

Beyond the Gates by Maura Roosevelt

Boston is the city that made me fall in love with all cities. This could be due to the fact that Boston also happens to be the city where I was raised, but it could also be due to the diverse and plentiful activities, neighborhoods and cultures that Boston has to offer. Growing up, I would grab a friend and hop on the T without a second thought, ending up in Charlestown, or the South End, or Allston. Boston seemed to be the ultimate life-size playground, but then a funny thing happened during my first semester at Harvard: I barely left campus.

This tendency, I soon learned, is not a rare occurrence in the Harvard community, and the Harvard administration is all but supporting it. Indeed, Harvard students are very busy people, and we should all definitely be taking advantage of the resources that are offered to us on campus— but since I imagine many of us chose Harvard because of its urban environment, why should we ignore our city now that we're here?

It's not that Harvard had ever explicitly told me to not to venture into the diverse neighborhoods that surround Harvard Square, but the predominant culture of Harvard encourages students to stay within the cocoon of its gates. The student handbook offers little information about activities off campus, and the HUPD's guide to staying safe, the "Playing It Safe" handbook, highlights a recommendation to walk on four "designated paths" throughout the Cambridge campus (for a map of these pathways go to: www.hupd.harvard.edu/designated_paths.php.) While the HUPD has actually mapped out the preferred place they want students to inhabit, it hasn't offered any safe routes for traveling around the city. Perhaps the HUPD believes that the best spots for students is on those paths, and within the greater confines of Harvard's watchful eye... These handbooks say little about public transportation and fail to list major urban cultural events that actually could enrich a student's experience.

A resolution for the new school year should be to get off Harvard's "safe paths." There are seemingly endless neighborhoods and areas easy to get to from Harvard. One of the many things you could do is get on the 66 bus, it'll pick you up right on JFK street, and head over to Allston to check out a tons of small restaurants, or a punk show at Regeneration. Check out other shows at The Abbey in Inman Square. You could take the T the end of the Orange Line, and wander around the Arnold Arboretum on a sunny day, or attend a poetry reading at the Spontaneous Celebrations community center in Jamaica Plain. Heck, just look for events that are close to home, like the World's Fair festival in Central Square, or just go people-watching in Cambridgeport and admire the fact that everyone is not a college student! Riding a bike is a great way to explore the Boston area, and Cambridge is pretty good about having bike lanes. Check out the bicycle safety pamphlets that are offered in the basement of Dudley House.

Just like in any city, though, getting off a "safe" path also means that you need to of course be cautious in your actions and aware of your surroundings. This article's ambition is to inspire people to push out of Harvard's campus, and challenge and enjoy themselves

in different environments; this experience must always include being aware of, and critically examining why one feels safe or not safe in a certain environment. Writer and urban activist Jane Jacobs (RIP), theorizes in her book *The Life and Death of Great American Cities*, that urban neighborhoods are in fact safer than secluded areas like suburbs, because city streets are often populated, and city dwellers tend to look out for each other. If Jacobs' theory interests you, I recommend checking out the aforementioned book, and if you're specifically interested in the history of urban life in Boston, Ronald Formisano's book *Boston Against Busing* discusses not only the "Busing" phenomena of the '70s, but also the cultural and historical character of Boston's different neighborhoods.

Don't get me wrong, one doesn't necessarily need to leave Harvard Square in order to find some gems of Cambridge, but it becomes increasingly important to get off campus as Harvard Square increasingly resembles an outdoor mall. Gentrification, in the form of the corporate takeover of small independent businesses, has transformed the old Harvard Square from a bustling artsy intellectual center, to a land of chain stores. A prime example of the gentrification process happened at the corner of JFK and Eliot Streets. Where the Citizen's Bank now resides, was once a little 24 hour diner called *The Tasty*. The guys behind the counter at *The Tasty* always had a nickname for you, and usually remembered how you liked your grilled cheese sandwich. In 1997 *The Tasty* was bought out, and an Abercrombie and Fitch branch was erected in its place. While the diner was always bustling, the clothing store had more trouble, and after a few years the bank moved in.

Whether the corporation be a bank or a clothing store, neither establishment can replace the personal connection that *The Tasty* brought to Harvard Square. Although this unique establishment and connection is gone from our neighborhood, that kind of connection still exists in many pockets and corners of Boston, and it's just too good to be missed.