

LETTER FROM HARVARD

A Rude Welcome Back: Tempests Greet President

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. Poor Neil Rudenstine. No sooner had the Harvard University president returned from a medical leave for exhaustion than the place started flipping its lid.

First came the Gina Grant case. She is a young woman who attends Cambridge Rindge & Latin, the tough city high school just blocks from the university. At 19, she lives on her own (about which more later), gets straight A's, tutors other kids and so on.

Harvard snapped her up, even giving her early admission last December. Her story was so compelling that the Boston Globe featured her recently in its Sunday magazine in a series of profiles about children who overcome adversity.

But shortly after the glowing profile appeared, Harvard got an anonymous bundle of news clippings from South Carolina about Gina Grant.

It seems she is an orphan because she killed her mother—by bashing her skull with a crystal candlestick. She pleaded no contest to the charges when she was 14, served six months and then moved to the Boston area, her juvenile record sealed.

Harvard rescinded her acceptance—not because she killed her mother, who was an abusive alcohol-

ic, the university said, but because Gina had lied on her application.

This being Harvard, the incident quickly escalated into a full-blown affair, with lawyers, public opinion surveys, angry protests and an examination of it on ABC-TV's "Nightline."

The debate has raged between those who say Grant has been spectacularly rehabilitated and deserves a chance to put her past behind her and those who say her place at Harvard should be given to some other bright young striver who did not kill her mother. Students held a "Justice for Gina" rally, demanding that Harvard backtrack and offer her admission.

Not to be outdone, Boston University's caustic conservative president, John Silber, jumped into the fray, inviting Grant to apply to his fine school on the other side of the Charles River.

Columbia University in New York City also apparently accepted her on early admission.

The tide seemed to shift against Grant last week, however, when the Harvard Crimson newspaper reported that Grant had lied to an alumni interviewer during the admissions process by saying her mother had died in a car crash.



NEIL RUDENSTINE

... maintaining a steadfast silence

But that's not all Rudenstine has to deal with. There is another uproar on campus, this one concerning a decision by the government department to invite columnist George F. Will to teach a class next fall. In this case, the protests are coming from liberal professors, who sniff that Will lacks a certain something.

Evidently, some people at Harvard would sooner welcome a mother-killer than a conservative.

But that's not all, either. According to a column in the Boston Globe, Harvard's Medical School has launched an investigation into one of its faculty members—tenured psychiatry professor John Mack.

Mack's offense, it seems, is that he has been making a name for himself in recent years as an advocate of the view that some people really do get abducted by aliens from outer space. In his popular book "Abduction," Mack argued that we need to listen seriously when people described being whisked off in space ships.

Now, Mack is about to have a close encounter with a high-powered committee that has reportedly come to the preliminary conclusion that he is "in violation of the standards of conduct expected of a member of the faculty of Harvard University."

All in all, it has been a dubious welcome back for the school's over-worked chief executive.

When Rudenstine returned to campus, he said he had learned that he would have to delegate tasks and spread himself out less. So far, he has done the same way—with a steadfast silence.

—Christopher B. Daly