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# L.A. youth

the newspaper by and about teens

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MYSELF AT  
COLLEGE



PAGE 10

GEORGE FINLEY BOYD  
ADMINISTRATION AUDITORIUM  
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# L.A. youth

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## FOR PEOPLE WHO CARE ABOUT TEENS

### About L.A.Youth

#### *How L.A. Youth started*

Former teacher Donna Myrow founded the nonprofit teen newspaper in 1988 after the Supreme Court Hazelwood decision, which struck down student press rights. Myrow saw a need for an independent, uncensored forum for youth expression. L.A. Youth is now celebrating its 22nd year of publishing.

#### *How L.A. Youth is doing today*

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

#### *How L.A. Youth is funded*

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

#### *L.A. Youth's mission*

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

### Advocating for teens

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

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# IN THIS ISSUE

## ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

Taking photos for L.A. Youth is great. I love using the camera for something productive. When I go on a photo shoot, I get an inside look at people's stories. I have learned so much about photojournalism. And I've been so many places I would have never gone, like tango lessons and high school football games (p. 14).

*Jasper Nahid, 16, Hamilton HS*



## BEHIND THE SCENES

I want to be a journalist so I've always wanted to do an interview to experience what journalism is (Jobs Q&A, p. 7). At first I was nervous. My voice was quivering and I didn't know if the words were going to come out but as we talked I relaxed. When I asked her something she was nice and went into details. I'm glad I did it. I think a lot of people are going to find the job tips helpful.

*Patricia Chavarria, 19*



## STAY IN TOUCH WITH US

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

SEPTEMBER 2010 ISSUE

### A BOY FINALLY FOUND GOOD FRIENDS IN BAND

I COULD RELATE to “Finding harmony” because it happened to me too. I never really had many friends, but when I joined the school band, I started to get a lot of self-confidence. I noticed how much fun I was having. People started to like me more, I started to make more friends, and I started to realize that self-confidence makes a difference. Joining band was one of the best things I’ve done.

**Andre Martinez, “The Saxophonist”**  
*Madison MS (North Hollywood)*

IT TOOK COURAGE for Brian to write about being bullied. It is an issue that we teenagers try to either keep to ourselves or pretty much don’t think about until it happens to us. I admire him for sharing what many other teens go through. No one is ever alone.

**Isabel Juarez**  
*International Studies Learning Center (South Gate)*

### THE L.A. RIVER SHOULDN’T BE IGNORED

A LOT OF kids from L.A. can relate to “L.A.’s forgotten river.” I know I do. When I used to pass by the river I was disappointed by how dirty it looked. The worst part was that I knew how amazing it could be with a little help from people. The river has so much potential and it’s wasted by the graffiti and trash. I would like to volunteer to pick up trash around the river. One day I hope all the people who once passed by in disgust and disappointment will look at it and take pride in it.

**Christian Reyes**  
*San Gabriel HS*

### A GIRL SAW NO FUTURE IN TAGGING AND GANG LIFE

I CAN RELATE to “Saying no to gang life,” because, like the writer, I was affiliated with gangs at an early age. I was in a crew, tagging, causing trouble and fighting rival crews. I felt a sense

of respect from the younger and older kids from school and the block. It wasn’t until I put a loved one in harm’s way that I realized how gang-banging wouldn’t get me anywhere but 6 feet under the ground.

**Name withheld**

GANGS AND VIOLENCE are serious problems. Although I was disgusted with the writer’s actions while she was in a tagging crew, I felt sympathy for her. All she wanted was to feel protected and be respected by the people around her. I’m lucky to live in a neighborhood where there aren’t any gangs to influence me. However, I can’t help to think about what my life would be like if there were gangs in my neighborhood. Would I be out somewhere tagging a wall instead of doing my homework? Most importantly, would I be able to get out, like the writer did?

**Eliza Suluyan**  
*Wilson MS (Glendale)*

I USED TO look up to my cousin and his friends. My cousin was in a gang and he and his family lived with us. I saw my cousin and his friends as heroes. They told me stories about their gangster lifestyle and the things they

would do, and I thought they were so cool. As I got older, I started dressing and acting like them. One day a rival gang shot at my house. My cousin got shot and was badly injured. Luckily, no one else was hurt. At that moment I realized gang life was very dangerous. I was over wanting to be a gangster. Surprisingly, my cousin was over it too and was able to leave gang life behind. Nothing good can come from being involved in a gang.

**Name withheld**

### APPRECIATING CÉSAR CHÁVEZ

I REALLY LIKED your story because it taught me more about César Chávez and farm workers than my school has. I hope more people commemorate the life of César Chávez and continue to help the farm workers who are living in horrible conditions.

**Jessica Kwon**  
*Comment on Facebook*

### A FEAR OF BIRDS IS NO JOKE

“FREAKED OUT BY birds” caught my eye because the writer has a fear of birds and I have a fear of insects. Just as she feels that birds are going to eat her, I feel as if insects are going to bite me and crawl all over me and that grosses me out! I’m just glad I’m not the only one afraid of animals.

**Lindsay Garcia**  
*East Valley HS (North Hollywood)*

THE STORY I related to was “Freaked out by birds” because I am very afraid of spiders. I have to check my bed so

many times before I can go to bed. I am a pretty big guy and it’s kind of embarrassing to admit I am scared of something so little, but I am.

**Alfred Quinonez**  
*San Gabriel HS*

FEARS CAN BRING bad things and good things into your life. I am scared of the dark. I feel very anxious and vulnerable. Being scared of the dark means I won’t go through any dark alleys. That’s something that will probably make me safer. We should try to conquer our fears for our sanity and well-being.

**Jocelyn Valdez**  
*East Valley HS*

### TECHNOLOGY FREE FOR A WEEK

I CAN RELATE to “Can I unplug?” I have gone without my iPod and phone for a week, but going without TV or the Internet is nearly impossible for me. I’m pretty much addicted. That’s what my mom says. I deny this accusation, but I do spend three to four hours online almost every day after school. Now that it’s a new school year, I have a new goal. I’m going to try to spend less time online and more time studying.

**Verenice Hernandez**  
*Madison MS*

LIKE ALMA, I too am in love with TV. I’ve tried avoiding it before, but one new episode or show always sucks me back in. This article inspired me to let it go. I’m working on cutting down my TV hours and focusing more on homework and family. Thanks!

**teamcoco**  
*Comment on layout.com*

### A FOSTER YOUTH WAS DETERMINED TO GET HER EDUCATION

WHEN I READ “I never gave up” I thought that what Marisa did for her education was mind blowing. It was unbelievable how determined she was to finish her education so that she could have a good future. Reading this article made me realize how important school is. Because of Marisa, I’m now inspired to work harder and focus more on my grades and schoolwork. She’s an amazing role model. She believed in herself and even though she had to go through it alone, she succeeded.

**Lara Singzon**  
*Wilson MS*



**A girl in a tagging crew dreamed of joining a gang until her cousin got shot.**

Illustration by Michelle Cao, 16, Temple City HS

# The perks of being a nerd

It might not be cool, but I love learning and the friends I've made

**By Jose Zacarias**

17, Orthopaedic Hospital  
Medical Magnet HS

People think that nerds are awkward and have no friends. They think being nerdy isn't cool. When my 13-year-old cousin comes to my room and sees me at my computer desk studying, he'll say, "You're such a nerd." I don't like how he says it as if it were bad. It's not bad. I'm a nerd, and I love it! I love learning things I didn't know before. I like going out but I like reading too. Plus, being a nerd has brought me a lot of friends.

I've always liked to learn. In third grade, there were some rowdy kids in my class who interrupted the teacher and yelled. When I was about to start fourth grade, I hoped that my next classroom would be filled with quiet kids who paid attention all the time. I still hope a class like that exists and that I find it in college.

When I got to middle school, subjects came easily to me and I didn't have to study much, except for the occasional vocab quiz. My grades were As, except for a C in P.E. and a B in my second semester of algebra. To this day I hate that B.

When high school started and I made new friends, I found out that some of them had gotten straight As all their lives. How cool! How did they do that? I wondered what it would feel like to get straight As. I started watching my friends. If they were taking notes during a lesson, I would take notes. If they were asking questions, I would ask questions. After class, we would talk about what we didn't understand. We started sitting together at lunch and talking about TV shows and the schools we had come from. From then on I didn't just like being a nerd, I loved it. There were other people like me.

## WE JOKED AROUND SPEAKING IN FRENCH

Last year, we had a minimum day at school, which meant we got out at 1 p.m. My fellow nerds and I didn't want to go home so early, so we decided to go on an adventure. We headed off from our school, taking the buses for a few miles to explore downtown L.A. As we were walking, one of us suggested we should pretend to be foreign tourists. Most of us had taken at least a few years of French so we transformed into European tour-

ists. I was the "French" one. I would talk to one friend in French and she'd translate to English for the "British" one. Our conversations mostly involved things such as "Where are we? Are we lost?" People eyed us weirdly every time we spoke to each other and we would laugh once they walked away. We have fun no matter what we do.

One of the perks of being a nerd, for me, is getting together with my friends to study. We like to get together after school or on weekends. We have this special place behind the Central Library. It's between two tall buildings so it's shady. There are tables and it's always quiet, which makes it perfect. We play games like Jeopardy using the material we need to learn such as math or geology. We'll make up silly categories such as "Sure," "I knew that," "Oh! ... Right" and "WTH!" and we'll yell out stuff like "I'll have WTH for \$300!"

Last year, my trig teacher, Mr. Tran, told us in the first week of school, "Nerd is the new gangsta!" Everyone cracked up. He told us that he was a nerd in school too and after that, everyone in my class started calling each other nerds as a compliment. It was so awesome be-

cause the way it was said was intended to make each other feel good. Before, when people would call us nerds, we would reply "So?" But now, we yell out "And proud!"

## TAKING SCHOOL SERIOUSLY WILL HELP MY FUTURE

I like doing well in school because I've seen how not taking school seriously can have consequences. My older siblings don't have college degrees and struggle to support themselves. I don't want to go through the same things they have. This is another reason why I like being a nerd. I know my education will benefit me and make my parents proud because I'll be able to get into a good college, have a career and support a family.

During the summer, I tried learning Russian on my own. I thought it would be fun to be able to speak a different language. Learning a new alphabet and then trying to piece letters together to form words was hard. After getting the hang of the alphabet, I was giddy because I was reading a word with weird symbols, which made me proud. I imagined running into a person who speaks Russian in college and if I learn enough, I'll have something to share with that person. I took my Russian

book to L.A. Youth and started reading it while I waited for the meeting to start. My book was propped open and another staff member saw it. "Is that for your class?" she asked me. "No. I'm just doing it for fun." She looked puzzled and gave me a long "OK." I laughed and explained that it was just something fun to do for the summer.

Some people question what I think "fun" is because it's usually something that involves learning. But I don't care. I'm a nerd—it's who I am.



*Jose says to embrace  
the nerd inside of you.*

# Someone please hire me

I've spent months trying to find my first job



**Patricia has been frustrated that she can't get hired.**

Photo by Jennifer Gonzales-Romero, 17, South Gate HS

**By Patricia Chavarria, 19**

**M**y job search has been hell. I've applied at nearly 20 places since December and none of them have hired me. Most said it was because I didn't have experience, which was confusing and frustrating. How can people expect me to have experience if no one will give me a chance to work in the first place?

In December I was a senior in high school, and I wanted to save for college because my parents didn't make enough money to create a college fund for me. They'll help me, but I need to contribute too.

When I started the search I was willing to work any kind of job—fast food, as a cashier, in a stock room or even do janitorial work.

The first place I applied was AMC movie theaters. I heard that you could see movies for free, so this job seemed great. I applied online to work the concession stand, as an usher who helps people find their seats and for a janitor position. I wanted to work at least 20 hours a week but no more than 35, since I was still in school.

The online application asked for my name, address, whether I had a criminal history (I don't), references, what hours I could work and questions like "What would you do if you saw an employee stealing?" After

I submitted it, I saw a message that said they'd review my application and call me in two weeks if they had a position. I submitted my online application to six AMC theaters. I wrote down a phone number that I could call to check on my job status.

I waited and waited, but after three weeks I still hadn't gotten a call. I never called them because I figured if they hadn't called me, they didn't have a job for me.

Then I applied at a movie theater near my house. While filling out the application I was tempted to lie and say that I had worked at my mom's office, but I didn't because I knew it was wrong and I thought I'd get caught. When I left my application with the manager, she said my lack of experience didn't matter, because if I got the job someone would train me. She said she would review my application and if everything looked good she would call me for an interview. The manager made it sound like I had a good chance. I never got a call.

#### **THEY SAID THEY WEREN'T HIRING**

I became so frustrated. I had applied at seven theaters and never even got an interview. I called the theater near my house to check if there was a problem with my application. The woman who answered said that they weren't hiring; they were only accepting applications. I was angry because I had been waiting for a call that was

#### **WEBSITES TO HELP YOU FIND A JOB**

##### **WWW.CALJOBS.CA.GOV**

You have to register for the site but it's free and you can search job listings throughout the state.

##### **FIRST BREAK**

Year-round jobs available to Los Angeles Unified School District high school students. Call (213) 241-0878 or go to [firstbreak.lausd.net](http://firstbreak.lausd.net).

##### **L.A. YOUTH**

We have lots of links to websites with job listings at [layouth.com](http://layouth.com). Click on "Get a job."

##### **LA YOUTH AT WORK**

Job skills workshops and mock interviews. Go to [layouthatwork.org](http://layouthatwork.org) for a list of free workshops.

never going to come.

I quit looking for a job in February so I could focus on school. Three months later when my big tests and projects were done I applied at Target. My brother's girlfriend, Ana, worked there, so I asked her to recommend me. I felt like this would improve my chances. Two days later Ana told me that Target had tried to call me, but they couldn't get a hold of me and they hired someone else. I was so angry that I swore loudly and slammed my fist on the table. I asked her to keep recommending me, which she did, but I never got called.

Next I tried the mall. The stores I wanted to work at, like Hot Topic, Macy's and Old Navy, weren't hiring. Since getting a job was so important I left my name and phone number anyway and asked them to call me if the store started hiring. Once again, no calls.

#### I EVEN TRIED AN EMPLOYMENT AGENCY

In June, my brother and his girlfriend told me about a place that tries to match you with a job that fits your skills, called an employment agency. We submitted online applications answering questions like what our skills were and what kind of job we wanted (typing, warehouse stocking, janitorial work). After I finished, a message on the screen said we would get a call for orientation in less than two weeks.

A few days later we were at orientation along with 15 other job seekers of all ages. A woman told us that the agency would try to provide us with jobs as long as we were hard workers. We watched a one-hour video on safety. I could see the boredom as people yawned and complained to one another. Even I almost fell asleep.

After the video we took a math test. As soon as I saw equations I knew I would fail because I'm not good at math. We weren't supposed to use calculators, but almost everyone used the ones on their phones, because no one was watching. I copied off Ana's paper. After we finished the lady said we would get a call from them once they found a job for us.

We all waited for a call but unfortunately we never got one. We called and they said that some papers got mixed up and they were unable to find our applications. The guy said that we could come back and apply again. I was furious. Two hours of orientation and they lose our applications! I was so upset that I decided not to go back.

Since everyone in my family had a job this summer, I made a deal with my mom. I baby-sat my little sister and she'll pay for college when I start in the spring. In mid-September, I started collecting applications from grocery stores in my neighborhood and Build-A-Bear in the mall. I got some good advice from interviewing an employment expert, so I'm going to make sure I call back after I turn them in. Hopefully, I'll have better luck this time.



*Patricia says don't be picky when you're looking for your first job.*

## JOBS Q&A: ADVICE FROM AN EXPERT TO HELP YOU ON YOUR JOB SEARCH

*I wanted to find out good things to do and things I shouldn't do when looking for a job. So I talked to Alma Salazar, who oversees LA Youth at Work (no affiliation with L.A. Youth), an organization that helps teens prepare for their job searches. There were things I didn't know, like dress up even when just asking for an application and call to follow up (but not too often). These tips will be helpful if you're looking for a job. — Patricia Chavarria*

**L.A. Youth: Where should teens look for jobs?** LA Youth at Work: Really hitting the pavement and going to local places is your best bet. Most of the fast-food places and franchise chains most likely will not advertise their job opportunities online. They'll just put a notice on their window.

**Who is the best person to turn in an application to?** Usually the best person is the manager or assistant manager. You definitely want to give it to someone in a decision-making capacity.

**I heard that when turning in an application it is always good to turn in a resume as well. Is that true?** A good resume, one that's mistake free, will definitely make you more marketable and it may increase your chances of getting hired. Having a resume is good but if it's riddled with typos, spelling errors and grammatical errors it might hurt you.

**What should I do after I turn in my application?** When you turn in your application make sure you are dressed in business attire. First impressions are everything, even before you turn in your application. When you go and ask for an application, right then and there you're making a first impression. You don't want to go in showing a bare midriff or wearing baggy pants. Imagine the type of impression you'd make if you came in a suit and tie or nice business slacks to ask for an application.

Once you've submitted your application, it never hurts to follow up. You want to say, "I'm really interested and I'm just checking" and they will remember you.

One thing that frustrates employers is when they call a cell phone to schedule an interview and they have to listen to a three-minute song intro. Just "hi this is so-and-so please leave a message." No four-minute Lady Gaga song. Also, have an e-mail address that's easy to type, you don't want lovelybutterfly24. Just your name.

**What are some interview tips?** One definitely is always maintain eye contact with the person

who's interviewing you. Anticipate what some of the questions might be and be prepared to articulate what your skills are, what strengths you bring to the position. Even if you don't believe you have skills, chances are you do. Our recommendation is to go through a mock interview. Never say "I don't know" or not respond to something.

**What should a person do when they can't get hired because of no work experience if no one gives them a chance to have experience?**

That's a good question. A lot of kids do volunteer work but they're not very good at including it on their job applications and their resumes. I don't know how many kids I've talked to who've done baby-sitting or helped on a work site for family members or helped out at a swap meet. All of those are good skills that students don't include. And getting involved in extracurricular activities at school is another way.

**Does a person's appearance matter? Would many tattoos and piercings decrease someone's chances of getting hired?** It's going to depend on the employer and the type of job the student is seeking. Employers are becoming more open to those but I still think students need to balance those things with what's proper in the work environment. If you have an office job, cover up where appropriate. If you have a piercing or tattoo it doesn't mean you won't be taken under consideration, but you also need to be aware of what's appropriate for the job you're applying for. That's going to vary from someone working in the front office to someone working in a movie theater.

**Would someone who went to a regular high school get a job over a person who went to an alternative or continuation school?** Not necessarily. I'm not sure most employers look at that that closely. Employers are going to look at your experience and how well you do on your interview. Attitude has a lot to do with that. If you convey that you're willing to do whatever it takes to get the work done, schooling may play a smaller role in selecting the best candidate.

# Life in the bike lane

Getting around on my bike gives me freedom to explore the city

**By Sam Landsberg**

17, Hamilton HS

One day last year, I had a rough day at school. It was November and it felt like there was no end in sight. I got on my bike to ride home, just like any other day. Something about riding home in the warm weather under a blue sky made me feel like it was the middle of summer vacation. My mind was nowhere near school, homework or how far I really was from summer break. It gave me a brief 20 minutes of freedom. When I got home and sat down to do my homework, my imaginary vacation dissolved to reveal the massive amount of homework I really had.

That sense of freedom is one of the reasons I love to bike. I got a used road bike for my birthday a few years ago. Near the end of my sophomore year I started riding my bike to school every day. I like riding it to school a lot more than taking the city bus, because I can leave whenever I want and I have more freedom. I'm on my own schedule, not a schedule issued by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. Biking just seems to make more sense to me, because it is faster and more fun.

My ride to school takes me down Venice Boulevard. It's a 10- to 15-minute ride. Last year I would meet up coincidentally with two of my friends who took Venice to school and we'd often ride there together.

Sometimes on my way home from school, instead of taking the faster route down Cattargus Avenue to Venice, I take a more pleasant route down Robertson Boulevard to 18th Street, which is a residential street. Ironically I discovered this route in a car last fall when my friend was driving me to school. It's nicer to bike on because there are no street lights, there's less traffic and it's quiet.

## VENICE IS MY FAVORITE STREET TO RIDE DOWN

I love biking on Venice because unlike most of the streets in L.A., Venice has a bike lane, which I can take to the beach. The bike lane is marked by a painted white line. Because it is also the right-turn lane, drivers often do not respect the bike lane and cut through it or just drive in the middle of it. Even so, it is safer and easier than biking with those same disrespectful drivers on a street with no bike lane.

One of my scariest experiences biking was on my



Photo by Jasper Nahid,  
16, Hamilton HS

way to school one day last year. I was riding in the bike lane on Venice and was behind a bus, which was going slower than me because of its frequent stops. I tried to get ahead of it by going around it to the left, but as I did, the bus moved out of the bike lane, forcing me into heavy traffic. People honked and I panicked. I thought I was going to get hit and had to cut off a car to get back to the bike lane quickly enough to not get stuck in car traffic or hit. I safely made it back, although barely. The bus drove past me and I thought that I was pretty lucky to not have been hit. It reminded me why I wear a helmet.

Biking around Los Angeles gives me a unique view of the city. There's a woman who sells fresh-squeezed orange juice on the corner of Venice and Fairfax who I always see in the morning. And there are all these

guys who sell used junk along the sidewalk on Venice in Mar Vista. I get the personal view of a pedestrian, but I don't have to walk everywhere or wait around for the bus. Biking is always faster than walking, sometimes faster than taking the bus, and more fun than either.

## I CAN GO ANYWHERE ON MY BIKE

One of the other great things about bike riding is that I'm not limited to a set number of destinations, like I am when I take the bus. I can bike almost anywhere I want with directions from Google maps.

Last spring I biked about 10 miles from my school in West L.A. to the Museum of Contemporary Art in downtown for my apprenticeship at the museum. Although it took 45 minutes, it was worth it. I'm usually awful at getting a sense of a city and understanding directions. But now I can find my way around downtown and other neighborhoods in L.A.

Riding my bike also gives me a sense of community with other people who bike in L.A. It is not uncommon for me to get a thumbs-up or a smile from other bikers while I ride. It's cool to think that that would only happen on a bike.

One morning last year I was making my usual commute, when an older man rode by me. He must have noticed that I wasn't using my gears very well. He told me that I should start in a low gear (less resistance on the pedals) and as I reached the maximum speed on each gear level, move up to a higher gear. I hadn't asked him for the advice. I hadn't even asked for his name, but the fact that we were both riding bikes made it perfectly acceptable for him to teach me something. I have remembered his "lesson" ever since. It's not for everyone and at times, it can be frustrating or scary, but I love biking in L.A.



*One of Sam's goals is to bike the length of Venice Boulevard, which runs about 13 miles from the beach to downtown.*

By Audrey Salas

17, Bravo Medical Magnet HS

My house is cozy. It has a porch that doesn't have a roof so at night I can see the stars. It has pink flowers in the front yard that contrast with the yellow house to give it a Spanish vibe. My living room ceiling is dome-shaped, which prevents the light from reaching the ceiling so it feels warm, like I'm in a library. Best of all, it's in a part of eastern Los Angeles where everyone takes care of their homes. I've lived in my house for most of my life. I could never imagine leaving it.

So growing up it was scary knowing that the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) wanted to build a freeway through my neighborhood. To extend the 710, Caltrans would either knock down my house, or build the freeway a few blocks away. My parents don't have enough savings to buy a house, so if our home is demolished, we'd have to move to an apartment. If they build the freeway in my neighborhood, it wouldn't be the same. Its peace and quiet would be replaced by honking truck horns.

Caltrans has always wanted to complete the freeway because they think it's too inconvenient for drivers to exit the 710 in Alhambra, where it ends, and take the streets to Pasadena, about five miles away. If built, the freeway extension would cut through Pasadena, South Pasadena, Alhambra, and my neighborhood, El Sereno. I don't understand why the people who support the freeway believe a shortcut is worth people's homes.

#### EVEN AS A KID, I KNEW IT WASN'T RIGHT

I attended my first "NO 710" rally while still in a stroller. The rally was held in Pasadena. The trees blotted out the sun, the homes were clean and well kept, and almost all the lawns had flowerbeds. My parents and many others paraded the streets shouting and carrying "NO 710" signs. My mother explained to me that the trees and homes were going to be knocked down so that Caltrans could build a freeway. Even though I was 3, I wondered, "Why would anyone want to ruin such a pretty place?"

When I got older, my mom took me to town meetings about the extension. It was our chance to take our concerns to our community leaders. They used words I didn't understand but I got the basics of what they were saying. Speakers argued that a freeway extension would bring more people. People would get off the exits to go to businesses like McDonald's or Target. With more traffic comes smog and noise. Major streets would get even more congested. I felt like I had to save my community.

When I was 11, I helped my mom distribute flyers door to door to alert our neighbors about anti-extension events. I was eager to go with her so I could say I was doing something but I was scared. Would they listen to me? After my mom told me what to say to the residents, she said we should split up to go faster. Once someone answered the door, I would introduce myself and explain why the 710 extension was a threat to our community. I'd tell them how it would affect them and hand them a flyer. We had lawn signs with "710" crossed out. We'd load them into our car and ask if the residents wanted one. Most people

# Fighting to save my home

A proposed freeway extension could demolish the houses in my neighborhood



**Audrey and her mom have been fighting the extension of the 710 freeway for years.**  
Photos by Ha Young Kwen, 16, Wilson HS (Hacienda Heights)

said yes; it was awesome.

But one time, I rang the doorbell and a guy in a muscle shirt with a big belly opened his door. I was nervous, so all I could manage was a "Hi-my-name-is-Audrey-and-I'm-here-to-talk-about-the-710-extension. Have-you-heard-of-it?" All his answers were short. It seemed like he wanted me to get off his porch. He didn't bother opening the screen door, so I put a flyer in his mailbox. Once I did, I bolted. I felt insignificant. Why should a grown man listen to an 11-year-old? But I kept going because I didn't want the freeway to knock down my house.

I began to see the signs pop up on more and more people's lawns. That's when my mom and I thought that there was enough opposition to stop the freeway extension. We thought we had won.

Then last year, my mom called me into her room to watch a newscast about a proposal to run the freeway extension underground. At first, a tunnel seemed like a perfect answer. No homes would have to be knocked down.

After my mom went to a meeting, she told me the problems with the plan. Could California afford the multi-billion dollar project? (The Metropolitan Transportation Authority estimated that construction of

the tunnel would cost between \$2.3 billion to \$3.6 billion, according to the MTA website.) How long would the project take? Since the tunnel would be built over a fault line, what would happen to the people inside the tunnel if there were an earthquake?

#### THIS WOULDN'T HAPPEN IN A WEALTHIER COMMUNITY

I overheard someone telling my mom that there were no freeways running through Beverly Hills or San Marino. That made me wonder: why is it that the poor have to deal with freeways? I think of it as an indirect form of oppression. The poor have to accept what they're given while the rich enjoy their untouched neighborhoods.

I think a good alternative is to extend the Metro Blue Line rail system. It would cost half as much as the tunnel, according to one speaker at a meeting. MTA is studying the tunnel proposal to see if it can be done. I recently spoke at a town meeting. I told them how a rail system could benefit my neighborhood. I was scared but my home is my home and I'm willing to stand up for it.



*The fight against the freeway has made Audrey appreciate her house more.*

# Picturing myself at college

Visiting schools made my dream seem more real



**By Yesenia Reyes**

16, Locke HS #3

**B**efore last spring I had no idea how to decide which college would be best for me. I felt lost because no one in my family has gone to college—most people in my family have dropped out of high school.

I realized I wanted to go to college when I was in middle school and my sister dropped out of high school and ran away. She thought it was going to be all fun and games when she left but it wasn't. She had to get a job and pay rent, all while taking care of a child. She worked in a factory, where all she did for eight hours a day was cut fabrics for \$8 an hour. I want to graduate from high school and go to college so I don't have to work for minimum wage most of my life.

But when I was in middle school all I knew about college came from UCLA and USC posters I saw hanging on the wall. I thought college was where you automatically go right after high school, where you get something called a "degree," and then got a job. I had no idea how expensive it would be and how many different universities there were. All I knew was that I had to go.

When my English teacher, Mrs. Coffey, invited me on a college road trip I was so excited that I would be able to see colleges in person. She told me that she was renting a van and taking seven of us to San Francisco for three days during spring break. She saw that we wouldn't be able to do that without someone else's help. She told us that she was going to pay for all the expenses and we'd stay with her aunt. She wanted us to see different schools, and learn what it takes to get accepted.

She also wanted to motivate us and show us that there are more options than the community colleges nearby and UCLA or USC.

I couldn't wait, but my parents are very protective and I didn't think they'd let me go all the way to San Francisco without family. But after Mrs. Coffey met with my parents they said OK. They agreed to let me go because they knew that they would never be able to take me college touring because they're too busy working and can't afford to take time off.

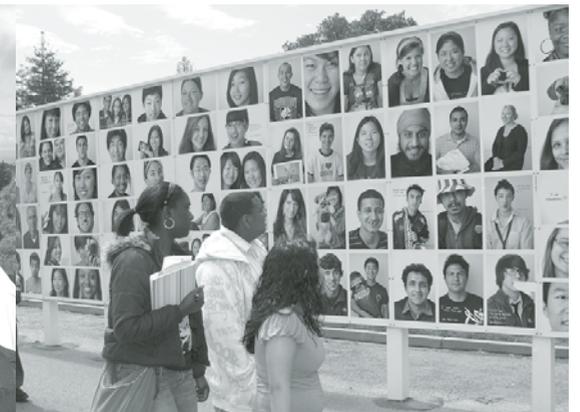
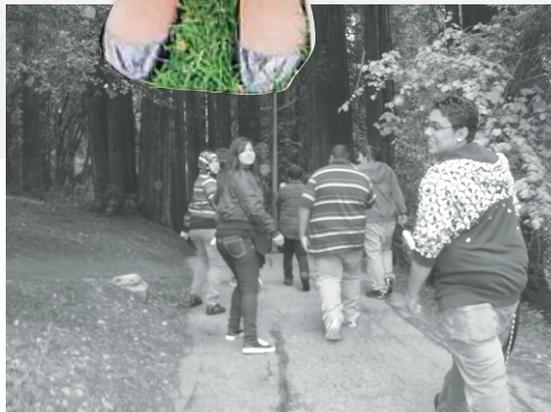
We planned on visiting five colleges but because of a flat tire, we visited only four: Dominican University of California, University of San Francisco, UC Berkeley and UC Santa Cruz. Mrs. Coffey gave us worksheets so that we could take notes on the different schools such as admission requirements, application due dates, interesting classes they offered, and pros and cons of the school.

## WOULD WE BE THE ONLY MINORITIES ON CAMPUS?

I was excited and nervous. I don't know anyone who has gone to college besides my teachers, and in movies it's always white people at universities. I thought it would be weird if it was the seven of us, a group of Latinos and African Americans, walking around. I was afraid that the students wouldn't welcome us and they'd wonder why we were there because of our skin color. I was also afraid that the setting would be too serious and the teachers would be strict. I was completely wrong.

The first school we visited was Dominican. It's a small private school in San Rafael, about a half hour from San Francisco. I absolutely fell in love with the campus. I was surrounded by trees, bushes and grass. In my neighbor-

When my English teacher, Mrs. Coffey, invited me on a college road trip without someone else's help. She wanted to motivate us and show



## WHAT TO LOOK FOR ON A COLLEGE TOUR

When Yesenia and her classmates visited colleges, their teacher, Mrs. Coffey, gave them a worksheet to fill out so they could evaluate each school. Here are the questions they answered. Writing down your answers will help you see if a school is a good fit for you.

1. What's your first impression of the school? (For example, the size of the campus or the kind of people you see.)
2. As you walk around, make a list of pros and cons.
3. What are some interesting facts about the school?
4. What are the admission requirements and application deadline?
5. What do you need to work on to increase your chances of getting in?
6. What was the most memorable part of the visit?
7. Rate your visit:
  - *Very positive. I feel at home*
  - *Solid. I will apply*
  - *OK. There were some aspects I didn't like*
  - *Definitely not for me*

hood the only place that can barely compare is maybe a tiny park with a few trees. It reminded me of my dad's home in El Salvador where it's green and relaxing.

The tour guide, Hugo, was a friendly student. During the tour he pointed out that the campus was small and had only about 1,500 undergraduate students. That was comforting because I don't really like crowds and I know it would be better for me to go to a small school. He said

that at a smaller school, you can learn from the professor, rather than the teaching assistant, which is more common at much larger schools. And because the teachers know you as a person, not just as a filled seat, they can recommend you for internships. I was even more comforted by the fact that Dominican was 40 percent minorities, meaning that I wouldn't feel alone and I wouldn't have to worry about not fitting in. I liked the campus, but then Hugo told us that the school was mostly focused on medicine and nursing and I don't want to study that.

We also met the admissions counselor. He told us that they interview prospective students to determine whether to accept them. That was a big relief because I knew it would give me better chance to get accepted. My history teacher once told me that an A at my high school may have less value than an A at a school that is higher ranked, such as Beverly Hills High. Hugo told us that extracurricular activities were also very important because they want an active student, not just an academic one. At the end of the tour I was hyped about going to college.

We drove back to San Francisco to see USF, another private school. I was intimidated by the amount of students and the lack of diversity. When we walked around the campus and inside the buildings it was mostly white students and faculty. There were only a couple of Latinos.

Our tour guide mentioned that USF was 14 percent Latino and 5 percent African American. I know I would feel awkward being one of the few Latino students at the school. I would feel that the other students would point me out and say things like "Oh there goes that little brown girl" or "What is she doing in college?" Besides I don't like big places with big buildings.

The next day we went to Berkeley, one of the top public schools in the country. When we were driving around campus it felt even scarier than USF. The dorms that Mrs. Coffey pointed out looked like skyscrapers and there were crowds of students on the sidewalks. We met up with Mrs. Coffey's sister, Angela, who lives a few blocks from the school, so we walked there from her house. Angela had been a student there and encouraged us to go to Berkeley so there would be more people of color (out of 25,000 undergraduate students only 3,000 were

Hispanic and fewer than 1,000 were African American). The school is very hard to get into though. Angela told us that incoming freshmen have an average GPA of 3.91 and it's also expensive. (It costs \$28,000 a year to go there including tuition, housing and food.)

She took us around the campus, which was humongous. We passed crowds of people holding signs and bullhorns. There was some kind of election campaign going on. Angela told us that the school was very involved in politics and many of the students participated. The school had a lot of political history and it was interesting, but also intimidating. I don't think I would be able to handle protests on a regular basis.

I liked that there were cafes and clothing stores next to campus. But I felt frightened and small walking around the campus with waves of people surrounding me. I don't think it was the school for me.

### IT WAS BEAUTIFUL WITH HILLS AND DEER

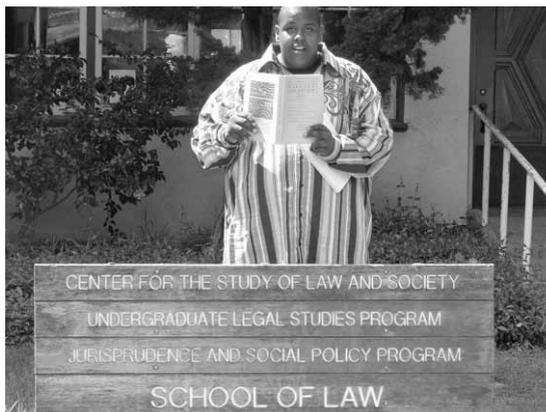
On the last day, we drove to Santa Cruz, which is about an hour and a half south of San Francisco. We met four seniors who were living together in a house where they kept a snake, a chicken and some kind of big, scary lizard. We walked to a nearby school bus stop that took us to the campus. On the ride, we passed meadows. It was green like Dominican except much larger (it has about 15,000 undergraduate students). The school was partially hidden in a forest and it was amazing. We even got to see a couple of grazing deer. I really liked it although I was exhausted by the amount of hills and trails we had to walk up to get to each building.

We visited the dorms and the rooms were tiny. I worried about sharing a bathroom with eight other girls. I imagined I'd have to wait in line to shower and that they'd be dirty. But, I could picture myself walking to class each day wondering if I'll see some deer or maybe a couple of flying squirrels. They also had many programs that I would be interested in such as literature and classical studies.

My favorite college of the four was Santa Cruz be-

*Continued on next page*

trip I was so excited that I would be able to see colleges. She saw that we wouldn't be able to do that us that there are more options than the community colleges nearby and UCLA or USC.



### OUR ROAD TRIP Yesenia's teacher took her and six of her classmates to visit Dominican University of California, University of San Francisco, UC Berkeley and UC Santa Cruz last spring.

Photos by Jerica Coffey,  
English teacher at Locke HS #3

*Continued from previous page*

cause even though I was hundreds of miles from home, it felt homey. Berkeley and USF were the most alike because the campuses were in cities and huge. I'm tired of a city environment and want to try something new. I like Dominican, but it costs a total of \$45,000 a year. I don't think I'd apply to a private school unless I knew I could get a scholarship or financial aid.

#### **I KNOW WHAT KIND OF SCHOOL I WANT TO GO TO**

Now I have a clearer idea of what to expect. I always thought college was in the city, not green and open. I thought you had to know specifically what you want to study, but I found out that I can start out undecided and pick my major later on. I thought everyone was going to be serious, but a lot of people were friendly. I was scared that I wouldn't be able to afford it, but there is financial aid for people who need it, and scholarships for Latinos

and for people who are first in their families to go to college. I want to go to a school that has a lot of majors, somewhere with not too many students, not in L.A. but close enough that I'll be able to come home once in a while, and I'd like to be at a rural campus where I can go biking and hiking.

I imagine what life would be like living on a campus away from home and I can't wait. I can see myself sitting on a bed in a dorm typing some assignment where I have to analyze literature like *Romeo and Juliet* or *Wuthering Heights*. (We don't read those at my high school.) I just need to find the right college for me. I know I'll probably miss my family but I would be doing it for them and myself.

I'm worried about how I'm going to pay for school. I'll have to get a job, my parents would have to help me out and I will have to get scholarships. A few months ago I went to the College Board website to research scholarships. Most of them required an essay, so this

year, my junior year, I'm probably going to write a ton of essays. I also want to research more colleges, even some out of state.

I'm very grateful toward Mrs. Coffey because she spent her time and money on us, and if it weren't for her, I would most likely never get an opportunity to visit colleges. I'm now more determined to get to college no matter what.



*Yesenia wants to check out UC Davis and Humboldt State University.*

## Tips: applying to college

2010 graduates share what they learned after going through the process

- Be realistic. Don't apply only to hard-to-get-into schools, even though applying to a couple won't hurt you. Apply to colleges where you think you will have a good chance of getting accepted. I learned that the hard way because I applied to a lot of competitive Catholic and Jesuit colleges, like Villanova University, where you need a 3.9 or 4.0, even though I had a 3.2. I thought I could get accepted because I attended a Jesuit high school. I couldn't have been more wrong. I was denied or placed on a waitlist for 13 colleges. I got accepted to one college, the University of Colorado at Boulder. Luckily, I love the school and it was my first choice.

Apply to colleges that are within your reach so you have more than one to choose from once you are admitted. You can figure out what schools are within your reach by researching the school's admission requirements such as average GPA and SAT/ACT scores on their websites. If you have a 3.0 and the average GPA of students they accepted is 3.2, give it a shot. But if the average is 3.9 or 4.0 then you will most likely not get in. When you apply to mainly hard-to-reach schools, you are wasting time and money.

When I was a junior my counselor explained to me that I should apply to three schools that I could easily get into, three schools that were within my range and three "long shot" schools. I didn't take her advice because my parents wanted me to go the Jesuit route. I'm disappointed I didn't take her advice. I most likely could have gotten into more colleges.

- A lot of kids are worried about their essays

because they think they have to be perfect. You can have an outstanding essay if you write about your experiences. When you are answering the personal statements and essays in the college applications, discuss your past experiences as a way to answer the questions. They are easier to write because it's your life and you don't have to do any research.

Some colleges asked me questions about how I would be able to positively impact the campus community. I responded by saying how I volunteered for community service throughout high school. I told the colleges how I developed compassion for the homeless by serving them food and giving them clothes. Reflect on the experience you had and how it made you a better person, and then how you can benefit the school because of that experience.

**—Brett Hicks, 19, UC Boulder, Loyola HS graduate**

- Apply to a reasonable number of schools. I applied to 13 schools, nine of which had separate applications, and it got really stressful. I had to sacrifice time with my family and friends to work on my applications, and when I did go out, my mind was usually elsewhere—on my personal statement and resume, to be exact. So, unless you can manage your time exceptionally well (which we all know is hard during senior year), I'd say apply to no more than seven. I know that we think that the more schools we apply to, the more options we'll have. But, if you do your research beforehand,

you'll have a better idea of which schools you can actually see yourself attending. If I had taken the time to really research UC San Diego or USC, I would've realized that I truly couldn't see myself there, and that would have saved me a lot of valuable time and effort.

- Be confident! If you approach the college application process without confidence, that will be reflected in your essay and your overall application. I know it's easy to get down on yourself. I felt sad and inferior a lot throughout the application process. But I found that if I began to list my achievements to myself, I felt like a more deserving candidate. As hard as it may seem, you need to stay positive and believe in yourself. Remind yourself of all the amazing things you did throughout high school, and tell yourself that the colleges you're applying to would be lucky to have you!

**—Serli Polatoglu, 17, UCLA, AGBU Manoogian-Demirdjian School graduate**

- Stay organized. I stressed about whether I would have enough time to get everything done. Using Google Tasks, an online to-do list, and Google Calendar helped me. I set deadlines for everything, like when to finish essay drafts, ask teachers for letters of recommendation and do SAT prep. The Calendar alerts reminded me when deadlines were coming up and helped me plan ahead. I tend to misplace planners, so having this information online was helpful. I wish I had started using the online calendar and to-do list earlier because using a timeline with deadlines throughout the entire college app process would have lowered my stress level.

**—Charlene Lee, 17, Wellesley College, Walnut HS graduate**

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

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



## RULES

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

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

### Questions?

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

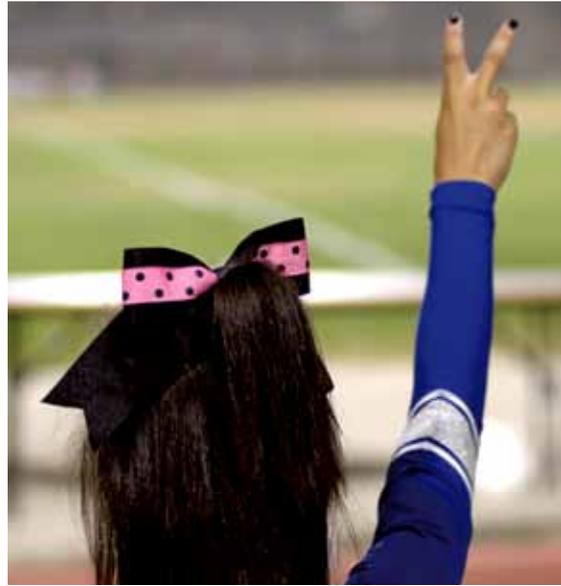
Send your submission to:

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



IMAGE BY FLAGS-TO-PRINT.COM

DEADLINE: MARCH 31, 2011



**Kheri's squad cheered on the football team in their first home game.** Photos by Elizabeth Vidar, 16, North Hollywood HS Zoo Magnet; Christian Santiago, 17, University HS; and Jasper Nahid, 16, Hamilton HS.

**By Kheri Givens, 16, Culver City HS**

**M**y favorite part of the year is football season because I cheer at the games. I love performing dances while the band plays, cheering on the football team and getting the crowd excited. At one football game last year the crowd was just watching the game silently with their hands in their laps, not clapping or yelling for the players, or slamming their hands against their legs in disgust. So one of the cheerleaders called out the chant “DE-FENSE,” and the rest of us joined in. We shouted “ DE-FENSE, DE-FENSE.”

The crowd started yelling along with us. Then I noticed that some guys in the stands were holding up a huge letter “D” and a small, white picket fence. This made me feel like we were doing a great job because they were interacting with us. As the game went on, the crowd clapped and yelled for the players even without us cheering.

I started cheerleading when I was 13. My dad signed me up for a Pop Warner cheerleading team in Redondo Beach because he wanted me to join an activity outside of school. Pop Warner is a recreational league for kids. The moves, like holding your arms up in a V shape and kicking your foot up to your head, were easy to learn and it was fun making friends with the other girls. Before I joined I was afraid of even talking in front of my classes during presentations, but during football games, knowing my teammates were cheering along with me, I was yelling, jumping and dancing in front of more than a hundred people.

#### SEEING OTHERS CHEER MADE ME WANT TO JOIN

As much as I liked cheerleading I didn't do it my freshman year at Culver City High because I missed the tryouts. When I saw the cheerleaders at the first football game I went to, I was jealous. It reminded me of when I cheered in middle school. I missed being with my cheerleading friends, shouting chants and lifting them in the air. I knew I had to try out the next season.

I was nervous before tryouts because I didn't know how hard they would be. But as one of the coaches taught us the moves to the cheer and the dance, I picked them up easily. When I found out that I made the junior

It's fun to be a cheerleader because I get to pump up the crowd at football games

I've got spirit

varsity cheer team, which meant I'd be cheering for the JV football and basketball teams, I was really excited.

Practice was harder than when I cheered on my team in Redondo Beach. In Pop Warner, when we couldn't perfect a stunt the coach would say forget it and move on to a new stunt. But on my high school team, we kept going until we mastered it and it was the captain who pushed us as much as the coach. We practiced three days a week for three hours a day.

Last year we had to learn a stunt that took all of my strength. The stunt started with me and another girl facing each other a few feet apart. Then a smaller girl (the flyer) jumped up and put one foot in each of our hands and we lifted her over our heads into a standing position. And I did all that while smiling.

#### **IT'S HARDER BUT OUR STUNTS ARE BETTER**

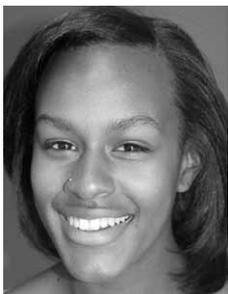
At first I didn't like that it was so serious, because I thought it wouldn't be as much fun. But because we practiced harder and longer, we were able to master stunts like throwing a girl and catching her. When I saw the hard work pay off that's when I realized I loved this.

So when I got hurt this summer, I was bummed. I heard my knee crack while doing toe kicks. At first the doctor thought I might have torn a ligament and that I'd miss the season. Thankfully it wasn't torn and I had to sit out for only a couple weeks. Instead of laughing with my friends at cheer practice this summer, I was stuck at home with my annoying brothers. I missed throwing people in the air. I missed dancing and learning the cheers. I missed everything.

I returned to practice in early August. It was great. As soon as I got there my friends ran up and hugged me.

A few days later coach said she was going to tell us who made varsity and who would be on junior varsity. My heart was racing. I didn't want to be on JV again but I was nervous because I hadn't been at practices. I squeezed my friend Masani's hand and the third name coach called was hers. She got up and walked over to the circle of varsity cheerleaders. My heart beat faster and harder as more names were called and I knew they were running out of spots. After about 12 people, I heard "Kheri." I got up and was smiling so big.

Cheering for the varsity football team is more fun. The crowds are bigger and we're not just doing cheers and chants, we're also doing dances while the band plays. The dances are becoming my favorite part because they're more entertaining than just cheering. And I'm not cheering for the JV team under the hot sun on Thursday afternoons, but the bright lights on Friday nights.



*Kheri is happy that her knee has healed and she can perform all the stunts and dances.*



# Odd girl out

The cool kids didn't accept me but I finally found a group that did

**By Charmaine Peguese**

*18, Cerritos HS (2010 graduate)*

I've always had problems fitting in. In elementary school, the other kids thought I was weird because my favorites movies were Star Wars and Lord of the Rings. They thought those movies were for losers. But I wanted to fit in so bad that I didn't care that they made fun of me. I just wanted to be liked! I talked to this one girl every day until she became my best friend. After a year of all that hard work we became really close. Then I made other friends.

In middle school, there was a group of popular girls. They were always loud and laughing. Everyone knew them and always said hi to them. They wore the stylish clothing, like Baby Phat and Ecko Red. I ditched my friends from elementary school to hang out with them. I didn't even think twice about it because we would still talk, but this was my chance to create a new image for myself. I'd buy \$100 outfits to fit in better. I didn't want to be that uncool girl everyone talked about.

When we started high school they had grown out of their middle school ways. They would talk about boys, clothes, shopping and parties. I wanted to talk about different stuff, like authors, writing, movies and science fiction.

They started to dress differently. They wore tight shirts, skinny jeans and dresses. I stayed with them because I didn't want people to see me by myself. I liked popularity and I wanted to have a lot of friends. I'd wear stylish clothing like Ed Hardy and I always had Jordans on my feet.

But even though I was looking nice, dressing to impress wasn't me. In 10th grade I stopped always shopping for new outfits. I hate shopping. I don't like to wear flashy clothes unless it's for a special occasion. School



*Charmaine says the friendships she has now will last forever.*

is just school. I'd wear things I was comfortable wearing. I didn't think anything about it until my friends started saying, "It's hot outside, why are you wearing a sweater?" They were always trying to tell me how to look. My hair would be in braids or in a bun. They'd say, "How come you never get your hair pressed?" I would say it was too hot and I didn't want to sweat it out after paying about \$50 for it, but in my mind I was screaming, "Shut up! Who cares?"

I didn't want to hang out with them anymore. But I didn't think about finding new friends because I felt like no one at school shared my interests and everyone was judgmental.

## I GAVE UP ON SCHOOL

I was upset all the time. Why do people care about how I dress or how I look? School felt like a place just to gossip, not for learning. I didn't want to be at school anymore so in class I never felt like doing anything. I'd open up a novel I was reading or space out and daydream. I never did my homework or studied for tests. I was so far behind I stopped trying.

In middle school, I got mostly Cs but now I had Ds and Fs on every report card. I had to go to summer school to make up classes but I knew they'd still move me to the next grade. My parents would say, "You're smarter than this." I'd say, "I know" and walk away. I didn't tell them about my problems because I wanted to handle it on my own. What were they going to do? Call the school? I didn't want any more attention on me.

I wasn't doing anything after school so I started going to the liquor store. I'd use my allowance to buy Snickers and Twix. I would go home and watch TV and read books and eat. I kept eating even when I was full because I was bored.

My friends started getting on me because I'd gained weight. They'd make indirect comments like, "Maybe we should go to the gym" but some would say, "You know you're fat, right? You need to go on a diet." I wanted to say something but I didn't want any problems. I would try to laugh it off but their words would be stuck in my head. You think I'm fat? It would make me sadder and I'd eat more.

I couldn't fit in my clothes anymore. I'd wear a long T-shirt so nobody would know that the zipper of my jeans was down. To hide my weight, I covered my body with big jackets I took from my brother's closet and

sweat pants from Walmart. My hair was never combed. I would get in trouble with my counselor and the security guards every time I wore my pajamas and house shoes. I figured I was going to school to sleep anyway so I didn't feel the need to bother changing. My parents would ask me, "Don't you want to look nice for school?" but that was the problem—it was just school, the last thing I cared about.

I would still hang out with my so-called friends during snack and lunch, even though they rarely said anything to me. I didn't want to sit there with no one talking to me so I would read a book. I'd be reading and eavesdropping. They would say, "lets go to the mall" and "lets go to the movies." They'd invite each other but not me. It sounded so fun. How come I wasn't invited? I felt really left out. It was me and my books, they were the only friends I had.

During junior year I started maturing. I noticed that no matter what I did to try to fit in, it was never enough. I realized that I was never going to be like them and my style is different because it's who I am. I would never be popular or the partying type, but I didn't care anymore. I didn't want to be that girl always worrying about looks and boys! I was getting sick of pretending.

When they talked about me I would say something back. When they made jokes about my weight, I would say, "Look at yourself." They'd say, "I was just playing" or "Don't take it so serious." The jokes slowed down.

## I WAS HAPPIER ALONE THAN BEING SOMEONE I'M NOT

I started sitting across the room from them in class. I felt better because I was separating myself from them. I didn't have to try so hard because I was just with myself.

In January of junior year I got caught with a pocketknife in my bag that I had used to secretly peel an orange in psychology class. I was sent to the office and three cops came and arrested me. I got a ticket, went to court and had to do community service.

I was kicked out of my school and transferred to Cerritos High. I felt like I had a chance to start over. Before I started at Cerritos, I started going to the gym and went on a strict diet. I drank only water and ate salads, vegetables and fruit, no meat or carbs. I lost 20 pounds in two weeks! I took off the big coats and baggy sweats. I wore jeans and T-shirts. I still had more weight to lose but I knew my look wouldn't change overnight. Every-

thing from then on started to fall into place.

My friends from elementary school were at Cerritos. My friends introduced me to other people. Making friends was easy because everyone was friendly and I had confidence. I didn't have a reason to hide.

On the first day I met a girl in my video game design class through my other friends. She introduced me to everyone in class. She said, "This is my friend Charmaine" and everyone said, "what's up." That class became my favorite. The other students would give me advice on my drawings so I could get better. The teacher was chill so he would never get annoyed about us making jokes in class or even at times not doing our work. I felt so comfortable with everyone that I would make jokes too.

One day this boy Josh and I were sitting next to each other talking about my drawing. He said, "You really suck at this." "What?" "Yeah, you're terrible." He said it in a sarcastic way so I knew it was a joke. From then on we were always talking in class. He would change my name from Charmaine to Charizard or Charmander from Pokémon. He would say, "I'm just kidding!" after everything and we would laugh about it and then I would insult him, saying stuff about his big ol' head or goofy laugh. And then one day he said, "What's your number?" We started texting each other during and after school. He became one of my best friends. I know that I can always talk to him.

#### MY FRIENDS AND I HAD SO MUCH IN COMMON

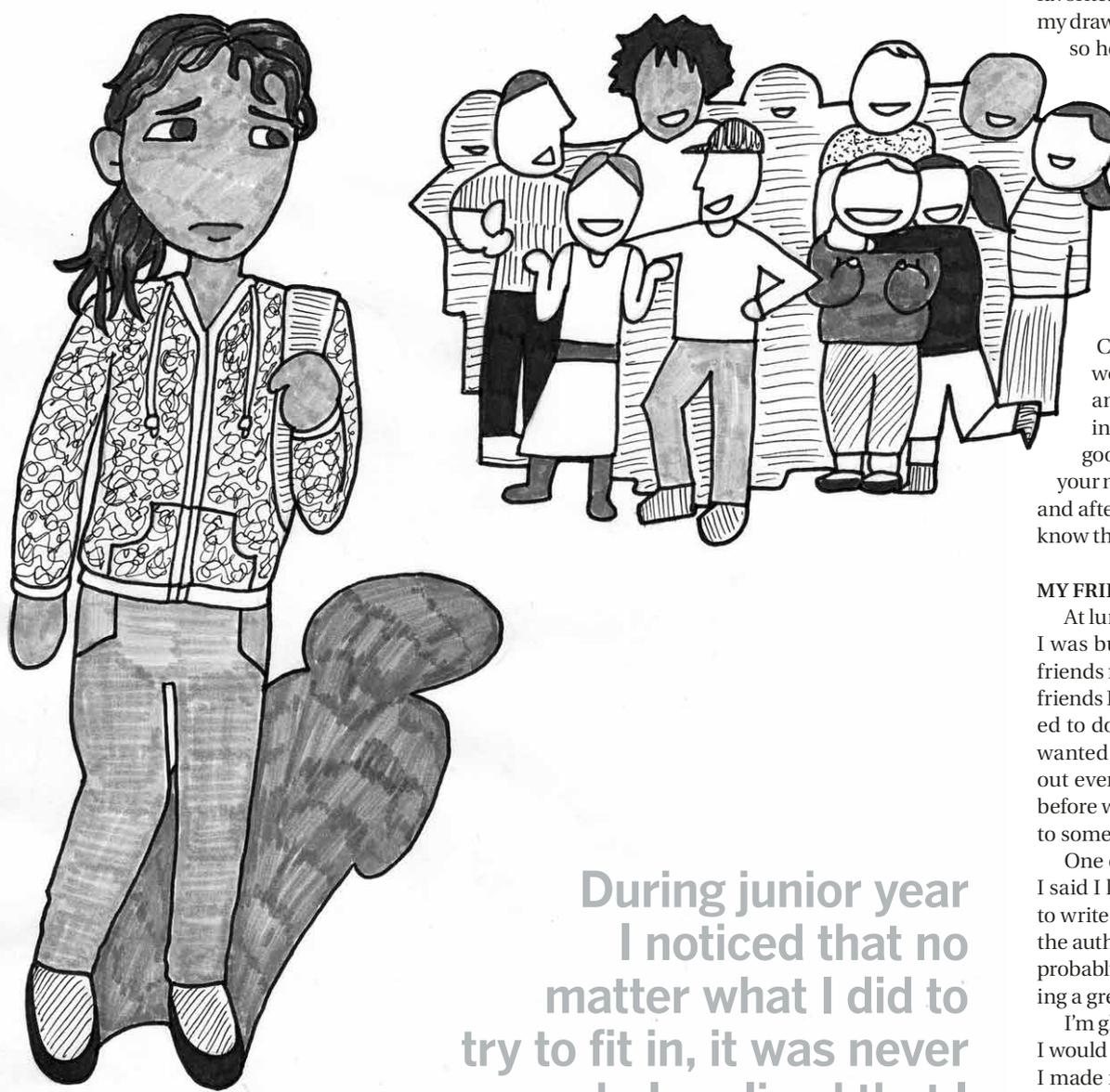
At lunch there was no time to read books because I was busy having conversations. I talked with my friends from elementary school and some of the new friends I'd made about movies and art, what we wanted to do when we graduated, and what colleges we wanted to go to. People brought up parties and going out every once in a while, but it wasn't the same as before when every weekend my other "friends" went to some party.

One day we were talking about books and stories. I said I like to write. One of my friends said she likes to write stories too. Everyone joined in, talking about the authors they liked and their favorite books. It was probably the nerdiest subject ever but we were all having a great time.

I'm glad I got kicked out of my old school. If I hadn't, I would have still been the outcast. Going to Cerritos, I made more friends and I was really happy. I found myself there. That was the turning point that made me want to do so much more.

My grades improved to Bs and Cs. I wanted to stay healthy and keep the weight off so I started doing Brazilian Jiu Jitsu and muay Thai, forms of martial arts. I graduated and am going to a community college and plan to transfer to a university.

I look back at what I went through trying to make friends and I think of how much I've grown up. I was trying too hard to fit in. Do your own thing and hang out with people who relate to you because you won't have to worry about stuff you do or what you say because they will accept you for who you are.



During junior year I noticed that no matter what I did to try to fit in, it was never enough. I realized that I was never going to be like them. I would never be the popular type but I didn't care anymore. I was getting sick of pretending.

Illustration by Amy Fan,  
16, Temple City HS

# The lows of getting high

*When I smoked marijuana I was more irresponsible and I started losing my friends*

**Author's name withheld\***

In middle school, I knew some of my classmates were smoking weed. I would overhear them brag about getting high with their friends. I'd also smell the strong scent of marijuana in the girl's restroom and I loved it. It reminded me of incense.

One day during December of freshman year, a girl I sat next to in class named Michelle asked me whether I had smoked weed before. I told her no, but that I always wanted to. She invited me to smoke with her friends some time. I said yes immediately.

During lunch the next day Michelle asked me if I wanted to smoke. I was hesitant since we were at school, but she said that they had a hidden spot. Now I was excited. I walked with Michelle and her friend Bernice to the soccer field where there was hardly any supervision.

I watched them each take a puff. It looked easy—just suck it in and blow it out. When they passed the pipe to me, I put it against my lips and inhaled. The smoke stung my lungs and I coughed. The next time I sucked in deeper to get a faster high, but it hurt more. My eyes started to water and I was coughing uncontrollably. Michelle and Bernice laughed at me and told me to stop coughing. I forced myself to hold it in.

I coughed less after the next few inhales. When the bell rang I felt lightheaded. Michelle and Bernice said that they felt the high already and I said I did too. They didn't believe me. They said that since I smoked only a little I couldn't have been high. But I knew I felt something.

When I got to my next class I sat in my seat and put my head down. I stared at the floor and I could smell weed on my clothes. I felt like I was hovering on my chair, like everything was happening in slow motion. I liked it, but the high wore off next period.

## I'D SMOKE RIGHT BEFORE CLASS

During the next few weeks, I would sometimes arrive late to first period because I was smoking with Michelle and her friends. When I would get to class, I couldn't think straight and all I wanted to do was rest my head

*\*L.A. Youth is withholding the author's name to protect her identity. Names have been changed.*

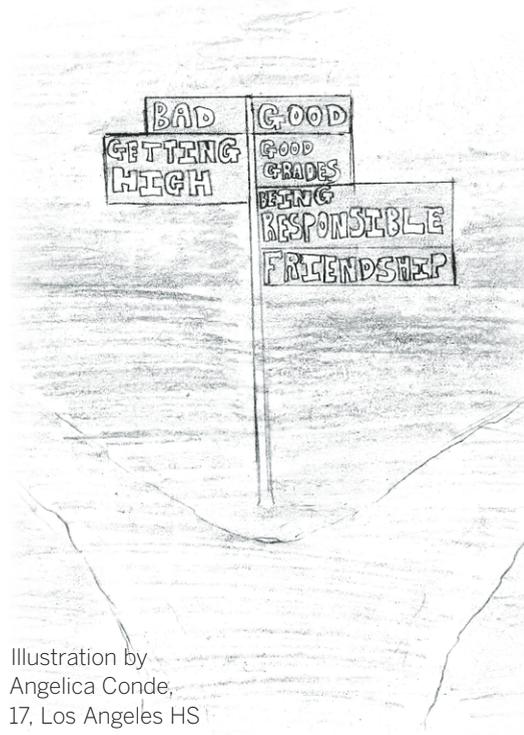


Illustration by Angelica Conde, 17, Los Angeles HS

on my desk and sleep. Sometimes I'd do it after school right before picking up my little brother. I always looked forward to getting high.

When I invited some of my other friends to join me, they said no because they were "straight edge," meaning they don't do drugs. Then they would say I shouldn't be doing it either. I felt bummed when they rejected me because it meant that me smoking weed kept them from hanging out with me. After three rejections, I didn't tell any of them when I smoked.

There were bad things about smoking weed. I liked to inhale the weed really deeply, which would make my head throb and I'd get anxious. When I felt like that, I wouldn't lay a finger on my homework.

When I didn't have a chance to smoke with Michelle, I would sometimes smoke in my bedroom using the weed I was holding for her (she was afraid her parents would find the weed so I kept it for her). Since my mom wouldn't be home from work until 8 p.m. I had enough time to let my room air out and for my high to wear off.

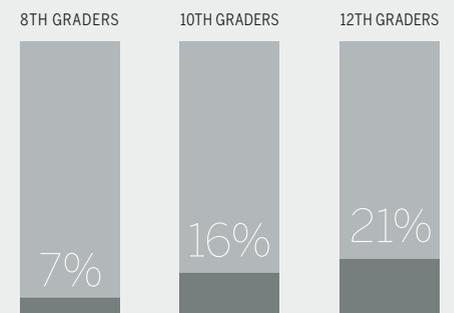
One time I smoked right before I had to pick up my little brother from school. As I walked to his elementary school, I was afraid I would get hit by a car or that I'd make it obvious to someone that I was high. I fidgeted a lot because I was anxious. Once I got to my brother's school, I had to ask an afterschool supervisor to help me find him. I tried really hard to act normal by looking her straight in the eyes while talking to her. But the supervisor noticed my uneasiness and looked at me in a weird way every so often. She must have at least noticed the marijuana smell from my clothes. When I finally found my brother he was too young to notice I was high. Even though we got home safely, I felt embarrassed and irresponsible for being high while picking him up from school.

## MY LIFE WAS BETTER WITHOUT WEED

When second semester started and our classes changed, I hung out less with Michelle and her friends so I no longer had access to marijuana. I started hanging out with my old friends again and I joined the marching band. I realized that using marijuana was not worth the high, especially considering I had responsibilities like homework and taking care of my little brother. I felt stupid; I had been smoking something that was harmful to my health and illegal. Thankfully my grades were not affected since I had very little homework. I told myself I wouldn't smoke again. I didn't want my friends to be disappointed in me anymore.

It wasn't hard to stop since I didn't know anyone who sold drugs and I didn't have any money to buy it. I'm thankful that I stopped smoking before 10th grade when my schedule became a lot more demanding. Had I kept smoking, my grades would have eventually been affected and I probably would have gotten caught. I'm glad I never got caught because I know that it would only devastate my parents if they knew I had smoked.

## HOW MANY TEENS SMOKE MARIJUANA?



Not as many as you probably think. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, a 2009 survey found about 7 percent of eighth graders, 16 percent of 10th graders, and 21 percent of 12th graders had used marijuana in the month before the survey.

# How dangerous is marijuana?

*From it's not that bad to it's harmful, our staff has mixed opinions*

Next month voters will decide whether to legalize marijuana in California. If it does become legal, anyone in the state who is 21 and over could smoke it legally, just like they can drink alcohol. It would still be illegal for people under 21. That got us wondering what our staff thought about marijuana. Here's what they had to say.

## IT'S NO BIG DEAL

I recently watched a documentary called *The Union: The Business Behind Getting High*. The filmmaker interviewed experts, including doctors. I found out that no one has died from using marijuana. I also learned that marijuana's effects aren't as intense as other drugs like heroin or LSD. The movie said that when you're high, you think more deeply about things that you wouldn't necessarily think about otherwise. Some people may feel very relaxed. Most people who smoke marijuana do not become aggressive and harm others. Once I learned about the effects, I didn't believe that marijuana was such a big deal and that it was fine to smoke.

I also learned that marijuana provides medical benefits. It can help people with glaucoma, anxiety, nausea and more. It also relieves pain for people going through chemotherapy. The documentary included an interview with a medical marijuana patient with multiple sclerosis. He was shaking uncontrollably and was barely able to move or talk. They interviewed him after he smoked marijuana. He was shaking a lot less and was calm and able to speak.

I don't like that people who smoke marijuana are viewed as losers who don't contribute to society. I know people who smoke marijuana and still graduated and are going to college.

—Brett Hicks, 19, Loyola HS (2010 graduate)

## IT'S EFFECTS ARE EXAGGERATED

For the longest time I thought marijuana was bad. But when I got older, I noticed people smoking it without any negative consequences. I have also tried marijuana a few times and nothing bad happened to me. I don't think marijuana is as dangerous as other drugs like Ecstasy or acid (LSD). I used to think that if you smoked marijuana or did any sort of drugs you would die. I feel that the effects of marijuana are exaggerated by teachers and parents. Yes, marijuana isn't the smartest thing to do since it's illegal, but it won't kill you.

—Name withheld

## IT CAN HARM YOU IN THE LONG RUN

I've heard both sides of the issue: the one that schools and the government seem to drill into our heads (drugs will screw up your life so just say no), as well as the

side my friends often take, telling me that no one has died from marijuana use and therefore it's safe. I'm not against marijuana used for medical purposes—it's proven to be an effective painkiller—but I don't think anyone should smoke it just for kicks. Through some online research, I found out that smoking marijuana frequently increases the chance of a heart attack and weakens the immune system, on top of it causing breathing problems. Considering the potential consequences, I think marijuana just isn't worth the trouble it causes.

—Elliot Kwon, 18,  
Palos Verdes Peninsula HS

## MY UNCLE HAS BEEN ARRESTED FOR SMOKING

I don't like what weed does to people. My uncle smokes a lot. One summer after sixth grade I was staying with my grandparents. They would get calls when my uncle was arrested for smoking. He has even come to their house when he was high. He would always fight with my grandfather. I hated it because he never was aggressive otherwise. One time he was yelling at my grandpa and he started throwing things. I was afraid and I left the room. If California legalizes marijuana I will try to move out of the state because I do not want to be around more people like my uncle.

—Caitlin Bryan, 18, Valley Alternative  
Magnet School (2010 graduate)

## IT DOESN'T SEEM AS BAD AS I WAS TAUGHT

My health classes and my parents drilled into my head that marijuana was bad. My parents portrayed pot users as unsocial psychopaths who stayed in their basements getting high. I thought that doing marijuana would send me into a downward spiral and I was adamantly against it. But when I heard of medical marijuana, I was confused. I couldn't understand how marijuana could be beneficial. I was even more confused when I found out that some people I know smoke marijuana. Some of them argue that pot is the "safest" drug, but to me, a drug is a drug. It's still affecting the body. But I realized that marijuana isn't as dangerous as I had thought. The users are not maniacs. I will never try marijuana, but I have a more open mind about those who choose to smoke it occasionally.

—Emily He, 16, Whitney HS (Cerritos)



Illustration by Lily Clark,  
17, Immaculate Heart HS

## WHAT THE U.S. GOVERNMENT SAYS

The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) says the short-term effects of marijuana include impaired memory, perception, judgment and motor skills. Because it affects perception and reaction time, it may play a role in car accidents.

The NIDA says marijuana can have long-term effects. Regular users often develop problems with coughing and wheezing and are at greater risk of getting lung infections like pneumonia. It also says people who have smoked marijuana for years can have problems with memory, attention and learning. The NIDA believes that some people can become addicted, in that they can't control their urges to use marijuana.

**By Tiffany H.**

I haven't always been the nicest person. I used to scream at and hit my mom, didn't do what I was told and I didn't get along with most people. Thinking about how angry I was back then is scary. Now I don't think I'm anything like the person I used to be. When I was a baby I was taken from my mother because she abused alcohol and lived on the streets or with random guys. She couldn't take care of me. I was put in the foster care system and I lived in five foster homes by the time I was 6 years old.

I lived with a woman named Lori for about four years,

but one day my social worker came to pick me up. She told me I was moving to another foster home to be with my little brother. I was hurt, angry and scared. I loved Lori. I didn't understand that she wasn't my real mom. I'd lived most of my life with her and I didn't want to leave.

I think that's when I realized I had to take care of myself. I couldn't count on anyone to take care of me. No one could be my parents.

I went to live with my brother's foster mother. During the year I lived there, one of her relatives sexually and physically abused me. He told me, "This is between us and if you say anything you won't have a brother and a family." So I didn't tell anyone. But at a court hearing

to check on how things were going, I did tell a judge that I hated living there. We were moved to a new foster home that day.

A few months later, when I was 6, my brother and I started visiting a couple who wanted to adopt us. We would visit them on weekends. I liked them and the idea of being a part of their family. My brother and I moved out of our foster home and in with them a few months later. My brother and I called them "Mom and Dad." My mom would read nursery rhymes to me before bedtime. We would say a prayer and she would say, "Good night, *buenos noches*." We did things as a family, like game night. This was the first time that I felt like I was someone's child.



Illustration by  
Vicky Chen,  
15, Walnut HS

# Finally free from my anger

Going to a treatment center for troubled kids helped me stop fighting and become someone I'm proud of

But even after they went to court to make the adoption official, I still felt that I would end up moving again. Promises had been made to me before. Lori told me I could live with her forever. Why would this be any different?

Although I felt welcomed at home, I was constantly battling my mom. I'd get upset over little things. My mom would tell me to do my homework, clean my room or brush my teeth, and I'd go off and yell at her. Sometimes my mom would have to hold me down until I was calm. Other times I would explode—yell, bite, hit, kick—anything I could do to let out my anger. I wouldn't stop until I'd completely exhausted myself.

It wasn't like my mom was trying to hurt me, or forc-

At Excelsior there were harsh consequences when I didn't do what I was told. I got in trouble two or three times a week for talking during class or not sitting at my desk. I'd get sent to detention or put in timeout where I'd have to sit in a room by myself. I think what helped most about timeouts was a lot of times there would be at least one staff around who I liked. They would talk to me and say things like, "It's not like I don't care about you. I don't go home and forget about you guys." They'd share their own experiences, or they would just listen to me. I would tell them what upset me. When someone listened to me, I didn't feel ignored and I was less likely to be difficult at that moment. The punishments

was helpful because I got a lot of stuff off of my chest and I wasn't holding as much inside. Now I can stop myself from letting my emotions get out of hand and acting on them in the wrong way. If I get angry, I'll feel angry, but also understand it's really frustration because I feel like I'm not being listened to. And instead of yelling, I'll stay calm.

Gradually my behavior started to improve and I followed the rules more often. The better my behavior was, the more privileges I got, like going with the staff and other girls to the movies, mini golf and restaurants. When I was finally allowed to leave the facility by myself, I felt proud. I didn't have anywhere to go so I walked to the grocery store and bought my friend Jell-O because I knew she liked it.

## My therapist went out of her way to help. When our sessions were supposed to be an hour, we would talk for two hours because she knew I needed it. She never seemed to judge me and I always left her office feeling happier.

ing me to do something awful. I was angry that she was telling me what to do. It wasn't hard to upset me. I think I was always angry but I wasn't able to talk about how I felt. It had to come out somehow and fighting was the only way I knew. My mom tried to help me by putting me in therapy, but it didn't work because I didn't like talking to the therapist so my mom did all the talking.

### I DIDN'T REALIZE HOW OUT OF CONTROL I WAS

My behavior didn't change, so when I was 11 years old, I was sent to an all-girl therapeutic treatment facility near Denver called Excelsior. I knew I was there because people thought my behavior was out of control, but at the time I didn't think I belonged there. I thought being sent away was extreme and I felt as if my mom was giving up on me. I didn't understand at the time how hard it was to live with me. They told me I'd be there six months to a year, but I ended up staying three and a half years.

When I got there I met one of the staff, Jim, who took me to meet all the kids I'd be living with. They said, "Oh, you're Tiffany! We've been expecting you!" I was surprised because I did not expect everyone to be so nice to me. I thought they'd be mean because it was a treatment facility for kids with behavioral problems. This one girl came up to me and introduced herself. She told me her name was Ariel and that she was from Redondo Beach like I was. It made me smile because I had only been there for a few minutes and I already had something in common with another kid.

After a few weeks of living at Excelsior I didn't really miss home. I talked to my mom twice a week and went home every few months.

Even though I'd left home, I didn't leave my problems there. I still didn't like being told what to do. I was always arguing and I would push limits to see how much the adult staff would put up with before I got into trouble.

didn't keep me from acting out again, but I usually got something out of talking to someone.

Another thing that helped me was the girls. Excelsior was the first place I made real friends. When I would get upset sometimes I would talk to some of the girls and they seemed to understand. One time I was mad and I was roaming the grounds without permission. When I came back some of the girls came up to me and said they were disappointed that I'd left and were worried and wanted to know what was wrong. I told them I was frustrated at the staff because I felt they were being rude. They said, "We've felt the same way too, but any time you're frustrated you should just come and talk to us." I felt better because they were there for me to let it out and they didn't make me feel like it was wrong to feel the way I felt.

It wasn't just the girls who were there for me. My therapist, Christie, went out of her way to help. When our sessions were supposed to be an hour, we would talk for two hours because she knew I needed it. She never seemed to judge me and I always left her office feeling happier.

More and more I found myself opening up and talking about myself and becoming closer to others. After a while I slowly started to accept that I did need others.

### I LEARNED TO STOP MYSELF FROM BLOWING UP WHEN I GOT UPSET

Christie helped me understand why I acted the way I did, and with that I was able to understand how I could change. I had to fill out a thought process sheet after every time I broke the rules like if I cussed or talked back to the staff. I would have to write what upset me, how I responded, what I could have done differently, and on a rating 1 to 10 (10 being the highest) how upset I was. I would think, "I can't believe I did that." It

### PEOPLE SAW THAT I'D WORKED HARD TO CHANGE

My therapist, the staff and my mom felt I was ready to leave Excelsior and live in a place without as many rules. On my last day at Excelsior they threw a going away party for me. There was cake and ice cream and I spent the night hanging out with my friends and staff. All of my friends signed a journal, writing goodbye letters. My friend Alissa wrote, "It's been fun having you here. You have come so far and I am really going to miss you I hope you do well outside of here." As good as it was to read those things, what made it better was that I believed what they were saying. It made me feel good that I could see that change in myself. I was proud that I'd made choices to turn things around.

On January 27, 2009 the day before my 15th birthday, I came back to California. I moved into a group home in L.A. where I lived with staff and five other girls. The group home was temporary so I could eventually go home to my mom.

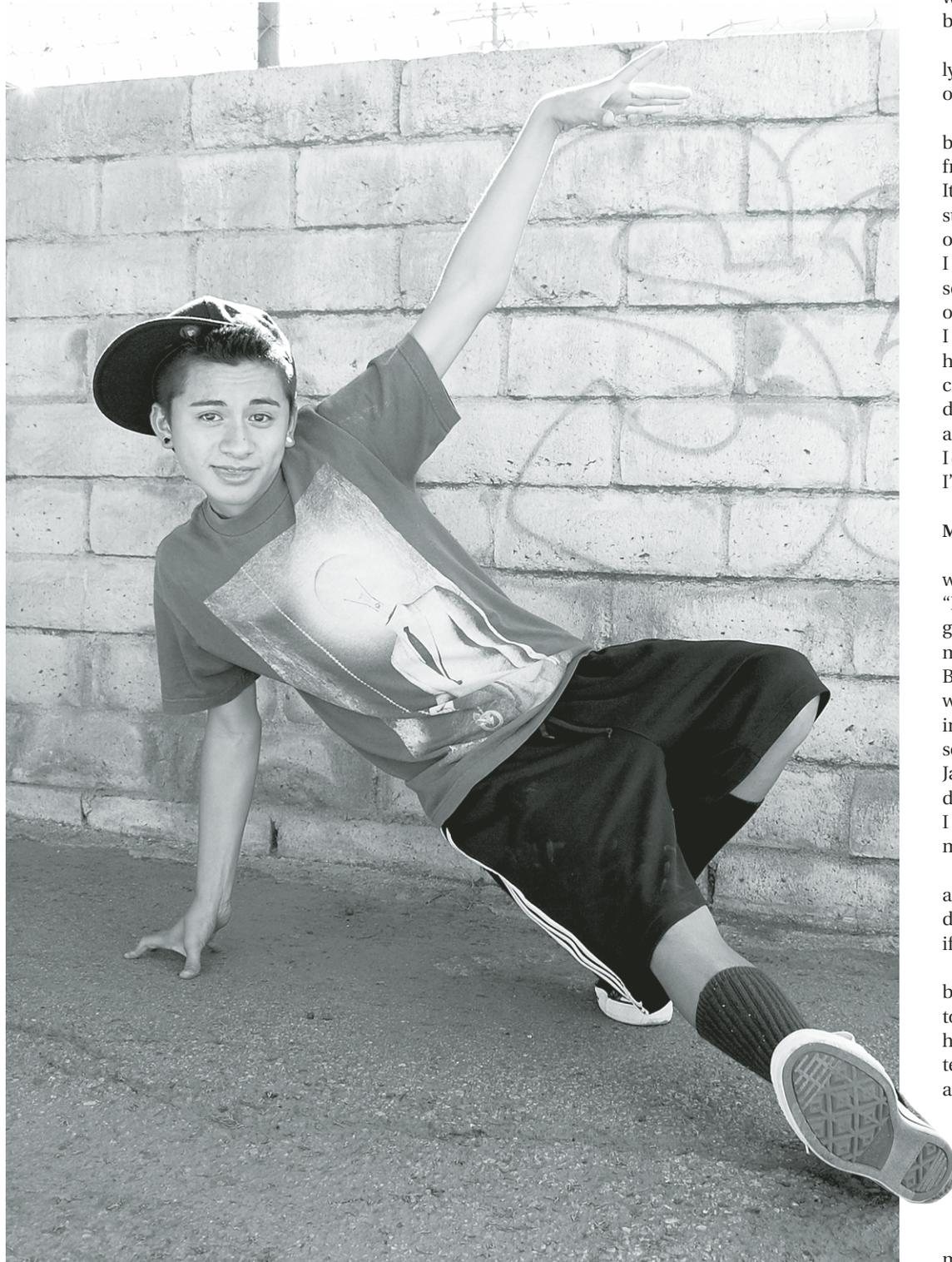
I was excited about being at the group home. It wasn't as strict and the staff and the girls were friendly. I joked with the staff that Excelsior dealt with the "bad girl" and they got the "good girl."

I moved back home in September. I haven't lived at home since I was 10 and now I'm 16. Things are better. I don't yell at my mom anymore. When we have disagreements we have discussions, like last month my mom and I talked about what school I should go to. I wanted to go to a less restrictive school that didn't focus more on my behavioral issues than my education because my education is important to me. I was frustrated. I explained to her that I didn't feel like it was what I needed. She told me that her options were limited, but that she would take everything I said into consideration. I felt good about the conversation because I felt like she was trying her best to understand where I was coming from and I understood where she was coming from. It made me feel more comfortable to talk with her in the future. It made me feel closer to her.

I'm lucky my mom sent me to Excelsior when she did. If I hadn't gotten help, I would be a lot different now. I think I would've ended up running away from home or hanging out with bad people. It has been a struggle getting to be the person I am today. I am a loving, friendly, outgoing girl. I don't think I am anywhere near done growing and learning about who I am, but I think that I have come very far.

# Stepping it up

I love to dance but I had to overcome my fear of performing



By **Anthony Arellano**  
16, Burroughs HS (Burbank)

**M**y friends Tai, Ica and I crouched behind the stage, hugging each other as we heard 19,000 roaring audience members at the Long Beach Arena. What did I get myself into? For a minute, I was a shaking mess. The stage was set for a hip-hop battle and we were supposed to freestyle dance. The only thing running through my mind was the fear of looking incredibly stupid in front of the biggest audience I'd ever performed for.

I like dancing because I can express a song's rhythm, lyrics and beats through my body. It's a way to get rid of all my worries.

I've loved to dance since I was in elementary school, but as I got older I started becoming afraid to freestyle in front of people. You can freestyle in any style of dance. It's a way to represent who you are as a dancer. In freestyling you think of each step right after another without a plan. This was the most frightening part because I thought I would freeze, mess up or wouldn't think of something new to do. I didn't think I was good enough or quick enough or that my moves were exciting enough. I couldn't pull off backflips, breakdance or spin on my head. What if I freestyled in the middle of a cypher (a circle of people with space in the middle for dancers to dance), did simple moves and backed away. I would be afraid that the crowd wouldn't like my dancing because I didn't have any exciting tricks. I didn't want to feel like I've been wasting my time loving dance.

## MY FAMILY INSPIRED MY DANCING

When I was in elementary school I'd wake up on the weekends to my dad playing Michael Jackson songs, like "Beat It," "Bad" and "P.Y.T. (Pretty Young Thing)." I'd get out of bed to see my parents cooking breakfast and my parents and older brother dancing. I'd feel happy. Back then I couldn't care less whether I looked stupid wiggling on the floor or spinning around and jumping up and down. I'd dance all around the house and sometimes get in their way. We owned some of Michael Jackson's performance videos. When I watched him dance, I wanted to become a dancer. From the videos, I learned to do the moonwalk from corner to corner in my living room.

But in fifth grade no guy would want to dance with a girl at school events and carnivals. My friends said dancing was lame. I wanted to dance but I thought that if I did, the guys would think I was weird.

In the eighth grade, I met a girl named Kayla in yearbook class who showed me dancing wasn't lame. She told me she'd been dancing all her life. When I'd ask her to show me a dance move she wouldn't hesitate to teach me in class. I'd never had friends who danced, let alone seen a friend feel comfortable dancing in front of someone. She would show me YouTube videos of popular choreographers teaching a routine to a hip-hop class. During free time we'd practice steps we saw in the videos, dancing in the corners of the classroom by ourselves until we had it down.

I wouldn't be nervous to dance in front of some of my friends in the class because the dance was already

planned out. Even if someone didn't like it, I would use the excuse that they weren't my moves.

I liked to dance but I didn't join a dance program until sophomore year. I'm Buddhist and I joined a youth performance group created by a Buddhist organization called Soka Gakkai International, whose goal is world peace. I joined the hip-hop group.

This past summer, there was a festival called Rock The Era where groups from across the West Coast would be performing at the Long Beach Arena to promote world peace and reach out to other youth. There were many practices with the different groups from around Southern California.

During one of the first practices, we broke up into groups, said our names and were asked to freestyle. I had no clue what to do. When it was my turn, I tripped

and give me confidence.

During lunch that day, I asked Tai and Ica if they wanted to start a cypher. We walked to the middle of the lunch area, and I tried my hardest not to panic. "Do I have the courage to jump in? Will I choke like last time?" I pushed those doubts away. My friends danced one at a time. Soon enough, people started noticing and a crowd formed around us. Then came my turn. I cleared my mind and jumped in. The moves started coming out effortlessly. Pop. Spin. Warp. Boogie with it. I was consumed by the beats. If I changed direction, I'd still see people facing me. About 50 pairs of eyes were on me for a minute that seemed to go on forever. Everyone was cheering for everyone's freestyle, including mine. It was a small victory. I finally showed people how I dance. I realized that I just needed to jump in and focus on hav-

everything around me. Hit the beats. Lock it. Slow down. Speed up. Hit a pose. Back it up. It felt as if the music was for just the two of us.

#### I SHOWED WHAT I COULD DO

After the cypher was finished, "I Got Colors" by Cool Kids blasted for the start of the choreography. We jumped up and purple, gold and white lights flashed. We performed the choreography for a couple more songs, then Janet Jackson's "Rock With You" played and my friends and I ran to each other. The arena darkened, the music stopped and the crowd's cheers were the only sounds. We walked out of the arena and into the sunlight. Sweat was pouring down my face. It felt like victory. When I looked around, I saw other dancers crying tears of joy. Everyone was jumping, cheering



**Anthony shows off some of his moves.** Photos by Elizabeth Pascual, 16, Burroughs HS

on my way toward the middle of the circle. I choked and got way nervous. I threw my hands over my head like I was in a rave but it didn't fit with the old school hip-hop beat. My spins were offbeat and I lost track of the music. I looked around and everyone was staring at me. I quickly walked back to my spot on the outside circle. It was the longest 30 seconds of my life. At that point, I was sure I sucked at freestyling.

#### I DIDN'T THINK I WAS GOOD ENOUGH

Every practice at lunch the hip-hop group I was in started cyphers. "Hey, are you going to jump in?" my friend Ica would ask me. I'd say no and walk away. I was jealous of how much fun they were having. I felt bad for having this silly fear. It was a bummer to see my friends freestyle while I wouldn't.

A part of Rock the Era was for everyone to set goals they wanted to accomplish. My goal was to learn new moves and have the confidence to freestyle. At the last practice before the performance, I decided to conquer my fear since it was the last day and if I didn't, I would probably regret it for a long time. Our hip-hop group took breaks often, and we meditated. During the meditations that day, I thought to myself, "I just need to try my hardest. I will get rid of my fear of freestyling. The best possible outcome will occur." This helped calm me

ing fun and not what others thought of me.

I was confident enough to ask one of the hip-hop leaders if Ica and I could join Tai and the others in the freestyle battle before the choreography that everyone would do. They said yes. I was still nervous about what I had gotten myself into.

It was time to perform, and as all the dancers were in line to get into the arena, I started to freak out. The only thing in my mind was 19,000 people, a stage and me in the middle. "Stop doubting yourself," I thought.

Someone cued us backstage, and as we walked through the curtains we were looking out at 19,000 people standing up and cheering for the drum performance that had gone before us.

When the drums were coming to a stop, we were told to sit down with the 20 other freestylers. That was when my body began to feel like an unstable mess while my two friends and I hugged each other. "We got this guys. This is our time," Tai said. "Every one of those practices comes to now." I felt more confident.

ADJ scratch echoed across the arena, and a Jay-Z song blasted. This was our moment. We were told to run on stage and I remember looking out at so many people cheering. The cypher formed into two crews dressed in different colors: yellow and blue. Tai, Ica and I were blue. When it came to my freestyle with Ica, I forgot ev-

I tried my hardest not to panic. "Will I choke like last time?" I pushed those doubts away and jumped in. The moves started coming out effortlessly. Pop. Spin. Warp. I was consumed by the beats.

and hugging each other. I was thinking, "We did it. We kicked butt." I couldn't believe it.

Rock the Era helped give me confidence. I'm getting better at freestyling, even though I still have more to learn. The performance showed me not to be afraid to do what I love. Since then, I've embraced dancing a lot more. Recently, my friends Madison, Tai and I roamed the streets of Studio City recording freestyle sessions on crosswalks, parking lots, dumpsters and rooftops of empty houses. We posted the video on YouTube. We dance for hours at each other's houses. Ica and I created choreography to "Little Bit" by Drake featuring Lykke Li and then went to Universal CityWalk to record it with people walking around us. Whenever I go places with them, I carry mini speakers just in case we want to dance. Songs last a couple minutes, but the beats are still inside me.

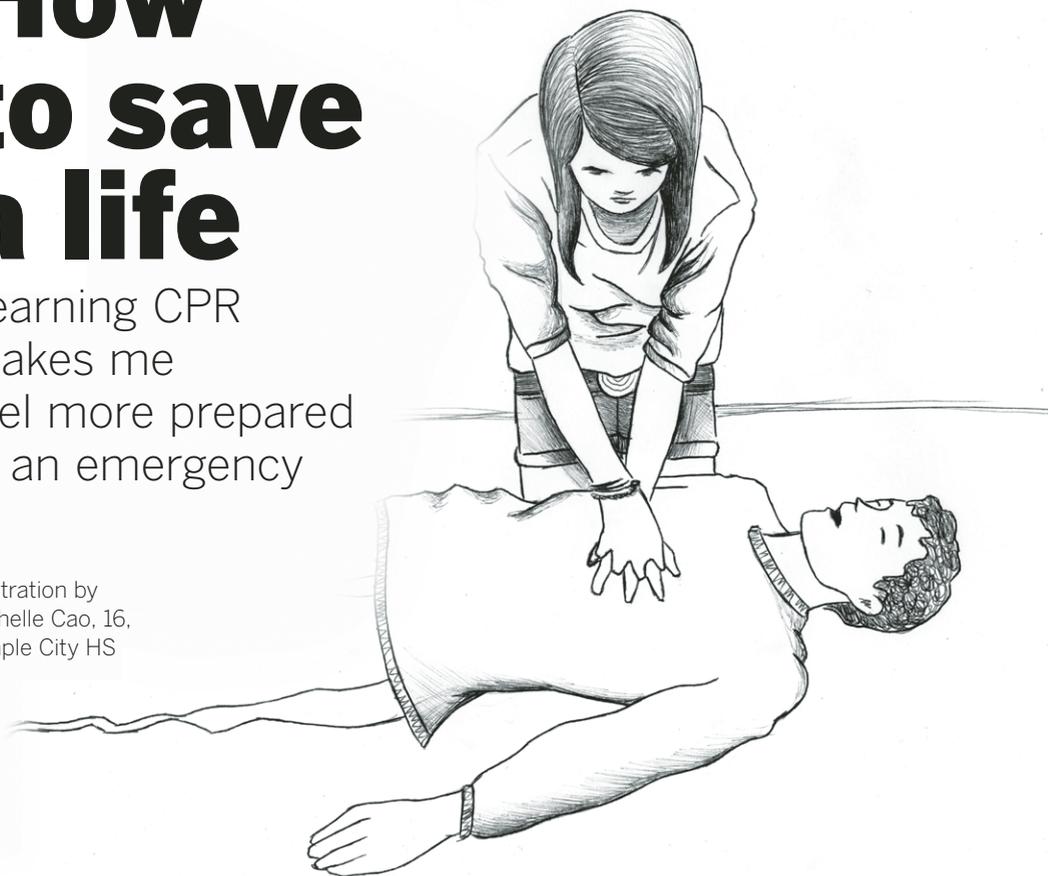


*When Anthony and his friend danced for the workers at a CityWalk yogurt shop, they got \$30 worth of free yogurt.*

# How to save a life

Learning CPR makes me feel more prepared in an emergency

Illustration by Michelle Cao, 16, Temple City HS



**By Sydney Chou**  
14, Sonora HS

Both of my parents have jobs in the medical field. While growing up whenever the subject of saving people came up, they would talk to me about taking a CPR course with them so that I could learn how to help someone in an emergency. My dad saved me from choking when I was in kindergarten. So I knew it was important, but I always felt too busy to take a class.

When high school started I joined the American Red Cross club at my school. My friend was the president and she said that being part of the club would look good on college applications. I became the events coordinator so I could learn some leadership skills. I found out the American Red Cross would be hosting a CPR day at Angel Stadium in Anaheim and figured it would be a great event for the club to participate in. I thought it was



*Sydney says learning CPR is important and didn't take long, so everyone should do it.*

important for club members to learn CPR because you never know when one of us might need to save someone's life. Unfortunately, everyone said that they couldn't go because they were busy. I was disappointed, but it was OK because my mom came with me.

Before I took the class, I had heard of chest compressions and knew you helped the victim breathe, but I didn't know what CPR stood for, let alone how to perform it.

I took the course in April. It was held in a large room beneath the stadium. Part of it was sectioned off for watching demonstration videos, while another section was used for practicing CPR on special mannequins used for teaching. The chests would go up and down when you pressed down during compressions. There was another big room for people to take their certification tests.

## CPR IS USED WHEN SOMEONE'S HEART STOPS

To start, we watched about an hour of videos explaining how to perform the steps. I learned that CPR stands for cardiopulmonary resuscitation and it's used when someone's heart stops beating. You determine whether someone's heart has stopped beating by checking if they have a pulse.

We learned that the first thing we should do is ask a victim if they want us to perform CPR. If they cannot give permission because they're unconscious, we should call 911 and then start performing CPR.

The instructors on the video made CPR look easy.

It seemed like the lady on the screen only had to blow into the mannequin's mouth lightly and push down on the chest gently.

We were led to an open area where mannequins were lying on mats. Each group had an instructor who described what to do.

He told us to start with checking the mannequin's airway by tilting the head back and opening the mouth to see if there was anything in the back of the throat. If there is, we scoop it out with our index finger. Then, we blow into the mouth to give a breath. When giving breaths, you have to cover the other person's mouth with your mouth and pinch the person's nose from the sides and then blow two one-second breaths into the victim's mouth. I play the oboe, an instrument that requires a lot of breath control and lung capacity, so blowing enough air to fill the mannequin's chest wasn't hard.

Next are the chest compressions. We learned that the proper place to do them is two fingers below the chest, in the middle of the rib cage. We had to give two breaths before every 30 chest compressions. Chest compressions simulate heartbeats and are used to pump the oxygen from the breaths through a person's body. The instructor kept telling me to push harder.

## CHEST COMPRESSIONS TOOK ALL MY STRENGTH

The compressions were the hardest for me because I am not strong. I weigh only 97 pounds, so I struggled with pushing down the mannequin's chest hard enough. I tried my best but my hands started to hurt. I got tired after pushing down a few times. My mom and I took turns giving the chest compressions and breaths so I had a chance to rest. After 10 attempts, the mannequin's chest started going down, meaning I was doing it correctly.

We also learned about the Heimlich maneuver, which is used to force an object out of a person's throat when they are choking. When I was choking, my dad wrapped his arms around me and made a fist in the middle of my rib cage and pulled in, causing the food I was choking on to fly out of my mouth. Having my mom practice the Heimlich maneuver on me was difficult because I'm ticklish. But learning to do the Heimlich wasn't hard.

After we practiced CPR, we took the certification exam. It was easy since I had paid attention while watching the video and listened to the instructors. Most of the answers were from what they had said. It was just a multiple-choice test. I missed only three questions.

The three-hour CPR certification course was definitely worth the \$10. I feel that learning CPR is important and beneficial for everyone, not just paramedics and doctors. I am glad and thankful my dad knew how to perform the Heimlich maneuver or I would not be here right now. I'm proud that I learned these two life-saving techniques. It makes me feel prepared that I could help someone who was in my situation, just like my dad helped me.

To find a class near you go to [redcrossla.org/classes](http://redcrossla.org/classes)

# Who should be governor?

The election is important because the winner will affect our education and futures

**By Aaron Schwartz**

15, Gabrielino HS (San Gabriel)

Even though I can't vote, I am trying to follow the race for governor because it affects my life, and other teens too. Whoever becomes governor will make choices that affect my education, my job opportunities and even the air that I breathe.

In the past five months, I have heard the names Meg Whitman and Jerry Brown, but all I knew about them was that they were running for governor. The current governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger, can't run for re-election because he's already served two terms. I wanted to learn more, so I went to the Los Angeles Times website to read about who they were.

Whitman, 54, is a Republican and was the CEO of eBay. She grew it from a small Internet auction website to the corporate giant it is today. She's now a billionaire. The Times reported that she's spent \$119 million of her own money on the campaign, which makes it seem to me like she is trying to buy the election. I'm not sure she's ready to be governor because she has no political experience.

Brown, 72, is a Democrat and was governor of California from 1974 to 1982. After that, he stayed involved with politics, running against Bill Clinton in the presidential primaries in 1992 and being elected mayor of Oakland in 1998. Since 2007 he's served as the state's Attorney General, which means he's the state's top lawyer. He's an experienced politician, but I wonder if he will be able to solve today's problems since we have such a huge deficit.

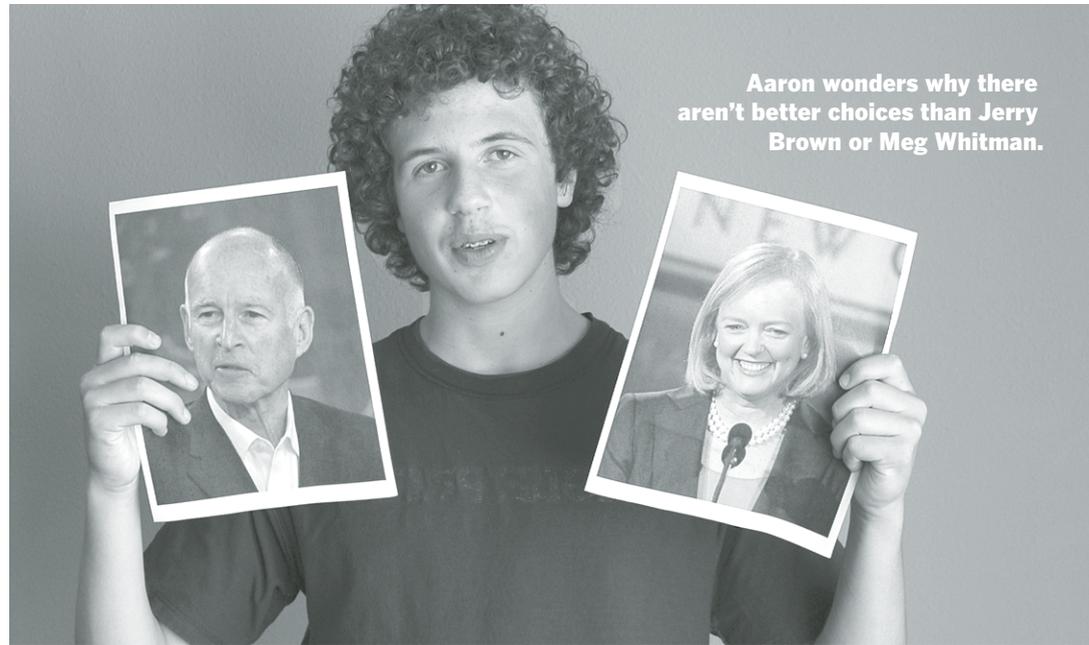
## HOW DO THEIR VIEWS DIFFER?

Since one of them will be governor, I wanted to know how they would handle the issues I care about. So to find out I went to each of their websites and read their plans. The information was easy to find, but it was kind of confusing.

Because the state had a \$19 billion deficit this year, Governor Schwarzenegger has cut billions of dollars from education. To save money, my school year was shortened by five days. This really annoys me because we barely had time to learn everything important before. We've also



*Aaron wants you to remind your parents to vote.*



Aaron wonders why there aren't better choices than Jerry Brown or Meg Whitman.

lost the option of having a seventh period, which means fewer electives for everyone. I had to cut speech and debate from my schedule, which was my favorite class.

According to his website, Brown would create a cheaper state-testing program, by having multiple shorter tests during the school year, instead of longer year-end tests. This is great because my school spends about two weeks taking state tests, so spending less time taking tests would give teachers more time to teach students. Brown would also increase state funding to community colleges. I like that idea because community colleges can be a cheaper way for students to take required general education classes.

Whitman's plan says she will give schools more control over how they spend their money. She also wants to reward good teachers with better pay and give \$1 billion more to the University of California system. I believe teachers are underpaid, but I don't know what standard she would use to determine how well a teacher is teaching. I do like that she is willing to give more money to the UC system, because it would help improve colleges that I might end up going to, but I wonder where she plans to get the money to do this.

I have friends whose parents are out of work, so I am interested in how the candidates will deal with the high unemployment rate. After all, if it's not handled now, my generation will have a hard time finding jobs in the future. Brown plans to create half a millions jobs by expanding California's renewable energy businesses, such as wind and solar energy, and the technology industry. He also says he will create jobs to help the construction

industry. I think this is a pretty good plan because it focuses on providing jobs for people.

Whitman's economic policy is based on helping businesses. If elected she plans to lower taxes on businesses, so they will hopefully hire more people. But giving businesses tax cuts might increase California's deficit. She also plans to cut state spending by \$15 billion by cutting 40,000 state jobs. I think her plan is bad because she doesn't have a concrete way to create new jobs and she has to fire people.

## THEY SHOULD FOCUS ON THE ENVIRONMENT

I also think it is important that our next governor does something to help California's environmental problems. Both candidates want to cut pollution and preserve natural areas, but Brown seems to have a better idea of how to do it because his plan is more detailed than Whitman's. I'm not sure all of Brown's ideas are doable, but I think he has the better plan.

If I could vote in this election, I would vote for Brown because I don't think Whitman has enough political experience to be governor, and I don't agree with her plans to fix California. Still, I'm not excited by Brown. The best candidate that the Democratic party has is someone who's old enough to retire. I wish there had been someone else who would have run instead.

The election is Nov. 2. To learn more about the candidates go to [megwhitman.com](http://megwhitman.com) and [jerrybrown.org](http://jerrybrown.org)

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L.A. YOUTH HAS GIVEN me the chance to express my thoughts in a creative way. I love to write and I love when my friends tell me, "I saw you in the newspaper!" My stories about eating vegetarian at school, riding the Blue Line train and how budget cuts are affecting my school challenged me. It was difficult to put my ideas down on paper. But working one-on-one with my editor definitely helped improve my writing.

—Ashley Hansack, 17, King Drew Medical Magnet HS



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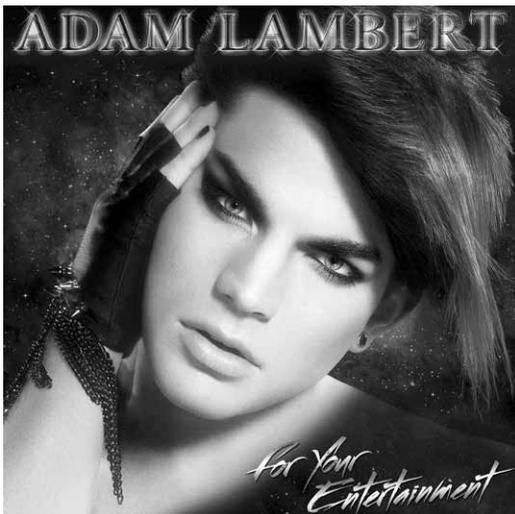
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## Adam Lambert

CD: For Your Entertainment

**Reviewed by Caitlin Bryan**

18, Valley Alternative Magnet School (2010 graduate)

I became a fan of Adam Lambert during American Idol, when he finished as runner-up in 2009, and anxiously waited for his debut album. I loved his voice and how every song he picked on Idol he made his own.

The songs on For Your Entertainment are amazing and fun to dance to. Most of them are pop with rock mixed in. The first song on the album, "Music Again," is one of my favorites and always has me dancing and singing this one part: "Look in my eyes, baby eyes/ Oh, you make me want to listen to music again/ Yeah you make me wanna listen to music again."

I also fell in love with "Fever" and "Sleepwalker." The song "Fever" is about being with the person you want and making them yours. "Sleepwalker" is one of the slow, sad songs on the album, but has a powerful meaning. It's about losing someone you care about, and always being reminded that the person is gone. I like listening to this song because it is heartfelt and sincere.

Another thing I like about Lambert is that he doesn't hide that he is gay. I like that he is out, because his personality is flamboyant and it's reflected in some of his songs. Like the song "For Your Entertainment," which has bold lyrics: "I bet you thought that I was soft and sweet/ You thought an angel swept you off your feet/ But I'm about to turn up the heat/ I'm here for your entertainment."

I recommend this album to anyone who is open to a different style of pop rock.

**The songs on For Your Entertainment are amazing and fun to dance to. Most of them are pop with rock mixed in.**



## Ratatat

CD: LP4

**Reviewed by Dana Green**

16, North Hollywood HS Zoo Magnet

Mike Stroud and Evan Mast are the masterminds behind the electronic rock band Ratatat, whose fourth album, LP4, is amazing. It was a surprise to hear orchestra sounds blended with their familiar combination of guitars, bass guitars and synthesizers.

The opening song, "Bilar," is an epic beginning to the album. It starts off with droning guitars and seconds later abruptly changes into a complex song with unusual synthesized sounds. The track ends with a mysterious voice speaking in German. The lyrics translate to "A romance ... All of the friends waited on top of me. This here is the best friend. A black ..." There is no reason why the quote is there, but it adds to the strange feeling of the song. "Bilar" sounds like nothing Ratatat has done before because the band experiments with dubstep beats that emphasize bass. "Bilar" prepares listeners for the crazy world they step into while listening to this album.

Another amazing track is "Drugs." The song starts off with pleasant piano and orchestra sounds. Moments before getting boring, it explodes into the familiar synthesized beats.

The only disappointment on LP4 is "We Can't Be Stopped." It is a depressing orchestra overture with repeating piano notes. While listening to it, you expect it to blow up into a wild rollercoaster ride, but it never does. From beginning to end, the track never goes anywhere.

The album is perfect for any mood. If I want to listen to rock, electronic, house or new wave, LP4 can deliver. My love for Ratatat grew after hearing this album.

**The opening song, "Bilar," is an epic beginning to the album.**



## Selena Gomez & The Scene

CD: A Year Without Rain

**Reviewed by Patricia Chavarria, 19**

On her new album, A Year Without Rain, Disney star Selena Gomez combines dance and pop and delivers 10 high-energy songs.

Just because Gomez's music is intended mostly for tweens doesn't necessarily mean other people won't enjoy it. Whether you're in love or you're sick of love, Gomez has a song for you and she'll make it seem like you're not the only one with problems.

"Off the Chain" is a dance song about finding your true love. "A thousand church bells ringing/ I can hear the angels singing/ When you call my name/ Your love is off the chain." It works as a love song because when I hear this song it makes me feel warm and fuzzy, as if I had found my true love. It's definitely my favorite and I can't help putting it on repeat on my iPod.

"Rock God" sounds more like rock. Some people might think this song written by Katy Perry is too mature for Gomez, but I think it's a great break from all of her innocent love songs. "Preacher man walked into the club and he said, hey girl/ Can't you walk and not stray?/ Father, I'm torn and I'm selling my soul to the rhythm, the beat and the bass" are just some of the captivating lyrics that I love.

I love how each song is different. Some like "Round & Round" have a pop vibe, others like "Sick of You" sound techno and some are mellow, like "A Year Without Rain." Regardless of your age, this CD is for everyone.

**Whether you're in love or you're sick of love, Gomez has a song for you.**

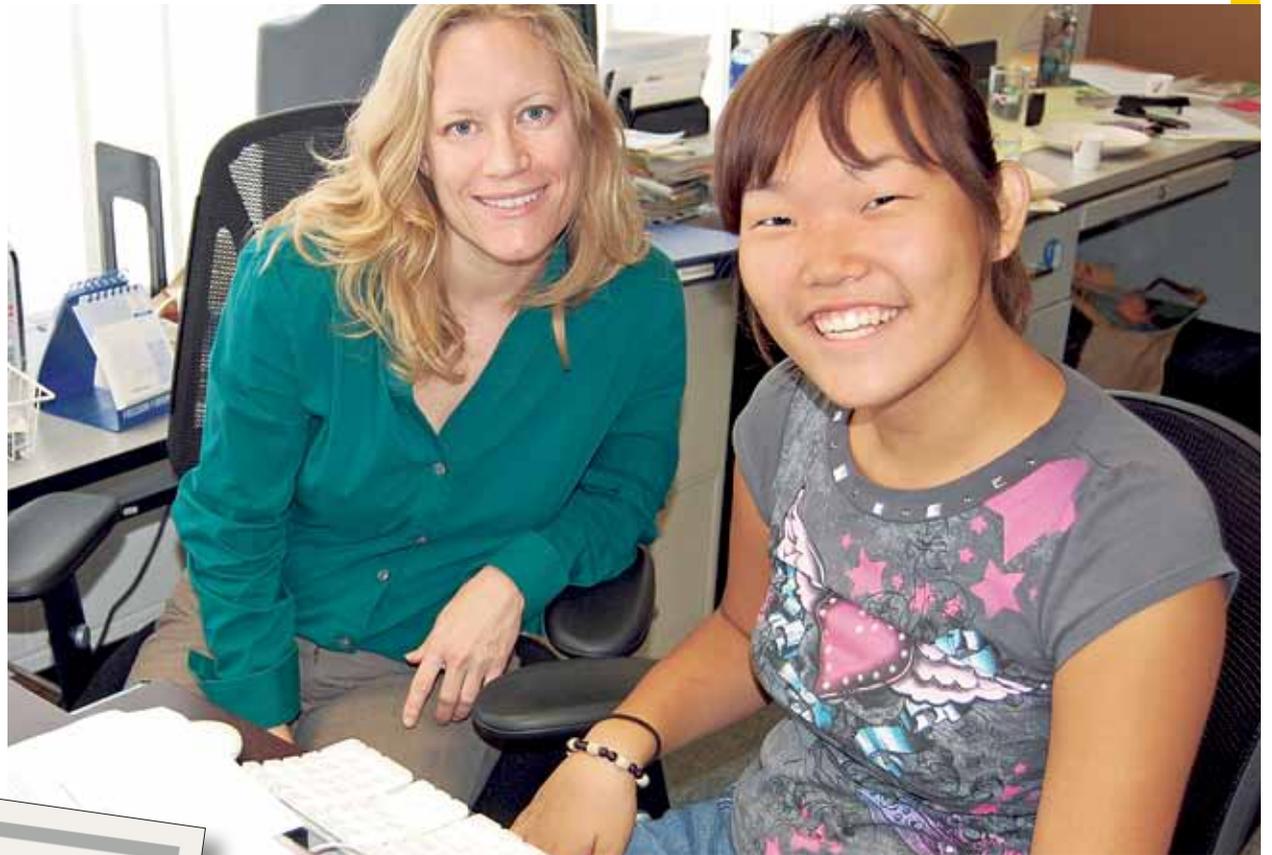
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Editor Amanda Riddle (left) works with Sally on her story. At left are some of the foster youth stories we've published.



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