The first person to congratulate me on getting into Harvard was Mark Zuckerberg. I clicked on the link in my acceptance email to find a picture of him looking back at me with his characteristic blank smile, as “Congratulations” appeared on the screen in white sans serif font above his head. At the time I was too thrilled to pay much attention, but later the choice of spokesperson felt strange to me. “Didn’t he drop out?” I wondered.

I thought I’d applied to Harvard to escape aspiring Zuckerbergs. My family moved to Menlo Park in 2008, just in time to see Silicon Valley transform from a chain of nondescript California suburbs into the tech hub it is today. As I drove to school each morning I passed landmarks of the corporate world, from the cluster of venture-capital firms on Sand Hill Road to the Facebook headquarters off the 101.

Silicon Valley felt like a company town—any ambition was bent back toward tech culture. Moms cooed over luncheons about how someone’s son who got a good score in AP Calculus could code for Facebook, or how someone’s daughter who gave a good speech at an assembly could be a CEO. Many of my high-school classmates dreamed of working five minutes away from their childhood homes, in the same tech jobs their parents held. This isn’t a bad thing—after all, who could criticize someone for wanting to work in America’s seat of innovation?

But I didn’t see myself coding or starting a company. I spent most of high school reading books my teachers recommended and writing furtive bits of fiction between classes. Most of my friends viewed my literature habit as if I were collecting stamps—a quirky, old-fashioned hobby, nothing to make a career of. Some reassured me that reading or writing could help toward a job at a start-up, writing press kits or interview responses. Or, at the very least, that knowing how to write could get me into college, which could then get me a satisfying corporate career. I knew I didn’t want to work in the Valley, but everything else felt irrelevant, or unrealistic, so I learned to keep quiet.

Cambridge couldn’t have felt more alien; it was startling to see so many buildings made of earthquake-unsafe bricks, covered in snow, all smashed together rather than spread out in 1970s corporate parks and strip malls. I don’t remember much about the admissions tour, but the moment I considered applying was when I sat in a café and listened to a grad student talking about his dissertation on horror movies without any of the self-deprecation that would have inevitably accompanied it back home. I began dreaming of trading Palo Alto’s freeways and açaí bowls for Cambridge’s libraries and coffee shops.

Since then, I’ve been able to fulfill many of my high-school dreams, dragging countless plastic bags full of books out of Widener and publishing articles in crumbling literary outlets like The Harvard Advocate. But it has also dawned on me that Silicon Valley is not as far away as I once thought; that many of my peers chose Harvard precisely because of its connection to tech culture.

The College markets Silicon Valley to 500 undergraduates each semester in its most popular class: Computer Science 50. Officially an introductory course, CS 50 functions as a microcosm of corporations like Facebook and Google. It has all the bells and whistles of a Silicon Valley behemoth—free food, T-shirts, a slogan (“This is CS 50”)—giving undergrads a sense of what could await them post-graduation. The class then culminates in a live-streamed festival in which students present their projects in booths,
aren't as different as they appear. Many aim-maimity, the other risk and rebellion—but they ing values—one prizes security and confor-

CEOs up with industry mentors.

grooming pitches and matching budding tion Challenge cultivate student start-ups,
i-lab and the i3 Harvard College Innova-

ferred novels. University resources like the in the same hazy, delirious tone that idle iconoclasts, pitching their nascent startups have the chutzpah to quit college, aspiring to the Next Big Thing. While very few actually tered Palo Alto flophouse as they dream up school to eat ramen on the floor of a cluttered but they want to do with the rest of their lives. Perhaps I was wrong to accuse Silicon Valley of invading Harvard; instead, they were never so separate in the first place.

Sometimes on my nighttime Widener trips I lug my bag of books past CS 50’s office hours, which turn the normal tomblike silence of the elegant second-floor Loker Reading Room into a cacophony of amateur coders typing and laughing and barking questions at passing TFs. It reminds me of a start-up’s open-office workspace: the high ceilings, the lack of cubicles, the programmers clustered around each table illuminated by their laptops’ glow. I know that some of these undergrads will end up working in similar—if less ornate—rooms across the Valley. I picture them, arriving on their first day of work, only to find themselves already at home.

Despite it all, Berta Greenwald Ledecky Fellow Natasha Laskey ’10 is still a Hist and Lit concentrator.

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SPORTS

Growing Pains

A young men’s basketball team battles inconsistency.

IN JANUARY, the men’s basketball team fell 62–56 against Vermont—the Crimson’s third consecutive loss, dropping their record to 5–9, with the Ivy League opener against Dartmouth just days away. The situation looked grim, yet the players spoke optimistically. “It’ll click for us eventually,” said Seth Towns ’20. “Our record,”

services with free WiFi. The job application requires essays, interviews, and tests, not unlike the intellectual acrobatics one goes through to get into an elite college. And in the minds of those undergraduates who aspire to work there, both Silicon Valley and Harvard provide prestige, intellectual fulfillment, and a coddling space in which these still unformed geniuses can figure out what