

THE CHALLENGER

Comfort on Campus

A Publication of the Harper College Honors Program

December, 2009



IN THIS ISSUE:

| | |
|-------------------|----|
| Food for Thought | 2 |
| Parking at Harper | 10 |

Food for Thought: How does Harper's Food Fare?

By Diptika Khanal and Cheryl Gistenson



Our eating habits not only determine our health but also our appearance. Don't we all want to look good and escape the discomfort and expense of weight-related illness? We must eat healthy food in order to be fit. By healthy food, I mean food that has nutritional value. Today, people are becoming more conscious about their health and thus are cultivating healthy eating habits--especially young students. For instance, they prefer a healthy Subway sandwich to McDonald's French fries or a McChicken sandwich. Many of these young students attend Harper College. It's convenient to be able to get this caliber of food right here at school. Let's find out what they are eating at school.

As you walk into Building A, you can smell the good food. That is exactly how I traced my way to the Building A Cafeteria, where Robert Passaglia is the kitchen manager. He and his staff try their best to serve fresh and tasty meals to all Harper students and staff. Upon entering the cafeteria, you will come across the sandwich station. Did you know the sandwich station is their best seller? So you can expect a line to have either a vegetar-

ian or a non-vegetarian sandwich. By preference, I am a vegetarian. I personally think that, aside from the sandwiches and the burritos, there are not enough options for vegetarians, so I took advantage of this opportunity and asked Mr. Passaglia about the vegetarian menu. He said that although there are not that many options available, they are open to suggestions. Harper students, if you have any menu in mind, please do not hesitate to share your ideas with the Harper kitchen. Another piece of information for all Harper vegetarians is that as of next semester, the Harper cafeteria plans to serve a vegetarian soup every day, but note the soup will be available only in the main cafeteria.

As far as nutrition guidelines are concerned, the Harper Cafeteria does not have a nutrition chart like

Continued from Page 2

that of Subway and other fast food places. Passaglia said, "While making food we do not follow any guidelines; we provide a large variety of food with high quality. Our goal is to provide a safe, affordable, good-tasting meal." Also, in the two years that Passaglia has been the kitchen manager, the Harper Cafeteria has received many compliments--especially from the staff. On the other hand, some Harper students say that the noodles and the other meals are very greasy. One student asked, "Why is everything pre-buttered?" Well, our expert Passaglia said that they use "real butter" in the food. The reason they use it is to keep the food moist and to add flavor. Now if the Harper Cafeteria is using real butter to keep the food moist, then what about the health of our students? When we talk about real butter, isn't that harmful for those who are watching their weight? Harper students, if any one of you are diabetic or is watching his/ her weight, please do not hesitate to talk to Passaglia. In the past, Passaglia has personally helped students and staff who have tried to avoid the greasy meals and have something else as an alternative.



Passaglia emphasized that they are open to suggestions and that they want to improve and provide healthy options. Passaglia tries to make this service a success among all Harper students and staff. In order to do this, he said that "I challenge all my staff to think out of the box. I tell them to be creative. I tell them to go online to search for new menus, new sauces." In the short span of time that Passaglia has been the kitchen manager at Harper, he says there have been many changes. The cafeteria has been trying to provide high- quality food with a lot of variation. There are different kinds of salads, wraps, sandwiches, non-vegetarian meals, pastas, fish, and fruits. Three times a year, the health department of the Village of Palatine comes for inspection, and in the past few years the results have significantly improved. Before Passaglia took over as the kitchen manager, the results were 87%, but now they are successfully scoring between 98% and 99%. The only reason they did not score a 100% was not because of any food or temperature violation but because of some minor or cosmetic things.

Many Harper students had things to say about the cafeteria. Some wanted the cafeteria's hours to stretch later into the evening, but this is not possible as it is not profitable to have the cafeteria opened at night. Instructor Larry Barr said that the cafeteria serves very nutritious hot meals. He also said that "There is a wide selection of fruits, salads and sandwiches." Linda Vazquez, a student here at Harper, sometimes eats in the Cafeteria, and she is delighted with the ample seating space; she likes going there with her friends.

It is not an easy task to run a cafeteria. In fact, it is a mountain of pressure, but with the help of a wonderful manager and his team, everything seems to run smoothly. The Harper Cafeteria is working hard to improve and provide the best facility for its clientele. They are not only planning to expand the succulent food choices but also improve the décor by re-arranging the beverage stations and having paintings done.



New signs and neon lights will liven up the place as well. They are making progress and Passaglia hopes to be rewarded with a whole new building. With so many changes about to take place next semester, please do check out the Harper Cafeteria. --D.K.

• • • If a student from another community college visited Harper's cafeteria, how would he or she compare them? I not only checked out the options other area community colleges offer, but I also spoke with some of their students. One very significant difference I came across was not in the food itself, but in the ease in which I had researching the food. I, along with a friend (to make sure it wasn't just a problem I encountered), tried multiple times to find information about our cafeteria from

Harper's website. We found nothing, absolutely nothing regarding the food a student can get while on campus. On the other hand, when I looked at the websites of the other colleges, I found a plethora of information. There, at the click of a mouse, was all you would need to know and possibly more.

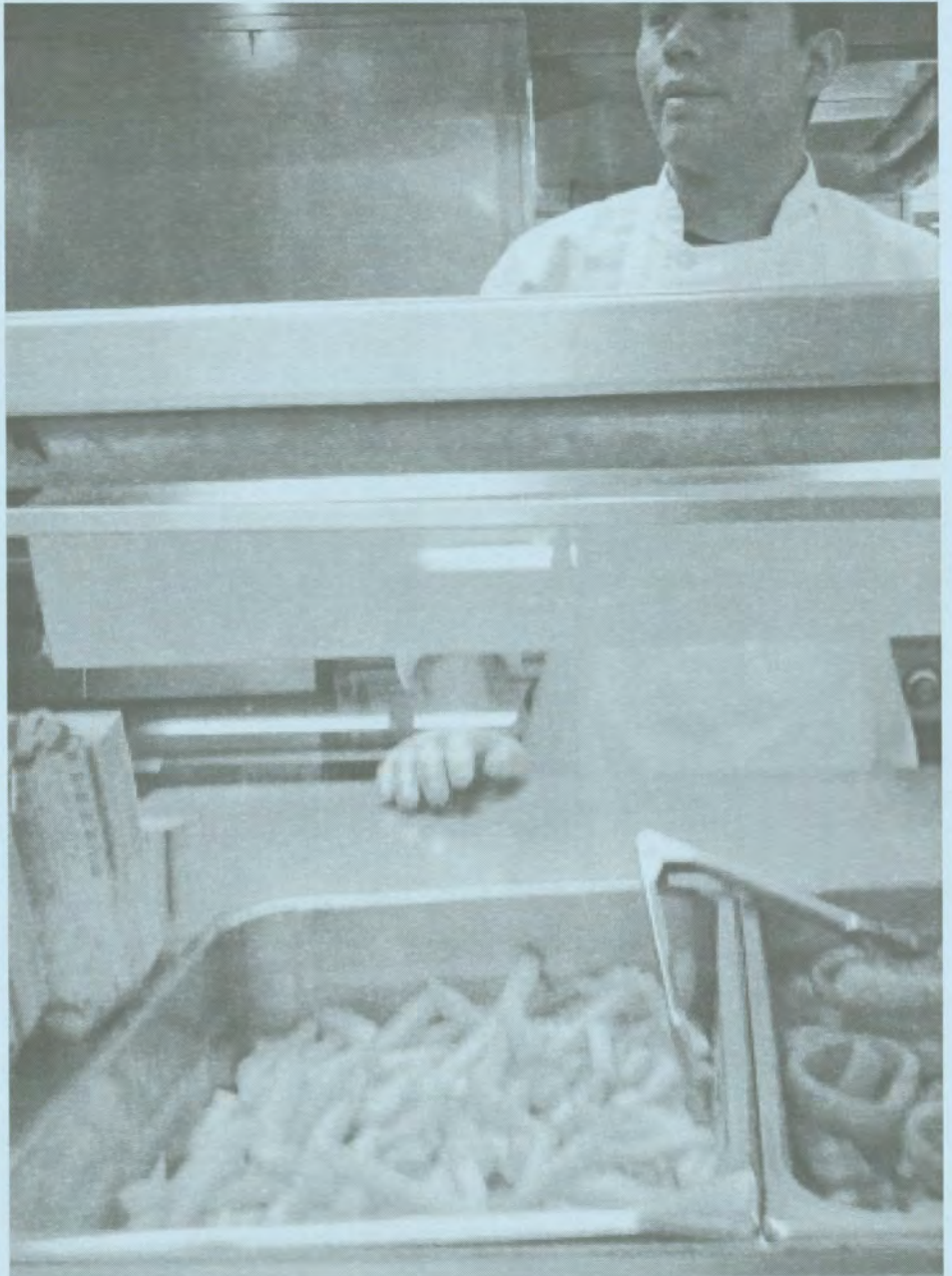
Upon looking at College of Lake County's (CLC) website, I found the information of the location, menu, hours, and prices of its food. The site gave this description about its deli-style restaurant: "The menu includes a variety of sandwiches from Subway, pizza slices from Giordano's, soups, salads, desserts, drinks, plus a daily special, all made fresh daily." Every day's menu includes two or three options of an entree, usually including a vegetarian dish, and soup. A small soft drink, coffee, or tea and a dinner roll are included with the meal--plus free refills. The restaurant is open considerably later than Harper's cafeteria; Monday through Thursday it is open from 7:00 A.M. until 8:30 p.m., and until 3:00 P.M. on Friday. CLC boasts that the Willow Room, another restaurant on campus, specializes in providing great food at great prices, and claims "As long as there are tables open, patrons will be able to walk in, have a complete meal, and be out in half an hour." This buffet-style set-up is open for lunch during the hours of 11:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Both locations offer items such as meat or vegetable lasagna, baked ham with wild rice and steamed vegetables, and beef shish kebob with sweet potatoes. "I chose not to eat on campus. If I



Continued from Page 4

had a long break between classes, I'd leave campus and go eat somewhere," said former CLC student Megan Miro.

My mouth watered when I read the options a student has at Elgin Community College (ECC). However, I realized I fell victim to good marketing after talking with some of its students. Granted, it is a seller's job to make its products sound extraordinarily appetizing, and maybe I was just hungry when I read the menu, but a "made-to-order grill and sandwich station" and a "saute station" do sound enticing. The cafeteria also has a dessert and ice cream station. Tomas Delgado, a former ECC student, was never fooled by the appealing descriptions. When I asked him about the quality of the food, he said, "The hot meal selection stuff was greasy: fries, pizza, and hamburgers--typical greasy cafeteria food. But the open and full salad bar made up for that." He also talked highly about the breakfast options the college provides. The cafeteria is open until eight in the evening, Monday through Thursday. Another benefit ECC offers is cafeteria gift cards. ECC has a second location on campus where students can "kick back with friends and play a little pool or a video game, send an e-mail or enjoy a snack." It is near the coffee bar that serves Starbucks coffee, shakes, and smoothies. Another student whose opinion I sought said this about ECC's food: "It's all right, but we do have Spartan Terrace."



Possibly the best option yet, Spartan Terrace is a full-service restaurant which offers "Elegant cuisine prepared and presented by students of the award-winning ECC Culinary Arts & Hospitality Institute of Elgin." Its menu includes "full upscale entrees," including vegetarian dishes. The students of the institute gain experience not only cooking the dishes, but also serving them to you. The website included a full worldly menu offering Asian, German, Spanish, and Jamaican dishes, among others. The prices for these full dishes, which include vegetables and at least one side (pasta, potato, rice, etc.), range from eight to ten dollars--many dishes are available in half portions at a reduced price. The restaurant also offers soups, salads, and desserts. There is one minor drawback, however. The restaurant is only open on Tuesdays and Thursdays, during the hours of

Continued from Page 5
11:30 a.m. and 1:00 p.m.

Even the food options of some area high schools sound better than what Harper offers. If you came from Stevenson, for example you might have been fairly disappointed after eating a meal at Harper the first time. Stevenson students had a variety of restaurants, on site, from which to choose: Taco Bell, Subway, and McDonald's--just to name a few. Granted, CLC has some products from Subway and Giordano's, but it does not offer the entire menu.

Now, Harper isn't completely out of the game. Rich Seiler, Harper's manager of retail services, felt the items Harper's cafeteria offers are comparable to those of a restaurant. When I asked him if he had considered bringing a chain restaurant to Harper, such as Subway or Taco Bell, he noted that the sandwich station and the taco/burrito station were of similar caliber. Harper does offer coffee from an outside vendor; Violet's, located on the main floor of A building, has at least one retail location in the area. Harper has also worked with a sushi vendor on and off in the past to bring sushi products to the campus. However, Seiler



stopped working with them after encountering continuous safety and price concerns. Seiler said he must consider multiple factors when deciding whether or not to bring in food vendors to the cafeteria. A large concern is the lack of available space in which to house the businesses, and each restaurant has individual requirements. Seiler also considers the possibility that students may get sick of eating the same thing over and over: "What we try to look for are options to bring variety to students; right now the best option is

Continued from Page 6

the cafeteria.” He did assure me, though, that Harper is always considering the possibilities.

If the idea of eating at the cafeteria or one of the satellite locations on campus leaves a bad taste in your mouth, or if you just want a little something to bring to class or eat while trekking the miles across campus, you can stop at a vending machine. This should be fairly convenient as there are 63 machines at Harper and its two remote locations. Harper has machines with the basic chocolate bars/candy, chips, and crackers. It also has machines with microwaveables, prepared foods, and beverages (hot and cold). In addition to these beverage vending machines, there are satellite stations placed throughout the campus where one can get, in addition to food items, a hot cup of tea or coffee. While this is a nice thing to have at our disposal, one professor I spoke with is displeased that the stations don't have milk to put in the coffee. You have two alternatives from which to choose: non-dairy creamer--a poor substitute for the real thing--or half and half.

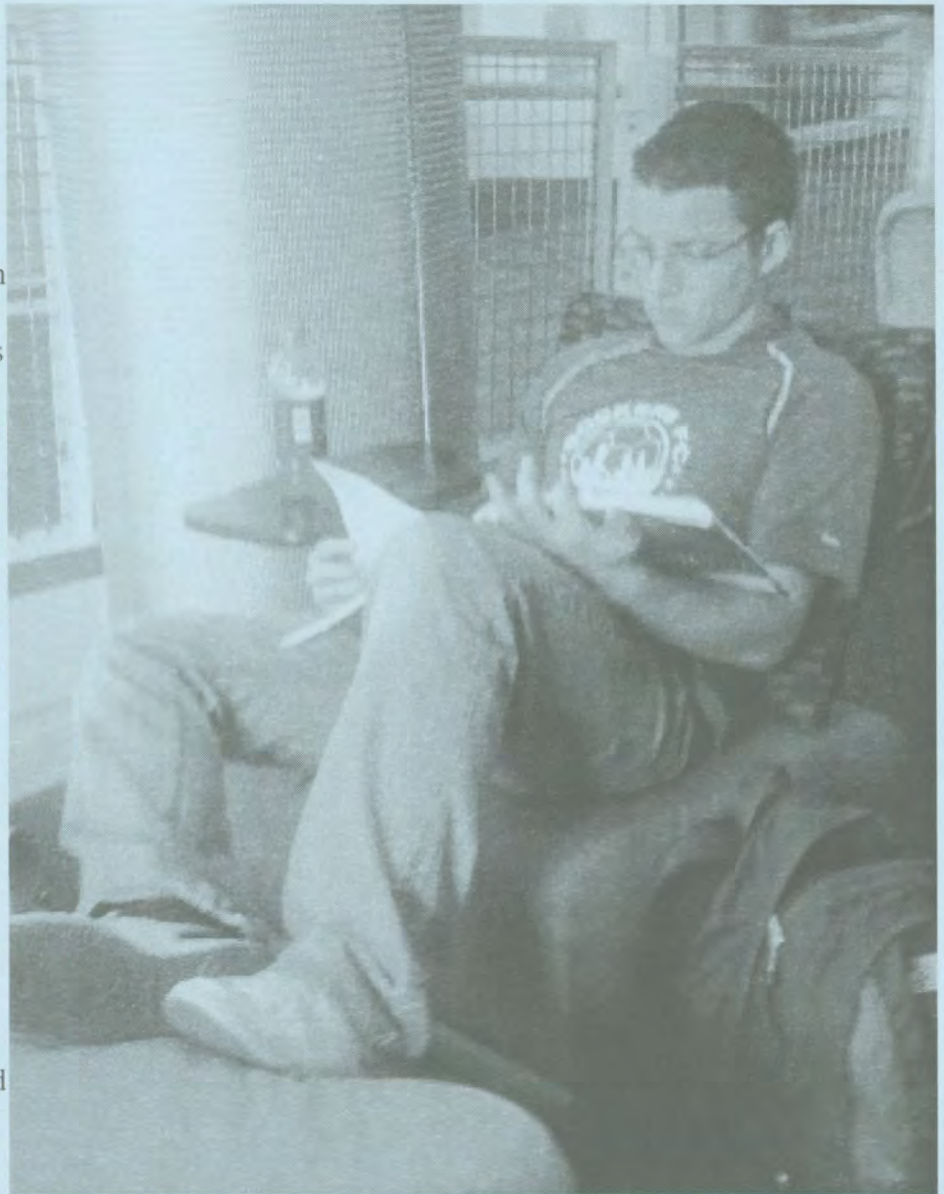
The campus also pairs some vending machines with microwaves. Individual frozen pizzas and other frozen items are offered in these machines, and the microwave placed next to them lets you conveniently heat up your food. One might ask how healthy these, and our other options, can be. Well, that's partially up to you, the consumer. After talking with Seiler, I found out we really do have some power over the matter. PGI Vending, the company that Harper contracts with to stock and manage the machines, monitors the sales of the items. After all, it is a business. Seiler explained, “If the students are buying it, [PGI] will stock it.” So, if you have the option of buying a bag of trail mix with dried fruit or a bag of M&M's and the company is constantly refilling the M&M's but has never had to restock the trail mix, they take that as a consumer message: “More candy; Down with trail mix!” It seems like Harper students have not been sending a healthy message. Seiler said, “We had a refrigerated fresh food machine that stocked fresh fruit and sandwiches. However, the product didn't sell [or] tended to expire before it was sold. We



Continued from Page 7

had to pull the machine and product out.” If you do happen to buy a product that is past its expiration date, you can take it to one of the designated refund centers.

You can also make a recommendation for specific items. Though PGI controls the items with which they stock the machines, Seiler said that your input is always taken into consideration. The usefulness of an item is also taken into account when deciding on what products to sell. For instance, you will find comparatively more water and juice drinks in M building’s beverage machines than the rest of the campus due to the nature of the classes and activities. Recently, Seiler tried an experiment in D building. Because of the multicultural center’s presence, he wanted to customize the machines. They tried stocking them with frozen burritos, among other products, but these were not very popular. He also chose D building for the experiment because it lacked convenience facilities (as compared to J, L, and Avante). Seiler said Harper is organizing a committee, including students, to address the

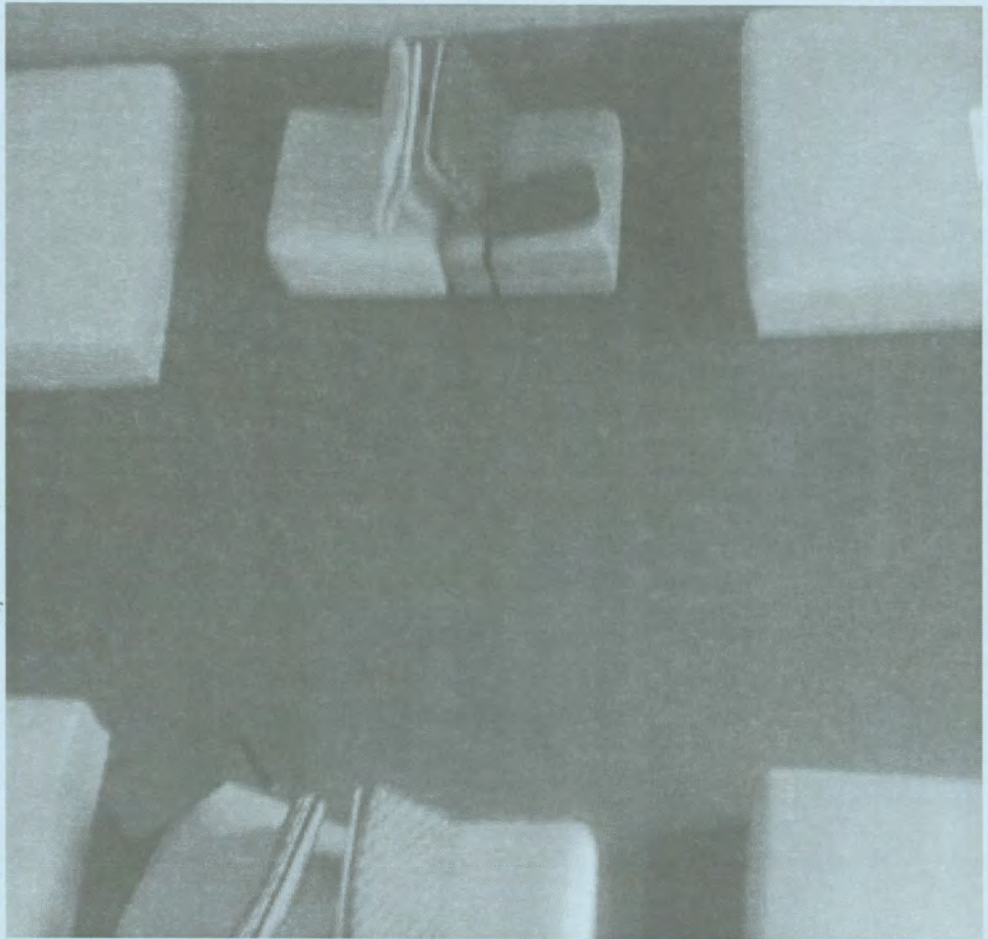


lack of a cafeteria satellite in D building and other concerns regarding the campus’s food services. For now, though, he said most suggestions find him by way of mouth. So where can you make these recommendations and get your refunds? Seiler’s office is located in the bookstore. He invites you to contact him if you have suggestions or concerns at the bookstore’s extension, 6608, or by email: rseiler@harpercollege.edu. If you just need to get a refund because a machine ate your money, you can go to one of the satellite cafes in either J, L, or Avante, the bookstore, or the cafeteria in A building. I asked Seiler if this was common knowledge. He said, “We probably need to do a better job of notifying where a customer can get a refund around campus.” This year he is working on projects to accomplish this, as well as including information in the school’s handbook and on the website. He also wants to provide a complaint/suggestion form on the site. The more entrepreneurial Harper students may be thinking of the extra change they could squirrel away by claiming they didn’t get their money back every week. It won’t work. You are asked to fill out a form when you request a refund to prevent fraudulent, reoccurring claims.

How much money do the machines pull in--not including eating our money, of course? Seiler told

Continued from Page 8

me that in the most popular location, the A building, the machines provided approximately 1,300 snack items and 460 hot and cold beverages in August alone! I believe the addition of machines that accept credit cards has contributed to the ease of using the machines. When Harper brought PGI to the campus about two years ago, they agreed to allow credit cards. The new equipment the company put into place not only reduced the occurrence of malfunctions, but it also incorporated the credit card option. (User beware: Check with your bank to see if they charge a usage fee; your seventy-five cent purchase may turn into a \$2.75 charge.) Convenience



does have an effect on the products' price; PGI maintains its equipment and restocks products daily so the machines run smoothly and are always full. However, Seiler believes, "you'll find the cost in the machines very reasonable." Keep in mind, the vending machine items have the tax already added to the price you pay. If you buy a product off a shelf, somewhere else on the campus, the tax is calculated in once you get to the register. Seiler surveys other campuses nearby, as well as other retailers in the area, to keep prices comparable. He assured me they are much lower than those you will find at the airport or Arlington Racetrack, for example.

All things considered, if you are stuck on campus the entire day, you won't go hungry or wind up poor. No matter what eating habits you have, you should almost certainly find something to eat. One very strong message the Harper staff wants to send us is that we can be a part of the decision of what items are made available. --C.G. 9

Woe to Ye Who Enter the Parking Lot

By Amanda Muledy



Your tuition? Just go ahead and add five hundred dollars to it. Because that's how much you'll be paying for your deductible when you come out of class and find a Grand Canyon sized gash in the side of your car. Or that's how much you'll pay for the rusted out '89 Geo Metro that you purchase just to drive to Harper, in order to secure the peace of mind that your real car is nestled safely at home.

I will venture to guess that everyone reading this has had an experience in the Harper parking lot that caused either tears, language you wouldn't use in front of Grandma, or a complete loss of faith in humanity. I'm also willing to bet that everyone reading this has either been hit in the parking lot or knows someone who has. If you didn't before, you do now. I had already been enraged by the previous encounters with idiocy in this horrible place when, last month, I left the L building and approached a poor, gashed, wounded car looking sadly at me, wondering where I had been while it had been brutally and senselessly attacked. It isn't the greatest car. It's fourteen years old and an econo-box. But it's my econo-box, and I took care of it. There wasn't a scratch on it until

I started frequenting the Harper parking lot. The line of paint transfer showed on my rear quarter panel; it was obviously the result of someone's miserably failed attempt to park next to me. I filed a report with a very sweet, understanding Harper policeman, who said that it happens all the time and there really wasn't anything to be done. The result of this event was exactly what I knew it would be the second I saw my injured car. Me? Furious and frustrated. Cop? Sorry for me. Wretched individual who can't figure out how to put a car in a rectangle? Allowed to terrorize the Harper lot, consequence-free. So my rather respectable, though modest, automobile is now an accident victim, scraped and dented and with a big mark on my driver door. Oh, I

didn't tell you about the mark on my driver door? That's from last week, when I parked in the desolate Lot 13 and still managed to draw someone to park next to me--someone who likes to open the door into my car.

I also own a lovely '87 IROC Z. Well, it was originally much lovelier than it is now. It mysteriously seemed that every time I would leave Harper, I would leave some of my paint behind. I would come home from school, look at my car on the way in to my apartment, and wonder how I was missing more and more bumper paint every time I went to school. I no longer drive the Camaro to school. Ever.

Two of my cousins who go to Harper were also hit in the parking lot; they both had to go to the hospital. Friend and co-Challenger writer extraordinaire Cheryl Gistenson knows someone who watched a car bluntly barrel over a curb and through the grassy median that divides the outer circle from the lots. Harper parking lot patrons cannot be bothered with avoiding things in their way, like other cars, medians, or people. It reminds me of a little kid who puts his fingers in his ears and starts singing when he's asked to clean his room.

The overcrowding of the lot may or may not be the main reason for all the car-on-car action. I feel like it contributes, but is not the primary issue. My opinion is that bad driving is the source of most parking lot nightmares. But the sheer mass of vehicles that are cramming into this claustrophobia-inducing pocket of the world will cause irritation, snap decisions, and road rage's deadly partner--the dreaded parking lot rage. (I suffer from parking lot rage, but I find it rather easy not to hit people in the midst of it, leading me to believe that the real problem is bad driving.) However, whether the crowding causes accidents or not, it is a comfort issue all its own. There is nothing I've encountered quite like the Harper lot at 11:00 a.m. on the first week of a semester. While one can, in fact, enter the parking lot, success will probably end there. Look forward to the next forty minutes of your life inching across pavement, going through rows of parked cars at a rate of ten minutes a row, boxed in with other cars doing the exact same thing you are doing (which is futilely wishing they had picked another row). If, while you are waiting, some Harper fairy picks you to sprinkle its dust on, someone will leave and get into a car somewhere in front of you. Your only remaining task will be to outwit or out-accelerate the other five enraged and frantic people in the vicinity who would sacrifice their firstborn to get to the spot before you do. On my second day of this semester, in which I had math at 10:50 a.m., I left my apartment at 10:20. I arrived at Harper at 10:27. I found a space at 11:25. That's fifty-eight minutes to park a car. You see, I know it is fifty-eight minutes because I can add. And I can add because I made it to every math class after that--but only by leaving an hour early from my apartment that is seven minutes away from Harper. So what can we do to ease the pain of the college's overcrowding? We can walk. That is especially a pleasure in winter. We can wait until about week three of every semester, when 30% of our classmates figure out they'd rather drink beer and play Assassin's Creed than go to biology and drop the class. Then we can park in Lot 12 or 13 and walk ten minutes to class--again, especially enjoyable in the winter. You can write off the lot in front of the L building. A spot in that lot is like that perfect girl or guy that you know is way too good for you--you'll never get it. We can arrive at school at 8 a.m. and get our pick of parking spaces. After all this hassle, that sounds worth it, doesn't it? I tried it. It abruptly became not worth it when my alarm went off at 6:30.

The parking lot is the bane of my existence. I hate the Harper parking lot more than the perfume my mother wears. I hate it more than I hate the Bears' offensive line. I hate it more than being constantly pocket dialed because my name is alphabetically first in everyone's address books. The parking lot is rage-inspiring and dangerous. I hypothesize that there is some sort of force field across the entrance to the parking lot that strips people of 70% of their brain cells.

Continued from Page 11

Extensive research has shown that the top least desirable places to be, as decided by the American population, are as follows:

1. NORMANDY BEACH IN 1944
2. COUNTY LOCKUP, IF A FORMER CRIMINAL COURT PROSECUTOR
3. THE HARPER PARKING LOT
4. HELL

These studies may actually just be my opinion.

Here are my possible solutions to this problem.

A. We can hold driving tests. There will be slalom, fitting trucks into compact car spaces...no, on second thought, that isn't even necessary. With the curve Harper parkers will be graded on, we'll just judge if they can maintain a speed while simultaneously staying in a lane or park a car without removing a chunk out of the car next to it. Those few who pass will be awarded an "Able to Safely Operate a Motor Vehicle" certificate (with less practical use, but more prestige than a driver's license, which they apparently hand out to anyone who breathes). They will be allowed to park in an elite "Safe Driver's Lot," which I vote be placed in front of the L building, because I love that unobtainable lot and I want to park there. All the gold star drivers will have peace of mind that their cars are safe while they're at Harper, and the riff-raff can play demolition derby in all the other lots.

B. The powers that be are aware of the parking lot issue. They can turn rumors into reality and buy land nearby to build more parking. While it would be a further walk than what we're faced with now, it would relieve the congestion problem. You would be assured you could always find parking if you need to.

C. Cameras!! Cameras in the parking lot!! Please put in cameras! Hold people accountable for what they do. Harper's logo could be "Home of the Hit and Run." The cameras wouldn't be a precautionary measure. They wouldn't be just in case; they would be for something that happens at least every other day.

Funny. The last two options are the only ones that are actual possibilities, and they don't address the major issue. Harper is simply full of horrible drivers. I'm convinced that if eight other people and I were the only ones at school, one of them would find some reason to park next to me and somehow rip off my front end while doing it. And how does one possibly fix a problem like that? Save your pennies and take a cab.

And may the person who hit me last month get coal in his/her stocking for Christmas.