mates and I, while trying to decide upon housing arrangements during our first night together, were leery about the prospect of sharing a bedroom.

Part of the problem was that—like many children raised in bedroom-rich suburbia—we’d never been obliged to share a room before. One roommate announced in a throaty accent that, as an only child, she had never been obliged to share anything, and didn’t plan to start now; another confessed a little breathlessly that she’d “fallen in love” with the big, many-windowed single bedroom she’d been sleeping in until we decided on more permanent arrangements. Raised by a mother who ranks self-sacrifice chief among feminine virtues (throughout our childhood, her favorite book was The Giving Tree), Shel Silverstein’s story of the deciduous martyr whose gifts—of her leaves, her apples, her branches, and her trunk—to an insatiable boy ostensibly leave her “happy”), I volunteered to share the double for the first semester.

And I was happy. The sweet-natured girl with whom I shared a bedroom was—but for her bizarre devotion to the Swedish rock group ABBA—a faultless roommate: she went to bed early, didn’t drape her dirty clothing on my desk chair, and imported no boyfriends. And if our living styles weren’t entirely compatible (our other roommates delighted in pointing out the contrast between the prim hospital corners on my top bunk and the comfortable tangle of bedclothes on her lower one)—well, we were both content to make concessions. She never said anything about the reading light I left burning all night or the times I slept through the alarm clock I’d set for 4 A.M. Buying earplugs to muffle the strains of “Lucky Love” was the least I could do in exchange.

Because of the painlessness of my freshman-year bedroom-sharing, I barely winced when I arrived last September to find that Winthrop House had foisted a senior single upon my roommate and me as a sophomore double. Sure, the bedroom was barely big enough for a bunk bed and a pair of bureaus, but my roommate and I were united in our pursuit of neatness. She used a T-square to align the furniture at right angles to the wall; I mopped with fanatical regularity. Visitors to our room would recoil from the Teutonic tidiness and from the Pine-Sol odor that hung in the air. “It’s awfully clean,” they’d say, visibly disturbed. “Thanks,” we’d say, recognizing a compliment when we heard one. When my roommate returned later than I from winter break, even our doll-sized bedroom seemed much too large: I drifted around it, bereft. When I stayed late at the library, she would ask me the next morning, in plaintive tones, where I’d been: “I’ve missed you.”

And the girls I looked after this summer? They drew lots to determine who would live in the double for the rest of the summer-school semester. About a week after they arrived, the summer’s first heat wave struck; that night, I went to their suite to make sure they weren’t breaking curfew. I found all six of them—including the girl with the coveted single down the hall—clustered around a fan, nestled as close as Girl Scouts around a campfire. They looked up at me and smiled beatifically, innocent of rooming conflicts. Actually, they didn’t leave the suite much: they inscribed “CANADIAN HERMITS” on the dry-erase board outside the door, having begun their Harvard educations in living civilly and having forgotten, so far as I could tell, their mothers’ insistence on their having their own space.

Phoebe Korman, a Winthrop House n-s junior who expects to know all of the lyrics to Mamma Mia! by spring, wraps up her stint as one of this magazine’s Berta Greenwald Ledecky Undergraduate Fellows with this column.

**SPORTS**

**Dante the Disruptor**

Football captain Dante Balestracci is the terror of running backs.

Defenders have attitude, and their mind-set differs sharply from that of players who line up on the other side of the ball. Call it the outlook of a stopper. “You have to have pride in stopping them: they’re not going to get a first down—you’re not going to let that happen,” says Dante Balestracci ’04, the most formidable stopper in the Ivy League, and one of the best linebackers in all of Division I-AA football. “You’re making them earn anything they’re going to get.”

Team captain and middle linebacker Balestracci is the star of Harvard’s defense. “On offense you have to be a lot more disciplined, because you are running a set play,” he says. “On defense you can let it hang out a little more.” In other words, defense has an improvisational aspect, since it is all about reacting to the team that snaps the football. “One guy can make a tackle, or 11 guys can make a tackle,” Balestracci says. “When you have all 11 guys flying around trying to make plays and hitting people, the excitement level goes way up. Defense tends to be more vocal and more excitable—when a guy makes a huge hit, the defense rallies around him.”

Balestracci has made a lot of huge hits. As a freshman he was Ivy League Rookie of the Year, and the first freshman in the League’s history selected for the First Team all-Ivy roster. He led Harvard that year with 94 tackles, making primary hits on 62 of them. Against Dartmouth, he ran back two intercepted passes for touchdowns, on jaunts of 48 and 53 yards. In his sophomore and junior years, he repeated as First Team all-Ivy, and hence could become the first player ever to make the all-Ivy First Team four years running. He again led the Crimson defense in tackles each season—despite missing two games with a sprained ankle as a sophomore. Balestracci is disruptive: last year’s 95 tackles included 12 for losses and four sacks. He also leads all active Harvard players in interceptions, with six.

At 6 feet, 2 inches, and 245 pounds, he is a bona fide National Football League (NFL) prospect who next year might fol-
low in the cleat marks of recent players like Carl Morris ’03, Jamil Soriano ’03, Jack Fadule ’03, and Isaiah Kacyvenski ’00, all of whom signed NFL contracts. Though Balestracci is exploring less violent career paths—a government concentrator, last summer he interned at an investment house, this year at a law firm—he admits that he “would love to play in the NFL. That would be reaching an ultimate goal.”

While Balestracci’s strength and athleticism are unquestioned, what puts him at another level is his mental agility, which may be even more important on defense, because defensive play is so reactive.

“Football is such an intense physical sport,” he says, “yet how you prepare mentally and how you see the game are more important. When you reach the college level, everyone is roughly equal in physical ability. What separates good players from average players is how they see the game, how instinctively they play, how quickly they react.”

Balestracci pores over game films to understand what a particular team likes to do from different offensive sets. “Teams can get predictable,” he says. “Seeing the whole picture is important—as opposed to having tunnel vision, knowing what you have to do but not seeing what’s developing around you.”

“Ivy League offenses tend to be complex, so there’s a lot developing. Opponents come to the line with running sets, passing sets, or 50-50 sets that can attack either by air or ground, with each set spinning off several variations. Linebackers, cornerbacks, and safeties have to read that offense for its likely lines of attack. High up in the colonnade, above the Stadium, the coaching staff posts spotters who identify which players the opponents are sending into the game and which ones they are taking out, since the personnel on the field indicate a lot about the play coming up.”

“It’s like a chess game,” Balestracci says. “You are moving pieces around to where they can be most effective. One of the biggest parts of success at linebacker or safety is being able to read plays as quickly as possible.” The offense has the initiative, because it snaps the ball, but “reading what they do is the equalizer,” Balestracci says. Making tackles depends, in large measure, on being in the right place, he adds: “Then you hit them as hard as you can, wrap them up—and it’s a fight after that.”

Balestracci comes from an athletic family in New Bedford, Massachusetts—his younger brothers Mark and Thomas play football at Holy Cross and Brown, respectively. “With three boys, there were all kinds of rough-and-tumble sports,” he recalls. “We had our share of disputes in the back yard.” Balestracci was a gifted all-around athlete; at New Bedford High School, he excelled as a basketball forward and as a first baseman, outfielder, and cleanup hitter in baseball. But he loved football the most, and could do nearly anything on the field: playing both offense and defense, he led his team in such varied categories as receptions, tackles, interceptions, and, as a senior quarterback, threw for 15 touchdowns and 1,365 yards, and recorded a 56 percent completion percentage.

Like many high-school quarterbacks, Balestracci plays a different role in the college game. But on either side of the ball, there are certain moments—like late in a close game, third down and short yardage, or fourth and goal, with the whole crowd on its feet, knowing that “this is it”—when “You can barely hear yourself think,” he says. “Those are the plays you live for. When you meet someone at the first-down marker or goal line and drive him back—that’s just the best thing that can happen.”

—Craig Lambert

Superlative Sailing

In June, Harvard’s sailing team captured the National Co-ed Championship in Grosse Point, Michigan. It was the first such title since 1974 and only the fifth in Harvard history. (The Crimson also won in 1952, 1953, and 1959.) Heavy air (up to 17 knots) on the second and third days of the regatta favored Harvard, allowing the sailors to dominate both A and B divisions. Harvard tallied 165 points—69 points ahead of the University of Hawaii’s total of 234—for the widest margin of victory in recent memory. St. Mary’s College (Maryland), last year’s champions, finished third with 238.

The Crimson also repeated as National Team Race champions, going 5-2 in the final round to defeat St. Mary’s (4-3) and Southern California (4-3). Three-time all-American skipper Clay Bischoff ’03 was honored as College Sailor of the Year. That title stays in Cambridge; last year’s winner was Sean Doyle ’02 (see “Sailing: Broad Reach,” July-August 2002, page 89).