

SEPTEMBER 2011
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L.A. youth

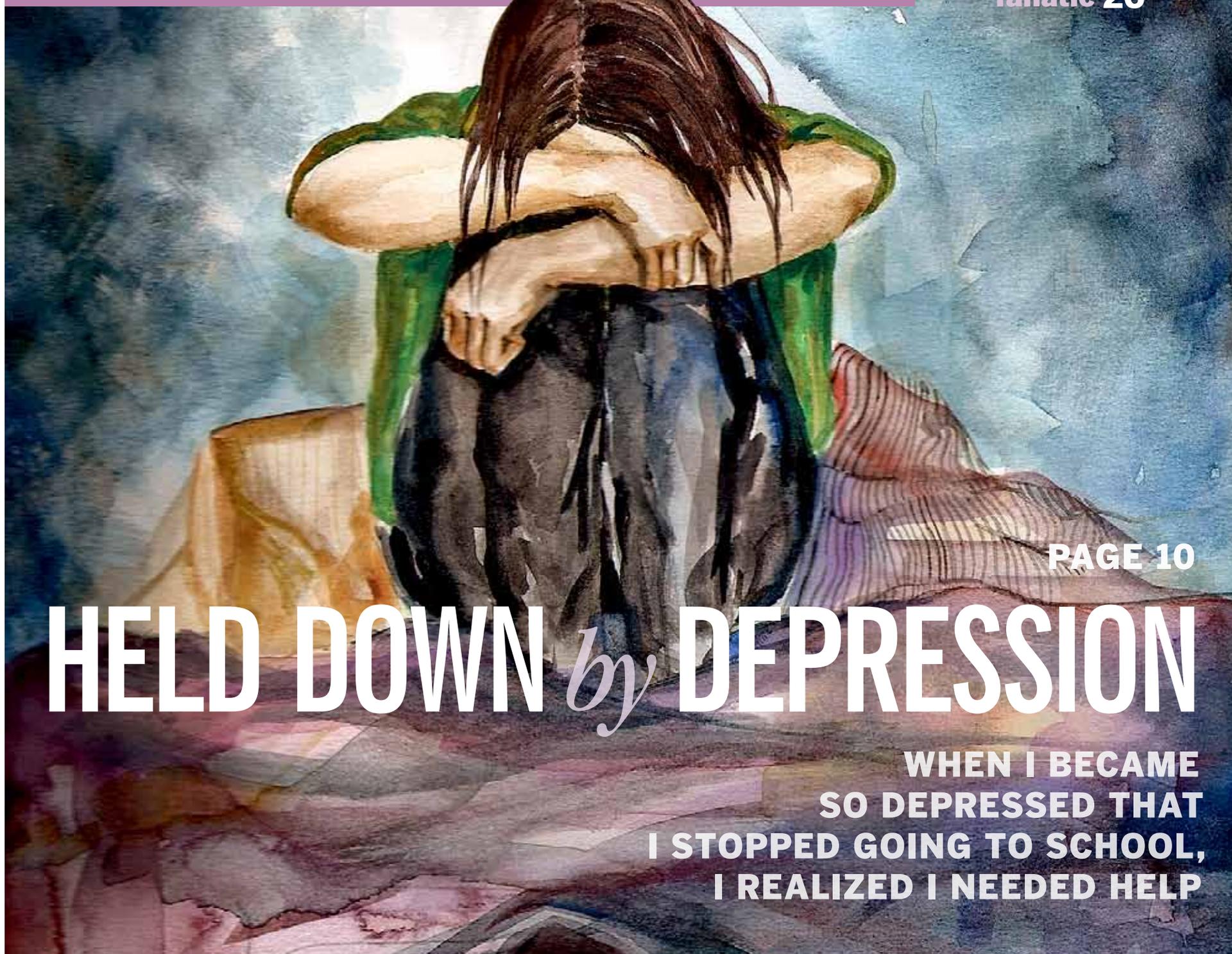
the newspaper for and about teens

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HELD DOWN *by* DEPRESSION

WHEN I BECAME
SO DEPRESSED THAT
I STOPPED GOING TO SCHOOL,
I REALIZED I NEEDED HELP

L.A. youth

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FOR PEOPLE WHO CARE ABOUT TEENS

About L.A. Youth

How L.A. Youth started

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

How L.A. Youth is doing today

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

How L.A. Youth is funded

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

L.A. Youth's mission

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

Advocating for teens

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

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Illustration by Lily Clark, 17, Immaculate Heart HS (2011 graduate)

10



9

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

I love illustrating for L.A. Youth because I get to use a quirky and cartoonish style that I don't normally do. It's interesting to read the stories and then be able to capture what they're about in art. The best part is hearing from the writers that they liked my illustration. I'm really glad that I was able to do such a big illustration this time (p. 14).

Amy Fan, 17, Temple City HS



BEHIND THE SCENES

L.A. Youth doesn't publish an issue over the summer, but we were still busy. In our summer writing workshop, 11 teens worked with our two editors to write a story in six weeks, and went on field trips. Their stories will be published in our fall issues. We have two workshop stories in this issue. On page 5, Jessica shares what she did this summer after she couldn't get a job. On page 26, find out which Best Picture nominees are Sydney's favorite movies.



STAY IN TOUCH WITH US

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

MAY-JUNE 2011 ISSUE

A GIRL WISHED SHE WERE THINNER

THE ARTICLE "I wish I were thinner" helped me tremendously. I do not have any sort of eating disorder. However, I know a friend who believes she has to look a certain way. The writer helped me understand her better and showed me how I could help. Before reading this I would try to avoid any conversation that would mention her eating disorder. I felt uncomfortable talking about it, since I had tried to help many times and failed. I got frustrated. However, now I know that it's the last thing she needs. I am planning on giving this article to her, so that maybe she will take the writer's advice.

Piunik Babakhanins
Wilson MS (Glendale)

I THOUGHT THIS article was amazing. In the end, the writer realized that her health is more important than her weight and I think all girls should know this. In my opinion everyone who believes in

themselves and has confidence in who they are is beautiful. I also believe that wanting to be thinner is OK if you lose the inches the right way!

Gyulnara Grigoryan
Wilson MS

I CAN RELATE to the article "I wish I were thinner" in many ways. Merryck went through many tough phases just to lose weight. The idea of headaches, vomiting and so on is quite painful to me. I once tried her method of losing weight, but I stopped. After reading this article, I realize that diets can harm people in severe ways.

Name withheld

A TEEN DEALT WITH HER FACEBOOK ADDICTION

I AM A Facebook addict. That's why as I was flipping through the newspaper, the headline "Addicted to Facebook" immediately caught my eye. Although I don't feel left out [like the writer did], I can relate to her when she talks about going to bed around 2 every night and her grades dropping because of Facebook. I'm trying to cut

down the amount of time I spend on the social networking site every day, but the thought of not being able to comment on status updates, like people's pictures, or change my banner scares me. I think Facebook is a great way to keep in touch with people, but you need to be careful not to let it consume you.

Eliza Suluyan
Wilson MS

I LOVE THE article about the girl who was addicted to Facebook. It helped me a lot!

Julie Martinez
Comment on Facebook

FINALLY! SOMEONE WHO actually knows how I feel! I liked this article because it relates to almost every teenager, including me. Every day I come home from school and I immediately go on Facebook. I have to check for updates or comments. I try not to go on Facebook a lot but I can't resist. I've tried to do many things so I won't log on every day but nothing works. I've deactivated my Facebook but three days later I reactivate it. I wish I could download a program that lets me go on Facebook for no more than 15 minutes. I really enjoyed reading this article because it really connected to my life.

Gevork Sarkissian
Wilson MS

THE ARTICLE "ADDICTED to Facebook" was very interesting. I was once addicted to video games and can relate to the writer. It takes work to get over an addiction. She wrote, "I was going to bed around 2 at night." To me that doesn't sound that bad. Letting your grades slip for social networking, in my opinion, is weak. Social networking is used to burn off time and happily she returned to her old self. I find it amazing she was able to put a two-minute lock on it. I cannot do that.

Scott Yzarnotegui
Wilson MS

ILLEGAL DOWNLOADING HURTS THE ARTISTS

I STOPPED ILLEGALLY downloading because my laptop got a virus. Now I buy iTunes cards and I like it, or else I would keep downloading!

Marisol Samayoa
Comment on Facebook

TEACHERS SHOULDN'T BE LAID OFF TO SAVE MONEY

I read the article "Cutting teachers isn't the answer" and it was interesting but also heartbreaking. I've seen this sort of story on the news and I ask myself why someone would cut teachers' jobs to save the school's money. I'm sure the school can find a better way to save money. For example, the school can start recycling or organize a fundraiser. Also, cutting classes isn't the answer, because that just hurts the teachers and the students.

Celine Der Boghosian
Wilson MS

A STUDENT ADVOCATED FOR BETTER TECHNOLOGY AT HIS SCHOOL

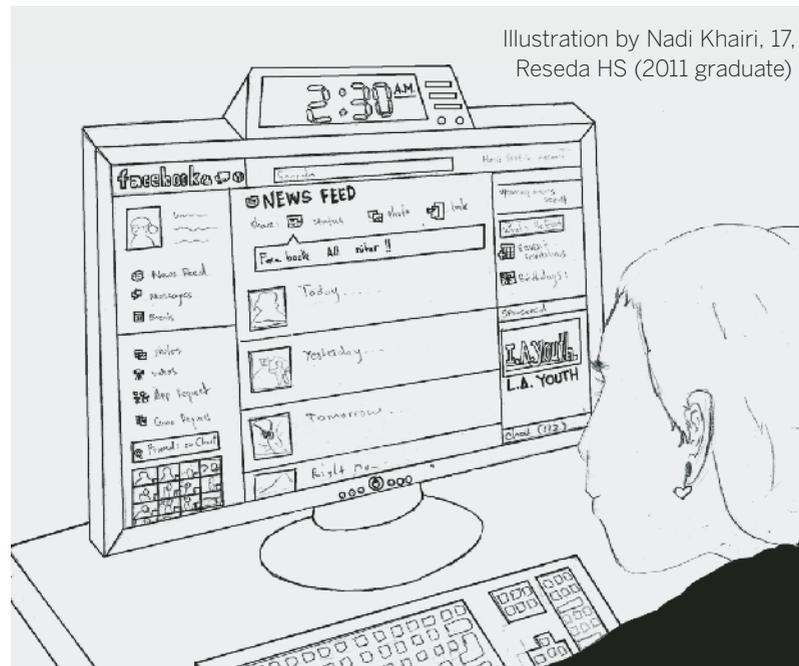
I COMMEND YOU on becoming informed about how important education is and how much more difficult it is to get. I just wanted to point out that even schools like Beverly Hills High School don't have the resources you implied. There is a new science building, but when labs are done, the students are in groups of about five, which means individual experience is pretty much not there. As an alumnus of the school, I can also say that the flashy building with what seems like great resources must have had the sole intention of pleasing donors to the school, since it did not enrich the academic experience [when] I was there. All public schools are under a crunch, and even Beverly Hills cuts everything that doesn't improve its chances of getting donations for things kids don't need (new track field while counselors jobs are cut, etc.). Unfortunately, the best education right now is most likely independent or through organizations like the one you joined.

Wildrose
Comment on layout.com

WEB EXCLUSIVE PAINTING A MURAL TO GIVE BACK TO YOUR COMMUNITY

I LOVE THE mural! It has a modern feel to it and all the colors complement each other. I also love the idea behind the project [that had high school students painting a mural for Temple City's library]. Great job!

Jessica Kwen
Comment on Facebook



One last carefree summer

After I didn't get a job, I had fun volunteering and hanging out with my friends

By Jessica Marin

17, Culver City HS

I had plans to make money this summer. I was going to get a job at a clothing store or a restaurant because I thought it would be fun to work around a lot of people. I wanted to make money for clothes shopping and going out with friends.

The first week of July my friend and I went job hunting. We walked around Westwood and the Westside Pavilion mall all day only to hear "We're not hiring but we're always accepting applications" or "You have to be 18 years old." Still, I picked up about seven applications because I wanted a job, but I didn't put in too much effort. One application asked for the days and hours I'd be available to work. I'd be available every day, but I didn't want to write that because I was scared that if I got hired, I wouldn't have time to go out with friends. I didn't turn in any applications because I didn't think I'd get hired.

The next week I stayed home and watched movies and TV. I was discouraged. What's going to happen with my summer? Is it going to be like this the whole two months? I thought, I might as well do something productive and get out of the house. So I started volunteering at my old preschool three days a week, doing arts and crafts with the kids, reading to them and playing with them.

I had a lot of fun with the kids. One of them, Dylan, made me a book where I was a princess and I had a prince named Sergio. They said the funniest things too. Once, one of the youngest kids, Diego, was helping me water the plants when he started complaining that his back was "killing him." I looked at him and started laughing. A 3-year-old complaining about his back! I told him that he was too young for backaches. Sometimes when I left, the kids yelled "We love you" or "We miss you." It made me feel like I was doing something good.

When I wasn't volunteering I'd go out with my friends. I was tight on money so I looked for cheap or free activities. My friends and I went to the Getty museum where we took a free guided tour of the "Paris: Life & Luxury" exhibit. It was about the French upper classes during the 18th century. The clothing of that time was so sophisticated and detailed. I learned that women back then had a designated time to get ready called a "toilette." During the toilette they took up to four hours to get ready. They would put on petticoats, which are like skirts that go under dresses to make them look fuller, and corsets, which were tightened to accentuate their waists. I thought it was crazy. I couldn't



Jessica and her friend Mithzy biked along the Ballona Creek to Marina Del Rey almost every week. Photo by Mithzy's sister Arely Hernandez, 12, Culver City MS

imagine living in that time period. I take 20 minutes to get ready in the morning. I'd rather have those four hours to do something else.

I DISCOVERED A COOL BAND

My friend Mithzy and I also went to the Hammer Museum near UCLA for a free concert to see the indie bands Grouplove and Milo Greene. I was excited because I hadn't been to a concert in three years. Standing and swaying to the music for two hours was tiring but at the end of the night I was a fan of Grouplove. Now when I'm at home I listen to their songs on YouTube.

Not having a job during the summer gave me time to be more active. Mithzy and I tried to bike to the beach once a week. We would ride our bikes along the Ballona Creek and go to the marina and sit on the rocks for two hours. We would watch people and the crabs. I thought it was cute when the tiny crabs would fight for food among the rocks.

I found out that a café near my house had yoga sessions every Wednesday morning. It was free and my mom said it would be good for controlling my "temper." I was scared to do yoga the first time. I imagined myself getting all tied up and worse I imagined accidentally farting in the middle of a pose. Luckily nothing like this happened and I realized I loved yoga. Yoga made me feel calm. When my friend and I came out of the café the bus passed by and didn't stop for us. Instead of yelling like I normally would, I didn't give it a second

thought. I knew that there would be another bus soon. I'm going to continue doing yoga.

One week my tutor took me to exercise boot camp. It was free for the first week. The class was from 6 to 7 a.m. The second day I was dying through the whole thing. We had to do these horrible things that I hated called burpees. You drop to the floor and extend your legs out and then pull them back in and jump up again. Those killed me. When I got home I collapsed on my bed and slept for three hours. The next day I couldn't even get out of bed. I never went back.

This summer was great. I had fun on a budget. I was able to do a little bit of everything and I didn't have to worry about being on time for a job. I'm a senior now so this was my last summer as a "kid." Next summer I'll have to work to make money to cover my college expenses. I'm happy that I was unemployed because my summer was carefree.



Jessica went to five museums this summer, and they were all free!

Looking back on 9/11

Ten years later, we have a better understanding of the attacks

On Sept. 11, 2001, terrorists hijacked four airplanes and attacked the United States. Two crashed into the World Trade Center towers in New York, causing them to collapse. Another plane hit the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. and a fourth crashed into a field in Pennsylvania because passengers stopped the terrorists from reaching their target. Nearly 3,000 people were killed in the attacks. L.A. Youth asked teens to share what they remember of that day and how the attacks have affected them.

Visiting New York made the attacks more real

I was 5 years old on Sept. 11. I woke up to the TV on, and when I walked into the living room, my mom was crying and my dad looked shocked. I had no idea what was going on, and when they saw me they immediately shut the television off. My dad took me to school and all I can remember is seeing my first grade teacher crying, and a confusing announcement about something awful that happened.

For years, the only time I would think about 9/11 was on the anniversary every year when we had a minute of silence for people who died. Kids in my class would start giggling, and no one would take it seriously. I didn't start to understand what had happened until I was 10.

My family visited New York, and one day we went to the World Trade Center site. I saw a list of names on plaques on a wall that stretched almost as far as I could see. My mom began to cry, and it hit me that these were the names of those who had died. My mom told me that terrorists had taken control of planes and flown them into the twin towers, causing thousands of innocent people to die. I cried even harder realizing that all these people had families, and that they all should be alive today. That visit made me realize that there are bad people out there who can harm you. For years after that, I was terrified for my mom to get on a plane.

This past school year our English class studied 9/11 when we read a novel called *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, which is about a boy who lost his dad in the attacks. We also had to read an

article called "The Falling Man," which is about a photo of a man who jumped out of one of the towers to avoid burning to death. No one knew who the man was and they still haven't figured out his identity. It made the attack much more real. We had to write a response, and it was the hardest thing I've ever had to write. I wrote that I believe the picture is a metaphor, symbolizing all of the lost lives as one, because most bodies were buried under rubble and never found.

The attacks had a lasting impact on me. Even now, when my mom leaves on a business trip, I tell her how much she means to me because I think of the kids who kissed their parents goodbye, not knowing they would never see them again.

By Camille Didelot-Hearn, 15, Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies

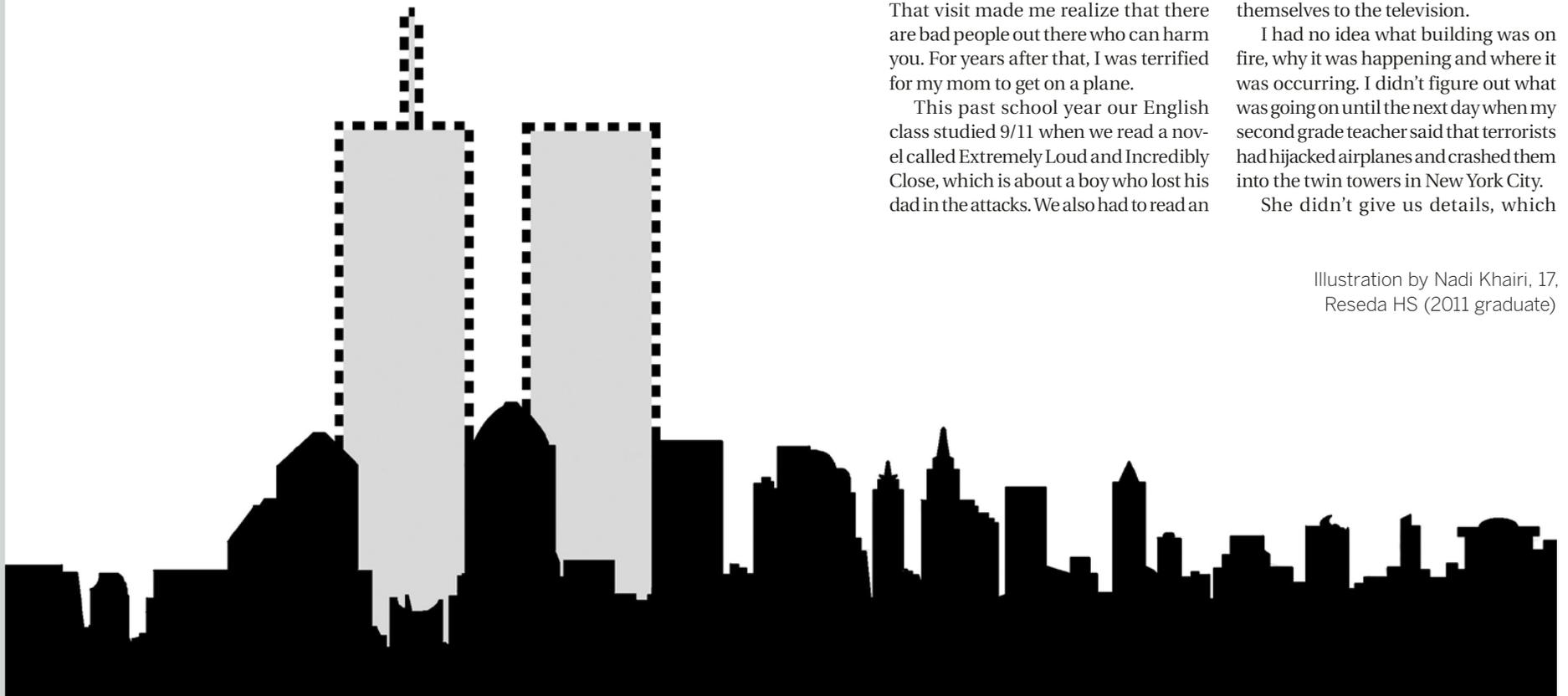
I read all the news I could to understand

At first, Sept. 11 was just like any other day. When I got to my grandma's house after school, I turned the TV on to watch Pokémon. But instead I saw two buildings in flames. I was angry that some "grownup TV show" was taking over Pokémon. Before I could figure out what was going on, the adults in my family took the remote from me and glued themselves to the television.

I had no idea what building was on fire, why it was happening and where it was occurring. I didn't figure out what was going on until the next day when my second grade teacher said that terrorists had hijacked airplanes and crashed them into the twin towers in New York City.

She didn't give us details, which

Illustration by Nadi Khairi, 17, Reseda HS (2011 graduate)



made me curious. I went to websites I had never gone on before like CNN, Fox News and MSNBC. Still, because I was only 6 I didn't get what was going on—I thought the twin towers and the World Trade Center were different things. For the next couple weeks, I would spend my recess in the library on CNN.com or any site that would give me information about Al Qaeda and 9/11.

The media kept saying that something could happen again. Throughout elementary school my main fear was that Osama bin Laden was watching me or that he could crash a plane in my city or sneak into my house during the night and kill me.

The Sept. 11 attacks made me more interested in politics and what was going on outside my neighborhood. I still go on CNN.com almost every day and I watch CNN on television. I feel like I should know what's going on. I like to learn different perspectives and form my own opinions. I don't want to be ignorant. If it wasn't for the attacks, I don't think I would care about the news.

*By Kevin Ko, 16,
Wilson HS (Hacienda Heights)*

'A shadow over most of my life'

I remember the morning of Sept. 11 very clearly, even though I was only 7 years old. I knew something was going on because my parents had the news on. They never had the TV on in the morning. I tried to ask my parents what was happening but they rushed my sister and me out the door, told us everything was fine and drove us to school.

That day at school the headmaster told us what happened. I'm not sure I

fully understood it at that point, but I must have watched enough news over the next few days with my parents to understand the fear that everyone felt.

No more than a week or two after 9/11, I was in my parents' bedroom as my dad packed to leave for a business trip. Footage of planes crashing into the towers was playing on the TV. I began to cry and when my parents asked me what was wrong, I begged my dad, "Please, please don't go. Don't get on the plane." He told me everything would be fine, but I didn't believe him.

While my parents have seen a lot of history in their lives, 9/11 was the first major historical event that I experienced. My grandfather on my dad's side was killed in the Islamic Revolution in Iran when my father was only 18. Knowing that my father came to the U.S. to escape the violent Muslim extremists and still has to be reminded of that here, I often wonder how safe we really are.

9/11 and the war has been a shadow over most of my life. It wasn't until Osama bin Laden was killed that I realized the war has been going on for nearly a decade and how normal it is to see footage of soldiers on the news. I ask myself when the war is going to end.

*By Chantelle Moghadam, 17,
Viewpoint School (Calabasas)*

I was living in El Salvador so I don't feel as connected

The Sept. 11 attacks weren't a big event in my life because I was living in El Salvador. I remember hearing the news and asking my mom if our family living in the United States was OK. She told me they lived in Los Angeles and that was really far from New York City.

Now that I'm living in the United States, I still don't feel connected to 9/11. My friends and family never talk about it. The date usually flies by me. At school, teachers never discuss it. I've learned things about the attacks from the news, especially around the anniversary. Now I know that Osama bin Laden was responsible and that the Pentagon was also attacked that day. I care about what happened because people got killed but I don't feel 9/11 affected my life as much as it affected others.

By Victor Beteta, 18, University HS

I could smell the buildings burning

At 9 a.m. on Sept. 11 I was looking out of my classroom window in Brooklyn, N.Y., noticing what I thought were dark clouds filling the sky. For the next few hours my classmates got pulled out of school one by one. When I was in gym class, I was told to go to the office. When I got there I saw my mom and dad. I knew something was wrong because my dad was supposed to be at work. I asked why they were picking me up, and they told me the World Trade Center had fallen down.

When I started to realize people had been hurt, I felt so upset. My friend Duncan had a father who was a chef on the 101st floor of one of the towers. I saw his mom in the office waiting for him, crying hysterically. At that point I became even more upset as I thought about one of my best friends losing his father.

I still remember going home and watching Katie Couric talk about what had happened. My parents didn't hide anything from me. They explained that bad terrorists had crashed the planes into the towers on purpose, so they could

hurt people. I remember watching very closely, thinking maybe they would find Duncan's father in the rubble and he would be OK. For the next couple of weeks I would ask my mom if they had found him, but she told me he was really high up and unfortunately they probably wouldn't find him and he might be dead.

The day of the attacks my babysitter took my brother and me to the playground. Papers were falling from the sky, and there was a horrible burning smell. It wasn't the smell of wood burning, but metal. For a few years every once in a while there would be a similar smell and I would look for smoke in the sky to make sure nothing had happened.

Every year at school we would have a moment of silence that would set a somber note for the entire day. I would think about Duncan, and about all the other kids and adults who lost loved ones on 9/11. When we declared war in 2003, I remember being petrified that planes from Iraq were going to fly over New York and drop bombs on us.

9/11 took part of my innocence. I realized that not everyone in the world is good, and lives can be taken so quickly. I remember going to the site of the attacks a few months later, and seeing all of the flower memorials that had been set up. 9/11 was an attack on the whole country, but no other city came together in the wake of the destruction like New York. Part of me is upset that I won't be in New York for the 10th anniversary. I would like to go to the memorial site and see what is in place of the towers. Seeing what was built up from the total destruction would give me some sort of closure.

*By Matt Sweeney, 17,
Campbell Hall (North Hollywood)*

HOW DID TEENS REACT TO SEPT. 11 BACK THEN?

SINCE TEENAGERS TODAY don't have a lot of memories of 9/11, we looked at old issues of L.A. Youth to see how teens at the time felt. When the terrorist attacks happened, L.A. Youth was working on its September-October 2001 issue. Even though the teens on our staff were 2,500 miles away, they felt it was important to write about how they felt because it was a tragic day for all of America.

They wrote about getting to school and seeing people crying, and watching the news in their classes. They said it was a day they'd always remember and expressed shock and sadness for the victims and their families. Richard Kwon, who went to Loyola High, wrote that at first he didn't realize how serious it was.

"But when I came home and turned on the TV, I felt sick to my stomach.

This is America, this isn't supposed to happen." He checked on his friends who were going to school in New York. They were OK but had seen people jumping out of the towers and the buildings collapse. "I am still in shock. I would like to offer my condolences to everybody across America," he wrote.

The next month, L.A. Youth staffers made a Day of the Dead altar to honor the victims, and a photo of it appeared on our November-December 2001 cover. In that issue, teens wrote about how they felt about the pledge of allegiance, being unsure of how to react to the attacks and questioning why Osama bin Laden hated America. Three L.A. Youth artists envisioned what a monument at the World Trade Center site might look like.

But just a few months later, Ezeoma Obioha wondered why some teens didn't seem to care and even joked about the attacks. "How can they think it's funny when they see real people dying—not actors pretending to die in a movie. How can they not care? I'm appalled by teens' attitudes."



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Hooking up?

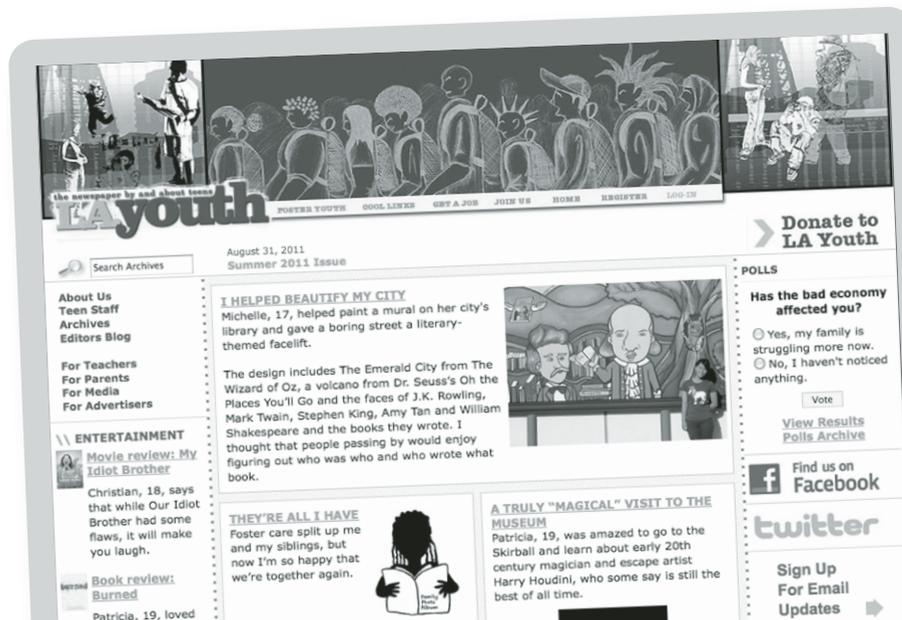
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L.A. youth
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My love for LEGOs keeps building

They're not just toys, they're a way to be creative

Henry used a type of LEGO called Bionicles to build his warriors and dragon. Photo by Victor Beteta, 18, University HS

By Henry Studebaker
16, Hamilton HS

I wake up the Saturday after my AP European history exam, and as soon as I open my eyes, the first thing that pops into my head is, "I have to build." I walk into the den, turn on the light and open my large plastic box of Bionicles (a kind of LEGOs). I see a jumble of colorful plastic parts and immediately I feel excited that I have time to return to my oldest and favorite hobby.

I start making piles of gold and black pieces to use for my dragon. I pick up two black pieces and start connecting them to make the wings. During the next few hours my hands move faster and faster, the piles shrink and the dragon grows. Five hours later, I feel like a proud parent as I examine the football-sized gold and black dragon standing in front of me.

Although some people might think I'm too old for LEGOs, I love them. To me, they're a form of self-expression, just like painting. I get to create whatever I want from dragons to sword-wielding heroes to evil magicians. If my head feels ready to explode with ideas, I know that I have to build. It's my creative outlet and it lets me make whatever I want.

I started building with LEGOs in elementary school. One of my first sets was a pit stop and race car. My dad helped me build the small roof and the red, white and yellow car. The pit stop looked so real that I could almost hear the car pull in. I wanted to build as many spaceships, trains, planes and buildings as I could.

Soon, following the out-of-the-box instructions be-

came boring so I started making my own creations. If I wanted to make a spaceship rainbow-colored by using bricks from other kits, I could and did. I created spaceships and military vehicles, like a flatbed trailer that was for a smaller car, or a car that had a small body, but a really high gun turret. I spent days building LEGOs with my friend Alex; the ideas just kept coming out of our heads.

WAS I TOO OLD FOR LEGOS?

One day at the beginning of middle school, I asked Alex if he wanted to build and he replied, without looking up from the TV, that almost all of his parts were gone. That was the first time that I felt too old to be into LEGOs. But I loved LEGOs and I wouldn't give up my hobby just because my friends did.

In middle school, I moved almost exclusively to the Bionicle kind of LEGOs, which are mechanical warriors that do battle in the name of good or evil. Traditional LEGO bricks were childish, the Bionicle parts were "manly." I created knights, fighting off evil dragons in the name of their kingdoms.

One day, I was bored and searched YouTube for Bionicle creations and found a whole community of people who loved Bionicles as much as I did. I started following YouTube users who dedicated their channels to their Bionicles and I immediately felt like these strangers were some of my closest friends.

About a year later, I finished watching a video by my favorite Bionicle creator and storyteller, Scotttjt, when a note popped up. It said that the full biographies of

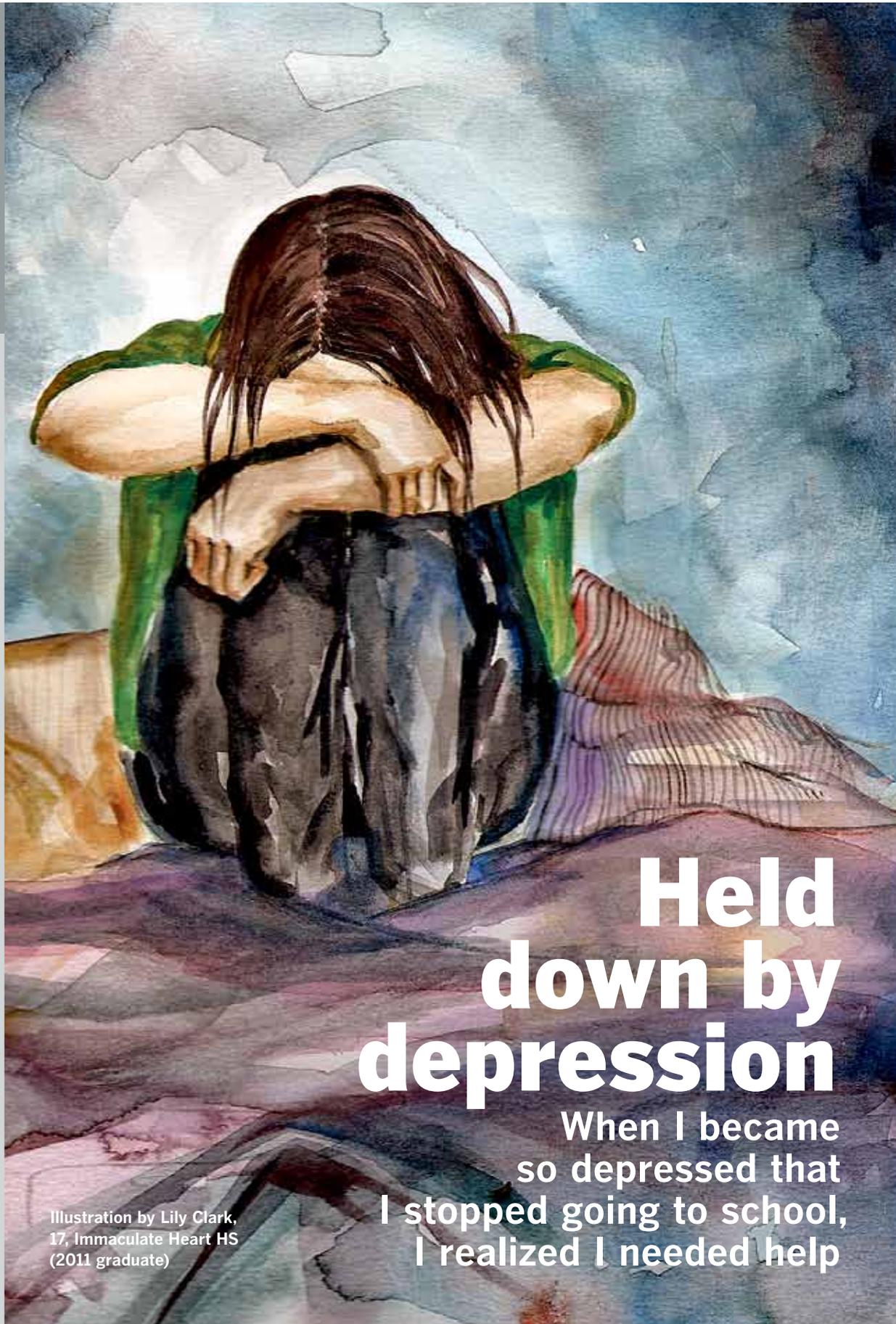
the characters could be viewed on MOCpages.com (MOC stands for "My Own Creations"). I fell in love with the website soon after. It has everything from Halo to Pokémon, all in LEGO form. I've seen a creation that looks like a mechanical pegasus that can actually move, thanks to the power of LEGO Mindstorms (LEGOs that can move independently by small battery-powered motors).

As I was looking at a creation on MOCpages.com earlier this year, I saw the word "TFOL." Since I already knew AFOL meant "Adult Fan of LEGO," it wasn't hard to figure out that TFOL stood for "Teenage Fan of LEGO." Then I noticed the messages on some of the homepages of builders: "Add this [message] to your page if you're a TFOL!" Seeing other teens with a passion like mine made me proud to be called a TFOL.

I love LEGOs, but I don't build as much as I used to. Even though school and video games have filled most of the time I used to devote to LEGOs, they will always be a part of me.



Henry wants to start posting pictures of his creations online so he can connect with other teenage fans of LEGOs.



Held down by depression

When I became
so depressed that
I stopped going to school,
I realized I needed help

Illustration by Lily Clark,
17, Immaculate Heart HS
(2011 graduate)

By Karen Ashley
16, *The Linden Center*

If you had seen me a year ago it would be hard to believe I've changed this much in so little time. I wasn't going to school and my grades were Fs and incompletes. My parents would give me talks in the morning and tell me, "It's against the law not to go to school." But I didn't care.

I've always wanted to do well in school but I have a hard time getting up and going. It started in elementary school. I'd think, "I'm tired." I wanted to stay in my bed under my warm blankets. To get me to school, my mom would throw me over her shoulder or take a half hour to get me dressed because I was fighting her.

When I was in fourth grade, my older brother and sister were seeing a psychiatrist, so I came along to the appointments and sat in the waiting room. They had inherited anxiety disorder and depression from my mom. My parents would explain what was going on with me to the psychiatrist: "It's always a battle getting her up in the morning. She's not doing her assignments and she's missing school." The psychiatrist said, "It sounds like anxiety and depression. We can put her on medications and see if it works." I didn't understand what they were talking about. I didn't know what depression and anxiety were. They told me "it'll help you" so I took my meds but I didn't know why.

But the medications didn't always seem to work. I still wasn't doing my assignments because I was lazy. After I missed an assignment, I didn't want to go to school the next day. I was picturing my classes each period, seeing my teachers disappointed. You didn't complete your homework again? After I missed one day it was a struggle to get out of bed the next day because I still had not completed my homework.

In middle school I'd miss one or two days a week and was late almost every day I did go. In the morning my mom would nag me, "I'm going to get in the shower and I want you dressed by the time I get out." I'd think, "I'm tired, let me go back to sleep. I don't want to go to school. I don't want to face my teachers. I should have done my homework." But I've always had a hard time expressing my feelings so I wasn't communicating what was going on inside me. When my mom came back and I wasn't dressed she'd yell at me, "You need to get dressed and get going." I wouldn't say anything back so eventually she left me at home because she had to get to work.

MISSING SCHOOL HURT MY GRADES

My parents would tell the school that I was depressed so my absences were excused. But after a while my parents stopped giving my school a reason because I was staying home so much, so I got detention for missing school. I failed English and got Cs and Ds in my other classes. Every year I went to summer school to get my credits. I knew that if I missed too much summer school I'd get dropped. I needed my credits, so I used that as motivation to go.

I told myself at the beginning of ninth grade that I would change. I was going to go to school every day, do my work and get good grades, like a normal student. But it was a lot harder than I thought.

My best friends were going to a different school than I was. On the third day it hit me that my friends weren't there. I didn't feel like I had much in common with the people I had lunch with. I started missing three, four days of school

DEPRESSION Q&A

L.A. Youth talked to Dr. Margaret Stuber, a child and adolescent psychiatrist and professor at UCLA, about depression in teens

L.A. Youth: What is depression? Regular depression is usually sadness in response to something that's happened, like you get a bad grade or you have a breakup. With major depression, in addition to having that sadness, you also have physical symptoms. You have problems with sleep. That can be that you're sleeping all the time or you have trouble getting to sleep. It affects your appetite. Some people will eat all the time trying to comfort themselves. Or they can have no appetite at all. The third physical symptom is a difficulty with attention and energy levels. You have trouble getting your mind on anything. You have no energy, everything seems like it's too much work to do.

Someone who is depressed can't seem to enjoy anything, even close friends. It gets really serious when there are persistent feelings of hopelessness and guilt. You feel like this is never going to get better and "I'm not worth anything." When you have a breakup, you may feel like nobody will ever love me but usually other people can talk you out of that. When you're really depressed, even being surrounded by people who love you doesn't convince you that you're loveable.

How common is depression among teens? Regular depression, just feeling sad, is really common in teens. Teens tend to be very moody. When somebody is just really sad it isn't serious depression. It has to last at least two weeks for us to be really worried about it.

How can I help a friend who is depressed? Try to help distract

them and reassure them. With a situational kind of depression that's going to be helpful—just knowing they have support and they're not alone and reminders that this isn't the end of the world even though it feels that way. If someone is hopeless or saying life isn't worth living or they're dropping out of everything they used to enjoy and it goes on longer than a week or two, they really need help.

When do you tell someone instead of keeping a friend's trust?

If your friend is talking about dying or feeling like they wish they could go to sleep and never wake up, it's worth talking to them about it. If they're cutting themselves or if they are talking a lot about dying, you might even bypass talking to them and tell one of your teachers that you're really worried. If you think that your friend is in danger of killing themselves, it's better to lose a friend you love temporarily than lose them permanently.

If a teen feels depressed, how can they get help? If they can talk to their parent that's going to be really good. There's usually somebody at school they can talk to, like the school nurse or school counselor. There are also teen hotlines and suicide hotlines. (You can call Teen Line at 1-800-TLC-TEEN to speak with a trained teen peer counselor from 6 to 10 p.m. If you have thoughts of hurting yourself, call a suicide prevention hotline at 1-877-7CRISIS.)

What is anxiety? There is often anxiety that goes with depression. Your heart rate goes up and you're more jumpy. You feel anxious and you're worried about things that haven't happened or having arguments in your head, like "This is never going to get better" or "Nobody likes me" or "I can't give this talk in class because what if I say something stupid?" All these what ifs.

a week. I didn't go at all in November and December. Because I had been diagnosed with depression, the school had a tutor come to my house to give me my work.

Being alone every day got boring so at the end of the semester, I wanted to go back to school for second semester. But I didn't know the people I had lunch with that well and I still had to take my finals. It was overwhelming all over again. I knew I had to have good grades and attendance to get a permit to go to the other high school with my friends. I tried to go to school every day but I couldn't.

It seemed like nothing I did was going to be good enough so I gave up and stopped going again and stopped taking my meds because it didn't seem like they were working.

I stopped caring about everything. I distracted myself by reading and watching TV. I even stopped showering. I could smell myself and my hair was greasy. After a while I noticed dark patches on my skin. I rubbed it and the dead skin came off. I realized the dark patches were dirt. Eww. I washed my arms in the sink or in the pool. Looking back, it grosses me out that I didn't shower but I can understand because I was depressed and I didn't feel like doing anything.

One time that May I was sitting on the couch and I started thinking about how I wasn't in school. I started crying. I thought about my friends, how they were probably having a good time. I thought about how my life was going down the tubes and I wasn't doing anything about it. My life sucks. Why am I even alive? What if I

It seemed like nothing I did was going to be good enough so I gave up and stopped going to school and stopped taking my meds because it didn't seem like they were working.

died? Would the world be better without me? No, my friends and family would be sad, I thought. I didn't want to think about that stuff so I started to read.

My dad was constantly nagging me, "They're going to put you in a group home if you don't go to school." He said that in a group home, I would have to go to school every day or there would be consequences. I didn't believe him. In eighth grade they had threatened to put me in a mental hospital and that didn't happen. If that didn't happen, why would this?

I HAD TO LEAVE HOME TO GET HELP

But one day in August, my parents sat me down and told me I was going to a group home. It's a house where six girls live with staff members who are in charge and look after us. I didn't believe it at first but it started to sink in. I was worried. Would the girls like me? Why are they there? Will I get along with them? I wanted to change on my own, I just didn't know how. I realized the group home would help.

I left home about a week later. It felt like a fresh start. We went to Six Flags the second day I was there. We laughed and had fun. I was happy because I was getting out of the house and doing things. It was the first time I'd hung out with anyone in almost four months. I asked the girls, "Why are you here?" Some had been to mental

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

hospitals for depression, anxiety or cutting, or been in fights. They had gone through stuff if they were here. I realized they wouldn't judge me.

When school started two weeks later I got up and went. The movement in the house helped wake me up. My roommate Bryanna would wake up earlier than me and she'd turn on the light. I'd lie in bed until the staff knocked and opened the door and said it's time to get up. I'd stay in bed for a few more minutes and then get up. The consequences were in the back of my mind. If you're not ready on time, when you get home from school you have to stay in your room and can't talk to the other girls for an hour or two.

After school we have down time, then we have a snack and an hour of homework group. I was motivated to do my homework because I had a set time. I was happy and doing well. I was taking my meds and they seemed to be working. They kept me from falling back into depression. There was more structure than I had at home and I liked that.

One day after I'd been there about a month, the girls were saying that they weren't sure if I was showering. One of the staff, Laine, told me that I'd have to stick out an arm and leg and show shampoo in my hair to make sure I was taking a shower. Later that day, I was crying on my bed. Laine came in and asked, "Why are you crying?" I told her that I was taking showers. Why did they think I was lying? She said they just wanted

to make sure. She hugged me at the end of the conversation. I hadn't talked to someone about my feelings before. It felt good to get that out and have someone understand how I felt. I wasn't as upset.

I LEARNED TO OPEN UP

After the staff talked to me a couple more times, I realized that they were there to help and that I could talk to them or the other girls about stuff. When I was having a bad day or I was upset about drama with the girls, they'd say, "Are you OK? Do you want to talk about it?" It helped to get it out. They offered advice and what I was worried about didn't build up and put me under a dark cloud.

I started to talk more with my parents too. We talked in family therapy. I'd tell them how I was feeling. We could talk about stuff without yelling because we had the therapist to say, "Why don't we hear your view on this?" We talk and we try to understand where the other person is coming from.

Because I was doing well, I got to go home to visit my family on the weekends. There was less stress so I was happier. One time my mom asked me to take a shower. I said calmly, "I'm going to shower. Can you please not nag me?" She said OK and walked away. I showered later that day.

After I'd been at the group home for six months, I felt like I was ready to leave. One day after I'd gotten up, I laid down on my bed. I thought, "I'm tired of being here. I don't want to get up. I don't want to do any-

thing." But then I thought, "If I'm reverting back to my old ways I'm not making any progress. When I'm back home I can think of what happened here and realize I can do it." I got up and went to school.

One time I was feeling depressed because I hadn't seen my friends in a while and hid from my mom that I was crying. But I told my parents later in family therapy. Eventually I'll get to the point of telling my parents how I'm feeling and talk about it right away. I'm still working on it.

I've been here a year. I'm proud I've gone to school every day. That's something I've never done my whole life. I'm happy because my grades are straight As. I'm taking showers every day, too. I love being clean.

The plan is to go home in the next few months. I want to go back to the real world but I'm scared that I'll go back to the way I was. When I'm feeling depressed I'll talk to someone. I have to keep working on it and I can't give up or I'm going to be depressed again.



Karen says everyone has problems. Sharing them is better than keeping them all inside.

Congratulations!

These are the winners from a photo contest we held on our Facebook page this summer

The contest was to capture the idea of "Freedom." First place won \$50, second place got \$30 and third place won \$20.

1st place

Marisol Samayoa, 18,
Wilson HS
(2011 graduate)

2nd place

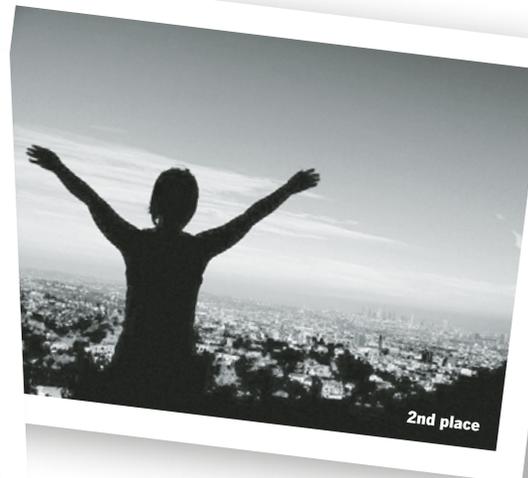
Jenny Choi,
17, Fairfax HS

3rd place

Samantha Crawford, 18,
Environmental Charter HS
(2011 graduate)



1st place



2nd place



3rd place

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Editor Amanda Riddle works with Charles on his story.



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

Contact Editor Amanda Riddle at
(323) 938-9194
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Invite Amanda to speak at your school, group home or foster agency about writing for L.A. Youth.

Got questions?

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

By Tyler Bradshaw

15, Redondo Union HS

I didn't want to do this challenge because I snack throughout the day instead of eating three full meals. I was sure that it was going to be complicated to eat healthy and take note of what I eat.

On July 1, I went to the MyPlate website (choosemyplate.gov). I surf every other day so it told me to eat 2,400 calories a day. I had to have 8 ounces of grains, 3 cups of vegetables, 2 cups of fruit, 3 cups of dairy and 6.5 ounces of protein a day—a bunch of numbers and big words that was way too much for me to swallow at one time.

I asked my mom to help me with my new diet because she's the one who cooks, and she said, "I can do that ... I think."

The rest of the day before the challenge I cleaned out the pantry eating Cinnamon Toast

Crunch, breakfast bars and canned pineapples because I wanted something that tasted good before a week of healthy food.

The next day for breakfast my mom put four waffles on my plate instead of the usual two or three, less bacon, a large cheese omelet and a bowl of mixed fruit. I don't eat eggs because they feel slimy, so it was really hard to eat the omelet. I complained but ended up eating it.

For lunch I usually have snacks,

like chips or a Pop-Tart, but my mom made chili cheese fries. For dinner I had a huge plate of veggies covered in cheese (for dairy) to make up for the vegetables I hadn't eaten all day, chicken, rice and grapes. After an hour of eating I calculated my calories for the day and I had eaten only around 2,000 calories. How is that even possible!? I was short 400 calories.

The next day for lunch I made grilled cheese with bacon and mixed vegetables. For dinner my mom didn't use as much butter to prepare the pasta sauce and she added olives and onions. I hate milk so I gave up after a swallow and had vanilla ice cream for dessert.

On the Fourth of July I woke up to the aroma of my mom's chicken. I ate 10 pieces of chicken and snacked on baked beans, potato salad and macaroni & cheese. While I was eating a hot dog, my mom asked me, "Have you recorded all that you ate today?"

I dropped the hot dog and silently cursed myself. I failed the challenge! I gave up on the challenge after that, but I still ate full meals for lunch.

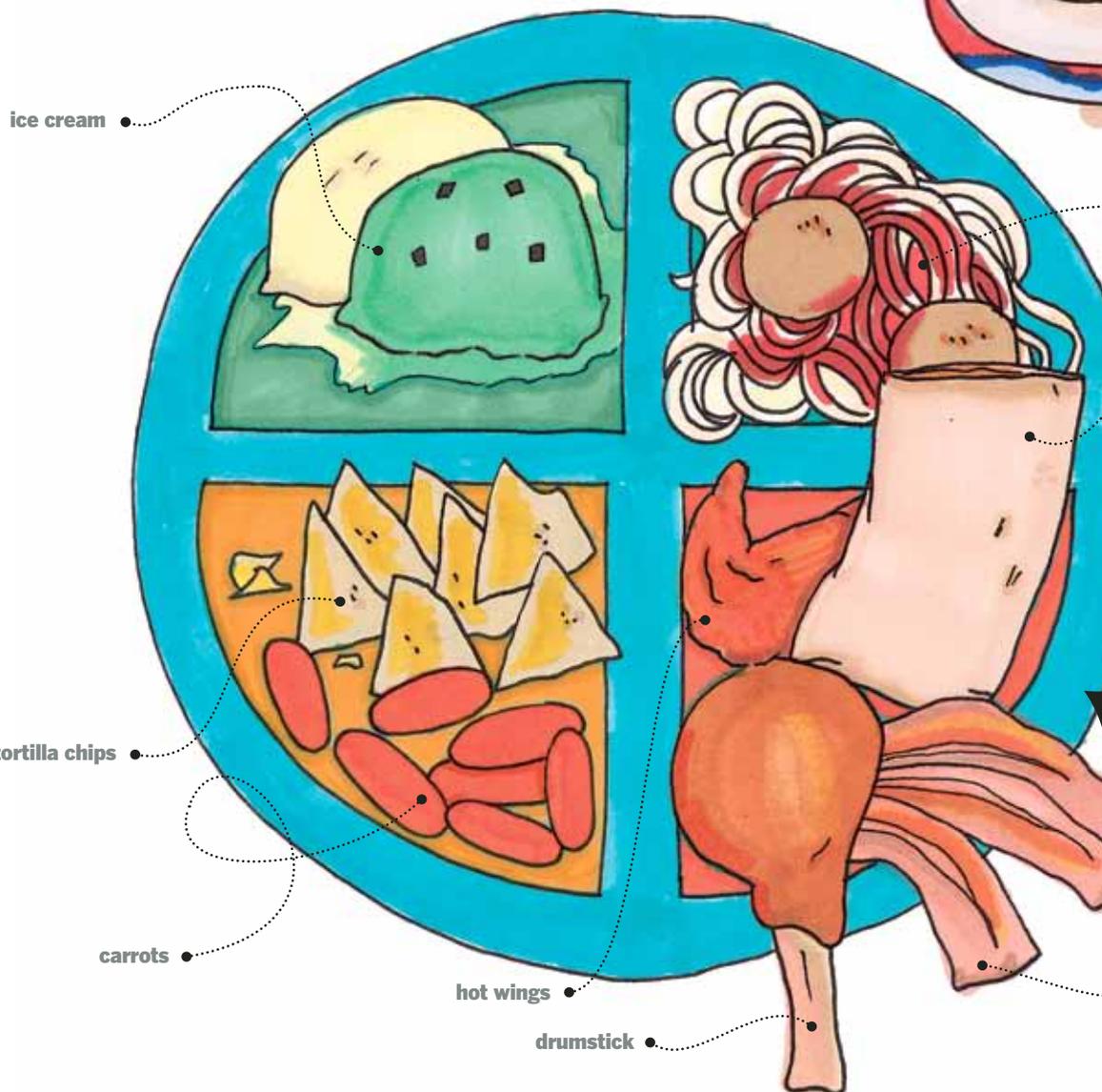
Eating healthy wasn't so bad after all. The hardest part was trying to eat all of the vegetables. Before, I wouldn't eat them because I didn't like the taste but now I enjoy vegetables more and I feel more energetic. I always knew vegetables were good for me and I felt bad for not eating them. I had to learn to like them.

Illustration by Amy Fan, 17, Temple City HS

WHAT'S ON YOUR PLATE

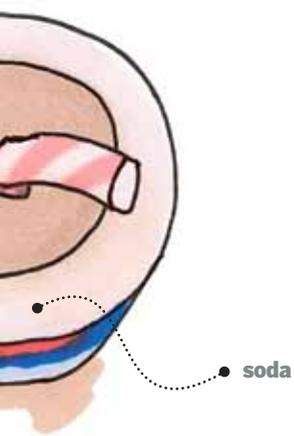
WE CHALLENGED THESE TEENS TO EAT HEALTHY

This summer the U.S. Department of Agriculture came out with new nutrition guidelines that recommend how much you should eat based on your age, height, weight, gender and activity level. To help people follow the MyPlate guidelines, which emphasize eating fruits and vegetables and whole grains, they designed a plate that is half covered with vegetables and fruit and half with grains and protein, with dairy on the side. We wanted to see how hard it was to eat healthy, so we gave our teen staff a "healthy eating challenge," in which they had to follow the guidelines for a week.



N TE?

HEALTHY



soda

spaghetti

burrito

What teens often eat

What teens are supposed to eat

bacon

By Kristy Plaza

17, Duarte HS

When I heard about this challenge, I wasn't worried because I already eat vegetables, fruit, whole-grain breads, yogurt and lean chicken breast.

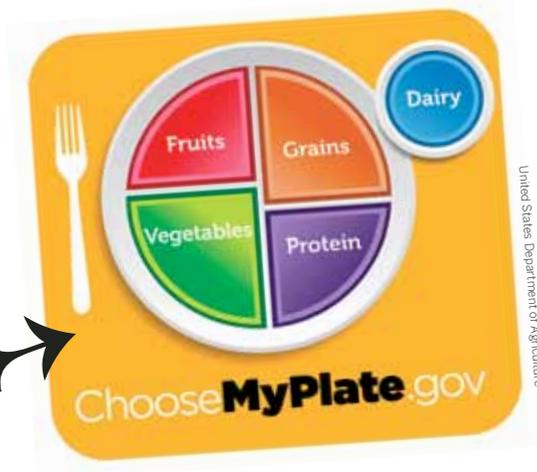
The MyPlate website recommended I eat 8 ounces of grains, 3 cups of vegetables, 2 cups of fruits, 3 cups of dairy and 6.5 ounces of proteins, totaling 2,200 calories per day.

On my first day, which was a Monday, I wanted to see how healthy my normal diet was, so I ate what I'd normally eat. I had a wheat bagel and a strawberry yogurt for breakfast. Later I had a handful of popcorn chicken, an apple, a tangerine and some green beans. For dinner, I had a 6-ounce piece of steak (the package listed the weight) and a quarter of my plate had grains (angel hair pasta), just like the MyPlate icon suggested. I felt like I did OK because I ate something from every group.

From Tuesday to Friday I tried to make my meals look like the MyPlate icon. Before I put my sandwich together, I separated the ingredients on my plate so it was easier to keep track of the categories. The whole grain bread and oven-roasted turkey went on one half of my plate. I put lettuce and avocado on the other half of the plate. And for the dairy on the side, I used provolone cheese.

I always eat lots of fruit and I made sure that I ate vegetables this week by making my favorite—steamed green beans.

Every weekend my family and I go out. Because it's such a normal part of my schedule I forgot about the challenge. I eat a lot on weekends, so even after I ate chicken and ribs, I had ice cream an hour later. I realized I'd failed the challenge, at least for that day. Even though I didn't pass the challenge, it's nice to know that I already eat a well-balanced diet.



By Aaron Schwartz

16, Gabrielino HS (San Gabriel)

I'm usually a healthy eater. This is partly because of my parents, who didn't expose me to junk food when I was young. In fact, until I started preschool, I thought the word "dessert" meant fruit. Now I eat healthy because I like to. Sometimes my friends look at my lunch and look at their cafeteria lunch and say, "Why do you



have to eat carrots when I'm eating pizza? You're making me feel guilty." I'll sigh, give them carrot and reply, "There, now you can't complain."

I did the challenge to see how healthy I really am. The choosemyplate.gov website gave me a 3,200-calorie plan (I do cross country). It had me eating 7 ounces of protein, 10 ounces of grains, 3 cups of dairy, 4 cups of vegetables, and 2½ cups of fruit every day. I was allowed 600 calories of unhealthy food. When I saw 3,200 calories I thought, "Yes, I don't have to starve myself to be healthy."

My main concern was how I would measure everything. But after exploring the website, I found that there were serving size measurements for almost every type of food. Two plums is one cup of fruit, eight slices of onion is one cup of vegetables, a slice of bread is an ounce of grains, and two slices of Swiss cheese is one cup of dairy. I was ready to go.

I thought this challenge would be easy. But I quickly learned that I physically cannot eat 3,200 calories of food.

For breakfast every day I had two slices of whole grain toast and a glass of milk, even though I usually drink water. For lunch I had a peanut butter and honey sandwich, a banana, two plums, 12 baby carrots (one cup), a handful of grape tomatoes and apple juice.

For dinner I ate what my parents made. One of the dinners I had was chicken, rice, salad and milk. During these meals I would try to have two extra servings of grains, vegetables and meat. Even though I ate until I couldn't eat another bite, it was never enough to meet the 3,200-calorie goal.

Overall I was able to eat all the fruit, vegetables and dairy that I needed, but could only eat about 7 ounces of grains instead of 10, and half of the protein. I only ate empty calorie foods twice, and that was because my mom made peach cobbler. I figured it has some fruit in it so it can't be that bad.

I finished the challenge thinking that I am a healthy eater, which is what I expected. The challenge told me that I should try to eat more meat and grains. But since changing my diet didn't make me feel different, I'm not going to worry about it.

By Avika Dua

16, Walnut HS

Since both sides of my family have histories of heart disease and cancer, I thought the healthy eating challenge would be a way to begin changing my eating habits. My editor warned me how hard it is to eat healthy, but I didn't think seven days of restraint would be that bad.

The MyPlate website told me I should eat 2,000 calories a day (my physical activity was less than 30 minutes a day since I hadn't been exercising much in the summer). I thought following that would be easy, but then I looked up how many calories were in a tall double chocolate chip Starbucks frappuccino (almost 450 ... yikes) and realized that if I went about my normal eating routine—a frap a week, a small bag of chips a day and fast food every other day—I'd consume all the calories I was allowed with coffee drinks and junk food. I was scared I wouldn't have room for good meals.

I stopped buying snacks at break during summer school and made sure my mom didn't give me chips (other than SunChips, since they are clearly the healthiest and least-tasty chips) to take with me. It didn't take me long to realize that my body's need for junk food was too strong.



To keep myself awake whenever I was up late doing homework for summer school, I'd sneak chips and ice-cream bars into my room. I didn't want my mom to see because she'd remind me of the challenge. Because choosemyplate.gov allowed me only 200 calories for extra fats and sugars, I broke the rules almost every day after the third day.

I didn't want to follow the rules if it meant not eating what tastes good. I didn't have time to go home and eat so I had a Chipotle burrito every day on my way from summer school to SAT class, with sour cream and cheese but no lettuce.

Yet, the challenge wasn't a complete failure. With every lunch and dinner I ate at home, my mom gave me vegetables. She also gave me fruit for dessert.

I think this challenge has improved the way I'll be eating. Even though I didn't quit unhealthy foods, I got into the habit of eating fruit and vegetables with every meal. I even sometimes catch myself asking my mom for peas or broccoli. It's a start, but the fact that my mom had to push me so hard to do this makes me kind of scared to go away for college. Hello "freshman 15."

Where can we play ball?

We don't even have a field, which makes me mad that girls' sports aren't treated the same as boys'

By Karina Arias

17, Animo Locke HS #1

I've always been a tomboy. As a kid, I liked getting scrapes and bruises playing kickball and tetherball with the boys a lot more than playing with makeup with the girls. I was one of the best tetherball players and I scored the most during kickball.

But in sixth grade all I saw were boys' sports teams at school. Whenever I passed by the girls' gym after school I saw the boys inside shooting hoops and it was the boys' soccer team kicking and passing on the field. I was jealous.

So instead of playing sports after school, I went home and watched TV. I also started hanging around with girls who didn't take school seriously. I stopped caring as much about my homework and I got my first Ds on my report cards. My mother would ask me, "Why are your grades so low?" I would tell her that my teachers had made mistakes with the grading. Since she spoke very little English, she wasn't able to confirm this with my teachers. By the end of sixth grade, I wasn't motivated about school at all.

It was so unfair that boys had all these opportunities. I felt like everything—sports, politics, some households—was dominated by men and I wanted to prove that girls are just as good as guys, even better sometimes. But to do that girls need opportunities to play sports in school, otherwise some of them will give in to the stereotype that men are better.

One day in November of seventh grade, I saw three sweaty girls walking after school. I asked them why they were so tired. "Drill team," one of the girls replied. I asked if I could try out and they said yes. I was excited that I had found something to keep me active.

I was doing fine when practice started, but then I turned to my left and saw three girls on the ground doing splits. I didn't think I could do splits. When practice ended the coach told us about the uniforms. They were small, sparkly, royal-blue dresses. The length was about 5 inches above the knee and when a girl twirled, the skirt would rise up higher and show the bottom part of the uniform that was stitched to the skirt, which looked like underwear. I thought about all the people who would see us perform: men, women and other kids our age or older. I have been raised to respect myself, and the idea of showing that much skin made me uncomfortable. I didn't want to join the drill team. This wasn't playing sports; this was cheering for sports. I quit drill team two days later and I felt like I would never play sports for my school.

A few months later I had a conversation that brought



back my passion for sports. I was sitting next to Mr. Martinez, a teacher's aide at my middle school, and told him about my drill team experience. I asked him if he knew how I could join a city league to play a sport.

"Why don't you join the softball team?" he asked me. I didn't even know what softball was, let alone that the school had a team. I thought "soft" ball sounded too girly. But he explained that softball was like baseball and the team had girls and boys. Now, I was excited.

Tryouts were that day after school. During sixth period my stomach felt weird and I couldn't pay attention. Would I be able to dive to catch balls as well as the guys? Would I be able to hit the ball?

WE PLAYED ON CONCRETE

For practice we met on the concrete PE field in front of the soccer/baseball field. Why did we have to play on concrete when there was a field right next to it? Then it hit me—this is a mixed-gender team. The boys' soccer team gets a decent place to play while we don't. It made me feel as if the school didn't care about our team. When Mr. Martinez arrived at the "field" at 3:30 p.m., he

began unloading the equipment from his car: gloves, three buckets of balls and five bats. I asked, "Why do you carry this around with you? Can't you leave it at school?"

"This is all mine," he said. He told me that he had paid for all of the equipment with his own money.

So the school gave the boys' soccer and basketball teams equipment, fields and three coaches, while we didn't get anything. The only girls' sport that seemed to get money was the drill team. Even though I was frustrated, that first practice went great. I learned how to throw the ball and field grounders. Mr. Martinez even called me "the rookie MVP." When I got home I couldn't wait to tell my mom how my day had gone.

During the next two years, I became one of the two best players, along with my teammate Miguel, and I was definitely the most competitive player on the team. I got mad when the coach said that someone else on the team was playing better than me. Miguel and I always tried to hit more home runs than each other. I loved it. And at the end of eighth grade we won a tournament against other middle schools in the area.

Being part of the softball team wasn't only about

getting to play sports though. I started liking school again and my grades improved a lot. I went from Cs and Ds in sixth grade to almost all As in eighth grade.

When I started high school I was nervous before softball tryouts, because I thought everyone would be better than me. But on the first day the coach called me over during a drill and said, "You're good, you know that? You have potential."

I was excited that I had made a good impression. I

Our coach said that we got shorts because they were affordable. Again, it made us feel like the school didn't care about girls' sports. My teammates and I decided that everyone would buy their own pants. They were about \$30 a pair, and after we got them some girls started sliding into bases again.

Freshman year our team sucked. We won only two games. Not everyone on the team tried hard all the time, even with the new pants. I think that the lack of

Sophomore year things improved. The school bought us new helmets with padding, batting tees and balls and we got a new coach. More players tried harder and we won four games. Getting new equipment and a new coach who knew more about softball made it feel like the school began to care, but we still didn't have a field to play on.

Later in 10th grade my teammate Yarely wrote an article in the school newspaper about how girls' sports were second class compared to boys' sports. I was glad someone tried to bring attention to the unequal treatment. Unfortunately, nothing changed.

WE'RE SUPPOSED TO GET A FIELD ONE DAY

To find out more about why the softball team seemed to get less support, I interviewed my school's former athletic director, Mr. Minix. He told me that in 2004 the Los Angeles Unified School District started a \$2.7 million building project at my school that included a new gym floor, new bleachers for the gym, lights for the football field, restrooms in the locker rooms and moving the tennis courts to make space for a softball field. But after Green Dot, a charter school company, took over the school in 2008, they stopped working on the improvements because no one knew who would pay for it or be in charge, he said. The good news is that he said the work has started back up but he doesn't know when it will be finished.

After the interview I realized that I was making judgments based on what I assumed without getting the facts. But I still feel like we're not getting enough support.

If the school supported us more, then maybe more girls would join the sports teams and learn the things I've learned, like teamwork, responsibility and leadership. When I started playing softball in middle school I had a huge ego and I cared more about my performance than the team's. I used to get angry at my teammates who weren't as good as me, but I would never help them.

But freshman year, I saw how Alejandra, the team captain, always helped our teammates by showing them how to throw the ball properly and how to swing the bat. I realized that I should do the same thing because that would help my teammates get better.

When the coach isn't at practice, I take over and run the drills. I show my teammates how to hit better and explain rules. I like doing this because it feels like they're looking up to me and if they see me help teammates, they'll do the same thing.

I needed sports when I was younger. Playing made me more confident and showed me that I'm not just an average girl. Every girl deserves that opportunity.



Photos by Yeseñia Reyes, 17. Animo Locke HS #1

made the varsity team, but unfortunately the team didn't get enough money from the school. We had helmets that didn't fit and didn't have any padding inside. The area where we practiced was too lumpy to play games on, we didn't have dugouts and there were bald spots on the grass. We had to play all of our home games at other schools. Meanwhile, the boys' baseball field is awesome. The grass is green, the dirt is smooth and they have dugouts. I was mad that we didn't have good equipment and a place to play, but I still loved being on the team.

HOW WOULD WE SLIDE IN SHORTS?

Another example of how we didn't get enough support was uniforms. We got new jerseys that everyone liked but instead of pants we got silky, loose shorts. We complained to the coach that they were too short and that we couldn't play as aggressively in them, like diving for balls and sliding while stealing bases. One girl slid and after the umpire called her safe, she looked at her leg and there was blood mixed with dirt from the field. I never dove for balls because I didn't want to get all cut up.

support from the school is one of the reasons not everyone tried hard. They probably felt like if the school wasn't going to give them anything, then they didn't have a reason to try their best. We had one home game on our rocky practice area, but there was no place for the fans to sit and many of them ended up leaving. If there were bleachers I think more people would come out to the games.

As we kept losing and losing there were times I wanted to quit. If not all of my teammates were going to work hard, why should I do this at all? Every week I would complain to my mom that my teammates didn't try hard enough and that the school didn't provide good equipment. But my mom always said not to worry about everybody else and to focus on being the best player I could be. She would ask me if I really wanted to be on the team even with all the problems and I always said, "Yes, I do." She said that if I really loved something I should stick with it and find the good in it. I still loved playing so I couldn't quit. I didn't want to become the girl I was in sixth grade who didn't care about anything. And I was proud of the 4.0 GPA I'd earned.



Even though the team won't have a new field this year, Karina is excited to play her last season of high school softball.

Violating my dress code

Wearing a dress for school dances is hard since I'm a tomboy

By Jean Park

18, Harvard-Westlake School (2011 graduate)

I don't like wearing dresses. I don't like that I have muscular legs from playing soccer. They make me feel manly in a dress or a skirt so I feel more comfortable in jeans or soccer shorts. My typical outfit is a pair of black jeans that have faded a lot because they have been washed so many times, flannel with a plain T-shirt and Converse. I only wear dresses when I have to.

In elementary school I was a tomboy. I was the only girl in my grade who wore the uniform shorts

instead of the uniform skirts and I played sports with the boys. My mom forced me to wear dresses for family pictures, but they showed only a few inches of my shin. My parents and friends knew

that I didn't like wearing dresses.

I usually got away with wearing something other than a dress. For the eighth grade Halloween dance, I wore leggings and a nice shirt, and sported nice dress pants for the orchestra concert. But my freshman year was more demanding. It was the year my grade was allowed to attend the semi-formal dance, and to my friends it was a huge deal. Who you took to the dance didn't matter, but to my misfortune what you wore did. I told my friends I didn't have a dress to wear, but they had so many dresses they weren't planning on wearing that my excuse didn't work.

My good friend Lily let me borrow a black dress that fell right above my knees. I agreed to wear it, hoping that my bruised and scabbed knees from soccer would go unnoticed. A few days before semi-formal, I wanted to get rid of the scabs so I scratched off the hard surface on my left knee. My heart stopped when I saw blood dripping down my leg. Trying not to stain the carpet, I made my way to the cabinet with the Neosporin and Band-Aids. The blood soaked through the Band-Aid a little bit, but at least the pain stopped.

WHEN I SAW CAMERAS I WANTED TO HIDE

The night before the dance, I tried on the dress again and walked around my room to get more comfortable wearing it. But when everyone met up at a friend's house before the dance, I felt my heart pound again. All of a sudden, I didn't want anyone to look at me. Parents were there with cameras and everyone wanted to see each other's dresses. I felt that my friends, who all had long, slender legs, looked better in their dresses. I turned around whenever I caught someone looking at what I was wearing and I stood on the third set of stairs so I could hide my body when parents were taking pictures.

At the dance, I pushed my table chair in all the way so the tablecloth would cover my legs. When I walked past the boy I had a crush on, I forced myself to walk taller so I seemed slimmer. When some of my friends got up to dance, they pulled me onto the dance floor. Surprisingly, after a few minutes, I was having so much

fun dancing and singing to Justin Timberlake and Daft Punk that I wasn't thinking about my sock tan or my Band-Aid.

Although I survived wearing a dress for one night, I decided that dresses were for special occasions. During my sophomore and junior years I didn't attend the semi-formals and I wasn't involved in anything that required me to wear a dress.

At the beginning of senior year, I made a pact with Lily to go "all out" during our last year in high school. That meant painting our faces for the Homecoming football game, dressing in school colors during Spirit Week and of course, attending our last semi-formal.

Lily offered me one of her dresses again and I didn't feel as uncomfortable as I did three years ago. I liked dressing up and being a little more feminine for one day because it's not something I do every day.

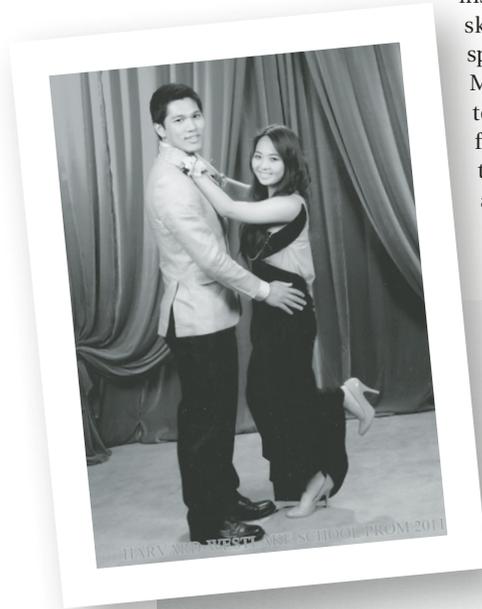
Before the dance, we met at a friend's house and just as we were about to leave, all the girls walked into Julia's bathroom to get one last look. It turned out that every person had something they were worried about. Emma had trouble walking in her heels, Rebecca was worried about her sunburn and Lily was nervous about her hair extensions falling out. But seeing their excitement despite their insecurities helped me get rid of mine. I realized that events like school dances should be memorable and the only way to have fun was not to worry.

This year, we were so excited that the dance was on the rooftop of a building that we ate for only 10 minutes, then spent the rest of the time laughing and dancing. I didn't mind so much that I was in a dress this time because I didn't want my insecurities to get in the way of me having fun.

Over the years, I've learned to adjust to my body and see what kinds of clothes make me feel the most comfortable. Although I'll always feel better in jeans, I've realized that you don't have to be "girly" to wear a dress. I've grown to become more comfortable in some dresses and I'm sure there will be more occasions in the future when I'll have to wear them. I'll still feel a little insecure, but much more comfortable than before.



Jean is learning to have fun and not pay attention to her insecurities.



Jean's typical outfit is black jeans, a T-shirt and flannel. (Above) Jean picked a long dress for prom instead of a short one so she'd be more comfortable.



I should have kept my hands on the wheel

I got into an accident because I was texting while driving

By Yuri Kim
17, Beverly Hills HS

When I got my driver's license last September I was really excited. Even though for the first year you have your license, you're not allowed to have passengers under the age of 20, I ignored the rules and went everywhere with my friends—the mall, restaurants, coffee shops and the beach. My mom warned me that if I got in an accident, she would take my car away. I promised her that I would be careful. But I didn't listen. Since everyone I knew, even my parents and friends, texted while driving, I didn't think it was dangerous. I texted whenever I was at stop signs or red lights because I thought it was safe.

A few days before Halloween, I was rushing from store to store to find my butterfly costume. My friends were constantly texting me, asking what I was going to wear and where I was shopping. I stopped at a stop sign to reply to my friend's text, "Where u at?" I texted back, "On my way home, where you at?" After I sent the message, I looked left and right to make sure that no one was there. As I was about to go, I heard my message ringtone and I looked down to read her reply, "What time are we meeting up?" As I was replying to that text, I pushed on the gas, assuming that no one was there since I had checked a few seconds before. Still looking at my phone, I drove through the intersection and boom! I hit a red Mustang.

BOTH CARS WERE DAMAGED

We both pulled over and got out of our cars. Thankfully, no one was injured and no passengers were in our cars. The right front side of my car was dented and my bumper was starting to fall off. The left side of his car was dented. I started crying, thinking that this was the end of my driving days. Even though he hadn't stopped at the stop sign, I felt as if it was my fault because I was texting while driving.

His face was bright red and he kept asking, "What were you thinking?" and "How old are you?" I was scared so I called my mom and told her I was in an accident. She asked me what happened and if I was hurt. She told me not to do anything until she got there and not to apologize.

While we were waiting for my mom, he was yelling. He called me a "b****" and said that I was too young to drive. He kept saying, "You're so f***ing stupid." He kept telling me that it was my fault. I felt like he was going to attack me. I didn't say anything. I didn't want him

to get angrier. My mom arrived 40 minutes later. She ran toward me and grabbed onto me. Her hug made me realize that everything was going to be all right.

My mom exchanged insurance and license information with him, while I waited in the car. On the ride home, my mom gave me the silent treatment. I was afraid to say anything because I didn't want her to be even more disappointed than she already was. I was shaken up and the accident replayed in my head. As soon as I got home, I went into my room and went to sleep. I didn't want to talk to anyone about it. I didn't want to be reminded of what happened because I didn't want to think about the consequences. Was I going

to get my car taken away? How much were we going to have to pay? (My mom took my car away for a few months but I got it back. And he ended up paying for everything because the insurance determined it was his fault.)

I GOT MY FRIEND TO PUT HER PHONE DOWN

I realized that so many people at my school text while driving. Every time I leave the school parking lot I see all the juniors and seniors texting. A couple of weeks after the accident, I was in a car with my friends. My friend, who was driving, had one hand on the wheel and one hand on her BlackBerry texting with her head down while driving. I was nervous that we would get into an accident. At first, I didn't say anything because I thought she would stop texting but she didn't. Then I yelled, "Put your phone away! You remember what happened to me!" She ignored me. "Can you please text later? Is texting really worth risking your life for?" I asked. "Stop making a big deal, nothing's going to happen!" she said. I told her, "It might not be a big deal now but you might get in an accident just like I did." She ignored me again so I said, "You're risking your life and ours and you're going to regret it if you get in an accident or get pulled over! A text can always wait!" After a few minutes she apologized and said, "You're right. I'm sorry. Here, keep my phone until we get to Chipotle."

After that, I told my friends, "Think about what could happen to you if you text while driving." I told them they could get seriously injured. It's similar to being intoxicated because you're not paying attention to the road. Most of my friends have stopped texting while driving.

Now, whenever I drive, I am more cautious. Before I drive, I set my phone to vibrate and put it in the glove compartment. When I hear my phone, I think, "Should I check it?" But I stop myself. I think of the accident and realize that I don't ever want that to happen again.



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



*Yuri says save a life
and don't text and
drive.*



Balancing act

I liked earning extra money, but working a part-time job didn't leave me enough time to study

By Jennifer Gonzales-Romero
18, South Gate HS (2011 graduate)

When I wanted money freshman year I would wash family members' cars for \$15 or clean their houses for \$40. The money was helpful but I wanted a real job with a regular schedule and a bigger paycheck.

During sophomore and junior years I applied for more than 30 jobs at mall clothing stores and coffee shops, but I never got a call back. I didn't want to work at a fast-food restaurant because I would have to wear an ugly uniform and my clothes would smell. But toward the end of junior year, I was desperate for money so I applied for a job at Little Caesars Pizza.

I told the manager that I would be a great worker if she hired me. She asked me about my experience. I told her that I was good at selling yearbooks so I would be just as good selling pizzas. She said the job would be hard but I told her I could do it. She handed me an application and when I was finished filling it out, she told me I was hired.

My first week I made a lot of mistakes, like pressing the wrong codes on the register and giving the wrong change, but the

Photo by
Luisa Mendoza, 17,
Lynwood HS
(2011 graduate)

manager who hired me said it was common for new cashiers to mess up. After a few weeks I got better and six months later I got a raise to \$8.10 an hour for being one of the best cashiers.

My favorite part about working was getting my paycheck. I made almost \$200 every two weeks. I paid for the books and materials I needed for the two college classes I was taking, especially the expensive photography class, and never had to ask my parents for spending money.

During that summer I worked five days a week for three to four hours a day. I had planned to quit when school started, but considering how hard it had been to get the job and how much I loved getting paid, I decided to keep working when I started my packed senior year.

I planned to take two AP classes and yearbook. I also wanted to volunteer with Key Club, work out, study for the SAT and ACT, and apply to college. I thought adding a job to my schedule wouldn't be too bad. Before I went back to school, I told my manager I wanted to work Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Saturdays and some Sundays for three hours a day. I was confident that I would have enough time to do everything just as long I stayed focused.

Just two weeks into the semester I was falling behind on my homework, especially for AP government. My counselor suggested I drop one of my AP classes and tell the colleges I was applying to that it was because of my job. I considered that but I felt like dropping one would make me look incapable of handling a busy schedule.

TOO TIRED FOR AP GOVERNMENT HOMEWORK

I began dreading my job. On slow days, I mostly folded pizza boxes and cleaned, which made my three-hour shifts feel like six. When I got home, I wanted to sleep. But I had homework, which sometimes meant staying up until 3 a.m. I never did my AP government homework because it was mostly reading and note taking that wasn't due every day. I always told myself I would start it the next night but I never did. Then the night before it was due I wouldn't do it because I was so behind.

The days following those late nights were the hardest. I woke up at 6:40 a.m. with bags under my eyes. By fourth period, I would space out because my mind couldn't keep up with my government teacher's boring lectures. When I got home I would start my homework but fall asleep. On weekends, I hardly volunteered with Key Club because I needed to catch up on homework.

I would sometimes take AP literature vocabulary flashcards to work so I could study for a quiz while I was folding pizza boxes. But my manager found my flashcards and said that she could write me up for not focusing on my job. If I got three write-ups I'd be fired. She had one of the assistant managers take my flashcards. I was angry. I told the assistant manager that the cards weren't distracting me because I glanced at them only occasionally when I was folding boxes. I told her how much homework I had and she said she had lots of homework too. Then I told her it wasn't the same because AP classes give out more work than college classes but she said it was the same. I didn't feel

like arguing so I gave up and continued folding boxes. Later the assistant manager secretly gave me back my flashcards and told me to put them away.

In October my parents noticed how my schedule was affecting me. I hardly ate dinner in the kitchen with my mom and I hardly ever slept over at my dad's house because I was working night shifts. When my mom would ask me how my day was, I would just say "OK" without looking at her and get annoyed when she asked me more questions. Then she would ask, "Why are you always so moody?"

I considered dropping government but my yearbook co-editor Ana said it would be better to keep my AP government class instead of my job because AP classes impress colleges. I told her I wanted to work because it was helping me pay for the things I needed.

I BOUGHT CLOTHES AND GROCERIES

Even though I was stressed, I felt better when I got my paychecks every other Saturday. I bought a lot of new clothes and the biggest package for my senior dues, which included a sweatshirt, a mug and key chains. And sometimes I helped my mom pay for groceries. It felt great to pull money out of my pocket whenever I needed it.

Later in October, Ana and I were text messaging and she pointed out how "moody" I had been acting lately. I hated to hear that because I heard it enough from my mom so I ignored her. Then one day in yearbook, my advisor told me to lower my voice during a discussion. Later Ana told me that I sometimes used a stern tone when I talked. She also repeated that I'd been acting moody lately.

I started crying and told her I was stressed out from all my schoolwork. I said I was exhausted and I couldn't handle it anymore.

For the next few weeks I'd get home from school, eat, nap, go to work, eat and then do homework until 2 a.m. I never had time to study for the ACT or SAT, work out or do any of my AP government homework. I had a C, the lowest grade I'd had since ninth grade.

In early November, the stress became too much. I walked into government class and the teacher mentioned that we would have a major test the next day. I hadn't read any of the chapters, so I lied to my teacher and told him that my counselor wanted to see me.

When I went to the counselor's office I explained that my schedule was too much for me because of my job. I told him that I wanted to drop AP government. He looked disappointed and said that it was technically too late to drop my AP class because the quarter was about to end. Eventually, I was able to drop the class with an "incomplete" and avoid having a C on my report card. I felt bad about dropping the class, but I knew that I had made the right choice. I took honors government in the spring.

I FINALLY REALIZED THAT I HAD TO WORK LESS

To get some balance I also told my boss that I wanted to work only two school nights (Mondays and Wednesdays) and to replace my Tuesday shift with a Friday instead. She wasn't happy because she had to find new cashiers to cover my shifts but I told her I needed to focus more on school. In the following months, I changed

JENNIFER'S TIPS FOR WORKING WHILE IN SCHOOL

- Make sure your boss knows your school schedule and what extracurricular activities you're involved in so that he or she knows when you can work.
- If you're working too many days but want the same amount of hours, ask your boss if you could work fewer days but longer shifts. This cuts down on travel time to and from work during the week.
- If you're having trouble finding enough time for everything, then work fewer shifts or drop an activity. A job counts as an extracurricular activity when filling out college applications.
- Don't waste your paychecks on pointless things. This way you won't feel the need to work more hours.
- Use a planner to make a list of what you need to do, like homework and chores. It will help you remember when you have to work and when you have free time.

my schedule to work just Friday through Monday. My boss said OK and I was happy because this would give me more time for homework during the week.

By January I had mailed all my college applications on time and fulfilled my duties as yearbook editor. Even though I never studied for the ACT and SAT and I didn't do as well as I wanted on the tests, I got into seven of the nine colleges that I applied to. I didn't apply for many scholarships, though, because I was busy with work and school. When second semester started, things were easier because I was done applying to college.

I don't want to scare anyone out of getting a job while they're in high school, but if you're going to get a job, understand the commitment and sacrifices you are going to have to make. You have only 24 hours in a day so you have to be realistic when you set so many goals for yourself for such a small amount of time.



Jennifer wishes she had started saving money in a college fund as soon as she started her job, because college is expensive.

By Frank Reed

17, Animo Locke HS #3

I talked to Dr. Sarah Guerry and health educator Ana Delia Hernandez, both from the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health's STD Program. What stuck out to me the most was hearing that females have a greater chance of getting STDs and that they have more STDs than males. I always thought that guys had more STDs. I realized it's important to get accurate information because what you believe is not always right.

L.A. Youth: What is an STD? Sarah Guerry, medical director of the STD Program: It is an infection that is passed from one person to another, via sex. There are STDs and STIs—sexually transmitted diseases and sexually transmitted infections.

What is the difference between an STI and an STD? Guerry: They're related. HPV is a great example. Human Papillomavirus is an infection that causes disease. It causes genital warts and cervical cancer. Herpes is an infection that causes the disease of painful ulcers (sores) or itching.

How are STDs transmitted? Ana Delia Hernandez: It can't be an STD if it's not transmitted by sex, so sex has to be involved. Most people think penis and vagina sex but you don't have to have penetrative sex. It can be rubbing, you know, stuff teenagers will often do. They're not doing the things that can cause pregnancy but they are touching each other's genitals. So oral sex, vaginal sex and anal sex are ways of transmitting STDs. For bacterial STDs it's through infected fluid such as infected pre-cum or infected semen or vaginal secretions. Chlamydia and gonorrhea are transmitted through infected fluids. If you don't use a condom, you can get that. And then there are the ones that are transmitted through skin-to-skin contact. Herpes and genital warts, even if you use a condom, sometimes can still be transmitted because of that friction that happens during sexual intercourse.

What's the most common STD among teens? Guerry: HPV—Human Papillomavirus—is by far the most common sexually transmitted infection in teenagers. [An HPV vaccine is available.] Chlamydia is the most common bacterial STD [among STDs that are required to be reported]. Chlamydia is a really bad STD because it can cause infertility and chronic pelvic pain.

Why is this? Guerry: There are a bunch of reasons why teens are more likely to have sexually transmitted diseases. Number one is biology. There's something anatomically different—primarily about young women because their cervix is more vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases. Number two, teens are much more likely to have shorter relationships. Even if they're going steady, it's for a month. Teens are also much more likely

Protect yourself from STDs

I talked to two sexual health experts about the high rates of STDs among young people and the importance of getting tested



Dr. Sarah Guerry shows one of the condoms the county STD program hands out for free.

not to wear condoms. They're much less likely to be going to their doctor and talking about STDs.

How can they prevent getting an STD? Delia Hernandez: Being able to talk about it. A lot of times, people are embarrassed to talk about STDs. And really, if you're not able to talk to your partner about it, then maybe you're not ready. But ways of preventing STDs are by use of condoms. There is the

male condom and now there is the female condom.

Guerry: Keep your number of sex partners as low as possible. A teen girl can only have one sex partner and she's at super high risk for having an STD. Abstinence is best and then one partner and ideally choosing that sex partner well. You've seen the ads—it's not who you're having sex with, it's who that person has had sex with. So having a talk about sex: 'Who have you had sex with before? Have you been

using condoms?' Otherwise stay away.

Are any contraceptives 100 percent effective in preventing STDs? Guerry: Condoms are 100 percent effective at preventing STDs if used consistently and correctly for bacterial STDs (anything that is spread by fluids). So that's chlamydia and gonorrhea. Unfortunately, for herpes and HPV, it significantly decreases your risk but it's not 100 percent. If the condom is not covering the area where they have herpes, it's not going to protect you.

Delia Hernandez: The use of lubricant would be a good idea because you're cutting back on friction. If things are slippery and slidey, you don't have the propensity for tears, which allow the virus to enter the body.

Are STDs treatable? Guerry: All STDs are treatable. Chlamydia, gonorrhea and syphilis can all be treated and even cured. Herpes you can't cure but you can take medicines to make the symptoms go away. And then of course [there's] HIV, which is also a sexually transmitted infection. You can't cure it but we have drugs out there [to control it].

How difficult is it to live with an STD? Delia Hernandez: Viral STDs can be lifelong. If somebody acquires herpes at a young age, you're going to be 70 or 80 with it. It can be a major toll on them. You think about, nobody is ever going to want to have sex with me, am I ever going to be able to get married, am I going to be able to have children?

Guerry: And they also have to tell their partners. That can be really hard for people to do, especially teenagers.

Delia Hernandez: Even going to the clinic can be

embarrassing. Oh I got an STD. Why did this happen to me? When in reality it happens to a lot of people.

Do STDs hurt? Delia Hernandez: For chlamydia and gonorrhea, you can have pain during urination. However, not everybody gets symptoms. This is why STDs are passed around because people can have them and not even know they have them. They continuously have unprotected sex and pass it on to the next person. Herpes hurts because it's an open lesion so it can cause pain. With HPV, you will have a small wart in your genital area and it doesn't cause any pain.

How can you tell if you have an STD? Delia Hernandez: If you notice anything like pain during urination or you have any kind of discharge from the genital area, those are indicators that there might be an infection.

Guerry: Women are much more likely not to have symptoms but similarly guys who are having anal sex often have zero symptoms. If you're a sexually active teen, you should be going to the doctor at least once a year and getting an STD check, especially if you're a girl. Women, because of their reproductive tract, have many more complications. So that's why these recommendations for screening teens, the strongest is around teen girls. And because it's asymptomatic [shows no symptoms]. Whereas guys know; if they have a drip, sooner or later they're going to come in.

Who's more likely to get an STD, a guy or a girl?

Guerry: In general females have more STDs than

guys and this is worldwide. You do have sub-populations though. Amongst gay men, there is a subset of incredibly high-risk guys, like gay teens.

Where can teens get tested? Guerry: All over L.A. Calling 800-758-0880 is a resource. You can enter in your zip code and it does a clinic locator for you. DontThinkKnow.org has a clinic locator that highlights teen-friendly clinics. If you're a female under the age of 25 and you live in L.A. County, you can order a test for chlamydia and gonorrhea and it'll get sent to you at home and you can test yourself. Unfortunately, we don't have a home test kit for guys.

Which ethnic group has a higher chance of getting an STD? Guerry: Well, STDs like everybody. But we've seen not only in L.A., but in California and the nation, that African-American teenagers have much higher rates of chlamydia and gonorrhea than do whites. And then Latina women have at least double the rates of chlamydia than white women do. It's complicated to say why it's happening.



STDs are more serious than people think so be aware of them, Frank says.

WHERE TO GET TESTED

These health centers have teen clinics, which are staffed by teens for teens. Peer counselors can answer your questions about sex and help you get confidential services, including family planning counseling, birth control, and pregnancy, STD and HIV testing. Most clinics charge sliding scale fees based on your income, making many services free.

You can also call the STD Hotline at (800) 758-0880 to get information on STDs, free condoms sent to you by mail and referrals to health clinics that offer STD and HIV testing. Or go to www.lapublichealth.org/std. To order a free home test kit, go to DontThinkKnow.org.

Planned Parenthood has 12 health clinics in Los Angeles County that provide confidential reproductive health care including abortions. Call (800) 230-PLAN to schedule an appointment and find the location nearest you. Or go to plannedparenthood.org and click on the "Info for Teens" link.

ASIAN PACIFIC HEALTH CARE VENTURE'S REAL YOUTH CENTER

www.aphcv.org
1530 Hillhurst Ave.,
Suite 200, Los Angeles, CA 90027
(323) 644-3888
Youth Clinic: Wednesday 5-7 p.m.

EAST VALLEY COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTERS

www.evchc.org
680 Fairplex Dr., Pomona, CA 91768
(909) 623-4598
Teen Clinic: Friday 11 a.m. -4 p.m.
420 S. Glendora Ave., West Covina, CA
91790 (626) 919-5724
Teen Clinic: Saturday 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

HARBOR-UCLA MEDICAL CENTER

www.humc.edu
Pediatric Clinic,
1000 W. Carson St., Torrance, CA 90502
(310) 222-2321
Adolescent Clinic: Wednesday 1-3 p.m.
\$80 fee pays for services
if you have the L.A. County HMO
or no insurance.

VALLEY COMMUNITY CLINIC

www.teen411.com
6801 Coldwater Canyon Ave.,
North Hollywood, CA 91605
(818) 763-4070
or toll-free (888) 763-4070
Valley Teen Clinic:
Monday 4-8 p.m.,
Tuesday 3-7 p.m.,
Wednesday, 4-8 p.m.,
Thursday 10 a.m.-5 p.m.,
Saturday 11 a.m.-3 p.m.

VENICE FAMILY CLINIC

www.venicefamilyclinic.org
905 Venice Blvd., Venice, CA 90291
(310) 392-8636
Teen clinic:
Monday-Wednesday 1:30-3:40 p.m.

WESTSIDE FAMILY HEALTH CENTER

www.wwhcenter.org
1705 Ocean Park Blvd.,
Santa Monica, CA 90405
(310) 450-2191
Teen clinic: Monday and Thursday 1:30-6 p.m.

ESSAY CONTEST WINNERS

The best present I've gotten

1ST PLACE \$50

I wanted a little brother

By Crystal Byrne
Opportunities For Learning

One of the most priceless and mind-blowing gifts I've ever been given is my little brother, Andrew! I know a lot of people say they wish they could sell their siblings on eBay (just kidding) or be an only child, but it's not at all like that with me. My brothers and sisters are the greatest thing invented since sliced bread and each of them contributed to the person I am today. I didn't know about Andrew's existence until I was 15 or 16 but for the longest time I had secretly longed for a little brother. Here's why: I am adopted and grew up with my five siblings who were also adopted.

My oldest brother Eddie, who is twice my age, and I used to be really close because I was a tomboy. Man, the pranks we would play! He is the one who taught me that someone may be able to overpower you physically but you can always outwit them. So he treated me equally and never went easy on me because I was a girl or because I was younger. It enabled me to think fast and sometimes I believe he grudgingly regretted teaching me how to be quick on my feet because he later paid the consequences. Although we bickered, fought and got into mischief, when push came to shove we had each other's back.

Eddie was my best friend so when he moved out and headed off to train for war I was absolutely devastated. Don't get me wrong, I adored my sisters. They provided me with emotional support and were



Crystal loves hanging out with her brother, Andrew.

Photo by Crystal's biological mother, Amanda Boten

always there for me if I needed to vent, but they simply couldn't give me the male companionship that I needed. My brother and I had a connection. No one challenged me the way he did and I missed that.

War changes people and he was one of those people. I got one letter from him, which I keep in my wallet, and after that he became a complete stranger. I no longer knew this person who had invaded his body. I was hurt beyond words but as upset as I was, I couldn't forget all that we had had together. For the longest time all my friends were guys and that helped fill in the emptiness, but it still wasn't the same. I began to wish for a little brother whose face I could wake up to and whose laughter I could fall asleep to.

Years went by without me knowing that safe and sound about 40 minutes from where I was, my dream come true was waiting. My brother had known about me since he was a tot, while I on the other hand had no clue that as I sat on my bed wishing and dreaming for him to exist, that he was sitting on his bed wondering every day if we would ever meet. When I finally met him for the first time a thrill shot through my veins and excitement raced up and down my spine. Andrew could never take the place of my brother Eddie; instead he has made his own place. Andrew is a bundle of inexhaustible love that I would never trade for any other gift in the whole wide world. He is the best present I've ever been given!!

2ND PLACE \$30

A special charm bracelet

By Daisy Jauregui
Wilmington MS

I have always been grateful for everything I receive because that is the way I was raised. Yet, one of the best gifts I have ever received was my grandmother's charm bracelet. My grandmother died when my dad was only 5 years old and ever since then my grandmother's bracelet has been passed down as an heirloom. At first my grandfather kept it but when my dad got engaged to my mom, my grandfather gave it to my mom. Then my mom gave it to me for my 11th birthday and I loved it so much because it made me feel secure.

The charm bracelet was different colors and had silver crosses on it that would shine in the light. However, what made it really special was that it was my grandmother's and it gave me luck. Ever since I began wearing it, I began to do better in school and began to achieve some goals that I never thought I would be able to achieve. Once I noticed this, I wore my bracelet every day and when I told my mom, she told me it must be my

grandmother looking over me. When she told me this, I began to feel closer to my grandmother even though I didn't know her. I knew she cared about me and was looking out for me. Yet, the charm bracelet was really old and it would break often, but not beyond repair. For instance, once I hit my hand against the wall by accident and it broke into three pieces. I was so scared that my dad wasn't going to be able to fix it, but luckily he did.

Unfortunately, now I don't have the bracelet anymore. One day after school, I was messing around with my friends during band practice and when I looked at my wrist, the bracelet wasn't there. I began to panic because I had been all over the school and I knew how delicate the bracelet was. I went crazy searching for it but it was no use. The bracelet was really thin, and I had a feeling I lost it on the school's grass field. At that moment, so many questions were going through my head including, "Does this mean I'm not going to do well in school anymore?" When I told my mom this, she just laughed and said, "It's OK. Maybe someone needed the luck more than you." Although my mom was trying to make me feel better by telling me this, she made me feel worse because I couldn't bear thinking someone else had my bracelet. Luckily, as I began to tear up, my dad made me feel better by telling me that the bracelet having luck was all in my head and that my grandmother has always been looking over me.

3RD PLACE \$20

A gift from Afghanistan

By Joseph Fischer
Fleming MS (Lomita)

The best present I've ever gotten was a hand-made box from Afghanistan. My grandfather was in Afghanistan along with other U.S. troops. He got my brother and I these hand-made boxes for our personal stuff. He also sent it with a note from him, a picture and money from "Da Afghan Bank." That is actually what is says on the bill, ha ha. The box is wooden

with a picture of the American and Afghanistan flags on the front. To open the box is even more special. You can't just lift the top, you have to ... actually that's a secret. That's the one thing that keeps the box so secret. I have put only the most personal of items in that box. There are only a handful of things that are that personal to me. The note that was sent with the box is one of them.

This box is special to me because it was a great surprise and it gave me a feeling that I was talking to my grandfather every time I read that note. I haven't seen him in a while. I've seen my grandfather only once since he was sent to Afghanistan. That box keeps him in my thoughts. I will never get rid of that box and it will never lose its importance to me. I only want to see my grandpa again. I miss him.

NEW ESSAY CONTEST

What do you wish you could give up?

One of our staff writers has to have her daily coffee fix. Another was so obsessed with video games that his grades went down. There are temptations all around us.

Sometimes we feel bad when we give in, but we're not the only ones. Tell us about what you can't give up. It could be a bad reality TV show, a website you spend too much time on, a video game you stay up too late playing or texting at any hour. Or it could be your favorite junk food or too much shopping. Tell us what you love about it and why you can't give it up. Also tell us why you wish you could give it up, like it's unhealthy or expensive or a waste of time.



WIN
\$50

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

Essays should be a page or more. Include your name, school, age and phone number with your essay. The staff of L.A. Youth will read the entries and pick three winners.

Your name will be withheld if you request it. The first-place winner will receive \$50. The second-place winner will get \$30 and the third-place winner will receive \$20. Winning essays will be printed in our November-December issue and put on our website at www.layouth.com.

Mail your essay to:

L.A. Youth
5967 W. 3rd St. Suite 301
Los Angeles CA 90036
or to editor@layouth.com

DEADLINE:

Friday, Oct. 21, 2011

The ultimate movie marathon

Trying to watch all the Best Picture nominees has turned me on to some great films

By Sydney Sellers
16, *Windward School*

I've seen 200 of the movies nominated for the Academy Award for Best Picture. In sixth grade I decided to watch every movie that has been nominated for or won Best Picture. My parents were happy that I decided to do this because they love movies. My friends weren't as happy because sometimes I couldn't hang out with them because I desperately needed to watch *Casablanca* or *Gone with the Wind*.

My love of movies started when I was 5. Movies like *Singin' in the Rain*, a classic musical, looked different than the TV shows I watched, like *Spongebob* and *Dragontales*. I liked the way actresses in old movies dressed. They wore long, silk dresses even when just relaxing at home, and dark lipstick and eye shadow. Actresses like Rosalind Russell and Vivien Leigh fascinated me so much that I named my cats after them (*Roz* and *Viva*).

In sixth grade I watched a movie called *Annie Hall* with my parents, and I liked it. I wanted to find out more about it so I Googled it. I found out that the movie had won Best Picture in 1977. I wanted to know what other films the director, Woody Allen, had made so I clicked on the list of all the nominees for Best Picture since 1927, the first year of the awards. I saw hundreds of movies I had never heard of. I thought some were probably worth watching.

At that moment I decided to watch all of the nominees by the time I graduated from high school. I was bored with the movies that had come out during the summer, like *You Don't Mess with the Zohan*, because I thought they weren't entertaining. Instead of going to the theater and seeing bad movies, I could watch some of the best films ever made!

The first movie I watched was *Naughty Marietta* from 1935. It was one of the most boring movies ever. It was about a princess who runs away to find true love, complete with cheesy dancing and singing. "If all the movies are this dull, why even watch them?" I wondered. My dad suggested I try a more modern one.

I COULD STILL CONNECT TO A MOVIE FROM THE 50s

I picked *Sunset Boulevard* because it was made by one of my favorite directors, Billy Wilder. It reminded me why I wanted to watch these classic films in the first place. The movie is set in Los Angeles in the early 50s, but it feels current. An unsuccessful screenwriter



Sydney printed out the entire list of nominees since 1927 to keep track of which movies she's seen.

is looking for work and stumbles upon a Hollywood mansion and ends up living with the owner, a former silent-film actress. I felt for him because he wants to leave and continue his life but he feels bad for the actress. The ride the movie takes you on is thrilling.

I realized that even though some of the movies would be boring, others could be fantastic and I would discover a lot of wonderful films.

I watched *Suspicion*, which I recorded on Turner Classic Movies. I liked the director, Alfred Hitchcock, but I hadn't heard of this film. It was made in 1941. It's hard to talk about *Suspicion* without giving the movie away, but it's about a wife who suspects her husband is trying to kill her. There is no graphic violence, but it's an intense psychological thriller. Sometimes you feel like you're inside the characters' minds. If you like movies like *Black Swan*, you'll like this.

I thought it would be hard to find some of these movies, but I found a video store in Santa Monica that had a lot of classic films. I also found movies on Netflix, YouTube and on cable. I was also surprised that I could rent films from the early 1900s on iTunes.

I would watch movies on Friday and Saturday because during the week I had homework. One time when I was home sick from school I watched five movies in one day. Some of my friends were willing to watch classic movies with me. I watched *All About Eve* with my friend Tessa because I knew she wanted to be an actress and the lead character acted on Broadway.

When I finish watching a film my dad asks me, "What did you think of it?" This motivates me to watch more movies because I like talking to him about them.

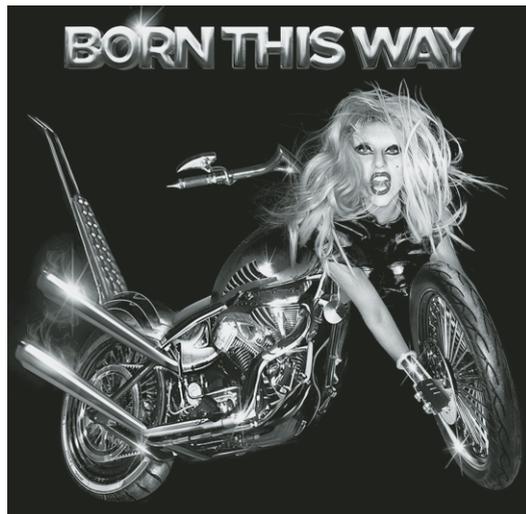
If you like *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* or *The Breakfast Club*, you'll like *The Graduate*. It feels like you're watching an older version of a character from one of those movies. The film is about a college graduate named Benjamin who has an affair with one of his parents' friends, Mrs. Robinson. Toward the end of the movie he tries to make his own decisions instead of letting other people control him. I related to his need to find his purpose in life.

Broadcast News is brilliantly written and funny. I couldn't stop laughing when a member of the news staff, Aaron, starts sweating during a live broadcast and can't stop. The movie is about a news producer named Jane (played by Holly Hunter, in one of my favorite roles) who tries to deal with two men who work with her and are both in love with her.

There are 485 movies that have been nominated for Best Picture, and I have 285 movies left. When people ask me what my favorite movie is I honestly can't answer because I have so many that I like. When I created a Facebook account, I listed about 50 films. I'm excited to find more favorite films. I think I can finish by the time I graduate high school in three years.



*Sydney is looking forward to watching *Schindler's List* and *The Lord of the Rings*.*



Lady GaGa

CD: Born This Way

Reviewed by Victor Beteta
18, University HS

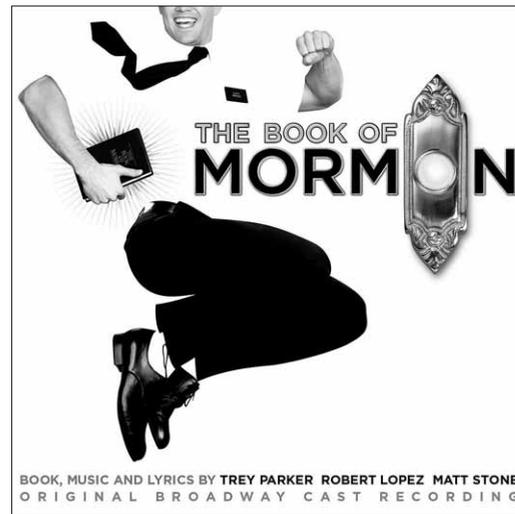
Lady GaGa's Born This Way is one of my favorite albums this year. A day doesn't go by that I don't listen to at least one song from it. The album is a passionate and daring tale of love and acceptance. GaGa also pushes the boundaries of what a pop song is. In "Scheiße" she sings in German. "The Edge Of Glory" has a saxophone solo.

The song "Born This Way" reminds us that we are not alone. She sings about how it doesn't matter if you're gay, straight or bi, everyone is beautiful because that's the way god made us. The first time I heard the song I wanted to dance to it because it's very upbeat, and I kept singing, "ooh there ain't no other way/ baby I was born this way." But even if the song is about a serious subject, she didn't want people to be sad when they hear it; she wanted people to feel powerful and happy about who they are.

One of my favorite songs is "Americano." In it she sings "Mis canciones son de la revolucion/ Mi corazon me duele por mi generacion/ (My songs are of the revolution/ My heart aches for my generation). The song has a mariachi undertone and a techno beat that make it fun to listen to. "Yoü & I" is different from the rest of the album because it's a country pop song. I really like that it sounded like other country pop artists such as Lady Antebellum and Taylor Swift.

GaGa's overall message is to accept each other no matter race or sex, to be "free as your hair" (as she says in her song "Hair") and to let go of all your fears. She's created a dark romantic album that inspires hope and love.

The album is a passionate and daring tale of love and acceptance.



The Book of Mormon

CD: Original Broadway Cast Recording

Reviewed by Brian Yu
16, Walnut HS

Since I'm not a morning person, I've been popping in The Book of Mormon soundtrack as I get ready for school, because it's hard to be in a bad mood when you're listening to the cast recording of the hit Broadway musical. The play is a satire of the Mormon religion. Elder Price and Elder Cunningham, two Mormon missionaries, journey from Utah to Uganda to convert the villagers.

I like the CD because it has a range of musical styles from Broadway to rock and roll to mimicking Mormon choirs. It starts off with "Hello!," a cheery song that pokes fun at Mormon missionaries who go door to door. The song cleverly uses chimes as a substitute for doorbells. The song includes lyrics like, "This book will change your life" when all of a sudden it is rudely interrupted by a voice shouting, "Hello, would you like to change religions? I have a free book written by Jesus."

The songs mock and pay homage to other musicals. "You and Me (But Mostly Me)" imitates the song "Defying Gravity" from the musical Wicked, with similar themes of rising above the status quo.

The musical is incredibly filthy at times. (What else do you expect from the creators of South Park?) But despite the cussing and dirty jokes, the songs are at their core, heartwarming. It is the story of two friends and the bond that develops between them.

I wouldn't recommend this CD if you're offended by jokes about religion, homosexuality and racial inequality. But if you enjoy raw humor, listen to The Book of Mormon and consider yourself converted.

Despite the cussing and dirty jokes, the songs are at their core, heartwarming.



Beyoncé

CD: 4

Reviewed by Merryck Dickerson
16, Pacifica Christian HS (Santa Monica)

During the American Idol season finale, I was excited to see Beyoncé perform because her album was coming out and I wasn't too impressed with her new song, "Run The World (Girls)." It's a great song to dance to, which she shows in the music video (she looks fierce), but it doesn't show her vocal talent. That night on American Idol she sang "I+1," which is a slow song that she sang flawlessly. I immediately went upstairs to listen to the song again on YouTube. By the end of the night I knew the chorus by heart.

Her new album, 4, is a perfect blend between "Run The World (Girls)" and "I+1." The CD is technically a pop album but the song styles go from R&B with a 90s feel on songs like "Love On Top" and "Rather Die Young," to hip-hop on "Countdown." The album shows her growth from her first CD, Dangerously in Love, which was mostly R&B.

My favorite song is "Best Thing I Never Had," an empowering song. She says, "Did you expect me to care?/ You don't deserve my tears/ I guess that's why they ain't there ... I'm so over you/ Baby good lookin' out." Anyone who has ever felt not good enough or let down in a relationship can connect with these lyrics. The song's message is a lot like "Irreplaceable."

I loved all of the songs except "I Was Here," which is too slow and has an echo behind her that makes the song sound repetitive and annoying. Otherwise, Beyoncé has done it again with another amazing album that hit number one on the charts!

Anyone who has ever felt not good enough or let down in a relationship can connect with these lyrics.

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**NEXT
ORIENTATION:
SATURDAY,
OCT 15
11 A.M. - NOON**



Staff members
judge a photo
contest.

I ENJOY BEING ON THE STAFF of L.A. Youth. I like having a place to express my thoughts and opinions. The weekly staff meetings are a great way to discuss important topics like 9/11, budget cuts and racial diversity with other teens from all over Los Angeles County. Writing for L.A. Youth is fun. I love seeing my finished work in the paper and working with an editor has improved my writing.

—*Jessica Marin, 17, Culver City HS*



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

—*Victor Beteta, 18, University HS*

L.A. youth

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