

#12 Hollis Hall
Harvard U.
Cambridge, Mass.

Boston, Mass.
Mar 5
10:30 PM
1950

Miss Sally B. Loving
5817 North Washington Blvd.
Arlington, Virginia

Dear Miss Loving,

I appreciated your letter more than you could ever realize. I am glad that you wrote and told frankly the reactions that you had from reading my letter and talking to me during Christmas. I more or less sensed that my relationships with my former high school friends weren't quite what they should have been.

Really, I was sort of prepared for the worst when I returned home over the vacation. My grades were low, I hadn't made any startling accomplishments at all, and, above all, I still was just plain Joe Rothrock, with little or no tangible appearances for having spent a half year at Harvard. Charlie Grey, Art, and all the rest seemed to have only made themselves into better personalities and more mature people full of love for their respective colleges. In short, they had all become college leaders so to speak; (and had all done well in their studies) and that I had been reduced to little or nothing, first in my own eyes when compared to them, and second, in their eyes the only consolation I received was comparing my college courses and professors with theirs, and I found that most of my studies were basically the best, especially in history. Then too, I have more opportunities to hear lectures etc. by the top in the country and I also know that I am in the toughest competition in the whole country, for Harvard got the highest average on the college boards, and I can see for my self that many, many of the guys up here are real students, they glory in the place, and they are brilliant. I don't want you to think that I putting too much emphasis on such things as the college boards, etc, but I was a fairly average student in high school and when I compare my work with some of the people up here it gives me a rather hopeless feeling. Boys come to this school to study for the most part they are not well rounded, few have been in sports and so on. [Illegible] too I am in a "scholarship" hall, and with the exception of one boy, I received the lowest marks – three C+s and two Cs. Some of my friends spend all their time studying, hour after hour after hour.

You can rightfully conclude then, that Harvard isn't the school for me. And perhaps in the long run, you may be right. It is true that part of my unhappiness was a feeling of inferiority, but another part just as important is the consciousness of my own ideals. This is true more now than during Christmas. Most of the persons up here are what I call "blind egotists" – sort of insensitive to other people, and rather selfish too boot. I have had occasion to hear Arthur

Schlesinger give some lectures on liberalism, and the impression he gave me can be summed up in a sentence. He is the result of this blind egotism, a great scholar, true, but completely insensitive to the real content of people. I don't want to be like him – ha! – he really isn't even a man. What I want to do is put myself above myself, to forget my own petty indulgences, prejudices, selfishness, and self centered thoughts, to truly be a Christian with faith in God and not just clean morals. If I could but reach half the success that A. Schlesinger has, yet still retain some of these ideals I hold, I would be content. Of course I'll never consciously be able to say that I have reached them, but though the hardest effort, some thing that really takes courage and maturity, I might do it. But as you say, Harvard could do things to me that I can't help, still, since I feel that I am not a "blind" person, since I do realize I what is really good and life, I'm confident that I will succeed. Lately, this has been my chief trouble, for my grades, my ability to study and learn, for my grades, have been on the up and up. I'm averaging a B in at least three of my courses this term, and its done wonders for me.

Now – there I one more point I'd like to bring out about Harvard and me – and it is, excluding the academic opportunities and soon. All of what I have thus far said more or less ties in with it, too. As already said, an inferiority complex and the stiffest competition, plus the fact that much of the environment is adverse to my own ideals, makes things awfully rough. At times I've thought of quitting the whole darned idea of a college education, especially Harvard. But I didn't and now I'm doing a little better scholastically, and I've been made to confront with social and ideological barriers that have not altogether beaten me – but instead, have suddenly made me come to realize that the right kind of life, that success, and that good marks don't just "come." For the first time in my life I've been put out away from the most suitable conditions for [illegible] attainment of success (mainly Washington-Lee & 4204 8th Road North) and have been forced to rely completely on my own self. In a sense it is pre Rothrock discovering that things don't "come," that he isn't pre-determined to always be a good person with success at every term. It is Joe Rothrock finding himself by himself under the toughest conditions, Now I know that its going to take effort to reach my ideals and success. – As for Charlie and Grey and Art – they have gone away to smaller schools where perhaps competition isn't so rough – where there are definite standards of success such as [illegible] and grades and glee clubs etc. – (Where there aren't a 100 guys as good as or better trying to get in) – where the atmosphere is decidedly more friendly and were people perhaps aren't quite the blind egotists. Sure, they'll undoubtedly go through life meeting success and would've met it at Harvard, too, but for a person like me what little success I meet will assume a broader scope, my own life and my own society will be 10 fold more meaningful. For these reasons, for the competition and the social make-up at Harvard, I believe that it is by far the best school for me. It will make me into a better, more "conscious" person – in short a man. And besides, Harvards got what it takes to help one attain the Arthur Schlesinger success ad well. I love my work; the mere fact that I am beginning to see things on a broader scope, that I am in a sense finding myself, has made me consider Art more and more, though as yet I haven't definitely decided.

So, Miss Loving, of I can reach these ideals (and some academic ability, too,) which I have for) – I will be more the Joe Rothrock than ever before. And because I reach those ideal, I'll always love people, I'll always love my parents and you and many others for what you really are.

I love people – I want to help them – and as long as I can keep this feeling I'll never set myself on any kind of a pedestal and look down on anyone.

I hope you have understood what I have tried to tell you. Sometimes I want to tell somebody so much that I cry it out instead, but it all makes for the better. Always have faith in my ability to see things as they really are. Over Christmas I acted smug because I didn't want to show my feelings. I was then a little self centered in that I was concerned only with my own failures, but that no longer bothers me. I can see things more clearly now.

I know this letter must sound a little goofy, but I've tried to be as sincere as possible. I'm definitely not rationalizing because many a sad night has made these things real enough.

I'm sorry that I've had no more to say about what I have been doing with myself, but weeks are awfully full, and mainly with studies.

Write again and let me know what you think -, hope this answer will suffice.

Yours very truly,

Joe