

by Rebecca Clark

I came to Bennington to escape from mathematics. And I know I wasn't the only one. It's not the best of reasons, and certainly isn't the only reason, but I admit it; I could never do long division. When I was a senior in high school, the thought of having to spend the next four years in countless classrooms doing things I hated, things that should only be done with a calculator, was horrifying. I had just finished my first sixteen years of school and the last thing on my list of things that excited me was another minute of algebra. I wanted to read and I wanted to write and I didn't want to have to forego Stendahl because I was trying to figure out what type of animal a logarithm was.

In my four years here I have done just that. I have learned to love the subjects I have studied here and thoroughly enjoyed the inspiration I have felt from teachers that are also writers, also painters, also actors who are teaching us what THEY love.

I'm not really sure of the best way to sum up four years of college in one speech. As I thought about it more and more I decided that I really couldn't and finally, that I didn't want to. I think if I could put it all into five minutes it wouldn't be a sincere or accurate account of the time I have spent here. I have learned and experienced so much and am in many ways a very different person from the eighteen year old I was when I arrived. As I look around at some of the people who have gone through Bennington with me, I see stronger, more confident people who KNOW that they are special and destined to make a difference with the work they will do.

The college years are some of the most important growing years in our lives. Certainly, I would have grown no matter where I had been or what I had been doing during these last four years. Had I been pumping jelly into doughnuts on the midnight shift or raising children, or even just wandering the streets looking for another bottle of Thunderbird, I would have been having experiences and learning from them. I am glad I chose college over any other path I could have taken, and glad that I was given that choice. Not everyone is fortunate enough to be able to go to college and I know that we all understand and appreciate the wonderful opportunity we have been given. I like to think we have all made the most of these years and have lived through them without regrets. Or at least, without too many regrets.

At Bennington most of us have seen the end of our teenage years and the beginning of a third decade. It was here that we got our first taste of freedom and independence, our first opportunity to see how really disgusting we could let our rooms become, to see how many nights in a row we could stay awake before losing our ability to speak English. It is true, some of us had some adjusting to do and not all of us knew what to do with our unsupervised spare time. I like to think that my classmates and I used our time as wisely as most college freshmen do: we learned to knit, volunteered our services to the local nursing home, and discovered new ways to cook vegetables. We chose our courses with care, making sure that we could leave every Thursday during the fall term to go home for a long weekend with our parents. We spent three hours at lunch eating cookies and jello so we could

assure our parents that we were indeed eating. Sometimes I had some spinach when I felt a twinge of homesickness. Time passed quickly. All of a sudden, just when we were getting used to college life, it changed dramatically and sophomore year began.

In a flash we were almost adults, experienced veterans of college, respected authorities on the inner workings of Bennington and one year closer to a senior thesis and a senior show. But we weren't really worried, most of us weren't yet consciously aware of the six thousand pages of writing or the fourteen million paintings awaiting our attention in two year's time. We reminisced about the good old days of our freshman year and made fun of the new freshmen, irresponsible kids who didn't appreciate all of the free time at their disposal. Some of us became sad and unable to cope with the fact that there were people who were actually having more fun and cooking more vegetables in more innovative ways than we had. We submitted our sophomore tentative plans, all of us running back and forth to our friends for advice, holding house votes as to what we should major in. We spent a little less time at the nursing home and a little more time with Shakespeare. Soon thereafter, halfway into a good party, we realized that we were juniors.

Again we reminisced about the good old days, and as all good upperclassmen do, we made fun of the freshmen who were, in turn, making fun of us because they were sure that we thought that we knew everything. Well, we didn't... not until we were seniors.

At the dawn of senior year we had emerged from the primordial puddle and entered the homo erectus era. We drank coffee in Commons with our teachers, whom we no longer needed to avoid in

the mailroom because we had become physically unable to miss classes. We could smile confidently and cheerfully at all who passed, knowing that we had finally figured out the secret formula for turning in papers on time. Spring term arrived and we were all beginning to chew our fingernails. At midterm, most of us were down to the first knuckle. We had writer's block, painter's elbow, welding burns, and an umbilical attachment to a coffee pot. We were on a first name basis with the deliverymen at Minuteman pizza. We screamed and yelled and wondered if our parents would still love us if we stayed just one more term to finish things up. But in the end, we finished it. We looked at our work and realized that we were honestly done, that we had accomplished something really remarkable and individual, and we all took a deep breath.

As of June the eleventh we are on our own. I can't help but wonder how many jobs there really are out there. I mean, are there enough for all of the college students graduating all over the country? Well, my guess is that there aren't, but no one ever said that things would be easy. No one is waiting impatiently for us to arrive on the scene. Every human being is so incredibly important, each special in our own way. Being at Bennington has made me realize how individual everyone is, I know now that I am important, what I do counts and I can make a difference. This is a big planet and there's room for all of us on it, but it's up to us to use the tools we have acquired here to do the best that we possibly can.

Good bye and thank you for everything. I'll miss you all.