

Galley  
April 1, 1965

( The following is a copy of a letter I recently sent to a friend in high school. Because I like Bennington and want to express my appreciation for the school in this time of "crisis," I am circulating this galley.)

Dear Mary,

Now that nearly a year has passed, I think that my impressions of Bennington are sufficiently clear and may be some aid to you in choosing a college next year.

Truly "this is the best of all possible worlds." Set in bucolic splendor and removed from men and the city, we can pursue self-development without distraction. Despite some recent complaints, students here are remarkably free. We can sign out to motels or Williams, serve liquor (except to the faculty at parties), even smoke "pot" with impunity (unless we are very foolish and let ourselves get caught). Experimentation in every way, in every realm, is encouraged by the rules and urged by the upper classmen, and there are virtually no penalties.

What the school is teaching is internal discipline, which can be developed only through experimentation, even if daring. Occasional mistakes are made, but they are seldom dangerous or beyond remedy. (My roommate is the only girl in our house in trouble right now.) Generally students are careful and responsible.

Most of the girls are very intelligent, very articulate, very decisive, very poised, and very creative. There are many skilled musicians, fine poets, superb dancers. Some of the girls are very social; a few are members of the "jet set," leaving for long weekends in the Bahamas or Florida with well-heeled, dashing playboys; but they are also fine and responsible students. During the week, work comes first; we are serious students. In the houses and in commons, we talk mostly about intellectual problems--from existentialism or myth in literature to civil rights and Viet Nam. We have become very political, and now picket and march, as well as speculate and analyse. This is one of the best student bodies and maybe the best college in the country. Admittedly, most of us have trouble with math or science, but nobody cares and most agree that these subjects are unimportant, unrelated to life, irrelevant to the human condition. Admittedly, college board scores are not uniformly high, but that is, as you know, because many of us can not take examinations. We become tense and anxious; we lose our poise and go blank. Fortunately, most faculty realize that exams are foolish: they test only "canned" or crammed information, which quickly evaporates. Instead, we have papers, many papers, which allow us to express originality and creativity and to probe to the essence of problems.

Of course we have problems. Some of the girls are "preppy" and there are some who "collaborate" with the administration, which is "spying" on us. But we are organizing to halt the encroachments on our freedoms. Most of the administration and faculty have faith in us, and we justify that faith. Basically, what is so wonderful about Bennington is the mutual respect, which is warranted.

M.D.