any way,” Marti notes. “But it is definitely a shift, for the kids as well as for us. While there is always an amazing connection to the University, it is a different outlook on life once you are away from it as a student.” Greg agrees. “We hope that the enthusiasm and love that we have for Harvard has worn off on them,” he adds. “Harvard has made such a difference in our lives that we try to give back in any way we can. We hope they will do the same to make Harvard educations available to future students.” ♡

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