

MARCH-APRIL 2012
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L.A. youth

the newspaper by and about teens

WE FOUGHT FOR FAIRNESS

AND WON!

After I got a ticket for
being late to school,
I helped change the
law so students will be
treated more fairly

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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.

How L.A. Youth is funded

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

L.A. Youth's mission

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

Advocating for teens

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

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Animo Locke HS #1

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ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

I had never taken photos for a publication before but L.A. Youth gave me the chance to get experience. I was part of the Bollywood photo shoot (p. 14). It was exhilarating to run around and take photos of the performance from different angles. L.A. Youth gives me the chance to explore a skill I didn't know I had. —*Ha Young Kwen, 17, Wilson HS (Hacienda Heights)*



BEHIND THE SCENES

When we hear about news that affects teens, we try to write about it. But it's sometimes hard because our stories usually take months to complete and we come out only six times a year. So when we heard that the L.A. City Council was going to change the truancy law, we were lucky. We were already working with a student who was writing about his involvement with getting the law changed (p. 10). Maceo, dressed in a cap and gown, got interviewed by a TV reporter after he spoke before the council.



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 layouth.com or on our Facebook page. You can also email us at editor@layouth.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.

JAN-FEB 2012 ISSUE

A GIRL LEARNED SHE'S BETTER OFF WITHOUT HER ABUSIVE FATHER

I WAS TOUCHED by your story "I'm better off without my dad." Many teens are going through these things every day and when they read your article they don't feel alone. You may have had very tough times but in the end it leads to something better for you and your family. My parents are also separated and I know that anger you feel when you have a stepmom or stepdad because I have both. At first it may be hard but once you realize what they mean to your parents and family you understand that it's for the best. I look up to you for writing this article and showing it to so many people even though it may hurt.

Ivan Garcia

Animo Leadership Charter HS

I WAS ABLE to understand and make connections as I read the article "I'm better off without my dad." Reading the words "I wanted him to understand the hurt I'd been feeling, but he only cared about himself" brought flashbacks of my dad. I totally understood what the author was talking about when she described her abusive dad. I am so glad that she was able to move on with her life and give her stepfather a chance. When I see a dad and daughter sharing special memories and demonstrating love toward each other it causes a pain in my heart that I know one day, with the help of God, will be gone.

Name withheld

A FAMILY STRUGGLED WHEN MOM LOST HER JOB

THE ARTICLE, "THE recession hits home," is very similar to my life. Because my dad is getting deported, my family has been ruined. My mom has no job and she has many bills to pay. She has to pay credit cards, car, gas, energy, and most importantly, the rent. My mom cries because she stresses a lot. She worries and I worry because she can't find a job and I'm too young to work.

I feel impotent and I wish I could do something. I wish everything was back to normal. I wish my dad was here.

Name withheld

P.E. IS WORTH IT

I RELATE TO the article "Give P.E. a chance" because I used to be one of those snobby girls who didn't like to get all sweaty. I look at them now and think, "Wow!" They're missing out on so much fun and exercise, which is why a lot of teens are overweight. I try to do my best when I'm in P.E. class, even though I'm out there in the middle of the day and I get a little sweaty. Just bring some deodorant and an extra shirt and you'll be OK.

Laura Moreno

Hollywood HS

A GIRL WAS SO STRESSED THAT SHE GOT SICK

FROM SEVENTH GRADE to ninth grade I put so much pressure on myself to be the best that I too became sick. I had become a monster and living with me was like walking on eggshells. My family and I finally had a discussion about me and school. I never knew that I was hurting them by not being happy. They wanted me to do well but to never forget to smile. Now as a sophomore I put less emphasis on the importance of being the best or having straight As. All I can do is my best.

Brianna Allen

Hollywood HS

IT'S HARD TO KEEP A NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION

I WAS REALLY able to connect with the article "New Year, new me" because I can easily relate to Merryck Dickerson. We both have tried to improve ourselves but to no avail. I believe that it's a great idea that as we grow older we try to improve ourselves and our habits, but it is not nearly as easy as it seems. My resolution this year was to refrain from saying any insulting and disrespectful words. I failed after a couple of days. I hope that one year I can manage to overcome one of my negative habits and improve

myself just like Merryck has managed to do push-ups so far.

Arely Paez

Animo Leadership Charter HS

FORMER DROPOUTS GET A SECOND CHANCE

I AM GLAD L.A. Youth published the story "Getting real about graduating." It got me more serious about school. The dropouts talked about how they started with one bad grade and it got out of control. My last semester grades were bad because I had a lot of Cs and Bs, no As. I probably won't go down that same path because my grades are improving but this snapped me back to reality and showed me exactly how important it is to get good grades.

Linda Arshakyan

Wilson MS (Glendale)

STUDENTS SAY BUDGET CUTS HURT EDUCATION

WHEN I WAS in middle school, I pictured high school to be like it was in movies—big stadiums, thousands of people, big football games and amazing pep rallies. But a lot of students at our school have stopped trying or even showing up. I know people who have

transferred because of the pooriness of our school. I am glad you wrote about the school cuts survey results to make people aware of how the budget cuts in high school can change the perspective of students on their learning. I hope high schools change this problem so students can have hope to learn and change the world.

Victor Banuelos

Animo Leadership Charter HS

A BOY CREATED HIS OWN COMIC STRIPS

THE ARTICLE "CREATING my own comics" inspired me. The way Austin talks about his love for creating comics makes me want to start drawing again. As a kid, I would take art classes but painting and fancy coloring didn't catch my attention; I always loved cartoons. As I grew older, I stopped drawing altogether. I have recently begun drawing again and I enjoy it. None of my friends care for it, but reading this article has shown me what it's all about. Drawing is about doing what you love and expressing yourself.

Kevin Rodas

Hollywood HS

Healthy Teen Smokers and Non-Smokers Needed to Volunteer!



Ages 13-17 needed for a UCLA research study

- We are studying the effects of cigarette craving on brain functioning.
- To qualify, you may not be pregnant, claustrophobic, have metal implants in your body, have a mental health illness, use illegal drugs, or abuse alcohol. You must speak fluent English and be right-handed.
- Parent or legal guardian permission is required for participation.
- If you qualify, you will visit our laboratory twice. In Visit 1, you will fill out questionnaires. In Visit 2, you will perform computer tasks while receiving a brain scan (MRI).

Qualified participants will be compensated \$50!

Transportation expenses, including bus and train fare and gas mileage, will be provided

**For more information, please call
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Driving me crazy

Learning to drive wasn't easy with my mom freaking out



Illustration by Amy Fan,
18, Temple City HS

By Andrew Pulido

16, Chavez Learning Academies (San Fernando)

When I started high school, I noticed almost all the 11th and 12th graders had cars and could drive to football games and practices and wherever they wanted. I hated having to depend on my mom or dad for a ride. My parents usually had to work or drop off my younger brothers at their practices. I would have to rush to be ready when they said "We're leaving in 10 minutes" and then I would end up forgetting something important like my wallet or keys. I needed to drive as soon as possible.

When I turned 16 I took my permit test and got only three wrong, which is passing, and got my learner's permit. But when we got home my parents didn't tell me when I would start practicing driving. After two weeks, it was obvious they were avoiding the subject. Learning to drive with my parents was going to be a lot harder than I thought.

One day, I asked my dad where he was going and he said he was going to the market. I asked him if I could drive. He hesitated but then said "Yeah, OK." I was a

little nervous but mostly excited to get started. My dad was pretty calm. Every once in a while he would tell me to slow down or not to press the brakes so hard. I felt great knowing I wasn't that bad my first time driving.

On the other hand my first time driving with my mom was a disaster. We practiced going around the block for an hour and a half. When I went slower than 35 miles per hour to be cautious, she would tell me I needed to drive exactly 35 miles an hour unless we were in a school zone. As we approached each stop sign I would hear, "Andrew, slow down, slow down, slow down, Andrew." I knew I was going to stop before the white line so my first thought would be, "Mom, shut up, mom, shut up." Her nagging made me worried that I would make a mistake. When we returned home I was mad at my mom for treating me like I was 6, not 16. I thought, "This is supposed to be fun, not something I should be getting mad over."

After that, I usually didn't ask my mom to practice driving with me but my dad was available only three days a week, so I didn't get as much practice as I would have liked. The trade-off wasn't that bad because my confidence behind the wheel didn't suffer any serious blows from my mom.

After about a month, I got the hang of parking, switching lanes and driving in traffic without feeling nervous. After I was done driving with my dad, he'd say, "You're getting better." My mom was still convinced I needed a lot of practice but I started finding her facial expressions hilarious. Whenever she would get into the car with me her eyes would widen and her jaw would tense even though I hadn't started the car yet! As soon as I started the car she would hold on to the door as if she were ready to jump out. I tried to drive the speed limit but the whole time she kept screaming, "Andrew, slow down, SLOW DOWN!" Or when I was making a left turn on a busy street, she'd say, "I swear if you do that one more time, I'm dropping you off and driving home without you!" I learned that when a parent is overreacting, just focus on what you're doing.

MY DAD GAVE ME USEFUL ADVICE

I liked driving with my dad because he was helpful. When some idiot was tailgating me or a driver was zigzagging through the cars around us, my dad would tell me, "Relax, move away from them and let them pass by you before returning to your lane." He always said the same thing: "Be a defensive driver, keep your distance and be on the lookout for other drivers." My dad's tips helped me build good habits.

My favorite memory of learning to drive was going on the freeway for the first time with my mom. After I had been driving about four months I was more confident and I asked her if we could try driving on the freeway. She was reluctant at first but I convinced her to let me. As I began driving toward the 118 freeway she said, "Andrew please be VERY careful. I don't think this is a good idea." As I turned onto the on-ramp I could immediately tell this was going to be different. You have to accelerate fast to match everyone else's speed. My mom was yelling at me to speed up (something I'd never heard her say before) and so I did. As I merged into the lane next to me cars honked at me as they flew by! Most of the cars were going much faster than I was, and I was going around 60 miles per hour. My mom was quiet, which was a change, but when I looked at her I saw her eyes were closed. After about 10 minutes my mom broke the silence and said, "You're doing pretty good." I was shocked because my mom had never given me a compliment about my driving before. I decided to get off at the next exit. I figured I owed her that much for not putting the usual pressure on me.

I've been driving for six months now. I'm going to be taking my driving test soon and I think I'll pass. I guess the nagging and lectures did pay off.



Andrew says his mom isn't as scared about driving with him as she was before.



The jobs of the future

You can make a living out of helping the environment



This story is made possible by a grant from Edison International to write about the environment.

By Miguel Molina

17, Film & Theatre Arts Charter HS

I started caring about the environment because of my sister. She'd tell me and my parents to recycle and not to throw trash in the gutters (because it ends up in the ocean). I realized it was important to protect the environment because pollution can harm animals and us. I joined a garden club called South Central Resistance. We're growing plants in vacant lots to fight pollution because plants consume the carbon dioxide that is released into the air from cars and factories.

When I heard that President Obama was going to create more green jobs, I was interested but confused. The only green technology I'd seen were windmills and solar panels. I thought green jobs were just related to renewable energy. When I interviewed educators at Los Angeles Trade Tech, I found out that there are a lot more green jobs than I thought. I learned about

mechanics who fix hybrid cars and people who make houses more energy efficient.

I also learned that California has passed laws that require technology to be better for the environment. As time passes there will be more green jobs because of these laws. If you're interested in the environment, you should consider getting a green job.

L.A. Youth: What's a green job? *Tom Vessella, professor in the Construction, Design and Manufacturing Department:* Jobs that focus on energy conservation, material conservation and environmental need. You help protect the environment, you save energy and you use less materials. When they say what is a green job? This [weatherization, helping buildings conserve energy] is a green job. Old houses are broken because they don't use energy efficiently. They have energy loss. If we insulate it really tight that means we don't have to use as much [air conditioning and heating]. That conserves our natural resources and saves money. We change the efficiency of the appliances. We get a smaller furnace so now we use less energy.

Can you give me some other examples of green jobs? *Marcia Wilson, the director of Green Workforce Education:* You can get a green job working on hybrid and electric vehicles. There are also green programs that are related to water conservation. There are all types of green jobs.

Did green jobs start arising because of global warming?

Wilson: I think so, because of that awareness of global warming and the issues of polluting the environment.

Vessella: In California we're actually leading the way on this. We have a green building code [which requires new buildings to use less water and be more energy efficient]. And because of our green building code, this knowledge and skills are more valuable than maybe in other states. It gives us more opportunities for energy auditors and things of that nature.

How much do green jobs pay? *Vessella:* Most [weatherization installers] are \$12 to \$15 an hour to start and \$26 once you move to the crew chief. The Department of Water and Power is also a weatherization provider and those guys make a very good wage, \$26 to \$40. [Solar panel installers make about \$30,000 to start and can make up to about \$50,000 a year.]

Five or seven years from now, will green jobs be in demand? *Vessella:* Yes. It'll be the norm.

How long does the training usually take? *Wilson:* From as short as 160 hours to some you need two years.

Can you apply the skills that you learn to other fields? *Wilson:* Other related fields, absolutely. When you're learning weatherization, you can apply it to any other construction-related field.

(Far left) Trade Tech student Bryant Corona, 21, demonstrates how to take a reading of carbon monoxide levels. This is part of the safety check that is done before weatherizing a house. (Left) Miguel talks to construction professor Tom Vessella and Marcia Wilson, the director of green workforce education.

Who should consider green jobs? *Wilson:* People who have an interest in the environment and want to get into that industry.

What can high school students do to prepare for green jobs? *Vessella:* Be aware. The difference between a green job and regular job is your awareness of everything around you, awareness of the environment. In construction, if you're aware of not putting things in a landfill, that's a green aspect to a job.

Has learning about green jobs changed your habits? *Vessella:* Yes, I downsized and got a more energy efficient vehicle. We bought a hybrid. How can you not make those changes if you have this knowledge?

(Editor's note: We also talked to Jess Guerra, vice chair of the Transportation and Related Technologies Department, who told us about Trade Tech's program in alternative fuels and hybrid vehicle technology.)

What's a hybrid? *Guerra:* A hybrid is when you're combining two different technologies to run the vehicle—a gasoline engine with an electric motor, a diesel engine with an electric motor. Sometimes hybrids can even come [with a] natural gas engine and electric motor.

One of the trainings we do is on compressed natural gas. L.A. Metro is one of our biggest partners here. Most of their busses run on compressed natural gas. Compressed natural gas is the same thing that you find on your stove to cook at home, except that they compress it so they can fit it into cylinders. We do a lot of the training here for mechanics that work on these vehicles.

How long is the training? *Guerra:* These courses were written as an add-on to the regular program so they're a specialty area. By the time they finish their automotive program [which takes about two years], they're going to get a certificate of achievement in automotive and they're going to get the hybrid and electric plug-in vehicle certificate as well.

Do they need to do well in certain classes in high school or have certain interests or skills to do well in this program? *Guerra:* Absolutely. A lot of the basic stuff you learn in high school, everything from reading and writing skills to computation. Before, the main tool of a mechanic was a wrench, now it's either a volt meter or a laptop. So you're first going to have to plug a laptop into the engine and see what's wrong. So there's definitely computer skills.

How much do people make? *Guerra:* An automotive mechanic typically tops off between \$20 and \$25 an

GREEN JOB TRAINING PROGRAMS

These Los Angeles-area community colleges offer training programs for green jobs.

CERRITOS COLLEGE

11110 Alondra Blvd.
Norwalk, CA 90650
(562) 860-2451
www.cerritos.edu
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Long Beach, CA 90808
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hour. If you're a hybrid mechanic, you're going to be at the \$25-\$26 per hour range. If you're working on the heavy equipment [trucks], you're between \$25 and \$32 an hour, including if you're working on hybrids. It depends where you go work. Automotive mechanics that work at dealerships can make over \$100,000 a year.

Do you think green cars are going to be in demand?

Guerra: Absolutely, especially because we're in the state of California and we have some of the toughest emissions laws in the country. When you first saw hybrids, you saw the Toyota Prius and Honda. Today every manufacturer has one because it's mandated

that if they want to do business in California, a certain percentage of their fleet has to be alternative fuels.



Miguel thinks it's cool that California has passed environmental laws because they create new green jobs.

Vote for me!

Would my posters, T-shirts and speech be enough to get me elected class president?

By Avika Dua

16, Walnut HS

About a month after I started high school, freshman class elections were announced. When I heard, I knew I wanted to run for class president. I really liked speaking in front of people—it was as natural to me as talking to friends. Since I got along well with people, I felt like I'd be easy to approach and receptive to ideas from the other students. I knew that the president led cabinet meetings, organized fundraisers and would get to plan prom, so I thought it would be fun to be in such an involved position.

I asked my best friends if they thought I had a chance of winning. They told me I should do it because they knew I'd work hard and take the job seriously. I made up my mind that I would run. I thought that since I had my friends' support, I could get other people to vote for me. But I was scared that people would feel bad for me if I lost—when people look at me with pity, it makes me feel even worse about myself. I felt like I had to win.

The following week was for campaigning. I wasn't going to make promises to put recycling bins on campus, which class presidents don't have the power to do, or tell people about how hardworking I was, which doesn't mean anything because everyone can say he or she's hardworking. My plan wasn't to make promises but to show them why I wanted to be president.

My sister, who was a senior, told me that making T-shirts was a good way to win because people love free stuff. The weekend before the campaign my mom and I went to Wal-Mart and Forever 21 to find packs of blank white shirts. We spent \$150. I went to a friend's house on Sunday to come up with ideas for what to put on the shirts, and she made the design in Photoshop. The front of the shirts would say "Vote Avika for Pres" and the backs were designed like jerseys with my last name and graduation year. The funniest part of the design was the fine print on each shirt, which read "Making life better since 1995." The phrase was a little

conceited, but I thought it was funny enough to make my campaign memorable. Another one of my friends had a dad who was in the printing business and his company printed the shirts for free.

I came to school on Wednesday with a box of 125 shirts and was swarmed during lunch by people who promised me a vote in exchange for a shirt. I went home with only two shirts left. That night, people who hadn't seen me at school text messaged me and posted on my Facebook wall asking for shirts, so I had to get more printed. As people took my shirts, they would tell me, "I'm definitely voting for you" and "You're definitely going to win."

My best friends told me I should do it because they knew I'd work hard and take the job seriously. I made up my mind that I would run. I thought that since I had my friends' support, I could get other people to vote for me.

I also made posters and fliers and spent time after school each day with my sister putting them up in hallways and in classrooms. I heard that I had three opponents, but it seemed like I was the only one campaigning because nobody else was making shirts or putting up signs. Since I was working hard on advertising, I felt that my chances of winning were strong.

I WANTED TO BOOST OUR CLASS PRIDE

Each candidate had to prepare a one-minute speech. A draft of the speech was due to the class advisers on Friday and candidates would present them to the freshman class during a 30-minute enrichment period on Election Day, which was the next Wednesday. I spent around two or three hours writing and rewriting my speech. I didn't know how to start. I knew I wanted it to be funny, yet serious enough to show how much I wanted to be president. I paced around my room whenever I got stuck—so about every five minutes. I started the speech with the corny "Why was six afraid of seven?" joke (answer: because "seven ate nine") to show people I had a sense of humor. I then wrote that I wanted to be someone they could come up to whenever they had a problem or question. I included how I wanted to increase spirit and give freshmen pride at pep rallies, where they're

usually booed by upperclassmen. I closed it with my campaign slogan: " 'Dua' smart thing and vote for Avika Dua." I practiced in front of the mirror about five times a day until Election Day. In the mirror, I pictured them laughing at the jokes and drowning out the end of my speech with cheers.

After that long week, Election Day arrived. When I got to school, I saw a poster outside the gym for one of my opponents. I was surprised because I hadn't seen any campaigning by other candidates for president until now. I began feeling nervous because someone else was finally campaigning. Between my first class and enrichment period, I noticed people wearing shirts supporting the person whose poster I saw. Since those shirts hadn't even existed the day before, I felt a little betrayed that I couldn't find anyone wearing mine. When I walked into the gym I heard people telling the other candidates, "I know you're going to win" and "Everyone's going to vote for you." It sounded weird to hear that, since people had been telling me the same things. All of a sudden, I felt like I wasn't going to win. Scanning the crowd, I wondered where the hundreds of shirts I had given out went—it didn't seem like more than 10 people were wearing them.

When I gave my speech, the response wasn't what I had pictured. They laughed at the funny parts but stopped looking at me or started talking to each other every time I got serious. I understood that people were bored with speeches, but I started thinking that whoever wasn't listening probably wasn't going to vote for me. I felt like I had to say something to get them to pay attention. In the middle I laughed nervously and said, "Please listen." I finished and heard scattered applause and cheers. Then my opponent who made the poster and shirts on the last day stepped up to the podium—it seemed like everyone was screaming his name. His speech was short, but drowned out by cheers so I couldn't hear what he was saying. Nobody could, but it didn't matter. After hearing his speech, I realized I should have made mine shorter because no one cared what we said. People were just going to vote for their friends.

DESPERATE FOR VOTES

It was clear who would win (hint: it wasn't me). I walked to the ballot table and felt like everyone was looking at me as I cast my vote. I saw people who had promised me their votes walk out of the gym without voting because they didn't want to deal with the crowd surrounding the ballots. I ran up to some and made



After losing the election, Avika got involved in other activities that still let her be a leader.



them come back and vote, but there was no way to catch everyone.

For the rest of the day, I felt like it was over. I wanted to just go home and cry, but I made it through the day without the waterworks. After school, I let my eyes fill with tears as I walked toward my mom's car because I knew nobody could see me. In the car, I told my mom what happened. She gave me a hug, but could only say that moments of failure build character and that I'd get over it in time. I think she was trying to make me feel better but her words didn't help. She didn't understand the humiliation of putting so much into an election and losing in front of everybody.

The following day as I walked to my first class, people who had been rooting for me asked me if I had found out the results. I just responded, "I don't know yet." I felt like I'd let them down. As the bell that signaled the end of school rang, I walked to the classroom where the results were along with my friends who had run for vice president and treasurer. My stomach was in a knot even though I knew it wouldn't be my name under the boldface title of "President." But what if my name was on the list after all? I couldn't help but hope that maybe I did win. But my prediction was right: I didn't. Both of my friends got the positions they ran for and I told

them, "Good job!" One of them gave me a hug, looked at me with the pity I'd feared, and said, "It's OK."

The other understood and just let me be. I didn't cry this time as I walked to the spot where my mom picked me up because I was all cried out.

I HAD TO FACE MY CLASSMATES

The next day, I woke up and wished I didn't have to show my face at school. I thought about how I could avoid being seen, but I knew that putting a paper bag over my head would attract more attention. So I decided to hang onto the hope that nobody would ask me about the election. I got to school, and about two minutes later at my locker, people asked me about the results. I acted like I wasn't embarrassed and told them that I didn't get it. They acted surprised, but I felt like they were just saying sorry for the sake of it. It became routine throughout the day to give a mechanical answer to everyone who asked me. "Then why didn't all of you vote for me?" was what I wanted to say, since they couldn't fathom how I didn't get it. Maybe I was just bitter about the whole thing, since I had let myself get too attached to the idea of being president.

For a while I felt like I'd forever be known as the girl who lost the election, but after two weeks things seemed to get better. People forgot about the election and were talking to me just as they had before about classes, clubs and weekend plans. I joined Class Cabinet so I could still play some part in student government. There was still a part of me that felt bitter whenever I saw our class president at cabinet meetings, but the feeling wore off as I got involved in other activities, like Future Business Leaders of America and debate. I took on leadership roles in those in my sophomore and junior years and I felt like I'd found my place in high school.

I don't regret running for class president. I learned that the election was more about popularity and less about trying hard during the campaign. But I know it was better to put myself out there than not run because I was afraid of the outcome. I'm glad I invested the time and energy into my campaign because it taught me the important lesson that things aren't always going to go the way I expect. My mom was right when she said moments like these build character—since then I've faced disappointment after applying for officer positions in clubs and have been able to move on stronger as a result. Even though I lost, people got over it, just like I did.

We fought for fairness and won!

After I got a ticket for being late to school, I helped change the law so students are treated more fairly

Photo by
Yesenia Reyes, 17,
Animo Locke HS #1

By Maceo Bradley
17, Animo Locke HS #3

One morning in December 2010 I was leaving for school and as soon as I took one step out the door, I realized I forgot the fundraising papers I needed to turn in that day for a college trip. I searched everywhere in the living room and my bedroom but I couldn't find them. After 20 minutes I called my mom. She said she put them in a cabinet the night before.

At this point I knew I would be about 20 minutes late to school. As someone who had been late four times (at most) in two-and-a-half years, I figured that I'd get a warning or at worst I'd get one day of detention.

As soon as I stepped into the main office at school a Los Angeles Police Department officer asked if I was late and I said yeah. He told me to have a seat. I was nervous. We're used to having Los Angeles County Sheriff's deputies on campus because they're the school security. But seeing four LAPD officers made me think something was wrong at school.

Sitting there, I noticed other students were getting tickets but I didn't know what for. I thought the police were ticketing students who were frequently late, so I assumed someone from my school would tell the cops that I didn't belong in that group. One kid got put in handcuffs because he didn't want to give his name. I got scared when I realized they were ticketing everyone. I had no idea how much this might cost. My mom once told me that when

a traffic camera snaps a picture of a car running a red light the ticket costs like \$400. I thought, "It's gonna be on my record. I'm gonna be a juvenile delinquent."

When it was my turn the officer asked me how old I was and why I was late. I told him I was 15 and I explained why I was late and that he could call my mom to verify that. He wrote me a ticket with a court date at the bottom. I had no idea why I was getting a ticket for being late. It seemed ridiculous.

When I got to first period my teacher, Ms. Deniz, asked me why I was late. When she saw the ticket in my hand she asked, "You too?" She told me that a few students that day and a few others in the days before had gotten tickets, too.

At lunch I called my mom and told her that I got a ticket. I was scared of her reaction. I'd never done anything bad or gotten in trouble with the cops. "We'll talk later," she replied. She did not sound happy. I struggled all day concentrating in my classes.

My mom got home around 4 and I showed her the ticket and explained how I got it in the main office. Her tone changed from anger to worry. I told her that I had heard from other students that this could cost \$250. That's a lot of money for being late. She gave me a hug. I was relieved and told myself I needed to wake up earlier to make sure this never happened again. The next day I woke up 20 minutes earlier and was on time.

A LOT OF US HAD GOTTEN TICKETS

That day I told the other members of Watts Youth Voices, a group at my school that teaches students how to have their voices heard in the community, about the ticket. More than half of the members said that they had gotten stopped by the cops or gotten a ticket on their way to school.

Our teacher, Ms. Coffey, told us that a lot of students had gotten tickets for truancy, which means ditching school. We were pissed off because if students are getting tickets in the main office, we're not truant, we're



Maceo speaks before members of the Los Angeles City Council in February. He and some other students wore caps and gowns so they'd be seen as future graduates, not future criminals.

just late. If I had gotten detention I would have been OK with that because I was late, but I wasn't ditching so I shouldn't have gotten a ticket.

During that meeting we Googled "truancy tickets and laws." There was already a local group called the Labor/Community Strategy Center trying to get cops to stop writing truancy tickets. We called them and they told us about their campaign and offered to come to our school to give us more information.

Ashley and Lissett from the Strategy Center met with us the next week and told us that truancy tickets were intended to increase attendance by deterring kids from skipping school. I didn't think ditching was a problem at my school, Locke #3. There are two or three students absent from most of my classes every day, so why were they writing tickets? Two days after I got my ticket I woke up a little late and I didn't even bother going to school because I didn't want to get another. So much for a ticket improving school attendance.

Ashley and Lissett showed us facts that proved how unfair this truancy ticketing is. City and school police issued more than 47,000 tickets from 2004 to 2009 and 88 percent of them went to African Americans and Latinos, who are only 74 percent of district students, according to data compiled by activists through public records requests. This wasn't that surprising to me. We have three law enforcement agencies (Sheriff's Department, LAUSD police and LAPD) on or around campus every day. Growing up in this area, there's a natural distrust of the police so a lot of students don't like having them at our school every day. People joke around saying our school resembles a prison.

When cops give us tickets for being late it creates a more tense relationship with the students. After getting my ticket I felt uneasy around cops and like I could get ticketed for anything at any moment. This was a weird feeling for me to have about cops. My dad was a probation officer so I grew up understanding they have a job to do.

After learning so much from the Strategy Center, we decided that Watts Youth Voices should do presentations for our classmates. Usually when we announce meetings most people don't even pay attention. But this time they were asking questions. When we told them their rights they actually had questions like: Could they go to court with an older sibling instead of a parent? No, we told them that you must be accompanied by a parent or guardian. What happens if I don't pay the ticket? You cannot get a driver's license. I felt good that I was helping my classmates, but I wished I could help do something to get the truancy ticket law changed.

I WAS ASKED TO SHARE MY STORY

About a week into summer vacation I got my chance. Ashley and Ms. Coffey asked if Gabriel (another student who got a ticket and he was fingerprinted) and I would testify in front of the Los Angeles City Council about how the truancy ticket policy was unfair. I was nervous but I agreed to testify because I didn't want to let my nervousness get in the way of something that could help students throughout the city. Ashley emphasized that the council members needed to hear how ridiculous it was that students at Locke were getting tickets for being

WHAT IS THE NEW TRUANCY LAW? IF YOU GO TO SCHOOL IN LOS ANGELES, THESE CHANGES TO THE TRUANCY LAW APPLY TO YOU:

- Students cannot get truancy tickets during the first hour of school. This will prevent students from getting a ticket if they are on their way to school but a bus is running late.
- Students cannot get a ticket for participating in an off-campus protest, like during a walk-out.

- First- and second-time offenders will not get fines. Instead they will receive no more than 20 hours of community service, which could include going to counseling, tutoring or working with an adult to help them find ways to get to school on time.
- On the third offense students would face a fine of \$20. The total cost of the ticket could become \$155 after court fees are added.
- Police can still issue tickets to students who are intentionally ditching school.

late to school while they were in the school's main office.

We knew we needed to prepare before we spoke before the council. If we only complained about the truancy tickets they'd probably think we wanted to get rid of the ticket policy just so we could be late. I wanted them to know how scared I felt when I got the ticket, how it made me feel like a juvenile delinquent, and how worried my mom and I were about getting a \$250 fine. That could be money we used to pay bills or buy groceries.

I got intimidated as soon as we entered the council chambers. The room was packed with a few hundred parents, students and other activists prepared to speak about the truancy ticket problem. I had no idea that many people would be there. But it was empowering to see so many people willing to fight.

TEACHERS AND PARENTS WERE ON OUR SIDE

There was a sixth or seventh grader who got a ticket right after getting off the bus on the way to school. As I heard stories like this, I felt even more strongly that the truancy policy needed to be changed. Teachers who testified said more of their students were missing school rather than being a little late because they were afraid of getting ticketed. And parents said that they had to take unpaid days off from their jobs to go to court for the tickets.

I waited nervously for about 20 minutes before I got to speak. When I started reading my speech the city council members looked interested. This gave me confidence, so I started reading faster, while the one-minute timer was counting down. "... being late that one time could have been a huge problem for my family, so I plead that you please think of a better solution than tickets."

When I was done I took a deep breath, looked at the timer and saw that I still had 30 seconds left. I felt like I should've said more and that reading from the paper made me sound boring.

While Gabriel was speaking I noticed that two of the council members weren't there. They showed up later. I thought it was ironic that we get truancy tickets for being late to school, yet the council members holding a hearing about truancy show up late and nothing happens to them. I wished I had noticed that and mentioned it while I was speaking.

After the hearing, the council members thanked everyone for coming and said they were very surprised that students were being handcuffed, ticketed on school grounds and fingerprinted. They said that they would look into this more. Outside a reporter asked to interview us. I felt like this was a sign that someone was taking us seriously and not just in a "look what teens can do" way.

Shortly after the school year started, Ashley called asking me to testify again. She said that this hearing could have more impact because we would be testifying in front of Judge Michael Nash, the head of the juvenile court system, and a truancy task force. I had to ask my mom if I could go because I would have to miss school. She hesitated a couple moments. What if I got another ticket while out testifying about fighting truancy tickets? But she said yes and the next day I went to the hearing. I spoke with more emotion this time because I had my speech memorized. I emphasized how getting a ticket made me feel like a delinquent.

On Feb. 13, I testified before the city council's public safety committee one more time. The council members told us about their proposed changes, which included eliminating fines for the first two times a student is late. We were all happy about that, but we were a little frustrated that fines weren't dropped completely.

When I got that ticket I never imagined I'd become part of something that would have so much impact. Growing up in Watts I've heard teachers and families complaining for years that the youth in our community are getting prepared for prison by getting harassed by the cops. But going through this I realize the impact that individuals can have. If you see a problem in your community you should stand up for what you believe is right, because you aren't alone.



*Maceo says
complaining about
problems won't get
you anywhere; you
have to help come up
with solutions.*

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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**



Staff members
at a recent meeting

THANKS TO L.A. YOUTH I'm able to share my ideas and beliefs with teens throughout L.A. County. I like being able to express my views on any topic. However, the best part is the responses I get. It makes me happy knowing that the readers enjoyed my work. I'm indebted to Mike, my editor, for working with me. One article can take up to 17 drafts to complete! It's a long editing process but my writing has gotten better. Now I proudly call myself a journalist and I'm on my way to becoming a professional reporter. And I have made new friends from all around the county by going to the weekly meetings.

—**Kristy Plaza, 18, Duarte HS**

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

L.A. youth

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I was walking with my friend one day when she told me that she had read on the Internet that one in three teens knows a friend who has been physically hurt by their partner. I couldn't believe it because you don't hear about teens being in abusive relationships. However, weeks later at an L.A. Youth staff meeting, we were talking about the tragic death of South East High School senior Cindi Santana, whose ex-boyfriend showed up at her school and stabbed her last September. I was shocked. I couldn't understand why anyone would hurt their partner, because relationships are supposed to be based on love, trust and respect. I interviewed Melodie Kruspodin, a rape prevention education coordinator at Peace Over Violence, a Los Angeles organization dedicated to preventing dating violence. I learned the warning signs of an unhealthy relationship and how to stay safe.

L.A. Youth: How do you know when a relationship is abusive? *Melodie Kruspodin:* It can be different for each individual but a lot of times controlling behavior, a strong amount of jealousy. When two people get together really quickly—emotions being really strong early on can lead to things becoming abusive or unhealthy if someone breaks up with the other person, [and] those emotions are still up there.

What are the warning signs of an abusive relationship? Is your partner trying to keep you from talking to your friends or family? Are they sending you 30 texts a day that are: "Where are you?" "Who are you with?" Have you seen them be physical, not only with you but do they hit the wall, things like that? If your partner puts you down, especially in front of people. If your partner tries to control where you go or who you talk to. If you're afraid to make your partner mad.

Why is it hard to leave an abusive partner? A lot of youth aren't allowed to date so how do you talk to your parents about being in an abusive relationship if they don't even know you have a boyfriend or girlfriend. Another factor is peer pressure. If the person you're dating is considered cool, it might be hard to leave that person. If your partner cuts you off from your friends and family, it's hard to leave that person if you don't have a support system. There are also issues of threats. Most commonly the worst physical abuse that happens is after a breakup. That can be a barrier to breaking up with someone if they tell you "I'm going to hurt you" or "I'm going to do something worse if you break up with me."

Did Cindi Santana's death seem typical of abusive relationships? Definitely. It takes an average of seven times for a woman to leave her batterer. Unfortunately [sometimes] that seventh time is the woman's death.

How common are abusive relationships? One in three adolescent girls are victims of some form of dating abuse, including emotional and verbal. And one in 10 are victims of some form of physical abuse.

Is your relationship unhealthy?

I interviewed an expert to learn about dating abuse and how teens can stay safe



Jaanvi (right) learned how common abusive relationships are among teens.

What is most common—physical, verbal or emotional? Verbal and emotional are the most common. When physical abuse does happen in teen relationships, a lot of times it's somewhere hidden so that people can't see it.

Is it common for guys to be abused too? Yes, boys and young men are also the victims of dating violence. There's a lot of shame and stigma attached to it so that's why we don't hear about it as much.

Can you tell me about the Los Angeles Unified School District resolution that passed last fall to prevent teen dating violence? Students have to be taught what is teen dating violence, what are the warning signs and how do you have a healthy relationship. The goal is to have it done in health classes. Part of the policy is also to have at least one person at each campus who would be an expert on teen dating violence who could be there as a resource for students to come to.

How will they know who that person is? It's supposed to be advertised. This is your prevention coordinator/liaison.

Right now if someone needs help, who should they talk to at their school? A dean or a counselor. [Or] if you have a trusted teacher or other staff. Talking about it is

really important, finding someone you trust who you feel you can talk to.

What should you do if you're in an abusive relationship? They can get more information on our website, peaceoverviolence.org. We also have a 24-hour hotline [626-793-3385, 310-392-8381 or 213-626-3393]. RAINN is a good resource [800-656-HOPE]. I would suggest calling a hotline. Everyone on a hotline is trained.

What can you do as a friend? The most important thing is to be there to listen to your friend, don't make judgments about what they're saying. The abuser may be trying to cut you off from your friend so it's important to be there for them. Be able to give them resources. Be there to listen.



For a realistic view of teen dating violence, Jaanvi recommends the novel Dreamland by Sarah Dessen.

By Shivani Patel

16, Whitney HS (Cerritos)

Finally, the day of my school's Talent Show had arrived. The members of my group, the Indian culture club, had practiced non-stop for the past three and a half months for this moment. The theme of our Bollywood dance number, "Sunderella," was Cinderella. We were all nervous because after all the practicing, the performance was here.

It started with the king announcing that a ball was being held. Next, our lead who played Cinderella danced with the evil stepmother. Then, the fairy godmother came and it was my turn to start performing. All of us girls moved onto the stage from the side. We were performing a traditional dance that is energetic and fast-paced. All the moves had to be big and full of energy because you have to show the audience that you're having the time of your life on stage, and the crowd was cheering and screaming for us. At the end of the song, my friend and I get tossed into the air. During our rehearsals, we had been having problems getting me high enough, so when our stunt went flawlessly, I grinned.

The next dance was a partner dance. The couples had to look like they were in love, but I didn't have to worry—I was so excited about performing that I couldn't stop smiling. Finally, the group dance began. I could feel the emotions in the air—happiness and excitement. When we got into our final formation, the audience burst out in cheers and applause. To make all the weeks of rehearsals that much more worth it, we received the award for best club act. In the end, we got our fairytale ending.

I've been Bollywood dancing for more than six years. My friend Karisma brought me to my first Bollywood dance class when I was 9 years old. I sat on the side, watching. They were in two lines and moving in place. All of a sudden, the back line switched with the front. I was amazed that it could look so good even with 14 girls in the class.

I wished I were dancing with them. I got lucky, because one of the girls in the class wasn't there. The teacher asked me to step in for her. I started doing what they were doing, making big arm movements and transitioning to different lines. I had always wanted to

be able to do Bollywood dancing.

When I was a child, I watched Bollywood movies with my family on Friday or Saturday nights. If there's one thing these movies are known for, it's their dance numbers. When something important happens to the main character, that's a cue for breaking out into song and dance. It's so fairytale-like, especially when they're falling in love. Later in my room I practiced the dances in front of the mirror and pretended I was that character.

Bollywood dance is a mixture of classical dances that originate in India and more modern influences like hip-hop and ballet. We usually dance to music from Bollywood movies, which are movies from India's movie industry. The music is usually remixed versions of old Indian songs. It's upbeat so you need to be energetic while dancing.

EVEN THE BASIC MOVES WERE HARD TO LEARN

After going to that dance class, I joined my friend's studio. During the first few months, the routine was the same. We formed a couple of lines and the teacher stood in the front. Then, he began to dance. The goal was to follow him. "Bring the elbow up, be sharper," he would say loudly. Once, he said in front of everyone that my hand movements looked like airplanes crashing into each other. My face was burning from embarrassment. Sometimes I would complain to my parents but they'd say, "We paid for your dance classes so you have to put up with it."

I had to learn basic steps such as the up-and-down (which is like walking in place), turns and the hand motions. I started doing the up-and-down step around the house and I practiced the hand motions in my room. I would twist my hands so they looked like lotus flowers. I would practice the "deer" position (the pointer finger and the middle finger touch the thumb while the other two fingers are spread apart). Once I learned those, I moved on to other moves such as the "light bulb" (moving the hand in a motion similar to unscrewing a light bulb).

It's really important to have facial expressions. If the song is about sadness, your face has to reflect that. If it's a happy song, it's important to smile. It was really hard to keep facial expressions because all I wanted to do was concentrate on my moves and not my face. At home I'd lock my door and practice the poses and facial expressions in front of the mirror because there were no people to criticize me.

After a year, the teacher would say, "Look at Shivani, she's doing that well." I got more confident and I didn't want to give up anymore. He gave us harder dances and expected us to practice at home. We also learned the poses of Shiva, one of the Hindu gods, and what the words meant in the classical songs.

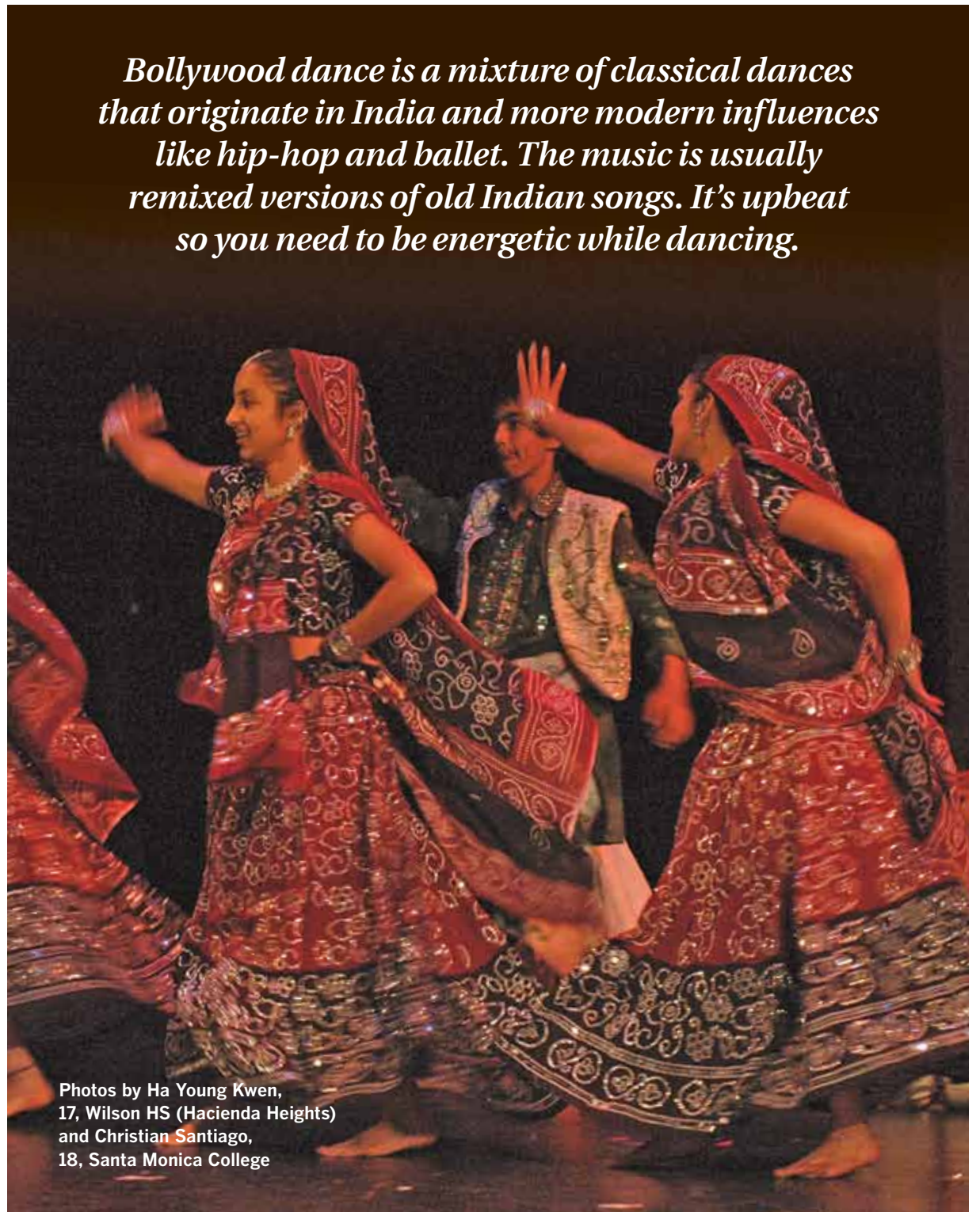
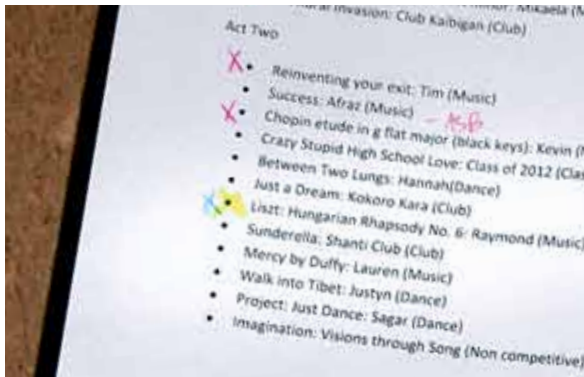
Bollywood dancing embodies my culture—it's vibrant, constantly changing but still true to our heritage, and fun! I love the connection to my culture.



Shivani is excited for her Bollywood competitions coming up next month.



Havir



Bollywood dance is a mixture of classical dances that originate in India and more modern influences like hip-hop and ballet. The music is usually remixed versions of old Indian songs. It's upbeat so you need to be energetic while dancing.

Photos by Ha Young Kwen,
17, Wilson HS (Hacienda Heights)
and Christian Santiago,
18, Santa Monica College

ng a ball

I love connecting
to my culture through
Bollywood dancing

Dad, I miss you

After my dad died unexpectedly,
I wished I had spent more time with him

By Alexia Sison

18, Marshall HS

Sometimes when I'm alone I think of the things that I never got to do with or say to my dad before he died. I wish that I had spent more time with him helping wash the dishes or playing basketball or listening to his stories about growing up in the Philippines. I also think about the future without him. He doesn't get to see me graduate. He won't walk me down the aisle on my wedding day.

On the night my dad died three years ago, I had been working on an essay due the next day for English class. My dad lectured me that I shouldn't leave my work until the last minute. I replied in a grumpy tone, "You don't have to tell me what to do." I was still working on the essay when he gave me a bottle of water and went to his bedroom. When I finished the essay around midnight, I thought about going into my parents' room and saying goodnight and "I love you." But I didn't because I didn't want to wake them up.

A couple of hours later, I woke up to my 12-year-old little sister shaking me. My sister looked frightened, and I heard my mom screaming and sobbing. I followed my sister to the living room. I saw my dad on the floor lifeless while the paramedics were trying to revive him with CPR. All I could do was cry, "Dad!" I thought, "Oh please! No, no, don't leave us, Dad!"

The next thing I knew, the paramedics were saying that they had to take him to the hospital because they couldn't revive him. When my mom followed one of the paramedics outside, I noticed that my sister and my mom were crying, which caused me to cry. I had been trying to be the calm one. During the car ride to the hospital, my sister and I held hands as we prayed for our dad to be OK.

When we arrived at the hospital, one of the receptionists said that minors weren't allowed in the patient rooms, so my sister and I had to wait somewhere else. When my dad's brothers came to the emergency room, I thought that if this wasn't life-threatening my

mom wouldn't have called them. But, I told myself, "Be optimistic! Maybe he'll come home soon enough."

After waiting nearly four hours, my mom told us it was time to go home. So I began asking questions. "When is dad coming home?" "Is Dad OK?" I stopped asking questions after about 10 times of her not answering me.

When we got home around 7 a.m., my mom kept looking at my sister and me with a sad expression and then she would look away. I knew she had something to tell us. She said, "Girls, I'm so sorry but Daddy died."

My sister started to cry but I thought that this was a nightmare and I would wake up. "No, you're lying!

have saved my dad, I wanted to go back in time and exercise with him.

The day after my dad died, my mom, sister and I tried to have a normal breakfast. I stared at the seat my dad would sit in. I remembered sitting next to him and the sound of his laugh when he would tell jokes. As I stared at my plate, I could picture my dad's special potato omelet that he made every weekend. I could even smell the pepper. I started to cry. I told my mom and sister, "I miss Dad." They started crying with me.

For the next 10 days, a lot of relatives and my mom's friends came to the house. As a Filipino family we have multi-day viewings with a memorial service and a fu-

I thought that this was a nightmare and I would wake up. "No, you're lying! You're lying!" I cried. I kept repeating this but after looking at my mom I realized that she was telling us the truth. I wailed until it was hard to breathe. I couldn't believe that my dad was dead.

You're lying!" I cried. I kept repeating this but after looking at her I realized that she was telling us the truth. I wailed until it was hard to breathe. I couldn't believe that my dad was dead.

After crying, I called and texted some of my friends and told them that my dad died. They said that they were shocked and felt sorry for me. I was touched by their concern but I missed my dad so much that nothing would have comforted me unless they could bring him back to life.

I DIDN'T KNOW HE HAD HEALTH PROBLEMS

Later that morning I asked my mom how he died. She said that the doctors told her he had a heart attack in his sleep. I was surprised. I always saw my dad exercise on the weekends and he didn't eat junk food. A few days later though my mom told me that my dad had been experiencing problems with his heart before he died and he had had a heart attack eight years before. After she told me this, I wished I could have done something to prevent this. Even though I knew it probably wouldn't

neral. The first day of the viewing would be the first time I saw my dad since he had died. I was afraid. When we saw his body in the coffin, my mom and sister started to cry. For some reason, I didn't cry. I stayed quiet. I came closer to his body, touched his cold hands and realized that he was gone forever.

To comfort me, my relatives would say things like, "I know how you feel, but you'll get over it." Or "Oh, your dad's in a better place now." Their clichéd words didn't make me feel any better.

But they also told some funny stories about my dad, like when he had an afro hairdo. However, I was sad that we wouldn't have new stories to share in the future. We'd never again see him working in the garden or laugh at his corny sense of humor, like when he'd scare me by hiding behind the front door when we came home from shopping. My sister was hardly ever surprised but I would scream, even though I knew he was going to do it.

For the first couple of weeks of my summer vacation, my sister and I had to stay at home while our mom



As a way to remember her dad, Alexia and her sister try to scare their mom just as their dad used to do to them.

went back to her job. That first day my sister and I spent 15 minutes holding on to her because we didn't want her to leave. We were scared that she would get in a car accident and also die. But she told us that she had to go to work to support our family. We eventually watched her leave for work.

A week later, my mom told us that my Uncle Bebot was coming to the United States. He was coming to help my mom for two months. I was happy that we would have another person living in the house, which had gotten too quiet since my dad died. But Bebot and I didn't get along that well.

I WAS TOO MAD TO APPRECIATE MY UNCLE'S HELP

One day, I was outside while my uncle was gardening when he said, "Alexia, I know that you're the oldest now. You have to take care of your mom and sister." Then he told me how as the oldest child in his family he had to take care of everybody after his dad had a stroke.

It felt weird that he was lecturing me like he was my dad. Even though I would get annoyed when my dad had told me what to do, I was OK with it because that's what dads do. My dad would tell me, "Study!" whenever he caught me procrastinating and he would dispense advice by saying things like, "Early to bed, early to rise, makes you stronger, healthier and wise." I would blow off these motivational quotes, but I've grown to miss them.

I started to get angry at every little thing Bebot did. The worst was when he changed the stepping stones in the garden and planted some of my dad's vegetables in different spots. I wanted to yell at him but I couldn't. I was afraid that my uncle would get offended and want to go back to the Philippines. I didn't want my mom and sister to blame me for chasing away the person who was trying to help us.

A month after school started, I went on a retreat for Confirmation class. During the retreat, we had to be alone and think about God. After a few minutes of reflecting about how I'd been dealing with my dad's death, I realized that I had to seek help. I felt like I shouldn't have been getting so angry at someone who was trying to help us. My relatives and the brochures I had seen at the mortuary said that it would take two years to get through the grieving process. That seemed like a long time to be so sad and angry.

I told a woman at the retreat about how I felt angry when my uncle started acting like a father to my family. She said that it's normal for him to act like a fatherly figure and that I should tell him how I felt. I realized that my uncle wasn't trying to replace my dad, he was just trying to help us. I regretted how rudely I'd been acting toward him.

A week after the retreat, my uncle had to go back to the Philippines. As we said goodbye to him, my mom, sister and I cried. I appreciated everything that he'd done for us and I worried that the house would be a depressing place after he left.

MY PRIEST'S ADVICE COMFORTED ME

Five months after my uncle left, I started to feel more normal. I was talking to a priest at my church and I told

him how I regretted being angry at my dad the night he died and how I didn't appreciate him enough. He said that I shouldn't focus on my feelings of regret and being angry at myself, but I should remember the love that my dad gave me.

Since it's been the three of us, I help my mom more with chores. My dad used to have to ask me to help out around the house but now when I wash the dishes, I

do it willingly. And when I talk with my mom about her problems, I'm not only filling my dad's role, I'm also honoring his memory.

Although I'm slowly getting better, I still feel the loss of my dad whenever my classmates talk about their parents. Sometimes, I even forget that my dad died and think that he is waiting for me after school. I'll never forget my dad.



Illustration by
Yolanis Herrera,
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HS #3

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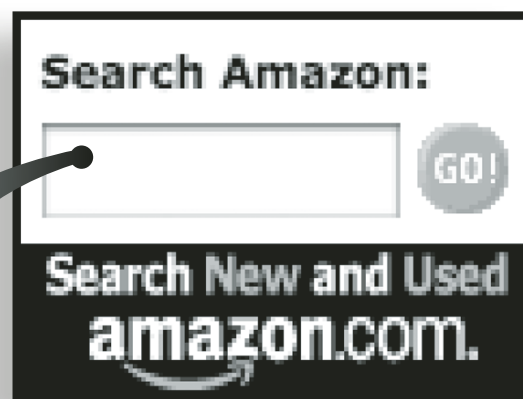
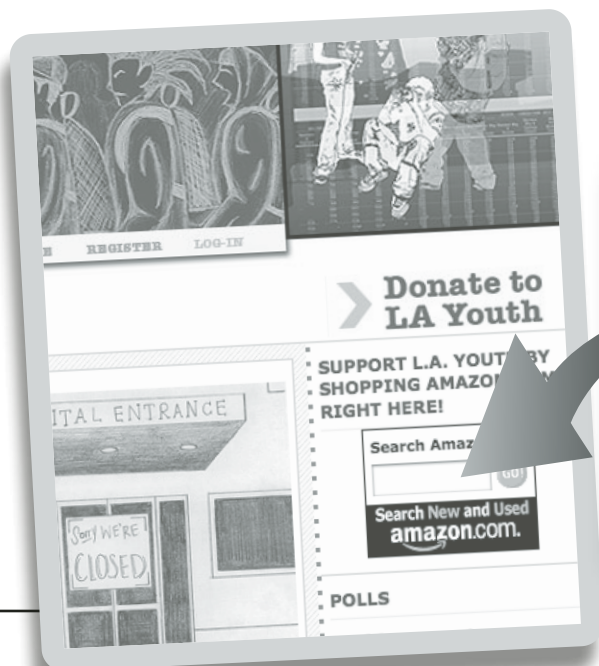
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By Kelly Lin

17, Wilson HS (Hacienda Heights)

I started writing letters when I was really young. I have saved almost every letter I've ever received. They are piling up in a box and right now I have 271. The earliest letter says June 21, 2003. That was the summer before fourth grade. Rochelle, an older girl I knew in Chinese language school, handed me my first hand-written letter while walking in the hall one day.

She wrote about how much she liked Harry Potter and as soon as I had a break I wrote back. Even though we talked every day about what happened in Chinese language school, we passed each other three letters a week. After a few weeks, we started writing about more serious topics, like the death of her mom. That made me feel more like her sister than just her friend. I felt like I could tell her anything (or at least write anything to her in a letter). I knew I didn't want to throw these letters away so, I saved them.

Getting Rochelle's letters made me feel important, so I started writing to other friends. My best friend, Chelsea, who went to another school, replied and soon we were mailing letters every few days. We stuffed each other's envelopes with pop star posters from magazines like J-14 and postcards from the places we went to. I created a special signature with fancy cursive letters.

After three years of letter writing, Chelsea transferred to my middle school and we stopped sending letters. Then for Christmas in seventh grade, I gave one of my best friends, Leina, a spiral notebook. She suggested that we use it to write to each other. I loved that I'd get to write letters again and that they'd be preserved in this notebook.

We each kept the journal for a day and would give it back the next time we saw each other. The first time the boy I had a crush on talked to me, I couldn't wait to write to Leina. Sharing that out loud would have ruined something so special by making it sound as meaningless as talking about clothes or gossiping about teachers.

All through seventh grade we encouraged each other through our boy problems, friend problems and school problems. While some of my close friends would tell me something cliché like, "It's OK. It'll be over soon," Leina would write something more honest and thoughtful. "What they did was kind of mean. But, you're stronger than that! Always follow what your heart wants."

At the end of the school year, she moved to Japan and I was devastated. One day about a month after she left, I saw a colorful envelope in the mail bin on our kitchen counter. Then I noticed my name written in Leina's familiar handwriting. I was so overjoyed that instead of using a letter opener, I ripped open the en-



Kelly likes learning about people's personalities through their handwriting.



velope. "Since we haven't really spoken in a long time, I feel this gap, but I guess we can start filling it in little by little? There's so much to say I'm not sure where to start!" Reading her letter made me nostalgic for our journal-exchanging days and it reassured me that our friendship didn't have to change.

I went to the backyard and wrote a long reply to Leina. She had asked lot of questions, like "How is everyone at school?" and "What are the latest trends in the US lately?" I sent my letter the next day.

Pretty soon, Leina's letters were quickly being added to my letter collection. We wrote to each other almost every week. "After I came to Japan, I've been attached to dancing," she wrote. "My friends and I come up with our own dance routines and perform it."

EMAILING JUST WASN'T THE SAME

By sophomore year, Leina and I were both swamped with extracurricular activities and homework so we stopped writing letters. We would email or Facebook message each other only once every few months. We just said hi and asked how the other was doing. "Fine" was usually our answer. Writing a letter required thinking about what you wanted to say, but communicating electronically took just a few seconds to type a reply.

I missed the times when I wrote until my hand cramped or when the page was filled with white out. Eventually we lost touch. I missed talking to her.

Around April last year, we got a chance to chat online. It was the first time we'd talked in about a year and when I had to go, she said, "We should write letters again!"

A month later, when I saw a pink-heart-decorated envelope in the bin, I jumped and screamed for joy. She began the letter with: "Things have been pretty crazy around here with all the shaking from the earthquake." When I had heard about the deadly earthquake and tsunami in Japan, I worried about her family, but in the letter she said she wasn't in the country when it happened.

After quickly reading Leina's letter on my way to my room, I picked out my white and pink stationery, and started writing. The magic of letter writing came back. Because I hadn't written a letter in about a year and a half, my hands cramped. But that didn't stop me from replying with four pages in less than an hour. I told her about my busy junior year and how stressed me and my classmates were about college applications.

When I read old letters, they are priceless. I laugh at the times me and my best friend from middle school, Chelsea, wrote in such a childish manner. We would tell each other things like "My dad says we might go to the beach how nice plus fun" or "What fruit do you like?" In a few years, what I am writing now may also seem silly. But that's what makes rereading them so fun—they show me how much I have grown, and allow me to relive those special moments.

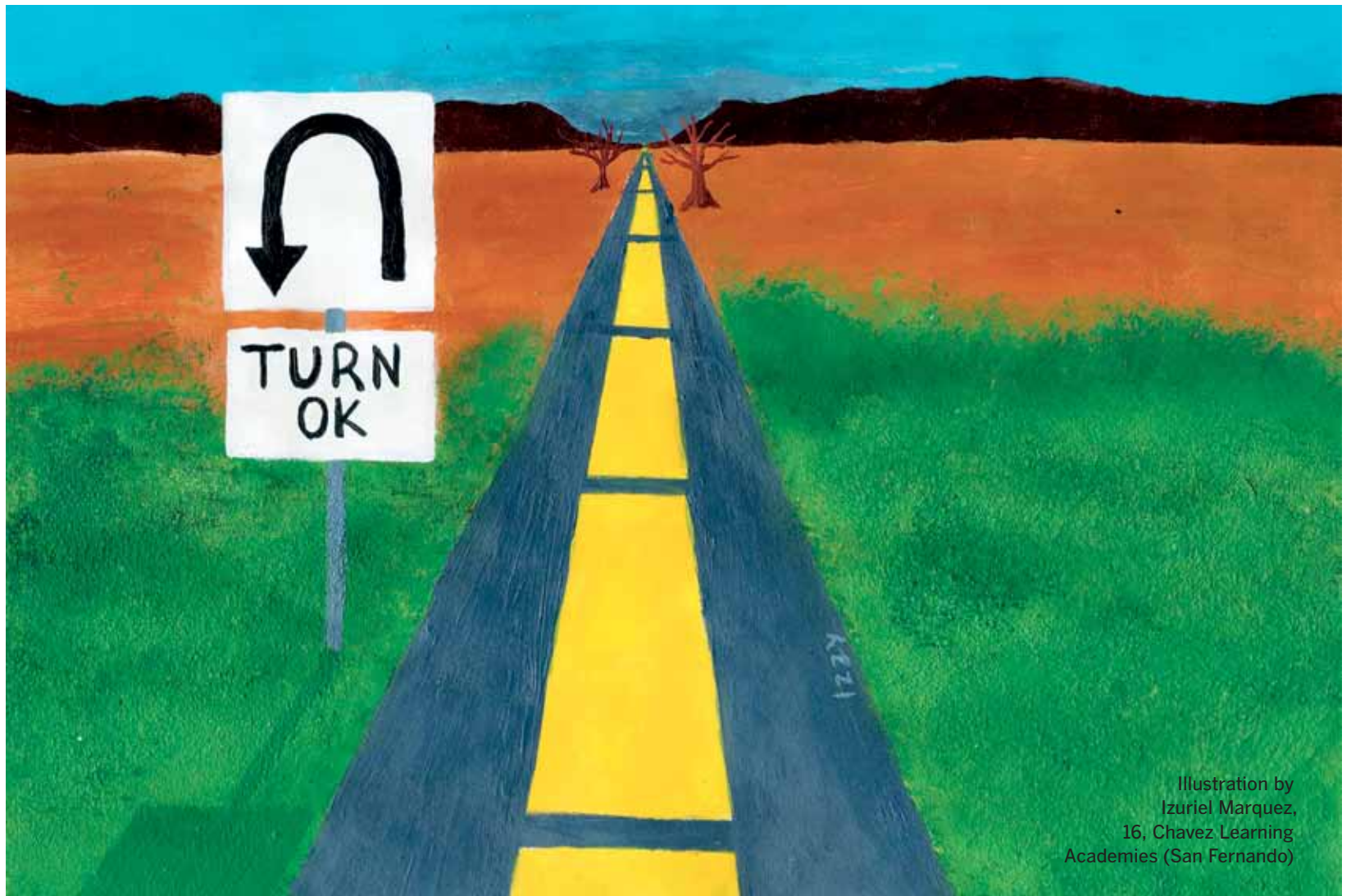


Illustration by
Izuriel Marquez,
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Turning our lives around

These teens say the juvenile justice system helped them change

WHEN A TEACHER at a detention facility contacted us about working with his students, we thought it was a good opportunity to hear the perspective of teens in the juvenile justice system. These boys say that the facility where they're serving their time isn't just about punishment, it's also helping rehabilitate them. Their facility is more strict than house arrest but not as strict as the juvenile camps. We are running these stories anonymously to protect the writers' identities.

Doing the right thing is more important than fitting in

My family came to the L.A. area about 10 months ago from Tennessee. We moved to Compton because we had family there and it was what we could afford. I didn't feel comfortable being the only white guy and there were bullet holes in the fence around our apartment complex.

Adjusting to a new school was hard, especially with all the gangs and drugs. I made the wrong friends. They used weed, ecstasy and cocaine, and they stole cars. I wanted to fit in with them so I had to steal a car. I got caught.

It's been better than I thought here. The staff cares about the kids. After I was here for a few weeks, I called my mom and she told me that my aunt, who has AIDS, had stopped taking her meds. If she stops taking them, she'll die. I felt helpless being here. I walked to my locker, sat down and then kept steaming on it. It was a mixture of anger and worry and I exploded. I cussed really loudly and I kept dropping f-bombs.

The staff came up to me and I said, "Please don't get near me, I'm mad right now." They said, "OK, tell me what's wrong."

We went to the office and I told them what my mom said about my aunt. They said that my aunt might have stopped for one day but would probably get back on her meds. They said that even if the worst did happen, that I couldn't let that affect me here. "You want to get out and be able to help her," they said. Advice like "it'll get better" doesn't help me. The staff here gives advice that makes sense.

I had cussed a few days before that and I got standards, when you have to copy a long paragraph a set number of times. So I was expecting the worst this time. I thought they might call my probation officer. I thought I might have to go back to juvenile hall or to a camp. But they didn't raise their voices. They were nice. After I left the office, I realized they were right. I can't mess with my progress here because then I can't help my aunt at all.

We have a strict routine here. My day starts with staff coming into the dorms and turning on the lights and waking us up at 6:45 a.m. You have to get up or you get punished. Then we get breakfast and do chores, like clean the bathrooms or clean the dining areas. After chores we walk in two straight lines to our classes.

After school we go to a group meeting and work with therapists. We role-play different scenarios that would usually make us mad, but the staff watches us to see how well we can use the skills we've been taught.

One of my scenarios was about a time I lost my pencil and I was yelling. I had moved a few things in my locker and when I calmed down, I found it under a piece of paper. I felt stupid.

In role-playing they would hide a pencil under papers and then I'd re-enact how I yelled. Then I acted in a way that I should have—looking for it without yelling. I realized I should have done it this way to begin with. It was kind of embarrassing, but the embarrassment helps me not do it again.

I've also learned that if you get a punishment you don't think you deserve, instead of arguing and getting punished more, just say, "OK, I'll do it." It teaches us how to handle things that we can't control.

In therapy we're also learning to think about pros and cons. If a friend asks you to smoke weed,

you think of the pros and cons. The pros are feeling good for a little while and fitting in. But the cons are that you could get arrested and end up back in juvenile hall. I would never make the mistake of trying to fit in again. My old mindset was that I needed to fit in, but now I'm going to fight that. It's going to be my hardest challenge but I'm confident that I can do this when I get out of here.

I feel a lot of responsibility not to let the staff down. The staff makes me feel like they care about me. I wouldn't want to take what they gave me and not repay them.

The way I acted before makes me mad now. My mom worked 12-hour shifts to support us and then I'd make her watch my brother while I was out. First thing I'm doing when I get out is telling her she can sleep as much as she wants. I'm glad I'm getting help now rather than when I'm older. If I didn't get the help now, I probably would end up in prison.

—T.S., a 16-year-old male

My family means more to me than drugs

I was on drugs and I was really heavy into meth. I flipped out one day and beat someone down. It makes my stomach clench up, the thought of what I did.

They sent me to jail. When I went to court and my public defender read me my charges and showed me pictures of my victim, I realized it wasn't a game; everything I was doing was real life. I took the deal I was offered of two years probation because I was sure that I had given up my old lifestyle. I went back to my continuation school but I was around drugs. Within a month I was smoking meth every day.

Two months later, I violated my probation by failing a drug test. I went back to court. The judge wanted to give me nine months in a juvenile camp but my mom started crying. She told the judge, "My son has a drug problem." Seeing her cry, I was ready to give it up for good. The judge sent me here for six months. I'm thankful for that because I had another chance to get my life together.

I grew up in Northeast L.A. with poverty, gangs and killings. I was 13 when I first smoked weed, 14 when I tried alcohol, 15 when I tried coke and ecstasy. I was 16 when I hit meth. That's what started my drug addiction. I would go to school to meet up with my friends and get drugs and that's it. I couldn't feel anything when I was on meth. I'd sock the walls and cuss at my aunt, uncle and mom if they told me to stop hanging out with that crowd. I'd tell them, "Nah, I don't want to do that. I'm going to go get high." After a while my aunt gave up on me. She always told me, "I love you and we're praying for you, but we can't do anything more for you."

When I first got here, I wanted to run away and be with my family. But after I met the staff and a couple

kids told me it's not really that bad, I started to look at it differently. I realized I needed to get clean and make myself a better person.

The day I met my social worker I opened up to her about everything. I told her that when I was growing up, me and my friend were harassed by a gang because we lived in their enemy's turf. They thought we were associated with their enemy, but we weren't.

One day my friend asked me to come along to the beach with his sisters. For some reason I said no. A couple hours later I heard on the TV that my friend had crashed his car. His sisters were killed instantly. He also died. I found out they were being chased by the gang. When I thought about it I wanted to hurt somebody. The meth covered the sadness and fueled my rage. My social worker told me, "You don't have control over everything. You're powerless over certain situations and you have to learn to accept them." This was a relief to me because that's what it was all about, I felt powerless over him dying. Being here I've been able to grieve in a proper way. It was scary to let all those emotions come out. Eventually I learned how to deal with it in a healthy way.

The counselors and my social worker showed me coping skills. I figured out that I have a lot of energy and if I don't get that out in healthy ways then I revert to using drugs. I like baseball so they told me to do sports. Another coping skill is talking about your cravings. When I leave, my big supporters are going to be a Narcotics Anonymous support group, my church and my family. Now that I'm off meth I can see the pain that my family went through. I think about my family and that makes me more determined to stay sober. They trust me now because of everything I've been doing these past five months.

I don't have my old friends using drugs around me so I'm more focused on my education. When I got here my English teacher told me, "I know you have a lot of potential." It made me more motivated. Before I was "fool" and "naw dog." He's helped me improve my vocabulary and grammar. They're giving me a chance to graduate with a diploma even though I was behind on credits.

I never thought I could graduate and go to college. Now I'm planning on going to community college and then getting my degree in sociology and going into the Marines. I have a chance to set myself up for a successful life, something I thought I'd never have.

I know I'm not a bad kid. I didn't fully think about the consequences of my decisions. But now I've learned from my mistakes and I'm growing into a man. I've been sober since I've been here and I'm going to continue to stay sober for my life. I don't plan on going back to my old lifestyle. My family and my future are way more important.

—E.A., a 18-year-old male

Go to layouth.com
to read the experiences
of three other teens.

No longer on our own at eighteen

A new law lets youth stay in foster care until age 20 so they're less likely to become homeless



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

By Precious Sims

18, Central HS (Long Beach)

A week after I turned 18 last April my foster mom told me, "You know I don't get paid for you anymore." I thought, "OK, so you're just taking care of me for the money." I always felt that way. I know that she cared about our safety and our education because she always made sure me and the three other foster girls who lived there went to school and she was strict about us being out late. But when it came to money she was cheap. The previous Christmas I just got a Snuggie. Her grandkids got shoes, clothes and video games.

So when I heard about a new California law that lets youth stay in the foster care system until age 20 I thought it was good. Before the law, foster youth emancipated (aged out) at 18 and their foster parents no longer got paid to take care of them. I think my foster mom would have been nicer and let me stay if the law had already been in place.

Foster youth were considered adults at 18 but they have no experience living on their own. So a lot of former foster youth end up homeless. There are transitional living apartments for foster youth who emancipate. But the programs are so packed it's hard for kids to get in. The new law will help keep foster kids from being homeless.

Social workers don't prepare foster kids to be an adult. I asked my social worker to get my social security card and birth certificate. I wanted to get a California ID and you need an original birth certificate for that and I wanted to open a bank account and look for a job. She would say she had to get it from my file but she never brought it. She kept saying she was looking for it so I asked my mom and she mailed it to me. Foster parents don't always help either and most foster youth don't have biological parents to turn to for guidance. I didn't have one-on-one time with my foster mom. She had to take other foster kids to appointments and in her spare time she made time for her family and herself.

I felt like it was a good law but more needed to be changed. The foster parents needed to stop being so controlling—they act like their house is a jail. I thought that staying until you're 20 and still having those rules was not going to improve the homeless rate because kids were going to leave the system and not take advantage of the law. So I interviewed Elizabeth Lott at the Alliance for Children's Rights to get more information on the new law.

Lott told me that you can stay in a college dorm, a group home or have an apartment with a roommate while still being in the system. If you're in a dorm or apartment, you can get your own check so you can get the everyday things you need. When you're under 18, the checks go to your foster parent and they spend it how they feel is best. Getting your own checks will help you get the feel for how it would be to be on your own without all the responsibilities thrown at you at once.

After the interview, I realized that the new law will prepare foster youth for independence while giving them more freedom. I think it's a great opportunity.

The requirements are you have to either be going to college, working, attending a program to help you get job skills or finishing high school (or you can be excused from those requirements with a medical issue). I believe these rules are easy to follow and will definitely keep foster youth on the right track. They are making sure you are involved with things that will prepare you for the future.

But to qualify, you have to have been in the foster care system on Jan. 1, 2012. That makes no sense to me. I think the new law should allow foster youth to return to the system even if they have already left foster care. Lott said 1,500 foster youth age out of the county every year and as many as 50 percent will become homeless. If they applied the law to all foster youth under the age of 20, they could save more than a thousand kids from being homeless.

I WISH THE NEW LAW COULD HELP ME

I'm no longer in the system because I got into a big argument with my foster mom. I wanted to have overnight visits with my family and friends since I was old enough but she told me I couldn't. I thought it wasn't fair so I left and my case was closed. Right now I'm couch surfing going from one house to the other: grandmother, girlfriend, friend, grandfather. I would have liked to get an apartment with a roommate. It would have been a lot of help. They would have given me money to take care of myself so I can get the things I need, like hygiene products, food and clothes, and still be able to pay rent. If I could return to the system, those things would help me a lot.

There's more that needs to be done to make the system better. They need more social workers. Social workers need to spend more time helping teenagers transition into adulthood. Foster parents need to respect the fact that teenagers need more freedom. But this law is a good start—it will keep more foster youth off the street.

Go to louth.com to read our interview about the new law.



Precious is happy they've extended foster care to age 20.

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Editor Amanda Riddle works with Charles on his story.

Contact Editor Amanda Riddle at
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ESSAY CONTEST WINNERS

Who do you admire?

1ST PLACE \$50

My brother was courageous for coming out

Author's name withheld

Growing up I never had a hero. I always thought it was a bogus idea to look up to someone when they haven't done anything to actually gain your respect. I always thought that there was no one who I would admire in my life. The reasons being because everywhere you look people are shallow, they never think of others. But in recent years I've actually found a hero, someone who I can admire with my heart and be proud to say he's who I admire. That person is my brother.

I have three brothers. I could lie and say they were always caring but I won't. Growing up, most times they were harsh. I never had anyone to play with me or have a conversation with. They always looked down on me since I was the youngest. Since the biggest age gap was between me and them, sometimes they would take time to talk to me but most times they were off in their own world. But all of them had their good traits and the one I most admire is my second-oldest brother. Like me he is gay, and he's gone through so much more than I have.

Coming out for him was the hardest. My mom and dad did not know how to deal with it. So they hit him. They thought the solution was beating the gay out of him and treating him harshly. Yet he didn't back down and he kept true to who he was. I remember going to church and keeping him as the secret of the family. I could only imagine how he could feel being the black sheep of the family—staining our family. He also came out when most people didn't accept homosexuals, saying they were a mistake of God and that they needed to die. I remember one day I was young and he came up to me in my room and said, "If you ever come out just know that it's going to be easier for you. I cleared the way for you so it'll be easier." I guess he meant with my parents and my family, that they would accept me more easily. To this day, those words stay

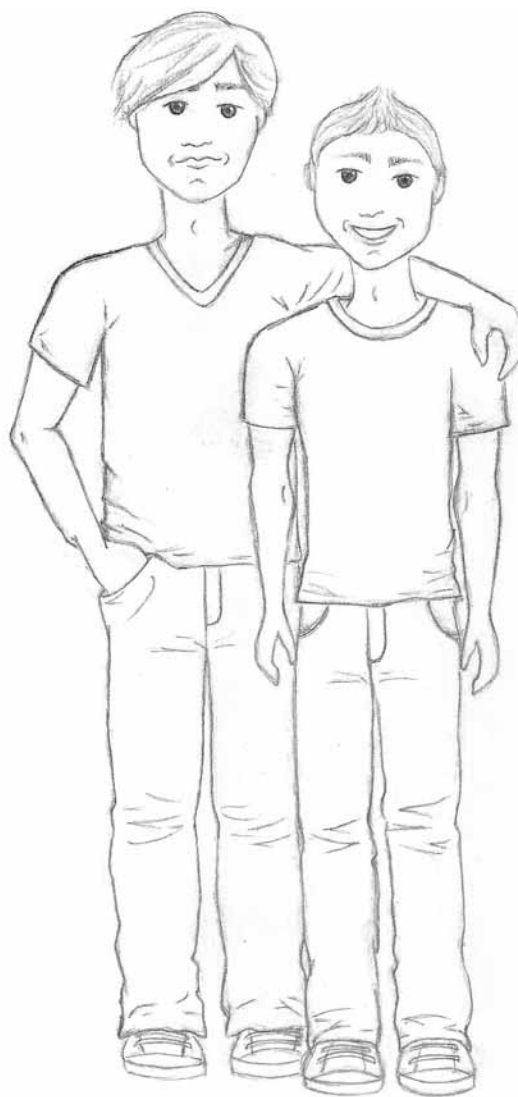


Illustration by Andrea Perez,
17, Bravo Medical Magnet HS

with me since he knew who I was when I was young. Even when I was denying it because society said we were sinners, he came up to me and said what needed to be said. Those simple words touched my heart and I have never forgotten them.

I love him so dearly. Because of those words I knew exactly what he went through, those words had the pain he went through laced all around them. I am proud to say he is my brother and my hero. He is the one who inspires me to be myself and not care what others say about me. That my life is my own and not anyone else's, and I know I will always admire him for what he has done in my life. Because after all these years no matter what happens I know he will be there for me, because despite of all the prejudice in the world he will never back down from who he is, and neither will I.

3RD PLACE \$20

My family stuck by me

By Jorge Sanchez

Wooden HS (Reseda)

Running away from something when you want to stay. Quitting something that you love doing. Giving up a life that you are used to. I admire my family for helping me do these things, even when I wasn't so sure I wanted them done.

My wife helped me stop doing drugs. I didn't think that I would actually meet someone like her. She

2ND PLACE \$30

My mom does it all

By Nancy Vo
El Monte HS

When I saw the headline in L.A. Youth that said, "Who do you admire?" there was no doubt in my mind who I wanted to write about. My mom.

Well, to start off, my mom was not born anywhere near the U.S. She was born on the other side of the world: Hanoi, Vietnam. She grew up during a time when making money to help the family was much more important than receiving an education. She grew up during a time of war, which made it that much harder for her to receive food and simple, everyday necessities that we here in the U.S. take for granted. Despite all these hardships, my mom still managed to get an education, start a family and accomplish something that would change the course of my life forever. She worked and worked and worked, and eventually she saved up enough money to get my entire family of five over to the States. I admire that woman because she went above and beyond to make sure that her kids were going to receive a better education, a better life and a secure future where we don't have to worry about where our next meal is coming from.

Secondly, I admire her because of her strength. She's been through hell and back, and amazingly she's still here, standing tall. About five years ago, my dad was diagnosed

with a brain tumor. When I heard the news, I broke down and cried. He's my world, my everything, and to know that I could lose him at any given moment scared the life out of me. I thought that the news of my dad's brain tumor would send my mom over the edge, but surprisingly it didn't. She held herself together very well. Whenever anyone needed a shoulder to cry on, they would look for her. Just the other day, I asked my mom why she never cried. She responded, "Are you kidding me?! I would cry all the time. I would cry when you kids were off at school. I would even cry myself to sleep sometimes. I just wouldn't cry in front of you kids or your father because I knew that I had to keep a straight face. I had to be the rock that kept the family grounded." She was the rock then, and she's still the rock now.

Lastly, I admire her because she's as quick as a whip and she's more independent than anyone I know. She's a clever one I tell you. It seems like whenever anyone in my family comes down with an illness, she has the cure. If you are living under my mom's roof there's absolutely no need for Advil or Tylenol. Just give her 15 minutes to whip up a homemade remedy and you're cured. On top of that, my mom is her very own mechanic and accountant. If the check engine light lights up, my mom can take care of it. When the time to file taxes comes around, she's got it.

A lot of people look up to celebrities like Kim Kardashian or Jeremy Lin. Now don't get me wrong, those celebrities are great and all, but I don't admire them the same way I admire my mom. She's an incredible human being who's hardworking, strong, clever and independent. I hope one day I grow up to be half the woman she is. (And if you're reading this Mom, I love you!)

started to tell me that I should quit, but I didn't want to. But she never gave up on me and kept encouraging me to stop. The main reason why I admire her is because she never gave up on me and kept pushing me forward. After she helped me stop doing drugs, her goal was for me to stop my gang-related life. She would always tell me that she didn't want that life for me and knew that I could do better. She never stopped believing in me, and she never gave up. When she found out that I left the gang-related ways behind me, she was really happy.

The main reason why I really admire my wife is because she is the mother of my two beautiful kids. My kids have motivated me to do many things that I thought I would never do. At first I didn't think I could be a good father because we were both so young, and I

thought I would end up doing the same thing as my dad . . . just leave. My wife and my kids showed me that I was better and trusted that I would always be there for them and would never leave them no matter what. When I dropped out of school, my wife was mad. She started to notice that I didn't want to go to school anymore and wanted to focus more at work. She decided to push me to go back to school. She helped me get back on my feet and pushed me to finish school. I will finally graduate this spring.

My babies and my wife are the best things that have happened to me in my life. Without them I don't know where I would be right now. I don't want to run. I don't want to quit. I want to stay exactly where I am with the woman I admire.

NEW ESSAY CONTEST

What's the best advice you've gotten?

As a teen there's a lot you're figuring out about school, dating, college, friendships and more, so you've probably turned to others for advice. It can be helpful to hear from others who have been through similar situations, whether it's your mom, dad, siblings, friends, teachers or someone else. We want you to tell us a story about the best advice you've gotten. Who was the advice from and how did it help you?

WIN
\$50

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

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

DEADLINE:
Friday, April 27, 2012

Mockingjay

By Suzanne Collins

Reviewed by Renzo San Juan
15, Belmont HS

After reading all three books in The Hunger Games trilogy, I can say that Mockingjay is the best. After being addicted to The Hunger Games and Catching Fire, I devoured Mockingjay, wanting to know how the story would end. I carried the book everywhere I went, even to school and the restrooms.

In the first book, 16-year-old Katniss Everdeen volunteered to fight in the Hunger Games in place of her sister. The Hunger Games is a televised event that picks a boy and a girl from each of the 12 Districts in the country of Panem. The Capitol, a powerful city that rules the districts, sends the kids into an arena where they will fight each other to the death for the entire country to see. Katniss comes home victorious. In the second book, Katniss has to go back to the arena again.

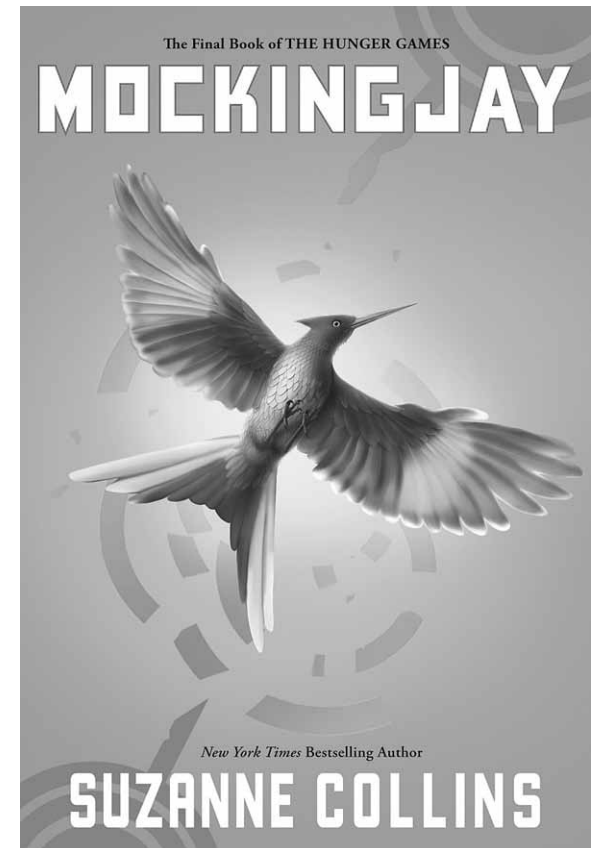
Katniss, who is now 17, starts off Mockingjay by visiting the ashes of her hometown, District 12, which the Capitol destroyed. She takes an airship to her new home in District 13, which people believed had died out decades ago when the Capitol bombed them as well. It turns out that they've been running an underground society that's planning to start a re-

bellion. District 13 is led by the stern President Coin. She intends to spread the rebellion to all the other districts so they can overthrow President Snow, the leader of the Capitol. She decides to use Katniss to spread ideas of rebellion to the other districts. Katniss is reluctant at first, but is eventually convinced. With that, Katniss goes around to the other districts carrying out missions with her companions to free Panem from President Snow's rule.

Mockingjay tackles more mature themes like politics and propaganda. District 13 creates ads that feature Katniss doing heroic acts like saving people from the Capitol's attacks. I noticed that propaganda is an effective and dangerous way to influence people. Also, there is a lot more violence. In one mission, Katniss and her companions are sent to a hospital under attack by the Capitol. Jets drop bombs on the hospital, killing children and adults, while her team returns fire, trying to protect them. There are so many lives at stake that I often cringed in the life-or-death situations.

It's also not as plot-driven as the other books. It delves more into the background of District 13 and what's going through Katniss' mind as she's acting out the rebellion. She constantly worries about the safety of her family and friends and how they will survive after the rebellion.

Mockingjay ends the series perfectly. Fans of the trilogy will not be disappointed. As for the new Hunger Games movie, all I can say is: Let the games begin.



Slaughterhouse-Five

By Kurt Vonnegut

Reviewed by Araceli Gutierrez
16, Cleveland HS (Reseda)

Slaughterhouse-Five by Kurt Vonnegut is my favorite book. A science-fiction book isn't something I would normally consider reading, since I usually read young adult novels or fiction that doesn't involve aliens. But as soon as I finished the first chapter, I was hooked.

The novel centers on the curious life of Billy Pilgrim: an unlikely American soldier who is "tall and weak, and shaped like a bottle of Coca-Cola." Billy is captured by the Tralfamadorians (aliens) on his daughter's wedding night and after that travels back and forth in time. Billy is aware that he is time traveling and tells others including his daughter. Yet she finds it hard to believe and sees him as a lunatic.

Although Billy begins his time traveling later in life, the novel begins in 1943, when Billy is drafted to serve in World War II. He is taken as a prisoner by the Germans. Suddenly, Billy becomes "unstuck in time" and travels to a moment from his childhood—when his father tried to teach him to swim.

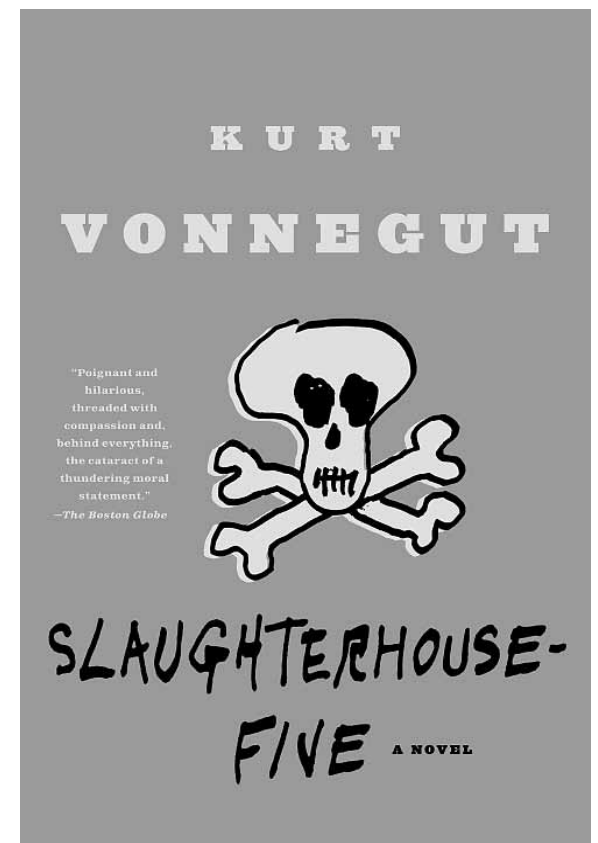
It bothered me for a while not knowing if he

was really time traveling or just imagining it. Yet as I read more, I believed in Billy's time traveling and became more fascinated by him. He tries so hard to convince others that everything he says is true. Billy's isolation from others, like his daughter, upset me. I know it's a good book once I feel for the characters and Billy is one of my favorite characters out of all the books I've read. Billy's kindness, like saving a fellow recruit and risking his life for others, even though they treated him with insults, made him stand out.

The way Vonnegut writes about the realities of war, like the brutal winter weather that killed soldiers, left me turning the pages for more. Vonnegut was a prisoner of war during World War II. I like knowing that what I'm reading is taken from a personal experience.

I think Vonnegut wrote this book to raise the question of war's morality. It left me thinking about the destruction that war left behind when Billy and those he knew tried, but couldn't, go back to their regular lives. Vonnegut made me realize that war is an emotional experience that follows everyone off of the battlefield. Billy changed after the war; he couldn't let go of his memories of the terrible fighting and seeing other soldiers die. This made me understand his odd behavior and I wished the people in his life could understand him too.

Even though at times you don't know what to believe, the story is so full of action you won't mind.





Florence + the Machine

CD: Ceremonials

Reviewed by Christian Santiago
18, Santa Monica College

Florence + the Machine's latest album, Ceremonials, was my favorite album of 2011. There was a lot of pressure on Florence Welch and her band to come out with new music that would be just as good as their first album, Lungs. The band stays true to their sound but Welch's lyrics have become more personal. Ceremonials is a masterpiece.

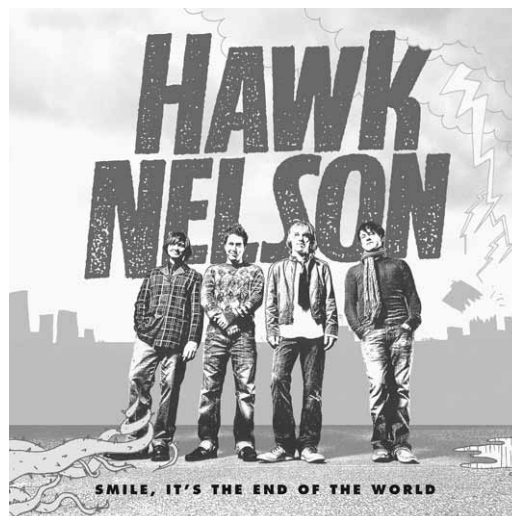
The first track, "Only If for a Night," is my favorite on the album. She sings, "I heard your voice clear as day/ And you told me I should concentrate/ It was so strange and so surreal/ That a ghost should be so practical." In an interview she said she had a dream of her late grandmother telling her to concentrate on her career. I find it beautiful how honest she was.

Welch uses religious references to portray the difficulties in her life on both albums, but you hear it more on Ceremonials. In "Shake It Out," she chants, "Shake it out, shake it out, oh whoa/ And it's hard to dance with a devil on your back/ So shake him off, oh whoa." Lyrics like "It's always darkest before the dawn" send a great message about moving on from your past or a sad place.

In "Breaking Down," her voice is slower. Welch sings in a soft voice until the last two lines, when she shouts, "I think I'm breaking down again, Oh, I think I'm breaking down," showing her frustration.

On this album you get to know more about Welch. The more I listen to this album, the more in love I am with Welch's imagination.

Lyrics like "It's always darkest before the dawn" send a great message about moving on from your past.



Hawk Nelson

CD: Smile, It's the End of the World

Reviewed by Kiera Peltz
18, CHAMPS (Van Nuys)

Whatever mood I'm in, I always like sad, slow music because I find peace in the lyrics. That's why Hawk Nelson's Smile, It's the End of the World is one of my favorite albums. Filled with songs about the meaning of life, disappointments and living up to others' expectations, the album touches on sensitive subjects I struggle with every day.

One of my favorite songs, "Everything You Ever Wanted," blasts a strong beat while pumping out powerful lyrics. When lead singer Jason Dunn sings, "I tried to be perfect/ Tried to be honest/ Tried to be everything that you ever wanted," I'm brought back to a time when I tried so hard to earn my father's approval and love. This song helped me cope with the harsh reality of never having my father love me back and made me realize it wasn't my fault.

While I usually prefer slow and sad songs, the fast-paced and upbeat songs on this album, like "Head on Collision," still make me think about my life. Dunn sings, "Let's go/ Back to the days when we were young and not restless/ We still believed and hadn't built our defenses." When I think about leaving my childhood behind, I wish nothing more than to go back to when I didn't understand that people will hurt me or the stresses of getting into a good college.

Hawk Nelson's Smile, It's the End of the World focuses on issues all teenagers deal with. Listening to this album helps me deal with my problems.

Smile, It's the End of the World touches on sensitive subjects I struggle with every day.



LMFAO

CD: Sorry for Party Rocking

Reviewed by Jennifer Gonzales-Romero
19, University of La Verne

When I first heard "Party Rock Anthem" on the radio, I got excited because that meant LMFAO was finally coming out with new music. I looked up some of their new songs on YouTube and fell in love with them. I bought the CD on iTunes as soon as it came out.

The album's second song is "Sorry for Party Rocking." Redfoo and Sky Blu sing "People always say that my music's loud/ Sorry for party rocking/ Neighbors complain saying 'turn it down'/ Sorry for party rocking." I can't help but blast this song on my car radio whenever I'm driving around.

I also love that I can dance to a lot of their songs. My friend Alex and I love to get crazy at the "wiggles" part of "Sexy and I Know It." LMFAO also has good shuffling songs like "Champagne Showers" and "Party Rock Anthem." I don't know how to shuffle, but whenever I hear those songs I wish I knew how.

Other than "party rock" music, LMFAO also writes good love songs like "Best Night" and "One Day." In "One Day" they sing, "When I get you girl, you're gonna be so in love with me/ Every day we gonna play what's your fantasy/ Every night I think of you in every way/ And when I get you, I'm going to celebrate/ Cuz I'm going to get you one day." Whenever I hear this song I get hopeful about one day finding that special person.

Some people may complain about LMFAO's music being too autotuned, but I think that if people don't like their music then they shouldn't listen to it. LMFAO's album makes you want to get up and dance. I hope they continue making party rock music.

LMFAO's album makes you want to get up and dance. I hope they continue making party rock music.



Before participating in the summer workshop, I never thought about pursuing journalism. I had just wanted to try something new. But I really liked it and now I'm considering journalism as a career. The workshop helped me learn how to relate to readers with my writing. I also loved meeting other teens and learning how to do interviews. It was thrilling to see my story published. And since L.A. Youth is far from my home, I learned to take the bus and become more independent.

Jazmine Mendoza, 16
Chavez Learning Academies (San Fernando), Workshop 2011

L.A. youth SUMMER WORKSHOP

Sign up for the L.A. Youth summer writing workshop, an intensive six-week program during which you will write an article that will be published in L.A. Youth, as well as conduct interviews. You will complete your story while working one-on-one with a professional adult L.A. Youth editor.

To apply, you must be a Los Angeles County teen ages 15-18 attending high school in the area. No journalism experience is required, but you must have an interest in writing for L.A. Youth to participate. The workshop is unpaid. Public high school students will be given preference. Apply early, because a limited number of spaces are available. If you have questions, call (323) 938-9194.

Expectations:

- In this workshop, you are expected to meet weekly writing deadlines and attend field trips. Students who do not meet the deadlines will be asked to leave the writing workshop and encouraged to remain involved with L.A. Youth in some other way.
- You are expected to generate material for the September 2012 issue of L.A. Youth.
- You must attend group meetings at the L.A. Youth office **every** Thursday from 2 to 5 p.m. from June 28 to August 2. You also must arrange weekly two-hour individual meetings with your editor. The first group meeting will be held at 2 p.m. on Thursday, June 28, 2012.

How to apply:

Submit this application form with a **one-page writing sample** as well as a **non-refundable \$75 application fee**. Financial assistance available. Tips for the writing sample: write an original one-page statement that tells us something about you and gives us a sense of your writing style. It can be about one of your interests or activities. After you submit your application, we'll call you for a short **interview** before you are accepted into the workshop. To prepare for the workshop, we strongly encourage you to read past issues of L.A. Youth on our website. Go to www.layouth.com and click on "Archives."

The application deadline is **Friday, June 1, 2012.**

APPLICATION for the L.A. Youth Summer Writing Workshop

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY

ZIP CODE

HOME PHONE

EMAIL ADDRESS

SCHOOL

GRADE YOU WILL ENTER IN SEPT ____ DATE OF BIRTH ____ - ____ - ____

Send application
with \$75 fee
and writing
sample to:

L.A. YOUTH
5967 W. 3RD ST. SUITE 301
LOS ANGELES CA 90036