

Margaret Irving
“Home is Where the Harvard Is”
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In the film “The Wizard of Oz”, to return to Kansas Dorothy must tap her ruby slippers and say “There’s no place like home”. But she is changed by her experiences in the technicolor world of Oz, and upon her return to sepia-toned Kansas is a different person.

We have come from all over the world to attend Harvard. On August 26, 2013 the Class of 2017 descended on Harvard Yard. Towing bags and family members, the second question we asked each other, after our names, was “Where are you from?” I had never before met someone from Wisconsin, let alone Mongolia. After someone told me excitedly “I’m from Jersey, too!” I learned to preface my home province of New Brunswick with “I’m from Canada”. Soon, our respective dorms became part of our ‘Harvard introductions,’ prompting commiserations (sorry, Union dorms) or queries of “Oh, do you know...?” As we shared meals in Annenberg and classes from the Science Center to Sever, we built communities with the people around us.

I pasted photos on my walls to remind me of home, while simultaneously marvelling at the brick- and ivy-lined campus I now inhabited. Although I believed the beauty of Harvard Yard would never grow old, over time it became my everyday view. The environs that felt intimidating and exciting in September became familiar and routine, while I became a different person than the one who left Canada. I felt conflicted the first time I accidentally called Lionel Hall “home”, wondering if this was a betrayal of the place listed on every form as my permanent address. After learning my House in March, my roots in Cambridge grew deeper.

I took countless pictures of the Lowell bell tower, from multiple angles, in all types of weather, so excited that I got to live *here*. The courtyards, tunnels and everything in between began to feel like home. I became used to the sights, smells, and sounds, the latter coming from the birds in the small courtyard on one side and the Winthrop construction on the other. I became used to writing “10 Holyoke Place” instead of “Harvard Yard Mail

Center”. Harvard Yard became a place of transit to and from class. When I lived there, I assumed the yard belonged to us, the Class of 2017, failing to realize that it had, and would continue to, house countless students before and after us. It was only ours for one year.

And so too with Lowell- it isn't ours to keep. At 5pm on Friday, May 26, the senior class will hand in our keys and suddenly, as afternoon turns to evening, we won't live here anymore. We will be alumni, used-tos, once upon a times. We again will be flung all over the world, like we were before arriving on campus for Opening Days. In her essay “The Opposite of Loneliness”, Yale graduate Marina Keegan said “We won't live on the same block as all our friends... This scares me... I'm scared of losing this web we're in. This elusive, indefinable, opposite of loneliness. This feeling I feel right now.”

But we will come back. We will return for reunions, Harvard-Yale, or just to visit. No matter where we are, we are the class that saw the loss of one of the great elms in the courtyard, built snow forts during the record-breaking snow days, and will give this building the best send-off we can before renovation. When we come back to visit, Lowell will have changed. There will be new faces and fresh paint. And we won't be the same as when we left, either.

In “Wicked”, the hit musical based on the “The Wizard of Oz”, Elphaba sings “So much of me/Is made of what I learned from you/You'll be with me/Like a handprint on my heart/And now whatever way our stories end/I know you have rewritten mine/By being my friend... Because I knew you/I have been changed for good”. Over the past four years, we have changed for good. If we tap our Bean boots and say “there's no place like home,” when we return we won't be the same people who left. I am still from New Brunswick, but now I am from Cambridge too. I can't, and wouldn't want to, imagine my life without the places and people that have changed me over the past four years. I wanted to rediscover the wonder I felt during move in days by seeing this place as if for the first time. But I can't get those eyes back, and instead am so grateful to look and see four years of memories inscribed on brick.

Three months from today is graduation. We will scatter. Some of us already may be apartment hunting while others don't yet know where we will be. Wherever we are, when

people ask where we're from, the answer will now be a little more complicated than it was four years ago. Next year, when members of the Class of 2017 are scattered across the globe, the people who shape and love us will be our homes. Because home is where the Harvard is. Thank you.