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# L.A. youth

the newspaper by and about teens

## ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

**14** Camping out for the Rose Parade

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## GETTING REAL ABOUT GRADUATING

These former dropouts talk about their second chance at a diploma **PAGE 10**



Brigitte Olguin



Abigael Perez-Rodriguez



Curtis Hess



Rosario Franco



Mayra Frjas



Cindy Ávalos



Maycoll Arata

# L.A. youth

**Senior Writers:** Kevin Ko, Wilson HS • Ha Young Kwen, Wilson HS • Jessica Marin, Culver City HS • Chantelle Moghadam, Viewpoint School • Stephany Yong, Walnut HS • Brian Yu, Walnut HS

**Staff:** Angela Aie, Walnut HS • Rosie Baek, South HS • Sarah Barnes, New Village Charter HS • Victor Beteta, University HS • Tyler Bradshaw, Redondo Union HS • Michelle Cao, Temple City HS • Heidi Carreon, Gladstone HS • Sydney Chou, Sonora HS • Ashley Cuevas, International Studies Learning Center • Moviz Dar, Hawthorne HS • Merryck Dickerson, Pacifica Christian HS • Camille Didelot-Hearn, L.A.C.E.S. • Avika Dua, Walnut HS • Seth Falcon, Alliance College-Ready Middle Academy #5 • Amy Fan, Temple City HS • David Garcia, Monrovia HS • Jennifer Gonzales-Romero • Araceli Gutierrez, Cleveland HS • Alex Hattori, South HS • Tiffany Hattori, South HS • Maria Khan, S.O.C.E.S. • Haley King, Marshall Fundamental HS • Alison Lee, Whitney HS • Kelly Lin, Wilson HS • Courtney Loi, Sierra Vista HS • Shirley Loi, Sierra Vista HS • Andrea Lopez, Chavez Learning Academies • Mariana Loza, Animo Leadership Charter HS • Izuriel Marquez, Chavez Learning Academies • Jazmine Mendoza, Chavez Learning Academies • Hanifati Mokhammad, Pacific Coast HS • Miguel Molina, Film & Theatre Arts Charter HS • Shivani Patel, Whitney HS • Kiera Peltz, CHAMPS • Andrea Perez, Bravo Medical Magnet HS • Anne Phan, S.O.C.E.S. • Kristy Plaza, Duarte HS • Andrew Pulido, Chavez Learning Academies • Nelly Quintanilla, Junipero Serra HS • Laura Rios, Bishop Conaty—Our Lady of Loretto HS • Nicholas Robinson, Cortines School of Visual and Performing Arts • Felix Ruano, Ambassador School of Global Leadership • Stefano Rumi, L.A.C.E.S. • Jaanvi Sant, San Marino HS • Christian Santiago • Aaron Schwartz, Gabrielino HS • Sydney Sellers, Windward School • Precious Sims, Central HS • Sarah Singer, STAR Prep Academy • Alexia Sison, Marshall HS • Austin Skootsky, Hamilton HS • Henry Studebaker, Hamilton HS • Edda Veelik, Marshall Fundamental HS • Elizabeth Vidar, North Hollywood HS Zoo Magnet • Julia Waldow, Beverly Hills HS • Sakshi Walia, Whitney HS • Hunter Whitaker-Morrow, Polytechnic School

**Publisher:** Donna C. Myrow

**Administrative Director:** Robyn Zelmanovitz

**Managing Editors:** Mike Fricano, Amanda Riddle

**Design Consultant:** Wayne M. DeSelle

L.A. Youth is published by Youth News Service (YNS), a non-profit organization.  
Editorial offices are at 5967 W. Third St. Suite 301, Los Angeles CA 90036. Phone (323) 938-9194.  
Website: [layouth.com](http://layouth.com). Email: [editor@layouth.com](mailto:editor@layouth.com)

L.A. Youth would like to express its gratitude to the following individuals who donate their time and expertise to our writers:

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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 24th 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](http://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](http://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 make a donation to help us provide a place where teen voices are valued.

### Free copies of L.A. Youth for Los Angeles teachers

L.A. Youth is distributed free six times a year to high school and middle school teachers in Los Angeles County. We do not share your info with other organizations or businesses.



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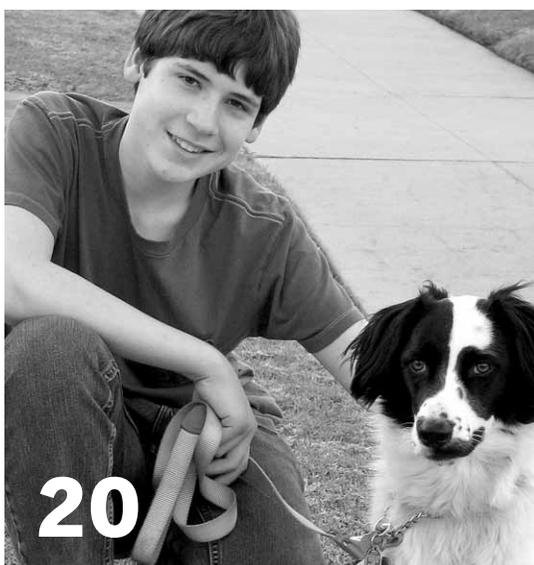
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## ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

I joined the staff after realizing how many teens I could reach by writing and illustrating for the paper. I've loved drawing since I was in first grade, so doing illustrations is the perfect job for me! I like that with L.A. Youth, I can express myself through my drawings (turn to page 18 to see Courtney's illustration). —*Courtney Loi, 15, Sierra Vista HS (Baldwin Park)*



## BEHIND THE SCENES

At our Saturday meetings we often brainstorm story ideas for pages 14-15. We always want those pages to be colorful because they are the only two color pages next to each other. We don't just want beautiful pictures, we're looking for stories about something meaningful a writer has done that can be told visually. When Edda said she was going to camp out to watch the Rose Parade, we loved the idea because it captured a fun thing that lots of teens do ever year.



## 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](http://layout.com) or on our Facebook page. You can also email us at [editor@layout.com](mailto: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 2011 ISSUE

### AN UNDOCUMENTED STUDENT HOPES COLLEGE IS IN HIS FUTURE

I HAVE FRIENDS who are illegal immigrants and they are the students who always try their best in everything. They give their everything to be able to go to college, but because they don't have social security numbers they can't. This made me realize that I have a social security number so I shouldn't be lazy and not do my work. I'm really glad the governor passed the California Dream Act to give people who work hard a chance that they deserve.

**Abel Luis**

*Hollywood HS*

I BELIEVE THE writer of "What now?" should be given a chance to go to college. You were brought here [by your parents], so why should you be punished for that? I support you all the way and if I could help in any way I would. If you take the time to learn you

should be able to use the knowledge you've worked for. Just because you weren't born here doesn't mean you shouldn't be able to go to college.

**Damont Johnson**

*Taft HS (Woodland Hills)*

I CAN RELATE to the article "What now?" Many people don't understand what we have to go through. They think we are criminals but what they don't know is that some, if not most, of us didn't have a choice. I couldn't talk back to my parents at the age of 3. I'm a hard-working student. It is my dream to become a book publisher, but I can't because of my legal status.

**Name withheld**

### A GIRL LEARNED THAT SUCCESS TAKES AN EDUCATION

IT WAS DEPRESSING to read about how tough Precious's life was. I'm not surprised she acted out so much. I probably would too if I were in her position. It must have been hard to

always be moving from house to house. I think she is incredibly smart for realizing that doing better in school to become successful is much more realistic than dropping out and trying to become a rapper. I always knew education was important, but reading this article made me think about how much trying your best in school can dramatically change your life.

**Annie Haig**

*Wilson MS (Glendale)*

THE ARTICLE "REALITY check" by Precious Sims really sunk into me. I'm not saying that I went through the same experience as Precious but I can relate to her. I thought it would be easy to make it big in life. I wanted to be this rich person with a big house and fancy car. But then somehow I realized that it was not possible if I kept up with what I was doing. I was slacking off in school. I didn't do my homework and I would fail tests. If I wanted that dream to be a reality, I would have to start focusing on my work. I now have a plan to get to college and study to be an architect. And if I do this right, I can be whatever I want to be.

**Nicholas Wofford**

*Hollywood HS*

I REALLY ENJOYED reading the article "Reality check" by Precious Sims. The struggles she went through are heartbreaking but her achievements are extraordinary. It really goes to show how effort and perseverance can take you anywhere. It's very inspiring and it motivates me to continue doing good in school.

**Angie Quintanilla**

*Hollywood HS*

### CAN GUYS AND GIRLS BE JUST FRIENDS?

AFTER READING "FRIENDSHIP is enough" I clearly saw that it's possible for a guy and a girl to be just friends. I think that everybody should stop staying behind invisible boundaries of boys versus girls. They should mingle more and then we can see a point of view other than our own.

**Christian Leyva**

*Wilson MS*

I PREFER HANGING out with guys because girls are too much drama and they make a big deal about everything. I also feel more comfortable hanging out with guys because what Tiffany

said ("Around most girls I have to be more careful about their feelings") is true. With guys everything is more fun and they are fun to joke around with.

**Kim Cherisse Cruz**

*Hollywood HS*

### SCHOOLS SHOULD KEEP THEIR FINE ARTS PROGRAMS

I WAS ABLE to connect with the article "Don't cut what I care about" because I was also in a music program when I was in middle school. Being in orchestra taught me how to be responsible and dedicated. I would stay after school and practice and would also practice my violin at home. When I graduated eighth grade, I found out that my high school would no longer have a band because of budget cuts. This was unfortunate because I enjoyed playing with other people. I hope some day schools will stop cutting back on performing arts programs.

**Jose Cruz**

*Hollywood HS*

### HOMEWORK WITHOUT DISTRACTIONS IS HARD

I LIKED THE article "Too much temptation" because I also have a problem with homework sometimes. I listen to music while working, which can be a distraction. I loved the article so much that I am going to tell my family and friends about it. I was thinking about doing the same challenge. I think the whole idea is responsibility, knowing that even if your homework is boring, be responsible.

**Dominique Robinson**

*Hollywood HS*

WHEN I GET home I always get distracted by something. It will make me say "I'll do homework later." Luckily, despite getting distracted sometimes, I know how to balance homework and time to have fun. People might say balancing is hard, but in the end it is worth it.

**Kevin Flores**

*Hollywood HS*

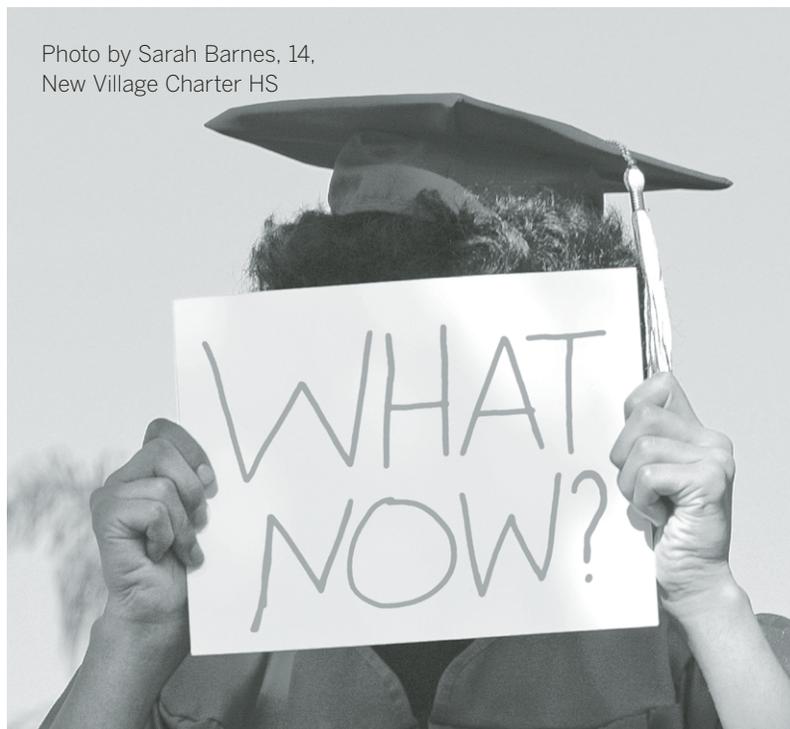


Photo by Sarah Barnes, 14,  
New Village Charter HS

Go to [layout.com](http://layout.com) to read letters responding to the winning essay about giving up gang life.

# New year, new me?

Every year I make a resolution even though I've always failed

**By Merryck Dickerson**

17, Pacifica Christian HS (Santa Monica)

When the new year comes around it seems like the perfect time for self-improvement. Even though I've always failed my New Year's resolutions, every year I promise myself that this time will be different. I've tried everything from being a vegetarian to starting my homework earlier to giving up Facebook. Each time after about a month (at most) I've given up. Why do I even bother? I don't feel that bad when I break my resolutions but sometimes I wish I could do better.

In 2009, I decided that I was going to become a vegetarian. It seemed like the hip thing to do at my school. I have a lot of friends who are vegetarians, so I thought it would be easy to stop eating meat. Unfortunately there were a few problems. First, every morning I usually ate bacon with my waffle or egg. I love the smell of bacon sizzling on the skillet and I hated having to watch my family enjoy eating the little piggies. Second, every dinner I was tempted by the smell of pot roast or pork chops. I felt like a lion in a cage watching a pig taunt me. One day during the first week of the new year, they served pepperoni pizza at school and I mindlessly bit into a slice, enjoying the pepperoni. I even licked the grease off my fingers. I felt really bad when I realized I'd broken my resolution and I thought about spitting it out mid-chew but the pizza was too good. I accepted the fact that being a vegetarian wasn't for me.

## DETERMINED TO BE A BETTER STUDENT

In 2010, I tried something that didn't require giving up food because I knew depriving myself of my favorite foods would be too hard. I promised to do my homework before Sunday night. As a freshman that year, I always waited to start my homework until Sunday evening or even Monday morning and often got incompletes on my homework. My parents were not too thrilled. So for my resolution I tried doing my homework during lunch the day it was

**Merryck hopes that this year she can keep her resolution at least until June, which would be the longest she has ever lasted.**

assigned or as soon as I got home on Fridays.

But about two weeks after school started, I realized doing my homework at lunch wasn't a great idea because I always got distracted by all the fun I thought I was missing. I ended up with my book open but talking to my friends. Then about a month into the new year, I started hanging out on Friday nights and not doing my homework. After that I tried getting up on a Saturday morning and hitting the books, but I ended up reading the same line over and over. I was bored and felt like I had something better to do. After I answered one question, I would check my phone or send a text. This made homework take much longer and I eventually got bored and stopped. After that I



went back to doing my homework on Sunday nights.

For last year's resolution I was a 16-year-old sophomore, which meant I should have no problem keeping a resolution because I was practically an adult (I thought). I vowed to give up Facebook ... at least until Easter, which seemed like an eternity. At the time I was addicted to Facebook. I used it on my cell phone and it was the most viewed site on my computer. I almost failed my first semester finals because I was on Facebook when I was supposed to be studying. I was the annoying person who every night had to tell all my Facebook friends "Good night" on my status.

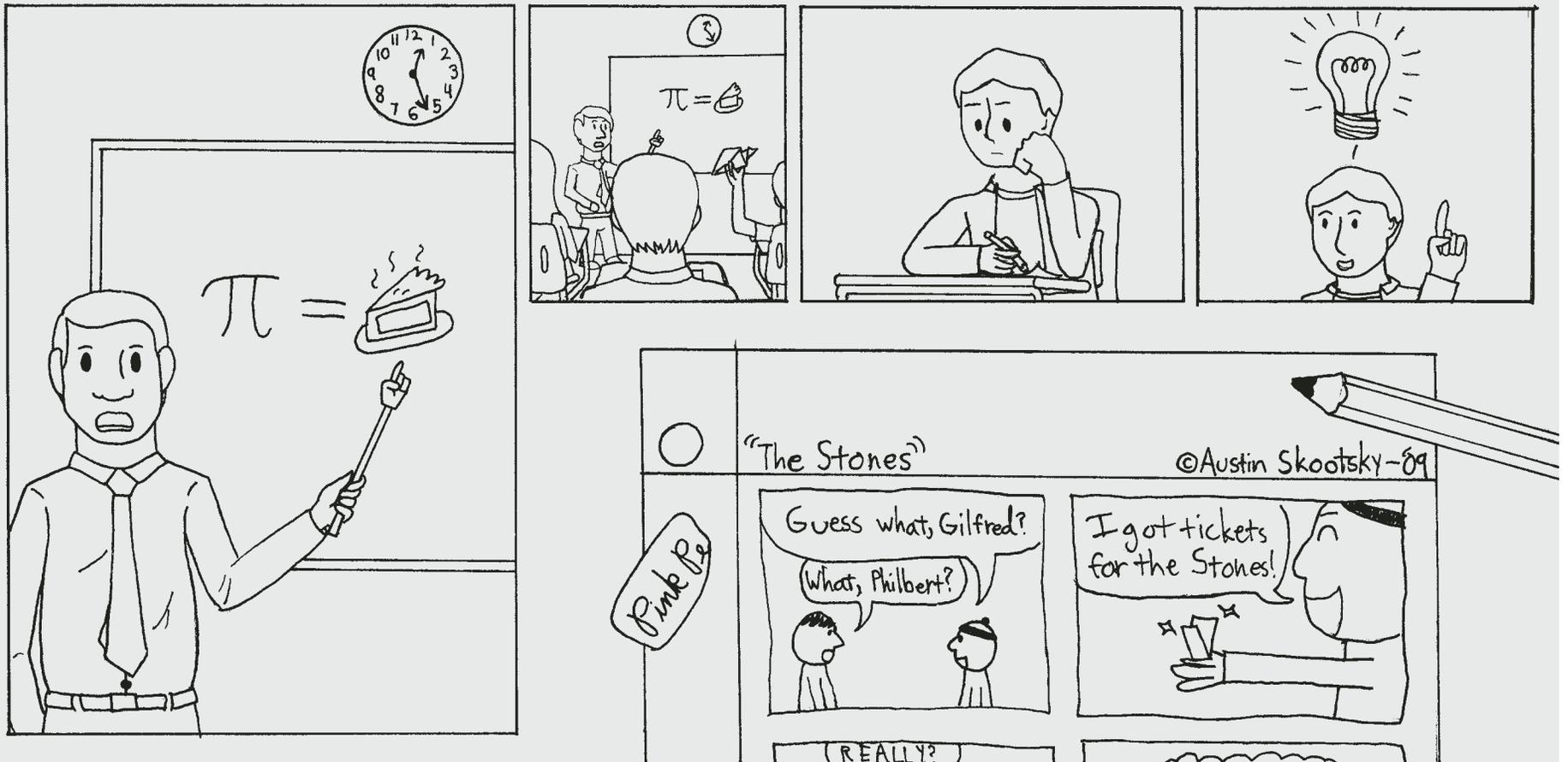
So on Jan. 1, 2011, I temporarily deactivated my Facebook page. But I was still constantly picking up my phone hoping to see a notification, even though I couldn't get any because I had deactivated my account. My mom said I looked like an addict having withdrawals! This lasted for almost three days. Around 9 p.m. on Jan. 3 my best friend called to tell me some gossip that I had no idea about because I hadn't been on Facebook. I ran upstairs while we were still on the phone. I don't think I could have reactivated my Facebook any quicker. I realize now how sad it was that I couldn't stay away from Facebook for even three days.

Today, I look back at those massive failures and laugh. It is not as if doing my homework before Sunday was Mission: Impossible. I eventually figured out how to do my homework by turning off the TV and doing it the night it was assigned. And being a vegetarian is a nice thought because it seems healthy but I love meat. The Facebook goal wouldn't be that challenging now. I have slowly become less attached to Facebook. I update my status only about once a week and I refuse to fail finals because of Facebook. I've learned that New Year's resolutions aren't meant to change your life, they're just a nice tradition. It's fun to challenge myself and find out how long I'll last.

Although I've failed every resolution, I decided to try again this year by doing 25 push-ups every morning. So far I'm doing well but I'm not sure how long it will last.



*After a few weeks of doing push-ups, Merryck feels stronger already.*



# Creating my own comics

I started out drawing Philbert and Gilfred as a way to fight boredom in math class, but now drawing comics has become something I love

**By Austin Skootsky**  
16, Hamilton HS

I was in math class and I was bored. The minutes in class felt as if they were dragging into hours and I couldn't bear to listen to the teacher ramble on. I began doodling on the pages of my notebook and after 10 minutes, I thought of a joke. Why not make it into a comic?

I took a fresh sheet of lined paper out of a folder. I marked the borders of the strip with shaky lines (I didn't have a ruler), and I planned how I would tell my joke. The comic was based on a pun: one character remarks that he got tickets for "the Stones." The other, assuming he means the band The Rolling Stones, is

very excited. However, in the final panel, it's revealed that they were actually tickets for a museum exhibit about geology. As I began deciding how to lay out the comic, I drew inspiration from newspaper comics, specifically the longer Sunday comics.

I have liked comics since first grade, and I used to read the comics in the newspaper every day. Get Fuzzy, Pearls Before Swine and Peanuts were some of my favorites. My family's refrigerator was covered with strips I had taped up. Knowing how my family and I had laughed at comics over the years, I was excited to see if I could create one that was funny too.

I drew boxes for the panels, and after that, I illustrated the characters and wrote the dialogue. I worked the entire period. Since I sat at the back of the class,

it was easy to avoid the teacher. By the time class was dismissed, I had finished. My drawings were basic—my characters' heads were perfect circles, they had no ears or necks, their eyes were dots and their hands were like lumps—but it was still a comic strip. Considering that I was a seventh grader with little experience, I was proud of it. I would rather have a poorly drawn comic than a beautiful set of solved equations.

After class I showed the comic to some of my friends, and they laughed. If they hadn't thought it was funny, I probably would have given up that first day. However, their positive reactions encouraged me.

I spent every math class after that creating comics. The lectures were so boring that as soon as I got to class I took out a sheet of paper and started drawing.

**This comic, which Austin created for this story, is about the first time he made a comic in class.** Illustration by Austin Skootsky, 16, Hamilton HS

Fifty minutes was the perfect amount of time for me to make a one-page comic. These would usually contain about six to eight panels, and each was an episode in the lives of two characters I had created, Philbert and Gilfred. I made up the names on the spot. They both had strange personalities, but Gilfred was usually the more realistic of the two. Many jokes played off Philbert's insanity (buying 300 crates of water bottles), and Gilfred's more level-headed responses (trying to stop Gilfred from buying so much water).

#### WITH MY LIMITED SKILLS, I COULD MAKE ONLY SIMPLE COMICS

I stuck with these two characters because I could not draw well enough to create more. I relied on the head, especially the hair, to tell my characters apart because I couldn't draw clothes well. The problem was that I could draw only about four hairstyles. If I had six characters, some would end up looking identical! To avoid this problem, many of my other characters were robots, mythical creatures or aliens because they didn't look like Philbert or Gilfred.

The comics I drew were random jokes and gags. One revolved around the idea of confusing "lox" (salmon served on bagels) for "locks." When Gilfred offers Philbert lox, Philbert becomes confused and asks why they're eating metal. The strip continues with food-

took one class period, so I worked on it for two weeks.

The same year in class, I began writing and drawing a full-length graphic novel. It featured the same characters, Philbert and Gilfred. This time they were on a quest to find the gods of music to receive the power to beat the game Guitar Hero, but along the way they are forced to save the world.

This story had magic, time travel and attempted assassinations. There were times when I couldn't draw what I needed for the story because of my poor art skills, which was frustrating. I finished about 60 pages of the novel before the school year ended, but I never completed it. During the summer, I was busy with programs and camps so the graphic novel, along with my folder of all my comics, was lost. At the time it didn't bother me too much; these were just things I did in class while I was bored. Now, though, I wish I still had those strips.

During eighth and ninth grade I continued drawing, but I no longer drew a comic every day. With more homework and more interesting math classes, I did not have as much time. For a few months in the beginning of eighth grade, I didn't draw a single panel.

My interest reignited halfway through eighth grade when I discovered web comics. While on the Internet one day, I found some videos in which someone had animated the first few strips of a web comic they liked called 8-Bit Theater. Intrigued, I Googled the comic and began reading. Since then, I have loved finding and reading new web comics. Artists often have blogs that accompany their own comics and they mention other web comics they like. I've also found others through The Webcomic List ([thewebcomiclist.com](http://thewebcomiclist.com)).

over time, and I realized that I could get better too. The comics also showed me that there are many different styles of drawing. Some use a manga-inspired style, such as the comic Megatokyo; while the artist who created the comic Sheldon uses cartoonish drawings; and some even use stick figures! By studying the different ways people draw, I was able to improve as I practiced at home.

So for the next two years, I spent many hours drawing, and my art has improved. I can draw necks and ears. Also, while my first comics recycled the same faces over and over, I am now much better at drawing a unique face for every character, and now I can use as many characters as I need. I usually design new characters for every strip so I can practice different hairstyles, clothing and other features. Even though I haven't used my original two characters, Philbert and Gilfred, since seventh grade, I have begun creating one-page joke comics again. I make about two every month.

#### I'VE FOUND OTHERS WHO SHARE MY PASSION

This year I started a comics magazine at my school that publishes student-made comics and drawings. It started with a few of my friends, but some others joined when they heard about it. Though it's only nine people now, we hope to expand in the future and have a large number of consistent contributors. During meetings we collect the work the members have created and make deadlines for the next issues. Then we eat lunch and talk. We recently published our first issue, containing four comics. They were distributed for free on campus.

Some day soon I want to create a web comic. I'd draw

I usually design new characters for every strip so I can practice different hairstyles, clothing and other features. Even though I haven't used my original two characters, Philbert and Gilfred, since seventh grade, I have begun creating one-page joke comics again. I make about two every month.

related communication problems—Philbert rejecting some cobbler because he isn't a cannibal. Though they featured the same characters, the comics did not have continuity from one to the next. I wanted anyone to be able to enjoy a comic without having read previous ones. Whenever I finished a comic, I would show it to my friends, although I never let my parents know what I was doing during math class. Even though I spent most of my time on my comics, the class was easy and I'm good at math so I ended up getting an A in the class.

After a month, I felt ambitious. I came up with a new concept, but I knew I couldn't tell the whole story in one page. As a result, my first multi-page comic was born, a story about Philbert and Gilfred's battle (with lasers and explosions) for their last doughnut. Each page

When I discover a web comic I like, I'll immediately go through the archives and read every strip, even if there are hundreds. Web comics offer a creator complete freedom. Newspaper comics are supposed to be family-friendly (no swearing) and stick to a simple, one-line format for most cartoons, but web comics can have a different layout for each strip depending on the comic's needs. If the cartoonists want to make a longer, more detailed comic with more panels one day, they can; if they want their strips to be shorter, they're allowed. Some of my favorite web comics are Bug, Edmund Finney's Quest to Find the Meaning of Life, Guinea Something Good and Nedroid.

These web comics inspired me. Web comics that have run for years show improvement in the artwork

and ink it first. Then I'd scan it and edit it in Photoshop and upload it to the Internet. It's pretty amazing to me how far I've come since those boring seventh grade math classes.



*Austin says that although he loves creating comics, he doesn't intend to make a career out of it.*

# Calling All Foster Youth in Los Angeles County

**Do you want to let other teens know what foster care is like? Here's your chance.**

L.A. Youth is looking for foster youth ages 14 to 18 who want to write an article to be published in L.A. Youth.

**By joining L.A. Youth, you can:**

- EARN \$100** for each story published
- IMPROVE** your writing skills by working with an editor
- HELP** other foster youth by sharing your experiences
- INFORM** others about the system



Editor Amanda Riddle works with Charles on his story.



A few of the foster youth stories we've published in L.A. Youth.

Contact Editor Amanda Riddle at  
**(323) 938-9194**  
or [ariddle@layouth.com](mailto:ariddle@layouth.com)

Invite Amanda to speak at your school, group home or foster agency about writing for L.A. Youth.

**Got questions?**

Go to [layouth.com](http://layouth.com) and click on the Foster Youth link to learn more and read stories written by foster youth.

# L.A. Youth art contest: Injustice

## 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.

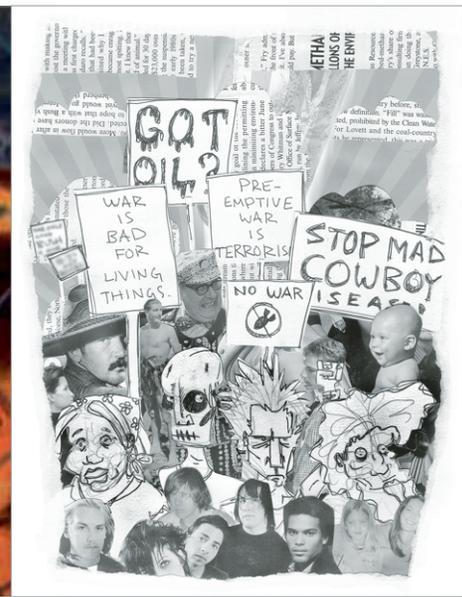
The teen staff of L.A. Youth will select a first-, second- and third-place winner as well as some honorable mentions. The first-place winner and his or her teacher will each receive \$100. The second-place winner and his or her teacher will each receive \$75, and the third-place student and teacher will get \$50. Winners and honorable mentions will be published in the May-June 2012 issue of L.A. Youth and on [layouth.com](http://layouth.com).

### Questions?

Contact us at (323) 938-9194 or [editor@layouth.com](mailto:editor@layouth.com).

**DEADLINE:**  
MARCH 31,  
2012

Send your submission to:  
**L.A. Youth 2012 Art Contest**  
5967 W. Third St., Suite 301  
Los Angeles, CA 90036



Illustrations from L.A. Youth archives

Art has always been used as a form of expression. Since the beginning of civilization, artists have been using art to communicate their ideas about injustices like oppression, the inhumanity of war, civil rights, political corruption and other issues important to them and their society. That's the true beauty of art. It's more than just a pretty picture—it can carry a message. Art can be a form of protest and a way for artists to try to create change.

For this year's art contest, we want you to create a piece of art about an injustice. It's your chance to raise awareness about an issue you care about. It could be about an unfairness

you see in your community, like bad schools, discrimination against certain groups like gays or minorities, or not enough opportunities for the people who live there. Or it could be an injustice happening around the world, like war, poverty or people living without freedom. Before you get started, think: What do you care about? What do you think is wrong in the world? How can you express your idea visually in a way that other people will understand what you're saying?

We hope these images from L.A. Youth's archives help inspire you. The image of the girl at the fence is about immigration. The artist said he was depicting a young Mexican

girl who has been separated from her family members who are living in America illegally. The fence represents the Mexican border and she is imagining how their lives are. The flag image was the artist's redesign of the American flag. She said, "Everyone says America is the best country, but human rights are still being violated." In the image of the fist, the artist has a more positive message and seems to be saying that we can fight AIDS. And there is an image of people protesting war.

You can also go to <http://www.pbs.org/treasuresoftheworld> and click on Guernica to read about Pablo Picasso's famous mural protesting the Spanish Civil War.

# Getting real about graduating

These former dropouts talk about their second chance at a diploma

A NEW PROGRAM called the Diploma Project is trying to reduce dropout rates at Los Angeles Unified School District schools. The Diploma Project, which is funded by the federal government, has dropout prevention counselors in six middle schools and six high schools. The high school counselors find students who have dropped out and work with them to get them back in school. They can either re-enroll at their high school or in a program where they can make up their credits, like adult school, continuation school or independent study. We talked to students from Fremont and Gardena, two high schools that are part of the Diploma Project, about why they dropped out and what helped them return. They were all thankful for the Diploma Project for helping them get back on track to graduate.



**Editor Mike Fricano:** Why did you drop out?

**Maycoll Arata, 20, Gardena Adult School graduate:** I was too busy partying, clubbing, going out and having fun instead of studying and doing homework.

**Cindy Ávalos, 18, Alternative Education Work Center (AEWC), an independent study program on the Gardena High campus:** When I was in ninth grade I didn't know it was that important to graduate. I didn't go to class, I didn't pay attention at all. In 11th grade I realized it was important and I noticed I wasn't going to be able to graduate.

**Mayra Frias, 19, Gardena HS:** For me it was a personal problem ... Me and my mom would fight every day. That's when I decided to drop out, which I did when I was in 11th grade for two months. I started looking for a job and I never found one. Then I decided to come back.

**Rosario Franco, 18, Gardena AEWC:** Since ninth grade I started ditching and I guess it becomes a habit ... Every year I would be like, "I'm going to do better next year" but then the next year I'll go some days but then I'll miss school other days and I'll be like "When I miss out, it's better." So I started falling back. My senior year I went for three weeks. I was like, "I'm behind credits, I know

I'm not going to graduate. Why go and waste my time?"

**Curtis Hess, 19, Gardena Adult School:** I dropped out of school because I was kicking it with the wrong crowd, gang bangers.

**Abigael Perez-Rodriguez, 18, Gardena AEWC:** When I entered ninth grade I started hanging out with the wrong people. I was getting high, drunk. I started ditching more and more. We used to hop on Metro and go to downtown, Hollywood, do whatever we want, drink a couple 40s, have fun. I stopped going to school my senior year.

**Brigitte Olguin, 16, Fremont HS:** In ninth grade my dad was sick. He was almost dying so all that depression got to me and I missed school. I went with friends to try to feel better. It stopped at 11th [grade] because I got caught. They told me, "Why are you missing school? You have a future to go to." I don't want to be a low-life. I want to have a good car, a home. If I do good in school I'll be the first one to graduate in my family. That motivates me to go to school.

**Cynthia Garcia, 16, Fremont HS:** I had family issues and then from there I started hanging out with the wrong crowd. I started ditching school. I was doing

drugs. It started in eighth grade and it went until 11th.

**Mike:** How were you able to get away with this for so long? Where were your parents or teachers or truant officer?

**Cynthia:** Both my parents worked. So they thought I was in school when I really wasn't.

**Mike:** But what about if you came home with a bad report card?

**Cynthia:** I would get the report card. They would ask, "When are the report cards due?" I was like, "I don't know, probably they have the wrong address." At that time my dad was an alcoholic so he never really paid attention. My mom was too busy trying to make money to put food on the table for us.

**Cindy:** I would get home first to get my report card, hide it, throw it away.

**Abigael:** In ninth grade my grades started being Fs. She [My mom] would be like "What's going on?" But after a while she got tired.

**Mike:** Did you have parents who emphasized education?

**Abigael:** My parents came from a foreign country so they're always telling me to look for a better op-

portunity that we have here in the United States but I didn't listen to them.

**Mike:** When you were at your lowest point—ditching and done with school—what did you think your futures would be?

**Cynthia:** My older brother would tell me, “I don't want to see you like me.” I'd listen but then I'd get a little image of me, like what if in the future I'm going to be a pothead? That would get me down and I would keep doing more drugs.

**Brigitte:** I would put in my head, “I'll just go to adult school or continuation later on and I'll make it through.” So I didn't worry.

**Abigael:** I just got lazy.

**Rosario:** I have always worked with my cousin. She works in the swap meet. They pay you cash so I've always had money. I was like, “I could work more days.” I

She was doing everything I was doing. I would tell her, “You finish school, stop ditching.” She was like, “How can you motivate me if you dropped out?” I started thinking, “I can't tell her to do something that I couldn't even do myself.” My teachers also, Ms. Robinson [in attendance] and Ms. Carmi [a Gardena Diploma Project counselor], they would call me every day. [They'd say,] “You have to go back to school, what are you going to do with yourself?” And then my older sister, she graduated and she goes to UC Riverside. She was like, “It's not that hard ... You have the brains to do it.”

**Mayra:** I have always pictured myself being a nurse, working with kids with cancer. When I used to hear friends say, I'm a senior already, I'm going to be this, I'm going to graduate, that's what persuaded me because I didn't want to stay behind.

**Cindy:** I'm an only child so I would want my mom

to a continuation school” and I didn't know about that.

**Rosario:** The program is independent study so they give you the work and you turn it in every week. I don't have to go to school and I'm still getting my credits. [School] seemed boring, just dealing with the teachers for a whole hour, listening to them. Not all teachers teach you something. So you'd be like, “Why be in his class if all he's doing is letting his students go wild?”

**Mike:** Why do you think independent study has been a good fit for you?

**Cindy:** Ms. Carmi calls me often. When she calls me I want to give her good news. So I'll do my work. Every time I have some good news to give her.

**Maycoll:** I graduated last month. Everybody's getting their stuff done. I used to see people getting into fights in the middle of class. It's a different environment because people are actually serious about their education.

**Mike:** What do you think could be done differently to have prevented you from dropping out?

**Curtis:** Nothing could have stopped me from doing what I was doing.

**Rosario:** In the first month I only went four times. How do you let a student miss out for so long and then when they come back you just admit them like nothing? If you don't have an excused absence, try to talk to their parents. Students would take it more serious.

**Maycoll:** Phone calls, voicemails, mail, none of that cuts it. You should get to the point with them like the second time. Start sending people to that person's house until they finally see the parent, not just the student. Sit down with them and tell them what's going on.

**Mike:** What are your goals for the future?

**Cynthia:** If I graduate, I want to be a social worker. I hope I will be able to help students with staying in school.

**Brigitte:** My goal is to graduate and work in the morgue.

**Curtis:** My goal is to be a tattoo artist someday. I'm good at drawing so it's something to keep me busy, keep me out of trouble.

**Rosario:** I plan to finish high school and get a job and I guess go to college after.

**Mayra:** I plan to be a nurse at St. Jude and after that I plan to go to Mexico and work in this program that helps kids who have disorders.

**Cindy:** I want to get my high school diploma and I want to be a pediatrician.

**Maycoll:** Get a stable job and finally get to college.

**Mike:** If you could talk to your former self, what would you have told that dropout?

**Cynthia:** I would tell them it's not worth dropping out because in the future you won't have a good life. Stop ditching and get your life straight.

**Mayra:** My advice is to stay in school and to not hang out with the wrong crowd. Now I don't care if I'm by myself. Don't be with people who you know are going to end up making you or influence you to do what they do.

**Cynthia:** Don't let nobody bring you down. If somebody tells you, “You're not going to make it in high school or in life,” that's not true. You just gotta put it in your head and think positive, yes I'm going to be able to do this.

My brother was telling me,  
“Go back to school because it's  
not easy without a high school  
diploma. I mean, look at me. I can't  
even get a job and you're going  
to struggle a lot so take life  
more seriously.” —Cynthia Garcia

really didn't focus on school. But now you think about it, you can't do nothing without a high school diploma. The swap meet is hard, after a while you get tired of it. It's a job that's not going to take you nowhere. So I'm like, “I have to go back.”

**Maycoll:** I used to think life was easy. You just get a job anywhere and you live off that. But now that I'm in the real world and I have a kid to support, I have my wife to support, now that I have a family it's so hard. You can't even get the low-paying jobs without a high school diploma. That got me to go back to school.

**Mike:** What motivated you to make school a priority?

**Cynthia:** My brother was telling me, “Go back to school because it's not easy without a high school diploma. I mean, look at me. I can't even get a job and you're going to struggle a lot so take life more seriously.” And then he's like, “Look at our little sister and our little brother, they look up to us. You don't want them to be like us.” So I said, “Yeah, I need to take this more seriously.”

**Abigael:** I turned 18 and basically you've gotta grow up. It took me a while but I managed to come back to school.

**Rosario:** I have a younger sister, we're one year apart.

to be proud of me. I would want her to be out in the crowd and see me graduate.

**Mike:** How did you get hooked up with the Diploma Project?

**Rosario:** When you drop out, they see how many credits you have and if you're not that far behind they tell you, you still have the opportunity to get [a diploma]. Ms. Robinson was the one who would tell me, “Go to adult school and get the diploma.” Then Ms. Robinson introduced me to Ms. Carmi and she enrolled me.

**Judi Carmi, a Diploma Project counselor at Gardena High:** These are six of probably 250 students that I'm working with to try to locate and enroll in a credit recovery program. Once I get them re-enrolled, I check in with them often to make sure they're staying on track. I invite them in if they're in the area and I call them a lot.

**Curtis:** Often, often. Just to make sure ... I stay on that track.

**Mike:** What are some of the things about the Diploma Project program that are making you have more success?

**Brigitte:** Help from Mr. Jones [a Diploma Project counselor at Fremont High]. He was like, “You could go

# School cuts survey results



In October L.A. Youth asked readers about budget cuts at their schools and more than 1,850 teens responded. I could relate to the students who took the survey because I've seen similar bad conditions at my school. We don't have working light bulbs in some overhead projectors and when the Internet stops working there's no one in the school to fix it. And all but one of the restrooms have been closed because we don't have enough custodians to clean them.

When my school opened two years ago students in Koreatown were happy to have a neighborhood school. But we didn't have any AP classes because there weren't enough teachers. I wanted to take AP biology and world history but couldn't. This year there are only four APs. Also, we have only one science teacher for the entire high school. He has a credential for chemistry but he's teaching my physics class. He shows physics videos and we teach ourselves from our textbook.

I used to blame the bad conditions for my bad grades, like failing history last

year and a getting a D in journalism. I felt that the school wasn't doing enough for us, so there was no point for me to do well in school. Now I realize that I can still learn even without properly trained teachers and the best resources. But not everyone has the motivation to do that so they stop coming to school. From sophomore year to junior year we've lost about 30 students out of 120. Some transferred but some dropped out.

Despite how they answered the survey, I was surprised that almost all of the students planned to go to college. That's good, but unless schools fix these problems, students could lose hope.

—Felix Ruano, 16, Ambassador School of Global Leadership

*Here are the answers from the teens who responded to our survey (thank you for helping us out). We randomly chose three people to win \$100 for participating.*

*Congratulations to: Matthew Alvarez from L.A. Leadership Academy HS, David Baltazar from Belvedere MS and Trevor Ryan Ramirez from Redondo Union HS. Note: Some percentages do not add up to 100 because respondents checked all the answers that applied.*

## RESPONDENTS WERE:

### Gender:

Female . . . . .56%      Male . . . . .44%

### Ethnicity:

Latino . . . . .79%      Black . . . . . 7%  
Asian . . . . . 9%      Other . . . . . 8%  
White . . . . . 9%

## ANSWERS:

### Do overcrowded classrooms make you feel like your teachers don't have enough time to teach?

Yes . . . . .67%      No . . . . .33%

### Have you been unable to participate in a program or class because it's no longer offered at your school?

No . . . . .71%      Yes . . . . .29%

### If yes, please list all the programs/classes that apply to you (here are some of the responses):

AP classes	Gymnastics
ASL (American Sign Language)	Journalism
AVID	Leadership
Art	Metalshop
Band	Nursing
Choir	PE class
Cosmetology	Physics
Culinary Arts	Saturday School for SAT
Drama	Soccer
Field trips	Softball
Football	Web Design
	Woodshop

### If your school had to make cuts to save money, what should they cut first? (They are listed in order starting with what respondents would cut first.)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. School newspaper or broadcast outlet | 8. Sports   |
| 2. Summer school                        | 9. Guidance counselors  |
| 3. Field trips                          | 10. Other   |
| 4. Security guards                      | 11. Administrators (like principals and assistant principals) |
| 5. Custodians                           | 12. Teachers  |
| 6. Libraries                            |   |
| 7. Arts and music                       |   |

### Have you experienced any of the following in your classroom in the past two years?

- Copied information from an overhead because there wasn't enough paper to make copies of a lesson for everyone . . . . .57%
- Not enough computers or enough working computers . . . . .52%
- Students had to share textbooks because there weren't enough for everyone . . . . .51%
- Not all the students had a desk to sit at. . . . . 37%
- None of the above . . . . .19%

### What have you or your family had to pay for in the last two years at your school?

- None of the above . . . . . 42%
- Sports uniforms . . . . .34%
- Supplies in art class . . . . . 22%
- Buses for a field trip . . . . .21%
- Participation on a sports team . . . . .18%
- Music program like band/choir . . . . . 12%
- Lab fees for science classes . . . . . 8%

### Has your school cut any of the following journalism programs in the past two years?

- My school doesn't have any of the above . . . . .43%
- No, none of the above has been cut in the past two years. . . . . 40%
- Radio . . . . .11%
- Television station . . . . . 9%
- Newspaper club . . . . . 7%
- Journalism classes . . . . . 7%

### How many students are in your English class?

The highest number was 50 and the lowest was 14

### How many students are in your math class?

The highest number was 50 and the lowest was 11

### Do any of the following need repair at your school?

- Restrooms . . . . . 64%
- Graffiti-covered walls . . . . . 49%
- Air conditioning/heating . . . . . 48%
- Classrooms/desks . . . . .47%
- Cafeteria . . . . . 36%
- Public address/bell system . . . . .19%
- No, all of the above are in good condition. . . . .15%

### Have you left or thought about leaving public school because of the budget cuts?

No . . . . .78%      Yes . . . . .22%

### Have budget cuts affected your ability to get the classes you need to graduate?

No . . . . .87%      Yes . . . . .13%

### Are you planning to attend college?

Yes . . . . .97%      No . . . . . 3%

### If yes, where are you planning to apply? (Respondents could check up to three choices.)

- Four-year public university in state . . . . . 64%
- Community college . . . . . 36%
- Private college or university . . . . .35%
- Four-year public university out of state . . . . .31%
- Trade school . . . . . 4%

### How do you expect to pay for college?

- Scholarships . . . . .73%      Loans . . . . .39%
- Work . . . . .60%      Military . . . . . 7%
- Family . . . . .54%

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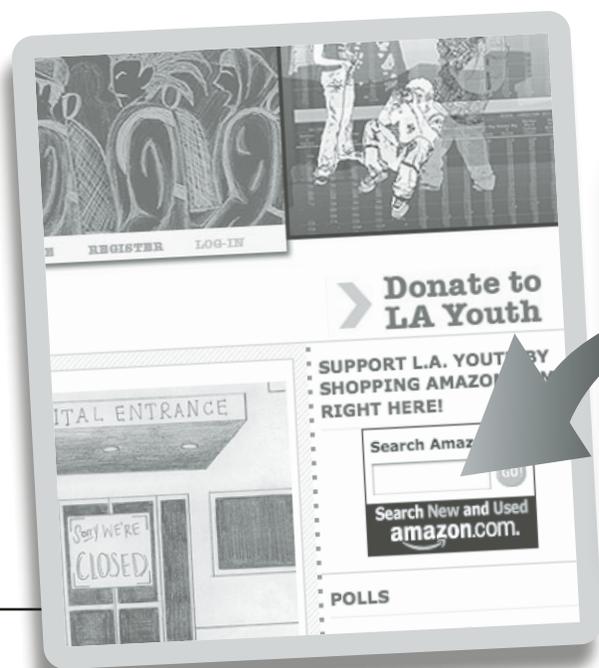


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**By Edda Veelik***17, Marshall Fundamental HS (Pasadena)*

I've watched the Tournament of Roses Parade nearly every year on TV. It's a family tradition. My parents and I get up early to watch the parade and comment on the flower-covered floats that pass by. It's a famous parade in our city, Pasadena, so it feels like it's our parade. I've always wanted to sleep out on the Rose Parade route the night before to have a front-row seat. This year I finally did it. It's spectacular in person. Plus, camping out is Pasadena's really fun five-mile block party.

The Rose Parade is Pasadena's pride and joy. The parade is broadcast worldwide on New Year's Day, or Jan. 2 if New Year's falls on a Sunday, like it did this year. Throughout the year there are signs about it, floats are designed and built, and in October the Rose Court is assembled. I even tried out for princess but didn't make it past the first round.

In October I decided I wanted to sleep out on the parade route. So I made a Facebook group and invited some friends. In the end three people could come. My mom was annoyed that she had to chaperone because she doesn't like being cold, but she had to because of curfew laws that say anyone under 18 must be accompanied by an adult.

We planned to get there at 7 p.m. At 2 p.m. my mom and I drove up and down Colorado Boulevard and realized we needed to get a spot right away because it was already really

crowded. We went home and started packing. I packed a blanket, my jacket, a T-shirt, my sleeping bag and my camera. I later posted on Facebook where we were on the route.

My friend Arnold arrived at our site at 5:30 p.m., and Abbey and Eleanor arrived at 7:30. We set up camp and decided to walk around to pass the time. We went to Walgreens and had



*Edda's advice if you want to sleep overnight on the parade route is to bring earplugs and an eye mask because you'll need them!*

fun throwing stuffed animals at each other. Later, we went back to the campsite and listened to music.

**WE WENT CRAZY WITH THE SILLY STRING**

We all bought cans of silly string from the vendors walking up and down the street. We silly stringed each other, we silly stringed cars and we silly stringed the people next to us. We made up a game and decided to give five points if you hit a car and 10 points if you got the silly string inside the car. It's an old Pasadena tradition to throw harmless things at cars the night before the parade. Cars drove by caked in silly string, whipped cream and tortillas.

At midnight, Abbey went to sleep. The rest of us walked to the comic book store about three miles away but it was understandably closed. Then I went to bed, but Arnold and Eleanor weren't sleepy. So they walked to Arnold's house to get his guitars and came back around 3 a.m.

At 11 p.m. you're allowed to move your stuff up to the blue line on the street, which is about six feet from the curb, so there's more room for other people. It was cold and hard to fall asleep because there were two streetlights shining in our eyes and irritating kids blowing horns. At about 5 a.m. when I was half asleep, a pickup truck drove by really close to my head. I gave up trying to sleep. When we were all up, we went to the taco truck to get coffee and breakfast. I was sleepy but I was excited for the parade to start.

More people started arriving at 5 a.m. and by 8 it was packed. People were lining up behind people who had slept out, and more people lined up behind them. Silly string fights were breaking out in the street. The parade started at 8 and at around 8:45 it got to us. My favorite was the color guards—how graceful they are, especially when they toss their flags in the air. You get to see things you don't see on TV, like the poop scoopers who follow the equestrian teams and how all of the floats are different sizes. The Trader Joe's float was so big we had to arch our necks to see the top of it. The people on the floats wave and say "Happy New Year" to you, so it's a more personal experience.

Two hours later when it was over, we packed up and left. I was tired from the long night, but I was happy that I had seen it live.

Parade photos by Edda Veelik, 17, Marshall Fundamental HS

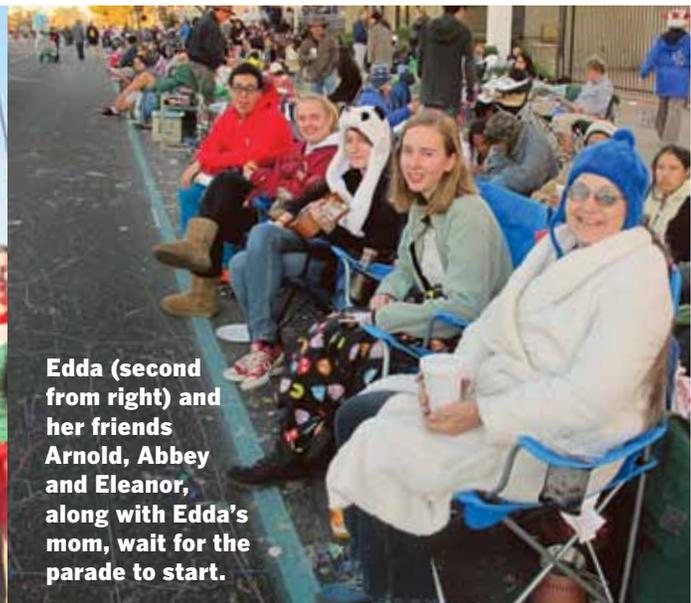


It was t  
can  
the



Exciting but fun  
pumping out for  
Rose Parade

# FRONT-ROW SEATS



**Edda (second from right) and her friends Arnold, Abbey and Eleanor, along with Edda's mom, wait for the parade to start.**

**By Sarah Barnes**  
14, *New Village Charter HS*

**M**ost girls I know don't like anything about P.E., except hanging out with their friends. I hear them complain all the time. "We don't have enough time to change into our clothes." "I smell! I hate P.E." Or "This is a waste of my time."

I understand why they feel that way. We should have more than three to five minutes to change our clothes. And being sweaty at school is gross. But I disagree about P.E. being a waste of time. I think it's important because we get exercise, which helps prevent obesity. According to the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than a third of American children and teens were overweight in 2008.

But even though now I think exercise is important, I didn't always like it. About a month into seventh grade, our teacher told us we'd be running the mile, which was two laps around the school. I liked sports, but I didn't like running. Running non-stop was difficult, and I had never run that far before. To get an A the girls would eventually have to run the mile in 12 minutes and the boys in 11 minutes. I didn't think I could do it.

The first time I had to run the mile I hated it. The first lap around the school was OK, but during the second lap I felt like I couldn't breathe. Toward the end I gave up and walked. I didn't finish in time and neither did my friends. Our teacher told all of us who failed to keep trying and we'd get better, but I didn't believe her.

I hated P.E. for the next couple months. I wanted my parents to write me a note saying I was sick so I would be excused from P.E., but I knew they would say no.

Even though I didn't like it, I got faster running the mile. I wanted to get an A in P.E. so I learned to keep going no matter how much I felt like someone was punching me in the stomach while I was running. By

the winter I had my time down to 12 minutes and I could see that running was good exercise. For the rest of middle school I liked P.E. It got me into the habit of exercising so I even stayed active in the summer. I roller skated, played tennis and did yoga.

When I got to high school, I found out our school had replaced regular P.E. with a program called Play Out Loud. On the first day of Play Out Loud I went with some of my class to the basketball courts. I saw four long, thick ropes on the ground attached to the base of a wall and some things that looked like buckets with handles on them.

My principal showed us what we were going to do. He picked up a rope in each hand and started shaking them to make the ropes look like snakes. It looked pretty easy. Then we got in lines and I watched the girls ahead of me shake the ropes for 15 seconds. They were complaining that the ropes were heavy.

When it was my turn I grabbed a rope in each hand. The ropes really were heavy and it was hard to start. As I kept going, even though I wasn't trying my hardest, my arms started feeling tired. I understood why the girls were saying this was so hard, but my competitive side wouldn't let me be the only one who gave up. After shaking the ropes up and down, we got in lines again and shook them from side to side and then we did other exercises with the ropes. These were hard, too.

#### I DIDN'T WORK AS HARD AS I COULD HAVE

Next we did an exercise with the weighted buckets. Our principal showed us the correct way to do the exercise, which meant bending your knees when you caught the bucket. We stood in a line about four feet apart from each other. The first person grabbed a bucket and threw it to the second person and so on. Compared to the ropes this was easy. I could catch and toss the bucket without even having to bend my knees.



*Sarah says schools should schedule P.E. at the end of the day so students don't have to be sweaty in class.*

We were out there less than an hour. I thought it was fun but I felt I didn't get much exercise. I thought that if we ran two or three times a week that would be a better workout.

The next day a few of my friends complained that they were sore. I realized that Play Out Loud could be good exercise if I did the exercises exactly as the principal had shown us, like bending my knees more when we did the bucket toss. I wanted to feel a little bit tired after the workout.

Since then when we've done Play Out Loud I've done the exercises the way the teacher showed us and I felt tired after we finished. But I've seen some students slacking off. They are the ones who complain the most about P.E. If they put in the effort I think they would see that P.E. can be a great workout and some of them might like it more.

P.E. helps get students in the habit of exercising regularly. Without P.E. some teens wouldn't get any exercise and if we're not active as teens, there's less of a chance that we'll exercise as adults. This can lead to becoming overweight and other health problems such as diabetes and high blood pressure.

Even though I don't like being sweaty in class after Play Out Loud, it's worth it because I get exercise and burn some calories.

# Give P.E. a chance

It's not a waste of time if you try to get a good workout

#### What do you think of P.E.?

"I don't like running the mile. I hate running. It's tiring. When we go to P.E. we have to change. It sucks having to change back into your regular clothes."

**NELLY QUINTANILLA, 17,**  
**JUNIPERO SERRA HS (GARDENA)**

"My teacher makes us do embarrassing things—like dance to workout music—and then laughs at us. It's more akin to torture than exercise."

**ANDREW CHEN, 15, WALNUT HS**



"You need it because they teach you not to eat a lot and how to stay healthy. I think it's fun because we do a lot of activities that I like. We do soccer, basketball, frisbee."

**CRISTIAN ESTRADA, 13,**  
**COLIN POWELL ACADEMY FOR**  
**SUCCESS (LONG BEACH)**

"P.E. is my favorite period of the day. At home I don't have time to work out. I love to run and I love the competition. Plus, having a nice teacher makes it better."

**JUAN BERCERRA, 16, CHAVEZ LEARNING**  
**ACADEMIES (SAN FERNANDO)**

# Stressing for success

Getting sick all the time made me realize I couldn't work so hard

By **Julia Waldow**

17, Beverly Hills HS

**M**y freshman year, I ran myself into the ground trying to live up to my dreams of going to a top school like Stanford, Berkeley or Yale. I'd heard about these colleges from friends' siblings who went there and from TV shows like *Gilmore Girls*. I'd see Rory walking across the Yale campus with its old, ivy-covered brick buildings and cobblestone pathways. I wanted the same experience.

I thought my chances of going to a competitive university were better if I had straight A's. After school, I'd do homework for three hours. I would read my math and science textbooks and take notes. When I didn't understand my math homework, I'd go on the website [hotmath.com](http://hotmath.com), which teaches how to do math problems. I'd study for tests a few days in advance, going over my notes and reading them aloud. Sometimes I'd make up songs for vocabulary words or scientific processes. My biology song about prokaryote organisms (which don't have cell nuclei) and eukaryotes (which have nuclei) went like this: "Pro means no. Eu means do."

When I got my first report card, I was happy because I had all A's. My mom said that she was proud of me. "However, you know that you don't have to be perfect," she told me. "I know," I said, but I didn't listen.

I need at least eight and a half hours of sleep, but I was going to bed around 10:30 and I had to get up at 6:00. I'd come down for breakfast and say, "I'm really sleepy." At night my parents would come in around 8:30 and tell me to stop my homework and get ready for bed.

"I don't want to. When will you let me be in charge of my own schedule?" I'd say. "Well, don't complain to me that you're tired in the morning," my mom would reply. Arguments like these got me worked up and I couldn't fall asleep. This made me even more tired.

Because of all that stress, I started getting sick about once a month. I had to stay home from school and lie on the couch, surrounded by crumpled tissues. I hated feeling crummy all the time and it was hard to complete makeup and regular work at the same time.

At the end of the year, I had straight A's, but I wasn't happy. I was tired of studying and my body was worn down. I really needed the summer break. However, instead of getting the fun summer I was expecting, I got sicker. I got strep throat at camp and had to go home a day early. After I recovered, my family and I went on a trip to Boston. But I had to go to the doctor's when we returned home and she told me that I had mono and strep at the same time!

For the rest of the summer, I couldn't go to movies and sleepovers. I was lying in bed or on the couch all day. It hurt to swallow so I couldn't eat my favorite summer foods, like watermelon.

While in bed, I thought about ninth grade and realized that when I work too hard and don't get enough sleep, I get sick. I didn't want to work so hard the next year that I got sick again.

Sophomore year, I decided to stop pushing myself so hard. I only read my notes twice before a test. Even though I studied less, I remembered things better because I was more relaxed. I trusted that I was ready and I didn't study any more.

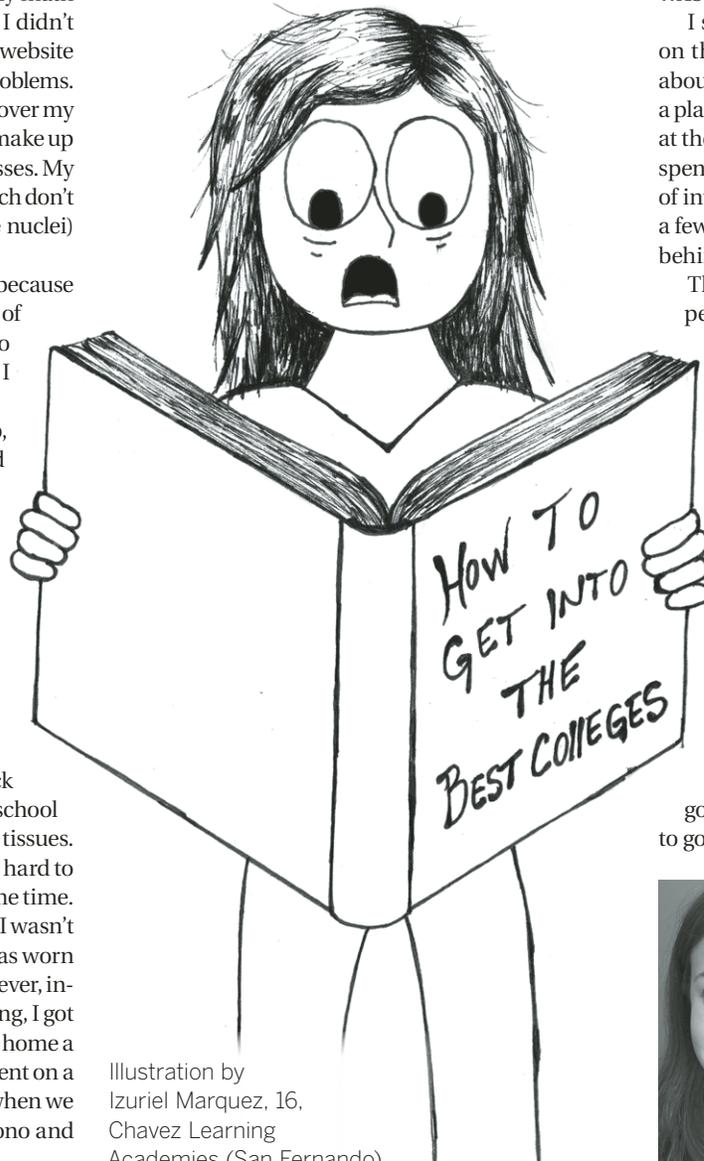


Illustration by Izuriel Marquez, 16, Chavez Learning Academies (San Fernando)

That year, chemistry was confusing. But I didn't freak out. I just asked my teacher my questions the next day. I also went to the library almost every day after school and stayed there for two hours. Because it's quiet, I'd get most of my work done there. Usually, I had some time after dinner to read or talk on the phone. I also got sick less.

I was really happy with my plan, or so I thought. One day when I went to my school library, I saw a bunch of books on a table about how to make yourself look appealing to schools. I picked up a book that had checklists for each grade.

## WAS I DOING ENOUGH?

I started to worry when I saw some of the things on the sophomore checklist. I hadn't even thought about them. It said to volunteer as much as you can at a place that was meaningful to you. I had volunteered at the food pantry at my temple, but I didn't like that I spent most of my time with bagels and bread instead of interacting with people in need, so I stopped after a few months. "Oh my God," I thought. "Why am I so behind on this stuff?"

The book made me feel like I had to be one of those people who did everything or else I wouldn't get into a good school. But when I realized that I'd been standing there for five minutes, I put the book back and walked away. I realized that I didn't have to follow exactly what it said. I didn't want to mess up what I was doing. I was more relaxed and happier and had more time to hang out with my friends on weekends. I couldn't do everything on the list because I would get run down.

Sophomore year I got all A's. Junior year is a lot of work. Right now I have two Bs, and I know that it's not the end of the world.

I still want to go to a good school, but I'm not going to aim so high that it takes a toll on my health. My parents say they'll be happy wherever I go. I've realized that wherever I go to college, I'm going to have a good experience and learn. I want to go to college somewhere that will make me happy.



*Julia's new goal is to go to a small college where her professors will know her by name.*

# I'm better off without my dad

After years of hoping he would be more caring, I finally have a father figure who is

## Author's name withheld

It's been more than a year since I've talked to my dad. My dad was abusive to my family so I don't want him in my life anymore.

He only spanked me to discipline me when I fought with my brother. But he hit my brother every week. When I was 6, my 5-year-old brother told my dad that he didn't want to go to Bible camp. My dad cursed at him and repeatedly kicked him in the stomach in the church parking lot. My dad didn't hit my mom in front of me, but later my mom told me that he hit her frequently.

I tolerated what my dad did to us because I couldn't do anything about it and he treated me like his favorite. There were also good times with my dad. Some nights, he made me and my brother laugh until we cried by telling us about the time he lost a finger while fixing a machine when he was in the Korean army.

These were the moments that made me feel like my dad could change and be loving. I wanted my family to be happy. But everything I was hoping for didn't happen.

One day when I was 8, my parents were fighting in the kitchen, while I listened to the argument in the living room. I heard my mom say, "I'm going to get a divorce!" and my dad say, "I'll kill you first and then burn your parents' house down!" I was scared, so I started to cry and rock myself back and forth. I heard utensils rattle, someone get slapped and my mom scream. I thought about running to my neighbors for help or calling the police. But I didn't do anything because I feared that the police would take my brother and me away.

Thirty minutes later, my dad came out and stomped into the bedroom, while my mom hurried off to the bathroom. When I caught a glimpse of my mom's face, I saw red puffy eyes from crying and small cuts on her face from where he'd cut her with a knife. I was shocked.

## MY MOM HAD ENOUGH OF THE ABUSE

Not long after that fight, my mom decided to separate from my dad. We went to a domestic violence shelter that was disguised as an apartment. After about a month, we moved to an apartment near my school and my mom's work, even though it was also close to my dad's house.

A few months later, my dad found out where we were living after he spotted us walking near our home. He

came to our apartment several times, wanting us to open the door. We moved to another apartment and he found us there, too.

A few weeks later, my dad told my mom in court that he wanted to see me and my brother. We didn't think he would do anything bad to us in public, so my mom allowed him to take me and my brother out to restaurants.

After the second time, my brother stopped going because he never liked my dad. But I went out to eat with my dad throughout elementary and middle school. He was fun unlike my mom. The mood in my home was depressing because my mom stressed over work and having to raise two kids on her own. My dad took me to the mall, the fair and the Huntington Library.

My mom just liked to rest at home after work and on the weekends.

## HE WOULD BLOW UP AT ME FOR NO REASON

But my relationship with my dad was complicated. There were times in the car when out of nowhere, he would yell at me about how my mom was a psycho for ripping the family apart and how it was her fault that he had to drive me home. I felt like he was trying to turn me against my mom. I would scream back, "You're the psycho! You hit us and never appreciated us. That's why we left. Why can't you just accept it?" When we arrived at my house, I would run out of the car, go in my room and cry on my bed.

After our fights, he would always call and promise to take me out to a nice restaurant or give me \$200. I

would accept his offer and continue to see him. I liked hanging out with my dad because I got to keep both of my parents in my life.

When I was in seventh grade, my dad got remarried. I went to my dad's house every weekend. My stepmom cooked delicious meals. I walked to the library with my 3-year-old stepsister and helped her ride her tricycle.

While I was hanging out with my dad, my mom was going on dates. My mom kept seeing this guy she had gone on a blind date with. I didn't like this guy at all. He was 10 years older than my mom, he smoked and he wasn't much of a talker. One day when I was in ninth grade, my mom told me that she was going to marry him and that we were going to move to another city closer to his work as soon as school ended. I said, "Stop joking. That's not funny."

But my mom's decision was final. She went out every weekend with her fiancé to look for a house that they could rent. She would occasionally invite him over to our house for dinner. I didn't like eating with him because he never talked and it was weird to have a grown man in our house.

One day, someone broke into my mom's car. Her fiancé skipped work to drive her to her job, took her car to the repair shop and picked her up again. If my mom had still been with my dad, he wouldn't have done anything except scream at her. When my mom's fiancé came over that night, I made him toast shaped like a heart to show my appreciation.

But still, I didn't want to believe that he was going to be

I believed that every man had the potential to be as mean as my dad so I tried to annoy my stepdad so he'd get violent; his kindness seemed like an act to win me over. But he never yelled or hit any of us. He was patient and understanding, so after a year I stopped being a brat.

my new dad. One day, I told my mom that she shouldn't marry someone she'd known for less than a year. She replied, "When you get to my age and experience lots of things, you know what's right for you. And I know that he is right for me, you and your brother. If you don't want me to marry, you can just go live with your dad."

Of course I wanted to live with my mom because I knew that my dad was nice only when I was with him. I knew he still had problems with his anger because I would sometimes catch him yelling at my stepsister or my stepmom. Although my mom and I argue sometimes, I love her and appreciate everything she does for me. But, I thought my mom should have let me get to know her fiancé for a long time before making such a life-changing decision.

In my room, I thought about everything I would

lose if my mom got married and I moved: a good relationship with my dad and stepfamily, my friends, the city where I'd grown up. I didn't want to let them go.

But one day, my dad and I got into the biggest argument we've ever had and I realized that he would never change. While driving me home from lunch, he kept pressuring me to tell him who the male voice was that he'd heard in the background when he called a few days before. He kept saying, "Your mom has a boyfriend, doesn't she?" I started crying. I didn't want to lie to him anymore. I would always tell him my mom wasn't seeing anyone or it was none of his business when he asked questions like that. My dad said, "It's OK. I'm not mad. I understand how you feel." But a few seconds later, he yelled, "Give me your phone. Call your mom right now. It's her fault that you're crying. She's crazy. Call that f\*\*\*ing b\*\*\*\* NOW!"

I wanted him to understand the hurt I'd been feeling, but he only cared about himself. He was jealous that my mom was seeing another guy and he wanted to yell at her about it. I yelled back, "Why do you give a s\*\*\* if mom's dating someone? You have your own wife! You're crazy, not mom. I hate you!" He said, "If you hate me, why do you want to see me so often?" I said, "I wanted to keep you in my life because I loved you." I had told him how I really felt and he laughed. I got even angrier.

We kept yelling at each other. Once we arrived at my house, I slammed his car door and stormed inside. I cried for two hours in my room and promised myself that I wouldn't talk to him again. I was tired of fighting,

making up and repeating the cycle. When my mom came home from work, I told her that I was more than happy to move to another city and she told me I made a good decision. On the first day of summer vacation, we moved 30 miles away.

Throughout the summer, my dad called me but I never picked up the phone. It was really hard not to give in, but I knew that he'd manipulate me to find out where I lived if I met up with him. I didn't want my dad coming to our house and harassing us like he had when we lived in L.A. That would get my stepdad involved and things would get complicated. I don't want to deal with any of that.

#### **MY MOM'S NEW HUSBAND IS NOTHING LIKE MY DAD**

After the wedding in July, my stepdad moved in. I didn't want to live with him. I believed that every man had the potential to be as mean as my dad so I tried to annoy him so he'd get violent; his kindness seemed like an act to win me over. Then, my mom would see that it was like living with my dad all over again and leave him. I'd ask, "Did you go to the market?" and walk away before he finished speaking. I would say, "Hey you," instead of calling him "dad." But he never yelled or hit any of us. He was patient and understanding, so after a year I stopped being a brat. I felt sorry for acting the way I did. When I talked in funny accents and made him laugh my mom told me that she was thankful that I was trying to be nice.

Since my mom comes home late from work, my stepdad cooks for me and my brother. I love the kimchi soup he makes from scratch. When I ask him to drive me somewhere at the last minute, he says, "OK sure." Since my stepdad doesn't yell at little things like my dad used to, I feel like I can ask him or talk to him about anything.

One day, when I was unloading groceries from his car, my voice shook a little as I said, "Dad, do you want me to close the trunk?" It was so awkward to say "dad." But I kept practicing and now it feels normal. I finally have a peaceful and loving family, just not the one I expected.

It's been more than a year since I've talked to my dad. I'm sad that he is not a part of my life anymore. I miss eating dinner with him and going places like we used to. I sometimes wonder what he's doing. I still sometimes cry about not having him in my life anymore. But I know it's better because it creates less heartbreak.

My family isn't perfect. We have minor issues that every family deals with, but not the kind of problems when someone is abusive. I'm grateful for how things turned out.

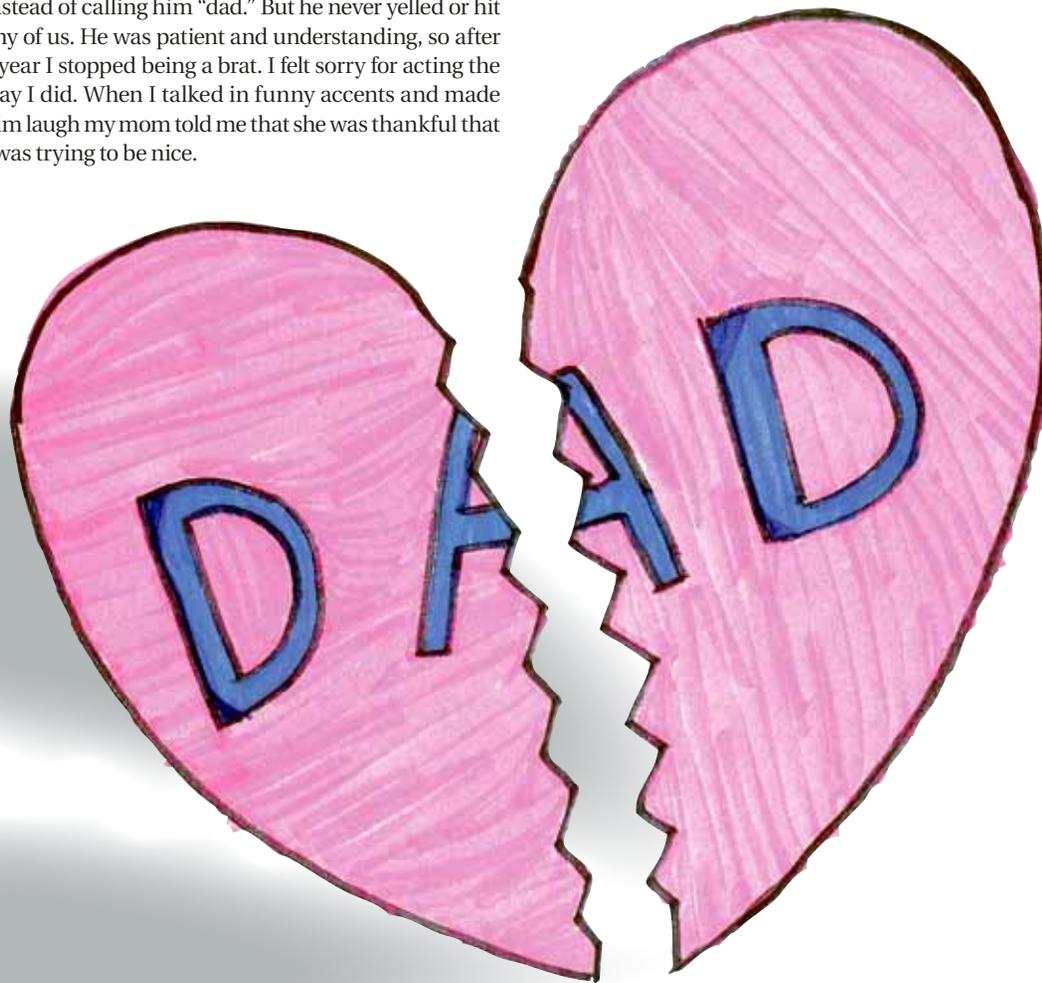


Illustration by Courtney Loi, 15, Sierra Vista HS

# How we've made money

These teens found ways to earn cash without a regular job

THERE COMES A point in all our lives when our parents stop paying for video games, a night out with friends or that cute top. We have to find ways to make money on our own. We all know that because of the economy it's hard for adults to get a job and even harder for us without much experience. But have no fear, there are other ways to make money!



the paste dries, it rubs off and an orange-colored imprint is left. The imprint lasts for two to three weeks. It's like a temporary tattoo.

In ninth grade, my former English teacher asked if we'd work at the fifth grade picnic. The kids were excited by the tattoos we created on their hands and many parents asked us to work at their private parties. We decided it would be fun to create a business. We did picnics for our school, homecoming games, parties and summer camps. Everyone referred to us as the "Henna Girls" so we put that on the business cards we had made. We charge about \$50 an hour or we charge per design, which ranges from \$3 to \$10 depending on how intricate. A small tattoo can take less than five minutes while a full hand tattoo can take 45 minutes. Usually, we'll work four to six hours and make \$100 to \$150 each. At big events we've done more than 200 hands. We don't get work often but I love becoming an artist for a few hours.

—Maria Khan, 17, Sherman Oaks Center for Enriched Studies

## DRAWING CARICATURES

I started selling caricatures for 50 cents at a school yard sale. The money was going to my club, Save Darfur, which raises money and awareness about the genocide in Sudan. Our ASB (Associated Student Body) adviser saw me drawing, so he asked me if I wanted to draw caricatures at the next dance.

It wasn't too hard to draw caricatures because I've been drawing people for most of my life. I sketched couples and friends with pens and art markers. Each sketch took about 10 minutes, and it was nerve-racking because there was a crowd of people around me and I had to work fast. The dance had a "back to the past" theme and everyone had a cool costume, such as a Bonnie and Clyde couple and a couple dressed as Greek gods. Some of the people who got caricatures gave me more than the \$2 I was charging. I made \$40, which I gave half of to my club.

I decided to draw caricatures for prom as well. My friends urged me to raise the price (they said it was way too cheap) so I charged \$5 per caricature and made \$75. It was great to have friends tell me that their family really liked their picture, or tag me on Facebook with what I made for them, and thank me.

—Amy Fan, 17, Temple City HS

## HENNA ARTISTS

My best friend, Nishat, and I learned how to do henna tattoos because of my Pakistani and her Bengali background. Henna is a flowering plant that is made into a paste, which then can be used to create intricate patterns on skin. When



## WORKING FOR MY PARENTS

My parents own their own veterinary practice. Last May, my dad offered me a job as a veterinary assistant, working Saturdays and some weekdays. I thought it would be a good way to help out my family, and I thought it would be great to earn money. I also knew how hard it would be to get a job if I had to look for one on my own.

Although the title “veterinary assistant” sounds distinguished, I do basic cleaning jobs around the hospital. I disinfect cages, wash dirty towels and blankets, and take dogs out for walks. Because I have never been professionally trained, I don’t help with the more complicated procedures. But I do help with nail trims and holding animals for blood drawings. Every now and then, I get to bathe dogs, which I like because I can listen to the radio. I like earning my own money. It’s also nice to work for my parents because they have the experience to know if I need help, and don’t make a big deal out of my mistakes.

—David Garcia, 16, Monrovia HS



## WE'RE WORKING HARD

**Henry says he likes walking dogs because he can let his mind wander, although it's not fun picking up after them. (Opposite page) Maria (left) and her friend Nishat show off the temporary tattoos they created with henna.**

**Amy was in demand drawing caricatures at a school dance.** Photo above by Daryl Studebaker (Henry's dad). Photo at left by Hope Duong, 17, Sherman Oaks Center for Enriched Studies. Photo at top left by Raymond Van, 17, Temple City HS

## 'GLUCOSE TRAFFICKER'

I never seem to have enough money to buy gifts for my friends and family on their birthdays or to pay for dates. Not being able to do small things for other people was not the way I wanted to roll.

I didn't have time to baby-sit or a car to drive to tutoring. Getting a legitimate job would take up too much time and I cringed at the thought of being bossed around while flipping burgers.

A thought struck me at the beginning of last year as I watched classmates sprinting to vending machines and lunch trucks to purchase the sugary, salty snacks they would devour: the easiest way into a person's pocket was through their stomach.

I began by buying four-packs of gum at the 99¢ Only Stores and selling each pack for a dollar and selling dollar candies like Hi-Chew for \$1.50 each. In the first week I was making around \$10 a day and increased to around \$30 a day. The best part was that I really didn't have to do anything. I bought all of my inventory, which expanded to chips, soft drinks and instant Ramen, from stores that were on my way to sports practices and music lessons, and my customers found me at lunch.

But be warned: many schools consider selling candy against the rules. If you cannot sell candy without being labeled a glucose trafficker, then you might want to find another way to make money.

—We are running this story anonymously so the writer doesn't get in trouble at school.

## I'M A DOG WALKER

I started walking dogs a year and a half ago. My mom's friend Lynette had recently gotten a new dog and needed someone to walk him. I didn't like dogs all that much, but I wanted money to buy video games, books and to have when I go out with friends.

Lynette paid me \$10 a week to walk Bello four times for 10-15 minutes. About a month later, I ran into a woman walking a dog named Bai-li. Bai-li was afraid of me and ran off. But when I saw the two of them again Bai-li didn't run. When her owner found out I walked dogs, she asked me for my number. I get paid \$15 to run with Bai-li four times a week for 10-15 minutes. After that I realized that business cards could help me get more clients, so my mom helped me make cards on her computer. I met Chloe's owners this past summer when I was walking Bello. When she asked if I was a dog walker, I gave her my business card. She called me a few weeks later and I started walking Chloe regularly. Chloe's owners pay me \$20 a week for four 30-minute walks. Picking up after the dogs isn't fun, but it's the law.

—Henry Studebaker, 16, Hamilton HS

## CLEANING IS TIRING, BUT IT PAYS

When I was in ninth grade, I wanted to make money but I couldn't find a job because I was only 14. I hated to clean but when my grandma offered to pay me to clean her house, I agreed. I would clean her house at least once a month for about six hours. It was tiring and I really hated cleaning the bathroom and dusting. But my grandma would pay me \$40-\$60 each time.

Around the same time, I convinced my mom to

pay me \$15 to wash her car. I started washing her boyfriend's, my dad's, his girlfriend's, my aunt's and my grandma's cars too. It usually took me two to three hours to wash each car. I would dry the car with a towel and then clean it with Windex so there wouldn't be any streaks. It was fun because I could play my music loud on the car stereo. It doesn't pay a lot or give you a set schedule, but I thought it was the perfect way to earn money when you're young and inexperienced.

—Jennifer Gonzales-Romero, 18,  
University of La Verne (2011 South Gate HS graduate)

## HELPING OTHER STUDENTS LEARN HISTORY

When I began applying to colleges, the cost of tuition and room and board haunted me. I wanted to find some way I could save money for college.

I couldn't get a real job because my schedule was too busy. And I didn't know anyone who needed a baby-sitter. But when the school year began, my AP European History teacher from my sophomore year, Mr. Schnauer, asked me if I wanted to tutor some of his students. I said yes but I didn't know what I would have to do.

For \$15 an hour I help students prepare for their tests by reading the assigned chapters with them and explaining what happened in a simpler way. When I compared the French Revolution to the Occupy Wall Street protests, the students were able to understand it better.

At first I was tutoring only two students, but as they began to do better on their exams, more kids wanted to be tutored. Four months later I was holding group tutoring sessions for three hours at a time and charging \$20 for each student. I've made close to \$1,000 tutoring three to four days a week after school.

—Kiera Peltz, 18, CHAMPS (Van Nuys)

## MAKING BIG BUCKS BABY-SITTING

One afternoon my mom called me asking if I could baby-sit her co-worker's daughter. “Sure, why not, I have nothing else to do,” I said. My mom then asked, “How much would you charge? ... Are you CPR certified?” Luckily, her co-worker found other arrangements because I wasn't ready to baby-sit then. But after thinking about ways I could make money it was clear that baby-sitting would be the way.

I wanted to get CPR certified to prove to parents that I could be responsible in an emergency. I took a Red Cross CPR class for \$75. My mom is a preschool teacher so I let her boss know that I would like to offer my services to all the parents. A few hours later I had six responses and was excited to get started.

I have been baby-sitting for about seven months. I set my own prices (\$10 per hour for one child and \$11 per hour for two children) and I work when I feel like it. Most of the time the children are asleep and I have time to myself. When they are awake it's like being a kid again or just a responsible older sibling—we have so much fun! We go to the park, play in the backyard, ride bikes, read books or play games until it's dinner time (which the parents have usually prepared), bath time or bed time. Over winter break I made \$390 working only 36 hours. Baby-sitting is an easy and enjoyable way to make money.

—Sarah Singer, 17, Star Prep Academy (Culver City)

# The recession hits home

It was scary when my mom lost her job and I saw her having trouble paying her bills

**By Jennifer Gonzales-Romero**

*18, University of La Verne (2011 South Gate HS graduate)*

**M**y mom, my brother and I used to go to the movies or eat out almost every weekend. We weren't rich but I could tell my mom wasn't struggling because she could always afford to take us out. Things changed in June 2009 when my mom was laid off from her job as an assistant property manager for a property management office. I never thought she'd lose her job because she'd been working there for eight years. But since she didn't look worried, I didn't worry either.

My mom had savings and the government gave her unemployment—money you get from the government every two weeks after you've been laid off. But she still made sure to budget her money. We didn't eat out or go to the movies as often. Out of habit, I'd ask my mom to buy me clothes when we were at the store but she said she couldn't. So I would mostly ask my dad whenever I went over to his house because he had a job.

Many times my junior year I'd come home after band practice and see my mom on her laptop looking for jobs, but she wasn't having much luck. I didn't think it would take two years for her to find a job and that she'd struggle to pay her bills.

The summer before senior year, I researched colleges. My dream school was the University of La Verne because I thought its small class sizes would be better for me. Tuition cost \$31,300 a year but I thought financial aid would cover everything since my mom was unemployed.

By the end of the summer I knew that I couldn't depend on my parents to buy me new clothes and pay for my senior year expenses so I kept my summer job at Little Caesars.

In late September my mom started dating an old classmate from New Orleans. He and his daughter moved here and my mom and them moved into a three-bedroom home. My brother and I stayed in our apartment and my dad moved in with us so we could continue going to school in South Gate. My mom and her boyfriend got married in December.

## MY MOM STARTED TO WORRY

At the beginning of 2011, I started to notice that my mom was struggling. Her mail was still sent to the apartment where I lived with my dad, so she would call almost every other day asking me whether her unemployment check had arrived. When I would say no she would say "OK" in a worried voice. She had been receiving unemployment for a year and a half and to keep getting it she had to prove she was still looking for a job. She told me she was worried that they wouldn't believe she was having trouble finding one and that they would cut her off. Her husband wasn't working either because he was having trouble finding a job in construction. I felt bad.

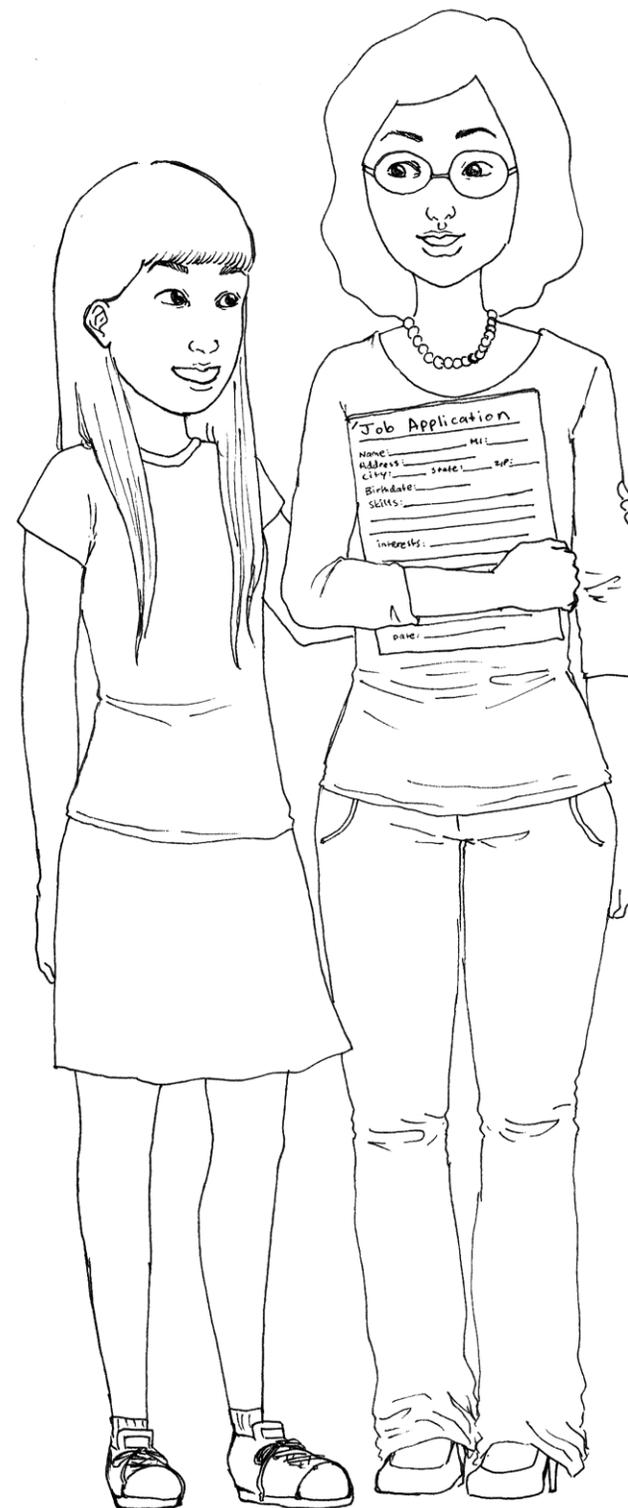


Illustration by  
Shirley Loi, 17,  
Sierra Vista HS  
(Baldwin Park)

One day in March, I was doing homework in my mom's room. She was sitting on her bed going through papers when she told me she was behind with her car payments. She started crying and said that she didn't know how she was going to pay for her car and for rent. It hurt me to see her cry and I started tearing up too. I wanted to help her but I didn't know how. I knew that if she couldn't pay her car loan that they would take her car away, but she needed it. How else would she go to job interviews or pick my brother and me up so we could stay at her house?

In April, my mom scored a temporary job as an assistant property manager. I was hoping that they would keep her permanently. But after five weeks they didn't need her anymore, so she went back to looking for a job. Around the same time I noticed that my mom's husband was borrowing her car more often. I asked

why she couldn't find a job. She had a college degree, she was outgoing and hardworking, so why wouldn't anyone hire her?

#### **SHE COULDN'T HELP PAY FOR MY PROM DRESS**

The next day she called and told me that she was having trouble paying rent and that they were going to move into a one-bedroom apartment. She told me she couldn't give me the \$100 anymore. I understood and told her it was OK. But now I didn't have enough money either so I didn't know what I was going to do. My next paycheck wasn't until the day of prom. I didn't want to ask my dad for money because he couldn't afford it and I knew he would get mad that my mom couldn't contribute since they always split the expenses for me and my brother. My mom suggested I use some of the money I had saved for college from selling *pastelitos*,

Many times my junior year I'd come home after band practice and see my mom on her laptop looking for jobs, but she wasn't having much luck. I didn't think it would take two years for her to find a job and that she'd struggle to pay her bills.

my mom what happened and she said he sold his car and they used the money to pay for rent. Still, I didn't think their situation was so bad because they still had their home and money to buy food. But now that I look back, my mom had been worrying about a lot of bills.

In May I decided that I wanted to get my prom dress made so that it would be unique. I asked my mom if she could help pay for it since my dad had offered to pay \$100. I think she knew how much it meant to me so without any hesitation she said she could pay \$100 too. I was so excited. I didn't feel bad for asking because if she had said no, I would have understood. I wanted prom to be perfect and I was just thinking about that.

A couple of weeks later my mom picked up my brother and me from my dad's house, and I gave her three letters from the unemployment office. When she read them, she looked worried. I asked her what was wrong and she said that they were no longer going to give her unemployment. When she started driving she remained quiet and looked like she was thinking. Then she started crying and said that she had a lot of bills to pay and she didn't know what she was going to do. I thought about saying, "It will be OK, things will get better" but it didn't seem right because I didn't know whether things would get better. My brother and I kept quiet for the rest of the car ride. I wanted to offer her money but the only money I had I was going to use to buy my prom ticket. I didn't want to be selfish but I didn't want to miss out on one of my most memorable high school experiences. I couldn't understand

a Central American meat pocket, at school. I didn't want to but it was the only way I could get money fast. I promised myself I would pay back every cent after my next few paychecks.

Then my mom asked me if she could borrow \$120 from my *pastelito* money. I was shocked she was asking me for money, but I said yeah. It showed how badly she needed it if she was asking me. Although it hurt to hear what my mom was going through, it felt nice to finally have a way to help her.

I had fun at prom because I was hanging out with my boyfriend and my best friend and her date. I was excited prom was finally happening and graduation was approaching.

Around the same time, I found out that the University of La Verne was going to give me about \$24,000 in grants and scholarships, which left me with about \$11,000 to pay myself or through loans for the rest of the tuition, books, food and personal expenses.

One of the loans had to be taken out by one of my parents, and it was the loan with the most money, \$4,000. I asked my parents but they didn't want to take out the loan because my dad had bad credit and my mom had no income. I understood but it meant that I would be able to take out only \$7,000 in loans so I would have to work part-time while going to school. I hoped I would make enough money to pay for my phone, gas and other expenses.

In June my mom went for a second job interview as a payroll clerk. I knew how hard my mom was looking

for a job and I was hoping that they would hire her. After the interview she picked me up so we could open a checking account. She said they would call her later in the day to tell her whether she got the job. When we were opening the account with a banker, they called her. She stepped outside the banker's cubicle while I finished opening my account. When she was done she came in crying with a smile on her face. I knew it was good news. She said they gave her the job and she would start next week. I was happy so I gave her a hug. Afterward, we picked up my little brother and celebrated her new job by going to a restaurant to eat tacos.

Now that my mom has a job, things have gotten better for her. She and her husband moved into a three-bedroom apartment and she's been paying her bills off. She also has extra money again so she and her husband go out to eat on weekends sometimes.

When my mom lost her job I was busy with my own life—just worrying about school, being in band and college applications. But as I watched my mom struggle, I realized how hard it is to make money and how the economy could affect even those who are good at budgeting their money or have a college degree. Seeing my mom struggle makes me worry about whether I will get a job after I graduate from college. I realize now that it's hard for a lot of people to get jobs, especially young people because we're inexperienced.

#### **I NOW KNOW HOW EXPENSIVE LIFE IS WHEN YOU'RE AN ADULT**

I'm scared about one day living on my own because I will have to pay for rent, groceries, utilities, the Internet, cable and all this other stuff. My job at Little Caesars is minimum wage and I couldn't support myself on that.

Looking back, I could have asked my mom if she had enough money to pay all her bills. If I knew that earlier, I could have understood that she was struggling. If I had saved my money from my job instead of spending it on clothes, I think I could have paid for my prom dress myself. Now, I'm more appreciative of what my parents are able to give me. My mom has agreed to pay for my car insurance. I appreciate her help because I know it's hard for her since she is still trying to pay off her bills. To thank my dad, I'm helping around the house more and contributing to some house expenses since he is letting me live with him for free while I go to college.

I wish my mom didn't have to go through that financial struggle, but I'm glad I've learned from it. Save money for emergencies. Make sure I don't go into debt. This is the perfect time to realize that before I'm living on my own.



*Jennifer is trying to help her dad out by paying one bill a month, which isn't much but she knows he appreciates it.*

## ESSAY CONTEST WINNERS

# Is it OK to lie?

1ST PLACE \$50

## I lie to protect myself

**Author's name withheld**

When I was smaller I always told the truth, and my parents always liked that about me. They always told my sister that the more she lied, the more people won't believe her, and it's true. The more lies you tell, the more people won't listen when you are actually telling the truth.

I have never lied to my parents because I feel that is wrong. But I have lied to some of my friends. I don't consider it a humongous lie, but it's pretty big. And this lie I tell is about my sexual orientation. I have lied to many people about being straight.

When people ask, "Who do you like?" I have to pick a random guy and pretend like I actually like him. Sometimes I have to agree on the "cuteness" of the guys my friends like, even though I don't find guys attractive. There was one time I picked this guy I didn't even know at all and I told my friends I had a big crush on him. They wouldn't stop bothering me about me "liking" him. It didn't feel right to lie, but it kept them from questioning my sexuality.

My parents have never questioned me about my sexuality and I don't know if they will. They always give me speeches about having a boyfriend and being careful, and I have to listen even though I don't agree with what they tell me. I pay attention and nod when I have to and, well, they have never asked me if I've had a boyfriend or anything. I thought they would've started to wonder about me because of my way of dressing. I own more button-down shirts than girly shirts, and I prefer to dress with a button-down shirt and fitted jeans. If my parents ever question me about my sexuality I'm going to have to tell them the truth because I have never lied to them and I don't plan on starting to now.

I never thought I would lie to anybody about anything. And now I have this lie going on about me being straight. But I lie about this because some people wouldn't accept me for being a lesbian and would hurt my feelings. I know that as I grow older I will gain more self-esteem but right now I prefer to have this lie going on. I know it's bad to lie and that I should stop, but it protects my feelings.

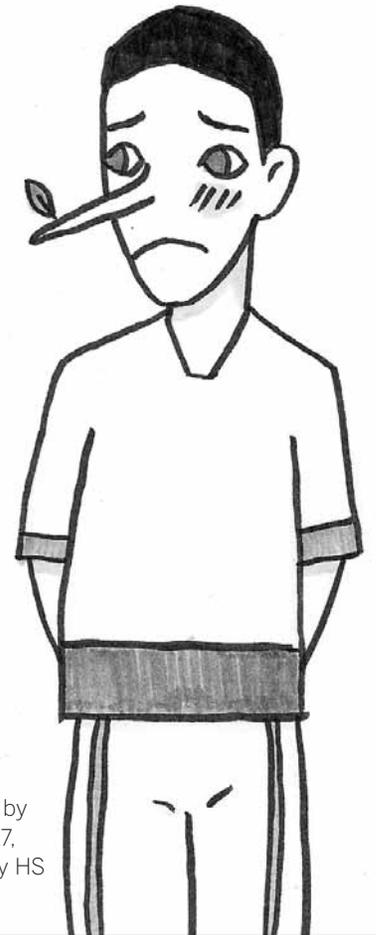


Illustration by  
Amy Fan, 17,  
Temple City HS

2ND PLACE \$30 (TIE)

## I wish they'd told me the truth

**By Lilit Mkrтчian**

*Clark Magnet HS (La Crescenta)*

Music has always played a large role in my life, whether I listened to it, made it or sang along with it. When I was little, I loved singing all of my favorite songs. I sang all day: while I was play-

ing with my dolls, doing homework and in the shower as well. On the weekends or whenever I got bored, I would plug in a microphone, stand on a chair and perform for my family and guests. They loved my singing and told me I had the sweetest voice. I was a little too confident and even thought I was going to be a star on American Idol one day!

In elementary school, I decided to join the choir to have some fun and show off my voice at the same time. During performances, I would always want to be the main voice and sing solos. My friends thought I was amazing, but what did they know? They were only in fifth grade. I always thought I was a good singer until one day, one of my family members told me the cold, hard truth.

During winter break of fifth grade, we were at a family gathering with many relatives, some of who

I didn't even recognize. As everyone sat down, I decided I should sing some of the holiday songs I had been taught in choir. I began to sing Winter Wonderland, when I noticed a lady looking at me with a weird expression, as if she had just eaten something sour. I remembered the lady as one of those family members nobody liked, but she wasn't aware of it. She was the loudest person there, always stating her opinion and being rude. As I got into the chorus of the song, the lady interrupted me with her loud, arrogant voice: "Stop singing, your voice is giving me a huge headache!" From this moment on, I realized that with their lies, my family was keeping the truth about my singing away from me.

A good 10 seconds passed as I processed what had just happened, and my eyes began to well up with tears. I threw the microphone onto the ground and

2ND PLACE \$30 (TIE)

## I got out of trouble, but still feel guilty

By Pierre Simonian

Clark Magnet HS

Is it OK to lie? This is a common question everyone faces. One might say yes because lying helps you stay out of trouble. Others might say no because telling lies creates more problems. But if you asked me, I would say, "It depends." Looking back at my life, lying put me in good and bad positions, it all depended on my situation.

When I was a third grader, I remember an event taking place on my school playground. It was some kind of magic show for us kids and teachers to watch. We were assigned seats and I sat next to the mentally impaired kid in our class who no one liked. As one of the crowd, I didn't like him either because no one else did. Sitting in front of us was a tall kid who I hated because he told on me all the time. He was so tall that every time he would sit down no one behind him could see ahead. That day, that person was me. No matter how much I moved my head left to right to see the magician, all I saw was his head blocking everything and I wasn't going to sit there and take it. So I took my hand and smacked his head from behind. He

ran into an empty bedroom, crying my eyes out into a soft pillow, which seemed to be my only comfort at the time. As a 10-year-old, my dreams were crushed: I would never audition on American Idol, become a star or be a well-known singer. Thanks to my family's little white lie, I had to be told the truth by someone I didn't even know in a pretty rude way. I would rather have had my family tell me I was never good than support me by lying.

Being young, you're constantly lied to, but you never realize it until you are older. This sounds harsh but hey—do you still expect presents from Santa Claus on Christmas or a quarter under your pillow from the tooth fairy? Lying is like a safety blanket, shielding

turned around in a rage wondering who it was. I just sat there looking up at the sky. He turned back around rubbing his head from the pain. At that moment I had so much adrenaline rushing through me that I could've hit his head another five times, but if I did he would know it was me. So I told the mentally impaired kid next to me to smack his head. He asked why and I yelled at him to just do it. He took his hand from his pocket and smacked his head twice as hard as I had. He quickly put his hand down but it was too late. The tall kid turned around, punched him in the face a good three times, grabbed the hand he smacked his head with and twisted it. As of now, the kid next to me was crying and everyone was looking in our direction. Two teachers pulled them out of their seats and rushed them to the office.

About two days later I was called to the office by the principal. She told me that the kid next to me was telling her that I told him to smack that tall guy's head. She asked if this was true. I said no, and pretended that I had no idea what she was talking about. I denied everything else the principal told me, and the principal believed it.

Sure, lying saved me but I still feel guilty even to this day. Lying should be used for a good purpose. For example, your friend gets a new haircut and you think it looks bad and you, like anyone else, would say it looks fine. No harm was done to you or your friend. However for my situation, everyone got harmed. Yes, including me. By saying "no" to the principal, I did not tell the truth. I lied, and I felt guilty.

Lying is an extremely powerful tool in human nature. The fact that we all take advantage of it is normal, but one must know how to use it unlike the way I did.

the not-so-important truth from the young and the not-so-nice opinions from teenagers and adults. In a way, adults preserve their children's childhood with little white lies such as supporting them in something they like to do but may not be good at. In the end, it's all about how the person feels. I would rather have the truth told straight to my face than to hear lies and later find out what someone was really thinking. Lying is never the right thing to do, because once you tell a lie it sets off a chain of events. If you lie just to spare someone's feelings, you have to consider the consequences. You might make the person feel good for a while, but in the long run, when the truth comes out, things may not end up so well.

NEW ESSAY CONTEST

## Who do you admire?

On page 18, our writer shares how she admires her stepdad for being loving, patient and kind to her family. She appreciates those traits and doesn't take him for granted because her father was abusive and didn't treat her family that way. Like our writer looking up to her stepdad, we want you to tell us about someone in your life who you admire. Maybe it's a parent who works hard to provide for your family or an older sibling who made it to college.

Or maybe it's a friend, classmate, teammate or co-worker. We want you to pick someone you know well, rather than a celebrity or athlete, so your essays are more personal. Pick one time they did something you admired and write about that, or write about why you admire this person overall.



### 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. Your name will be withheld if you request it. The staff of L.A. Youth will read the entries and pick three winners. 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](http://www.layouth.com).

### Mail your essay to:

L.A. Youth  
5967 W. 3rd St. Suite 301  
Los Angeles CA 90036  
or to [essays@layouth.com](mailto:essays@layouth.com)

### DEADLINE:

Friday, Feb. 24, 2012

## Inheritance

By Christopher Paolini

**Reviewed by Aaron Schwartz**  
16, *Gabrielino HS (San Gabriel)*

In the ancient language of the elves: *Eka elrun ono, Christopher Paolini, wiol förn thornessa*. In English: I thank you, Christopher Paolini, for this gift. In this case, the gift I'm referring to is *Inheritance*, his fourth and final book in the fantasy series known by the same name. The *Inheritance* cycle started as a trilogy with the first book, *Eragon*, but after completing *Eldest* and *Brisingsr*, Paolini needed another book to finish the story. The three-year wait for this 849-page book was definitely worth it.

The series follows Eragon and his dragon, Saphira, as they try to escape the grasp of the evil Galbatorix and learn how to fight and use their magical powers to overthrow him. *Inheritance* chronicles the final desperate confrontations of the allied rebels of humans (the Varden), elves, dwarves, werecats and Urgals against Galbatorix and his vast army. Eragon and Saphira must fight to survive the countless battles they have with the Imperial armies while trying to find a way to defeat Galbatorix, the most powerful Dragon Rider ever born.

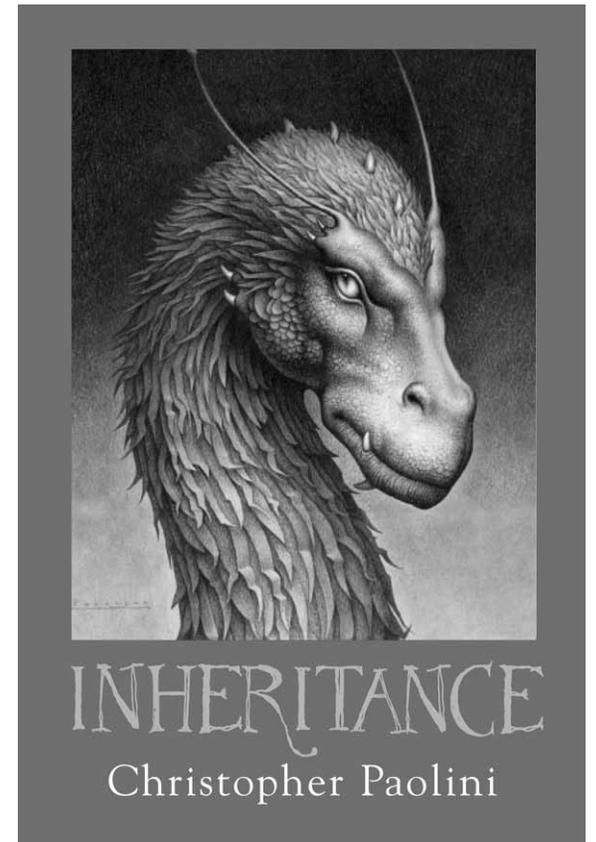
I liked *Inheritance* because it was fast paced, action packed and suspenseful. The book begins

with Eragon and the Varden laying siege to the city of Belatona, which was controlled by Galbatorix. From there the fighting never stops. I also liked the humor. One funny scene was when Angela tells the story of a "raging red-eyed rabbit" that eats flesh. Her audience of Urgals and werecats are natural enemies. However, they get so wrapped up in Angela's weird and gruesome story that the two groups forget they hate each other, and the werecats are even willing to lie on top of the Urgals as they listen to the story.

*Inheritance* ends the series in a satisfying way. We learn what happens in the final confrontation between Galbatorix and Eragon, and what happens to the land of Alagaësia afterward. The story also ties up the loose ends of the romance between Eragon and Arya, the elven ambassador who is Eragon's partner, protector and mentor. However, the resolution does seem too long. It takes 100-plus pages just to wrap up the series after the final battle.

One unresolved storyline was the mystery of Angela's past, which disappointed me since Angela the witch, who is as wise as she is strange (and she's really strange), was my favorite character. If Paolini were to write any other book on Alagaësia, Angela's back story would be a good one.

*Inheritance* is not as good as the *Lord of the Rings* series, which also has elves, dwarves and magic, but the story is entertaining. Anyone who likes sword fighting, magic, dragons, elves, mystical languages or just exciting stories should read this series.



## A Certain Slant of Light

By Laura Whitcomb

**Reviewed by Andrea Perez**  
17, *Bravo Medical Magnet HS*

I loved reading *A Certain Slant of Light* by Laura Whitcomb. It's not long, but it's beautifully written and a really touching story that deals with powerful themes like death, life, love and forgiveness.

The book is about Helen, a young woman whose spirit has been stuck wandering on Earth 130 years after her death. She cannot remember hardly anything from her life, but believes not being allowed into heaven is punishment for some sin she must have committed. She moves from host to host, forced to stay with each one until they die, even though they never realize she's there.

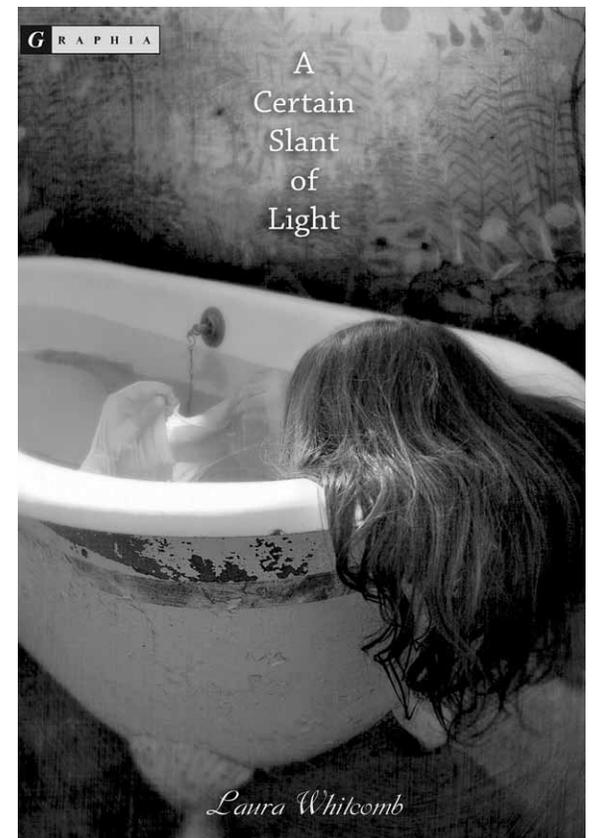
After 130 years of no one hearing or seeing her, Helen meets James, a wandering spirit inhabiting the body of a young drug abuser named Billy. He teaches Helen how to occupy a body if the person's spirit has chosen to leave. Billy's spirit left after nearly dying, leaving the body hollow but alive and accessible to James. So Helen finds Jenny, whose soul has been driven out of her body by her

parents' oppressiveness.

Helen and James start becoming attached to living in the physical world, but they realize how difficult it is to continue pretending to be Jenny and Billy. They especially struggle with the lack of freedom they have as teenagers. To free themselves from their punishment they do the only thing that seems reasonable. They try to remember what sin they committed that has left them stuck on Earth, hoping the realization of their sins would allow them to be together in heaven.

I felt like Whitcomb was trying to say that we shouldn't hold on to feelings of guilt nor run away from the pain that accompanies it, because it will hold us back. I think that Whitcomb's way of conveying this message through the struggles of Helen and James was powerful, because their predicament was extreme and their guilt was literally preventing them from moving on.

I liked the spirituality in the book. I'm not particularly religious so I appreciated that the author didn't overpower me with God and religion. The novel was exciting to read because it was original and I couldn't predict anything. The ending was beautiful and full of tender emotion, making it one of the best endings I've ever read.





## Coldplay

CD: Mylo Xyloto

**Reviewed by Tyler Bradshaw**

16, Redondo Union HS

When I heard Coldplay was releasing its fifth album, Mylo Xyloto, I was excited. I didn't like some of the songs that were more instrumental, but I've played the rest of the album so many times that I know the lyrics word for word.

Chris Martin's gentle voice, the strum of the acoustic guitar and the sweet words make "Us Against the World" my favorite song on the album. "Through chaos as it swirls/ It's us against the world." When I listen to this song I imagine that I am sitting around a campfire with my closest friends.

The shorter song "U.F.O." tells of a lost soul who is following the crowd and needs guidance. The song begins with Martin's soft voice saying, "Lord, I don't know which way I am going/ Which way the river gonna flow." This song makes me not want to follow the crowd because the speaker sounds sad and distressed.

"Princess of China," featuring Rihanna, adds a touch of pop to Coldplay's slow rock. I was a fan of Rihanna before. I didn't know she was on this song so when I heard her voice I thought, "This is going to be a great song," and it was. The song tells of a princess who runs away and she regrets not being able to have a king. They use the words "Once upon a time," which add a fairytale feel to it.

The acoustic guitar makes it easy to listen to the whole album. If you like slow songs, Mylo Xyloto will be a keeper.

**Chris Martin's gentle voice and the strum of the acoustic guitar make "Us Against the World" my favorite song on the album.**



## She & Him

CD: Volume Two

**Reviewed by Jazmine Mendoza**

16, Chavez Learning Academies (San Fernando)

She and Him is a collaboration between the star of TV's New Girl, Zooey Deschanel, and musician M. Ward. The combination of Ward's acoustic guitar and Deschanel's cute and simple lyrics creates a quirky duo that sounds like they're from the 60s. After listening to their second album, Volume Two, I feel like they are my best friends who give great advice and tell interesting stories.

On "Lingering Still" I feel like I'm hanging out with Deschanel and we're talking about boys. On "In the Sun" when Deschanel sings, "It's OK (it's OK) / We all get the slip sometimes every day/ I'll just keep it to myself in the sun," I feel like she's not crying about her problems, just hoping for the best, and I can relate to that. I try to stay positive at all times, especially when things are bad.

In "Gonna Get Along Without You Now," she sings about how she has lost her crush but she knows she'll find new love. For someone like me, who always has a crush, it's a reminder that they are just crushes and I'll soon be over them. "Gonna find somebody that's twice as cute/ 'Cause I didn't like you anyhow/ You told everybody that we were friends/ But this is where our friendship ends." That's advice that a lot of guys and girls (including me) need to tell ourselves every time a crush doesn't work out.

This whole album is great! Listening to the songs on a bad day cheers me up and reminds me of what great friends are like.

**After listening to Volume Two, I feel like they are my best friends who give great advice and tell interesting stories.**



## The Velvet Underground

CD: Loaded

**Reviewed by Miguel Molina**

17, Film & Theatre Arts Charter HS

I heard about the Velvet Underground when I read that The Strokes said their music was influenced by them. I listened to them on YouTube and eventually heard all their songs. My favorite album is Loaded, which was released in 1970.

One of my favorite songs is "Sweet Jane," which has a repetitive guitar part I will never get tired of. Lou Reed sings that Jack is in his corset, clothing that makes a woman look thinner, and Jane is in her vest. He says, "And me I am in a rock n' roll band" with an attitude that makes him seem fun compared to Jack and Jane.

Another song I really like is "Rock And Roll," which describes the life of a girl named Jenny. There is nothing fun in her life, but one morning she turns on the radio and is surprised that it's playing rock and roll music and she starts dancing. I really like the way Reed says "fine fine music" in a high-pitched voice he can't hit. He is not much of a singer, but he puts a lot of emotion into his songs.

"Who Loves the Sun" is sung by guitarist Doug Yule. His voice is different from Reed's raw, rough voice. He sounds sentimental and hits every note perfectly. There is a great "ba ba ba" in the background that goes well with Yule's singing. I like the nature references in the song like, "Who loves the rain/ Who cares that it makes flowers/ Who cares that it makes showers/ Since you broke my heart."

The Velvet Underground shows that you do not have to over-complicate music to create a masterpiece. Loaded is full of songs that will keep you singing.

**Lou Reed is not much of a singer, but he puts a lot of emotion into his songs.**

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**Los Angeles CA 90036**

I ENJOY BEING ON THE STAFF of L.A. Youth. I like having a place to express my thoughts and opinions. The weekly staff meetings are a great way to discuss important topics like budget cuts and racial diversity with other teens from all over Los Angeles County. Writing for L.A. Youth is fun. I love seeing my finished work in the paper and working with an editor has improved my writing.

—*Jessica Marin, 18, Culver City HS*

NEXT  
ORIENTATION:  
**SATURDAY,**  
**FEB 4**  
11 A.M. - NOON



Staff members  
judge a photo  
contest.

L. A. YOUTH HAS BECOME a big part of my life. At the weekly meetings we discuss current events and controversial issues and I get to hear the opinions of other teens. My writing has improved and I've become more aware of the mistakes I used to make. The editors not only help you write your stories, but are always there to listen to you about anything. I also like how I've gotten to take pictures for the newspaper.

—*Victor Beteta, 18, University HS*

# L.A. youth

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