

MAY-JUNE 2011
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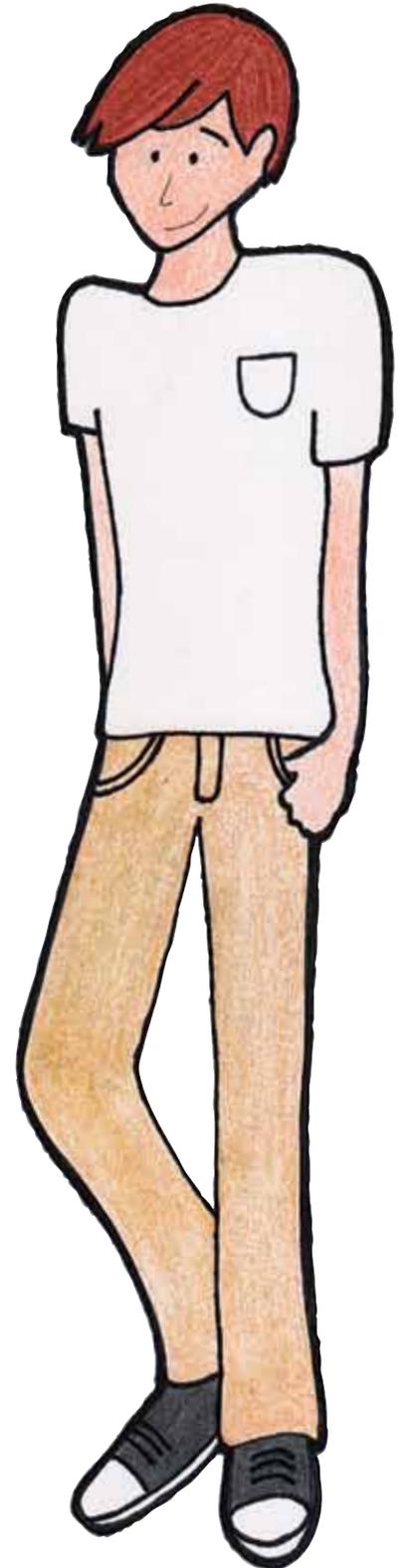
L.A. youth

the newspaper by and about teens

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What's next?

L.A. youth

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FOR PEOPLE WHO CARE ABOUT TEENS

About L.A. Youth

How L.A. Youth started

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

How L.A. Youth is doing today

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

How L.A. Youth is funded

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

L.A. Youth's mission

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

Advocating for teens

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

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What's next?

Teens figure out what they're doing after high school

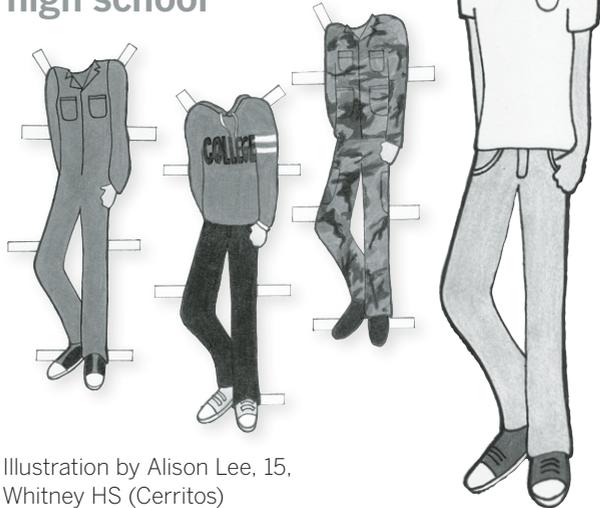


Illustration by Alison Lee, 15, Whitney HS (Cerritos)

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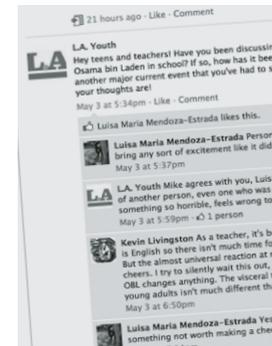
ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

Drawing has always been an outlet for me to express my creativity, so I was really happy when the editors asked me to illustrate my first cover for L.A. Youth. I joined the staff in February and I'm excited to be able to share my perspective through both art and writing with teens in Los Angeles.
Alison Lee, 15, Whitney HS (Cerritos)



BEHIND THE SCENES

As a newspaper that comes out only six times a year, it's hard for us to write about breaking news. When we heard that Osama bin Laden had been killed, the editors discussed how L.A. Youth could respond. Our staff didn't have enough time to write a story for the paper since we were going to press soon. So we used our Facebook page to ask teens and teachers if they'd discussed his death in school. Go to our Facebook page to read their comments and leave your thoughts.



STAY IN TOUCH WITH US

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

MARCH-APRIL 2011 ISSUE **A TEEN COPE WITH HIS ASTHMA**

I CAN BETTER understand the daily life of someone with asthma after reading the article “Gasping for air.” I don’t struggle with asthma, but it pained me to read about the difficulties that Brian faced because of his lung weakness. But his ability to do martial arts and to play the trumpet is impressive. It inspires me to hear of someone with a health problem who manages to succeed.

Liam Spires

Wilson MS (Glendale)

YOU WROTE A great article. Hopefully you’ll grow out of your asthma soon. You might be a marathon runner someday ... who knows.

Ann

Comment from layout.com

A TEEN LOVES CLASSICAL MUSIC

“CLASSICAL MUSIC NEVER goes out of style” was an interesting article and one that I relate to. I love to listen to classical music as much as I love to play it. During seventh grade, when I was in my school’s orchestra playing the violin, I started to appreciate classical music much more. Since then, I have learned a few other instruments, but I especially like the violin, cello and snare drum. I also listen to classical music every day on KUSC. I agree that classical music never goes out of style.

Timothy Lee

Wilson MS

A BOY NO LONGER BELIEVES HIS RACE HOLDS HIM BACK

I REALLY ENJOYED this article because what Edgar says is true. Many people think that Latinos cannot graduate. I disagree because if you look, there are lots of Latinos who grow up to be something important in life. The quote which says, “I no longer think that Latinos can’t be as successful as

others,” inspires me by making me do better in school to prove what it says.

Carol Santiago

Wilson MS

THE ARTICLE “MY race doesn’t hold me back” caught my eye because the writer’s background was similar to mine; he is Latino. And just like Edgar, both of my parents work low-paying jobs and we are barely making it. I can’t ask for money. I can’t ask my parents for help when I get stuck on a homework problem because they didn’t get much education back in their homeland. For almost half a year, my parents were unemployed and I couldn’t go out and have fun very much. But I got something out of it. I learned to not be selfish by only thinking about myself. I learned how to be hardworking and responsible by getting a job that ultimately paid for all my expenses.

Raul Martinez

Franklin HS

YOUR ARTICLE IS very clear and strong. I am inspired by your aspirations. I have a similar

perspective that many teenagers in America are very prejudiced toward others. I am Indonesian Muslim so I know what it feels like to be a minority, especially being a Muslim girl who wears a headscarf. Some people might think I’m an extremist. Thank you for writing this article.

Jamilah

Comment from layout.com

SHOULD POLICE USE DOGS TO SEARCH FOR DRUGS AT SCHOOL?

I AGREE WITH the writer that people should not bring drugs to school and that there should be police at schools. There should be searches for drugs at the entrance of the school. It is illegal for kids to smoke. You could end up in a hospital if you smoke a lot. You could go to jail if you get caught at school. There are very strict laws about smoking.

Carlos Campos

*Centennial College Prep Academy
(Huntington Park)*

A TEEN WHO SACRIFICES FOR HER BABY INSPIRES OTHERS

YOUR BABY, SERENITY, always makes you happy no matter what, so I think it’s great that you give her the world. It is great that your baby brightens your day with just the sound of her laughter. It must be hard to be a teenage mother and go to school, but you have to do it for

your baby. It is incredible that you are a straight-A student. Never give up because there’s someone in your life who needs you. Don’t mess up and good luck. I hope the best for you two.

Ataly Vazquez

Franklin HS

A GIRL EVENTUALLY OVERCAME HER SHYNESS

IF THE WRITER of “Alone at a new school” reads this, I just want to say that you helped me. I’m going to be a high school student and I am afraid. Your story sounded like me when I went from a Christian elementary school to a public middle school. I was afraid and alone but after reading your story, I realized that if I had opened up earlier to the students around me, I would’ve had more friends. I’m glad L.A. Youth published your story. It showed me that new kids all go through the same experience but those kids just need to open up a bit more.

Ashley Yim

Wilson MS

HOMELESS TEENS ARE WORKING HARD TO TURN THEIR LIVES AROUND

I REALLY ENJOYED reading the article “Getting off the streets” because reading about Luis’s and Lace’s lives was pretty shocking. It was hard to believe that they had gone through so much even though they are only teenagers. Luis and Lace are two very inspiring teens. They went from having nothing at all to building their lives up. They’ve done so much to benefit themselves already and I’m sure they’re going to accomplish tons more in the future.

Kelly Boonkrong

Wilson MS

I FOUND THE cover story really interesting. I had believed that most homeless people were alcoholics or dropouts who couldn’t get a house because they wasted their money on drugs or alcohol. Before, I was reluctant to give homeless people money because I thought, “Oh, they will just use the money to buy drugs or alcohol,” but now I know that most of them had no support and were really unlucky.

Christian Jensen

Wilson MS



Illustration by
Michelle Cao, 17,
Temple City HS

Cutting teachers isn't the answer



There has to be a better way for schools to save money

By Alma Sanchez

17, Orthopaedic Hospital Medical Magnet HS

In the past I would hear about school budget cuts on the news and I wouldn't pay attention. I thought that only teachers at big schools got laid off because these schools have larger budgets. I thought that my small school of 850 students would never be affected.

That changed this year, when I heard about several teachers getting pink slips. In March, my friend told me that the librarian, the magnet coordinator and the art teacher were getting laid off. I couldn't believe it. I said to my friend, "How does the district expect students to get higher test scores if they lay off teachers?"

I thought it was impossible to lay off the librarian because all schools should have a librarian. People go to our library to use the computers, hang out and check out books. Our librarian, Ms. Valdez, tells us about opportunities outside of school. She told me about and helped me apply to a summer program that teaches women about the entertainment industry and broadcasting. Since we're a medical magnet, she puts out a medical exhibit each month about different topics, like hemophilia, glaucoma and sexually transmitted diseases. This year she organized our first Career Day, bringing about 35 professionals to school for students to talk to. The library is the heart of our school. I can't imagine her gone and the library closed.

OUR POPULAR ART TEACHER MIGHT LOSE HER JOB

Ms. Santana has been our only art teacher since the school opened in 2004. Even though we will get another art teacher, I can tell you that art will not be the same without her. When I needed help drawing my self-portrait, she gave me tips like tracing the outline of my face from a photo of myself. Ms. Santana won a grant that allowed her to buy art supplies. Students always talk to her about their problems. She was our art coach for Academic Decathlon. She bought snacks with her own money and

designed our team sweatshirts. She loves my school but she loves the students even more. No teacher can replace Ms. Santana, no matter how good that teacher might be.

Even though I'm a senior, I still care about what happens at my school. My brother is in 10th grade and he goes to my school. If these teachers are gone, students like my brother won't get the same opportunities I had.

THE WAY THEY DECIDE WHO TO LAY OFF IS UNFAIR

My principal, Mr. Mata, told me that teachers were getting laid off based on seniority. Seniority means teachers who have been working for the district the longest will keep their jobs, while newer teachers, well, they are out of luck. This is just wrong. Why doesn't the district lay off teachers based on performance, ability and feedback from staff, teachers and students?

Mr. Mata explained that because of the bad economy, the state has less money to give to school districts. The Los Angeles Unified School District decided to lay off magnet coordinators and close libraries. He also showed me a letter from the superintendent that stated that they "plan for the worst-case scenario" by giving pink slips to 7,302 of their 38,000 teachers, counselors, librarians and administrators. They may lose their positions on June 30. I was even more surprised when he told me that four out of 34 teachers at my school might get laid off, in addition to the librarian and magnet coordinator.

Since the district isn't sure how much money it will have for next school year, we don't know the exact number of people who will get laid off. According to Mr. Mata, LAUSD has come up with four budget plans. The worst-case scenario was if Governor Brown's proposal to extend some taxes for five more years doesn't pass and unions don't compromise about furlough days, the district would have to cut \$408 million from its budget. The best scenario is if the Governor's proposal passes and the district and unions reach a compromise. Everyone hopes for the last scenario because that would mean fewer teachers losing their jobs. Sadly, this is the

Students at Orthopaedic Hospital Medical Magnet High have been protesting before school every Friday since they learned about teacher layoffs. Photo by Mr. Tran, a math teacher at Orthopaedic Hospital Medical Magnet HS

fourth year of cuts in a row.

I also learned that schools can use any extra money they have to save positions and pay a year's salary. My school's Site Council could afford to save only two of the six positions being cut so they saved two teaching positions.

This is not fair. There was no announcement that the committee was going to discuss the budget for next year, so there were only two students at the meeting. If more students were told about it, more would have shown up. I'd argue for keeping the librarian. Cut the staff who take care of the hallways. Cut the security guard. A teacher who can teach you to write better is more necessary than someone who tells you "No eating in the hall." Or get parent volunteers to do these "watch" jobs.

After interviewing my principal, I understood that budget cuts are necessary, but I think that everyone in the district is distant from students and they don't really know what's best for us. I think teens can have more impact if we get informed, participate in protests and go to those "boring" committee meetings—you might save a teacher. Let's use our voice and tell LAUSD: "Stop robbing my education!"



Alma says that if you see problems at your school, try to change them.

Dear Metro: I've got a new ride

Now that I have my license, I no longer need the bus

By **Claire Kaufman**

16, Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies

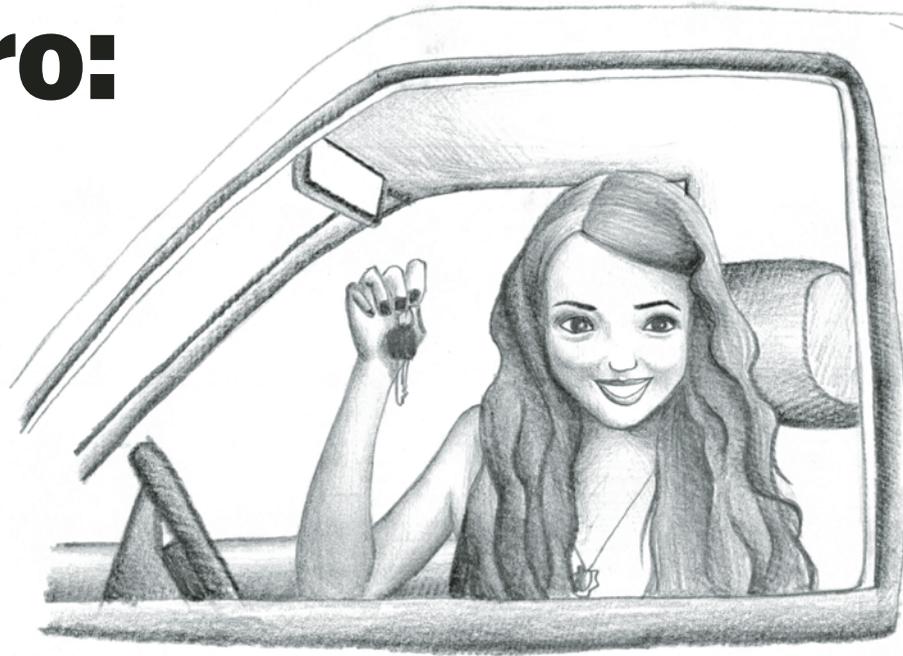


Illustration by
Michelle Cao,
17, Temple
City HS

Dear Metro,

I am breaking up with you. I just got my driver's license. We've had some fun over the years, but it's over.

I was only 14 when my parents decided I was too old to be driven everywhere, so they set us up on a blind date. Finally, I would be able to get around without depending on my parents.

As I walked to the bus stop, I was so nervous. I arrived at 2:25 p.m., giving me ample time to wait for your scheduled arrival at 2:29 p.m. But at 2:29 p.m., you didn't show. Five minutes later, you still weren't there. I was upset and bored. I took out my phone and texted as many people as I could think of. After every sent text, I would look up expectantly.

Finally, at 2:45 p.m., you arrived. As I stepped onto the bus clutching my dollar nervously, I looked up at the driver. She looked at me, scowled, and said, "What do you want?" I mumbled something about not knowing where to put my dollar. The guy behind me told me to hurry up. I could feel my face getting red. After almost putting my dollar in the coin slot, I managed to figure out where to put my money and scampered to the back of the bus. Before I could choose a seat, the bus started moving and I fell into a seat next to a sweaty old man.

As my stop approached, I realized I didn't know how to signal the bus to stop. So I walked to the front of the bus and politely asked the driver to let me off at the next stop. "Why didn't you just pull the cord?" she asked, irritated. I looked down, embarrassed, and walked off, breathing a huge sigh of relief as I saw my friend waiting for me. I knew that I'd see you again and hoped things would be

smoother, but I had no idea that you, my Metro 33, would pick me up almost every single day for the next two years.

Sadly, the scheduled time was never reliable. It was more reliable to count on you arriving a few minutes early or five minutes late. Additionally, you never drove me exactly where I needed to go. I would often have to take multiple buses that took me pretty far out of the way. You upset me a lot when you took away the reduced price for transfers between buses, and it didn't help when you raised the price from \$1 to \$1.50.

MY WORST RIDE

Only a couple months into our relationship we had to take a break. I was taking the bus from school to my friend's house where I had never been before. I got off the bus and started walking. A 50s-ish-looking man started walking in the same direction. As I reached the corner, I realized I had been walking the wrong way. When I turned around, I noticed the older guy stop, wait for me to pass, and turn around too. Suspicious, I turned around again and he did too.

I freaked out. I called my dad and mom but they didn't answer. I was so angry at them for not picking up the phone, and also terrified that my parents couldn't help me. I fast-walked to the nearest Vons, and was relieved when I saw the man walk away. Just to be sure I stayed in the makeup aisle until I decided it was safe and then walked to my friend's house. For the next four months, my parents drove me where I needed to go.

After that, the incident was forgotten and I took the bus again, but I was never excited to see you. I've had many a creepy man try to start conversations with me; there's always a lady talking to herself; and

the people who unfortunately take up more than one seat.

I'm not saying that the bus was all bad. I know I was helping the environment. Plus, I will miss people-watching on the Metro. You always gave me good stories to tell my friends. One day I smelled weed coming from the back of the bus. I ignored it, but the driver didn't. She stopped the bus in the middle of the street, stood up, stomped to the back of the bus and screamed, "Get the f*** off my bus!" Then she opened the doors and demanded that the two guys get off the bus in the middle of the road.

And not all the crowds were bad. A few months ago when I was taking the bus home from school, it was so crowded that I had to squeeze next to the door. As the bus started moving, I was pushed into two people, both my age. We talked for the entire bus ride and when I got home I friended them on Facebook. If I had made more friends on the bus, maybe I'd be less inclined to get my license.

Next time you see me, I'll be with a green 1995 Ford Explorer. I know he will be reliable, come wherever I want him to and carry all my things.

Best regards, Claire



Now that she has to pay for gas, Claire is looking for a job.

Addicted to Facebook

I couldn't stop going on, even though it made me feel left out

By **Yejean Kim**

17, Arcadia HS

When Facebook started getting popular my freshman year, I didn't get an account because I didn't want to get obsessed like I had been with MySpace. In sixth grade, I would waste an entire day on MySpace, spending an hour deciding which song to make my profile song and constantly checking to see if I was still on my friends' Top 8s. I never felt like I was missing anything big not being on Facebook, just small things, like when everyone would be laughing at photos they saw online or some kind of funny status, which is something you write that everyone who's friends with you can see.

Then one day in April of sophomore year we were supposed to wear pink to support teachers who had gotten pink slips, which meant they might get laid off. I was one of the few people not wearing pink, and when I said I didn't have a Facebook and that was why I didn't know, everyone looked at me like I was some weirdo stuck in the past. So I caved in and got a Facebook page.

That summer, I started going on Facebook every day. I would post a status of song lyrics that I liked or something witty, then happily respond to any comments I got. I would browse through other people's photos, watch videos and read statuses. When I saw photos of people hanging out, I felt like I was there. But sometimes I'd wonder why I wasn't invited. One Saturday afternoon, it seemed like everyone had a great time at a get-together the night before. There were pictures of them at a restaurant, the park and more. Other people seemed to be having a lot more fun than I was. I thought, why am I not more social? I also had fewer Facebook friends than other people. I had around 150 friends, while most people had more than 300. It made me feel unpopular. But I couldn't stop going on, even though it made me feel bad, because it was addictive.

MY GRADES DROPPED

When the school year started, I checked my Facebook constantly after I got home. I'd do my homework for 30 minutes and then go on Facebook for an hour, wondering if there was anything new to look at. I was going to bed around 2 every night. My grades went from As and Bs to mostly Bs, and I even had a C in math and a D in Japanese. My parents freaked out. They asked me if I needed a tutor. I said no, because I felt guilty that they would be spending money on something that was my fault. They asked me if I was all right. I said yes, even though I was starting to feel creepy. Why did I care so much about what people I didn't even know that well were doing?

Then near the end of October a girl wrote a story in our school newspaper about how maybe some people who

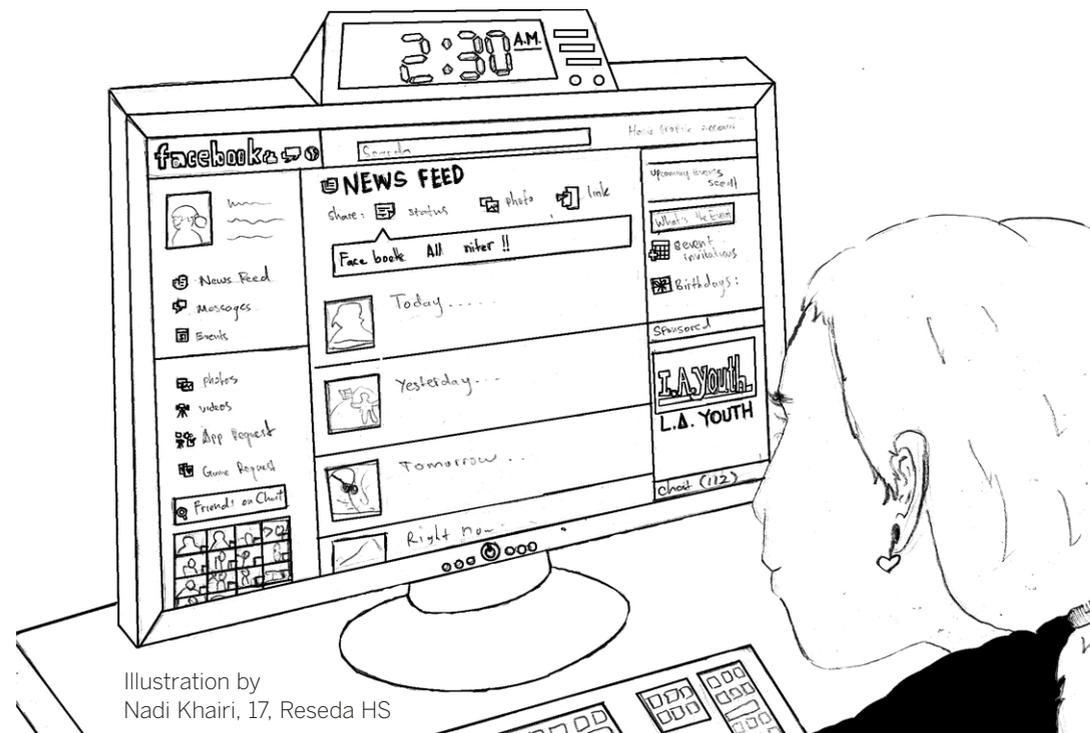


Illustration by
Nadi Khairi, 17, Reseda HS

were obsessed with Facebook had low self-esteem. That sounded like me. I hadn't thought I was obsessed with Facebook because I had low self-esteem. I thought it was the opposite: because I was vain. I thought that the more people commented and "liked" my statuses or photos, the more they must like me. The article helped me see that I would rather think about other people's lives than my own, and it was sad, like even I didn't think of myself as worth paying attention to.

I felt bad because I was comparing my life to others' online lives, but what I didn't realize was that people want others to think they're living exciting lives. No one is going to post pictures of being bored. It was dangerous to judge myself against such an unrealistic standard. I'm different online too. On Facebook I always seem like I'm in a good mood. I don't want people to think that I'm a whiny person. It's easier to project a personality that I want people to think I have. I could be wittier in my comments than I was in person because I could think before I typed them. I think people shouldn't take the image people project on Facebook too literally. It's not realistic.

I don't think people should get rid of their Facebook pages. It's impractical because a lot of people use it for school and everyone's on it. To keep from going on so much, I use a site blocker, an application that blocks any websites you choose. I found one called StayFocusd that allowed me to set a limit of two minutes a day on Facebook. That's long enough to ask project group members to email me instead. When I try to stay on longer than

two minutes, the page disappears, a white screen takes its place and it says: "Shouldn't you be working?" Those four words always seem to come when I'm about to be sucked in again.

I MAKE MORE TIME FOR REAL LIFE

Now that I'm on Facebook less, I have time to do things that are more important. I hang out in the living room with my family instead of being cooped up in my room, and I go out with my friends instead of making lame excuses so I can log onto Facebook. I've stopped using Facebook to measure my popularity. It's just a fun distraction. Sometimes I still feel insecure, but it's less because of Facebook and more of a teen thing.

I still have the two-minute limit on Facebook, although I turn it off sometimes on the weekends. I know it's for the best, because I want to live my life, not relive someone else's.



Yejean says Facebook is a great way to stay in contact with friends, but be careful not to take it too seriously.

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—Jasper Nahid, 17, Hamilton HS

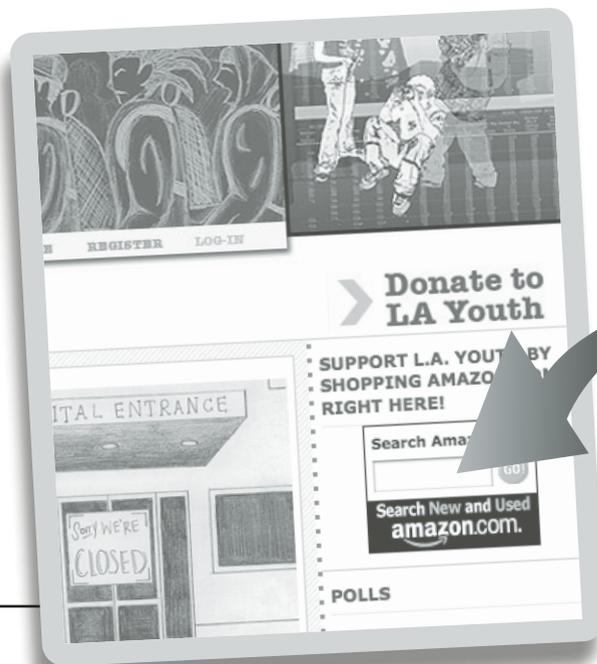


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I don't feel ready

I worry I won't succeed at college, but can I support myself without a degree?

By Ernesto Pineda

19, Animo Film & Theatre Arts Charter HS

I hear so much talk about college around my school. In the hallway they have a list of seniors and what schools they've been accepted to. They want to show other students that people are going to college and doing something with their lives. Our teachers tell us college is an experience we don't want to miss. One of the administrators talked about a former student who was unprepared and so culture-shocked that she dropped out. She was warning us that college is different than the ghetto. She was telling us this so we would take college seriously, but it strengthened my fears about college, that I won't fit in and maybe it's not for me.

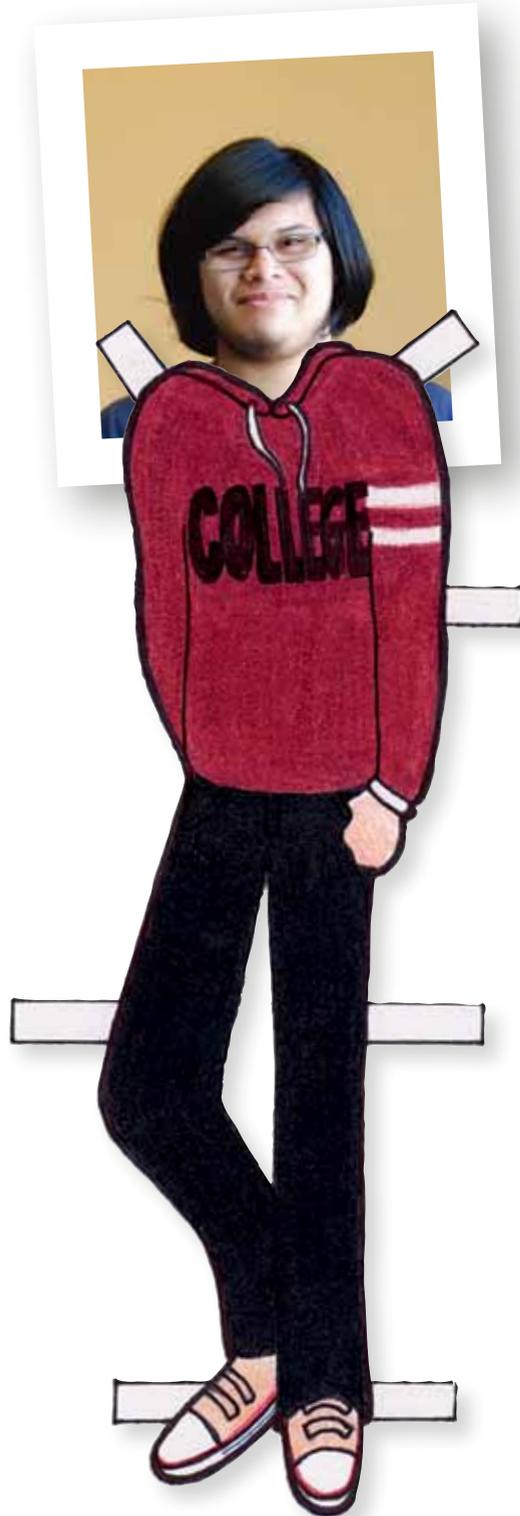
I can understand how living in poverty makes people want to embrace any opportunity to move up in life, but it's hard for me to see myself in college. When I went to UCLA for a field trip, I saw people carrying books as they were walking to their classes. They were doing work on tables outside. I thought, "I'm not as focused as these students." In college you work with others and ask others for help. But I don't like to talk to people I don't know. College students know how to organize their time and know to work ahead on assignments. I'm lazy and I wait until the last minute to write a paper.

I'm not sure that I'll get in because I feel the odds are stacked against me. My parents can't help me because they didn't go to college. So it wasn't easy to plan for college and I don't understand financial aid. I know it's not an excuse, but it makes it harder for me than for others.

I IMAGINED MYSELF WORKING A LOW-PAYING JOB

Because I'm lazy, I was a C-student in middle school. I knew I needed to do better in high school to get into college. My mother told me I had to go to college, because she didn't want me to spend my life working a low-paying job. She never finished high school because she got pregnant at a young age. It's been hard for her because she didn't have enough education to get a higher-paying job to support us. But I got bad grades in high school so I stopped believing I was going to go to college. Me and my friend Juan said that after we graduated we'd get an apartment. I thought I'd flip burgers or be a cashier, anything to just get by.

Then this year in our economics class we pretended to live on minimum wage (which is about \$1,300 a month). I went over my budget and I wasn't even buying anything expensive. I saw that having a minimum wage job is harder than I thought it would be.



In October, on the day we got our transcripts, I was disappointed. With my 1.95 GPA, I figured the chances were slim that I'd get into a four-year school. I gave up, aware that hundreds of students from other schools (as we are reminded by our school as pressure to motivate us) are applying to college and have higher GPAs.

My school encouraged us to apply to at least four schools, including one UC. There was such a push from the school to get our applications in that I decided it would be bad if I didn't apply to at least one. As a procrastinator, I barely got my UC San Diego application in. I was trying to get in my application for Cal State Dominguez Hills but I didn't finish in time. So I gave up on college from there.

VOCATIONAL SCHOOL IS AN OPTION

I'm a little more positive since I started this story. My editor at L.A. Youth showed me the website careeronestop.org, which gives you information about different careers and which ones are growing. I said I was interested in being an electrician so we searched for information about that career. Some electricians had on-the-job training and a few had associate's (two-year) degrees. The average hourly wage was \$26 an hour. Minimum wage is \$8. That's a huge difference. An electrician seems like a good job. I'm good with my hands and I've always had an interest in technology.

My counselor said I could still get into a four-year college because there are some that accept people all year. I feel like I should take her advice, but even if I get accepted I'm not sure I want to go. I've heard about students who drop out the first year. What if I become one too? It's hard because I don't know if I should go for vocational school or go for college.

I'm confused about what to do but at least I'm more aware of my options. I think people should learn about other options besides four-year college, to have a backup plan. I felt like I was going to end up in a minimum wage job just getting by, but now I see I can find something better. Knowing I have a better plan, I feel the future will be easier.



Ernesto says it's important to plan for your future.

Making the most of community college

I was disappointed to be going to SMC, but getting involved has shown me it has a lot to offer

By Devin Ruiz

19, Santa Monica College

After taking a tour of UC Berkeley at the end of sophomore year, I fell in love with the school and knew it was where I wanted to be. Every student I met on my campus tour was wearing something “Cal” and telling me that this is the college I should go to. I was convinced.

The problem was that my GPA, while good, was nowhere near the 4.0 that I felt I would need to get in. I thought about working extra hard to raise my grades to give myself a slim chance to get accepted, but I had taken only one honors class and one AP class and wasn't very involved in extracurriculars. Then I thought about going to a Cal State for undergrad and going to Berkeley for graduate school. But I knew that would feel like settling and I wouldn't be happy. So I decided to go to a community college for two years and then try to transfer to Berkeley. I figured that community college would be a chance to start over and get better grades so that I could transfer to my dream school.

I went to a private, all-girls Catholic school where the majority of students were smart and had known their dreams schools, like Cal Tech and UC San Diego, since they started freshman year. It was difficult not to compare myself to other girls in my class. When I told my classmates I was going to a community college, I felt embarrassed. One classmate told me I wasn't going to a “real college.”

Although I started to regret that I hadn't tried to get better grades during my freshman and sophomore years, I was motivated to create a plan that would allow me to transfer to a UC in two years. I started by enrolling at Santa Monica College, the community college that has that highest transfer rate to the UCs. Then I promised myself that I would work as hard as possible to get at least a 3.7 GPA (a 3.0 is the minimum GPA needed to transfer to a UC, but I wanted to increase my chances of getting into more competitive schools like Berkeley). I would have to stop procrastinating and start studying a week before the test instead of an hour before.

Two weeks after I graduated, I started my first class. I was nervous that the coursework would be too difficult or that the professor's way of teaching would be drastically different from what I was used to in high school. Since it was a remedial math class it was easy but I braced myself for a harder fall semester. To my surprise, my high school had taught me a lot. The books I

read my freshman year of high school were repeated in my English 1 and 2 courses. I ended my first semester with a 4.0 and was very proud that my plan was working.

My biggest worry during that first year was whether I would be able to get the classes I wanted or needed. I had heard horror stories about people who were only able to enroll in one class and had to try to add others on the first day. But luckily—with the exception of a sociology class that I couldn't get into—I didn't face these problems.

One of the best things about attending a community

college has been the opportunity to take classes that sound interesting. My friends who attend Cal States or UCs restrict themselves to classes they're required to take to graduate or for their majors. They feel that taking a class for fun would make it take longer to graduate, which would make college more expensive. Although the price has increased at SMC—from \$26 to \$36 a unit—I can still afford to take classes just because I am interested in them.

I DISCOVERED AN INTEREST IN FIGHTING FOR EQUALITY

When I enrolled at Santa Monica, I had no idea that I had a passion for women's studies. A friend of mine took women's studies his first year and I was extremely jealous that he called himself a feminist when I didn't know what “feminist” actually meant. I thought it meant equality for women. I took my first women's studies class during the fall of my first year at SMC and I've taken one more since. I've become a full-blown feminist who doesn't just fight for women's rights but the rights of people who suffer from various forms of oppression. I've decided that when I apply to a four-year university I will minor in women's studies.



One day at lunch, Devin and other feminist club members passed out bags with condoms and sexual health information on the SMC quad.

Although I loved being able to choose classes that interested me, I was still worried that going to SMC meant I would miss out on an exciting college life and that the students wouldn't be involved in clubs or care about the school. A teacher I respected in high school had talked down about students who attended community college, saying that they only went because their parents would kick them out if they didn't go.

I went to my classes, got my 3.7 GPA and joined enough clubs to get some community service hours. But I wasn't planning to make lots of friends because I feared that I would become someone who treated SMC like high school and went to class just to socialize. It was easy not to get involved—students in my classes never mentioned on-campus groups. So I became what I was afraid of, the stereotypical community college student who wasn't involved.

I would go to class and hang out with D'arcy, the one friend I met during my summer class. But it was lonely eating by myself and not what I expected from the "college experience." I had imagined college as hanging out between classes with my friends and having group study sessions. And while that happened sometimes, it was nothing like what my friends from high school

told me about their college lives, like staying up until 3 a.m. studying with their roommates. I became Facebook friends with some classmates but we never made plans to hang out outside of school.

I WANTED TO BE MORE INVOLVED

Toward the end of fall semester, I was tired of being alone at school and I decided to learn more about what was happening on campus. D'arcy and I attended Club Row—an event where clubs set up tables on the quad to attract new members. D'arcy, who is a year older than me and transferring to UCLA, told me that the UCs would want more than just a few hours of community service. I signed up for several clubs. But I wasn't sure I would have much to contribute so I didn't go to the meetings and continued to eat lunch alone.

Early in spring semester, the vice president of the feminist club came to my women's studies class to announce their first meeting. The way she passionately talked about the club's goals, I was able to see myself participating. I went to the meeting and learned about how the club wanted to bring better comprehensive reproductive health care to campus. One way they did this was to bring attention to pregnancy centers that target women who have

unplanned pregnancies. On billboards, the clinics advertise "Pregnant? Scared? We can help" and list a phone number. But they don't offer unbiased, medically sound services and often don't tell women about the option of abortion when dealing with an unplanned pregnancy. A woman I work with went to one of these clinics and they gave her literature that said abortion was wrong and led to breast cancer as well as other things that are medically false.

After attending the meeting I was inspired by the students' passion for activism and realized that this was what my college experience had been lacking. I began attending the weekly meetings and after the president had to step down because of work hours, I took over the position.

Since then, we've campaigned to help re-elect U.S. Senator Barbara Boxer and hosted a Domestic Violence Awareness week. We raised awareness of violence against women by having anyone on campus who had something to share write a message on a shirt and hang it on a clothesline on the quad. We hung 67 shirts. People's messages ranged from "Violence never equals love" to personal stories about their experiences with domestic violence and how they survived it. Right now we're working on

getting more comprehensive reproductive health care such as birth control and STD/HIV testing on campus. Along with this, we want to better publicize the days that the Westside Family Health Center is on campus doing educational workshops.

Through my work with this club, I have been able to work with other student leaders and professors. I've become the one who people turn to for advice on how to bring feminism into other school events, such as Earth Week. It's awesome when others recognize you and ask for your help with their club. The Latino Student Union wanted me to represent the feminist club during César Chávez Day. They asked me to talk about Dolores Huerta, who worked closely with Cesar Chavez. I've also been asked to give statements during student rallies against the budget cuts at SMC. Before getting involved, I never knew that community college had such active students.

As California public colleges face extreme budget cuts, it seems like community colleges are being hit especially hard. There have already been tuition increases and there are threats of the cost going up to \$66 a unit. During the time I have been here, it has become more difficult to get classes. Several of my classes, from economics to photography to Spanish, have been overcrowded with 40 additional people trying to add during the first week. The overcrowding can sometimes be distracting.

I'M PROUD THAT WE'RE FIGHTING FOR OUR EDUCATION

SMC canceled its Winter 2011 session (classes that are taught for six weeks between fall and spring semesters), and this upcoming summer session is getting cut in half, and could still be eliminated. Even more frustrating is the fact that while administrators have their minds set on cutting classes, professors and school resources, they are unwilling to hear students' ideas, such as lowering administrators' salaries. But even though I'm worried about how this will affect my education, there has been a positive: students are joining together and I no longer think that the students here are apathetic.

It's been inspiring to see students rally together or travel to Sacramento to protest or meet with the president of SMC. We have realized that we deserve an education without the cost nearly doubling.

At community college, I have been able to build my own network of feminist faculty, staff and students and we have had the opportunity to plan school-wide events—something I thought happened only at "real colleges." I have never regretted my decision to attend SMC. I am really grateful I was given this opportunity to prepare for a four-year school.

WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS AFTER HIGH SCHOOL?



"Joining ROTC in college and enlisting in the military for four years. And after that being a firefighter."

SALVADOR IXTA, 17, GARDENA HS



"I plan on going to a four-year university because my father didn't have the chance to further his education beyond high school. He taught me the importance of attending college and earning a degree so that I can have a career that I truly enjoy and live a stable life."

MARISSA DOI, 17, GLADSTONE HS (COVINA)



"It's either going to college or joining the military because my family's a military family. College, I want to move on further than my parents did in their education. Military, because the nation needs more people to serve."

JOEL ROCIO, 17, GARDENA HS



"I am planning to attend UC Irvine. Along with being a student, I am hoping to have a job so I can provide for myself. I'm also going to try to balance my school and work with an active social life."

MARIAM KHACHATRYAN, 18, GLENDALE HS



Devin says you can have a great "college experience" at community college by getting involved.

The military is my path to nursing

The Army Reserve is going to pay for school so I can become a nurse

By Caitlin Bryan

18, Los Angeles Valley College

I am the youngest of three kids. My dad is the only one who works in my family and he has been struggling to help my brothers pay for college. I knew I would have to find my own way to pay for college, because my dad couldn't afford to help. I signed up for the Army Reserve because it will pay for college and I can study nursing, which I want to do because I get to help people and care for patients. I can finish college first before I'm deployed. And as a nurse I'll be on base and not on the front lines so I'm not worried.

My junior year I learned about the Army ROTC (Reserve Officers Training Corps) scholarship. My friend Nile had applied for it. He said the scholarship would pay for college tuition and provide a monthly living allowance. While going to college you'd also do military training on weekends and in the summer for a week. If there was a war, you wouldn't be called up until after you'd finished school. And you pay the Army back for the scholarship by serving eight years—four years of active duty and four years in the reserves.

I'D NEVER PICTURED MYSELF IN THE MILITARY

If you had asked me three years ago if I would consider the military, I would have said no. I don't like guns. But I thought this would be a really good way to pay for college. And since I'll be a nurse, I don't think I will need to use a gun.

I went to goarmy.com and requested information about the ROTC scholarship. There's a list of colleges that have the ROTC program. I found three schools with accredited nursing programs that I wanted to go to (Texas Christian University, University of Portland and UCLA).

When I talked it over with my dad, he liked that I would become an officer but he wanted me to be sure that this was what I wanted to do.



Caitlin took pictures with her recruiter, Sgt. Zalucki, before her swearing-in ceremony. Photo by Caitlin's mom, Lynn Bryan

When I wasn't accepted to any of those schools, I enrolled at Los Angeles Valley College. Because of overcrowding, I couldn't get all of the classes I needed. It seemed like it would take three to four years until I could transfer to a four-year school. I was frustrated. I felt like it was going to take until I was 30 to become a nurse.

On the third day of school I saw Army recruiters at a table under a tree near the student store. I went up to one of the recruiters and asked about the training that Nile was going through. The recruiter's name was Sgt. Zalucki. I told him I was planning on transferring to college on an ROTC scholarship. He asked me what I was going to study and I told him nursing. He said, "I can help you with that. We can have a meeting with you and your dad and I can tell you about the Army Reserve."

Three weeks later my dad and I met with Zalucki. He gave my dad and me a lot of information about the Reserves. You go through basic training and then you're a soldier. When you get back from basic training, you go back to your job or school. Zalucki said they can't pull

you out of school to be deployed. Similar to ROTC, you train one weekend a month and two weeks in the summer. Your commitment is eight years but in the reserves, you're not the first soldiers to be deployed. You don't go until they need you.

He told me that you're guaranteed admission to participating schools and that the Army will pay for college. My dad asked a lot of questions and looked interested in what Zalucki was saying. He looked like he would be OK with me going into the Reserves.

I made up my mind to join the Army Reserve. I felt like this was the best way to go instead of ROTC, because I can get basic training out of the way and still go into a nursing program. I won't have the stress of trying to transfer and pay for community college. I know my dad is proud of me for going into the Army.

THEY TEST YOU TO MATCH YOU WITH THE RIGHT JOB

Once I made my decision, there was a lot to do. I started filling out the paperwork (it was a lot of paperwork). Then I took the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery test (ASVAB). The test is the military's entrance exam and it helps you figure out what job will be good for you. It tests you on 10 subjects, including general science, vocabulary, reading comprehension, math, auto shop, mechanics and electronics. After I finished, they handed me an envelope with my score. I was nervous to open it. I was literally shaking, but when I looked I wanted to scream. I got a 44 and needed only a 31 to pass.

The next week, I went to the swearing-in ceremony at the Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS) in L.A. I had a physical and signed the contract. Then I was

sworn in. I was really happy. I felt proud and excited about taking this step.

On June 6 I get shipped out to basic training at Fort Jackson in South Carolina. After basic training, I plan to apply to colleges, get into a nursing program and get my degree.

I am happy now that I'm in the Army, and that I have my dad's support. My grandfather, aunt and uncle were all in the military. I'm proud that I'm following them.



Caitlin is looking forward to being mentally and physically challenged during basic training.



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When school is out, L.A. Youth's teen staff doesn't stop working. Go to our Facebook page this summer to find out about new stories, polls and reviews of the latest movies. Look for our photo contests found only on Facebook. You can win money!



This photo won our Summer Fun Facebook photo contest last year.
Photo by Charlene Lee, Walnut HS

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Art on every

By Victor Beteta
17, University HS

I went to Art Walk in April with some L.A. Youth writers and the editors. Art Walk is a free event held downtown on the second Thursday of every month. It showcases local artists. I wanted to go because I really like looking at art. I was surprised to see how many galleries are downtown. There were small galleries everywhere and artists outside creating art in the streets. It was nice to see new and different art that's not found in museums. We got there at 6 p.m. As it got later, more and more people started to fill the streets, and it felt like everyone was excited to be there. There were bands and DJs. It was fun and I want to go again.

Most of the galleries have contemporary art, and many featured street art. Most street artists do graffiti-style art using aerosol cans and markers, but there were a few who were making sculptures. Street artists often showcase social issues. At the Crewest Gallery, there was a box of cigarettes labeled "Facebook." I thought that the artist was comparing the addictiveness and dangers of Facebook to that of smoking cigarettes. At the Cotrutza Gallery there were drawings by an artist named Claudia French dealing with pregnancy and abortion. The images were so strong that I couldn't look at them for too long without feeling a knot in my throat. The drawings were simple but they expressed a feeling of sorrow.

Meeting artists is a rare opportunity but at Art Walk, a lot of the artists are at the galleries; some might be even working on their art. There was a



Victor says Art Walk is more fun than going to a museum.

woman named Laura Leon spray-painting a portrait. She told me she'd taken a picture of her friend and used a projector to make a stencil. She said she started with the stencil and added colors. I never thought of

using a projector to make a stencil. Now if I find a projector I can make my own stencils. It sounded easier than doing it in Photoshop. I told her that I really liked her painting.

When we got hungry we found a parking lot filled with food trucks. I got food at the dumpling truck but the variety of food included Indian, Mexican, Korean and grilled cheese sandwiches. I tried fries I'd never had before—they had a garlic flavor and for those more daring you could order them with spicy wasabi mayonnaise. It cost \$10 for eight dumplings, fries and a drink.

If you go, try to get there around 6 p.m. before the galleries get busy so you'll have more time to check out different galleries. You can go without any money by eating before getting there and sampling the food and drinks. If you bring \$20 you can eat and get a souvenir. A lot of the original artwork is expensive but many artists sold prints for about \$10, so you could always go home with something.

Photos by Victor Beteta, 17, University HS and Elizabeth Vidar, 17, North Hollywood HS Zoo Magnet



1



3



2



corner

Art Walk is a free event held on the second Thursday of every month in downtown Los Angeles. Galleries are open from noon to 9 p.m, but most people get there after 6 p.m. The galleries are mainly on Spring and Main streets between 2nd and 9th streets. There are parking lots that charge between \$5 and \$15. It's also near bus stops and the Pershing Square station on the Red Line. For more information and to find out when the next Art Walk is, go to www.downtownartwalk.org.

At **Art Walk**, I got to explore downtown and cool galleries



1. Besides art, you can also find jewelry and clothing for sale. **2.** Victor felt like he could almost hear the music as he looked at this jazz-inspired painting. **3.** Some people might think the pile of cookies by artist Devon Paulson was a waste, but it made Victor think. **4.** Victor liked seeing the large photographs at the Los Angeles Center for Digital Art.



They're all I have

Foster care split up me and my siblings, but now I'm so happy that we're together again

Author's name withheld*

When I was 6, my brothers and sister and I went to live with my aunt because my mom used drugs. I was happy when my aunt took us all in because we could be together. There are five of us and we always took care of each other because our mom couldn't.

At first Aunt Charlotte was nice to us all—my older brothers Tyler and Roland, my little sister Alicia, my little brother Christopher and me. For our first Christmas and birthdays with her, she bought me and my sister Barbie dolls and my brothers a basketball and all of us bikes and scooters.

But after about six months, for some reason that I still don't know, she stopped being nice. If things didn't go Aunt Charlotte's way, she would yell at us and hit us. We'd get whoopings if she thought our facial expressions were disrespectful (even if we weren't trying to be), if we didn't eat all of our food or if we didn't flush the toilet. She'd say, "Who didn't flush the toilet?" None of us would say anything, but my big brother Tyler, who is three years older than me, would say, "I did it." Even though he hadn't, he'd take the whooping for us.

Tyler was always taking care of us. No matter whose turn it was to clean the bathroom or the kitchen, Tyler would help and most of the time he'd even clean for us.

I tried to be like Tyler and keep an eye on my younger siblings. Christopher struggled with his grades. I protected him by sometimes lying to Aunt Charlotte and telling her he was doing OK in school. This kept him from having to stand in the corner for hours by himself and getting another whooping. If Alicia got hit I would try to cheer her up by doing a silly dance in our bedroom just to make her laugh. I didn't want her to feel sad, because whenever she was sad, I felt sad with her. I wanted her to know that she has someone who loves and cares about her.

When I was around my brothers and sisters, I could joke around without worrying about getting in trouble, but I was quiet around Aunt Charlotte to save myself from the abuse. Aunt Charlotte would call me ugly and talk about my dark skin and short hair. I was almost always scared.

She would threaten us, "If any of you tell on me they will split you all up." She made it seem like we wouldn't see each other again until we were grown. She told us

** We are not publishing the writer's name to protect her family's privacy. All names have been changed.*



Illustration by Amy Fan, 17, Temple City HS

no one would want to take in five foster kids. I believed her because raising five kids is hard work. My siblings and I were too afraid to tell anyone about the abuse.

ON WEEKENDS, WE GOT AWAY FROM THE ABUSE

But on weekends we could just be kids and have fun. We'd go to a church member's house and we would play tag and jump rope together. One game we'd play was "Sir, yes sir!" One of my older brothers would be in charge and tell the rest of us what to do. He would

say, "Give me a lap!" We'd say, "Sir, yes sir!" and run around the front yard. You weren't allowed to laugh, and if you did, you'd get penalized with an extra lap or push-ups. It was hard not to laugh because he'd deepen his voice to try to sound older.

When I was 11 years old, our church mom wanted to take all of us in and told us to ask Aunt Charlotte if we could live with her instead. People at church knew my Aunt Charlotte was very strict, and looking back, I think our church mom suspected something was

wrong. My sister and I were afraid to ask Aunt Charlotte because we knew she'd get mad and say no. But we thought that if our church mom knew about the abuse we wouldn't need to get Aunt Charlotte's permission to move. So a few weeks later my sister and I told our church mom about the abuse. After we finished telling her she started crying and hugged us. It felt good that there was someone who wanted us to be happy and safe.

My church mom called the Department of Children and Family Services and reported the abuse, but when the social workers asked us if Aunt Charlotte hit us, we lied and said that she didn't. We were so scared about how Aunt Charlotte might react and that we would be separated that we couldn't tell the truth.

One day during school a few months later, Alicia, Christopher and I were called out of class. When we got to the office our social worker was there and said, "You're coming with me." I was happy that we would finally be moving but I was crying because I didn't know where I was going to go. I had no idea why our social worker came that day, but looking back, my guess is that our church mom called the foster care system again.

The social worker brought us to her office. My brother Roland had packed up clothes for all of us and the social worker brought him and Tyler to the office. We lived in a temporary foster home for three months while the system looked for family members who would let us live with them.

A couple of months later, my uncle surprised me by saying, "You're moving in with me." I said, "Oh my god, for real?!" I was super happy. I smiled while I packed that night and kept thinking about getting to talk with my brothers every day and finding out who they're dating and how they're doing in school—stuff a sister should know.

My Uncle George took my three brothers in and my Auntie Tanya took me and Alicia in. It was good that we were with family but it sucked that I wasn't going to be able to see my brothers all the time. They lived in South L.A. and we lived about an hour away in North Hollywood. The system separated us because they wanted the girls to live with a woman and the boys to live with a man.

I'd see my brothers when my uncle would come and get my sister and me for the weekend. I didn't

feel as close to them seeing them only twice a month. I missed talking to them about what was going on in our lives. I missed walking to school with Christopher. I didn't know what they were doing or if they had friends or girlfriends. Most days I didn't even know if they were happy.

I didn't get along with Aunt Tanya because she's a neat freak. My sister and I shared a closet and would stack our folded clothes on the floor. That would make Aunt Tanya mad. She didn't want to see any clothes on the floor ever. She would say, "If you guys want to stay with me you're going to have to clean up after yourselves. I can't live in a dirty home." But my sister and I thought our room was clean.

I CALLED MY BROTHERS WHEN I NEEDED THEM

When I'd get into a fight with my aunt and needed someone to cheer me up I would call Tyler or Roland. Roland would say, "Don't talk back to her and do what she says." I thought it was good advice because it would stop the argument.

She decided to give us up a year later because she said we were giving her a hard time. I was kind of glad to leave, but I didn't know where Alicia and I would go. I wanted to move in with my uncle but I didn't know if that was possible. I also worried that Alicia and I would be moved farther away and see our brothers even less.

Alicia and I moved in with Uncle George temporarily while the foster care system tried to find us another

woman to live with. I was happy that I would be able to spend more time with my brothers, but sad that it wasn't going to last long.

While we were living with Uncle George, he took us to Hawaii. It was amazing. I got on a plane for the first time. I'm scared of heights, but it was super cool to see the clouds up close. It was fun to spend time with my siblings away from everybody else. Hawaii has the clearest and bluest water and the beach is so clean. We went snorkeling. That was scary because we

were in the ocean and I'm not a good swimmer. But it was fun and I felt safe because Alicia let me hold on to her and I was wearing a life jacket. We also went to a luau (a traditional Hawaiian feast on the beach). Every day we would tell Uncle George, "Thank you for taking us on this trip."

When we got back to California my social worker found a wonderful lady, Shonda, for me and my sister to live with. Shonda lived in Watts, about a 10-minute drive from my uncle's house, so we got to see my brothers almost every weekend.

After about nine months with Shonda, when I was 14 years old, my uncle told me and Alicia that he was getting a room ready for us to move in soon, but he didn't know exactly when. I was so excited that I would finally get to live with my brothers again.

A couple months later when he picked us up for a weekend visit he surprised me by saying, "You're moving in with me." I said, "Oh my god, for real?!" I was super happy. I smiled while I packed that night and kept thinking about getting to talk with my brothers every day and finding out who they're dating and how they're doing in school—stuff a sister should know.

WE SHARE RAP BATTLES AND ROAD TRIPS

Living with my uncle has been amazing. My brothers and sister and I have been able to share the important moments. When my boyfriend in eighth grade cheated on me and dumped me, my brothers said not to cry over that guy, because I would find someone better. And Christopher and I have dance and rap battles during the holidays with Alicia as judge.

My uncle likes to travel and he took us to the Grand Canyon our first summer with him. He takes us to San Diego and in 2009 we visited San Francisco when we took my brother Roland to college in northern California. Everyone tried not to be the first one to fall asleep during car rides, because whoever did would get a wet willie, which is when someone licks their finger and sticks it in your ear while you're sleeping. Christopher got the first one on the way to San Francisco, and I got one, too. It was disgusting, but I'll always remember those wet willies.

We also go to church and the movies and lots of family events with our uncle. My uncle's family meets up on Thanksgiving and Christmas and Easter. We all go to Aunt Lena's house and she cooks a lot of the food. In the morning or the night before, Alicia and I help my uncle make enchiladas or sweet macaroni and cheese so we can bring it to the gathering. The family eats, plays cards and dominoes, and catches up. I'm happy because I'm around people who show my siblings and me love.

I understand why the foster care system separated my brothers from me and Alicia. They were trying to place us with adult family members. But they didn't realize that staying together was even more important to us than staying with relatives. Ever since we were young and lived with our mom, we've been the only ones we could count on to take care of each other. I feel blessed that I was reunited with my brothers. We've been living together for four years in a loving home. I finally have what I've always wanted.

Calling all foster youth in Los Angeles County

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

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

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

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



Editor Amanda Riddle (left) works with Sally on her story.
At left are some of the foster youth stories we've published.



Contact Editor Amanda Riddle at
(323) 938-9194
or ariddle@layouth.com

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

Got questions?

Go to layouth.com and click on the
Foster Youth link to learn more and read
stories written by foster youth.

A new state flag

CONGRATULATIONS TO the winners of our annual art contest, which asked teens to create a new flag for California. The L.A. Youth staff chose these images as the winners. The California flag has a bear and star on it with the words "California Republic." We asked teens to create their own state flag to show what California means to them, since there are so many things that make the state unique and everyone has different things they love about it. The first-place winner received \$75 and the second- and third-place winners received \$50. Please go to layouth.com to see additional artwork that won honorable mention.



FIRST PLACE

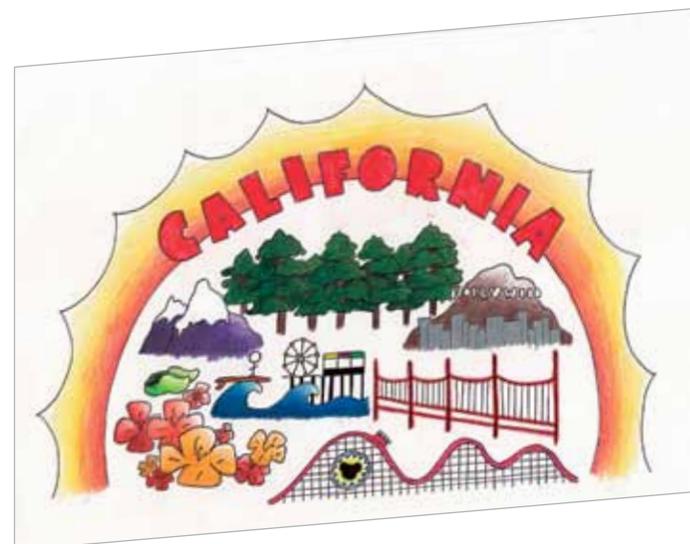
Stephanie Wong, 15, Temple City HS
Teacher: Diane Chang-Ho

"Part of the flag is white because I feel like California is really peaceful, for example they're really accepting of gay people. Green is for the agriculture. The gold represents the gold rush and how warm California is. And the star represents Sacramento. The black font and capital letters make California look strong."



SECOND PLACE

Izabel Warzhapetian, 14,
Sherman Oaks Center for Enriched Studies
Teacher: Patricia Torres-McLeod



THIRD PLACE

Lynn Tran, 17, Sherman Oaks Center for Enriched Studies
Teacher: Patricia Torres-McLeod

California flag image by flags-to-print.com

THIS SCHOOL YEAR students from Crenshaw, Manual Arts, Roosevelt, Wilson and Locke high schools worked with graduate students from UCLA to examine the quality of their education. They learned how to research and also interviewed students, teachers and administrators about problems at their schools and how they thought things could be improved. The students presented their findings to their schools and even at a national education conference in New Orleans, L.A. Youth liked how the students on the Council of Youth Research were demanding a better education, and we wanted to share what two of them learned. Go to layout.com to read Jaqui Herrera's story about how students are taught at Manual Arts compared to wealthier schools.

By Bernardo Torres

17, Crenshaw HS

I always thought I was receiving a high-quality education, until I joined the Council of Youth Research in the summer of 2009. I joined because some of my favorite 10th grade teachers were in danger of being laid off and I felt like joining the council was a way to speak up for Crenshaw students and the teachers who genuinely care for us.

Being on the council was challenging that first summer because we were doing college-level reading and research. But once I caught up, I liked how it was nothing like regular classwork. We worked in groups and I enjoyed the college environment at UCLA. Last year we studied how the

economic crisis affects students' education and ability to go to college. This year we focused on the availability of resources like books, computers and counselors.

After interviewing and surveying more than 1,000 students, our group learned that Crenshaw students don't have access to updated technology. The majority of our computers at Crenshaw are still running Windows XP, which was created in 2001. Also, teachers don't assign work that requires students to use computers in the classroom, instead they teach only from textbooks. Out of seven classes I'm taking this semester, I've had to use computers in only two classes. In math class we researched statistics and in my English class we had to find information to support a persuasive essay. This affects my classmates and me because we need to know how to use the latest technology to succeed in college and once we have jobs. Teachers can help by requiring us to type our reports or assigning more research projects. Research projects are important because you learn to tell the difference between a trusted Internet source and an unreliable Internet source.

Another problem we came across was that our textbooks are not culturally relevant. One day my classmate and I were going through our algebra book and we noticed that all the word problems were related to factory jobs. Instead, books should have word problems about jobs like engineering that reflect the high expectations everyone should have for all students, even urban students. And our history books teach mostly about European people and refer to people of color as immigrants and/or slaves. This makes students like me feel like we're not important. And it leads to us not knowing about our own cultures. My parents shouldn't have to teach me about the Mexican Revolution or people like Emiliano Zapata, a leader in the Mexican Revolution. My African American and Latino classmates and I want to know our history!

Through our research we learned that one of the biggest obstacles schools face in providing an excellent education is the unequal distribution of resources. During our summer research we went to Beverly Hills High School

and noticed that they have a whole science building filled with materials like models and dead animals for dissections. Crenshaw has just one science floor and is always short on materials. In my chemistry class, we had to take turns doing labs because there weren't enough materials for everyone to do the labs at the same time.

When our principal saw a presentation about our findings, she just congratulated us. At the time I felt like she did that because she felt challenged by our demands for better technology and more relevant curriculum. The following week though, she sent two of us a card saying we made her proud and that she would try her best to give us access to better technology. However, that was all that happened; we still use the same old computers.

A TEACHER LISTENED TO OUR IDEAS

On the other hand, my English teacher attended our presentations and I've noticed that he started assigning research papers that must be typed and require research on the Internet. I asked him why he changed and he said that he had always felt that he should require us to use computers more, but our presentation gave him a push. Students say they like the idea of using technology to make the class more interesting.

The most important lesson I've learned by participating in the Council of Youth Research is to fight for what you believe in or what you deserve, even when people don't take you seriously.



Bernardo says schools need modern technology because students need to know how to use it in college.



Illustration by Lily Clark, 17, Immaculate Heart HS

Have you gotten your shot yet?

You can't start school this fall until you get the vaccine for whooping cough

By Ha Young Kwen

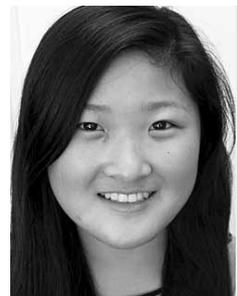
16, Wilson HS (Hacienda Heights)

Did you know that you need to get a shot or else you can't go to school this fall? A new state law requires seventh through 12th graders to get a booster shot to protect them from whooping cough. I got my shot a few months ago when my doctor told me to come in to get the whooping cough booster. It took only a few seconds for my doctor to put the needle in my shoulder and take it out. It didn't hurt that much. It felt like a pinch.

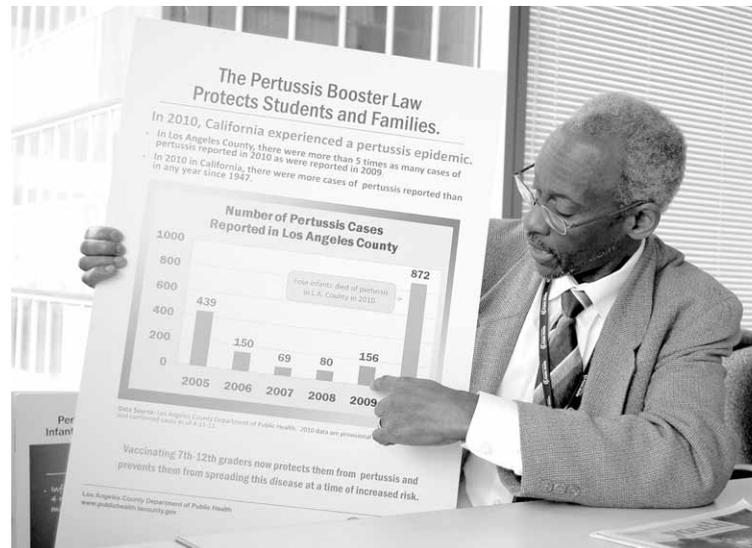
I was curious about the new law so I interviewed Dr. Alvin Nelson El Amin from the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health. He told me that there's an epidemic of whooping cough going around right now. Already 10 infants have died of this disease in California. Only 50 percent of teens have gotten the whooping cough vaccine. Since it's so dangerous to infants it was surprising that so many people haven't gotten the vaccine. I'm glad I got the shot so I can go to school without worrying that I'll get the virus and spread it to others. It seems horrible to be coughing for a minute straight. Since whooping cough lasts for several weeks, I don't want to miss school and have to make up all that homework.

Below are my answers to common questions about the whooping cough requirement based on my interview with Dr. Nelson El Amin and information from the public health department.

What is the new whooping cough requirement? Students entering grades seven through 12 in both public and private schools need to have a booster shot to protect against whooping cough, also known as pertussis. "Get it done as soon as possible," said Dr. Nelson El Amin, the medical director of the county's immunization program.



After doing this interview, Ha Young told all her friends to get the whooping cough shot so they can be safe and go to school in the fall.



Dr. Nelson El Amin from the county Department of Public Health explains that the number of whooping cough cases has increased dramatically in California.

Why was the law passed? In 2010, California had more cases of pertussis reported than in any year since 1947, including 10 deaths, all infants. There were 922 cases in Los Angeles County, more than five times as many as in 2009. Even though it was always recommended that pre-teens and teens be given this booster shot, only a little more than 50 percent have received the vaccine. Since we're having an epidemic, it needs to get much higher than 50 percent to prevent further cases. Whooping cough "can be devastating in a school setting" because of all the close contact, Dr. Nelson El Amin said. It's very contagious. Someone who is in the same classroom for an hour with someone who has whooping cough is more likely to get it if they're not immunized.

What is whooping cough? It's an intense cough that can last for a minute. You first get cold-like symptoms, like a runny nose, stuffy nose and sneezing. Then you start coughing, and then develop the intense cough. Since you don't get a lot of air in your lungs, when you finish coughing you take a deep breath and make a whooping sound. That's where the name comes from. You may vomit, and the violent coughing can lead to

rib fractures and passing out. It can last four to eight weeks, which means students staying out of school for a long period of time. It can also be deadly for infants.

What is the name of the shot? It's called Tdap. It's a booster vaccine for three diseases: tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis. You only need one dose, you don't need it every year.

What's the difference between a vaccine and a booster shot? A booster shot is the same thing as a vaccine. It's called a booster because it's boosting the immunization from the vaccine that you got as a child. Children get vaccinated for whooping cough as an infant and they get vaccinated again before starting school. The protection starts wearing off at 11 to 12 years of age so they need to get it again.

Why is the vaccination required only for seventh to 12th graders? Isn't everyone vulnerable? The whooping cough vaccine is recommended for adults, especially if they're going to be around children. The 10 infants who died from whooping cough probably got it from a sibling or mothers who weren't protected.

What does a student need to do after getting the vaccine?

Because we are in an epidemic, the rules are stricter. They need to bring paperwork to school that specifies that they have received the Tdap vaccine. They

will be sent home if they show up to school and don't have proof.

Can students choose not to get the vaccine? Yes, if they have a note from their doctor that says they're allergic to the vaccine or for some other medical reason. Also, in California we have the personal beliefs exemption for religious reasons. Schools have copies of the form but parents shouldn't use it for convenience. A lot of times parents don't know they're putting their child and school at risk by not getting them vaccinated.

Where can we get the vaccine? Your doctor should have them. For people without health insurance, there are free or low-cost health clinics. Call 211 or go to www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/ip to find a clinic near you. Call first to make an appointment.

Besides the vaccine, what else can students do to prevent getting whooping cough? Ask people to cover their cough because you don't know what they have. Learn the cough etiquette, which is cover your cough inside your elbow. Stay home if you have a bad cough. Wash your hands often.

I wish I were thinner

Trying to lose weight the unhealthy way didn't work

By **Merryck Dickerson**

16, *Pacifica Christian HS (Santa Monica)*

“Do I look fat in this?” I asked my mom as I tried on my piano recital dress. It was red, with a big bow on the front, in a baby doll style where the skirt puffs out. I was 14 years old. “Of course not,” she said. I rolled my eyes knowing that she was just trying to make me feel good.

Looking back, “fat” is the last word I would have used to describe myself, but back then I looked in the mirror and saw bulges. When I put on jeans I felt like my fat was trying to break free. I was 5-foot-6 and 127 pounds and my doctor told me I was healthy. He said I weighed a little more than my classmates because I was taller than them. But when I looked at the gorgeous women on America’s Next Top Model who were taller and thinner than me, I felt chunky.

My older sister has always been thin and she models a little. I wanted to look like her. It seemed like she could eat anything, not exercise and stay the same weight. My mom would constantly remind me how beautiful I was, but when I looked at my 48-year-old mother, all I saw was how beautiful she was. My mother and I could wear the same jeans and tops so most people called us “twins.” I know my mom felt great that people compared her to a teenager, but I didn’t like that our bodies were so similar.

I WANTED TO LOOK LIKE THE POPULAR GIRLS

In eighth grade, I started at a new school and didn’t know anyone. At my old all-girls school I would just put on my uniform skirt and shirt and head to school, not trying to impress anyone. At my new school, girls wore tons of makeup and wore their skirts way higher than my old Catholic-school limit. The prettiest girls were the cheerleaders with long blond hair and small waists. They sat with each other at lunch, always laughing and wearing their uniforms. I felt like they would like me if I were as skinny as them.

I complained to my parents that I didn’t like my new school, but after a few months I realized that they weren’t going to let me transfer. So I stopped complaining, kept my problems to myself and decided I would try to make people look at me the way I looked at them. That meant losing weight.

My first step was working out. To lose weight, I played a sport each season—volleyball, soccer and basketball—and worked my butt off to stay fit. I’d be the one who wanted to practice twice a day. I’d also do 30 sit-ups every day. And three or four days a week I’d run on the treadmill for 45 minutes to an hour. I would do this even after I had my hour-long practice.

Exercising made me feel strong and healthy, but when I sat down I hated the way my thighs expanded on the



Illustration by Vicky Chen, 15, Walnut HS

chair. I’d ask my mom “How do I look?” She would tell me, “Well you look nice, but if you want to lose weight then just eat the way I do.” Her diet didn’t allow her to eat flour or foods with artificial sweetener or added sugar. This meant no cake, cookies or even some Starbucks drinks. I thought that was so extreme. I’d be embarrassed if I was on the same diet as my mom. I didn’t think 14-year-olds went on diets.

In December I started skipping meals. My mom would ask me why I was eating less. I’d say I wasn’t that hungry. On weekends my mom made big breakfasts with waffles, bacon, eggs and potatoes, and I had to eat them. Those days I would skip lunch and for dinner I

would put smaller portions on my plate. Once I went to Johnny Rockets with a friend. I ordered fries, which I didn’t even finish, and water. She ordered a chili burger and a root beer float. She said, “This is too big, do you want some?” I replied, “No, I’m good,” but secretly I did because I was really hungry.

I began to get headaches. Sometimes I’d get woozy during soccer practice. I was always hungry and always thinking about my favorite foods like pizza and pasta. I even ate ice and imagined it was food. I thought that eventually I’d lose weight and have the body I wanted and everyone would say, “Whoa, she looks really good.”

After a few weeks, my mom would ask me why I was

losing my appetite. I'd shrug and say that I wasn't hungry or that I had decided to eat healthier. Then I would try to change the subject quickly so she wouldn't suspect anything. Even with smaller portions, I still ended up just moving the food around on my plate. When I talk to my mom about this today, she says she always knew something was wrong. She called it a "mother's intuition."

By Christmas break I'd lost only two or three pounds and I didn't look any different. How was I supposed to lose weight? I used to think that puking away the weight was disgusting, but since nothing else was working I was ready to try it.

One day in January, my mom made a delicious meal with bow-tie pasta in cheesy cream sauce with small chunks of lobster and shrimp. I ate two bowls of pasta until I felt stuffed, a feeling I immediately wanted to go away.

When I finished I ran downstairs to the bathroom, got on my knees and forced myself to throw up into the toilet until I felt empty inside. I thought I would feel better, but instead I felt weak and disgusting. I wiped my mouth and sat on the cold tile floor and laid my head against the wall. My throat stung from the stomach acid and I felt very cold. My hands were shaking and I started coughing and trying to catch my breath. The worst part was that I knew what I was doing was wrong.

When I was around 9 or 10, my mom was a nurse and she used to go to group homes where girls with eating disorders got treatment. The girls had anorexia (when you starve yourself) and bulimia (when you throw up after you eat). Sometimes I joined my mom when she went there to give the girls their medications.

MY MOM HAD TOLD ME HOW DANGEROUS EATING DISORDERS WERE

My mom explained how harmful starvation and purging can be to your body. Your teeth could rot from

When I finished the meal I ran downstairs to the bathroom, got on my knees and forced myself to throw up. I thought I would feel better, but instead I felt weak and disgusting.

the excessive vomiting. It can cause you to feel very faint from the lack of nutrients, and you can die. The girls in these houses had luckily been sent there to get help before their disorders became fatal. She also said that most people who have eating disorders have them because it gives them a sense of control. I knew so much about eating disorders, but somehow I was sucked into this illusion that I didn't look good enough.

But knowing all that information about eating disorders didn't stop me from throwing up. I came up with ways to excuse myself from meals without being caught. At restaurants I'd go to the bathroom when everyone was too caught up in their conversations. If someone

WHERE TO TURN

If you think you have an eating disorder, you can get help. Check out these websites for information and referrals to treatment centers and support groups.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ANOREXIA NERVOSA AND ASSOCIATED DISORDERS

www.anad.org
(630) 577-1330 or anadhelp@anad.org

NATIONAL EATING DISORDERS ASSOCIATION

www.nationaleatingdisorders.org
(800) 931-2237

SOMETHING FISHY WEBSITE ON EATING DISORDERS

www.something-fishy.org

was in the bathroom, I'd wait until she left.

Puking left me hungry, tired and lightheaded. At this point I was eating only dinner and a snack every day and sometimes I threw up after my dinner. When the headaches were unbearable, I would have another snack that I wouldn't throw up. This would include a small bag of chips or something else unhealthy, which probably contributed to me not losing much weight.

I couldn't talk about this with anyone, even though I wanted to. I thought people would think that I was taking the easy way out by puking up my food instead of using a healthy diet and exercise to lose weight.

That February after I'd lost a total of four pounds, I

finally got the guts to tell a friend. I wanted to know if I was the only one who was so insecure. When I told my friend, she looked at me shocked, but then turned her head as if trying to avoid eye contact. I felt like I had uncovered a secret about her as well. She told me that she used to have an eating disorder, and she didn't lose much weight either. I was surprised that she was telling me this. At this point, I was relieved that I wasn't the only one who felt like this and I realized how alike we were. We had the same body shape and played the same sports and people even thought we looked alike. After she told me, she looked ashamed of herself and sad that I was doing the same thing.

"It's something that a lot of girls think about and try, but in the end it doesn't really work," she said. I expected her to lecture me about how wrong it was, and how much damage it could do to my body, but she didn't. "I know you're not going to listen to me, but you should know that it doesn't work and it's just going to make you feel sicker." I thought she was probably right, but I couldn't stop for a few more weeks.

One day in March, after having lost only about six pounds, I looked in the mirror. I looked really tired. My eyes felt heavy and I always wanted to sleep. I felt ashamed. I didn't recognize the worn out young lady who had lost all the sparkle in her eyes. I knew then that nothing was worth looking like this.

I thought about what my friend had said and told myself that I needed to learn to be happy with who I am. I was making myself sick. If I kept not eating and got worse, my mom could find out and I could end up in the hospital. I didn't want to end up like one of those girls in the group home who my mom used to give medication to.

I'M WORKING ON LIKING MY BODY AS IT IS

It wasn't very hard to start eating again. I ordered my much-missed onion rings and a root beer float when I went out to eat. I didn't worry about how I would get rid of the carbs I had just eaten. On some occasions, I would eat a nice cheesy slice of pizza and then go into the bathroom and look in the mirror. But now when I did this, I stopped zooming in on my imperfections. "I am beautiful on the inside and outside," I thought. Whether I believed this or not was not the point. I had to keep saying it to myself, to make myself believe. It served as a reminder and eventually helped my self-esteem.

Today I am hard on myself about things like school and sports, and I focus much less on my weight. I still see skinny model-like girls and envy them. But while I think it's natural for me to want something I don't have, I no longer let my envy drive me to starve myself. In the end the only thing that matters is how I feel about myself and I care less and less about people who might not accept me.

But this isn't one of those stories where suddenly I thought I had the perfect body. I still try on clothes and don't always like how I look. Sometimes, I still see love handles but I remember that everyone has imperfections. Sometimes I have to tell myself to eat all my food or eat three meals a day. Deep down, I occasionally want to slip back into my old ways or I feel guilty about eating something like a hamburger, but I tell myself that starving myself is out of the question.



Merryck now enjoys her favorite Italian foods and never turns down her mom's cupcakes.

ESSAY CONTEST WINNERS

My summer wish list

FIRST PLACE \$50

Going to a Bieber concert

By **Tatyanna Diggs***Birmingham Community Charter HS (Van Nuys)*

I want to be one of the screaming girls. Screaming for an encore. The most important event on my summer wish list is going to a Justin Bieber concert.

I have never in my life been to any concert and it would be an honor if my first was Justin Bieber's. I want to be able to meet him, hug him, touch him and even take pictures with him.

I have entered many online contests to attend a Justin Bieber concert, but have never won. Now I am praying that the recent contest I entered will be the one I win. My friend told me that he was going to take me to a Justin Bieber concert, but with my friend I never know. My heart is set on attending a Justin Bieber concert.

I actually believe I would "die" if I never got the chance to meet him. I need to. I have to. I can't continue to live unless I do. I have dreams about meeting him and I always think that I am going to be calm and cool and that I am not going to cry—just be friendly. But I know I'm going to be one of those crazed fans, only screaming and crying.

Justin Bieber is my "drug." I am like one of those alcoholics who if one day they have no alcohol, they go crazy, but with me it's with Justin Bieber's music. If I don't listen to it every day, I go crazy. I have all of his songs on my iPod and if I don't hear his voice every day, I'm nuts. He's my drug. He's my air. Without him I can't live.

I really hope that after this summer, I can finally check "Go to a Justin Bieber concert" off my list of things to do. I have so much that I want to do and I know that this one is the most important.



Tatyanna's room is full of Justin Bieber posters. Photo by Tatyanna's mom, Nancy Solorzano

WHAT OUR READERS WOULD LOVE TO DO THIS SUMMER

As we selected the winners of our essay contest, we noticed that our readers shared some of the same ideas of what they'd love to do this summer. These are the most common responses from among the 75 essays we received.

I wish I could...

- Go to an amusement park
- Hang out with friends
- Visit another country (including Italy, Ireland and Brazil)
- See family (including a half brother, a father, an uncle in Chicago and family in Utah, Mexico, Peru and San Francisco)
- Go camping

2ND PLACE \$30

Visiting my family in El Salvador

By Paola Aparicio

Birmingham Community Charter HS

There are so many things I would love to do this summer. A lot of exciting things, like skydiving or climbing the highest mountain. But at the top of my list is something very special to me. I would love to spend my vacation with my family in El Salvador.

It's been a long time since I was back in El Salvador. The last time I went, I was in third grade, six years ago! I love it over there, it feels right. It feels like home. All my cousins live there. My aunts, uncles and my grandpa and grandma. There are so many things to do with so much

family around. The possibilities are endless.

One thing I really want to do is go to the beaches. I'm not really into beaches, but the beaches are just beautiful in El Salvador. The water is just the right temperature, nice and warm. The sand is full of tons and tons of starfish. I love chasing crabs around after the sun goes down. It makes the beach that much more fun. You can't do all of that in L.A.

There's so much sightseeing in El Salvador and I would love to see it all, but that's not my main purpose for wanting to go to El Salvador. Don't get me wrong, I would love to go out and all, but I really would like to spend time with my grandpa. I love my grandpa so much and he's getting old so fast. I'm scared to think about all the things that could happen to him. So before anything does happen, I want to spend time with him—sit and talk and reminisce about the old times.

So between all the fun things I could do, I will always choose family. My grandpa means a lot to me and if I had one wish for summer, it would be to go to El Salvador and spend time with my grandpa. That would be a summer well spent.

3RD PLACE \$20

We'd have so much fun sneaking out

By Xyvil Dapal

Alexander Fleming MS (Lomita)

Imagine a cool summer night. You're laying in your bed, happily texting your BFF. Then, a brilliant idea pops into your mind. "Hey,

U wanna sneak out 2nite?"

My number one summer wish is to sneak out with my best friend. We would do all kinds of things, but the first thing we'd do is go to the park. We would lie down on the grass and stargaze. I would amaze my friend with my knowledge of the constellations. We would have a deep talk. There are only us two, no one else.

After the park, we would walk around. We would go to a restaurant and pig out on french fries, burgers, shakes, etc. We would talk as we stuffed ourselves.

During this sneak out, we would take massive amounts of pictures. They would be the perfect memories of that night. My BFF and I would take as many goofy pictures as we want.

A sneak out would be on the top of my summer wish list. Just think about the suspense all throughout the night. Think of all the laughs. A sneak out would be so fun!

NEW ESSAY CONTEST

What's the best present you've gotten?

Some of the best presents aren't the most expensive. The best gifts are usually the ones you really wanted or are the most thoughtful or come from someone special.

We want to know, what's the best present you've gotten? Maybe it was a birthday or Christmas present, or something unexpected. Maybe the

person spent money on it or maybe it cost nothing at all. It could be store bought or homemade. Tell us what the gift was and why it meant so much to you. Why was it the best present you've gotten?



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 September 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 editor@layouth.com

DEADLINE:

Friday, June 24, 2011

I'm not down with downloading

I stopped stealing music when I realized it hurts the artists I love

By Christian Santiago
17, University HS

Last month I was at a music festival at USC. My friends and I were really hyped up about the L.A. indie band Abe Vigoda. As we were waiting for their set to begin, I asked my friends if they had bought any of Abe Vigoda's albums. All three of them said no, that they download music off a file-sharing site. My friend Byanca said, "I don't want to waste my money on music." I was surprised that they hadn't paid for Abe Vigoda's music because they're big fans. Carla was even wearing an Abe Vigoda shirt. If you're a fan of an artist, you should support them by buying their music.

Teens download illegally because it's easy and free. They don't think it's a big deal because all their friends do it. I used to download music illegally too, but I've realized that it's wrong. People don't think about it, but you're actually stealing when you download illegally. It would be as if you ran into a store and stole a bunch of albums. I think everyone should purchase their music legally. When you download illegally, you're being selfish and you're hurting the artist.

I DIDN'T HAVE MONEY FOR EVERYTHING I WANTED

When I was in 10th grade I started downloading music illegally because I didn't feel like paying for it anymore. There were other things I wanted to buy instead, like video games.

The first album I downloaded was by the pop singer Santigold. After that I went on a downloading spree. Over the next year I downloaded about 2,000 songs. I wasn't worried about getting sued because I didn't hear any recent stories on the news about record companies filing lawsuits. When a new album came out, I would go online and download it for free. If I liked it I kept it, if I



Christian used to download music illegally but now he likes supporting artists by buying their music.

didn't I would just delete it. Eventually, all of the music I downloaded illegally filled up my music library.

In 11th grade, I started listening to indie artists that I saw on iTunes like Local Natives, Joanna Newsom and Bat for Lashes. They were a lot different from the music I had been listening to. Most indie artists write their own lyrics so their songs are more personal.

I wanted to learn more about the artists and find out what they were singing about so I looked for artist interviews on YouTube. I watched an interview with Natasha Khan of Bat For Lashes talking about her new album. At the end she turned to the camera and said, "Buy your music." It was like she directed it at me, and I felt bad. I watched more interviews and a lot of other artists said the same thing.

I started buying albums by indie artists at Amoeba Music, an independent record store in Hollywood, or buying their music on iTunes. It was hard at first because I had to save more money. But I'd think to myself, "If there's something that I really like, then I should pay for it." I cut back on other things that I was spending money on, like movies and acrylic paints, so I could buy music. I save the money my parents give me for food and when I go out, and I use it to buy music. I was able to buy about one album a week.

ARTISTS HAVE TO GET PAID SOMEHOW

My younger brother thinks that music is expensive and CDs aren't worth buying. He says "That's half a Diamond shirt right there." He thinks clothing and skateboard gear are more valuable than music. I used to think that way too. I thought I didn't have to buy music because artists were making money anyway. But I realize now that not all of the money from album sales goes to the artist. A lot goes to pay their record company for promoting the album and paying the studio for every recording session. Whatever is left over goes to the band.

Between 2004 and 2009 there were 30 billion songs downloaded illegally, according to the Record Industry Association of America. Let's say one song costs one

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF DOWNLOADING?

"I think it's OK because a person has to know whether they like the song or not before they go and buy it. If I like the song I will go and pay for it."

Andrea Nettles, 17, Gardena HS



"I never download music. I don't feel it's right. The artists are working so hard to make their music so you should help them out. The way they make money is by you buying their CD. It's expensive but it's worth it."

Javier Hinojosa, 17, Gardena HS



"I don't think it's wrong at all because I think music is for the love of music, not to make the record companies money."

Sabrina Gaytan, 17, Wilson HS



"I feel that the artists make enough money as it is so why should we pay for their work. They make a lot more money off their tours or concerts. It shouldn't be that big of a deal. For the bands I love I don't get their music online. I go buy a hard copy."

Crstian Salas, 16, Equal Partnership HS (Long Beach)



dollar, that's \$30 billion the industry never got. When you don't buy your music, you're causing people who work in the industry to lose their jobs, people who may have families. Piracy has caused more than 70,000 jobs to be lost, according to the Institute for Policy Innovation. I knew that not buying music was bad, but I didn't think so many people would lose their jobs because of it.

There are other ways to listen to new music for free without downloading illegally. You can use legal sites like Hype Machine, SoundCloud and 8tracks that allow you to stream music on your computer. Sometimes upcoming artists on SoundCloud promote themselves by letting you download their album for free. Even some big-name artists put their music on the Internet for free. Kanye West was promoting his new album, My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy, by giving out a new song every Friday. There are a lot of ways to get new music for free without doing it illegally.



Britney Spears

CD: *Femme Fatale*

Reviewed by Victor Beteta

17, University HS

I was pulled into Britney Spears' new CD, *Femme Fatale*, the moment the first beat dropped on the first song, "Till the World Ends." The track is typical of the album, which is very electronic and makes you want to get up and dance.

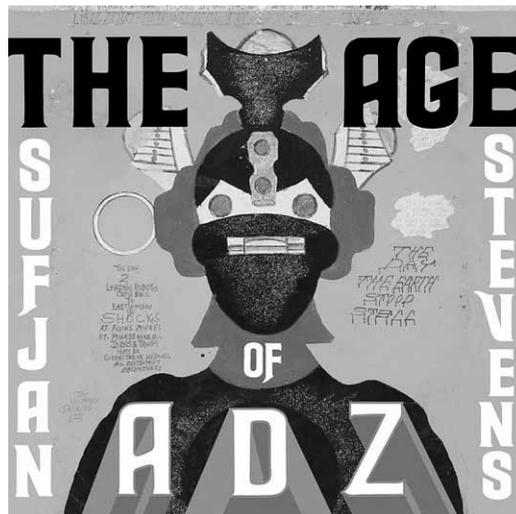
I love how her sound has changed from pop to electronic. I can imagine the songs being played at clubs. The album's first few songs sound like they're going to be hits, including "Hold It Against Me," the song that got me to buy the album. My favorite is "Inside Out"—a break-up song about how she knows the relationship is going to end but they spend a last night together. "Won't you give me something to remember/ Baby shut your mouth and turn me inside out/ Even though we couldn't last forever/ You know what I want right now/ Hit me one more time it's so amazing."

The lyrics make you feel like she's flirting with you and inviting you to join her adventures, which could be dangerous. But you don't mind and follow her into the darkness. The album is filled with fun and sexy songs mostly about having a good time, and not caring about what is going to happen the next morning.

The one song I disliked was "Big Fat Bass" featuring will.i.am. It's annoying because through most of the song all Britney says is something about being a treble and you should be the bass.

A femme fatale is a mysterious and seductive woman who drives men crazy. And I think Britney really deserves that title. Her album drives you crazy and leaves you wanting more.

The lyrics make you feel like Spears is flirting with you and inviting you to join her adventures.



Sufjan Stevens

CD: *The Age of Adz*

Reviewed by Lily Clark

17, Immaculate Heart HS

When I first heard Sufjan Stevens, he was embarking on a massive project: an album for every state in America. His technically precise, chamber-folk songs about Michigan and Illinois were mesmerizing. He played the saxophone, flute and oboe, while still maintaining an indie folk sound.

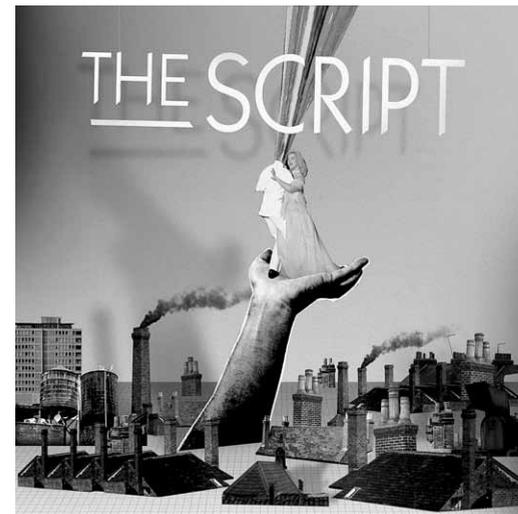
But on Stevens' latest album, *The Age of Adz*, he favors a darker, more muddled narrative based on the work of the schizophrenic artist, Royal Robertson. The result is an album unlike anything I've heard before, as he pairs troubled lyrics with a disjointed, anarchic version of his signature chamber-folk sound.

Stevens sings about suicide, betrayal and space ships, all prominent themes in Robertson's life and art. On the 25-minute track, "Impossible Soul," Stevens sings, "Woman, tell me what you want/ And I'll calm down without bleeding out/ With my broken heart that you stabbed for an hour."

Stevens has addressed these dark themes in the past, but on *The Age of Adz* he embodies Robertson's schizophrenia through nonlinear, repetitive lyrics containing biblical references. In songs such as "Get Real Get Right," Stevens sings, "Get real, get right with the Lord" nine times. Nevertheless, the song does not feel weighted by religious allusions.

It took a few listens to appreciate the unpredictability of *The Age of Adz*. Now I can't stop playing "Vesuvius" and "Get Real Get Right," which reflect Robertson's pain and address death, insecurity and shame. Although stylistically distinct from Stevens' past work, *The Age of Adz* is one of my favorite albums.

It took a few listens to appreciate the unpredictability of *The Age of Adz*.



The Script

CD: *The Script*

Reviewed by Kiera Peltz

17, CHAMPS (Van Nuys)

Last year I heard a song on the radio that I liked. It was an upbeat alternative rock song with meaningful words. When I got home, I looked up the lyrics and played it on YouTube constantly. The song, "Breakeven," by The Script, became one of my favorites because it described breakups perfectly.

After seeing The Script in concert, I found the band's first album, conveniently called *The Script*, online. The songs, which are about love and relationships, have a pop sound with an edge of rock. I fell in love with every song, especially "The Man Who Can't Be Moved" and "If You See Kay." Almost all of the songs tell a story. "The Man Who Can't Be Moved" is about a man who recently broke up with his girlfriend and wants her back. When frontman Danny O'Donoghue sings, "Cause if one day you wake up and find that you're missing me/ And your heart starts to wonder where on this earth I could be/ Thinking maybe you'll come back here to the place that we'd meet" I dream that one day a guy would wait forever for me.

"Breakeven" is still one of my favorite songs. Whenever it comes on the radio, I'm instantly put in a better mood. When O'Donoghue sings, "when a heart breaks, no it don't break even," I can instantly relate.

One thing I didn't like was that a few songs have rap verses in the middle. While the mellow, thoughtful lyrics make up for the rap, I'm not a rap fan. Still, anyone who enjoys pop music with catchy lyrics and a strong beat will love *The Script*!

Whenever "Breakeven" comes on the radio, I'm instantly put in a better mood.



I was really excited when I was accepted into L.A. Youth's summer workshop. I wanted to explore journalism as a career and I thought I would learn what it's like to be edited, how to tell stories in an interesting way and meet other reporters my age. I did all three during the workshop and I feel like my writing is much better than it was before. It was fun too! My favorite part of the workshop was working with my editor. Every edit was aimed at making my piece stronger. It made me feel like what I wrote was worth reading.

Audrey Salas, 18
Bravo Medical Magnet HS, Summer Workshop 2010

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 2011 issue of L.A. Youth.
- You must attend group meetings at the L.A. Youth office every Wednesday from 2 to 5 p.m. from July 6 to August 10. You also must arrange weekly two-hour individual meetings with your editor. The first group meeting will be held at 2 p.m. on Wednesday, July 6, 2011.

How to apply:

Submit this application form with a **one-page writing sample** as well as a **\$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, hobbies 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 3, 2011.**

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