

As the title suggests, I will not be talking about physical safety. Instead, I will discuss the metaphorical walls many of us build, the inflexible paths we often commit to, and the opportunities we miss as a result.

Harvard intimidates me. At some point, most of us have had that feeling of not belonging here. Let's think back to our first week at Harvard, orientation. Remember the anticipation of finally meeting the roommates you awkwardly Skyped, that potential significant other (or others) you chatted up on Facebook, and that one kid who friend requested everyone in the class? Remember when you were pre-med? Remember when it wasn't awkward to meet people over a meal?

Amid all this excitement, I felt a tinge of anxiety. I did well up until this point, so there should be no reason to worry, right? Even though I repeated this to myself, a voice in my head always said, "But this is Harvard! For the best of the best, the geniuses of the world. How did someone like me even get here?"

One of the most unsettling things was that everyone seemed so sure about everything. I applied to college as an undecided major and even auditioned to music conservatories, because I had no idea what I wanted to do. As a result, I felt out of place here. There was an unspoken expectation I had to know what I wanted to do to not fall behind, and that falling behind was the sin of sins. Instead of embracing my uncertainty and taking advantage of Harvard's opportunities, I retreated.

To gain a sense of security in this overwhelming environment, I limited my efforts to strengthening familiar foundations, building these walls higher and higher. I excelled in biology during high school, and when I got here, ignored my interest in the humanities,

studying what I felt comfortable with. I had several Asian friends in high school, but now, I sat amongst a mass of Asians in Annenberg every day. I told myself I would learn how to dance or act at college, but instead, I stuck with what I'm already good at and joined the orchestra. I did all of these things because I found security in them, but as I would understand, they also closed countless doors of opportunity.

Fast-forward to sophomore year. I now have some sense of what I'm doing, and I enter the best house on campus. Despite the *lovely* experiences Lifescila & b were, I remained pre-med so had to face the nightmare of all pre-meds. Yes, organic chemistry. I heard many horror stories and was worried whether I could handle it. Feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy returned. Sitting down for the first lecture, I could feel the anxiety of premeds in the air. I was nervous.

Nevertheless, I tried my best to put preconceptions aside and took a deep breath. During the next 53min., something unimaginable happened: I actually enjoyed it. Everyone knows the first lecture is deceptively interesting, but as we went from topic to topic that semester, I couldn't help but see the elegance of the science. The harmony and creativity behind it fascinated me and even reminded me of music.

By taking a small step out of my comfort zone, I ended up learning and changing in big ways. That's when I realized, after finding my niche, when I built those walls higher and higher, I closed off countless opportunities. I just happened to be lucky enough to find a hidden passion through the cracks of those walls.

This brings me back to the title of this speech: challenging Harvard's security. All of you are gifted in certain areas, but perhaps there exists a hidden passion that awaits you, something you never imagined you'd love.

And there's no reason to limit this mindset to courses. Let's meet new people. Heck, let's meet each other. An unspoken problem at Harvard is the walls that keep us from meeting people after freshmen year. We can learn so much from each other, yet I'm willing to bet very few people in this room know just everyone else's name, let alone their stories.

Why? Because you just don't meet people after freshmen year? Because it's awkward to talk to someone you don't know? That's ridiculous. No one should walk into a Dhall and worry whether they see a friend to sit with. Remember freshman year? Maybe there is something we can learn from freshmen.

I admit I also feel nervous approaching new people. It's not easy, but as I hopefully conveyed today, taking a small step outside your comfort zone can make a big difference. At the very least, you'll learn a new name, hear an interesting story, and who knows, you may even find a new passion.

Thank you.