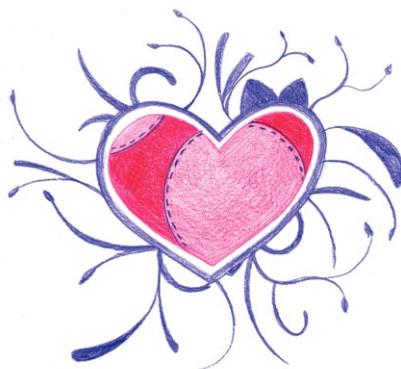
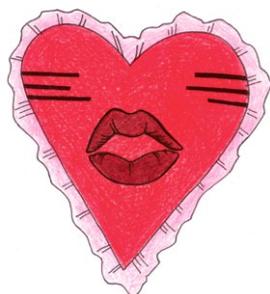
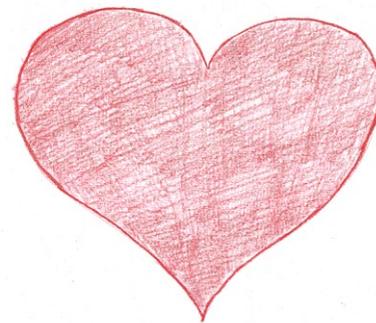


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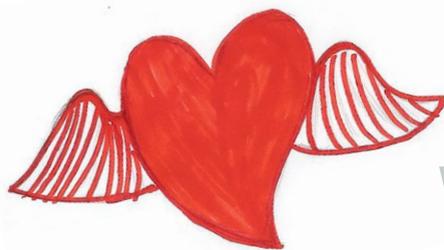
L.A. youth

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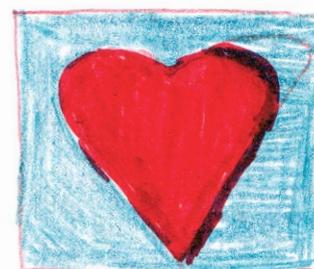


TEENS SHARE
THE JOYS AND PAINS
OF DATING PAGE 9

Falling in love



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L.A. youth

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FOR PEOPLE WHO CARE ABOUT TEENS

About L.A.Youth

How L.A. Youth started

Former teacher Donna Myrow founded the nonprofit teen newspaper in 1988 after the Supreme Court Hazelwood decision, which struck down student press rights. Myrow saw a need for an independent, uncensored forum for youth expression. L.A. Youth is now celebrating its 23rd year of publishing.

How L.A. Youth is doing today

L.A. Youth now has a readership of 350,000 in Los Angeles County. Hundreds of students have benefited from L.A. Youth's journalism training. Many have graduated from college and have built on their experiences at L.A. Youth to pursue careers in media, teaching and other fields. Our Foster Youth Writing Project has brought the stories of teens in foster care into the newspaper. For more info, see layouth.com.

How L.A. Youth is funded

L.A. Youth is a nonprofit charitable organization funded by donations from foundations, corporations and individuals.

L.A. Youth's mission

L.A. Youth is a leading advocacy voice for teens through journalism, literacy and civic engagement. We use media as a tool for young people to examine themselves, their communities and the world at large.

Advocating for teens

Do you like what we do and want to support us? Go to why.layouth.com, our blog written by L.A. Youth's adult staff, to learn more about the issues L.A. Youth cares about. You can read our criticisms and praise of policies affecting teens. We take stands on education, access to mental health, foster youth rights, teens' rights to free speech and more. There you can donate to help us provide a place where teen voices are valued.

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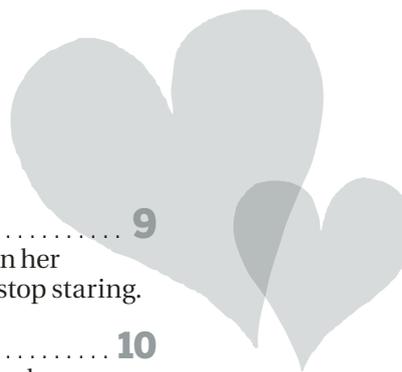
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BEHIND THE SCENES

When we decided to put our stories about dating on the cover, we were faced with a challenge—how to illustrate a package of three different stories with a single image. We brainstormed with our teen staff and they came up with a lot of ideas, but none of them were quite right. Editor Amanda Riddle took notes and tried to sketch their ideas. We talked to our art director and he suggested that instead of one person drawing an image, we could have a lot of people draw hearts. We liked the idea and thought that was the best way to represent teens and dating. So we did something we've never

done before. We reached out to all of our staff members—not just our artists—and asked them to contribute. They responded enthusiastically. These are our cover artists: Feather Flores, 15, Monrovia HS; Amy Fan, 16, Temple City HS; Michelle Cao, 16, Temple City HS; Hanifati Mokhammad, 16, Pacific Coast HS; Avika Dua, 15, Walnut HS; Sophie Chung, 15, Canyon HS; Lily Clark, 17, Immaculate Heart HS; Sam Landsberg, 17, Hamilton HS; Jerry Qin, 16, Walnut HS; Victor Beteta, 17, University HS; Ana Perez, 17, Orthopaedic Hospital Medical Magnet HS, and Bon Jin Koo, 18, Crescenta Valley HS.



STAY IN TOUCH WITH US

Did you like a story in this issue? Hate it? Could you relate? Tell us what you think. Leave a comment on layout.com or on our Facebook page. You can also e-mail us at editor@layout.com or send us a letter to L.A. Youth • 5967 W. 3rd St. Suite 301 • Los Angeles CA 90036. We might choose your comment to be published in the newspaper.

NOV-DEC 2010 ISSUE

NORTH KOREANS SHOULDN'T HAVE TO SUFFER

IT'S GREAT TO hear that the author took the time and effort to raise awareness about the grave human rights violations that occur daily in North Korea. As a South Korean, I find it chilling to think about how different my life would have been had I been born a North Korean. To think that torture, public executions and human experimentation still take place in the North—to think, in the 21st century!—it's outrageous.

el2thekwo

Comment on layout.com

A GIRL TRIED TO GET HER FATHER TO STOP SMOKING

WHENEVER I SEE my father walk back into our house after he's just finished smoking a cigarette, I can't help feeling a little disappointed because I know that

he's better than that. He tells me that he tries to stop, but he never shows any initiative. I just wish he'd stop smoking.

Jaime Suarez

Bell Gardens HS

I NEVER REALIZED how hard it is for a person to help someone stop smoking. When the author's dad started smoking at her grandpa's funeral, I realized how addicting smoking could be. I admire her effort to help her dad stop smoking. I hope her dad finds a different way to relieve his stress.

Jacob Feldman

Sherman Oaks Center for Enriched Studies (S.O.C.E.S.)

I CAN REALLY relate to this because my dad also used to smoke. My sisters and I always told my dad to stop smoking and that it was bad for him. He tried to quit, but it was not easy. Finally, he quit for good and it has been three years without smoking! He tells everyone that

thanks to his kids he has stopped smoking! Never give up telling your dad to quit. You will be amazed when he finally does!

laura124

Comment on layout.com

AN INJURY DIDN'T KEEP A SOCCER PLAYER OFF THE FIELD FOR GOOD

I WAS HEARTBROKEN by this story. I can't believe that Claudia actually played with a broken spine. I play soccer, but I've never been injured severely and never realized how lucky I am. This story made me realize how fortunate I am to be healthy.

Sara Kwan

Wilson MS (Glendale)

Illustration by Amy Fan,
16, Temple City HS

A BOY PURSUED WRITING WITHOUT HIS PARENTS' SUPPORT

I REALLY ENJOYED "Choosing my own path" because it addressed the issue many teens face today with their parents wanting them to go into a certain field of work that may not be what they want. I wish more parents could be like mine, because my parents are accepting of any jobs my sisters and I might want to pursue. I know I am very lucky to have such accepting parents and I hope more parents can be understanding of what their children want.

Sarah Harden

S.O.C.E.S.

ALTHOUGH MY PARENTS want me to be a doctor, I want to be a comedian. I dream of having my own HBO special. I know it will take a lot of work, but I know I can do it. My parents don't accept my choice, but I'm sure they will once I am on stage with thousands of adoring fans laughing at my jokes.

Jasmin Hernandez

Madison MS (North Hollywood)

I WANNA BE a journalist but my dad says it's not a well paid job. But ... blah ... Who cares ... I like it!

Patricia Chavarria

Comment on Facebook

A GIRL'S FAMILY CARES FOR FOSTER KIDS

THIS IS REALLY a great story of how love comes in many forms. I think it takes a great person to open their heart and home to a stranger and to love them as his or her own family. I am adopted and this story hit close to home. Helen and her family are doing great things for the most worthy cause!

Jenny Philp

S.O.C.E.S.

I COULD REALLY relate to "They're family, not foster kids" because my uncle fosters children too. We've had many children live with our family and they have all been great. We even adopted a little boy. Like Helen said, it's very tough to let them go, but it's best when they return to their families. I'm glad that there are people out there who are willing to help others in need.

Samantha Laguna

Bell Gardens HS

BARBIE IS A GIRL'S FASHION INSPIRATION

WHEN I READ "I'm a Barbie girl," I was surprised that the author thinks that other people find it unusual for a girl her age to collect Barbie dolls. I don't think it's weird for a 16-year-old to own a Barbie doll. It actually seems very common for older girls to collect dolls, whether it is for the doll's clothes, antiqueness or just for the fun of it. She should keep collecting Barbie dolls if she enjoys them.

Heather Aquino

Wilson MS

SINCE I WAS young, I have been collecting Barbie dolls. People are surprised when they see how many I have and the great condition I keep them in. My dolls mean a lot to me and when I have my own place, I'm going to put them on a shelf and display them. My Barbie collection will be worth seeing.

Nairi Tutunjyan

Madison MS

GETTING READY FOR EARTHQUAKES

WHEN I EXPERIENCED my first earthquake I thought we were all going to die. I immediately packed a bag with food, water, video games and stuffed animals. My mom then told me to relax since we have an earthquake kit. Since then, I have felt a lot better about earthquakes.

Sean Perez

Madison MS

WHEN A TEEN WAS HURT, THE HOSPITAL WAS FAR AWAY

PEOPLE NEED TO have a hospital close to their home. If there is an emergency, people would have to drive for a long time, and some might die before getting there.

Carlos Campos

Centennial College Preparatory Academy (Huntington Park)

AN INCURABLE DISEASE DOESN'T STOP A GIRL FROM ENJOYING LIFE

THERE AREN'T MANY people who have a disease and still are satisfied with what they have and are always looking on the bright side. The author could inspire a lot of people because despite her condition, nothing holds her back from what she wants to do.

Eleen Babloyan

Wilson MS



Rough waters

My one season of water polo was harder than I expected, but I'm glad I tried

By Amy Fan

16, Temple City HS

I was ecstatic when I joined the water polo team sophomore year. After every practice I took notes in a notebook on what I needed to improve, like a swimming technique or ball-handling skills. I even read the USA Water Polo magazine every month.

But there was one problem ... I was a terrible swimmer. I was afraid of water and could barely swim 10 feet. I took swimming lessons when I was 11, but I had forgotten almost everything. I couldn't even tread water. This was important because in water polo you're not allowed to touch the walls or the bottom of the pool.

I had joined because whenever my friends on the team talked about playing water polo, it sounded so fun and exciting. But playing water polo without knowing how to swim well was hard.

I made the team only because the girls team didn't have enough players. My water polo friends told me that they would teach me to swim better and teach me the rules and how the game was played. I thought that my swimming would improve quickly because I was dedicated to working hard. My goal wasn't to become one of the best players, just not to be one of the worst.

When the season started, I was the worst player by far, so I was put on the junior varsity team. At first all I did during practice was work on treading water, while everyone else was running the regular drills in the pool. I didn't even want to go to the deep end of the pool because I would sink unless I grabbed the wall. After three days I learned to tread water but I still wasn't good.

I DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

Water polo became more complicated after that, because then I had to learn the rules and tactics. The coaches used confusing terminology, like weak side or driving, that I didn't understand. I would tap a person



Amy gets ready to shoot on goal at practice. This photo appeared in her school yearbook.

next to me and have them explain what the coach meant. I learned that weak side meant the side without the ball, while driving meant moving toward the goal to shoot or receive a ball.

Water polo players are supposed to play both defense and offense. But I couldn't swim fast enough to the other end of the pool, so the coaches told me to "stay on defense." It was embarrassing to have everyone stare at me while I treaded water alone. During games, I was lucky to even touch the ball. I felt like a loser but my coach encouraged me, saying that I was still learning.

I was frustrated that I couldn't do my part for my teammates who always encouraged me even when I

made embarrassing mistakes. One time they passed me the ball (this was a big deal because they never passed me the ball) but I lost it to the other team. During another game, I ended up on the wrong side of the pool. The rest of my team was setting up after the other team scored but I didn't notice because they were all behind me. The other team's goalie kindly pointed it out and I had to swim back.

After a while, I accepted that I wouldn't improve as much as I had hoped in the beginning.

When I finally improved my swimming enough to play offense, I still struggled. Sometimes I managed to make good passes, but other times I freaked out when I had the ball and usually lost it.

At the end of the season, I managed to make a few attempts at the goal because the coaches set up plays so that I could score. It felt fake to me, even though my teammates told me that they did that every year. The first game they did this, my shot didn't go near the goal, but during the last game, I made three attempts and the ball almost went in. A lot of my teammates congratulated me, even though I didn't score. But by then I couldn't care less about scoring. I was just happy that I could play and wasn't alone treading water on defense.

HANGING OUT WITH MY TEAMMATES WAS THE BEST PART

Even though we didn't have a winning season, I enjoyed the year because we had a lot of fun. My coach put an emphasis on closeness, so we often had team bonding days where we went hiking or had a team dinner. On Fridays we went to our school's boys basketball games or played board games with the coaches. Out of the pool, we were all on the same level and just had fun.

Water polo season ended, and at the banquet my teammates voted me "Most Improved." Before giving me my plaque, one of the coaches recalled how I used to be afraid to swim in the deep end, but how by the end of the season I could swim and play. It made me feel thankful because I wouldn't have improved as much without them.

As much as I loved water polo, I decided not to play this year so I could focus on my grades. It hurt to leave my teammates. I still cheer for them at games. Watching them makes me want to join them, but I know I have to put school first.

Water polo gave me a better understanding of myself because I had set my expectations too high. I learned that working hard isn't always enough. But I'm proud that I kept trying to improve even though I wasn't very good.



Amy still wears her water polo jacket all the time.

Francesco (second from right) had to learn how to dance and act for his school's production of *Oklahoma!*, a musical set in the early 1900s.

Photo courtesy of Laura Bamford



Playing a new role

From late-night rehearsals to the thrill of performing, I loved being in my first musical

By Francesco Jimenez

17, The Buckley School (Sherman Oaks)

Last summer I made a resolution that I should not leave high school regretting things I didn't do. I was about to begin my senior year and I thought, "I might as well make the most of it." Throughout high school, I had been watching my friends perform in theater productions. They told me stories about late-night rehearsals, inside jokes and the friendships they made in theater. It sounded like so much fun. Even though I was on the soccer team and sang in the choir, I wanted to have this experience too, so I decided to try out for the school musical.

When I found out our fall musical was going be

Oklahoma! I was disappointed. It was an old musical and I wanted to do something more modern, like *Rent*. But I decided to go for it. Auditions were at the beginning of the school year.

On a Monday afternoon I went backstage and wrote my name on the callboard. About 40 people had already signed up and seeing all those names scared me because I had never acted before. The audition committee was four teachers from the performing arts department and I had to prove to them that I could sing, act and dance. I felt nervous and said to myself, "Who are you kidding? You can't act. Get outta here, it's a waste of your time." But I remembered the promise I made over summer, so I didn't give up.

The first audition was Tuesday after school and we

had to sing. Since I was in choir for three years, I was confident that I could sing the easiest song, "Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin'!" The audition went great and I was eager to go to the next one.

Wednesday was the dance audition. The only problem was I've never really learned how to dance. Most of the girls were practicing flip kicks and cartwheels. First, the choreographer had to teach the guys the western cowboy dance moves. I practiced for half an hour and I performed that day. I didn't mess up during the audition. I was glad to get it over with and that I did all right for my first time dancing.

Thursday was the acting audition, which I was most terrified for. I wanted to play Ali Hakim, the foreign peddler who switches accents the entire show, because

I thought if there was one part I could pull off it would be the funny guy. I was set up with two other people to perform a scene. They gave us our lines to read from a piece of paper and we practiced for about 30 minutes. After we performed the first scene, the faculty told me I should always face the audience rather than have my back to them. This threw me off for the rest of the audition because I was focused on facing the audience instead of saying my lines. I was worried they wouldn't ask me to come back.

The director reminded us that he would post the list that night. I was so nervous that my name would not be on it. The next day at school I checked the callback list backstage and was so happy to see my name on there that I jumped up and screamed, "Yes!"

During callbacks they asked me to read for Ike Skidmore, a friendly farmer, instead of Ali Hakim. Surprisingly, I read it better than the other part and the director said, "Good read, Francesco." Yet I was still worried I would not be cast in the show. My friends Brady and Kylan reassured me that they needed guys in this show so no matter what I would be in it. This made me feel a little bit better. The director told all of us that the cast list would be posted on the school website at 8 a.m. Saturday.

I GOT A PART

The next morning I woke up at 7:45. The list wasn't posted at 8:05 and I thought about e-mailing the director because I wanted an answer. Instead I kept refreshing the page and checked Facebook and Twitter to see if others had posted the news. Finally, at 8:27 the cast list was posted on the school website. I was happy and disappointed at the same time. Happy to see my name

at home in my room. Once, my sister walked by and yelled, "Why are you so loud?" That made me feel like I was ready to perform.

REHEARSALS WENT LATER AND LATER

The directors gave us breaks to get a snack or drink. Sometimes they gave us enough time to finish our homework before going home. As the weeks went by rehearsals got longer and more tiring. In September our rehearsals ended around 5 p.m. In October our rehearsals started ending at 7 p.m. The longest we stayed was 10:30 and I was dead after that. I got home at 11, showered, did homework and went to sleep at 2. Sometimes I missed two morning classes because I needed the rest.

Sometimes when we had an hour or two to kill before rehearsal started, I would go to a sushi restaurant with my friends Benzi, Kylan and Brady. We talked about school and how well the musical was going. We would make fun of the ensemble for eating so much during rehearsals or start brainstorming a list for the top 10 funniest moments.

The first week of November was production week, the week my friends had warned me would be the most important and most exhausting part. My friends told me they could never do a full run-through of the show because something usually interrupts rehearsal. And sure enough an accident happened that stopped us from finishing a run-through. On Monday night a windmill that was on stage fell on top of one of the teachers playing in the orchestra. Even though the teacher was OK, I was afraid something else would happen during the live performance.

That week I discovered that "guyliner" is your best

going to mess up. But as soon as I got on stage it seemed like everyone's eyes shifted to me and I felt an adrenaline rush. That energy helped me dance better, sing better and act better. I felt like I could do anything.

After the show, we got a standing ovation. When I went to my calculus class the next day, my teacher, who I knew to be a tough critic said, "Amazing job last night. I don't know how you kids can memorize those lines and perform so well. Truly, the show was great." Hearing that from her was high praise. It gave me confidence that carried over to the next three performance nights.

During the first act of the show on Thursday night I was so full of energy. In one dance scene, my jumps and kicks were so precise I felt like I was dancing like a professional. I lifted my partner in the air as we danced in unison. Backstage, after the scene, she said, "Awesome Francesco, you nailed it!"

When I opened the backstage door after the show, BAM!—a bouquet of flowers hit me in my face. "Great job buddy! We knew you could do it!" my friends said. I'd never gotten flowers before and it was a really nice feeling.

My father saw the show Friday night. He told me he was proud and impressed at how well I performed. I felt happy to be able to perform in front of my friends and family. The feeling of standing up and acting in front of a crowd just gave me so much energy. I fell in love with it.

THE FINAL NIGHT WAS EMOTIONAL

On the last night of the show, the seniors got to make a toast to the cast and remind everyone about the top 10 funniest moments of the production. Me and the other seniors got together before dinner was served and presented a PowerPoint of the funny moments and giggled about all the good times we had the past three months. After our slide show came the saddest part—saying goodbye to the teachers in the performing arts department. As we gave out flowers I started tearing up and could not believe how fast time flew by. When I saw my choir teacher, who'd helped me with my songs for the show and encouraged me to be in the musical, I told him, "Thank you for all the fun years in choir. You're an amazing teacher."

I gained confidence in my ability to perform. Before the show my doubts and insecurities held me back from expressing myself. It's soccer season now and I'm too busy to be in the spring drama. I miss the rehearsals, the jokes, the laughs and the performing. So, I signed up to help out backstage for the spring drama because I miss my friends so much.



Francesco says you should try new things before graduating because you never know what you're capable of.

Before the show I was nervous and I thought I was going to mess up. But as soon as I got on stage it seemed like everyone's eyes shifted to me and I felt an adrenaline rush. I felt like I could do anything.

next to the part of Ike Skidmore, but sad I did not get the part I wanted.

During rehearsals I practiced my lines and dancing and had fun pretending to be someone else. I learned about staging, which is where you're supposed to be on stage during the scenes. Then there was blocking, where I had to remember things like how I should deliver a line or what my facial expression should be.

I had about 50 lines. They weren't hard to memorize, but I had to remember to project my voice. The director told me, "Even though there are only 10 people in here, there is going to be a much bigger crowd who will only hear you whispering." To remember to speak up, I wrote myself notes like "project this word" and "emphasize this phrase," in my script. I practiced saying my lines

friend. We all had to wear make-up on stage because the stage lights would make your face and eyes look weird without it. This was the first time I wore make-up. I put on some foundation and eyeliner and powdered my face, determined to give this show everything I had.

The first performance was on Wednesday for the faculty. After dinner everyone got psyched up to give the best performance. Each night we picked a line from the show, usually a line that gets laughs. After we were in costume, we'd all go into a room. We'd get in a circle and hold each other's shoulders. We'd jump around and sing, "Chica chica boom boom!" It was so loud and fun. We'd yell, "Rah rah rah rah" and then say the line. I felt focused and ready, like, "Let's do this! Let's make a show!"

Before the show I was nervous and I thought I was

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—Jasper Nahid, 16, Hamilton HS

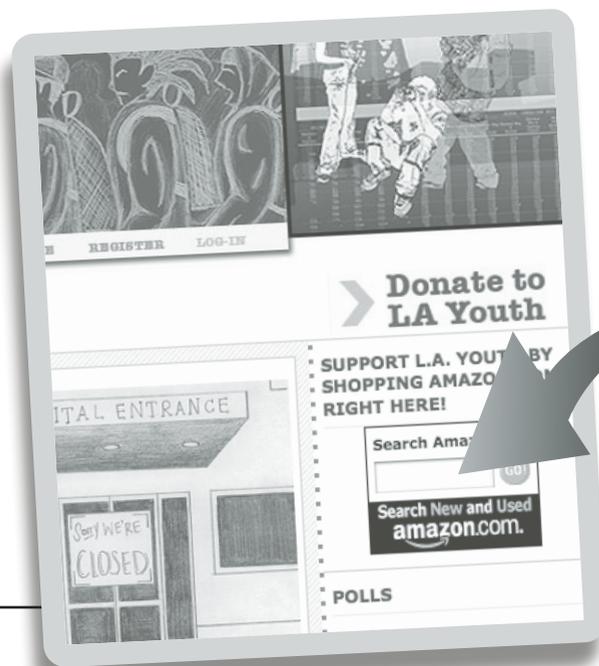


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Height doesn't matter

I don't care that I'm taller than my boyfriend, so I wish people would stop staring

By **Audrey Salas**

17, *Bravo Medical Magnet HS*

My boyfriend and I went to Hollywood for his 18th birthday last year. When we stepped out of the movie theater, it was raining hard, so we shared an umbrella. Abee (short for Abraham) had to hold the umbrella high above his head to make sure my neck wasn't cramped. Some guy on the crowded sidewalk started laughing. I saw his finger pointed right at us. He wasn't used to seeing a 5-foot-3 guy holding an umbrella for his 5-foot-8 girlfriend. Abee pretended not to notice him. I tried to do the same, but it completely killed the great mood I was in.

It's like that every time we go out in public. It used to bother me a lot, but now I don't pay much attention to the comments ("she's too tall for him") or stares because I know I'm not going to change their minds.

I met Abee at my best friend Pedro's birthday party at the end of sixth grade. He was wearing Converse, ripped jeans and a half-open flannel shirt. It was as if Julian Casablancas (the frontman of my favorite band, The Strokes) had a hot, Mexican younger brother. At the time, he was an inch taller than me.

A week after the party, I found out that Abee really liked me. I added him as a friend on MySpace and when I got a cell phone a few months later, we would call each other every night. We started opening up to each other, about fights with siblings, the pressure we felt to get good grades, anything. He even played the guitar and sang to me a couple nights to help me sleep.

We realized that we didn't want to be just friends. Two years had passed since our last meeting; I was going to be a freshman and he was going to be a sophomore. We decided to meet up even though our parents didn't allow us to date.

HE SAID 'I FEEL SO SHORT'

The next time we saw each other, we had a big surprise. I'd had a growth spurt and grew from 5 feet 2 to 5 feet 6. When we saw that his head reached my nose, all he could say was, "I feel so short." I watched his face to see if he felt awkward, or worse, had lost interest in me. But nope. He smiled back at me.

I was too shy to ask him in person, so I asked him online whether he was uncomfortable with my being taller. He said no and couldn't stop saying how pretty I



Audrey and Abee have a strong relationship because they can laugh about their height difference.

looked. That was enough for me to like him.

That winter, we became boyfriend and girlfriend. We'd sneak out and meet each other at the mall, the movies and parties. I can't remember feeling happier. But one thing was ruining that happy feeling: people kept staring. Some people were rude enough to point and giggle. I would look at the floor to avoid making eye contact. I felt like we had a spotlight on us just because of our height difference. I hated it.

Even some of my friends were jerks about it. After one of my friends met him, she pulled me aside and said, "HE IS SO TINY! How do you guys kiss?!" Others

would say, "You can do better."

The key for a girl to dating someone shorter than you is to laugh about it and move on. When Abee gets frustrated that he has to stand on his tiptoes to kiss me, he tries to make it funny. Sometimes, he'll hop up and down until he finally plants one on my lips. When I'm frustrated that my stride is much longer than Abee's and he's slowing me down, I walk even faster to make him rush to catch up. Laughing about our height difference is way easier than trying to hide it.

I PROUDLY WORE HEELS TO HIS PROM

For Abee's senior prom, I wanted everyone to know that I didn't care that my boyfriend was shorter than me, so I wore 3-inch heels instead of flats (my usual dance shoes). My mom drove me to his house to take pictures before the event. She kept snapping pictures until it got time for us to leave. She said, "Wait, I want just one last picture. But Audrey, can you squat down for this one? Just so you guys look even in the picture." Abee's parents and siblings looked offended. Abee glared at my mom and looked at me to try to stop her. I hissed, "Mom! Stop!" But she didn't notice. I wanted her out of that house as fast as possible, so I squatted. I felt kind of stupid.

To find our seats, we had to squeeze our way through the other tables in the dance hall. Of course, people stared. I reminded myself that Abee was proud to have me as his date. I walked with my chin up and said hello to Abee's friends.

We had a great time. I even dragged Abee out to the dance floor. I was having so much fun that I completely forgot that people were staring at us. We didn't slow dance though. That's where I draw the line because it's awkward, no matter your height.

Abee and I aren't any different from other couples. Yeah, Abee's shorter than me, but it's not that big of a deal. He's a talented musician, smart and sweet, and I wouldn't change a thing about him.



*Audrey's advice:
Don't rule out shorter guys. You could be missing out on a great boyfriend.*

Lessons in dating

Here's what I tell my friends when they ask me for advice



Illustration
by Amy Fan, 16,
Temple City HS

By Kevin Ko

16, Wilson HS (Hacienda Heights)

Once during freshman year I was in my room doing homework and I got a text. It was from my friend, who was on a date, asking “Should I put my arm around her now or half an hour into the movie?”

At first I thought, “Is this guy really that stupid?” I imagined him sitting in the dark movie theater, leaning over and secretly texting me with his phone poking out of his pocket while the movie trailers were going on. A few seconds later I replied, “When the movie starts.”

He texted back, “OK.”

In eighth grade, my friends started asking me for advice with girls. By my freshman year, I became the guy who gave relationship advice to other guys because by then I had dated five girls. Some guys I barely talked to would message me on MySpace or AOL Instant Messenger asking me for help. But I didn't want to be the relationship-advice guy. What if I gave my friends advice that would completely mess things up? The way I saw it, just because I had dated some girls shouldn't make me seem like a dating expert. I'm not Mr. Confidence. But I know some basics: don't use cheesy pick-up lines (unless of course, you're trying to be funny) or write bad

poetry. Just relax and be open to trying some new things.

Now that I've given advice that has helped my friends, I've become more comfortable when my friends ask me for help because I'm confident that I won't screw them over.

So whether you're a guy who needs a few pointers or a girl who wants to know what a guy is thinking when he's trying to get to know a girl, here are the three most important pieces of advice that I've given to anyone who has asked me for help.

ADVICE: While being friends first is good, don't date your best friend.

My “romantic adventures” started in eighth grade. On a school trip to Washington, D.C., I spent a lot of time—on the bus rides, at monuments and at restaurants—with one of my best friends, Angela. Even though I was already great friends with Angela, I ended up spending more time with her than I ever had back at home. So toward the end of the trip, I thought about asking her to be my girlfriend.

On the second to last night of the trip, my best friend Niko and I went to the hotel lobby to get hot cocoa. Angela was there, too, and she and I started talking by ourselves.

“I've spent so much time with you,” I said while trying to keep my voice from shaking, “that I feel like I've gotten to know you better in this one week than in the last year and a half. And I know we're best friends but I feel like we could really make this work. Will you be my girlfriend?” This was my first time asking someone out. I had to put the cocoa down because my hands were shaking so much.

She gave me her signature smile and said “yes.” Then we hugged for like 15 seconds while I smiled from ear to ear.

But since we were still in middle school we didn't act like an actual couple. We never held hands at school, and our only date was a triple-date with two other couples. In fact, I never even kissed her. The one time I tried to kiss her cheek, I was extremely nervous, so I closed my eyes and just threw my lips toward the side of her head. I got her ear, but hey, it's the effort that counts, right?

Nothing seemed to go right dating-wise. Every move I tried to make, whether it was putting my arm around her during our movie triple-date or even texting her, I just didn't feel as comfortable as I did when I was just friends with her.

I had assumed that we would become closer once we were a couple. But it wasn't possible for us to get any closer. In D.C., we spent three to four hours a day together, just the two of us hanging out. When we got back to school we spent only two hours a week together and that wasn't even one-on-one time. When we were best friends we hugged randomly and it always felt natural, but once we started dating I felt required to hug her every time I saw her.

After about a month we broke up. I don't even remember why. I just remember that I was really angry at her and she was mad at me. The weird thing was that we didn't argue at all when we were friends. I think we both kind of knew that we were better off as friends and to this day Angela and I are friends.

ADVICE: Text messaging or instant messaging is the best way to get to know a girl.

If you want a girl to notice you, you should start by texting and instant messaging her. That's how it went with my current girlfriend, Jinny.

I thought she was cute so one day as everyone was taking their seats in class, I said, “Hi, Jinny!” and smiled at her. She looked up and glared at me. I still thought she was cute, so I wanted to find out why she didn't say hello back.

The next day I started cracking a few jokes in class and Jinny laughed. And that's what I wanted, for Jinny



Kevin says don't forget to use deodorant on your first date, like he once did.

WHAT AGE IS IT OK TO START DATING?



“Relationships take a lot of effort. There has to be a lot of maturity. I started dating in middle school and I can see why some of those relationships didn’t work. I lacked the knowledge and experience that I have now.”

Diego Mouriz, 17,
Northridge Academy HS



“I don’t think there’s an appropriate age—if you’re mature enough to be in a relationship and think about how far it can go. There are some relationships in high school that are a joke. You think you’re in love, but how would you know if you’ve experienced love?”

Erika Najarro, 16,
Northridge Academy HS



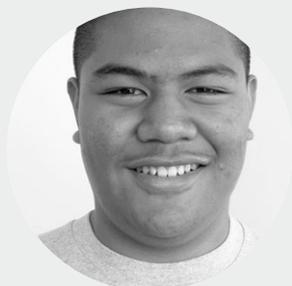
“I think you should date around 15. When you’re 12, they might just be playing, like ‘Let’s see who can kiss a girl.’ They’re more serious when they’re older.”

Yulissa Gamero, 12, Berendo MS



“High school is the right time to date. I think you should be more focused on schoolwork in middle school. You’d be distracted by a boyfriend or girlfriend in middle school, but in high school you’d be more mature.”

Francisco Zuniga, 13, Berendo MS



“Twenty-five, because if you start too young things can get out of control. People be getting girls pregnant and they’re not settled. At 25, you can have a job and a house.”

Neariah Vaiagae, 14, Carson HS

to see me as a relaxed guy. That way when I asked for her number it would be more of a friendly thing than a dating thing. A couple weeks later she gave me her number. From there, I knew I had to do one thing to truly get to know her better: text.

My first text to her was a simple, “Hey there!” For the next few days I texted her, “So what’s up?” Maybe it was annoying, but it did two things for me. One, it helped me get a better sense of what she liked to do with her free time. Two, it showed her that I cared about what she was doing and that I was interested.

I always wondered if she was spending as much time thinking about me as I was thinking about her, so I texted her a lot. We ended up texting about 100 times a day. We talked about everything—classes, favorite foods (I found out that she literally loved everything), her extremely fast metabolism, our goals and dreams, our childhoods.

Eventually we started talking on the phone and I discovered a personality trait of hers that made me really fall for her: she listened. She was always open to learning new things, so even though she had no interest in sports, she would always listen to me whenever the Lakers were the only thing on my mind. She even asked questions, which would lead me to giving her a whole history lesson on whatever sports subject I was talking about.

After about three weeks, Jinny and I had developed a friendship, but I didn’t have enough confidence to flirt with her in person. So, I decided to be flirtier when I texted. One day I pressed the keys on my phone to spell: “Haha you looked really nice today! (:” Sent. Happy face and all.

After my phone’s screen flashed “Message Sent,” I started cursing and calling myself stupid for sending it. I yelled, “I rushed it, didn’t I?!” I beat myself up for two minutes until my phone vibrated.

“Thanks! (: It took me all night to pick that outfit ... Glad that someone actually noticed ...”

I went from thinking, “Kevin, you’re so stupid,” to “Kevin, you’re a genius.” After that, I complimented her a lot more and two months after I sent that first flirty text, we started officially dating.

ADVICE: If you’re attracted to two girls, go with the second one you started liking because you weren’t into the first one enough to like only her. And dating both at the same time is just wrong.

Things started turning bad with my former girlfriend Katelin during the summer before ninth grade, because she wasn’t part of my group of regular friends.

But there was a bigger issue—Kristine. While Katelin was really cool and outgoing, I really liked Kristine because she was not only cool and outgoing but was also a sports fan. We had some amazing conversations about the Lakers, the Dodgers and college sports, which I never had with any girl before. I got the vibe that Kristine kind of had a thing for me too.

Even as I started having some feelings for Kristine, I still dated Katelin. Those dates were torture. Instead of having a good time and giving all my attention to Katelin, I would constantly ask myself, “Should I really be here right now? Am I with the right girl? Am I leading this girl on by dating her even though I like someone else? What am I doing?!”

It came to the point where I had to think about the situation for a good three or four days. I decided that if I really liked Katelin, then I wouldn’t be thinking about Kristine. So a couple days later, I called Katelin to tell her that I didn’t have feelings for her anymore and that I had feelings for another girl. I felt like an a-hole, but Katelin told me that she appreciated my honesty and that she was happy that I told her instead of leading her on. I ended up dating Kristine for about eight months.

I know there are people out there who are having trouble with dating. Trust me, I’ve been there. I wanted to write this article because I used to be the guy who didn’t think he could ever get dates with girls. But I’m here to tell you that it’s possible to get a date with the girl of your dreams!

I fell for a bad boy

While dating him I did things I'm not proud of, like ditching class and using drugs

Author's name withheld*

Until second semester of 10th grade, school and grades always came before my social life and definitely before boys. If I ever dated a guy, I figured it would be someone I met in the library. I never imagined I'd fall for a bad boy and end up skipping class, trying ecstasy and lying to my mom.

It started on a Wednesday in April 2009. I saw the hottest guy coming my way. I stared at his brown eyes, his boyish smirk and his black leather jacket. Then I saw his hands entwined with a gorgeous girl's. I was crushed.

I told my friend Tina about the guy. "Oh, that's my friend Adam," she said. How dare she have a hot friend and not tell me? She offered to introduce me to him but I was too shy and, besides, he had a girlfriend. Tina said she would put in a good word for me with Adam. I hoped she would tell him good things—like that I was tall and exaggerate my attractiveness.

Tina surprised me by introducing me to Adam after school that day. I was so red with embarrassment while we were talking that I wanted to leave. But then I told myself to look like I was interested, but not too excited. After a couple minutes he said he had to leave for work, but he invited me and Tina to hang out Friday. I was thrilled.

MY FRIENDS WARNED ME ABOUT HIM

Even though I was so anxious to hang out with Adam that I got distracted in class thinking about him, I didn't know anything about him. I asked female friends about him and they told me that he was a womanizer and a drug user. They also said that he'd been in rehab and had been kicked out of a college-prep class for disrespecting a teacher. Basically, he was a bad boy. I couldn't believe it. He looked so sweet when he was holding hands with his girlfriend. I thought that my friends were saying bad things about him because they were jealous.

That Friday after school, Tina, Adam and I

**We are not publishing the writer's name to protect her identity because she writes about using drugs. Names have been changed.*



Illustration by Michelle Cao, 16, Temple City HS

went over to his friend Jesse's house. There was a bag of pot on the floor. My friends were right, at least about the drugs. I was scared, because I had smoked only once before. But I felt like Adam would never want to talk to me again if I refused or if I left.

We started passing the pipe around. When it was my turn to smoke, I inhaled, coughed and passed it on. As we kept passing it around I got high. Things were going well. Adam was playing our requests on his guitar, I didn't look like a fool trying to smoke and I was talking with Adam and his friend.

SMOKING POT MADE ME SICK

Soon we walked to a restaurant. I was high and started feeling nauseous. Once we sat down Tina took me to the bathroom where I threw up. When we got back to our table, Adam and Jesse were laughing at me. I was humiliated. I had wanted to prove that I was mature (Adam was a senior and I was only a sophomore) but I ended up puking. I didn't expect to hear from him again.

But one day about a week later Adam sent me a text. (Tina had given him my number.) We spent hours texting that day and discovered that we both loved the Canadian band Metric and were Harry Potter nerds. He complimented me on my good taste in music and how cute I was. My cheeks went red as I read his text.

I asked female friends about him and they told me that he was a womanizer and a drug user. They also said that he'd been in rehab and had been kicked out of a college-prep class for disrespecting a teacher. Basically, he was a bad boy.

A few days later Adam asked me out on a date. I did my happy dance and texted all my friends. I didn't care that he was dating someone else. We saw a terrible movie, but it didn't matter because the hottest guy I knew went to this movie with me! I could have been at a bus stop in the rain and been happy as long as I was with him. As we were walking out of the theater, he smiled, leaned in close and kissed me. My face went hot and my heart was beating fast. When my mom picked me up she asked how my date went. All I said was that the movie was bad but the talking was great. I was too embarrassed to tell her about the kiss.

After that, Adam and I, along with some other friends, hung out every day during lunch and after school. Adam would tell us about the crazy parties and raves he went to where people would overdose on drugs. I smiled nervously, not knowing what to say. I had never heard someone talk about overdoses so casually. I felt like the only one who was shocked.

A few weeks later I was skipping class a couple times

a week to be with him, and even worse I was smoking pot with him every other day. I also heard that Adam and his girlfriend had broken up. That day I saw his beautiful ex-girlfriend looking somber as she passed me in the hall. I knew that this was the perfect time to prove myself to be girlfriend-worthy.

Later that day my friend Serena asked me to go with her to an all-ages dance club that night. I said I couldn't go because my parents wouldn't let me stay out past 11, let alone go to a club. Eventually she convinced me by saying that she would tell my mom that I was sleeping over at her house. I'd never been to a club or lied to my mom to go somewhere I wasn't supposed to.

We met Adam there and he introduced me to his friends and held my hand. I could see them look from me to him and nod approvingly. As soon as we got inside, I was overwhelmed by the loud techno and hip-hop, the colored lights and the hundreds of people dancing. I wanted to impress Adam and his friends so I tried to imitate how they acted. They weren't looking around wide-eyed so neither could I.

When we started dancing I felt so free. A little while later, some of Adam's friends bought ecstasy. Adam said he didn't want any but without thinking I blurted out that I wanted to try it. He and his friend looked happy when I said yes.

Suddenly, I felt my pocket vibrating. I took my phone out and saw my mom's name on the caller ID. I stared at my phone not knowing what to do. Freaking out as it kept ringing, I thought of an excuse to tell her when I called her back. I put my phone back in my pocket. I felt so guilty. I was somewhere I wasn't supposed to be and I had lied to her to get here.

I calmed myself by thinking that my rebelling was a natural part of being a teen. At 15, pretty much everyone I knew had lied to their parents at least once. I danced with Serena and then Adam took my hand and led us out of the hall where he and I each swallowed an ecstasy pill.

After a few hours of dancing I felt like I was on the drop of a steep roller coaster. This freaked me out and I told Adam I had to sit down. As we sat on the floor, I remembered Adam's stories of people overdosing and I hoped I wouldn't make a dumbass of myself. About 30 minutes later, Serena told me I had to act normal because her dad was going to pick us up soon. I had just started

feeling the ecstasy and I needed to act like I wasn't on drugs. When I got to Serena's around midnight I texted my mom that I hadn't seen her missed call because cell phone reception at Serena's house was bad.

When I woke up at Serena's the next morning I felt guilty about lying to my mom. But I also knew I'd gotten away with it and then I started to slack off even more. Instead of always being on time to class, most mornings I would meet Adam and spend minutes kissing him after the tardy bell rang. My French teacher would get upset when I walked in late and didn't apologize. Eventually I no longer had the highest grade in class.

My new life with Adam came at a price. A few of my friends stopped speaking to me because I had ditched them for Adam. They also didn't like that I was smoking pot. I thought, if they were my real friends they wouldn't care whether I did drugs or judge who I was seeing.

WOULD HE EVER MAKE ME HIS GIRLFRIEND?

By May, some friends questioned me about my relationship status. I would say that we were just dating, but inside I worried whether Adam would ever make me his girlfriend. I assumed he would since we already acted like a couple. He walked me to my classes, we went on dates and out to parties together. But since we hadn't had a conversation about our "status" I feared that he would drop me like he did the girl he was dating before me. I never asked him about it though. I was too afraid he would say he didn't want me as his girlfriend.

A few weeks before school ended, Adam was hospitalized for alcohol poisoning. When I saw him at school he was talking to our group of friends about how he was going to stick to whiskey now. I couldn't believe him. A night in the hospital would have straightened me out, but he still wanted to drink. It sickened me. So when Adam tried to hug me I shrugged him off and walked away. He didn't ask me what was wrong.

After that day Adam stopped walking me to my classes, asking me to hang out and he rarely replied to my text messages saying "hi." I felt rejected but after a few days, I got the hint. A week later, I learned that he had begun seeing an old girlfriend. I spent most of those days at Tina's house crying, watching Mean Girls and eating ice cream. Thankfully the friends I had ditched were understanding.

When my report card came, I didn't want to open it. I had blown off a lot of classes since April. I was shocked when I saw that I ended the year with a 3.8 GPA. I was so thankful my teachers were kind but I felt guilty because I didn't deserve my grades.

That summer I went to summer school, didn't touch drugs and was boy free. I felt so much happier hanging out with my friends, enjoying evening walks at the park. I didn't need to lie to my mom to have fun on the weekends. I realized that I was not meant to be with someone who I needed to change so much for.

Even though now I can see that he clearly was a bad boy, at the time I was too infatuated to acknowledge it. I had this image of what I wanted him to be, sweet and loving, and I wasn't going to let anything taint it, not even reality. The next time I feel a crush building up for someone like Adam, I'll remember that a bad boy broke my heart.

By Stacey Avnes*16, Sherman Oaks Center for Enriched Studies*

The first time I went to Venice Beach the people were so different and the place was so amazing, that I couldn't wait to tell my friends about it! It was a Saturday and the boardwalk was crowded with all different kinds of people—teenagers and adults. There were people whizzing by on skateboards and walking their dogs. On one side of me there were dozens of vendors selling everything from \$1 friendship bracelets to intricate paintings and posters, and on the other side were tattoo and piercing parlors and hole-in-the-wall food places. A man with dreadlocks and a tie-dye shirt skated by playing an electric guitar while another guy was pulling a cart that was blasting reggae children's songs like "The Itsy-Bitsy Spider."

My friends and I go to Venice Beach, which is between Santa Monica and the Los Angeles airport, about once every three or four months. I live in the Valley and if I can't get there by car, I can always take the bus. Unlike the mall, you don't need a lot of money to have fun. Plus there are interesting people, street performers, handmade products and amazing weather all year round.

My friends and I usually stay for a few hours and we can spend anything from just \$2 on a slice of pizza and a soda, to as much as \$30 on food, plus a painting, incense and handmade jewelry.

One Saturday in December I went with my friend Sophia. We started out by getting henna tattoos (temporary tattoos that last for a few weeks) from "Dennis from Venice, the free Henna Man." He told us that he believes in doing henna for the sake of the art and not the money, but he gladly accepts donations. (I gave him \$5.) I got a butterfly on my wrist and Sophia got a Native American animal on hers. Then we walked along the boardwalk



Stacey says the sunsets at Venice Beach are beautiful.

checking out all the vendors. I bought a pair of earrings and \$1 incense. Along the way we even saw the house that the America's Next Top Model cast stayed in during their most recent season! Then we got \$1 pizza slices. We ate our pizza at the skate park where we saw a little girl skateboard better than any of the older guys who were there.

The recreation center on the beach hosts basketball tournaments, which are interesting to watch. Next to the courts is an outdoor gym called Muscle Beach. There are always weightlifters with huge muscles.

Often there are breakdancers or street performers who are cool to see. Sophia and I saw a crowd of people surrounding a small, muscular, shirtless man. I didn't know what was happening, but the crowd was big so I decided to take a look. He explained how he was going to do his trick, which was to flip over eight people, lined up and bent over. After he gathered the group of children, he told everyone to stay in school and stay off drugs. Then he flipped over them, which was absolutely incredible to watch!

The best part about Venice Beach is that no matter what you're into, you can always find something. It is one the most diverse places I have been to.



Stacey and her friend Sophia shopped, got henna tattoos and ate pizza on a recent trip to Venice Beach. They were entertained by the street performers, like the guy at right pretending to be a statue.

Photos by Elizabeth Vidar, 16, North Hollywood HS Zoo Magnet



Making money online

I earned cash to hang out with my friends by selling my clothes on eBay

By Lubina Kim

17, Wilson HS (Hacienda Heights)

Two years ago, my parents stopped giving me an allowance. It was the summer before my sophomore year and I didn't want to be held back from going to the mall or movies with my friends because of money. I was desperate for a job.

I searched for jobs at the mall but was shot down by six places. One day my friend suggested I try selling my clothes to secondhand stores such as Wasteland in Santa Monica. My sister and I rifled through our closets and filled a huge cardboard box with our old clothes that we'd outgrown. I hoped to make at least \$10 for each item.

When I arrived at Wasteland and emptied my box of clothes on the counter, the woman behind the counter offered us barely any money, like \$1 for the shirts. I told her that the shirts were worth more than what she offered but she said that they were only willing to pay 35 percent of what they thought they could sell them for. She pinched at the corners of my shirt as if it were infested with germs. My clothing was in good condition and it's not like I had been running miles and rolling in the dirt with them on. I picked up my box of clothes and left.

I hated the idea of the store taking so much of my cut. I'd heard about eBay, a website where people can sell used and new clothes and other things. The site offered two ways to sell: auction, where the seller allows people to bid on an item for a set period of time, and "buy it now" where the seller gives a set price. I trusted eBay because a lot of people have used it for a long time.

I READ TIPS FROM PEOPLE WHO'D MADE A LOT OF MONEY ON EBAY

Before I started selling, I Googled tips for a beginning seller. Most of the online guides were written by top eBay sellers who sold for a living. I never knew people could actually make a living from eBay. I thought the website was just something people used occasionally when they needed to sell their junk. Most of the guides told me to begin by selling in-demand items, such as bestselling novels, popular video games or brand name clothing. Most of the clothes I'd taken to Wasteland were from stores like Abercrombie & Fitch and Hollister and I knew those brands were popular among teenagers.

The first item I put up for sale was a red Hollister button-down shirt, which I had bought on a whim for \$10 during their winter sale but had never worn. I was so anxious to sell that I modeled the shirt and took the picture myself. My right arm couldn't stretch far enough to get a good angle so the flash ended up whitening a large portion of the picture. I used the photo anyway.

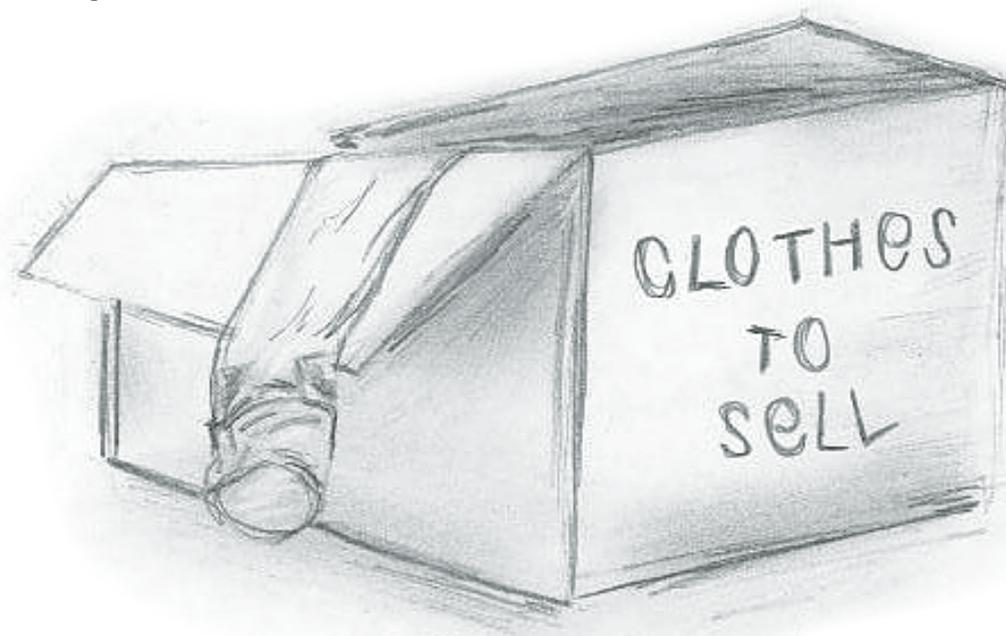


Illustration by Sophie Chung, 15, Canyon HS

I loved the feeling of having a full wallet again. I was able to treat my friends to dinner, go to movies whenever I wanted and go shopping without worrying about the price tag.

There was nothing special about the shirt but the material was soft, so for the description I wrote, "Very soft shirt" and clicked submit.

I auctioned the shirt for a seven-day period and tracked its progress online every day after school. It was exciting to see my starting price of 99 cents increase each day. It eventually sold for \$5, which wasn't much but it was still more than what Wasteland offered.

I was so excited to receive my first e-mail that read, "You received an instant payment of \$5." The money was deposited into my bank account through an online service called PayPal. It felt like receiving a paycheck and it felt good to start making money.

I wanted to sell more, but I didn't want to make the same mistakes I had made with my first sell. So I asked my sister to photograph my clothes for me as I modeled them. I tried to copy the professional pictures of other sellers and posed in front of my white closet door. The image didn't look as cluttered. I also provided a description of the condition of my items. Listings that stated "navy blue, 100% cotton, like new hoodie with patterned kangaroo pocket" attracted more attention than "blue jacket."

My clothes began attracting more bidders and selling for around \$20 to \$30 after I took better pictures and gave clearer descriptions. After two months, I ran out of clothes to sell. I'd sold about 40 items and made about \$600. I saved half of it for college and spent the other half. I loved the feeling of having a full wallet again. I was able to treat my friends to dinner, go to movies whenever I wanted and go shopping without worrying about the price tag.

WHEN I RAN OUT OF CLOTHES I SOLD MY BOOKS AND VIDEO GAMES

Selling things online became a part-time job for me when I needed money. I listed my old SAT books and

Sims video games and was able to easily sell them for more than \$10 each. Sometimes I spent three hours a week listing items and two hours making trips to the post office shipping them out. I also went on eBay three times a day to check my listing and answer questions from potential buyers.

A year after I joined eBay, I began buying clothes just to sell them. I didn't want to sell any more of my own things but I still needed the money. I looked for bargains and flipped through the sales rack of thrift shops. Some of the shirts I bought on sale for \$10 sold for double the price on eBay.

My friends and I went to a factory sale at American Apparel where they sold last season's clothes for 50 percent off. I bought dresses for \$8 and T-shirts for \$6

but they sold for more than three times as much on eBay.

After I turned 16 last year, I decided to look for a job again. I knew I couldn't rely entirely on eBay for money because it was inconsistent. Sometimes the things I auctioned didn't sell or I ran out of things to sell.

My search for a steady job at the mall wasn't very successful so I went around to nearby middle schools and after-school centers to advertise myself as a tutor. A lot of people responded but I accepted only five students because I didn't want to work more than 10 hours a week. Getting a job as a private tutor gave me a steady income.

I'm thankful for my stable job because I went back to eBay two months ago to sell my old jackets and it wasn't as easy. There were a lot more sellers and fewer

buyers. The brands I sold were going for less than half of what they used to. Although eBay isn't what it used to be, it taught me to be creative when searching for ways to make money.



Even though Lubina doesn't sell clothes on eBay anymore, she still shops on the website.

HOW DO YOU MAKE MONEY?

"I do chores at my house and my parents pay me. It's really hard to get a job—being a teen especially makes it harder. Adults are more likely to get hired."

Yuliam Rivero, 16, Fairfax HS

"My parents give me an allowance. And I help out and get good grades."

Leah Mack, 15, Fairfax HS

"I don't have a job. I'm trying to get one right now. A fast-food restaurant, anything. I want the money for spending money and supporting my family."

Ray Balboa, 16, Fairfax HS

"I don't have a job but I get money from my mom and I have a scholarship to pay for school. I tried applying for jobs online [last summer] but no one hired me since I was going off to college."

Aspen Makkar, 18, Cal Poly

"My friend's mom sells tacos at churches. We make sure everyone has napkins and rice and if anyone needs anything and she pays us. I also wash cars. I'll tell my family I'll wash their car and they'll bring it over to my house."

Laura Garces, 16, Northridge Academy HS



"I don't have a job, but I help my dad at his restaurant for a couple of hours. And I recycle with my dad. I collect the cans at home."

Rachel Metriyakool, 17, Northridge Academy HS



"After school I help my dad in landscaping. I've been working with him for about two and a half years. He used to give me \$50 a month, but it wasn't enough. Now he gives me \$90. It keeps me motivated to go to school and get a good job."

Edwin Ramirez, 17, Northridge Academy HS



"I clean the bathroom and the kitchen at home. Sometimes I go where my dad works and help him out."

Carlos Miguel, 13, Berendo MS



"Every Saturday I help my dad sell food and sodas. Sometimes I help him make soup to sell. I feel like I'm being helpful."

Andreina Perez, 13, Berendo MS



"I worked at Old Navy and Foot Locker. I liked that it was laid back but it was still a lot of work. At Old Navy I was folding clothes and at Foot Locker I was organizing shoe boxes by color code and number. I was dealing with a lot of boxes."

Nicholas Adegbulugbe, 18, The Linden Center

Win \$100

You could be one of three winners by taking our **survey about reading**

1. Do you like to read?

- Yes
 No

2. If you chose "no" in the first question, why not? (Check all that apply)

- I'm a slow reader
 I haven't found books that I like
 I get bored when I read
 It isn't cool
 I do like reading
 Other _____

3. What kinds of books do you like to read? (Check all that apply)

- Fiction
 Classic literature
 Action/adventure
 Mystery/suspense
 Romance
 Fantasy
 Science fiction
 Biography/autobiography/memoir
 Comic books/manga
 Horror
 History
 Westerns
 War
 Poetry
 Other _____

4. How many books did you read for fun (not for school) in 2010?

- 0
 1-5
 6-10
 11-15
 16-20
 More than 20

5. How many days do you usually read for fun each week?

- 0
 1-3
 4-6
 Every day

According to a National Endowment for the Arts survey from 2007, the percentage of 17-year-olds who read for fun almost every day has dropped from 31 percent in 1984 to only 22 percent in 2004. L.A. Youth wants to know more about how much you read for fun. By answering this survey you will help L.A. Youth learn more about what teens read and how much time they spend reading. Three people will be randomly chosen from all the entries to win \$100 each.

6. What prevents you from reading more for fun? (Check all that apply)

- I don't have enough time
 I don't like reading
 I'd rather watch TV, go online, play video games or hang out with my friends
 I read so much for school that I don't want to read for fun
 The public libraries are closed
 Books cost too much
 I read as much as I want to

7. Do you have a library card for the public library (not the school library)?

- Yes
 No

8. When was the last time you visited a public library?

- In the last month
 In the last three months
 In the last year
 More than a year ago
 There are no libraries in my community

9. Where do you get the books that you read for fun? (Check all that apply)

- School library
 Public library

Please fill out the survey only once. You can also fill out this survey online (check for the link at layouth.com). To be eligible for the drawing, your name, address and phone number must be included and all questions must be answered. You must be a teen to participate in the survey. All information will be kept confidential. The deadline is Tuesday, March 1, 2011.

Mail the survey to: L.A. Youth,
5967 W. Third St. Suite 301, Los Angeles CA 90036

- Borrow from a teacher
 Buy them at a bookstore or online
 My family already owns them
 From friends
 I don't read
 Other _____

10. What's the last book you read for fun? Or what book are you currently reading for fun?

11. Besides school books, what do you read most?

- Books
 Magazines
 Newspapers
 Websites
 Comic books/
manga



Illustration by
Lily Clark,
17, Immaculate
Heart HS

To be eligible for the drawing to win \$100, please fill in the following information. Your information will be kept confidential. It is used only to mail checks to winning entrants. The deadline is Tuesday, March 1, 2011.

Name _____

Age _____

Sex: M F

School _____

Grade _____

Home street address _____

City _____ Zip _____

Phone (_____) _____

Your race or ethnicity: Latino Black White Asian Other (write in) _____

Allergic to my food

Eating was frustrating until I got treatment

By Feather Flores

15, Monrovia HS

My family and I were eating fruit salad after dinner about two years ago when I felt my lips beginning to burn and swell. I couldn't focus on eating or even think straight. I excused myself and went to the bathroom. When I looked in the mirror my lips were red, bumpy and swollen. I rinsed them with water and the swelling went down and the burning faded away.

"It's just a rash," my mom said. I wanted to believe her but I wasn't so sure. Wondering why I'd had such a strange reaction, I tried each fruit slowly—the grapes, the apples, but nothing happened until I got to the cantaloupe. The second it touched my lips they began to swell again. I realized that I was allergic to cantaloupe, one of my favorite fruits.

Before, I felt bad for my friends with food allergies, but I didn't know how hard it might have been for them. After I discovered my own allergies, I understood how they felt. Being allergic to something isn't fun, no matter how mild it may be.

THE LIST OF FOODS I COULDN'T EAT KEPT GROWING

For the next few weeks I avoided cantaloupe, but other foods began causing symptoms. Bananas made my mouth tingle and itch. Raw carrots made my tongue swell. Cucumbers made my lips red and puffy. At home we use real tomatoes in our pizza sauce and once I had a reaction in the middle of dinner, which was horrible because pizza is one of my absolute favorite foods. I also love Starbucks parfaits (yogurt mixed with fruit and granola), and whenever we'd go, I'd get one. But once, after three bites, I started getting that tingling feeling. I thought, "Oh great, I'm having a reaction," and I had to throw it away.

These reactions were irritating and itchy—kind of like mosquito bites—and lasted for about a minute. My friends and family knew me to be a picky eater who never wanted to eat vegetables, but as soon as my allergies prevented me from being able to, they were all I wanted to eat. It became frustrating to keep track of what I was allergic to. Before I took a bite of anything, I had to remember whether it had caused a reaction before. Pears were OK, oranges weren't.



Fruit was one of the hardest things for Feather to give up when she suddenly developed allergies to certain foods.

Photo by Danny Flores, Feather's father

I wanted to know what I had and just how bad allergies could be. I researched allergies online and I checked out library books. I was surprised to discover that people can be allergic to just about anything, even water! I read that each person reacts differently, so people with less severe allergies might not even notice they have them because their symptoms aren't obvious. I also learned that getting allergies is pretty common as you get older.

Finally, about two months after my first reaction and weeks of complaining, my dad set up an appointment with an allergist to get me tested. At my first appointment about a week later, I was scared. I assumed I would be getting the same allergy test my brother had had two months before. He told me it really hurt and I had a vague idea that there were lots of needles. After he took the test he started getting shots for treatment. I

hate shots. But my doctor reassured me that it wouldn't hurt at all. She said the test would consist of pricking my skin with tiny needles to see whether I reacted badly to any of them.

The test was horrible. My gown was open at the back and the nurse drew a huge grid of squares on my back with a pen. Each square was pricked with tiny samples of weeds and pollens that people are commonly allergic to; how much I swelled up determined how allergic I was. The test was to see what medicine would help me,

because there's a shot to reduce reactions to almost everything. Unfortunately, I was allergic to almost everything. My back felt like it was on fire and I couldn't stop wriggling. The test took about half an hour, but it felt like an eternity.

It turns out that besides being allergic to almost every tree and grass you can think of, the doctor told me that I also have OAS (Oral Allergy Syndrome), which is a type of food allergy that is a response to eating certain fresh foods. I'm most allergic to certain fruits (bananas and cantaloupes) and vegetables (carrots and cucumbers).

THE ALLERGY SHOTS WERE SCARY

I went to the doctor to get allergy shots every week to keep my reactions down. And there wasn't just one shot either, there were three—two in one arm and one in the other! I hate needles, so the whole experience was awful for the first few months. I would go every Tuesday right after school. The needle was 4 inches long. But I tried to think about how it was worth it to know that with the shots, I could eat whatever I wanted.

A few weeks after my first shot my family was eating at an Italian restaurant and about two bites into my pepperoni pizza, I panicked. "Wait, am I eating something that's going to make me break out in a reaction?" Then I remembered that it didn't matter because of the shots. It felt great! I ate every bite like I'd never tasted pizza before.

Because my body is reacting so well to the shots, I've been able to go from getting them every week to every three weeks. I don't know

if it's something that I'll have to do for the rest of my life, but if it is, I'm willing to do it. So I don't have to give up salads, Italian dishes with tomatoes and all the other foods that I love, I'll take my shots any day! I'm lucky my allergies aren't worse, and I'm thankful for that.



When Feather found out she is highly allergic to mushrooms, one of her least favorite foods, she was happy to have an excuse not to eat them.

L.A. youth ART CONTEST: Create a new state flag

The California flag has a bear and star on it with the words "California Republic." It was created almost 100 years ago and we don't see too many bears anymore (thankfully!). We want you to create your own state flag to show what California means to you. There's a lot to appreciate. We have beaches, mountains and famous landmarks. There are so many things that make the state unique and everyone has different things they love about it. Enter our art contest and design a state flag that shows us your view of California.



RULES

- 1) Contest entries must be original artwork of Los Angeles County youth ages 13 to 19.
- 2) The work may be done in any medium, including acrylics, oils, charcoal, pencil, pen, watercolor, collage, multimedia, photography or sculpture. The dimensions should be 8 1/2" by 11". Three-dimensional artwork should include a photograph of the artwork.
- 3) Each artist may submit only one entry.
- 4) The artist's name, age, address and phone number should be included on the back of the artwork. If the artist is in school, the school's name should be included. If the artwork was created as an assigned project in a classroom, the teacher's name should be listed. Artwork will be returned if a return address is provided.

The teen staff of L.A. Youth will select a first-, second- and third-place winner as well as some honorable mentions. The first-place winner and his or her teacher will each receive \$75. Second- and third-place winning students and teachers will each receive \$50. Winners and honorable mentions will be published in the May-June 2011 issue of L.A. Youth and on layouth.com.

Questions?

Contact us at (323) 938-9194 or editor@layouth.com.

Send your submission to:

L.A. Youth
5967 W. Third St., Suite 301
Los Angeles, CA 90036



IMAGE BY FLAGS-TO-PRINT.COM

DEADLINE: MARCH 31, 2011

Loud and clear

Being part of speech and debate taught me not to be afraid of public speaking

By Brian Yu
16, Walnut HS

I was standing at the lectern at Walnut City Hall, looking down at elected officials and community leaders. This was the Lions Club student speaker contest. The topic was “Water: Will California be left high and dry?” I raised and lowered my voice dramatically, adding hand motions for emphasis. I felt confident, even though I had written the speech the night before. I ended my speech with my arms raised dramatically in the air as I said, “If we don’t do something, in a couple years California will be the next great desert.”

Before I joined the speech and debate club, I would have been terrified to be standing where I was then. Speech and debate helped me overcome my fears of audiences and public speaking, and my fear of embarrassment. When you’re up there, everyone is judging you. I learned to ignore that.

The first time I spoke for an audience was in eighth grade. I stared at all those faces in my English class, thinking, “What do they want from me?” I was talking about why countries should use nuclear power. I couldn’t stop shaking. Twice, my teacher had to tell me, “Speak up, son.” My cheeks turned red and I wished I could disappear.

That summer I saw a politician giving a speech on TV. He seemed so at ease. I thought, “If only I could do that.” Then I thought, “It shouldn’t be that hard. Everybody talks, all you have to do is get up there and talk.”

I WANTED TO BE MORE CONFIDENT

When I got to high school, I joined the speech and debate club. I had always imagined speech and debate like something from the movies. There would be sharply dressed people in suits countering everyone else’s arguments. That was what I wanted to do. All my life I had been insecure because I was teased and bullied when I was younger. I didn’t want to be afraid of what others thought anymore.

I chose speech over debate. There was a tournament coming up in less than two weeks so I was already competing. The high school league lets you choose your topic. The speech captain told me to write a speech that was relevant to modern society that was less than 10 minutes long and to write it like an essay. I was struggling because I had the freedom to write whatever I wanted to, but nothing came to mind. I banged my head on the table in frustration and swore, which gave me the idea to write about swearing.

Six hours later I had written my speech. Now I had to memorize it. I practiced in front of my bedroom mirror, saying the words over and over again. I kept playing back the worst scenarios in my head, like I would forget the words and freeze up.

The night before I was so nervous I barely slept. The tournament was divided into rounds, and each round was held in a room where you competed against four or five other speakers. Two people judged the speeches based on content and style. I was selected to speak first.

With my heart pounding I walked to the front of the room. I started off stuttering. I paused, took a breath and then I started easing into my speech. During the middle of the speech however, I stopped. I had forgotten the words. One second passed. Two seconds. The silence grew uncomfortable. My mind raced, scrambling to come up with the right words. Finally I found them. I finished my speech and sat down, relieved. When nothing happened, I realized that this fear of speaking was all in my head. People might stare at you or think badly of you, but in 10 minutes they would probably forget about it (after a while all the speeches sounded the same).

After that, I really started to get into it. To get better, I watched videos of the national high school champions, paying attention to things like body movement and tone, which was especially important because different tones indicated different emotions. A raised voice meant passion or anger. I also watched politicians on YouTube. From Bill Clinton I learned to talk to my audience no differently than I talked to my friends. From Martin Luther King Jr., I learned not to be afraid to be loud. From the videos, I learned to gesture to emphasize words.

From placing last in each round I moved up to fourth and third. Sophomore year I moved up to varsity. There’s this positive energy that comes from giving a good speech. People congratulate you, and there’s a part of you that goes, “Wow, I did that?” It seemed silly that something that was so natural now, used to terrify me.

Nowadays, I’m more outgoing, and I’m not afraid to be funny or stupid. During band practices my friends and I sang “I Want It That Way” by the Backstreet Boys to girls walking by us. I’ll be the first to answer when-



Brian practices a speech he wrote for an upcoming competition.

Photo by Kaitlyn Tsai, 17, Walnut HS

ever there’s silence when the teacher asks a question, because I no longer care what people think of me.

I CAN USE MY SPEAKING SKILLS OUTSIDE OF COMPETITION

One of the greatest parts of public speaking is that you can make a difference. In November, my history teacher let me talk about a project I was starting to help the school. I said we needed to reach out to teens going through hard times. I was fighting back tears because I believed in what I was saying. Even though I had poured my heart into my speech, I was still surprised when people applied to join my group. I didn’t expect them to have time. I had inspired people to take action, and that meant something to me.

I’m no taller or smarter or more outgoing than anyone else. The only difference was that I was determined to make a difference in how I spoke. And I did.



Brian is nervous and excited because he’s flying to Sacramento this month to give a speech and meet the governor.

We're not ready to be on our own

Teens in foster care say they need support from the system as they become adults

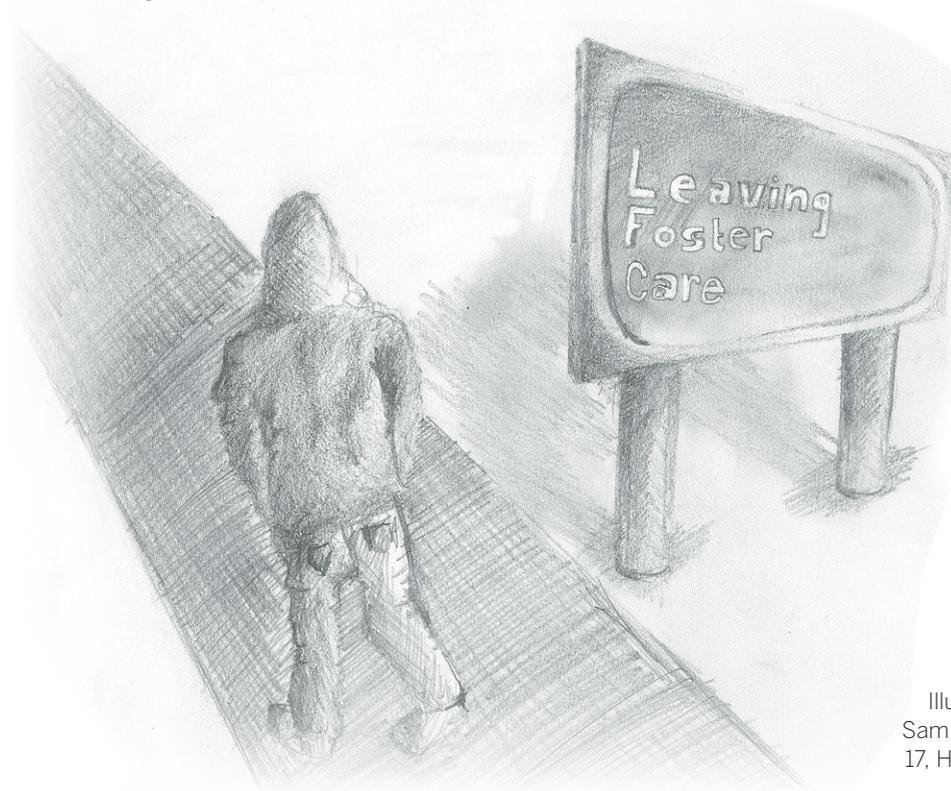


Illustration by
Sam Landsberg,
17, Hamilton HS

I recently got together with three other foster youth to talk about our futures. When you're in the foster care system and you turn 18, you're on your own. It's called emancipating. The system believes you're grown up and you don't need any more help. But we do. Some of us don't have families so we need the system to help us.

The people at the discussion who were already on their own talked about how they were in transitional housing. You live in an apartment with a roommate and the system pays for it. I thought, "That's cool, the system is still helping you out." I think it would be cool to live by yourself and be more responsible, but you'd still have support.

But not everyone gets into housing. I've heard about foster youth becoming homeless after they leave the system. One of my friends who was in foster care was homeless for a month. You have to sign up for transitional housing, so maybe she didn't know about it.

It's hard being in the system. You have to do everything yourself if you're going to make it. I have to make sure I tell my social worker that I need my monthly bus pass so I have a way to get to school. My social worker does everything he needs to do but I know people who don't see their social workers regularly.

I've been in foster care since I was 6 years old. I'm about to turn 18. I need support so I can get to where I want to be in life. I'll need a place to live when I get out of the system. I need money and scholarships for college so I can get a good education. I want to study sociology or psychology. I want to be a social worker or a counselor because I want to help people.

—Keisha Solis, 17, Animo Locke HS #3

The following are selected comments from Keisha and three other foster youth, at a discussion organized by L.A. Youth.

L.A. Youth Editor Amanda Riddle: Have you thought about emancipating and your plans for the future? Do you feel like the system has been helping you get ready to be on your own?

Keisha Solis, 17, Animo Locke HS #3: I'm in 11th grade. I'm kind of scared for when I get out of high school, where I'm going to be. I don't want the system to forget about me when I'm 18 because I'm still going to be needing help—college help, scholarships, trying to make it on my own.

James Allen, 15, Manual Arts HS: I'm scared for when I graduate. When I'm 18 I will get transitional housing [an apartment for former foster youth that the system pays for] but I'm still scared to live on my own. I don't know where to start. I don't know where to go in life. I'm thinking of going to college. I don't want to be out there on the streets. I want to get a good education because I know that I can make it in life.

Marisa Rodriguez, 18, Maywood Academy HS (2010 graduate): I just turned 18. When I entered the system at 14, I didn't want to be in a foster home. I hated it. They weren't treating me good. I tried to find ways to get out of there. I found out about THPP [Transitional Housing Placement Program, where foster youth ages 16-18 live in apartments that the system pays for]. I was looking for independence but I found the complete opposite of that. I found support from the staff of my THPP program and now I don't want to leave.

Amanda: How long are you able to stay there?

Marisa: Two years. I got in there when I was 16, so now is about my time [to leave]. Since I'm doing so well—I'm following the rules, I'm going to school and I have a job—they don't want me to leave. But the people who want me to leave is the system, my social worker, they're the ones that are pushing for me to go.

Amanda: What reason does your social worker give?

Marisa: You're 18, you've gotta go.

Amanda: Do you feel your social worker has your best interests in mind?

Marisa: Not necessarily. She's concerned more about herself because they're telling her, "She's already 18, you've gotta get her out of here." She's the one who's in charge of me right now because she's my social worker. So I understand where she's coming from but she also has to understand what we need. We need that support because I don't have my parents, I don't have nobody to fall back on. That's why I do need the system.

Amanda: Brandon, what was it like for you to go through the emancipation process?

Brandon Cherry, 23, Cal State L.A.: I went straight to college out of school. I lived in the dorms for a year. I really didn't like the dorms because we had to move during the summer so it wasn't permanent. So I applied for transitional housing and I got in and I was there for two years and did exceptional. After my two years it was time to go. So I was living on my own for the past 10 months. It's kind of difficult right now. I'm staying with friends and I'm trying to find housing. I have a little over a year and a half left at Cal State L.A.

[A new law passed by the governor last fall allows

foster youth to stay in foster care until age 21. The law goes into effect next year. It's intended to provide support to foster youth as they become adults so they can be successful. Foster youth who stay in the system after age 18 are more likely to be in college and less likely to have been arrested, according to a University of Washington study.]

Amanda: A new law extends foster care to age 21. You can stay in your foster home, group home or transitional living program until age 21, as long as you're in school, working or getting job training. Do you think that would help you?

Marisa: It's a good thing and a bad thing because some kids are going to be thinking, "The government is going to be giving me money until I'm 21, I can just chill, kick back and do nothing." But for those of us who do want to do something it would be good. But they have to have restrictions to make sure they're doing something with their life.

Keisha: I think the law would be good too. When you're 18 you're still not standing on your own, you're still growing.

James: I want to stay in the system until I'm 21 because I'm not ready to be on my own. I don't even know what I want to do with my life. I barely know how to clean. Even though I want to go to college, I'm still trying to make my idea of where I'm going to go, what job am I going to have, how much money am I going to make so I can be stable, stuff like that. I think it is a good idea.

Amanda: If the new law is going to be offering more support, what should it include?

Brandon: Having a mentor to guide you along the way, somebody you can go to for support.

Marisa: It's about having people there. The staff from my program are very good. We have life skill classes every week. They teach us new things, like how to do grocery shopping, all that stuff. What we need are people there to help us because we don't have our families. We want that love and support from other people.

Keisha: I think we need more scholarships. Probably because the economy is bad it's harder to get scholarships now.

Amanda: There are high rates of foster youth not finishing high school, not going to college and ending up in jail, pregnant or homeless. It seems like if you have to be on your own at 18, life is going to be a lot harder. Do you feel like the system is helping you get ready to emancipate? Are you learning those life skills you're going to need to know? James, has your social worker talked to you about that?

James: No she hasn't talked to me at all.

Amanda: Have you heard of ILP [Independent Living Program] classes?

James: No.

Marisa: Those are very good, you'll benefit a lot from it. In the classes they teach you how to fill out your FAFSA [a form to apply for federal financial aid], where to go to look for scholarships and grants, they teach you how to budget, how to look for an apartment, how to clean. We had a career counselor come. We got online and tried looking for the careers that fit us. And that was good

budgeting. It was helpful.

I learned a lot but I would like them to go into greater detail and tell us the consequences. If you don't budget your money, this is going to happen. We have to learn on our own. They just said, "Don't spend more than you make." I wish they had a class to teach you when you get your driver's license, to encourage you to follow the rules because I lost my license recently and I had to get it back. To tell you the little things, like if you get a traffic ticket, don't ignore it, go to court.

Marisa: Recently when I got my car, the staff in my program were there, asking, "Did you get your registration? Did you do this, did you do that?" I was like yes. I already knew how to do it but it was good that they were helping me and making sure that I did everything how it was supposed to be done. That's what you need.

Amanda: I thought that was cool when you said you got into the program because you wanted independence but what you found was support.

Marisa: I really did. I wanted to be by myself but everyone was really supportive. It's a really good program. THPP is great because you're in an apartment by yourself. You can call the staff, they check up on you but you're actually on your own. You have to go grocery shopping, budget, do your laundry. You're doing it by yourself but in case something goes wrong you have somebody there.

Amanda: What can help foster youth be more successful?

Marisa: Educate the kids. My social worker only sees me once a month. I see her for maybe 30 minutes. Maybe if she would take her time and talk to me about things, about the programs we have, the funding that there is, if they would actually do their job.

Keisha: I have a good social worker. I only see him once a month but he calls me twice every week, trying to get me into a whole bunch of programs. Like HerShe, this program for girls that helps you with scholarships. People I know in group homes are about to be 17, 18 and they don't have their birth certificates or social security cards so they can't even get a job. I've had a good experience with a social worker but people I know need better social workers, social workers who actually care about the kids and want them to make something out of their life.

Brandon: I'd like to see improvements in the ILP classes, as far as the importance of maintaining a driver's license and good credit. You need good credit. When you're finished with transitional living you want to get an apartment and they do credit checks.



What we need are people there because we don't have our families. We want that love and support from other people.

Clockwise from upper left: Keisha Solis, 17, Animo Locke HS #3; Brandon Cherry, 23, Cal State L.A.; Marisa Rodriguez, 18, Maywood Academy HS (2010 graduate); James Allen, 15, Manual Arts HS

for me because I was still trying to figure out what I was going to do.

Amanda: Is there a difference between taking the classes and being out in the real world?

Brandon: I was raised pretty well and I knew a lot of the things that they taught us. I enjoyed the classes, they were helpful. I did learn how to write a check. And

What brightens your day?

1ST PLACE \$50

My baby's smile brings me joy

By **Sabrina Orta**

Azusa Cal-SAFE

The one thing that brightens my day is my daughter, Serenity. There's not a day that goes by that she can't make me smile. Whenever I'm mad, stressed, upset or just feeling down, she's always the first one who can clear my mind and make all my problems go away. I always wonder how something so tiny can make you the happiest person in the world. Every time I'm struggling in school and feel like I can't do it anymore, I look in her eyes and my bad thoughts change. I get in the mindset that I can do it, I can do the impossible.

My little girl is tiny, smart, beautiful and the happiest baby I've ever known. It's amazing how she knows just what to do when I'm not in a good mood. Even if she's done something wrong and I've told her "No," she does her little dance that makes me laugh when I should be mad.

My Serenity is the reason I'm finishing high school. Before I had her, school was a big struggle for me. I wasn't getting the best grades and really didn't have a great attitude. That attitude put college far out of my mind. As soon as Serenity came into this world, I knew I had to do whatever it took for my daughter to have a better life.

Despite the fact that I'm a teenage mother, I do have a good head on my shoulders. If it weren't for my daughter, I can honestly say I would not be the person I am today. I would not be a straight-A student. I would not be graduating this June. I also would not be enrolled at Pasadena City College. Se-



Sabrina with her daughter, Serenity.

renity is my everything, my blessing from God. I can see the future in my daughter's eyes, what I am and who I'll be.

Another way Serenity brightens my day is by the sound of her laughter when I tickle her. When she laughs, she makes the whole world smile. Whenever I am having a conversation with someone and I start laughing, sure enough, Serenity starts to laugh too. She is the only one who has the power to make

me happy and bring me up when I'm down. I love to come home to her running toward me to give me a big hug, and how when it's time for bed she plays with my ears to fall asleep.

She is my pride and joy and there's not a day that goes by that I'm not thankful for this blessing. Ever since she was brought into my life, I've never been happier. Whenever my day needs to be brightened, she's the one I turn to.

2ND PLACE \$30

My brother's notebook reminds me of him

By **Victoria Thompson**
Pasadena City College

Every few days, when I'm feeling blue, I shuffle through my various multicolored notebooks to look for the one thing that will make me smile. "This is for you." I can still hear my brother saying these words as he handed me his black and white Mead notebook. Well, the white is a dingy off-white now, and the corner on the left is peeling off, but I can still see his name—first, middle and last—in blue ink, the way he always proudly writes it.

I don't even have to open the notebook to smile. I just remember that he—the brother I've been separated from by the foster care system—gave this to me and I am elated. I picture him, his toothy smile and that little dot on his face that we're both not exactly sure what it is (it rises up on his cheek when he smiles). And when he smiles, it brightens my day. I might roll my eyes at him or tell him, "Stop laughing so much!" But underneath it all, I adore his smile.

Sometimes I get jealous of the other girls at my group home because they get to see their families and I don't. But when I touch that Mead notebook, it's like I can feel where my brother's hands have

been, like his aura has left an imprint on it.

On the inside of the book (where the real magic is), there is a letter that I wrote my brother. There is a drawing he did of giant people fighting monsters in the city and an airplane flying over them with a sun that has box-shaped glasses and buck teeth. He drew a roller coaster and wrote the lyrics for "21 Guns" by Green Day. My brother drew part of a football field with the UCLA bear, the USC Trojan, a referee and a Gatorade stand. My second-favorite drawing is an all-black pirate ship near an island with octopuses and sharks down below. Next is a cowboy with a giant head and an ear piercing.

After that there are my favorite drawings of all because they are the pictures that my brother dedicated to me. It's Jack Skellington (from *The Nightmare Before Christmas*) in Halloween, Christmas, Cinco de Mayo, Easter, Independence Day and Thanksgiving costumes. I still remember the excited look on his face when he told me, "This is what I drew for you, Vikki! I know how you love Jack Skellington... so, what do you think?" And he nudged me with his shoulder a few times until I smiled so hard that I had to hug him.

I plan on giving my brother his notebook back once I get out of the system so that he can continue drawing, not only for me, but for himself as well. When he draws, he gets this look on his face that says, "Hey! You better not say a word to me right now, or else." I just love his determination.

Looking at my brother's black and white journal gives me hope that I will see him again one day and that we will be together. I will always keep my brother's notebook, not only in my room, but also in my heart.

On the weekends I get to see my parents for a few hours. My dad comes on Saturdays and stays from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m., when visiting is over. Then on Sundays I see my mom from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. On any given week this is probably what can brighten me up the most. The familiar smell of Mom and Dad, the warmth and comfort of their hugs, even the way they talk is a reason for me to smile. Even though seeing my parents from inside here makes me sad, I try to appreciate the fact that they come. A lot of kids around me never get visits. It really has taught me how special my parents are.

I really hope that my essay can teach kids to appreciate what they have because it's true, you don't realize what you have until it's gone. Think about all the things we do on a day-to-day basis. Simple, mundane things. Imagine feeling such a terrible longing as wanting to wake up in your own bed. I just want kids my age to count their blessings because there are teens just like them who would trade anything to be in their shoes and they're not the kids in third-world countries. They're right here in Los Angeles.

3RD PLACE \$20

Little things mean a lot in jail

By **E. C.**
Central Juvenile Hall

There aren't too many things that can really brighten my day where I am. The things that manage to make an impact on me are probably things people take for granted. After going through what I've been through, I've learned just how much the little things really mean.

Currently I'm in Central Juvenile Hall. The reasons are unimportant. It's been about four months now that I have been away from my home in Pasadena. Four months since I've eaten real food, been in a car, seen my friends or walked down the street. Being in a place like this reminds me of all the simple joys that we sometimes overlook.

NEW ESSAY CONTEST

What was your scariest experience?

On page 21, Brian writes about how scary it was for him to give a speech in front of his English class. We want you to tell us about a time in your life when you were afraid. Maybe you moved and had to start over at a new school or maybe your neighborhood is dangerous and it's scary to go outside of your house. Have you ever felt like everyone was counting on you and you didn't want to let them down, or that you messed up and had to face the consequences of your action? What was your scariest experience and how did you get through it?



Write an essay to L.A. Youth and tell us about it:

Essays should be a page or more. Include your name, school, age and phone number with your essay. The staff of L.A. Youth will read the entries and pick three winners. Your name will be withheld if you request it. The first-place winner will receive \$50. The second-place winner will get \$30 and the third-place winner will receive \$20. Winning essays will be printed in our March-April issue and put on our website at www.layouth.com.

Mail your essay to:

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Los Angeles CA 90036
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DEADLINE:

Friday, March 4, 2011

Naomi and Ely's No Kiss List

By Rachel Cohn and David Levithan

Reviewed by Kristy Plaza

16, Duarte HS

Written by the dynamic duo that wrote one of my favorite books, Nick and Norah's Infinite Playlist, Naomi and Ely's No Kiss List is pure genius.

Even though best friends Naomi and Ely are college freshmen going to school in New York City, I related to them. Naomi is the beautiful, cool girl who doesn't want to waste time with the wrong guys, and who I wish I could be more like. Ely lives to be the center of attention. I would love to get all that attention, but I don't feel confident enough to actually do it.

However, this isn't just a story about two friends in college. Naomi secretly loves Ely but he's gay. The title refers to a list of boys who neither of them can kiss since they both are attracted to them. This keeps them from ever betraying the other. And of course they can't kiss the other's boyfriend.

So what happens? Ely ends up kissing Naomi's boyfriend, Bruce the Second. To make matters worse, Bruce kissed Ely back! When Ely told Naomi about what he did, she acted like she didn't care.

But she was heartbroken; not because he kissed her boyfriend, but because she finally realized that Ely would never love her the way she loved him. After that, their friendship begins to crumble and it becomes a battle to hurt each other.

Throughout the book, I was rooting for them to make up. Even though they don't have an ideal relationship, they still love each other. I hoped that they would come to see that the love between best friends is powerful because they chose one another as best friends out of all the people they've met.

One of the fun things about this novel is its choice of words and its format. The authors sometimes use symbols and little pictures instead of words, so it feels as if whoever the speaker is at that time is actually talking to or even texting you. The authors put a picture of a globe to mean "world" and a skull and crossbones to mean "dead on the inside."

This is an awesome novel that will make you laugh one second and cry the next. There's also a great message—to stop believing in the concept of finding one true love but instead to believe in forming lasting relationships with everyone you love.

Fallen

By Lauren Kate

Reviewed by Jessica Ayala

14, Wilson MS (Glendale)

I normally take one or two weeks to finish a book but it took me only three days to finish *Fallen* by Lauren Kate because I was so hooked.

Fallen takes place in modern day Georgia, at a reform school named Sword & Cross. Seventeen year-old Luce Price is forced to go to Sword & Cross because her boyfriend died in a mysterious fire and the authorities suspected she killed him. Another reason is because she admitted that she can see what she calls "shadows," which no one else can see. When Luce arrives at the reform school, she learns that there are fallen angels both good and bad hidden between the normal human students.

At school, Luce meets two cute guys, Daniel and Cam. Cam buys her gifts and takes her on picnics, while Daniel flips her off the first time they make eye contact. He also accuses her of stalking him. Luce isn't sure why, but she feels drawn to him and thinks she has seen him before—that's why she can't stop feeling attracted to him.

One day, when she is at the library a fire starts and she loses consciousness. As she wakes up, she feels someone carrying her. When she looks up she

sees Daniel, with big white wings on his back. When I read this I tried to figure out what this meant and if it was a dream or reality. I eagerly kept reading.

Daniel tells Luce he is trying to stay away from her for her own safety. She slowly begins to learn the truth about the dangers of loving Daniel too much. Non-fallen angels in the otherworld will do anything to stop Daniel and Luce from being together. They send bad angels and demon-like creatures to try to kill her or take her away.

I love how the author expresses the feelings of teenagers. I felt as if I was Luce when she sees Daniel in the library. "As she watched the slight movement of his body as he sketched, Luce's insides felt like they were burning, like she'd swallowed something hot. She shouldn't go to him. After all, she didn't even know him, had never actually spoken to him. Their only communication so far had included one middle finger and a couple of dirty looks. Yet for some reason, it felt very important to her that she find out what was on that sketchpad." Sometimes I feel as if I want to know what my crush is doing, even if I do seem like a stalker.

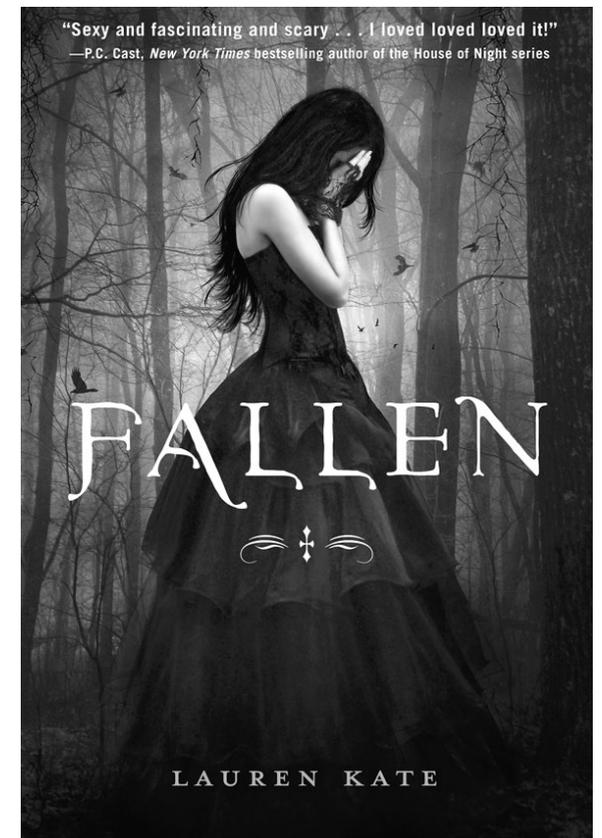
I would recommend this book to anyone who loves fantasy and romance. I have also read the follow-up to this book, called *Torment*. I can't wait until the next book, *Passion*, comes out. I really like *Fallen* because their love is put to the test against other creatures and even themselves when they doubt their love.

BY THE AUTHORS OF
NICK & NORAH'S
INFINITE PLAYLIST,
SOON TO BE A
MAJOR MOTION
PICTURE



a novel

Rachel Cohn and David Levithan





The Black Eyed Peas

CD: The Beginning

Reviewed by Tyler Bradshaw

15, Redondo Union HS

The Black Eyed Peas are a worldwide sensation with good reason. Their loud party music makes me want to get up and fist pump. On their new CD, *The Beginning*, they took a more electronic turn, using more keyboard and electric guitar to make different sounds.

"Light Up The Night" is my favorite song on the CD, because it reminds me of the fun times I've had with my friends when we are at the Del Amo mall at night and the whole place is lit up and the sky is black. Every time I hear the lyrics "It's on and poppin'/ And we ain't stoppin'/ Let's light up the night/ Let's light up the night" I want to scream with excitement.

"The Time (Dirty Bit)" is my second-favorite song, because it starts slow, but then goes into a disco-type beat. The song samples an 80s song from the movie *Dirty Dancing*, but I think The Black Eyed Peas transformed it into a great hit. When the beat suddenly switches, it puts me in a good mood.

I also like "Just Can't Get Enough." It expresses how I feel about a girl right now (I can't get her out of my mind). "Boy, I think about it every night and day/ I'm addicted wanna jump inside your love."

Some songs weren't as good. I didn't like their slow songs, like "Fashion Beats," "Don't Stop The Party" and "The Best One Yet (The Boy)." But I think anyone into pop music should buy this CD. You won't regret it. You'll be singing in your sleep. This CD is addicting.

I think "The Time (Dirty Bit)" is a great hit. When the beat suddenly switches, it puts me in a good mood.



Florence + The Machine

CD: Lungs

Reviewed by Victor Beteta

17, University HS

The moment you hear Florence + The Machine, her voice drags you into her world. It's powerful, like a pleasant scream. She holds long notes so it's opera-like, but her sound is a mix of pop, rock and soul.

Florence Welch is a British singer and The Machine refers to all the musicians who collaborated with her on her first album, *Lungs*. It is filled with amazing songs and all of them are worth downloading.

"Dog Days Are Over" is the first song I listened to. Because of this song I decided to purchase the album. I was hooked from the first word Welch sang. It felt like she was right in front of me because her voice filled the room.

My favorite track is "Drumming Song." She sings, "There's a drumming noise inside my head/ That starts when you're around/ I swear that you could hear it/ It makes such an all mighty sound/ Louder than sirens, louder than bells/ Sweeter than heaven/ and hotter than hell." It's about love and how it sometimes drives us crazy. When someone I really like is near me I can hear a drum, my heartbeat.

Welch sings about love the way it is, with not only its ups but also its downs and about overcoming them. Even though songs like "Kiss With A Fist" and "Hurricane Drunk" have dark titles and are not happy songs, they're still musically upbeat.

I'd recommend this album because it's unique compared to what's out there right now. With Florence + The Machine you hear the true power of the human voice.

It felt like she was right in front of me because her voice filled the room.



Maroon 5

CD: Hands All Over

Reviewed by Julia Waldow

16, Beverly Hills HS

I absolutely love Maroon 5. Their songs, which deal with heartbreak, love and friendship, are fun, easy to relate to and the beats are hard to get out of my head. When I found out that they had released another album this past September, titled *Hands All Over*, I knew that I had to get it. Overall it was a good album, although I liked their previous album, *It Won't Be Soon Before Long*, better.

This album has something for everyone. Faster songs, like "Stutter" and "Last Chance," are great to listen to at a party with friends, while slower songs, like "Just a Feeling" and "Out of Goodbyes," keep me company on sad days.

I like the song "Misery" because I can identify with the lyrics, "Why won't you answer me/ The silence is slowly killing me" because I don't like it when I'm in a fight with friends and we ignore each other.

I also really enjoy "Don't Know Nothing." I especially like the lines "Living inside my head pulling my strings/ Letting me think I'm in control/ Giving you all my heart was a good start/ But it turns out you want my soul." When I hear this song, I think about guys I've liked who turned out to be different than I thought they'd be.

Despite all of the great songs on this album, I feel that the title track, "Hands All Over," fell short. The tune sounded like some sort of mantra, the same beat repeating over and over.

Despite a few missteps, I would definitely recommend this album to people looking for great dance beats and soulful songs.

Slower songs, like "Just a Feeling" and "Out of Goodbyes," keep me company on sad days.

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Editor Laura Lee (left) works with Tiffany on her story. At left are some of the foster youth stories we've published.



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