

Margaret Crane  
Lowell Speech: Harvard Yard  
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Has anyone ever asked you, “What are you going to do when you graduate?” As a senior, you get asked this question a lot, but it’s a question I’ve faced throughout college—as if my career goals define my character. When a friend asked me this question sophomore year, I was unsure about my answer. I told her that I was interested in mental health, but did not want to be a therapist. I also told my friend that it was important to me to have a career that would allow time for myself, my family, and one day, my children. Upon hearing the last goal, she replied, “You know, Margaret, you should really have bigger ambitions.” This comment was jarring to me, not only because a successful career should not exclude a family, but also because my friend seemed to dismiss my desire to have balance between my work and personal life. Striking this balance is harder than I would like to admit. Attending this university, having ambitious goals, and being surrounded by amazingly talented peers has made it hard for me to live in the present.

Around this time last year, I hit a breaking point. My dad and I had taken a ski trip and I had decided to turn off my phone to give myself a much-needed break. Turning my phone off seemed trivial, but it turned out to be incredibly liberating. I didn’t realize how freeing it was until I turned it back on at the end of the trip, only to watch my inbox fill up with a never-ending stream of new tasks. My feeling of relaxation quickly left me and I started to cry. I had hit a wall and realized the work-life balance I value so much had become completely unbalanced, leaving virtually no time for myself.

As my stepmom drove me back to school, she responded to my panic by recounting a story featuring my golden retriever, Benny. Once, when Benny was a puppy, he was playing with a toy when he noticed a squirrel sitting on the other side of our glass door. Without thinking twice, Benny ran full speed ahead toward the squirrel—and crashed into the door. He jumped back with a shocked look on his face, and we all gasped, hoping he was okay. He then quickly shook his head and went back to playing with his toy. My brother broke the silence, saying: “Well, it’s all part of the learning process!” I think of Benny when I am feeling overwhelmed. He reminds me to treat each stressful experience as part of my process of learning how to maintain a balanced life and live more in the present.

I got another unexpected reminder of the importance of living in the present on my birthday last year. Friday, April 19, 2013 was the day I turned 21. Much more notably, however, it was the day of the Boston Lockdown. Being unable to leave Lowell, my friends and I could do nothing but spend the day together in my room, listening to news updates and finding solace in each other’s company. While it was not the birthday I had imagined, it was a deeply meaningful moment in my college experience; it was the

only time in my four years when no one was worrying about a paper they had to write or was rushing off to their next meeting. Instead, we were all together, simply being with each other. It's an experience I will never forget.

It should not take a crisis like the Lockdown to give us moments like these; they are available every day. I have found that paying attention to little things, like the slope of Harvard Yard, helps me find a small dose of balance every day. How many of us have walked through Harvard Yard texting, checking email, or reading the news on our phones? I have. But if you put your phone away, you can notice extraordinary, subtle beauty. One of my favorite features of Harvard Yard is that it is not flat. The Yard slopes as the field naturally did hundreds of years ago. Tiny dips make the paths blend into the grassy patches of the Yard. Tomorrow, take a moment to notice how the paths slope downwards and disappear into the grass. I promise, you will feel less stressed. Noticing these subtle beauties helps us find our inner balance.