

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2012
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L.A. youth

the magazine by and about teens

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POP STAR DREAMS

My audition to be a Korean pop star was a disaster **PAGE 10**

L.A. youth

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FOR PEOPLE WHO CARE ABOUT TEENS

About L.A. Youth

There aren't many cities where teenagers have their own newspaper, but in Los Angeles they do. It's called L.A. Youth, and since 1988, it has given teens more than a voice. With it, they have had a megaphone.

Celebrating our 25th anniversary in January 2013, L.A. Youth's rigorous writing program provides high-quality stories that offer important information to teens. Teachers use the paper to engage students and help them improve their skills.

Teens gather after school and on Saturdays in our mid-city newsroom for editorial meetings. There they work with adult editors one-on-one to rewrite their stories, fact check, and exchange ideas with other staff members from diverse racial, ethnic and economic groups.

There are no requirements to join our staff. Teens bring friends, teachers refer students, parents call us looking for a summer workshop or a place for their son/daughter to improve their writing skills. On Newcomer's Day every other month, prospective writers, illustrators and photographers meet the adult staff.

Benefits to Youth

L.A. Youth is helping to change outcomes for disadvantaged youth by providing the skills and experience needed to help young people become productive members of the community. The supportive learning environment is designed to build self-esteem and the critical thinking skills that are necessary to become successful in today's highly competitive workforce and globalized economy.

L.A. Youth helps to close the achievement gap through its direct service to participating students, its contributions to teachers' curricular tools and its strong role as a youth advocate.

Community Support

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

The youth in our community represent our future. The investment today will have a lasting impact on a young life, opening the doors to opportunity, education and hope.

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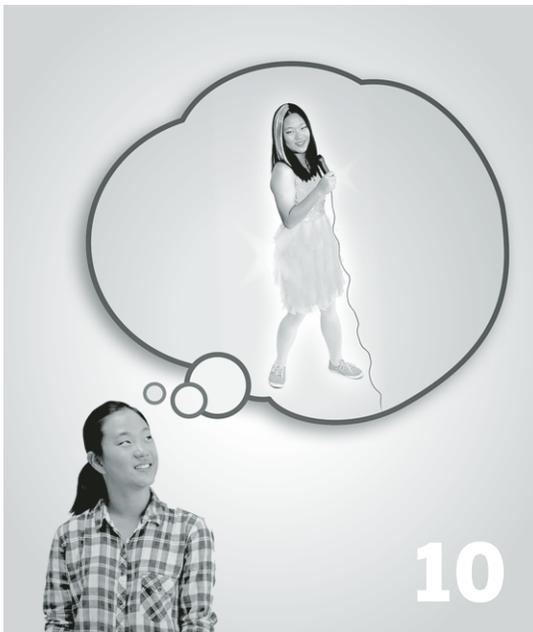
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Cover Story: POP STAR DREAMS

Susie's audition to become a Korean pop star was a disaster

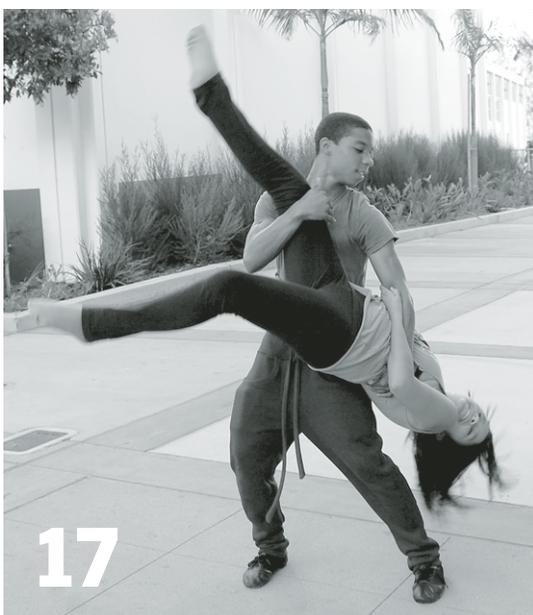
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Cover photos by Cassandra Ellis, 17, Wilshire Academy



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Our staff writers recommend *Out of My Mind* and *Divergent*, and CDs by Fiona Apple, *I Fight Dragons* and *Dinosaurs on Mars!*

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

It was really cool taking photos for my hiking story (p. 14). I learned a lot about cameras, like using the sports mode setting when taking action photos. I had to go back a second time because I didn't get enough photos the first time, which taught me to take way more pictures than I think I should!

—Camille Didelot-Hearn, 16, Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies



BEHIND THE SCENES

The photos for the cover story were very different for us. As a newspaper we usually take photos of teens as they look every day, but for our K-pop story we wanted to take photos of Susie dressed up like the K-pop star she dreamed of being. The editors have journalism backgrounds and here we were applying makeup, fixing hair and suggesting poses—something we've never done before. It was harder than we thought it would be, but we love how it turned out (p. 10).



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 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.

OCTOBER 2012 ISSUE

A GIRL MADE HER IMMIGRANT PARENTS' COLLEGE DREAMS COME TRUE

WHILE I WAS reading the article "Making their college dreams come true" I realized that I have much in common with Yesenia. My parents are also from El Salvador and want the best for my future. They always tell me, "If you want to be someone in life you've got to show them with hard work." My parents can't help me with the majority of my schoolwork, and that makes it harder for me. Yet, it benefits me too because it makes me have to think more for myself. When I accomplish a challenging task it makes me feel empowered and helps me know that I can do anything I put my mind to. My parents push me to get straight As, and I know they push me because they care about my education and want me to be somebody in life.

Ashley Tulle

Madison MS (North Hollywood)

IT'S HARD TO have one of your parents not be able to help you because

your homework is too difficult for them. But I liked how Yesenia never gave up and wanted to make her parents proud. Now that Yesenia is in college, I know that I can do what she did to make my mom proud.

Gabriella Diaz

Pacoima MS

I WAS REALLY impressed with the article "Making their college dreams come true." I admire Yesenia's dedication to succeed. I also admire her for realizing that a good education means much more than perfect grades. It's about getting informed about important issues in our communities and our country, and using that information to better ourselves and to try to improve things in society. Yesenia's example is very inspiring.

Sophia Plesh

Wilson MS (Glendale)

WE DESERVE SAFE PARKS

WHAT IS THE point of having parks if people are afraid to enter them? When I read about the shooting of a 19-year-old college student, I felt awful. He was just sitting on a bench minding

his own business when it happened. This was a wake-up call to me about how unsafe parks can be. Even though I don't spend much time at parks, I know I wouldn't want to have to worry about gangs and killings when I'm sitting under a tree reading a book. It's good advice to not go to a park after 7 p.m. and to always go with friends. There should be more security in parks because they are meant to make people of all ages feel welcome.

Maya Bocanegra

Madison MS

A TEEN WAS EXCITED TO RIDE THE NEW EXPO LINE TRAIN

IT WAS INTERESTING to learn that there are train lines that connect downtown Los Angeles to outlying cities. I am considering buying a TAP card. I hope to use it if I am going to the Staples Center or the California Science Center. Maybe I could see the new space shuttle Endeavour! I am excited about the new light rail line and I hope I can use it instead of my parents having to drive me through the suffocating traffic in downtown L.A. Thank you for writing about this new method of travel that I am looking forward to trying.

Bhavin Shah

Wilson MS

A GIRL WONDERED WHEN LIKE BECOMES LOVE

I STARTED LIKING this guy in sixth grade and I still do. Since everyone knew how I felt toward him, people would ask me, "Are you in love with him?" My response would always be "no" because deep down inside I knew that it was just a really strong like. Even after two years of liking him a lot, I can't say my feeling for him is love. I feel like I'm just too young to even know the meaning of love. Love isn't a game and it shouldn't be treated as one. When saying "I love you," it should mean something huge.

Meylin Barillas

Madison MS

A MUSLIM GIRL DEFENDED HER FAITH

I CAN RELATE to the article "In defense of my faith" because I'm Muslim too. I have heard many stories about how Muslims hijacked planes and crashed them into the World Trade Center in New York.

When I was in fifth grade, I heard one of my classmates saying she thought that Muslims were terrorists and that Islam is a bad religion. So I decided to stand up and defend my religion. I asked her, "What if an American hijacked planes and crashed them into the towers? Then you would also think that Americans and American religions weren't good?" I think I made my point since from that day forward I have not heard anyone at school say things like that. Instead, people ask me about Islam and they wonder what makes Islam interesting. One thing that everyone should keep in mind is to never judge people because of their religion, and never doubt your own religion. Be proud of who you are and help people understand more about you.

Mujgan Nessari

Madison MS

COMPARE THE CANDIDATES

I LIKED THE article, "Compare the candidates." I think it's great for kids to be exposed to politics and see how political decisions made now will affect their lives in the future as they grow into the next generation of American voters. As a Barack Obama supporter, I think informational articles like this help show the great ideas that Obama promotes and some of Mitt Romney's ideas that I don't agree with.

Justin Fortaleza

Madison MS

A POET INSPIRED A GIRL TO WANT TO BE A WRITER

DAISY WAS INSPIRED by the poems and works of Sylvia Plath, and at first I wondered how it was possible to be inspired by such dark writing? But as I read further, I realized that Plath used writing as therapy. The article reminded me of myself. I have been inspired by writers such as Jean de Meun (author of the allegorical poem Romance of the Rose), Alexandre Dumas and Philippa Gregory. I have also become interested in poetry and inspired by Geoffrey Chaucer's Canterbury Tales. I am happy that there are still plenty of young people who like to write. Hopefully, the art of writing will thrive!

Aleksandra Shirzad

Madison MS



IT WAS VERY important to me that President Obama won. I think he will do something about immigration, which is important to me because many of my friends are illegal. I believe Obama understands that many illegal immigrants see America as their home, and would be lost if they were deported to their birth countries. Now that he has been re-elected, he has a chance to pass the DREAM Act and grant citizenship to illegal immigrants who join the military or get a college degree. I was happy and now look forward to the future.

*Jenny Guevara, 17,
City of Angels HS*

SINCE I'M TAKING an international relations class, I have followed global issues. Drug trafficking in South America has become uncontrollable and Iran is trying to create nuclear bombs. A friend of mine knew someone who was shot in Tijuana when he refused to smuggle drugs for a drug cartel. Obama promised to create more peace than there was during President Bush's presidency. I know that in the next four years, he will do that.

*Hunter Whitaker-Morrow, 17,
Polytechnic School (Pasadena)*

I AM HAPPY that Barack Obama won because I think he has better ideas for health care. I like Obamacare because it helps lower-income families get health care. My parents can't afford health insurance and so my mom can't get new glasses and my dad can't get treatment for his back problems. Mitt Romney said he wanted to repeal Obama's healthcare act, which could have taken away the opportunity for many low income families, including my own, to get health care.

Susie Park, 16, Marshall HS

I WAS SURPRISED when Barack Obama ended "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," which said that if you serve in the military you couldn't be openly gay or lesbian. I'm gay and want to join the military. Knowing I can be myself made me feel like I belonged more. Obama supports same-sex marriage, unlike Mitt Romney. America wants someone who represents change, is for the people and supports gay rights.

Precious Sims, 19

I DIDN'T KNOW who I supported. A deal breaker for me was when Mitt



Photo courtesy barackobama.com

Teens react to Obama's victory

These teens were thrilled when the president was re-elected and share their hopes for his second term

Romney's vice-presidential pick, Paul Ryan, proposed eliminating \$170 billion from Pell grants. I worry whether my family will be able to afford college. Eliminating \$170 billion would decrease not only my chances of going to college, but also millions of other students. I feel like Obama knows what it's like to stay up at night adding up the cost of bills and sympathizes with the student who goes to extra lengths to be the first in their family to get a college education.

*Jacqueline Uy, 15, Los Angeles
Center for Enriched Studies*

I WAS RELIEVED when Barack Obama won because I didn't like Mitt Romney's views on same-sex mar-

riage. I don't think it's fair that just because someone is gay they don't get the same rights as a straight person. I was really happy Obama said he changed his mind and supported marriage for same-sex couples. I supported him even more after that. I hope he fights to legalize marriage for everyone in the country, even though he said he thinks that individual states should decide this.

Silvia Velasquez, 14, Glendale HS

WHEN I HEARD that Mitt Romney said that 47 percent of Americans "are victims, who believe that government has a responsibility to care for them," I felt like he was being unfair to people who are less fortunate. My mom works

really hard to raise four kids. I think Obama will be a compassionate president who will make people who are richer sacrifice more by paying more taxes, and will make sure all Americans have what we need like health-care, food stamps and welfare.

Aileen Lee, 17, Crescenta Valley HS

AFTER MONTHS OF believing in Obama, my reaction to his victory was less animated than I expected. Obama supports abortion, taxing the wealthy and providing healthcare to the poor. As a woman I like that Obama is pro-choice. I also like that he believes government should support people who don't have a lot of money. But I think it will be difficult for him to get things done. Over the last four years I've felt that Obama hasn't been able to convince Congress to listen to his ideas. I have doubts about his ability to create the change this country needs.

*Sydney Sellers, 17,
Windward School*

EDUCATION FUNDING IS especially important to me. My sister got into her dream school, but couldn't go because my family couldn't afford it. Obama has talked about providing more student loans and creating more jobs, which will help our generation pay off our student loans. The issue that matters the most to me is same-sex marriage. My favorite cousin is gay, and to have him not be able to marry the person he loves upsets me. When they announced Obama's win, I felt like flying. I've never been happier because I feel like my future is so much brighter than it would have been if Romney had won.

*Camille Didelot-Hearn, 16, Los
Angeles Center for Enriched Studies*

I WAS HAPPY when Obama won because I know that he is going to fight for immigrant rights. I want him to pass the DREAM Act and if not, to extend his deferred action policy, giving undocumented students an opportunity to work and pursue an education. I think that everybody deserves an opportunity to succeed in this country. Obama's policies support the middle class and the poor, unlike Romney, who insulted the 47 percent of people who don't pay taxes. This told me he didn't care about the poor.

*Miguel Molina, 18,
East Los Angeles College*

Painfully shy

I'm so afraid of what people will think of me that it's been hard to make friends

By Jaanvi Sant
15, San Marino HS

Walking into crowded places makes my heart pound and my stomach twist into a pretzel. Every time I go to the mall or gym and see more than 10 cars in the parking lot, a math equation pops into my head: more vehicles equal more people, and more people equal more anxiety. I think, "I don't want to get out of the car." But I know there's no avoiding going because I'm already there.

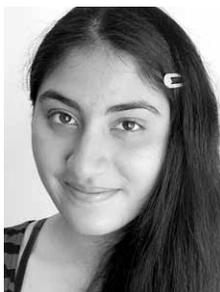
I feel like everyone is watching me. I think, do I look OK? Should I fix my posture? Should I make eye contact or stare at the floor? If I have to talk to salespeople, I'm afraid looking at them will make me laugh and they'll think I don't have self-control. It hasn't happened before, and I know it most likely won't happen, but it's a fear I can't get rid of. Sometimes, I talk myself out of asking employees questions by thinking, "Maybe I'll come back another day."

I wasn't so nervous around people when I was young. I wasn't afraid to scold boys if they were saying mean things. But when I was 8 years old, I was visiting my family in India during my summer vacation. We were celebrating my grandpa's birthday at a banquet hall, and I stepped outside for fresh air. But then a stranger approached me, put his arm around my shoulders, and touched me inappropriately. It lasted for a few seconds, although it felt longer. I was so scared that I couldn't talk or move. After he touched me, I ran away from him as fast as I could.

When I returned to America, I hid myself in baggy T-shirts and shorts. I thought I was weak for letting a stranger touch me without fighting back.

My shyness became worse when I was almost 10 years old. A few weeks after I started fifth grade, I was moved into sixth grade. There were 11 sixth, seventh and eighth graders, so we learned in one classroom from one teacher. I saw some familiar faces but I wasn't introduced to the class.

The only other sixth graders were three boys. I didn't



Jaanvi is working on speaking louder.

know what to say to them because they liked video games. The seventh- and eighth-grade students were interested in PG-13 movies and rock bands like Good Charlotte, while I was still watching Disney Channel.

REJECTED AT LUNCH

One day, I sat down with the boys from my class to eat but one of them said, "Go away, no one wants you here." I teared up and went to another table.

After sixth grade, my parents could tell I was unhappy, so I switched to a different school. The principal and my parents agreed that it would be easier for me

They became my friends too. I was proud of myself for starting a conversation.

However, in eighth grade, my frightened turtle instincts returned. My parents told me they were getting divorced. I felt guilty because I realized that I was the only reason they had stayed together. I didn't want to upset them further by showing them how sad I was. I feared that if I told my friends how I felt, they would worry about me or feel bad for me or think I was trying to get sympathy. I stopped hanging out with my friends as much. I looked at the floor instead of waving when I saw them. I didn't even say bye to half of

I noticed a pattern: In class or in the hallways, I was reluctant to talk to people unless they talked to me first. Sometimes I walked in a person's direction to say "Hi," but then backed out at the last second.

to make friends if I repeated sixth grade. On my first day, I didn't know where to wait for my parents to pick me up so I followed a group of people from my class. I heard one of the boys, whose name was Greg, say, "Why is she following us?" He seemed to think I was creepy. I decided to prove him wrong by talking to him. If I didn't, I thought that my chances of making friends would be gone. I set a time and place for my mission: I'd say one sentence to him every Wednesday in P.E.

A couple of weeks after I hatched my plan, I blurted out, "Have you ever been on a soccer team before?" I had soccer practice the night before and it was the first topic I could think of. His eyes widened in surprise that I was talking to him. "Yes, I played for a few years, but I quit because I didn't like it very much," he responded.

Then we started talking about our hobbies, and I learned that Greg loved acting, singing and dancing. I told him that I loved music too, and that I took hip-hop dance classes. I ended up eating lunch with him. I was nervous because I thought he wouldn't want me to, but we kept talking. After that day, we sat together at lunch every day and he introduced me to his friends.

my class at graduation, thinking that I had pushed them too far away.

After middle school, my parents thought it would be a good idea for me to go to a public high school. They thought that going to a school with more than 1,000 students would help prepare me for college because there would be a lot of people in college. I was excited but also scared because I wouldn't know anyone.

I spent a good chunk of my summer typing questions into Google: "How do I make friends in high school?" "How do I come across as an approachable person?" "How can I be less shy?" Yahoo! Answers and WikiHow said things I'd heard before, like "just be yourself" and "don't worry." The advice didn't help me much.

On my first day of freshman year I felt lost at such a large school. I didn't talk to anyone unless it was necessary. But later that week, three girls in my English class invited me to sit with them for an assignment. My heart leapt because I had people to talk to!

I discovered that all four of us loved Donald Duck and the band Paramore. The next day, I sat next to them again even though I worried they would find

me annoying or clingy. To my surprise, they didn't say anything, and we continued to sit as a group for the rest of freshman year.

A few days after meeting the girls in my English class, a girl from summer school tapped my shoulder and said, "Jaanvi, you should talk to that girl. She looks quiet." I saw that she was gesturing toward a girl sitting alone and reading. I immediately wanted to talk to her because reading is one of my favorite things to do. I also felt like I could relate to her because she looked lonely.

Taking a deep breath, I sat down next to her. "Hi, my name is Jaanvi," I said, extending my hand. "I'm Rei," she responded softly. We began to ask each other questions and my heartbeat returned to normal. There were some silences in our conversation, but I learned that she had come from Japan two years earlier. She said she was afraid to talk to others because her English was not the best.

I FELT COMFORTABLE BEING MYSELF

For the rest of the week, I would return to the same spot and we shared how our days went. Rei was the first person I met who was quieter than me! As we got closer, she started to crack jokes with me and her book went in her backpack during lunch. Rei was the first person to whom I'd admitted I was terrified to give class presentations. I told her that I was afraid I spoke too softly, and so people might not know what I was saying. She said, "Don't worry, you'll do fine. It'll be OK when it's over." I found a friend who understood me.

I noticed a pattern: In class or in the hallways, I was reluctant to talk to people unless they talked to me first. Sometimes I walked in a person's direction to say "Hi," but then backed out at the last second.

I tried to conquer that fear by taking journalism because I thought it would help me get to know other students and make friends. I wrote for the Features section, which required interviewing students.

For my first interview, we were supposed to write about a person who showed skill in a hobby. I panicked because I didn't know many people, but then I remembered that Dina, one of the girls from my English class group, had mentioned that she won an art competition in sixth grade. She agreed to be interviewed at lunch the next week.

Fear didn't hit me until the day of the interview. I couldn't concentrate in any of my classes and I counted down the minutes until 12:20. When the time came to ask questions, my breathing was rapid and the sheet of questions shook in my hands. I glanced at Dina,

but almost immediately looked back at my paper and asked, "How long have you been drawing and painting?" She smiled and told me, "Ever since I could hold a pen." I scribbled down her answer and moved on to the other questions. As she responded, I began to relax. So far, I didn't seem to be doing so badly except for speaking too softly.

After 10 minutes though, Dina's friend Sarah sat next

She reassured me that things would be OK, but also said Sarah was an amazing writer. Sarah overheard and I was shocked when she said I could email her my article for corrections!

They asked if I wanted to eat lunch with them one day. I took Rei with me and all four of us ended up eating together the next week. I also emailed the article to Sarah, who handed it back the next day in Spanish. We scooted our desks together and became friends. We talked about writing, books, movies and our favorite websites. I felt happier because I realized that things could turn out well even if I didn't expect them to. Sarah and Dina started coming over to my house on weekends to hang out, and we walked to Starbucks after school when we had time.

I'M GETTING HELP TO BE MORE CONFIDENT

I also started to see a counselor in April because of what happened in India and how it has affected me since. Every two weeks, she helps me with my fears of talking to other people. One time I told her I'm afraid I sometimes come across as annoying. She said, "So what if some people think you're annoying?" I responded that I would feel embarrassed. She asked again, "So what?" I thought about it and realized that the feeling would last for only a moment.

She told me that it's not important to have everyone like me, and that I should spend time with people who accept me for who I am. She also reminded me that I shouldn't be afraid to talk to friends if something is bothering me, because if they are truly my friends, they won't think badly of me. I felt better after hearing that because it was something I hadn't done for a while. So in September, when Sarah and I were at Starbucks, I talked to her about my parents' divorce and how I felt after it. I had been scared to tell her, but she listened to me and gave me advice. It felt good to tell someone my feelings.

If I feel like I annoy someone, I now catch myself and say, "Everyone is different, and maybe my personality just doesn't appeal to some people." It's hard because I hate it if people don't want to be around me, but I can't control how other people feel. There will be people who like me the way I am, even though I am shy.

I still talk to my friends from English class every day, and I have classes with them this year too. I eat lunch with Rei and a few other friends I met through my English class friends. I don't have a big group of friends, but that's OK because I love spending time with my small group of close ones.

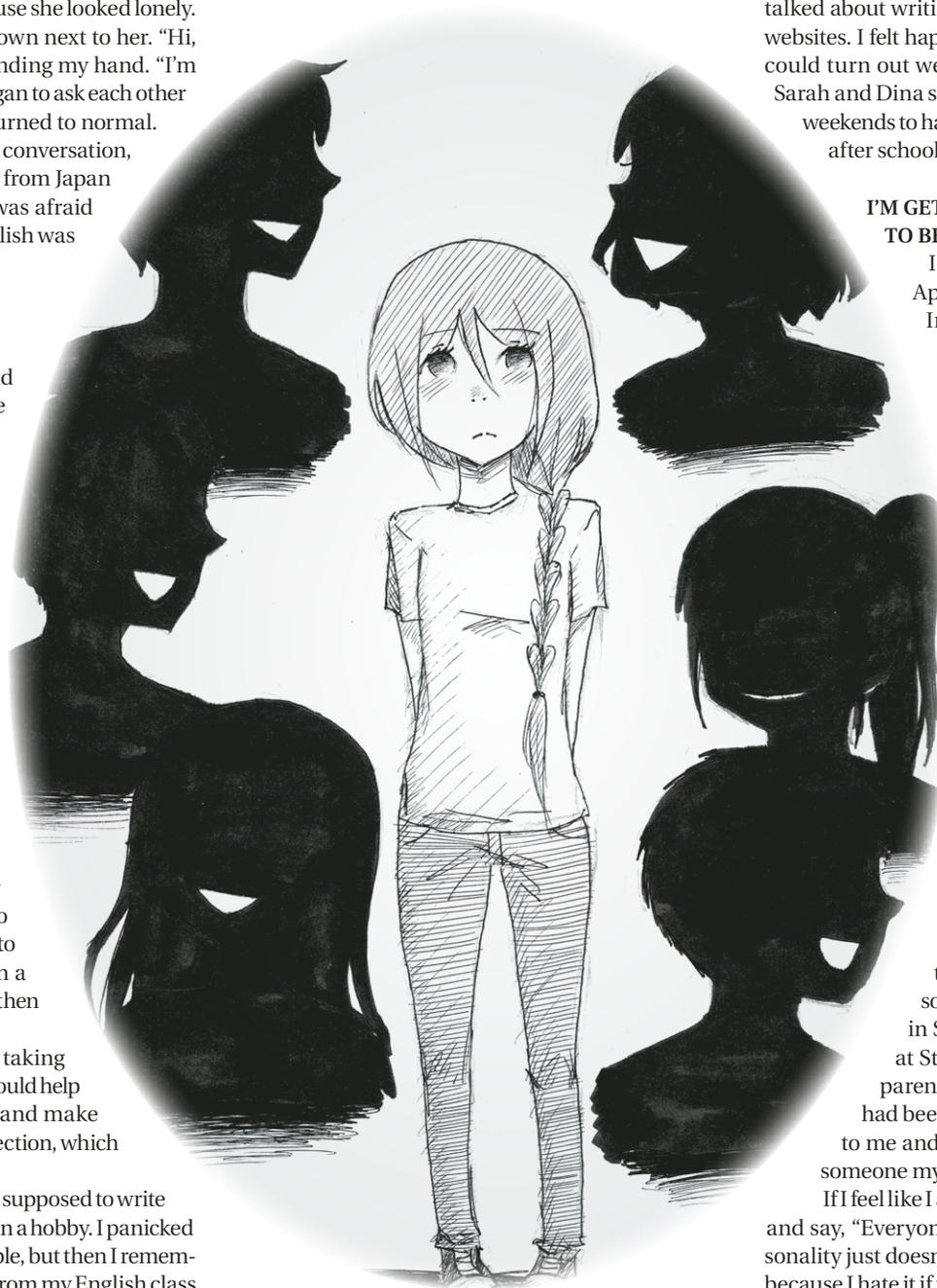


Illustration by Flor Carolina Barillas, 16, South Gate HS

to her. My stomach clenched again. Sarah and I had Spanish together and I thought she looked like a nice person, but I had never gathered the courage to talk to her. At the end of the interview, I confessed to Dina that I was afraid my article wouldn't be good enough.

My future's on hold

I can't get the community college classes I need to transfer

By Destiny Jackson

19, Orange Coast College (2011 graduate of Mayfair HS in Lakewood)

In high school our nagging teachers and perky counselors tell us which classes to take and what grades to get so that we will make it to college, get a degree and be at the job of our choice in four years, and live happily ever after.

My family doesn't have a lot of money and my grades in high school weren't that great, so I didn't have options besides community college. But budget cuts have made my college dream less likely. I'm struggling to get the classes I need to graduate and transfer. It's frustrating having to put my dream of becoming a journalist on hold. I'm going to be 23 or 24 by the time I get out of a university. How is cutting funding, classes and teachers making things better for students?

It all started around high school graduation. Rejection letter after rejection letter after rejection letter. My counselor and I knew that I would end up at a community college. I didn't mind because I thought that I would be out in two years and onto a four-year university. Then I thought about my coworkers who said they were in their third and fourth years at community college. I chalked it up to them being lazy students who weren't sure what to major in.

As I got ready to start at Orange Coast College in August 2011, I received a notice saying that I had qualified for financial aid and it was time to register for classes. It would have been nice to know that registering is like an online fight club.

A few weeks before school started and after my English and math placement testing, I visited a counselor to register for classes. As I furiously clicked my mouse trying to get my two remedial courses, English 99 and Math 10 (elementary algebra, sigh), I prayed to the class gods to let me in without being waitlisted. When I added them to my schedule I saw the glorious word "Registered."

A LOT OF THE CLASSES I WANTED WERE FULL

Now I moved on to my other general education classes. I had listed 15 possibilities. I was waitlisted for 10 of the classes I wanted (Film, Broadcast Journalism, Journalism and Marine Science to name a few). It shows you on the schedule how many students are enrolled in the class, how many are on the waiting list and your position on that list. I didn't bother going to those classes and trying to add them because I was always number 25-36. So after online fight club was over I had five classes—English, Math, Geography, Ethnic Studies and Intro to Communications.

That semester I passed all of my classes except for Geography. I had to retake the class for it to count for credit and qualify for transferring. I planned to take it during winter session but then winter session was canceled. Annoyed at myself for failing Geography and my school for canceling an entire semester—the year that I enroll—I registered for the spring.

But I wasn't able to get into the Geography class or math. Desperate, I signed up for anything. I knew that if I didn't take any classes that semester I'd have a later enrollment date the next semester because I'd still be considered a freshman when I was supposed to be a

sophomore. I also had to sign up for enough credits to qualify as full time so I could get financial aid.

I was stuck with nonsense elective classes that weren't transferable like Sociology of Married People (I'm not married) and Intro to Sailing. I was grateful to be enrolled in Broadcast Journalism and Film but the only class that was transferable was Film.

I scheduled a visit with my college counselor. I explained to her how I didn't get into the classes I needed, but I told her I wouldn't let myself worry about it because there was summer. She told me, "We are not going to be offering summer courses this year. At least not very many."

I left the office stunned and pissed off at my counselor's estimated graduation date of spring 2014. My original graduation date was spring 2013. I was now a year behind schedule.

I got hired at Disneyland that spring. My coworkers told me that going to school and working during summer is impossible because it's peak season and they don't take any special requests for time off, even if you're in school. A lot of my coworkers had mentioned they had tried to take online courses during the summer.

When I went to my counselor I found out that there were no online classes being offered in our school system. There were 40 on-campus classes available, but I couldn't attend them and work full-time. I chose my job over school because I needed the money to get gas and pay for books and what financial aid doesn't cover. I hoped I could get the classes I needed in the fall.

HAVING A JOB MAKES BEING A STUDENT EVEN HARDER

When school started in the fall, I didn't quit my job because I needed the money. I was working 20 to 40 hours a week. It frustrated me to no end that there were classes I couldn't sign up for because they weren't offered on days I wasn't working. I couldn't sacrifice my job for school but I couldn't sacrifice school for my job either. I never enrolled in a class that was held more than three days a week, like Journalism, because that would cut down my work time.

According to a recent article in the Los Angeles Times, more than 470,000 community college students in California began the fall semester on a wait list. I was one of them. I got waitlisted for Geography, Marine Science and Japanese. I didn't try to go on the first day to get in because I was far down on the wait list and knew my chances were slim. Luckily, I got four classes I needed, which meant I was full-time. But only two of my classes count toward my major and transferring.

Is college worth it? I would like to think so, even though it's taking a ridiculously long time to get the classes I need and graduate.

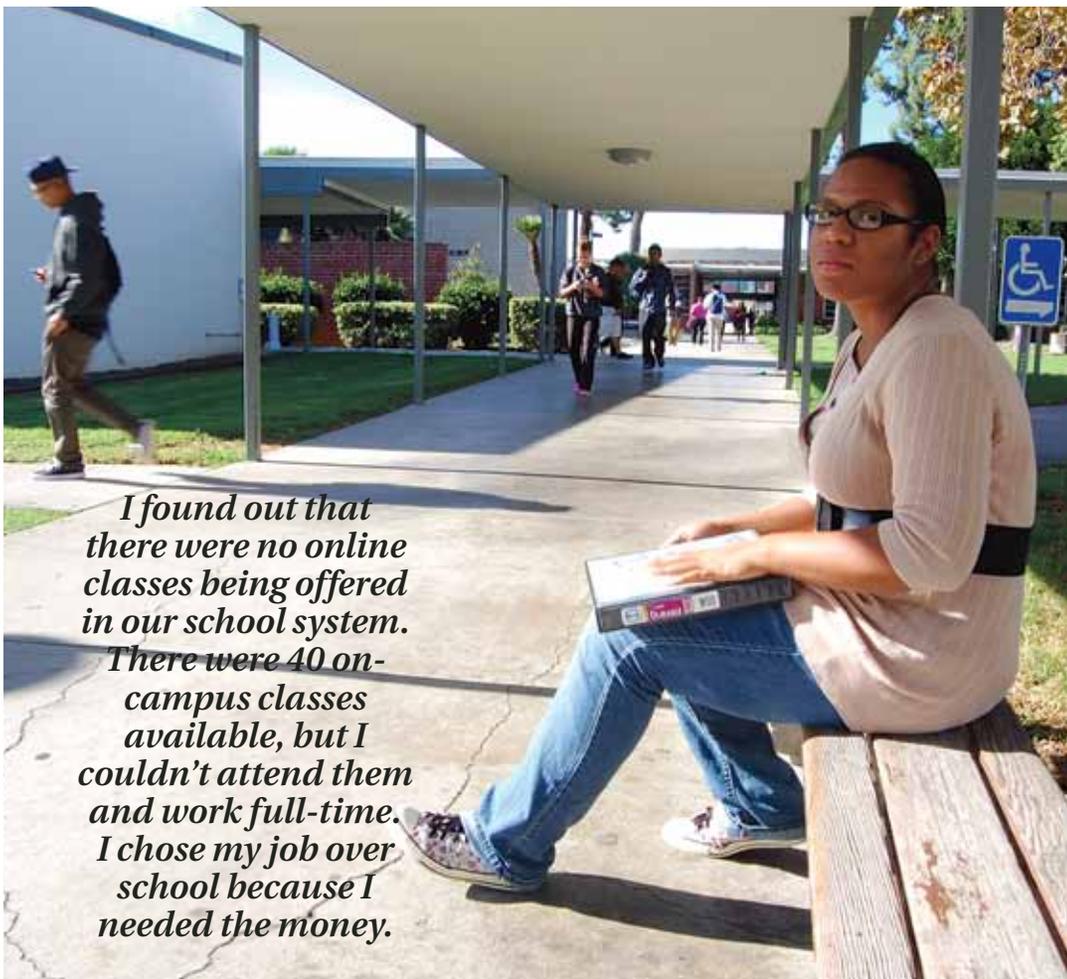
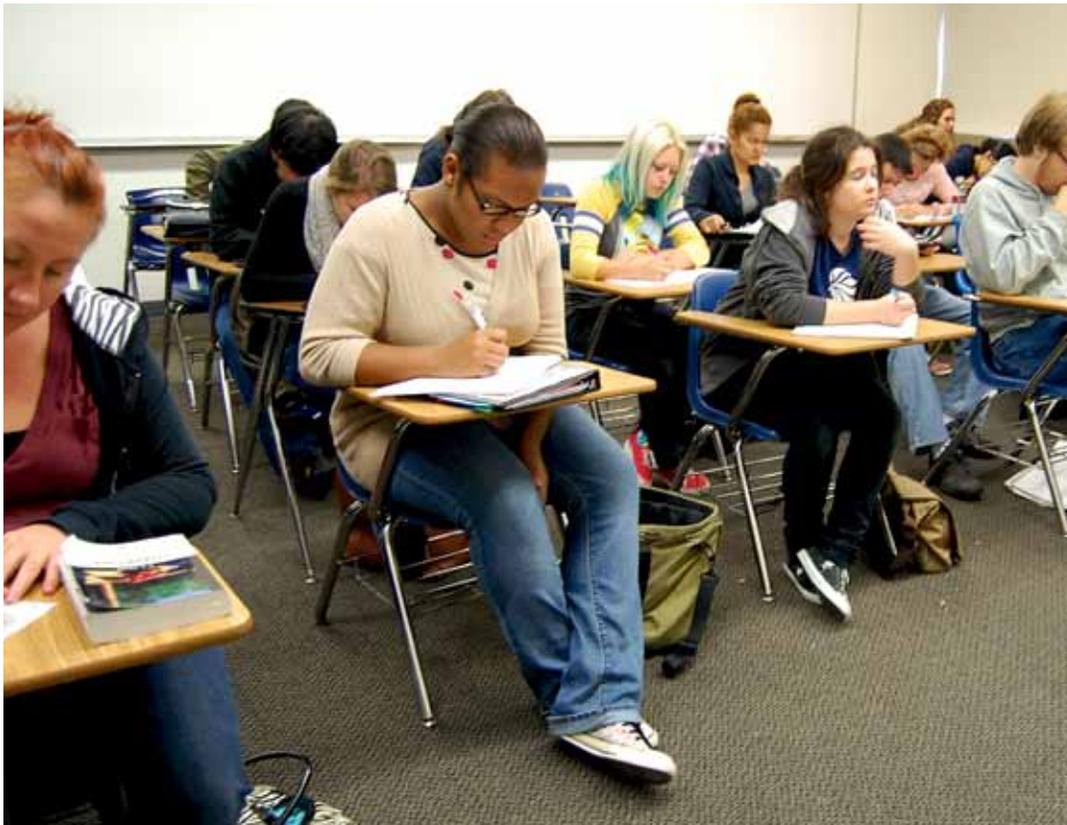
HOW TO GET CLASSES

IF YOU PLAN ON ATTENDING A COMMUNITY COLLEGE, HERE ARE DESTINY'S TIPS TO HELP YOU GET INTO THE CLASSES YOU NEED.

1. Take classes in the morning or late afternoon. Most students don't want to wake up early or stay late, so go for the times most students would dread. A class on Friday is even better.
2. Take classes while in high school. If the class gives you college credit, that can speed up your graduation date.
3. Take classes at more than one community college in your district. Dual enrollment gives you more options and puts you on a faster

track to graduating.

4. Be persistent. Classes have a wait list once they fill up. A few students don't attend the first couple days of class, leaving room for others to get in. If you are between numbers 1 and 10 on a wait list, go to the class and fight to get in. Any number higher than that, your chances of getting added are low.
5. Take online classes. This allows you to take more classes since it doesn't require you to be on campus.
6. Take less popular courses. Different classes satisfy the same requirement. For your art requirement there are classes such as film, drama, theater, photography and architectural technology. You won't have much competition for architectural technology.



I found out that there were no online classes being offered in our school system. There were 40 on-campus classes available, but I couldn't attend them and work full-time. I chose my job over school because I needed the money.

"Overcrowding has definitely become an issue," my coworker Cecilia Stewart told me. "I'm going to two different schools just to get the classes that I need to graduate. I've been here for nearly three and a half years."

I also know coworkers who dropped out of community college because they couldn't get classes and it was taking too long to graduate. They chose making money over school. I stay determined because I've always liked learning. I also have known what I wanted to do since I was in seventh grade since I always liked writing.

We shouldn't have to decide between dropping out or going to more than one school to get a degree. We shouldn't have to worry each semester that the following semester might be canceled or offer only half the classes, or linger around taking classes that have nothing to do with what we need just to stay enrolled so we don't get a later registration date. I don't want to have to face the choice of choosing school over my job or my job over school.

The community college state board voted in September to give enrollment priority to students seeking degrees, certificates or transferring. This change, which starts in fall 2014, bumps undecided students to the end of the line. Giving enrollment priority to students who know what they want to do is the right thing to do. I've encountered many students who don't show up to classes and then talk about how the class and school sucks, and I'm thinking, why are they here?

I MAY NOT EVEN FINISH IN THREE YEARS

Spring 2014 is still my graduation date but it could be later if I don't get into some of my classes. And if I don't pass my math class this semester I have to take it again next semester and that might push me back even more. They say community college is cheaper, but that's only if you're staying there for two years. If I'm here for four years I might as well have gone to a university.

We need to stop cutting money from schools and find other things to take away money from.

I don't want to sound like I'm against going to community college. But I want high school counselors to tell students what they should expect. They should know that classes are hard to get into. It's no longer a two-year institution so you might want to save money while in high school so you don't have to work during college. Some people have to work. But they should be aware that it's going to limit their availability for classes unless they have flexible hours. Meeting requirements and getting to a four-year college isn't as easy as my college counselors made it sound. So I just want students to beware of that and be prepared for it.



Destiny wishes it didn't take a tax increase to fund education, but she's happy the passing of Proposition 30 means money for schools.

Pop star dreams

My audition to be a Korean pop star was a disaster

By Susie Park

16, Marshall HS

I became a hardcore K-pop fan in 6th grade. Almost half the students at my middle school, John Burroughs, were Korean and almost all of them listened to Korean music, especially K-pop (Korean pop music). I had never been interested in it. It sounded too strange to me, but that all changed in sixth grade when the huge hit “Gee” came out. All my friends were singing the chorus and imitating the dance. “Gee” fever sucked me into K-pop. It became my life. I listened to K-pop nonstop and filled my iPod with it. In a month, I had memorized the names of countless members of boy and girl bands and stuck pictures of my singer “boyfriends” on my walls. I would ditch my weekend art and math classes and go with my friends to concerts. This would always result in my mom yelling that I was wasting my life. My mom thought K-pop was trash and wanted me to like classical music like she did. But classical music made me fall asleep.

Every day during middle school I went to a K-pop gossip and news site called allkpop.com. On this site I learned that I could audition to become a singer in a K-pop band. The flashy clothes, thousands of screaming fans and hearing them chant my name seemed so much more exciting than being a middle school student. Becoming a K-pop star was all I wanted.

I started watching the audition videos of current stars and reading blog posts from people who had auditioned. They explained how it worked and

made the environment seem low-pressure. This made me want to audition even more. After watching those videos, I saw that most of the current stars weren’t that amazing in their auditions and that each singer had improved so much through training. I had never had vocal lessons and didn’t think of myself as a good singer. “But if they could do it, I could do that too,” I thought.

I DIDN’T PRACTICE MUCH

My friends and I spent the two weeks before the audition practicing together at our houses. We would half fool around and half sing without real effort. It seemed to be more of a hang out rather than a serious practice. I chose “Because of You” by Kelly Clarkson because it’s hard to sing. I thought I could impress the judges with it. During our practices, we took turns singing and giving each other feedback. My friends would say, “you’re decent” and “you’ll be fine,” so I believed them. As the audition got closer I got excited.

The night before the audition, I quickly looked through the lyrics again so I wouldn’t forget any of the words. I felt ready.

On the day of the audition, I woke up early and practiced for an hour. After singing the song one last time, I met my friends and we walked to the Wilshire Plaza Hotel in Koreatown. We arrived two hours early so we wouldn’t have to wait too long in line. My friend who had auditioned once before told us that she had come an hour after auditions had started and waited four hours.

When we got there I saw at least 50 people already in line in the park-



Photos by
Cassandra Ellis, 17,
Wilshire Academy

ing lot and felt my confidence dropping. They were all practicing. The singers filled the air with the sweetest voices I had ever heard. In the waiting room B-boys and B-girls were spinning and break-dancing so wildly that I wondered how a human could move that way. The model applicants posed with their pretty faces and tall, slim bodies. I looked around and saw that everyone was much more talented and beautiful than me. It seemed obvious that these people had taken lessons for years. I had thought practicing for two weeks would give me a chance. As more and more people got in line behind us, the more I didn't want to audition.

While waiting, a person working there gave us all applications to fill out. I wrote my name, birth date, address and other information and attached a picture of myself (the ad for the audition told us to bring a picture) to the paper. To note that I was auditioning to be a singer, I checked the box that had "singer" next to it. There were also boxes for "dancer," "model," "actor," "comedian" and "composer." We were all auditioning for S.M. Entertainment, a big entertainment company in South Korea. If they liked our auditions, we would become trainees and move to Korea to study singing and dancing, and then hopefully become stars.

As I got in line to turn in my application, I saw that we were being put into groups of 10 and told we would be auditioning with each other. I felt a part of me dying. I would have to humiliate myself in front of all these people.

I felt dizzy and nervous as I walked into the room. It made me feel so confined. Inside, there were two judges and a cameraman sitting at a table. They smiled but their stares seemed to pierce us. The sight of the judges made me even more nervous and I held my friend's hand tighter.

"Calm down, Susie," whispered my friend, "You're going to break my hand."

After everyone was in the room, we were instructed to stand in a straight line facing the judges. The head judge looked at us and the woman judge next to him gave him a nod to begin.

"Welcome to the audition," the head judge said. "You guys are our first group and I wish you all good luck."

He smiled and sat back down. The woman next to him stood up.

"We will go one by one. Everyone should say their name and age before their audition," she said. "Let's begin."

I gulped. I was sixth in line. The first applicant stepped forward.

"My name is Emily Lee and I am 15 years old," she said. "I will be singing."

THE FIRST TWO PERFORMERS WOWED THE JUDGES

Emily's voice was so strong. She sounded better than most professional singers. Even the judges seemed impressed. They smiled at her as they asked her questions after she finished. My stomach began to turn. If I had at least a tenth of her voice, I wouldn't feel like this. She was a potential star.

Emily took a step back and a dance boy swaggered out. He made the judges laugh and his dancing was impressive as well. He was a street B-boy who danced so crazily that the others in my group had to back up so we wouldn't get accidentally kicked in the face. The judges and the other people trying out smiled during his audition. He was surely going to the next round.

One by one, the others before me auditioned. There was a boy who rapped so fast that the judges stared wide-eyed. I figured out that the bad ones were cut off after about 10 seconds, while the ones the judges liked got to sing for a minute. You could also tell who was going to the next round by looking at the judges' faces. If they liked you they would smile and nod their

heads, and if they didn't they kept a straight face the whole time.

My hands started to sweat and shake as my turn approached. The tall girl who auditioned before me, and who the boys stared at, was trying out to be a model. After she finished striking her five poses, it was my turn. I hesitantly stepped forward.

"M-my name is Su-sie Park and I am-m 13 ye-ears old-d," I stuttered

The cameraman turned the video camera in my direction. I wished that I could turn back time. I felt a large lump coming up to my throat. Sweat formed on my forehead. Only 13 people were in the room, so why was I feeling like my audition was being broadcast throughout the world? All eyes were on me. The silence gave the judges an impatient look. I took a deep breath and began. Every second felt like hell. My voice was horrible. It cracked from nervousness and sounded whiny. I slowly looked at everyone in the room. The disappointed judges stared at their papers instead of me. The other participants smirked and whispered in each other's ears. I hoped the judges would stop me sooner, but they didn't. I was so bad I wanted to stop myself.

"Because of you, I am afraid..." I stopped before finishing the song because I was so bad. I could feel my eyes water, so I stepped back into the line.

"Umm, OK. Thank you," said the woman. She gave me a pitying smile.

I COULDN'T GET OUT OF THERE FAST ENOUGH

There were no comments or claps, unlike after some of the other performances. I waited for everyone to be dismissed. Every second I felt trapped and when we were done, I ran out. As I tried to get out of the building, I noticed that an hour had passed. The people in the audition line were now wearing numbers like 623.

"So many people want this," I told myself. "You will never make it."

After the audition I quickly told my friends goodbye. As I walked home, I cried. For the rest of the day, I couldn't concentrate. In math class, I promised myself that I would never audition again. In art class, I thought I was stupid for thinking someone as untalented and ugly as me could even audition in the first place. In book club, I thought that I shouldn't ever show my face in public again. My mom didn't help my ruined self-esteem. She told me that

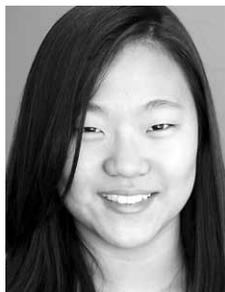
she knew that this would happen. Things got worse at school on Monday when my friends teased me because of how bad I was. I felt my world tumbling down when I heard that a girl I despised got into the final round.

Two weeks later I got an email rejection letter that also invited me to "come back next time." No way. Delete. I was sad about having a bad audition, but I was devastated I had lost my dream. I felt like I had nothing to look forward to in my life. My depression turned into anger. Every time I listened to a K-pop song or saw a picture of a K-pop singer, I thought of my audition and how it broke me. It made me too sad. I stopped listening to K-pop and ripped the posters off my walls. I started hating K-pop. I guess watching people live a life I couldn't have made me mad.

After about a year, the horrifying experience of my audition became a funny memory and I didn't care anymore. I laughed with my friends whenever we mentioned it. I didn't worry about losing my dream, because I had made a new, more realistic one. I made it my goal to get accepted into Columbia University and live in New York City. Columbia is hard to get into but about 1,300 freshmen enroll every year, while only about one or two new K-pop stars break out every year.

I learned that becoming a singer takes talent, lots of practice and luck. I also discovered new boy groups and slowly filled my iPod again. I bought new posters and started to annoy my mom again by going to concerts. I love it again, but this time not as someone trying to pursue it, but just as a fan.

My voice was horrible. It cracked from nervousness and sounded whiny. I slowly looked at everyone in the room. The disappointed judges stared at their papers instead of me. The other participants smirked and whispered in each other's ears. I hoped the judges would stop me sooner, but they didn't. I was so bad I wanted to stop myself.



Susie's new goal is to become a pediatrician.

Should have known better

We asked our teen writers what they learned from times they weren't prepared

I WAS OVERCONFIDENT BEFORE A CONCERT

About a year ago, the rock band club I'm in at school had our first performance in front of a live audience. We were playing at a local senior center for a fundraiser. We were going to perform four songs. I always practiced them perfectly and I thought to myself, "I'm going to rock this show."

About five minutes before the show I did a sound check and I realized I had forgotten to tune my guitar. But I wasn't worried that I hadn't tuned it because I was being cocky and thought I was ready. Right before we had to perform I used my friend Lorenzo's tuner but it wasn't working properly. I sounded so bad that my instructor told me to lower my volume during the show. I was eventually drowned out by every other instrument. During our second song I thought, "I ruined my first show already," and I knew I disappointed everyone.

Now I always try to make a list in my head of what I need to get done before a performance. Since then I have been tuning up for shows at least 10 minutes before they start and I've been rocking every show since.
—David Zacarias, 15, Roosevelt HS

I APPLIED FOR A JOB I COULDN'T DO

When I was 16 I wanted a job so badly so I could make my own money. I was filling out applications like crazy, even to places I would never think of working.

I was online one day and saw an opening at a pizza parlor in Culver City. The posting explained that the person hired would work in the kitchen and serve customers. I applied and a couple days later I received a call from the manager to come in for an interview. I was ecstatic. It was my first interview and in my mind I was already hired. The next day when I walked in, the manager looked at me like I had three heads. He started questioning me. "So, when did you learn to make pizzas? What other Italian dishes can you cook? Are you aware that you're going to have to make pizzas from scratch?" My only response was that I was willing to learn and work hard. Obviously that didn't work; he politely dismissed me and told me he would call me back. I left confused, but after a while I realized I made a complete fool of myself and he wasn't going to call me back.

My experience was pretty embarrassing. I decided to give up looking for a job and volunteer instead. I don't

get paid, but I help those in need while I get experience for when I do start job-hunting again.

—Jenny Guevara, 17, City of Angels HS

TAKING GOOD PHOTOS IS HARDER THAN IT LOOKS

My aunt and uncle had a giant first-birthday bash for my cousin last year. Since I have the nicest camera in my family, my aunt asked me to be the photographer and promised to pay me \$50. I thought it was an easy way to earn some money so I immediately said yes.

The day of the party I went around taking pictures of the tables with their Elmo centerpieces and my cousin in his little tuxedo. As the day went on, more people arrived. I'm not much of a people person so knowing that I had to take pictures of



Illustration by Ana Muñoz, 15, North Hollywood HS Zoo Magnet

my uncle's family and friends who I didn't know got me nervous. I tried asking people if they wanted their picture taken and most said no, so I got discouraged.

Instead of continuing, I went inside the house and watched a movie with my other cousins. After awhile my aunt came in and asked why I had stopped taking pictures. I told her that the amount of people was overwhelming and she told me that she was going to fire me if I didn't do my job and left, annoyed. I stayed inside so when my aunt came back she fired me. I didn't blame her; I was missing all the important things that were happening outside.

In the end, I didn't get paid. I wasn't prepared for the responsibilities of the job. Photography isn't about just owning a nice camera, it's about taking pictures of people and being able to interact with them, something I'm just not good at.

—Jackie Alvarado, 17, Social Justice Humanitas Academy (San Fernando)

I THOUGHT I DIDN'T NEED TO TRAIN

I joined cross country this year. Because I was overconfident, I didn't feel I needed all the training, but I was wrong.

I went to the summer training, and being one of the faster rookies, I could run seven miles without stopping. But when summer school ended and I got to go on vacation, I was thrilled because I would get to miss practice, which meant a rest for my sore muscles.

After school started, practices were mandatory. I noticed that many of my friends who practiced every day were able to keep up with me and even beat me sometimes, which surprised me because in the summer I was always faster. At our first meet, everybody kept passing me and I got tired after one mile. My final place was 125 out of 250 with a time of 21:34 for three miles.

The results of that meet told me I needed more time to get fit, but the season had already begun. Now I'm trying to make up for the time I missed by coming to practice every day and doing everything the coach says. Even though I'm not as fast as I could be, I now know that I have to stay consistent to get better, and I'm trying to make up for the time I lost.

—Cliff Chang, 14, Walnut HS

YARD SALES TAKE PLANNING

I wanted to throw a yard sale because I had a bunch of junk after cleaning my room. There were clothes I hadn't worn in years. I had old exercise equipment and toys, and my grandfather gave me kitchen appliances we hardly used. So that Thursday evening I said, "In two days I'm having a yard sale." I separated my clothes and gadgets. I made two signs Friday night. Then Saturday morning I posted them on each corner of my street.

That morning I set up around 6 a.m. and stayed until 2 p.m. It was a horrible, long day. People passed by but didn't stop. I sold only four items: a beanie, a couple of shirts and a hoodie, and made about \$10. I realized that not only did I try to do it overnight, I didn't promote it enough or set up at a good time. There wasn't a lot of traffic so maybe a weekday afternoon would have been better. After that I gathered all my junk just to take back in the house.

—Precious Sims, 19

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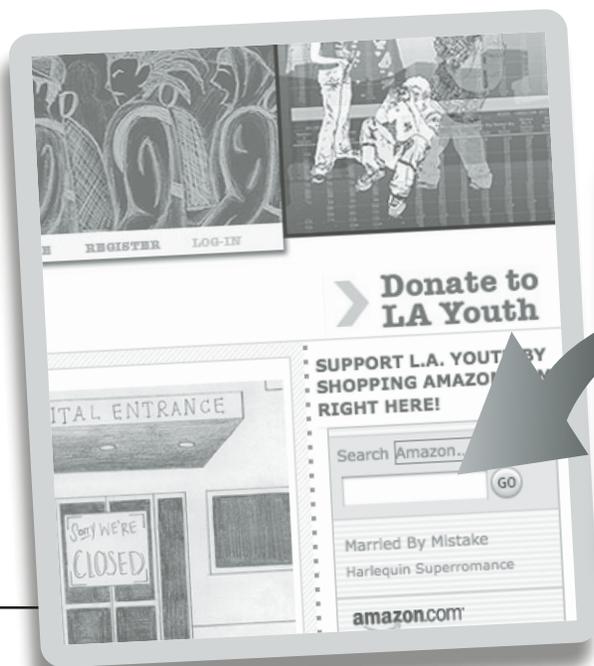
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By Camille Didelot-Hearn*16, Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies*

My family made a New Year's resolution to get in shape and eat healthier. So on the first day of the year, we went on a hike together. It was the first time we'd gone hiking in the city even though my sister and I have lived in LA since we were born. I had never thought of hiking, especially in a city like Los Angeles. The only nature I see is the small hill near my house. I thought you had to drive an hour away from the city to get the real experience. I had also never thought hiking was fun. But I was totally wrong.

We hiked in Runyon Canyon, which is near the Hollywood Hills. I had heard of Runyon Canyon and how amazing the views were but had never been there. The rumors about the views are true—they took my breath away. Standing on top of the mountain looking at the entire city and beyond, and feeling so accomplished with myself for making it all that way, was one of the best feelings I've had. Since that hike, my friends and I go at least every other weekend to Runyon. It's fun and really good exercise.

Recently, we went hiking when it was really hot, almost 90 degrees. My friend Lily and I were already planning to go hiking but I invited my friends Taylor and Maddy to come along too because they had never been hiking before. Taylor, Lily and Maddy got dropped off at my house and we put on tons of SPF 50 sunscreen and filled up two water bottles per person with ice and water, which is really important. It's easy to get dehydrated or sunburned while you hike. We wore sneakers, T-shirts and shorts. We left my house in Laurel Canyon with my mom driving because she decided to tag along and walk my dog, and we were there in about five minutes. As we all got out of the car, Maddy exclaimed to Taylor how hot it was and how much she was not looking forward to this. I felt bad for them, but I lightened the mood by cracking a joke about how Maddy never exercises.

We had to park three blocks from the Fuller Avenue entrance because there's only street parking, plus it was harder to find a spot because there were a lot of people that day. You can also take the 217 bus that runs along Hollywood Boulevard to get there (you get off at Fuller Avenue). To get to the entrance we had to walk up a long hill and boy, was it hot. Then there's another 15-minute walk to get to the beginning of the hike, so by the time we reached the trail we were already sweating like crazy. Luckily, there's already a beautiful view of Los Angeles where you can see all the way downtown, so we took some pictures and had a water break.

Then we started the hardest part of the hike, which is a series of steps carved into the mountain that takes about 10 minutes. Once you reach the next flat part everyone stops, takes pictures and drinks water. We found a bench to sit on where we could see from downtown to the beach. Even though I've seen the view dozens of times, every time I think about how

beautiful it is and how far out you can see.

But that isn't even the best view. We continued on even though Maddy and Taylor were trying to stop in every shaded place possible. During the middle of the hike, we got so jealous of the men hiking without their shirts on that we took our shirts off so we were just in our sports bras.

We eventually reached a fork in the road. The short way is a leisurely walk that takes about 45 minutes to get to the top and then back to the start of the trail. It's mostly shaded, and would have let us cool down but still get exercise. But I coaxed Maddy and Taylor into going the long way because it's more fun.

WE SCRAMBLED UP THE HILLSIDE

We walked up winding paths that led us to a steep part, where you have to use your hands to get to the top. It was scary at first because it was really high up, but it got fun, especially when we were going down the other side and Taylor fell on her butt and slid for a few seconds down the hill. We made fun of her for the rest of the hike by making comments about her "natural athletic abilities."

After walking up another hill, we reached the top. You can see everything—from Mount Baldy to the east to Long Beach to the south. It's amazing. It hits me every time how beautiful nature is. It makes me think about what people were doing here 50 or 100 years ago, and it makes me sad to think that there are so few great hiking places left. It changes your perspective of the city and makes you appreciate it more. We all loved the view and we stayed there for about 15 minutes admiring it and resting. Taylor and Maddy admitted that they were glad they had come on the hike and that they wanted to do it again.

To get back, we walked for about 10 minutes down a different dirt path that leads to the entrance. Overall, the hike took about an hour. It's so fun to hike with my friends, because they motivate me and keep my mind off the hard part of the hike.

You can bring your dog and there are some places where you're allowed to let your dog off its leash.

Anyone can hike Runyon Canyon. It's a great hike to do to get in shape and there are easier trails that aren't too hard if you're new to hiking. It's really cool how in the middle of the city you can still connect with nature and do something outdoors. Give Runyon a chance. You won't regret it!

For information on Runyon Canyon and other hikes around the L.A. area, go to localhikes.com.



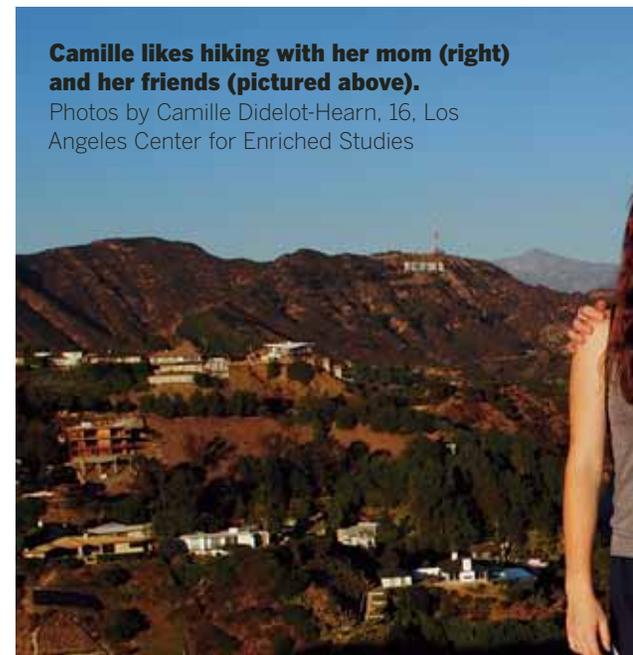
Camille wants to try other hikes in L.A., like Griffith Park.



I love hiking Runy

Camille likes hiking with her mom (right) and her friends (pictured above).

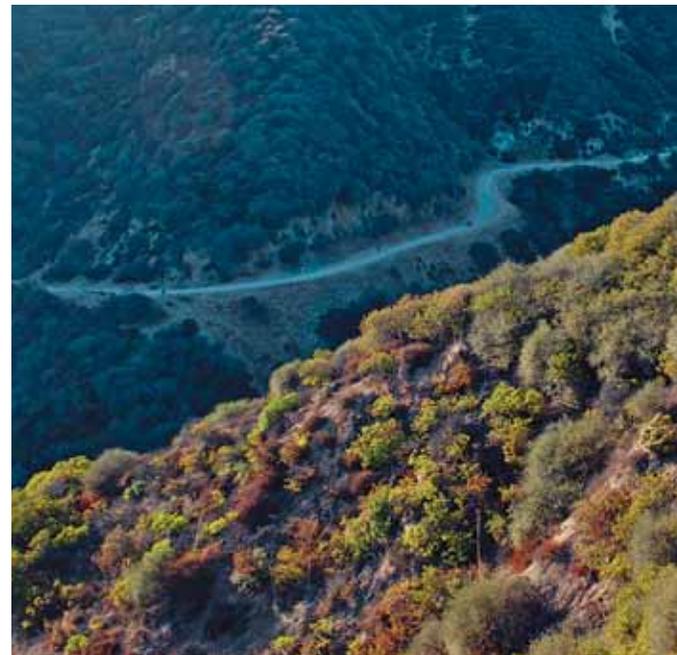
Photos by Camille Didelot-Hearn, 16, Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies





Nature close to home

yon Canyon because it's good exercise with great views



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THE L.A. YOUTH EDITORS HELPED ME improve my writing. They would work with me one-on-one for hours editing my drafts. It was all worth it because I got to see my article published. When I got letters from readers, I saw that I was writing about things that other people care about too. I discovered that I like to write and express my own opinions. —**Miguel Molina, 18, East Los Angeles College (Film & Theatre Arts Charter HS 2012 graduate)**



Staff members
judge a photo
contest



L.A. YOUTH GIVES ME EXPERIENCE in journalism, which is what I want to major in at college. The weekly meetings with the rest of the staff are great because I get to hear from other teens about topics like the Trayvon Martin shooting, mental illness and college. When other teens share their personal experiences that relate to the topic we're talking about, it makes me realize I'm not the only one who's had that experience. —**Melissa Nuñez, 17, Warren HS (Downey)**

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Moving to the Latin beat

It was hard to learn but now salsa dancing has become my passion

By Tyler Bradshaw

17, Redondo Union HS

Every year in the spring my school has a rally where students watch performances from the dance clubs. At my first spring rally in March 2011 they were all great, but the salsa performance gave me chills because of the fast footwork and stunts. I'd never seen a person lift a girl so high. It looked effortless. One stunt that really shocked me was when a guy jumped over a girl's shoulder then she fell back into him.

I have always danced for fun at parties, but I had never thought about taking dance lessons. Once I saw the salsa club dance, it inspired me to see if I could do what they were doing. I was excited. But I'm clumsy and I worried that I would be bad at dancing and step on my own feet.

I signed up at the beginning of the next school year. At my first practice a month later I was nervous because I didn't know anybody in the club. Thankfully, the people treated me like their friend right away.

That day the boys and girls were separated so that we could learn the basic move, which has six steps. I was thinking, "How will I remember that?" For men it starts by stepping forward with your left foot, stomping in place with your right foot and bringing your left leg back next to right foot. Then you step back with your right foot, stomp in place with your left foot and bring your right foot back next to your left.

We learned a simple routine to "Hips Don't Lie" by Shakira. They said to feel the rhythm of the music so you know when to move your hips. I was trying to move my hips but they were stiff. I didn't want other people to look at me. At the end I was tired but when I got home I practiced for two hours until I memorized the steps.

A team member told me one day when I was curious that salsa originated in Cuba. There are different styles—L.A., New York, Colombian and Cuban (we learn L.A. style, which is more dramatic). Salsa music is fast-paced with trumpets and drums. You have to have a lot of energy to dance salsa.

Later we learned more advanced steps. Then we tried the steps with partners. And we learned part of the routine for tryouts to determine who our partners would be.

I practiced so hard for tryouts. To make things more stressful, our advisor, Mr. Soohoo, told us that Angélica Hernández-Ball, one of Southern California's best salsa dancers, would be there. I was one of the last people to try out and it wasn't that bad.

The next day I met my partner, Xia. She seemed like a perfect partner because she was short (I'm only 5'1") and she's beautiful with a big smile perfect for performing.

Learning basics was pretty easy, but partner work



Photo by Tiffany Hattori, 16, South HS (Torrance)

was more complicated. There are combo moves and handwork that can be messed up by one wrong turn. It took the team months to learn parts of the routine and the school rally was in less than two months. So in late January the club presidents arranged a 10-hour practice.

OUR DAY-LONG PRACTICE WAS EXHAUSTING

We learned the entire routine that day. The presidents were encouraging and patient. We went over every detail, like exactly where our hands were supposed to go. I did all three stunts every time we went through the routine, even though at the end I was shaking when I was lifting Xia because my muscles were sore. We went home at eight that night and I plopped down on my bed and didn't move until the next morning.

One day close to the rally the presidents announced the people who wouldn't be performing because they hadn't attended practice. Xia was one of them. My new partner, Jenny, was a little taller than me so we put in extra practice and I was able to spin her around my neck. The salsa team was always the favorite performance and I didn't want to be the one who messed up.

On March 15, the day of the performance, we had to be at school at 6:30 a.m. so we could run through the routine. There were like 10 ASB members watching as they set up for the rally and I was nervous then. Imagine what it would be like in front of the entire school!

I couldn't sit still in my classes. I got dismissed early from my fourth period and the team met outside the gym. After the previous performance was done, we walked onto the floor and took our beginning pose. It felt like forever waiting for the music to start over the crowd cheering.

My hands were shaking because I felt like everyone was watching me. I chose one person at the top of the stands and stared at her the entire routine just to make sure I was smiling and looking up. Me and Jenny did great, we were full of energy and we didn't mess up the stunt where I lift her onto my shoulder and she spins onto the other shoulder and lands with one foot on my knee. When the routine was over we had to hold our partners in a dip for 10 seconds as the crowd cheered. Then we lifted the girls up and walked off the floor. I gave Jenny the tightest hug and went around giving out hugs and high fives to everyone saying, "We did it!"

I never thought I'd get the steps down but I was able to learn the routine. After that I wanted to learn more moves and get better.

After the rally we had four more performances for the school year. At our next performance at USC Jenny and I messed up every stunt. I learned that it wasn't going to go smoothly every time. The next day we went to a competition at our school. There were salsa dancers from all over California and even Mexico who were really good. This time me and Jenny did everything perfectly. The team placed first in the large group division. It felt great.

This year I'm one of the team's dance captains. My responsibilities are to know the routine and teach it to other people. I'm glad that I can help the team improve like the presidents did for me. We recently performed for our school's fall rally and now we are teaching that routine to the newcomers.

Some people complain at practice that they're tired, but I'm always happy to go to salsa because when I dance I'm worry free. It takes my mind off of schoolwork and deadlines. I may be tired, sweaty and thirsty while dancing, but I'm happy because I'm doing what I love. Even when there are no crowds I'm always smiling when I dance.



Over the summer Tyler performed in Brazil. It was tiring, but he loved dancing every day.

Arroz con leche (rice pudding)

My mom used to make *arroz con leche* in the winter. We ate it hot and it looked like *atole* (porridge), perfect for the weather. It has been a while since I had my mother's *arroz con leche*, so I asked my aunt to help me make it because I didn't know how. She gave me clear instructions and it was easy to make. I thought that it could have turned out better if I had used condensed milk. My mom used condensed milk and her rice pudding was amazing. In the end the rice pudding came out all right. When I put it in the fridge and ate it the next day, it tasted pretty good because it wasn't as sweet as when it was hot. —Miguel Molina, 18, East Los Angeles College

1 piloncillo (also known as panela), which is a piece of unrefined whole cane sugar shaped in a cone (you can get piloncillo in any store that sells Mexican products, like Superior)	3 cups rice
	6 cups water
	9 cups milk
	1 cinnamon stick
	10 tablespoons sugar
	2 tablespoons vanilla extract
	Ground cinnamon for garnish

- 1 Put rice and water in a large pot and bring to a boil.
- 2 Add milk (you can add less than 9 cups. We add a lot because we like to eat it like porridge).
- 3 Add cinnamon stick, broken into smaller pieces.
- 4 Cook on medium heat for about 15 minutes, then add piloncillo and sugar. You can add more or less depending how sweet you want it.
- 5 Add vanilla extract.
- 6 Turn heat to high for 3-5 minutes to allow it to return to a boil. You will notice that the grains of rice have grown. This is the result that you want because the rice absorbs the milk.
- 7 When done you can eat it hot or refrigerate it to eat it cold. Add ground cinnamon for garnish before serving.

Serves 12-15 people



Cocoa zucchini cake

What holiday dessert is more popular than cocoa zucchini cake? I know it sounds weird, but trust me—this recipe turns out sweet. I chose to make this dessert because it was convenient. My mom had coincidentally bought all the ingredients for it on the day I was going to bake, so when I asked for a suggestion of what to make, she gave me this recipe. I bake whenever I get a craving, but I'd never seen this recipe before. My mom offered to help me with it, and we made it in less than an hour. The cake has two cups of grated zucchini in it, but the sugar, vanilla and orange flavors mask the zucchini and make it taste like a normal chocolate cake. It was delicious! —Austin Skootsky, 17, Hamilton HS

Nonstick vegetable cooking spray	2 cups sugar
1 ½ cups all-purpose flour	3 egg whites
1 cup whole wheat flour	2 teaspoons vanilla flavoring
1 cup wheat germ	2 teaspoons orange extract
½ cup unsweetened cocoa	2 cups grated, unpeeled zucchini
2 ½ teaspoons baking powder	¾ cup skim milk
1 ½ teaspoons baking soda	
1 teaspoon salt	<i>Vanilla Glaze</i>
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon	2 cups powdered sugar
¾ cup vegetable oil	3 tablespoons skim milk
	1 teaspoon vanilla extract

- 1 Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
- 2 Spray a 10-inch tube pan with cooking spray; dust with flour, then set aside.
- 3 In a bowl, combine all-purpose flour, whole wheat flour, wheat germ, cocoa, baking powder, baking soda, salt, cinnamon and set aside.
- 4 With an electric mixer, beat oil and sugar in a separate bowl until blended. Add egg whites. Stir in vanilla flavoring, orange extract and zucchini. Alternately stir in dry ingredients and milk.
- 5 Pour batter into pan that was coated with cooking spray. Bake for 1 hour or until toothpick inserted in center comes out clean. Cool in pan 15 minutes; turn onto wire rack to cool.
- 6 Meanwhile, combine glaze ingredients and beat until smooth. Drizzle glaze over cake.

From Vegetable Desserts, serves 16



Holiday treats

Here are some easy desserts you can make

Sugar cookies

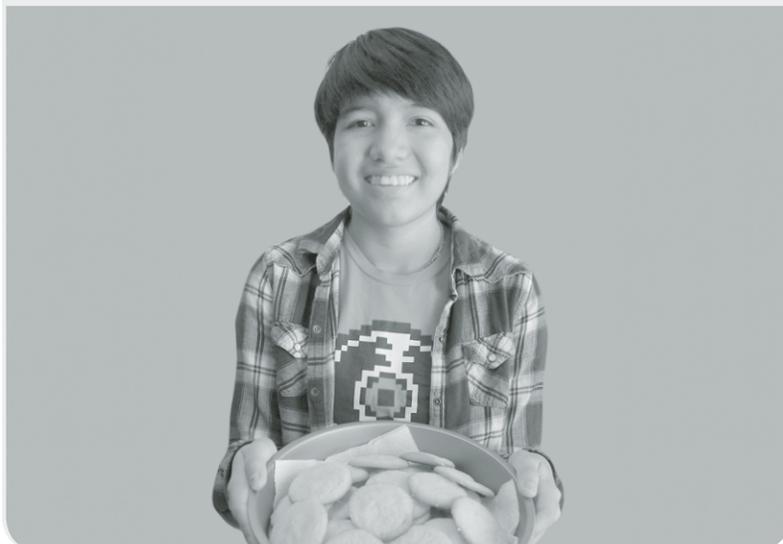
I made sugar cookies because I really love the sugar cookies that the grocery store sells around the holidays. This was the first time I baked without using a box mix. I made two batches because the first batch was horrifying. When I pulled it out of the oven, it was this monstrous pancake-looking thing because the cookies had merged together. I realized I didn't put in enough flour. When I tried again I put in the right amount and refrigerated the dough overnight. Needless to say, I learned to follow recipes more carefully because the cookies came out better when I did. —Ana Muñoz, 15, North Hollywood HS Zoo Magnet

1 ½ cups butter, softened
2 cups white sugar
4 eggs
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

5 cups all-purpose flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
1 teaspoon salt

- 1** In a large bowl, mix together butter and sugar until smooth. Beat in eggs and vanilla. Stir in the flour, baking powder and salt. Cover, and chill dough for at least one hour (or overnight).
- 2** Preheat oven to 400 degrees. On floured surface, roll out dough 1/4 to 1/2 inch thick. Cut into shapes with any cookie cutter. Place cookies one inch apart on ungreased cookie sheets.
- 3** Bake 6 to 8 minutes in preheated oven. Cool completely.

From Allrecipes.com, makes 5 dozen



Apple crisp

I made apple crisp because it was a dish I'd helped make in a cooking class once, and wanted to know what it'd be like to make by myself. I also wondered what it'd be like to make a dessert more complex than your basic cookies or cake. Apple crisp is sort of like an apple pie. The apple filling is sweet but also sour with the addition of lemon juice. There's also the crispy topping. It was easy to make but time consuming, mostly because I doubled the recipe. But it was fun to try on my own and I'll definitely make apple crisp again. —Leilani Jimenez, 13, Irving MS

Filling

5 Granny Smith apples, peeled, cored, chopped small

¼ cup finely chopped pecans

3 tablespoons all-purpose flour

½ cup brown sugar

2 tablespoons maple syrup

1 tablespoon lemon juice

Topping

¾ cup all-purpose flour

½ cup brown sugar

¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon

¼ teaspoon salt

6 tablespoons chilled butter, cut into pieces

¼ cup coarsely chopped pecans



- 1** Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
 - 2** Mix all the filling ingredients together. Place into 7- to 8-ounce ramekins. (I used a baking pan and lined it with foil.)
 - 3** For the topping, mix the flour, brown sugar, cinnamon and salt in large bowl. Blend the butter into the mixture until it forms pea-size lumps. Stir in pecans and sprinkle over filling.
 - 4** Bake for 35 to 40 minutes. Cool 10 minutes before serving.
- From The Neelys, The Food Network, serves 8

Struggling with OCD

I saw germs everywhere so I couldn't stop washing my hands

By Henry Studebaker

17, Hamilton HS

When I hear people say, "Don't be so OCD" just because someone is organizing the things on their desk, it makes me sad. I've been diagnosed with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), and it isn't a joke to me. For me it's a fear of germs that prevents me from focusing on anything other than washing my hands. But in the last year I've finally gotten help to control it.

Things started in seventh grade when we learned about germs in health class. Our textbook said that germs are everywhere and that they can be easily passed from person to person, person to object, and object to person. This scared me. How had I not known about this?

Before I had learned about germs, I hadn't made distinctions between what was clean and what was dirty, unless it was something obvious like garbage. But this planted a seed in my head. Maybe the things around me aren't clean.

I started thinking about germs hundreds of times a day. When I would touch something like the TV remote, light switches or my phone, I added them to my mental list of dirty things. I felt like the germs were clinging to my hands and would spread to the rest of my body.

The bathroom sink pulled me toward it like a magnet. As I walked to the bathroom I'd wish that I didn't feel this need to wash my hands. But as I got closer the need to wash my hands overpowered any other thoughts. Once my hands were under the warm running water, I'd pump the liquid soap onto them, rub it all over and scrub. But as good as I felt after washing my hands, having to do it so often kind of scared me. Was there something wrong with me?

I also became obsessed with organization. When I helped set the table I had to make the forks and knives parallel to each other. And each place setting had to be identical to the one across from it. Then I would line up the chairs. If I noticed a mistake (even a fraction of an inch), I would correct it before sitting. I didn't know why I had to do this, but it was like an itch that wouldn't go away.

I DIDN'T WANT MY PARENTS TO KNOW HOW BAD IT WAS

After a few weeks my parents noticed my hand-washing and obsession with organizing. When they asked me why I did it I shrugged and told them that I didn't know. I was afraid to tell them the truth because I thought that they would think something was wrong with me. I hoped it would just go away.

There were times I didn't wash my hands and lived



Illustration by Ruth Xu, 17, Temple City HS

with them feeling tainted because my parents had just asked me about my handwashing. I didn't want my parents to start asking me more questions. When I didn't wash my hands it felt like they were covered with a layer of dust. Thinking about it sometimes literally made it hard to breathe. But other times I couldn't not wash my hands even though I knew my parents might question me. Every day I had to choose between being clean and risk getting asked about my obsession or avoiding their questions and being dirty. I felt stuck.

The weird thing about my OCD was that it didn't bother me at school, which was good because I didn't want to attract more attention to my handwashing. But as soon as I got home I immediately had to wash off all the dirt that had accumulated on me during the day.

After a few months my obsession with staying clean became mind-boggling to my parents and sister. Instead of accepting my "I don't know" explanations, they started asking if there was something they could do to help. I always said that I was fine. I felt like I had to get this under control and wash my hands less or my parents would force me to get help.

I had no idea what was happening with me, but there were hints on the television show *Monk*, which I liked. The lead character Adrian Monk is a police consultant who has OCD and on the show is depicted as having an over-the-top fear of germs (and pretty much everything else). I recognized some of his OCD tendencies in myself, but I refused to believe that I also had OCD because I didn't want to be like him.

To try and help me, my dad told me that although he loved being clean as a kid, one day he realized how fun it was to play in the dirt, as if these were magic words that could change my thinking.

I felt like I was a burden. Our water bill increased about \$100 a month. My parents would always say, "It's not just because of you," but I knew it was. I washed my hands more than 30 times a day and most of those were unnecessary, like after I got out of the shower, because I thought the shower handles were dirty.

I GOT PROFESSIONAL HELP

One day in ninth grade, my parents said that I would be seeing a psychiatrist because they saw that my obsessive thoughts weren't going away. I was surprised. We hadn't talked about a psychiatrist and my parents thinking I needed professional assistance made me feel like there was something wrong with me.

Before my first session with my psychiatrist, I was anxious because I thought she would think that I was a freak. She asked me questions about how I would feel if I was asked to touch something dirty, like the garbage bin. I told her that I would feel like the germs were on my hand, and that the only way to get them off would be to wash my hands. I sat in that chair answering questions for an hour. At the end it was official: I had obsessive-compulsive disorder.

I was scared to be diagnosed with a medical problem. I thought I would turn out like *Monk*, scared of everything and a burden to everyone. But I also realized that it was exactly what I needed to hear. In a weird way, it made me happy to be diagnosed because if doctors had heard of this maybe there was a

treatment. The psychiatrist prescribed Zoloft, which is an antidepressant sometimes used to treat OCD. I thought it was annoying that I had to take pills twice a day, but I'd rather take pills than constantly feel like I had to wash my hands. The psychiatrist wanted me to come back in a few months to see how I was doing.

But things didn't change. My mom suggested I try a form of meditating. Whenever I felt the need to wash my hands I'd tell myself that I didn't need to wash them, because I was OK. As much as I wanted to believe what I was telling myself, it didn't help.

Half a year after I started seeing the psychiatrist (and a few increases in the dosage of my medication), I was still obsessing about germs and washing my hands dozens of times a day. I was so angry that there was no change. All the meds seemed to do was make me tired. I felt like I was being cheated out of the help I needed.

In 10th grade things got even worse. I took my first AP class, and it was incredibly difficult. The pressure

WHERE TO TURN

If you are having any kind of mental health problem and need someone to talk to, there is help. Counseling and other services are available.

TO FIND THEM:

Dial 2-1-1 to find social services in Los Angeles County, including counseling and mental health centers. Or search online at www.healthycity.org.

Call Teen Line at 1-800-TLC-TEEN (1-800-852-8336) to speak with a trained teen peer counselor from 6 to 10 p.m. or go to www.teenlineonline.org.

Go to the ReachOut forums, a website for people ages 14-25 to talk about what's on their mind, at www.ReachOutHere.com.

made me even more stressed and I became depressed. And I was so tired because of the meds that I even fell asleep in class a couple of times.

I felt like I couldn't win. I had a mental disorder to deal with, and I had this class that was giving me hell. Every few months when I would have my check-up with my psychiatrist, she would just say that they hadn't found the right dosage of the medication. It was a constant annoyance, like a fly buzzing around my head.

And then came junior year. At the time when my classmates and I were starting to think about college, I felt like I was cursed with OCD.

I couldn't study as hard as other students because I was always focused on how clean things were. I'd be reading and then suddenly it was like I could see the germs on my binder and then I couldn't focus on what I was reading. I would add the binder to my mental list

of things that are dirty, and I would know not to let that touch anything or else whatever it touched would get dirty. So instead of studying I was obsessed with how dirty my stuff was. In class the next day, I would make mistakes on tests because the day before I had spent so much time thinking about germs. I didn't tell my teachers because I didn't want to get singled out.

With all that stress, I washed my hands even more. I felt like I wouldn't be able to function in college, and it made me think that I wouldn't go at all. My parents and sister tried to help me by telling me to focus on something else that wasn't related to cleanliness because the pills weren't working. But I was skeptical. If the medication hadn't helped me, then how could their advice to just think of something else help?

THE MEDICATION FINALLY WORKED

In second semester of junior year, after about two years of trying, we finally figured out the right dose for my medication. One day I went to wash my hands after moving from doing homework on my bed to the computer, but I stopped myself. Was it really necessary to wash my hands?

It was a question that I had asked myself thousands of times, and the answer was always "yes." To my surprise, this time the answer was "no."

It was like a switch flipped inside my head, and I realized how foolish it was for me to always feel the need to wash my hands. I imagined that all of the things I had thought were dirty, like the TV remote, the light switches and my binders, were being crossed off my mental list of dirty things. I was free, and I knew that life would start to get better for me. I told my parents and sister and they were cheering for me. This was just the first moment, but I realized that I was over my obsession with germs, and that I could function like a normal person for the first time in years.

Since we figured out the right amount of medication, my life has been great (except for the times I fall asleep in class). I haven't had to worry about washing my face after a dog licked it, which is important because I get paid to walk dogs (and they like to lick me), or washing my hands when I bring in the trash cans for my neighbor. Now, I wash my hands only when it's necessary, like after I go to the bathroom, and the water bill has dropped down to what it was before all this started.

I wanted to write this story to show people that OCD isn't a joke, but that you can get help for it. Now that my OCD is under control, I'm looking forward to going to college and so relieved that I can finally live a normal life.



Now when Henry sets the table, the silverware doesn't have to be perfectly straight.

I'm here to listen

It's been rewarding working at an online forum where teens get help with their problems

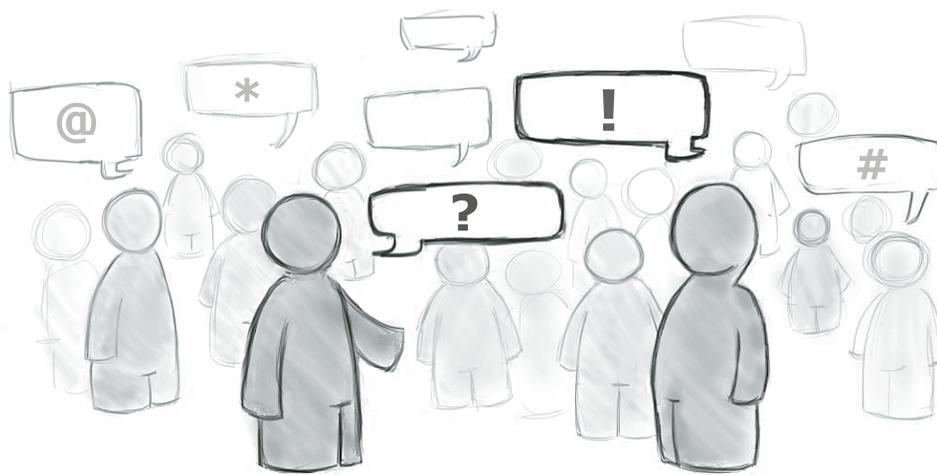


Illustration by Sarah Chong, 17, Wilson HS (Hacienda Heights)

By Eric Whitt

17, Millikan HS (Long Beach)

A little more than two years ago, while on Facebook, I noticed that someone I knew through another friend had posted an upsetting status: "I don't see the point anymore. I'll miss you guys." I commented, "Is this serious? Are you OK?" I also messaged his best friend, who told me that she had called his parents and the police, who sent help right away. She told me that, luckily, they were not too late and he was stopped. The situation could have been much worse if his friend had not taken his post seriously.

That night, I texted a close friend about this. We wondered what our school was doing to help people who were going through rough times. I've always liked to help people and I've never had a problem talking to someone even if it's a sensitive subject. So a few days later we talked to one of our school's co-principals. We talked about what we had seen on Facebook and said we wanted to do something to help others. A school counselor suggested a peer-counseling program. The counselor, two of my friends and I tried to start one but it didn't work out.

Then one day last February, the counselor called me and my two friends into her office. She had found out about the opportunity to become a peer moderator at ReachOutHere.com, which is an online forum where teens can share their problems and get advice or encouragement from members who have been trained to respond. She said it was a paid position and urged us to apply. I was excited that I could help other teens.

In March I was flown to San Francisco for the week-

end for an orientation with 12 others between the ages of 17 and 24. I wasn't sure what I was going to do as a peer moderator. But I felt comfortable around these people because everyone shared a common goal.

The people from ReachOut said we were going to encounter problems like depression, drug and alcohol use, and physical or verbal abuse. They trained us how to respond. They said that if the person posting their problem was overcoming something, congratulate them on what they've done so far. You can relate to them to make them feel like they're not alone. They also told us about the importance of suggesting that someone does something rather than telling them they have to. This helps them feel more comfortable. There are also adult moderators who monitor the posts. If the poster needs immediate help they'll be referred to hotlines and resources.

They also said that everyone using the site would be anonymous so there was no fear of being judged.

I thought I'd be able to help if it was something I'd seen friends go through, like depression and anxiety. I'd never known someone who'd been abused or had drug problems but I felt that with time I'd be able to help.

When the site was launched in June, seeing people with problems on the site made it more real. The forums are always available, but most posts are made from the afternoon until night. Scrolling through, I thought, "Where do I start?" I wrote 10 or 12 responses the first day. Most of the posts I replied to said, "I don't feel like I have any friends," "I feel overwhelmed at school," "I feel like I don't meet people's expectations."

I'd had similar problems with the stress of school and meeting everyone's expectations, like balancing marching band, jazz band and bands I'm a part of out-

side of school, as well as homework and other extracurriculars. If I couldn't relate, I'd say I've known someone with a similar problem. I wanted them to feel like they weren't talking to a stranger. At the end of this day, I felt more comfortable with what I was being asked to do, but still not entirely sure if I was up to the challenge.

When choosing which posts to respond to, I would look for people having problems that I felt I could help with.

One day I came across a post by a girl who was caught in the middle of fighting friends. They both came to her saying, "You have to take my side." She wasn't sure what to do. I thought back to how I'd made mistakes by taking sides with friends. The advice I gave her was to be there for both of them but don't take a side. You're not hurting the other person by just listening.

Most times they said thank you. Other times I would never hear back from someone I responded to and wonder if they had gotten the help they needed, or if they had come back to the site at all.

I HELPED A GIRL WHO FELT ALONE

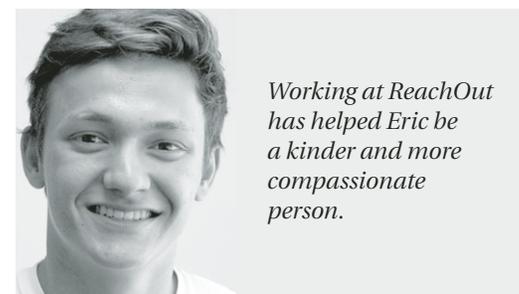
Two months in, a girl posted about how she felt like she didn't belong at her school or have any friends. She felt depressed. I gave examples of things she could do: join a club, branch out from your usual social circle. She asked, "How can I branch out?" I said, "Be yourself or look for people with similar interests." She said she'd try. Eventually she came back and said, "Thanks for the advice. It really helped." Getting feedback made me feel like I'd made a difference instead of hoping I had.

Not every post works out. One day I saw a post from someone who said he was 15 and had never had a girlfriend. There were responses from the other peer moderators. "That's perfectly normal." "You have your whole life ahead of you, not having a girlfriend isn't a big deal."

No matter what we said, he said he still felt bad about it. We couldn't tell if we helped or not. Maybe he wasn't ready to help himself.

This job ended up being more important than I ever expected. I feel like I'm making a difference when people say, "Oh this helps." It's an amazing thing that there's someone on the other side of a computer somewhere who's being helped by the advice they found on the forums.

If you ever feel like life is too much to handle, go to the forums at ReachOutHere.com. Someone will be there to listen and give advice if you need it. Even if you don't need advice, you can still use the site to leave encouraging replies for others. Listening is sometimes the most important part of helping others. People just need someone to talk to and tell them it will be OK.



Working at ReachOut has helped Eric be a kinder and more compassionate person.

RULES

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

The teen staff of L.A. Youth will select a first-, second- and third-place winner as well as some honorable mentions. The first-place winner and his or her teacher will each receive \$100. The second-place winner and his or her teacher will each receive \$75, and the third-place student and teacher will get \$50 each. Winners and honorable mentions will be published in the May-June 2013 issue of L.A. Youth and on layouth.com.

Questions?

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

DEADLINE:
MARCH 31,
2013

We're moving in 2013! For our mailing address go to layouth.com or email us at editor@layouth.com

L.A. Youth art contest



1ST PLACE
\$100
2ND PLACE
\$75
3RD PLACE
\$50

Most of us have spent time thinking about the future. What will life be like and what will our world look like?

For this year's art contest we want you to create a piece of art that shows us what the future looks like to you. What do you hope will change for the better or what do you fear will change for the worse?

Here are some ideas to get you thinking about what type of future you

envision. You may imagine a different future from these examples and that's OK.

What do you think will happen with race relations? Will we all get along or will we become more divided? What about world peace? Do you think countries will get rid of their weapons or that we'll go to war again?

Or maybe you want to show what role you think technology will play in our lives. Do you imagine a post-apocalyptic world where robots have

taken over humans? Or do you imagine exciting technological advances improving our lives?

A lot of people are worried about the environment. Do you think we'll have solar panels on every house or do you think we won't be able to stop the harmful effects of global warming?

Before you get started, think, what's most important to you when you think about the future? How can you express your idea in a way that other people will understand what you're saying?

ESSAY CONTEST WINNERS

Moral dilemma

1ST PLACE \$50

Should I give the dog back?

By **Mary Razo**
Wilmington MS

It was a few years ago on a rainy day when we found her. My family and I were walking to my aunt's for a birthday party. We passed by a dumpster and behind it was a shivering dog.

"Don't get near it," my mother warned. It was a small white dog; at least it used to be white, now its fur was dirty and covered in oil from sleeping under cars. It also had a tattered pink leash. I began to get near it but it started backing up. It winced and limped away from us.

We went to the party. Despite the rain, everyone was having fun dancing and laughing. As we began to leave, the dog limped toward us. My dad put her near the fire to warm up and fed her some meat.

We all decided she should come home with us since it was obvious she was lost. It would have stayed with my aunt except my cousin was allergic.

After she was clean, her fur was white and curly but neatly trimmed. We played with her and had a lot of fun. One day as I was walking home I noticed a flier. It had a picture of the dog we found saying it was missing. I continued to walk home and contemplated whether or not the dog was her and if so, should I return her? I didn't want to return her. I enjoyed

having fun with her.

"Should I give her back?" I thought to myself. I pondered my dilemma and reasons why I should. For example, it wasn't my dog to begin with. Her owner was probably worried about her and it was the

right thing to do. "Or was it?" I thought. In that moment I didn't know what was right and what was wrong.

I then began to convince myself that that had not been the right dog. But it was pointless; deep inside I knew it was. A few days later it was pouring rain and there was a knock on the door. Outside was a woman in a thick coat. "Sorry to bother you" she said, "but have you seen this dog?" She held up the flier that I had seen the other day. "She responds to Coco."

I had to make a choice: lie or tell the truth. Then I imagined the woman out in the pouring rain,

going from door to door looking for her dog. She never lost hope even though it had been weeks. I knew what I had to do. She loved her dog and I shouldn't take that away from her. I gave back the dog, who was very happy to see her. As I watched them walking away, I knew I had made the right choice. Instead of being selfish I had told the truth and I felt much better than I would have if I had lied.



Illustration by Austin Skootsky, 17, Hamilton HS

2ND PLACE \$30

Pressured to drink

Author's name withheld

It was Saturday night and I was getting ready for one of the biggest parties of the year. One of my friends is friends with the party host, a football player from my school. I was extremely nervous because I wasn't the most known or popular person in my school. I heard my friend honking outside, which added to my nerves. Coming out of my house my mom gave me a big kiss on the cheek and told me not to do anything stupid. I promised her I wouldn't, but that promise would soon be broken.

Driving up to the house I could see people outside dancing in the street and acting stupid. I felt awkward being there because I knew the people there but I had never talked to them. My friend and I went to the backyard where there was a fire with people around it drinking from red cups. Me and my friend sat down in the circle and were offered alcohol. In my head I was saying, "NO, NO, NO!! REMEMBER WHAT MOM TOLD YOU ...". The guy had the beer right in front of my face. I said, "No thank you, I don't really like drinking alcohol."

Everyone in the circle was telling me not to be such a wimp, that I was scared, and teasing me. I got embarrassed so I decided to grab the beer but not drink from it. They yelled at me to chug the beer down. I really didn't want to. They laughed at me so I chugged the bottle and I didn't really feel anything. They started chanting my name and I felt like I was a part of something and I was popular for the first time. They gave me another one and I took sips here and there, but I didn't think it was going to do anything.

By this time I couldn't remember anything so I had to rely on my friends to tell me what happened. They told me I kept drinking and drinking. I was acting stupid and not acting like myself. They had to drag me out of the party because I kept falling over. When they dropped me off at my house they had to knock on the front door. My mom opened it and was worried sick.

The next morning I woke up with my head hurting and my stomach angry. My face was glued to the toilet. I kept throwing up. I felt really bad. I had broken a promise to my mom and to myself. I felt stupid and embarrassed that I let peer pressure get to me. I promised myself I would never drink again and I would make sure to keep this promise. Today is my 49th day since I had a drink of alcohol.

3RD PLACE \$20

I lost my mom's ring

By **Aileen Seav**
Gabrielino HS

My parents have always stressed the importance of honor and integrity. My mom often says to me, "The moment you lie is the moment when I will lose all my trust in you." So with that threat in mind, I remained a very truthful person. But as I grew older and entered high school, I felt a strong sense of independence. Because of that, I started lying to do the things I wanted to do.

One day, my mom and I were cleaning out her jewelry box. That was when I encountered her diamond engagement ring again. It was a simple diamond with small rectangular diamonds around the band. My mom told me to try it on to see if it would fit and miraculously, it did! She told me that I could keep it. I was in shock. This was the first jewelry that my father had given her and she gives me the responsibility to wear it and watch over it? But I was too awestruck by how it beautifully complemented my pale complexion that I didn't even hesitate to say "OK!" From that day on, I wore that diamond ring every day.

It was during my junior year's spring final when things took a turn for the worse. My mom wanted me to concentrate on my finals before I did anything with my friends. I thought that was completely unreasonable. I thought it was enough that I had to sit through two hours of a class just to take my finals. I felt that I deserved a day to relax. So that was why, during the middle of finals week, my friend and I decided to go to the beach. It was a mastermind of a plan. I would tell my mom that I had to do a science project, saying that my science grade depended on it. Of course, she didn't say no to that. So after school ended, my friend and I drove all the way to Huntington Beach, enjoying the water and waves and having a great time. We were having so much fun that I didn't even realize my ring was missing from my finger. After I realized it, I went into complete shock. "Oh my god," I thought. "This can't be happening. What do I tell Mom now? I can't tell her the truth. She is going to kill me!"

When I got home, my conscience was fighting me, telling me to tell the truth. But I was so scared. How could my mom

forgive me? Plus, she couldn't know that I went to the beach and lied to her. Things were spiraling out of control and I felt so overwhelmed. So, I decided to not tell her. The following day, my last day of finals, which happened to be my most difficult class, I couldn't concentrate at all. The only thing that was running through my mind was how I was going to tell my mom. I couldn't focus on kinetic energy, torque, force or anything physics-related. It was a disaster.

So after finals ended and I got home, I marched up to her room, opening the door slowly. She was relaxing on her bed after a long day of work. I told her, "Mom, I need to tell you something." And everything spilled out. My mom listened intently. I felt fury and rage boiling inside of her, but she had on a mask. I couldn't tell if she was mad or if she was disappointed. She just stared blankly at me as I was telling her everything. After I was done confessing, the room was deadly silent. In the most menacing tone, she told me, "Get out." I got out of her room and started to cry. This was all my fault. If only I hadn't gone to the beach, if only I hadn't lied to her, none of this would have happened. I lost my mom's ring, a symbol of my mother's and father's relationship. How is my father going to look at me now?

After I had stopped crying and a few hours passed, I decided to drag myself to her room once again and apologize. She was there, sitting up on her bed. We stared at each other for a good minute and suddenly she told me "Come here" and held out her arms to embrace me in a hug. I went over to her and apologized again. She told me that she was sorry she reacted that way. She told me that she was happy that I told her instead of lying and trying to cover it up. She told me that it was OK.

From that day forward, I've tried my best to be as truthful to my parents as possible. I don't want to hear the hurt and disappointment in her voice ever again. I can't damage the relationship I have with her just for a little lie. No lie is worth it.

We picked these essays as the winners because they did the best job of describing the dilemma the writer faced. But of the more than 400 essays we received, the most common responses were about cheating, shoplifting, and drinking and drug use.

NEW ESSAY CONTEST

Who or what are you jealous of?

We've all been jealous at one time or another, whether we were envious of someone's looks or possessions or abilities. When we're kids we get jealous of the toys other kids have. When we get older, it could be someone's beautiful long hair or the freedom they have that we don't. We want you to tell us about an experience when you were jealous. Why were you jealous and how did you feel about it?

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 January-February 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, Dec. 14, 2012

Out of My Mind

By Sharon M. Draper

Reviewed by Zahava Jaffe
13, Sinai Akiba Academy

Out of My Mind, by Sharon M. Draper, is a moving story about an 11-year-old girl named Melody Brooks who has cerebral palsy. She is unable to move or speak, although she is a genius with a photographic memory. The one thing in life Melody wants is to be a normal kid, so she can express herself and show everyone around her what she knows. Trouble is, she can't eat, walk or go to the bathroom by herself. It was amazing to read a book about a kid who has a disability and to see how it would be in real life because it's impossible to know the thoughts of someone who can't express themselves.

The school Melody has attended for six years has a special needs program that utterly sucks. The kids are taught the same thing every year, and haven't learned anything! Melody is the only one who understands what they're learning. She's excited when her school decides to include the special needs kids in regular classes for part of the day because she can challenge herself more.

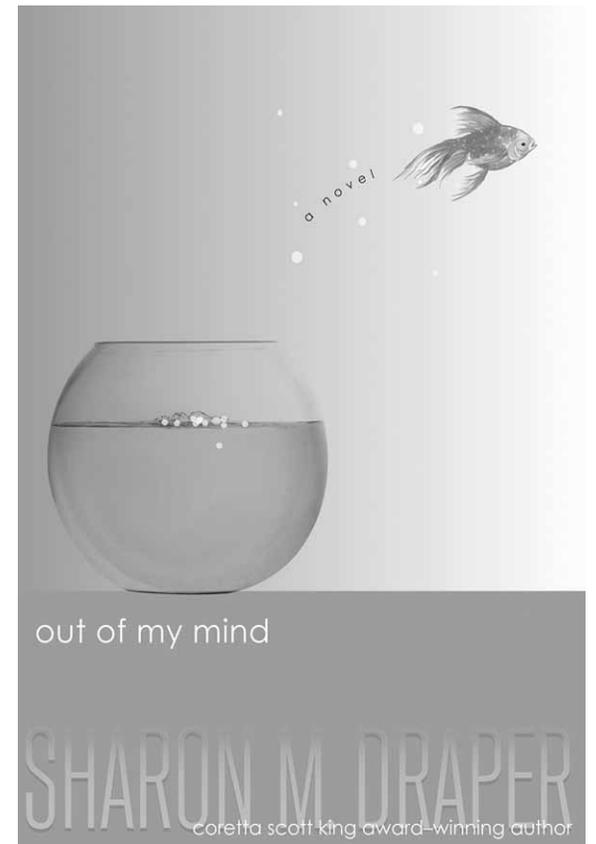
Then she learns about a computerized wheelchair that can robotically "say" whatever

is typed on the keyboard (her thumbs are her only working body parts). When Melody finally gets the wheelchair, she turns it on and starts to use it right away. I was so happy for her, because she was finally able to share what was bottled up in her mind. Through this new tool, her school recognizes her talents and she enters the school quiz team, shocking everyone with her phenomenal brainpower (but making some kids skeptical and jealous). Can her new classmates overlook her differences and accept her as an equal?

The story was really believable. It didn't sound like Draper wrote it, it sounded like Melody had. She describes everything so vividly that it makes you feel as if it was happening to you. "I push the button. 'Hi everybody. I have a new computer'. Heads turn and voices whisper. But Connor jumps up ... and says loudly 'that's awesome, Melody!'"

I cheered for Melody and her desire to be heard. When it's raining and Melody can't use the computerized wheelchair, she's unable to tell her mother something critical during a dangerous situation. I cried (something I never do) because I understood what it would be like to face extreme physical limitations, and how it hurts when no one listens to what you have to say.

This book was hard to put down. I learned that you have to see things from a person's perspective to understand who they are. If you can, you can connect to people you never thought you could.



Divergent

By Veronica Roth

Reviewed by Youn-Mee Oh
16, UCLA Community School

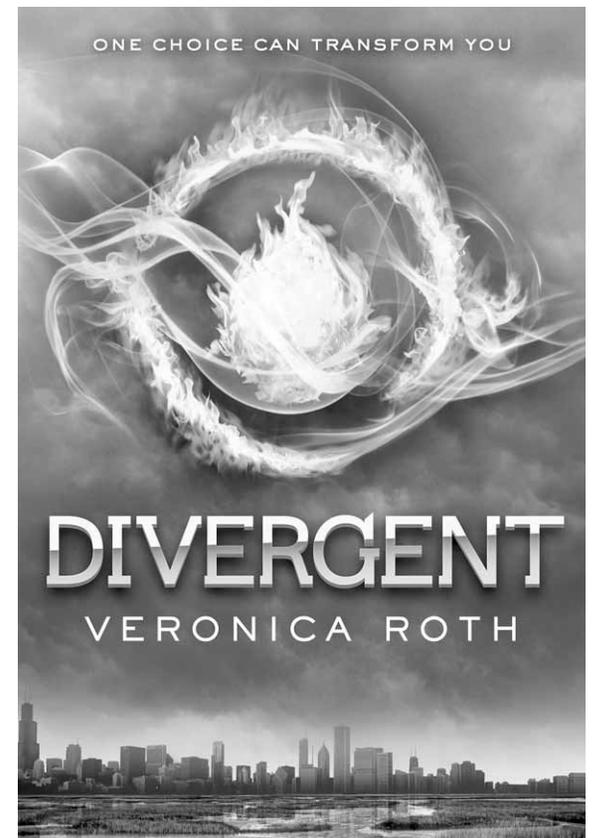
Divergent by Veronica Roth will appeal to teenagers who like action-packed stories and who want to live in a world with enormous freedom. The book, which is the first in a series, is set in a future Chicago. Society is divided into five factions, each named for the characteristics of the people in it. The factions are: Candor (the honest), Abnegation (the selfless), Dauntless (the brave), Amity (the peaceful) and Erudite (the intelligent).

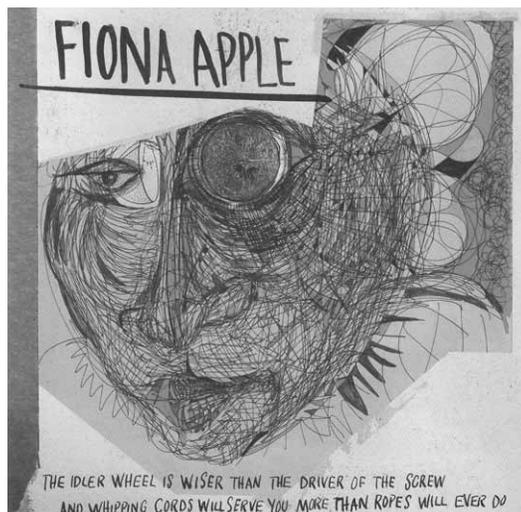
At the age of 16 every citizen has to take a test that reveals what characteristic you have the most of. Then you join the corresponding faction for the rest of your life. But during the test something unusual happens to the main character, Beatrice Prior. Her test results say she has qualities of three factions: Erudite, Abnegation (her family's faction) and Dauntless, instead of just one. She later learns that this rare phenomenon means

she's a Divergent. Beatrice's instructor tells her to keep it a secret or she might be in great danger. On her Choosing Day, she leaves her family faction and selects Dauntless, which she always admired because of their bravery and freedom. Unlike those in Abnegation, the people in Dauntless can get tattoos and go wherever they want.

Most of the rest of the book is about what happens after Beatrice, who renames herself Tris, makes her choice. She has to pass a cruel and dangerous initiation test to join Dauntless. During the test Tris meets her love, a guy named Four, who is also a Divergent, and he helps her pass the test. But just when she passes the test and thinks things will be normal in her life in Dauntless, she learns that her life is in danger and that one faction is trying to wipe out another. But it's there that the book ends. The story continues in the next book, Insurgent, which I wanted to read right away.

I recommend this book because it has so many things that teens want, like partying and lots of action. My world is full of rules and I love the idea of being able to choose how I want to live and who I belong with.





Fiona Apple

CD: The Idler Wheel ...

Reviewed by Sydney Sellers

17, Windward School

I've been a Fiona Apple fan since I was 13. Her music has always intrigued me because of her ability to combine compelling melodies with personal lyrics. There isn't a songwriter today who is as talented as Apple. Her fourth album *The Idler Wheel ...* (the full title is 23 words long) is brilliant. She blends many musical styles including blues, jazz and folk to create a unique sound. The album is not an easy listen; it is an intense journey into an artist's mind. But after I listened to it a few times I realized it was genius.

The dazzling first track "Every Single Night" made me understand her struggle to cope with everyday life. She sings, "Every single night's a fight/ With my brain." These lyrics made me realize that she was unsure about her fragile frame of mind and made me feel like I knew her on a deeper level.

The album has lighter moments. "Anything We Want" remembers a past relationship with spirited drum music. Apple sings, "I kept touching my neck/ To guide your eye to where I wanted you to kiss me." The song has a playful attitude, which I liked because it lightened the tone of the album.

In my favorite track, "Hot Knife," Apple and her sister sing to the beat of drums. Lyrics like "If I'm butter, then he's a hot knife" made me feel the intensity of the relationship. The song is beautiful and has superb harmonies.

The Idler Wheel ... is complex and sometimes unsettling. However, it is brilliant, and for a glimpse into the mind of an artist, no recent album compares.

The album is not an easy listen; it is an intense journey into an artist's mind. But after I listened to it a few times I realized it was genius.



I Fight Dragons

CD: Kaboom!

Reviewed by Nicholas Robinson

17, Cortines School of Visual and Performing Arts

As someone who has played video games since I was little, a band like I Fight Dragons, which creates songs using the melodies of my childhood, is perfect for me.

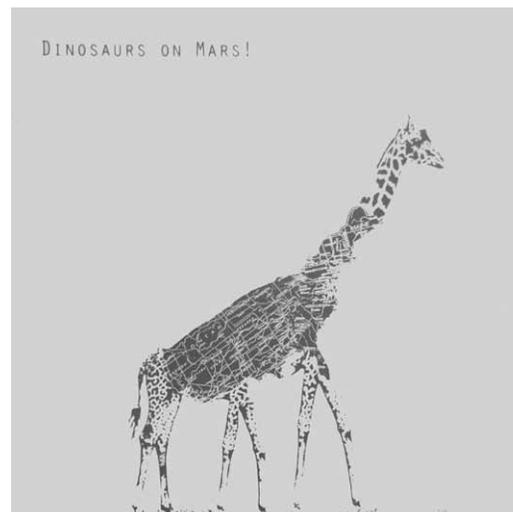
I Fight Dragons use guitar, bass, drums and keyboard, but they also program Nintendo GameBoys, video game controllers and game consoles to create notes similar to the low-quality sounds from old video games. All these elements are part of an obscure genre known as chiptune. I discovered the band when a web comic I was reading linked to their cover of "Heart Of Life" by John Mayer. I loved it.

Most of I Fight Dragons's songs use a common idea from a video game (saving the world or getting the princess) as the theme. But there's always a deeper message. Take the song "cRaZie\$." It's about zombies but when I listen to the lyrics "Whoa ho ho, there's a body on the floor/ and the crazies/ the crazies/ are coming to life," I hear a song dealing with the dangers of conformity.

Whenever I'm feeling like an outcast, I listen to songs like "My Way" or "The Geeks Will Inherit the Earth" and listen to the lyrics: "Well, I don't give a damn about what they say/ I'm not here to save the day/ I may lose it but I'll lose it my way." When I hear these words, I'm ready to take on the world.

If you were like me and grew up playing video games, you can't help but get tingles when you hear the classic start-up sound from a GameBoy. The combination of the powerful messages in the songs and those familiar video game sounds will keep you coming back for more.

Most songs use a common idea from a video game (saving the world or getting the princess) as the theme.



Dinosaurs on Mars!

CD: Dinosaurs on Mars!

Reviewed by Frank Gaspar

15, The School of Arts and Enterprise (Pomona)

When my friend recommended the band Dinosaurs on Mars!, I was surprised to learn that the lead singer, Steven Mucci, is a teacher at my school. After my friend played "A-Game" and "Pick It Up" for me, I was in awe of Mucci's voice. He's a younger teacher who gets along with students well, but I still didn't know what to expect from the rest of the album. When I heard Mr. Mucci was selling CDs for \$2, I bought one.

Dinosaurs on Mars! is an indie pop band that plays weird songs about love, aliens and zombies. On "Space Aliens Stole My Face," a little green man roams the Earth and gives someone a laser gun to assassinate the president. I like this quirky song because the lyrics weren't about feeling sad, like most of the music I listen to.

My favorite song is "Creepy Disaster." It's about someone falling in love, but then slowly becoming a zombie. "I'm looking for you, you're feeling distressed/ You look in my eyes, but I'm deep in your flesh." I like this song the most because it's mysterious. When I listened to the song I couldn't tell what the man was turning into. I thought it was a vampire. (Mr. Mucci later told me the man wanted flesh, not blood, making him a zombie.)

I like that every song is upbeat and fun. I've never heard anything like Dinosaurs on Mars! and I can't wait to hear what Mr. Mucci's band releases next.

I like the quirky song "Space Aliens Stole My Face" because the lyrics weren't about feeling sad, like most of the music I listen to.

Are you in foster care?

DO YOU WANT TO TELL YOUR STORY ABOUT LIFE IN THE SYSTEM?

L.A. Youth is looking for foster youth ages 14 to 19 in L.A. County to join our staff. Write a personal story about your life to be published in L.A. Youth.

When you join L.A. Youth you can:

- Earn \$100 for each story published!
- Have an outlet for your passion for writing
- Help other teens and foster youth

How do I start?

Contact Editor Amanda Riddle at (323) 938-9194 or ariddle@layouth.com for more information or to receive an application.

Got Questions?

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



Working with my editor

Amanda over the past year has been great. Not only has my writing skills improved but so has my confidence. I feel like I'm getting a lot off my chest and learning at the same time. That's something you definitely can't do while in school. You don't get to tell your teachers your personal problems in English class because it's a

classroom. This is your own personal classroom where you grow, vent and learn. The writing process helps me look back at things and grow from them. When I saw my story published in the paper, I felt like I was important and what I went through mattered. It's great to let everything out and build up your writing skills and reach out to other foster youth. Writing for L.A. Youth is a great experience.

—Precious Sims, 19

Precious was excited to see her stories published in L.A. Youth.

