

INS & OUTS

GRINNELL SPRING '08

Flowers Never Bend With the Rainfall

• Erin Sindewald '08 • Orland Park, IL • English Major

My armpits dripped with the stinkiest of all sweats: that of the “I’m-really-stressed-out” variety. My heart raced, and I struggled in vain to fight back tears. Here I was, the day before Thanksgiving break during first year, intent on finishing a paper due the next day. My pink and purple folder containing all the meticulously edited drafts of said paper had gone missing.

I cried. I swore. I threw my lobster-shaped pillow across the room. Finally, as it dawned on me that taking my frustration out on my bedfellows was not very productive, I called my friends Calvin and Boyer for help. They came over, dried my tears, and searched all around campus with me until we finally located the folder, tossed lazily on the floor outside the dining hall, below the coat hooks.

Looking back three years later, I’m reminded of what a strong support network I have at Grinnell. During every rough patch, big or small, I’ve always had a swarm of Grinnellians to provide a sympathetic ear, a kind heart, and a limitless supply of hugs. However, I didn’t realize just how remarkable of a community Grinnell was until something tragic actually did happen, something whose seriousness greatly surpassed that of a misplaced folder.

On Thursday, December 13, 2007, around 8 p.m., like many Grinnellians the week before finals, I was sitting on a couch, laptop situated firmly on my lap, feverishly typing away at one of the many papers I had due over the course of the coming week. Then I received The Call from my mom. She had been walking laps with my dad at the Orland Park Sportsplex when he went down. And that was that.

My dad had died.

I do not wish to describe the immense shock that swam over me, or the grief that still clouds my thoughts and daily activities. Rather, I would like to focus on how much my fellow Grinnellians have reached out and supported me in so many ways, making these difficult times infinitely better.

Within 20 minutes of the ill-fated phone call, my good friend Charlie was at my side. Soon after, my friends Meredith, Liz, and Henry joined us on the couch for an evening of hand-holding, hair-stroking, and everything-will-be-all-righting. I fell asleep in the arms of Mer and Liz.

When I awoke the next morning, two other friends, Ben and Sarah, were waiting for me downstairs, bearing organic chocolate bars from the bookstore and giant hugs. Later, Colette showed up with a delicious veggie wrap from Comeback Café for lunch. As the hours passed, more and more people kept dropping in: running buddies, neighbors, classmates, my cross country coach. Although the mood was somber, being surrounded by all these caring people made it feel almost like a house party in the middle of a Friday afternoon. I was the guest of honor, blubbing in my bathrobe, but letting myself be distracted and entertained by

the amazing group of people gathered in my living room.

And although the wake and funeral services took place the weekend before finals, two friends (and one alum) made the four-hour trek from Grinnell to my Chicago suburb to attend. Not only did they bring their loving presences, but they also brought an enormous care package of cards, letters, cookies, and even a jar of a homemade tomato-based substance from Grinnellians back at school. The tomato-y jar actually brought some much needed humor to the afternoon as it allowed me to sit around for quite some time with my aunts and cousins debating whether the jar contained salsa or soup. (I found out later it was salsa. And it was delicious.)

The loving gestures continued to reach me even from afar. My housemates and I

had been planning a holiday party to hold as a finals week study break, but due to my extenuating circumstances, I was unable to attend. In my absence, Meredith lit a candle at the party in memory of my father. She also provided all the guests with scraps of paper for them to write me notes of love, encouragement, and strength. When I returned to campus a few days later in order to retrieve the rest of my belongings for winter break, I was greeted with all these wonderful messages.

It’s been a rough couple of months, to say the least, but I am grateful I have so many amazing people in my life to remind me of all the good in the world. My dad once told me, “Erin, we only get so many moments like this.” Now I understand more than ever how right he was.



Grinnell's Green Thumbs

• Hart Ford-Hodges '10 • Pittsburg, PA • Biology Major

The transition from small farms and backyard gardens to centralized agriculture has distanced us from our food. We no longer know who grows our food or how they grow it. This, in turn, distances us from our environment and community. Large-scale monocultures leave our soils vulnerable to erosion and let chemicals leach into our groundwater. Our reliance on prepared foods from grocery stores instead of whole foods from local farms weakens our local economy and our community’s health. This food system is unsustainable and harmful.

Fortunately, the status quo is gradually changing as local, small-scale producers receive more recognition and support. Grinnell College has started to be a part of that change. Students have encouraged the dining hall to incorporate more local foods into the menu. With the growing interest in agriculture on campus, small groups of students are also working to revitalize the

Community Garden on campus.

This fall, Grinnellians rolled out of bed early on Saturday morning to get their hands dirty in the garden, clearing out weeds, laying down compost, and planting seeds. They transformed plots of canary grass and past-their-prime tomatoes into a four-season harvest garden with hardy greens and root vegetables. This transformation was made possible with the construction of cold frames and hoop houses, small structures that act as miniature greenhouses and protect plants from the frost. We enjoyed carrots and beets, fresh from the garden, in late November. The mistakes we made along the way created opportunities for innovation and laughter. For instance, we experimented with three different hoop houses before settling on a version that survived the Iowa winds.

Because each person contributes a unique skill set to the garden projects, we teach each other and learn from

each other. With his enthusiasm for building and tinkering, Sam Calisch '10 designed and built an 80-gallon rain catchment system that supplied the garden with fresh, clean water all semester. Elyssa Mopper '11 led a vermiculture workshop and has helped the garden develop an effective composting system. Students living off-campus and cooks for the Vegan Co-op trudge down to the garden — even in snowy weather — to return their kitchen scraps to the land instead of to the landfill. Over fall break, a group of students, staff, and local people replastered the walls of the straw-bale tool shed.

With such a diverse group, we have been able to accomplish much more than just grow a few vegetables. We have laid the foundation for sustainable, interconnected system that captures rainwater, returns waste to natural cycles, and models natural building practices. By connecting students to the land and the food they eat,

the garden has also inspired other initiatives on campus.

The Local Foods Co-op, supported by Dean Porter '10, Ami Freeberg '10, and Erica Hougland '10, has connected students to Paul’s Grains, an organic producer in Laurel, Iowa. Nathan Pavloic '10, Alex Reich '11, and Caitlin Vaughan '10 are spearheading a movement to establish EcoHouse, a College-owned house that would model sustainable living practices and nurture a community of environmentally sensitive activists. This summer, I will be staying in Grinnell, along with Alex Reich '11, Eric Nost '09, and Meredith Groves '08 to coordinate a local foods initiative funded through the Davis Foundation.

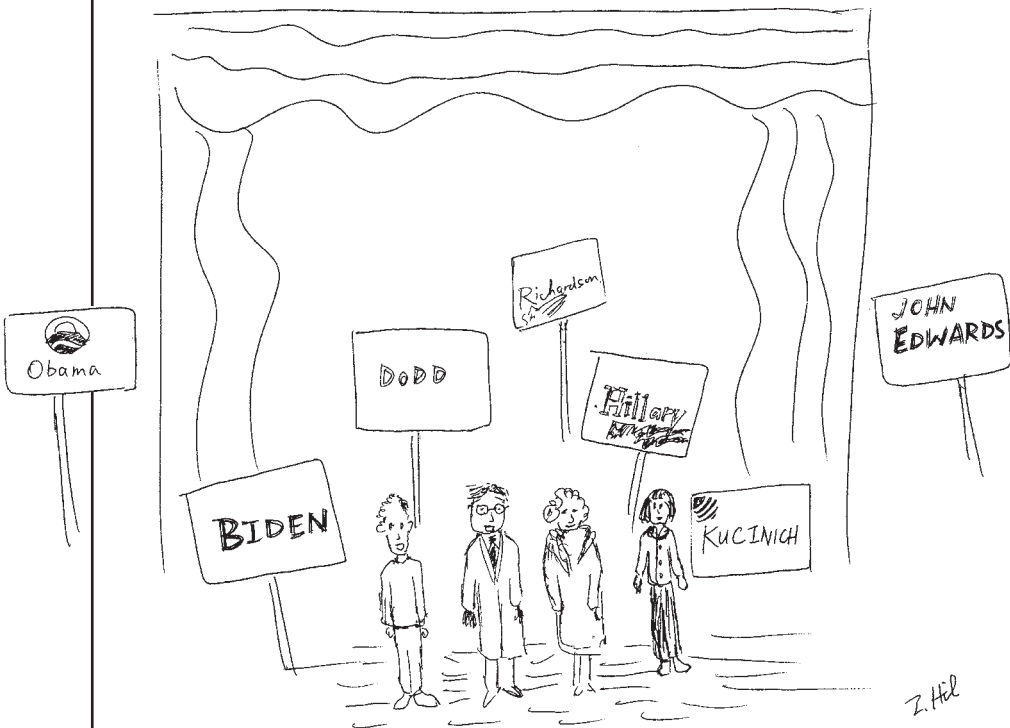
The garden focuses and unifies diverse forms of activism, all seeking to nurture the land and our communities. It creates space for us to gather as a community to work, eat, laugh, and learn together.

Caucus Season

• Smita Elena Sharma '08 • Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia • Philosophy Major

The Iowa caucuses came a few weeks early this time around, on a chilly evening three days into the new year. College was out, and winter break was on for another three weeks. There was no reason for us students to be around town. None, that is, but for the excitement of participating, whether watching or voting, in the first part of a yearlong process that will determine the next president of the United States of America.

But this article is not about the specific procedures of the Iowa caucuses. That may be of interest to the political science major, but for me personally, it's more interesting to watch the coming together of a community. Perhaps for the first time ever, I was able to see democracy in action. And not just any democracy, but a specifically Iowan democracy that emphasises acting as a community.



Un Feliz Año Nuevo en Guatemala

• Stephanie Rosenbaum '08 • Glencoe, IL • Spanish Major

As a travelin' woman, I'm proud to say that I have never spent New Year's Eve at home during my time in college. My first year, I spent time in Overland Park, Kan., with a friend from school, along with her friends from home. Second year, I was on a flight to Israel when the clock struck midnight. Third year, my high school friends and I watched the ball drop from Milwaukee, Wis.

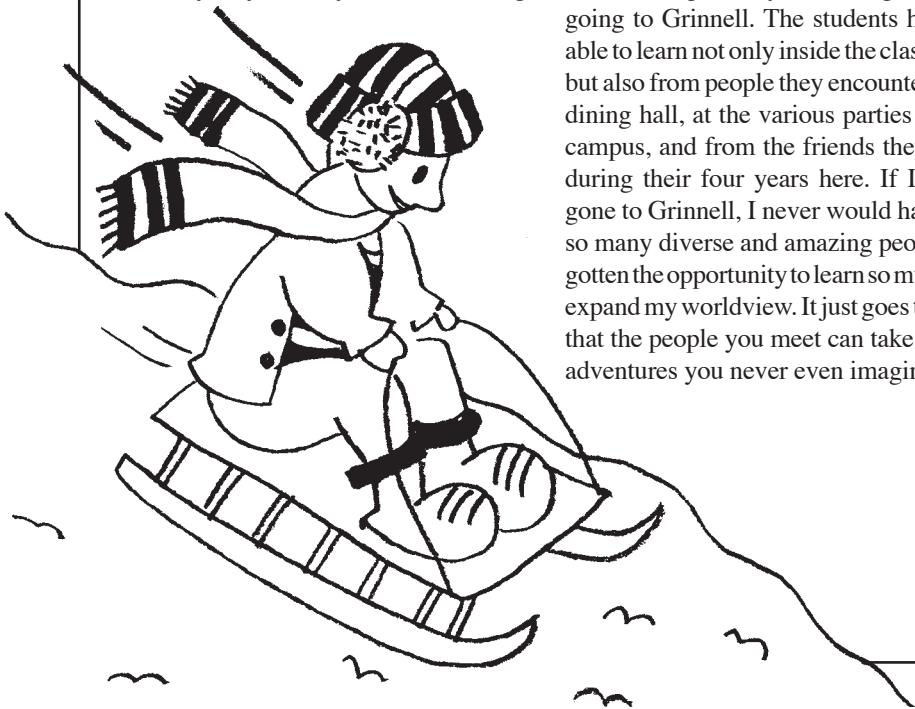
Even with all these amazing experiences, I must say that my senior year New Year's Eve was by far the most memorable. I mean, not everyone can say they watched fireworks from the beach in Guatemala.

My best friend, Camila Alarcon '08, is from the beautiful Central American country of Guatemala. We've been friends since the end of our first year. Ever since we met, she has been on my case about coming to visit her during a break. I was finally able to save up enough to go this past winter break, and the trip was well worth the wait. I'm from a suburb of Chicago, and the day I left the weather in the Windy City was abysmal. I'm talking

wind, sleet, and snow that even a postal worker wouldn't tolerate. Arriving in warm, breezy Guatemala City was the perfect remedy for wintertime blues.

I spent two weeks with Camila and her family in Guatemala this winter break. Apart from the fantastic New Year's on the beach, we did everything from tanning on the beach and watching the waves roll in off the Pacific Ocean, to climbing ancient Mayan ruins in Tikal, to exploring crypts in 17th-century cathedrals in Antigua. I ate traditional Guatemalan food (and would recommend the beans to anyone), fed crocodiles part of my breakfast, and danced in clubs in La Zona Vive. It was a perfect vacation. Her family and friends were so welcoming (and a bit impressed that I knew un poco de español), that I felt completely comfortable and at home. When it was time to leave, I didn't want to go! It was a great opportunity to not only meet the family and friends of someone I had known for four years, but also to experience a culture and lifestyle completely different from anything I knew growing up in Glencoe, Ill.

That's probably the best part about going to Grinnell. The students here are able to learn not only inside the classroom, but also from people they encounter in the dining hall, at the various parties around campus, and from the friends they make during their four years here. If I hadn't gone to Grinnell, I never would have met so many diverse and amazing people and gotten the opportunity to learn so much and expand my worldview. It just goes to show that the people you meet can take you on adventures you never even imagined!



My friend Vicki and I headed to Harris Concert Hall after a pre-caucus dinner at my downtown apartment. We were feeling all grown-up and excited, and still quite unsure about our support for Barack Obama. Along the way, we met another friend, Abby, who announced her intention to vote for John Edwards. In trying to argue Obama's case, I think we did a better job convincing ourselves than we did her. Of course, my "vote" would have been academic, that is to say, moot. I am not a citizen of this country, let alone a registered Democrat. Thus I could only talk to others and watch the process itself.

We got to a very crowded Harris Center and joined the queue to register. As an independent observer, I had to sit on the stage apart from the registered Democrats. Some 500 people were in the auditorium. The mass slowly assembled into distinct groups, each bearing a banner proclaiming their candidate for president of the U.S.A. Each, that is, except for the six adults gathered in support of Dennis Kucinich and the lone woman who was supporting an also-ran whose name I forget. Obama and Edwards polled the biggest numbers — about 240 and 170 respectively. Perhaps more surprisingly, Clinton's contingent was small: she had about 40 supporters, while 72 were required to attain viability (or in plain speak, to gain a delegate).

Only one student caucused for her, perhaps in retaliation for her fudging on the issue of whether "out-of-town" students should rightfully be allowed to vote here. Don Smith, a retired history professor known for his genteel Southern charm, presided over the proceedings.

And so I sat onstage and watched. I saw people trying to make up their own minds about which candidate to support and trying to persuade others to agree with them. I heard people talk to each other about politics and about the weather and about travel plans. I exchanged greetings with faculty members, college staff, students, and the few parents of my friends who came down to see Iowa's famous caucuses for themselves.

A couple in their 50s sat next to me, and we started talking. They turned out to be the parents of a friend who graduated last year. Talking to them, I realized why Grinnell appeals to me so much. Whether in politics or in ordinary conversations with almost-strangers, Grinnellians are polite, warm, and firmly invested in the everyday activities in which they engage. The Iowa caucuses are an important political mechanism, but more than that, they are also a manifestation of community at its best: all these people together in one room, trying to make a difference in the world.

All that Jazz

• Henry Reich '09 • Mahtomedi, MN • Physics Major

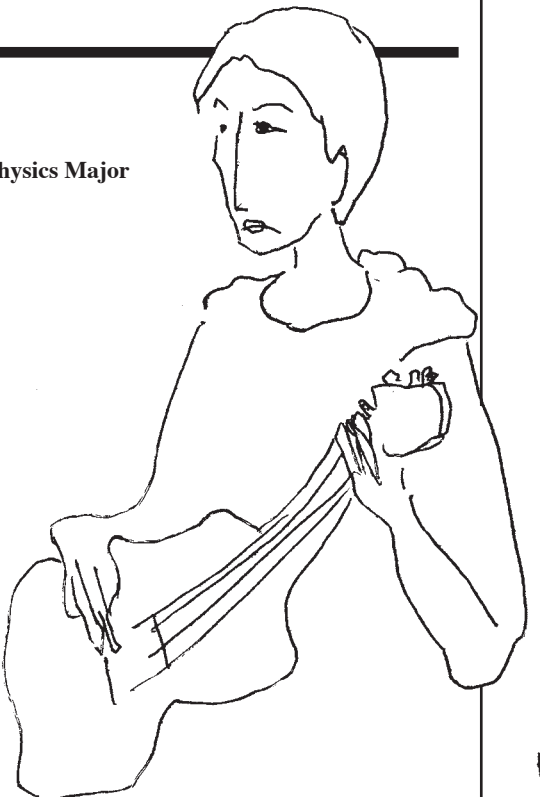
It's late on a Monday night. I rush down the dark stairs to the basement of Main Hall and pull open the door to Bob's Underground Café. The wail of a trombone echoes from down the entryway, the piano and bass comp cool through the changes to "So What," and each slap of the high hat matches my footfall.

I slink down the corridor and the band comes into sight — trumpet, sax, drums, and cymbals all reflecting red and yellow light as the pianist sips an iced chai, playing one-handed. I walk up to the stage, and the 'bone player stares at me over the golden bell of his horn. The drummer rolls his eyes. I'm late.

Just about every Monday night, musicians make their way to this lonely corner of campus to stretch their wrists, loosen their chops, and tear through jazz charts for two hours, maybe more. They come from all walks of life: music, Spanish, and physics majors; first-years, seniors, and everything in between; music teachers; tennis and Frisbee players and cross country runners. They come from funk, classical, bluegrass, big band, Latin, or rock backgrounds. But they all jam over the same familiar tunes, each time with a different twist, a new solo improvised for that night only. Tonight they fill space with cool Ellington and heat the room with Herbie Hancock '60.

And students flock to Bob's, filling the couches, tables, and booths. Some swing dance in the entryway, while others wait in line for a cup of coffee from a quirky barista. Most study, or pretend to study, getting cozy with a monster textbook or taking revenge on a dozing friend with a highlighter. Papers and laptops are strewn across tables between bagels and mugs. At one table, two guys lean over a chessboard, each concentrating on his move and then turning to chat with friends.

Maybe people come to listen to the



music, or they read better with background noise, or they just want to hang out with friends. Maybe they'd be here whether there was a show or not. I wouldn't know — I only come on Mondays. But even the workers behind the counter seem to be enjoying themselves, tapping their feet and dancing a quiet little dance of their own when no one's in line.

Especially on cold winter nights, Bob's is a cozy beacon shining out from the south side of campus, slowly drawing students away from the still bookshelves of the library or the cramped confines of a dorm and into a vibrant pool of community.

Of course, I'm here for the music. I stand for a moment, letting the beat pulse through my hands, my fingers shaping the notes of the next line before the sound hits my ears. The chatter swirls around me in the background, but the melody beckons.

I throw open my case, but no shiny brass greets me here. I run my fingers over the warm grain of my fiddle, then lift it out and tweak the strings into tune. The drums crescendo as I jump out in front of the piano and into the middle of the song.

Grinnell is Swell

• Molly Rideout '10 • Madison, WI • English Major

Grinnell and Carleton. Those were my top two college choices when I applied. I'll be truthful — Carleton was my top choice. I had a friend going there, and he sounded like he was having a lot of fun. "Oh man!" I thought. "I wanna have fun too!" I hadn't figured out by this point that most people have fun at their school; that's why they chose it.

I'll be truthful again: I got wait-listed at Carleton. So while I hung around to hear back from them, I went to go check out Grinnell. I drove down here for an overnight stay and was 100 percent terrified. I'm not a big fan of stepping out of my comfort box, and I considered sleeping on a stranger's floor in a state I'd never even stepped foot in before as definitely outside the box.

My host picked me up at the admission office and took me over to her dorm. We made small talk, and by small talk, I mean I'm-really-outside-of-my-element-here-someone-please-take-me-back-to-high-school nervous talk. Then I noticed this giant paper clock on the wall next to her room, divided into 12 sections, each with a different location on it (Food, Burling, Class, etc). There were several hands on this clock, each with — as I soon learned — the name of one of my host's roommates on it.

That's right, they had built themselves a Wesley family clock from the Harry Potter books. It took me about five more minutes of small not-so-nervous-anymore-because-you-guys-are-awesome talk for me to realize that, forget Carleton, this was the place for me.

Actually, the clock was just one of many little tip-offs I got as a prospective student at Grinnell. There was also a shirt. Specifically a T-shirt worn by a rather attractive friend of my host, a shirt that came from the same webcomic as the one I was wearing. It was the connection to the webcomic that gave me the clue: maybe I was in the right place. It wasn't the attractiveness of the guy wearing it (but while that didn't influence my decision, it was nice that Grinnell students turned out to be about 41 times more attractive

than any possible prospects I had at my high school).

After that initial awkward walk, I felt more at ease, as if I was with people who could understand me. I hung out with a handful of Grinnellians and one other prospective student who was visiting at the same time (whom I forgot all about, only to later re-meet in my American Lit class three semesters later). We played Loggia Frisbee, which meant I got to run around on the roof of our first-floor walkways catching Frisbees thrown from the ground. Wicked fun, even if my catching skills matched that of, say, a T-rex. But a T-rex who was thoroughly enjoying herself!

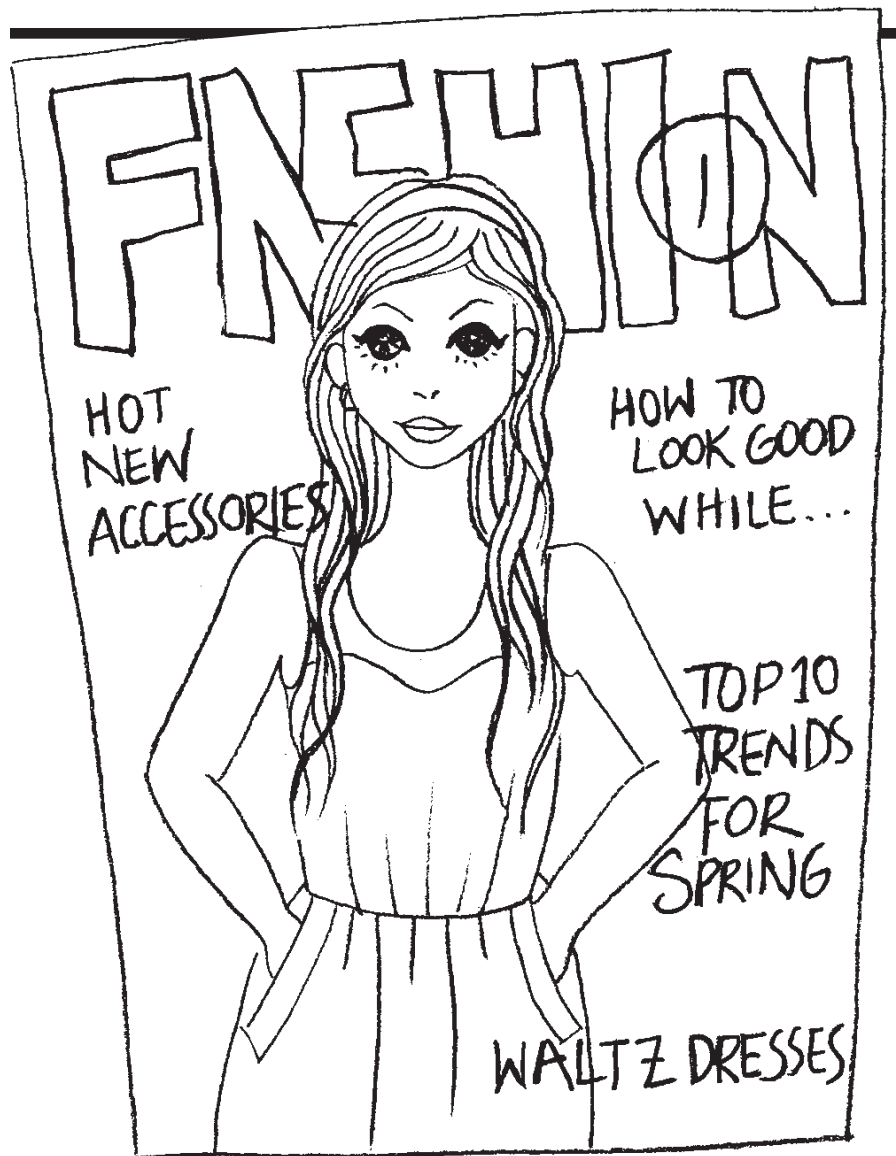
Some people talk about a sign they received in the final decision-making moments — a sign that somehow told them they needed to go to Grinnell. Someone got cut off in traffic by a car with a bumper sticker from her other top school. Another met a Grinnellian in their as-far-away-from-Iowa-as-possible hometown. While I was still deciding, I learned that my own hometown was like a Grinnellian super-magnet or something, because Grinnell people were popping up out of the woodwork. My across-the-street neighbor's mother was a librarian at Grinnell; the mother of the family I babysat for was an alum; the son of a woman in my mother's exercise class had just been hired by Grinnell's English department.

Grinnell just wouldn't leave me alone!

I never regretted choosing Grinnell over Carleton. And often, such as when I'm running off to the *Star Wars* trivia contest where I'm maybe only the 34th most knowledgeable person there, I'm thankful I decided to come to here.

"Your father and I didn't want to say anything to influence your decision," my mom said to me after I'd sent in my housing application to Grinnell, "but we never thought Carleton would have worked for you."

And as parents usually are (much to our disgruntlement), they were totally right.



Bare Feet and Name Brands: The Fashion Scene at Grinnell

• Tiffany Au '09 • Honolulu, HI • Political Science Major

Many Grinnellians pride themselves on adopting countercultural attitudes, breaking social constructs, and going against mainstream fads. More important, we also pride ourselves on being liberal and open-minded. These characteristics have served as the basis for many innovative activities and unique endeavors — from realizing the hypothetical (as in the founding of a fake campus newspaper) to the outlandish (as in participating shamelessly in cross-dressing parties).

So I was surprised when there was such a significant opposition to the creation of Grinnell College's very first fashion magazine, *Sensuelle*. Apparently, some people think an interest in fashion equals social deviance. Truthfully, the fashion magazine grew out of my personal worry that in our efforts to set ourselves apart from the mainstream and traditional ideas of what is appropriate, we had become what we had worked so hard to counter: narrow-minded.

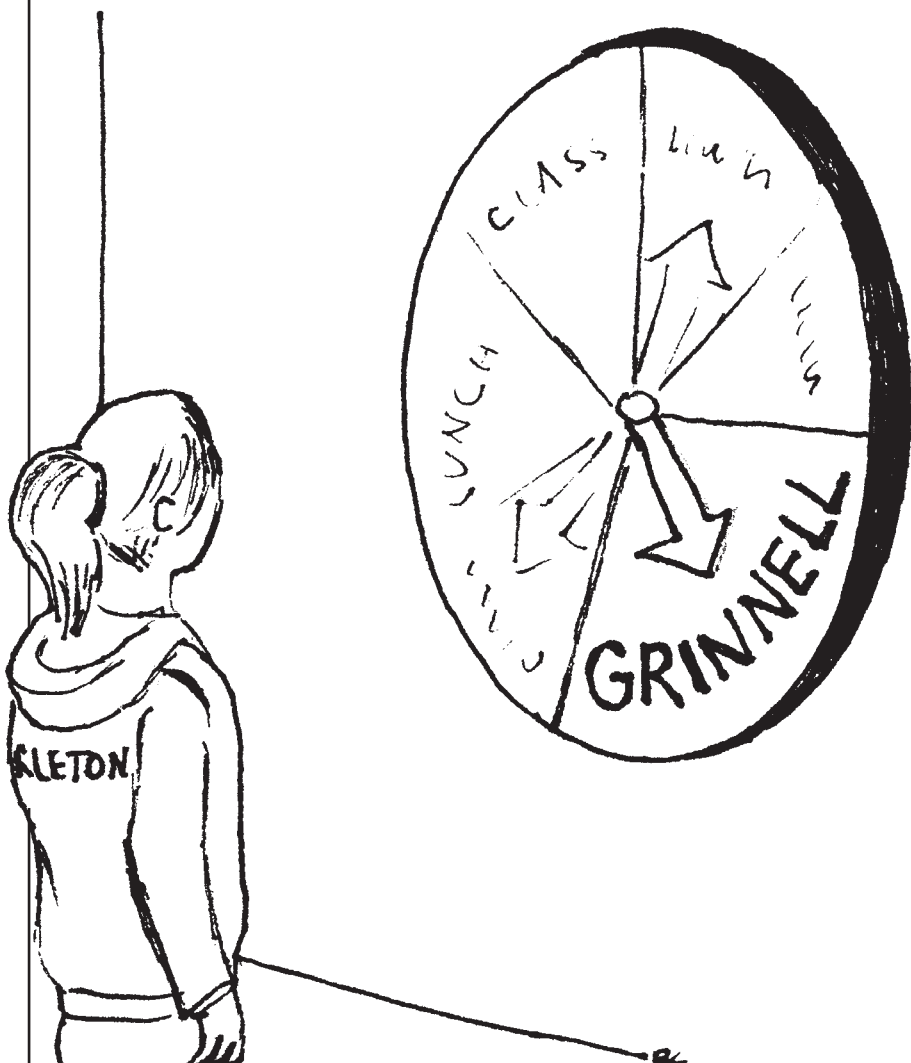
Some people make the mistake of thinking that the term "fashion" means *haute couture* or Paris runway. They complained that combining the words "Grinnell" and "fashion" is incongruous and paradoxical — in other words, extremely un-Grinnellian. For example, a fellow student told me, "There are much more important priorities than worrying about how we look." However, whether students wear the same T-shirt five days in a row, sport pajamas and hoodies, don sports jerseys and jackets, walk around barefoot, flash name brands, or wear vintage and grunge garb, they all do so with intent — either to reveal or to hide a part of their identity, and to disclose other aspects of themselves. I believe people wear what they do for a blatant or latent reason, despite clothing's apparent functional purposes.

My interest in the semiotics of fashion began after several experiences on campus made me realize that appear-

ances do matter, especially in terms of how people treat and view each other and themselves. I wanted *Sensuelle* to celebrate the diverse and unique fashion and stylistic attitudes of Grinnellians, as well as to provide a safe space for all to share personal advice and stories and exchange ideas about what they think of Grinnell fashion. Furthermore, I wanted to analyze shifts in attitudes about dress, its correlation or lack thereof to social status, and the relationship between preconceived notions about people based on their superficial appearance, and their true selves.

Now, it would be unfair to say that Grinnell College's coursework had no influence on the start-up of *Sensuelle*. Sociology, for example, taught me to understand that subcultures exist at Grinnell, many of which are differentiated by certain stylistic differences. Anthropology taught me there is danger in thinking our lifestyles and choices are superior to those we do not understand (which made me more sensitive to style-centrism). My political science courses taught me there are various faces or influences affecting us daily — every choice, even those regarding clothing, is a result of past and present societal dictates.

Creating *Sensuelle* has deeply enriched my college experience and made me realize not only how much Grinnell College has changed my perspective, but also the power of the human will. If you really want to do something, you can, no matter how silly it may appear to others. I achieved what I set out to accomplish: Grinnellians' stories are out there! Furthermore, working on the fashion magazine has been extremely fun and has allowed me to talk to interesting people I never knew before. This experience has shown me that if we just take some time to get to know people outside our usual social circles — sporting clothing that may be quirky or unconventional — we may find out how much we actually have in common.



Floored by Read Second

• Elizabeth Bologna '08 • Fairfield, CT • English/History Major

Sometimes in college residence halls, there are floors so great their inhabitants are designated by floor name. My first year, there were “those kids from Loose Second.” The next year, it was “those kids from D First.” I was always sort of mystified. How could people who had seemingly nothing but geography in common become so close?

Then, in my senior year, I moved to Read Second.

Read Second is a magical place. Representing all four classes (although heavy on the seniors), the floor includes people from all over the country (and out of it), with majors ranging from chemistry to studio art. It is without a doubt my favorite place on campus. All the inhabitants are so relaxed and amusing, and we can get pretty silly at times. I've seen people chased up and down the hallway by someone waving a stinky air freshener. Other times, people leave leftover food from their dining hall sack lunches on the table down the hall so hungry floormates can enjoy it. On any given day, there are usually cookies or apples or mini carrots waiting to pick up the spirits of some poor ravenous paper-writer in the middle of a late night of homework.

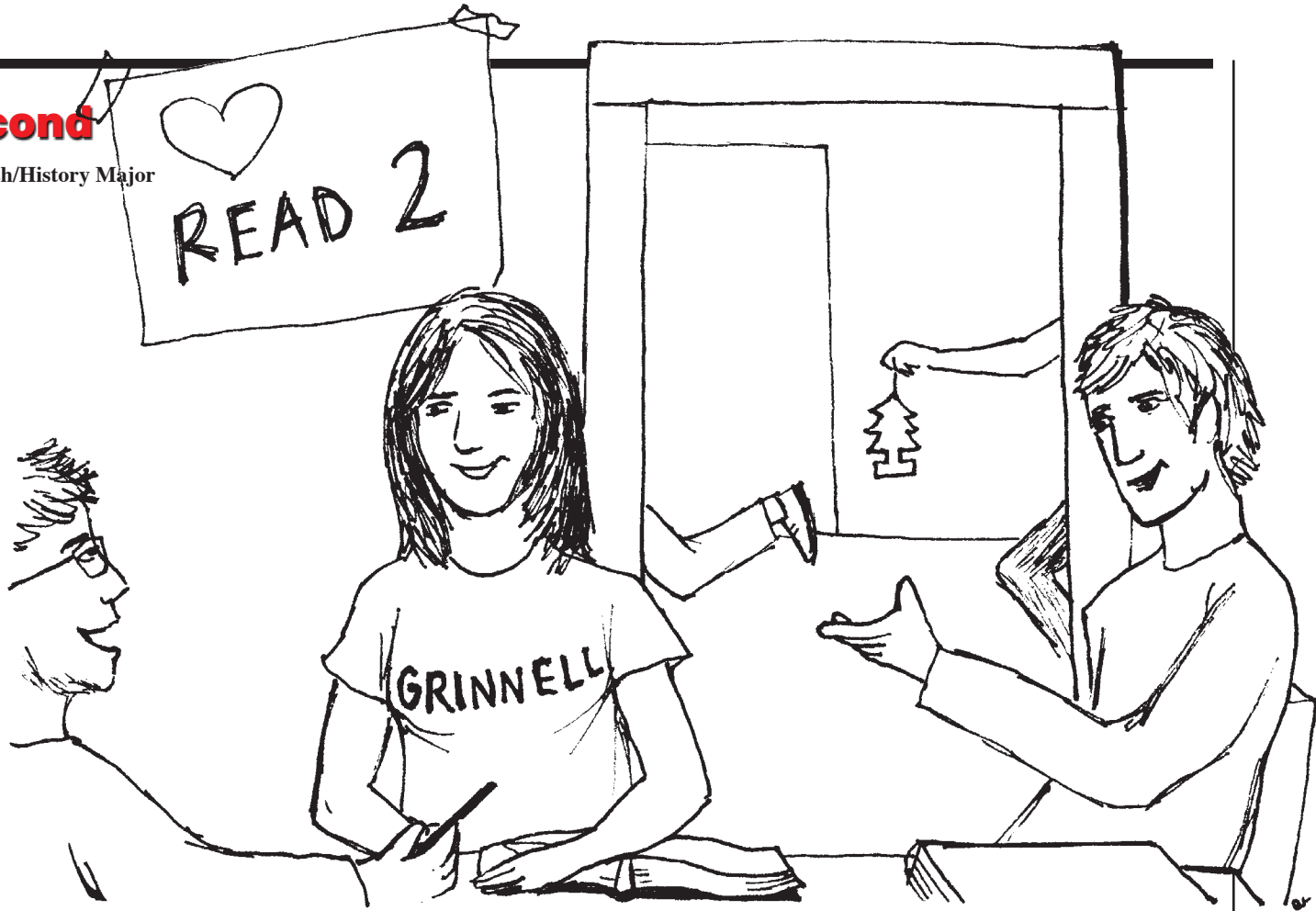
One night, we had a huge floor get-together and ate pizza while making collages on the walls. Someone had salvaged a stack of 40-year-old *Smithsonian Magazines* about to be thrown away. We had incredible photos to choose from. The walls look amazing now. Everyone who comes on the floor now gets the collage gallery tour. My

favorite is the wall of fictional Read Second alumni, which includes Albert Einstein, Lord Byron, Ashton Kutcher, a baby howler monkey, and a man wearing a squid on his head.

Of course, Read Second can foster seriousness as well. I've always had trouble studying in my room, because I tend to distract myself too well (just five minutes to check my e-mail turns into an hour on the Internet). But now, we have homework parties. Throughout the night people drift into one room or another and settle down to study. Whether it's my room or someone else's, it isn't unusual to walk onto the floor and see eight people crammed into

one room, hunched over their books and physics problemsets. I wouldn't exactly say it makes homework fun, but it does make the experience less painful. Periodically, someone will ask the definition of a word or point out something cool in his or her reading, and we get distracted and start chatting. It usually doesn't last too long, and we all settle in again. These study parties create a nice atmosphere, and we've started attracting people from other floors because of it. I have friends who will trek across campus — sometimes even from off-campus — just to do homework with us. And who can blame them? Sometimes there are snacks!

I love living on a floor where I know everyone and I love being surrounded by my friends. It makes the entire dorm feel like home, instead of just my room. Having a single is nice, and I certainly don't want to go back to sharing the mirror with a roommate every morning, but it can get lonely. With a floor like this, it's the perfect balance of friendly faces and personal space. Want to procrastinate? Wander down to a friend's room. Want to focus? Close the door and write that paper. It's the best of both worlds. Which is why Read is the best dorm on campus, and no one will convince me otherwise.



INS & OUTS

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