surprise. On weekday afternoons, strangers at the mall gave him odd glances, as if caring for his children during a typical workday was aberrant behavior. His own inner conflict influenced his decision not to tell his boss why he was quitting; instead, he said he had outgrown his job and wanted to explore other opportunities.

Findley went public in 2000, when he let a Washington Post Magazine staff reporter trail him for nearly six weeks to write a story on his life as a stay-at-home parent. “Harvard is what makes the story so fascinating for people,” he says. More than 30 papers in Japan picked up the story, he adds. “It was big news: ‘Harvard man giving up career for kids!’”

Ironically, that cover story opened doors for Findley in the architectural world and elsewhere. Phone calls came in from homeowners who were interested in hiring him to design residential space. A local preschool and a newly formed private school invited him to join their boards. He says that he includes the Post story in his portfolio because it “graphically explains what I’ve been doing for six years, as opposed to leaving a blank hole on my résumé.”

With his sons now in school full time, Findley has begun a home-based practice that will allow him to resume work on his own terms—part-time at present. His goal for the next few years is to enlarge slowly to a full-time practice that will allow his wife to stay home with the children. In the meantime, he continues to attend professional seminars and enter architectural competitions as he has done all along. And every afternoon, without fail, he is there to pick his kids up from school.

The uneasy balance between career ambitions and family is something most parents grapple with, whether they work or stay at home. Elizabeth Abate ’87 of San Diego, a former marketing writer in the high-tech industry, has spent time both as a working parent and a stay-at-home parent. Currently at home with her two sons, she ran into an old friend at her reunion last spring and they chatted about the friend’s career, which was going very well. Then her friend confided, “I never expected to be at my fifteenth reunion unmarried and with no kids.” Abate countered, “Well, I never expected to be a stay-at-home mom at my fifteenth.” Her friend laughed and said, “Together, we have the perfect life!”

The trade-offs between parenting and careers are inevitably frustrating. “I wouldn’t pretend I’ve done a good job trying to manage this,” says Kadis. “I have no magic answer for parents who have little children. Whatever you do, you feel torn. If you went to Harvard, you’re smart and an overachiever and you have high goals. Everyone tells you that you can do anything you want. Then, you find it’s not so easy.” She is certain about one thing, however: “If you’re going to have kids,” she says, “you owe them time.”

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THE UNDERGRADUATE

Accidental Academics

by Garrett M. Graff ’03

(Please note that I should not be writing this column: I have a thesis chapter due on Thursday and pages to go before I sleep…)

Harvard attracts its students in many different ways. Some come for the name, some for the academics, and some for the opportunity to work with a specific star professor. I knew Harvard’s academics would be good, but that was not a big draw for me. If I had been primarily concerned with academics, I probably would have opted for my other top choice, Amherst College—after all, I reasoned, the students there actually know their professors. For me, Harvard’s appeal came from outside the classroom: in the rich network of its extracurriculars. Although the College eschews preprofessional training, students have built an impressive range of organizations to fill the void resulting from the lack of concentrations like communications, theater, business, or pre-law—extracurriculars so stimulating and intense that they rival many of the academic preprofessional programs at other schools. I came for the student-run newspapers, which are widely regarded as offering one of the best journalism “programs” in the country.

I joined the Crimson as soon as I could freshman year, and by November, my roommates had to order call waiting for our telephone line in Wigglesworth so that I wouldn’t miss requests to cover breaking news. In the end, though, it didn’t matter much, because by spring semester I spent more time at the Crimson’s 14 Plympton Street offices than in my room—a pattern that continued until I finished my executive term this past January.
ary 22. My work took me from murder scenes and arson investigations to the “victory” celebration of Al Gore ’69 in Nashville on Election Night 2000 to the final round of secret interviews during Harvard’s presidential search in 2001. I learned enough journalism to land a couple of summer internships and to begin what I hope will be a promising career. As far as I was concerned, my college years had been a success.

The long hours at Plymp- toton did not come without a price—my grades inevitably suffered over the years, and the history department (my concentration) warned me several times to cut back my hours of reporting and writing. Moreover, there were those awkward moments in section and tutorials when it became apparent that my night of layout had kept me from reading the assigned text. Let us just say that there is no grade inflation evident on my transcript. For me, as for many of my fellow students who live out their undergraduate careers wedded to a specific high-impact extracurricular—whether athletics, the Let’s Go travel series, the Hasty Pudding, the Undergraduate Council, or a public-service program run by the Phillips Brooks House Association—academics do not always come first in college. All of us so inclined make a conscious decision that what we learn outside the classroom during our college careers will be as important as what we learn inside.

Despite my tense relationship with the history department—or perhaps specifically to spite it—I decided early on to write a thesis this year and settled easily on a good, arcane topic. I would study America’s attempts to annex the Yucatán Peninsula in 1848. When I sat down last fall with my adviser, I explained that after three years of butting heads with my professors over my “journalistic” approach to writing academic papers, I wanted this project to be the one piece of impeccable academic research that I did in college. Although that goal might be a tad lofty (it is hard to do impeccable research in just seven months), I nevertheless threw myself into the project, and found it opening a whole new window on my undergraduate experience.

Suddenly, I was sitting for hours in the library reading, researching, and reflecting; I had my own carrel in Widener; I even presented a semicoherent argument at the department’s senior-thesis conference in December. Research skills gleaned from tedious tutorials where I thought I had learned nothing bubbled to the surface. These skills combined with critical-thinking techniques (developed under individuals I had considered nothing more than overly demanding professors) to push me ever deeper into my project, until I found that, entirely by accident, I had uncovered an argument germane to the modern American experience.

The subsequent months brought continual bouts of bubbling enthusiasm as I checked footnotes, dug through primary sources, and even—shock of all shocks—found myself leaving the Crimson early some afternoons to burrow into the government documents stored in Lamont Library. When I sat down to begin writing, the energy of the moment left me so euphoric that I worked in 10-hour marathon stretches and I wouldn’t fall asleep until the wee hours of the morning. Who knew that learning could be so fun? It turns out that academia is an exciting place to be, and there is nothing more exciting than being on the cutting edge of original research—in the end, it’s not all that different from being a good journalist.

So it was that, through these scattered, gradual epiphanies, I have come to realize just in the past few weeks that my thesis, still unfinished, is not so much a chance to showcase the best academic work that I have done during my time at Harvard (although it will certainly be that). Instead, I have realized the thesis has been a subtle message from my old nemeses in the history department that—despite my best efforts to dedicate myself wholly to the Crimson—they managed to teach me something anyway. Somewhere, I learned to be a student, too.


The Way of the Long Strings

To be a virtuoso musician and a college student at the same time is somewhat like forcing two people into one body: something’s got to give. For example, if you want to spend every evening from about 7 to 11 p.m. at the Music Building with your cello, you have to hope for the