

the newspaper by and about teens

L.A. youth

LAYOUTH.COM

SEPTEMBER 2006

L.A. adventure p. 14



PHOTO BY KATIE HAVARD, 16, BEVERLY HILLS, HS

ALSO INSIDE

MY ANGER 4 I'LL NEVER FORGET MY FRIEND **8** HELPING IN NEW ORLEANS **10**
BACK PAIN **16** AID TO LEBANON **19** PIPE CLEANER CREATIONS **20**
FEAR OF AIDS **22** ESSENTIAL SOUNDTRACKS **26** TUPAC TRIBUTE **27**

About L.A. Youth

How did L.A. Youth start?

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 18th year of publishing.

How is L.A. Youth doing today?

L.A. Youth now has a readership of 400,000 in Los Angeles County. Hundreds of students have benefited from L.A. Youth's journalism training. Many have graduated from college and have built on their experiences at L.A. Youth to pursue careers in journalism, teaching, research and other fields.

Our Foster Youth Writing Project has brought the stories of teens in foster care to the newspaper. For more info, see www.layouth.com.

How do teens get involved with L.A. Youth?

Teens usually join the staff of L.A. Youth when they read the newspaper and see a notice inviting them to a Newcomer's Orientation. They also get involved through our summer workshop for writers. Sometimes a teacher or parent will encourage them to get involved.

Newcomer's Orientations are held every other month on Saturday mornings. Call for info at (323) 938-9194. Regular staff meetings are held every Saturday from 1 to 3 p.m.

Where is L.A. Youth distributed?

L.A. Youth is distributed free to teachers at public and private schools throughout Los Angeles County. It can also be picked up for free at many public libraries and agencies that provide services to teens.

How is L.A. Youth funded?

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

What's L.A. Youth's mission?

We will provide teens with the highest level of journalism education, civic literacy and job skills. We will strengthen and build our relationships with more teachers to bring relevant issues into the classroom and improve the quality of education. We will reach out to the community to better educate policy makers about teen issues; create a more positive image of teens in the mainstream media; and raise the credibility and awareness of L.A. Youth.

Free copies of L.A. Youth for Los Angeles teachers

L.A. Youth is distributed six times a year free to high school or middle school teachers in most of Los Angeles County. Teachers also can look

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L.A. youth

SENIOR WRITERS: Katherine Lam, Ramona Convent; Selina MacLaren, West Valley Christian Jr./Sr. HS; Sam Rubinroit, Malibu HS.

STAFF: Gabe Andreen, Pilgrim School; Walker Andreen, Pilgrim School; Patricia Arteaga, St. Joseph's HS; Kendall Bass, Harvard-Westlake School; Laura Bliss, Cleveland HS; Melanie Boysaw, S.O.C.E.S.; Kathryn Brown, L.A.C.E.S.; Sally Cho, L.A.C.E.S.; Susan Cho, Cleveland HS; Diana Cooper, Abram Friedman Occupational Center; Vanessa Cordova, Glendale HS; Nicole Del Castillo, St. Joseph's HS; Nadia Economides, Palos Verdes Peninsula HS; Ariel Edwards-Levy, North Hollywood HS; Melissa Etehad, Santa Monica HS; Sarah Evans, Temple City HS; Alana Folsom, Marshall HS; Mindy Gee, L.A.C.E.S.; Genevieve Geoghan, Marlborough School; Katie Havard, Beverly Hills HS; Brett Hicks, Loyola HS; Bailin Hummitsch, The Linden Center; Victoria Imtanes, Fairfax HS; Sylvana Insua-Rieger, Beverly Hills HS; Martin Iseberg, L.A.C.E.S.; Hayden Jacoves, Cleveland HS; Ankush Jindal, Palos Verdes Peninsula HS; Marcus Kazazian, Daniel Murphy Catholic HS; Alex Key, L.A.C.E.S.; Se Kim, Pacifica Christian HS; Charlene Lee, Walnut HS; Chris Lee, Walnut HS; Sara Lee, Crescenta Valley HS; Jowee Lirio, Daniel Murphy Catholic HS; Leira Marte, Notre Dame Academy; Victorino Martinez, Daniel Murphy Catholic HS; Brad Marx; Desiree Matloob, Beverly Hills HS; Shannon Matloob, Beverly Hills HS; Lily McGarr, Santa Monica HS; Brenda Montoya, Schurr HS; Reanna Moon, Hoover HS; Esther Oh, Cleveland HS; Jenny Potter, Arcadia HS; Sandy Ramirez, Fairfax HS; Geraldo Raygoza; Seth Rubinroit, Malibu HS; Sinai Santizo, Sierra Vista HS; Fred Scarf, Birmingham HS; Estee Schwartz, Concord HS; Mel Shin, Whitney HS; Samantha Sumamong, Bishop Alemany HS; Joshua Sushman, Hamilton HS; Nattalie Tehrani, South HS; Ana Tenorio, Orthopedic Hospital Medical Magnet HS; Katherine Trujillo, Notre Dame Academy; Paul Uhlenkott, Hamilton HS; Tanya Vazquez, Downtown Magnets HS; Jennifer Velez, Venice HS; Mar Velez, Venice HS; Angela Wu, Walnut HS; Manuela Yim, Fairfax HS.

PUBLISHER: Donna C. Myrow

MANAGING EDITOR: Elizabeth "Libby" Hartigan

EDITORS: Mike Fricano, Amanda Riddle

ADMINISTRATIVE COORDINATOR: Joanne Resnick

DESIGN CONSULTANT: Tomi Nelkin

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mail

These are letters we received about stories in the May-June 2006 issue of L.A. Youth.

IMMIGRATION WALKOUTS

After reading "Were the walkouts effective?" it really got me thinking about our walkout. At my school a couple students walked out, but I didn't see a reason to go even though I'm Hispanic. Not because I was in favor of HR 4437 [the proposed law that would have made it a crime to be in the United States as an undocumented immigrant], but because I didn't really know what it was about. I watched my friends walk out though, and when the administrators came they all started running. That showed me that they weren't really trying to stand up for something, but that they were just trying to find a way not to go to school.

When I got home I talked to my parents about it and they told me that it was good that I didn't walk out. They told me what HR 4437 was about, and after that I was mad that I didn't walk out. I seriously disagree with it.

Danny Cardenas, Wilson MS (Glendale)

STANDING UP FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

I disagree with the article "A different kind of school" by Genesis Morales. I think that whatever school you attend, you can still do well in your classes. It does not matter if your school has the lowest rank in the world, you can still be a

straight-A student. I don't like the comments about Lincoln High because it has a magnet program. It's very wrong to judge any school in such a short period of time [one day] or by asking a student who doesn't care.

The point is that you don't need to be in a charter school to succeed. Big public schools, like Lincoln, are like the real world: tough, huge, diverse and challenging.

Justin Daniel Casillas, Lincoln HS

A GIRL IN FOSTER CARE MISSES HER MOM

This story was interesting to read. Sometimes I argue with my mom but it never gets to the point of threatening one another.

I don't blame Brandy for hating everyone after her grandfather died. I went through the same experience with my uncle. I always wondered why he had to die. But ... you can't stop living if something goes wrong.

I also believe that things happen for a reason. Going into the system and becoming a ward of the court must have made Brandy want to be more positive. It probably also made her happier. Of course, it's natural to miss your parents if you love them. I think that when Brandy moves to Hawaii that she and her mom will get closer and be a happy family. I only wish the best for her.

Marlow McCurdy, Wilson MS

For more letters see our Web site, www.layouth.com.

Send your letters to L.A. Youth



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

C O N T E N T S

SEPTEMBER 2006

COVER STORY

L.A. adventure 14-15



Taming my anger

Tray spent years fighting until moving to a group home helped him control his rage. **4-5**

Helping in New Orleans

Melissa's youth group was shocked by how bad things still are one year after Hurricane Katrina, but glad they could do their part. **10-11**

Rebel looking for a cause

Brett tried to be like the tough characters in S.E. Hinton's novels, but realized that the books were taking over his life. **12-13**

Back in line

Relief from chronic back pain inspired Esther to be a chiropractor. **16**

A burning question

Teens express their views about the First Amendment right to burn an American flag. **17**

Sending aid to Lebanon

L.A. Youth staffers donated 100 pounds of food and diapers to refugees of the Israel-Hezbollah war. **19**

Pipe cleaner creations

Brad makes intricate dragons, soldiers and guitars out of pipe cleaners. **20**

What do you fear?

Essay contest winners wrote about AIDS, prostitution and riding horses. **22-25**

Essential soundtracks

Katie recommends five top movie soundtracks. **26**

Tupac tribute

Tupac fans say the rapper is still relevant 10 years after his death. **27**



I'll never forget Shiri
8-9

Taming my anger



ILLUSTRATION BY BRIAN LOPEZ-SANTOS, 15, MARSHALL HS

By Tray T., 17

Looking back on my life, I see myself as two people because anger has always been inside me. The old me was something that came out of the pit of hell—evil, powerful and strong. I'd fight people and I didn't care if I hurt them. The new me is someone coming out of the clouds—sweet, charming and loveable, with a sparkle to him. It's been hell getting to where I am now, but I'm proud to be here.

My angry ways began when I was a child. My mother did drugs and couldn't take care of me and my younger brother and sister. She never kept a job but she wasn't

home to take care of us either. She would leave us alone in the house or take us to my aunt's house. When my aunt went to work, my older male cousins sexually abused me. They told me not to tell anyone and if I did, they would do it again.

When I was 7, the police took us away from our mom and we went into foster care. From my mom not being a mom and that horrible thing my cousins did to me, for a long time I felt no one loved me and that everyone was out to hurt me. I kept it in me for a long time, which was a way to be angry about it.

But even though I was safe from my cousins, when I went into foster care I still had problems. In my first foster home, I got into an argument with my foster mom over my hair being so long it came to my lower back. She said that it was feminine and I

said I didn't give a damn. Later that night she came into my room while I was asleep and cut my hair. The next morning, when I woke up and saw my hair on my pillow and bed, I went off. I got a broom, went to her room and hit her in her sleep. Then I went to the living room and destroyed the room.

I moved to another foster home. For the next five years, I never lived in a foster home longer than three to four months. They'd kick me out because I was fighting at school and getting suspended, arguing and cursing them out. I got moved to group homes where I lived with 50 other foster youth. Because of what my cousins did to me, I could not trust the male staff members.

FIGHTING PUMPED ME UP

At one facility, the other boys found out I was gay. My new name became Cup Cakes. That just added to my anger. They took my things and threw water at my face. Once when I was asleep a boy urinated in a cup and threw it on my covers. Another time a boy set my bed on fire when I wasn't there, then he and four other kids jumped me. I beat them up and thrashed their rooms.

The staff felt I was in danger so they moved me to another group home, where I got restrained several times a month for fighting. At almost 300 pounds and especially with my anger, it took five or six staff to pin me. But there was a female staff named Nina who didn't give up on me. It was a slow process, but we started talking and getting to know each other. She encouraged me to go to bowling and skating with the other kids. As I got to know the staff and kids, I got in less fights. For the first time, I started to get along with male staff.

But one day Nina got a better job and she left. I got so angry that I cursed her out and hit a wall. I thought "F*** everything and everybody!" because if she could leave, everyone could. For a few weeks I went back to fighting, yelling and throwing things, until I got over her leaving.

Soon I started secretly going out with this guy I liked. A kid told and it got around to the staff. My therapist told me about GLASS (Gay and Lesbian Adolescent Social Services), which is for gay and lesbian foster kids. I agreed to go because I didn't want the kids at my group home to call me names and try to fight me because I was gay. I was feeling a lot better and didn't want to go backwards. I thought I was going to do good. But I didn't realize I would have to get used to a new environment and new people all over again.

At GLASS, I was the old Tray. Kids knew not to mess with me when I gave my look—rolling my eyes and raising my lip. The whole room would clear when I was going to get into a fight. The staff would have to pull me off. I'd be punished for a week. I couldn't use the phone or TV or go on day outings. Sometimes I liked being that person people were scared of. I had control.

I was going down the wrong path when one day after I'd been at GLASS about six months, a staff person who fills in when the usual staff calls in sick showed up at my group home. She was like a guardian angel. She told us a story about how when she was younger she imagined herself doing different jobs, like being a prostitute, robbing people or picking up trash. Then she imagined herself working with kids and realized that was what she wanted to do with her life. It made me imagine my own

future. I imagined myself hurting somebody and ending up in jail. I imagined myself on the streets.

Around the same time, my social worker was getting fed up. He told the staff that if something else happened, to call the police and take me to jail. I was pissed off, but I was also scared. It was time to straighten up.

But it was hard to change because being angry was all I knew how to be. I took baby steps. I went to therapy. One time I got in an argument with Isabelle, one of the staff at my group home. She wouldn't back down. She said, "I can see something in you. I know you can go far and I'm going to help you." If I was angry because the staff wrote me up for something stupid, I would go to her about it.

I also started to accept that I was gay. When I arrived at GLASS I didn't know there were young people who were openly gay. It was weird seeing gay people who were acting feminine and flamboyant. I always knew

Sometimes I liked being that person people were scared of. I had control.

I was gay but I didn't want to admit it. I realized that GLASS was where I belonged, where I could be open and not be made fun of. One day I said, "I'm gay." The kids said, "Girl, we already knew." I busted out wearing a rainbow belt.

GLASS gives us a place to be who we want without being discriminated, without being afraid to say "I am gay." They tell us, "You have to accept yourself before you accept anyone else" and "How can you love someone if you don't love yourself?"

Being able to be who I am made me happier. I made friends. I started listening to the staff's suggestions for ways to keep calm. When I was mad, I'd count to 10, dance in my room or sit in a chair and listen to my CD player, bobbing my head to the music. Or I'd ignore the person and talk to staff or my friends. I signed up for art and dancing groups.

CHANGE CAME SLOWLY

I still had my ups and downs. One time I went off on a staff at my group home because she didn't know how to cook. Isabelle overheard and pulled me out of the kitchen. We talked about it. I was getting older and I saw I couldn't do these things anymore.

When I was 15 I moved to another group home at GLASS. I became friends with one of the girls, Tiffany. She's a little thing but she was the only person to stand up to me, which made me respect her. We talked about relationships and stuff in our lives. One night at 11 p.m. I was crying. I woke her up and told her, "I need to talk." We stayed up until 2 a.m. just talking. That's something I really need. I know Tiffany isn't going to give up on me.

Everything was going real good. Then on my 16th

birthday I went to my mother's house and my cousin tried to molest me again. I told him I wasn't a child anymore and I was big enough and old enough to defend myself, so he backed off. When I came back, I told my therapist. It was the first time I told someone about what happened to me. I knew that if I wanted to get somewhere that it had to start now. Talking about it made me less angry.

WORDS NOT FISTS

When a new teen named Yvanna came to GLASS, she wrote notes to my close friend Jonathan, who I call my "brother," saying she liked him. Jonathan told me he didn't like her so I wrote back saying to leave him alone. She ripped up the letter. I went up to her and said, "Do you have a problem with me?" She said, "I don't have a problem with you, but if you want to make problems, you can." I was mad but calm. I wanted to let her know

I wasn't there to fight her, but to settle the situation. I said, "I'm very sorry for how I came at you, but Jonathan is my heart." We saw eye to eye and from that day on became friends. I'm proud of myself for making another friend.

I was voted president of the Resident Advisory Board, a group that plans fun activities. In June we set up an open mike. Me, Tiffany and another girl in our house did a dance routine to hip hop and R&B. We laughed and played around as we practiced in the living room, each of us throwing our own moves in. I threw in the splits. I love dancing because it makes me feel like I'm not vulnerable. It puts me in a place where I'm far away and free.

I sometimes visit my brother and sister, who got adopted and live in Lancaster. But I have no contact with my mom; it's too much pain. GLASS is my family. I feel loved. The staff makes me feel like I always have someone to talk to. I know they expect more out of me. It makes me want to do good because I know I will let them down if I mess up.

I still argue and get upset, but I don't go off. When Isabelle left, I didn't know she was leaving until the staff told me she was gone. I told one of the staff at my group home, Dorothea, that I was upset. She told me Isabelle got a promotion. I was mad at her because I didn't get to say good-bye. But this time, I didn't curse or yell. I kept to myself and wrote in my journal. I have to learn how to deal with it when the staff or kids leave me.

When I see other kids acting like beasts—destroying things, fighting, yelling at staff, not listening and not doing what they're supposed to do—I see myself. It's a trip because I think, "Damn, I did that."

Some days it still gets me mad that I felt that pain from my cousins, two people who were supposed to love me. But I think of all the things I went through and I thank God that He got me through it. What I went through is making me stronger.

These days I think about my future and the things that people say I can't do, like that gay, black males won't succeed. People see black males in jail and gangbanging, having babies and not taking care of them. That's not going to be me. Some people say gays are going to hell. I don't believe that. I'm going to prove that I will be successful. I'm not going to jail, I'm graduating from high school and going to college. I am a strong, gay, black male and no one can tell me different.

Are you a foster youth in Los Angeles County?

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

L.A. Youth is looking for foster youth ages 13 to 19 who want to write an article to be published in L.A. Youth.

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Foster Youth Editor Amanda Riddle works with a writer on her story.

They got me through

My foster family gave me a stable home and a chance for a better future

By Teresa Hidalgo

Before I entered the foster care system, I thought that I would walk in the same footsteps as my cousins. I would live in poverty and probably get pregnant at the age of 15 or be addicted to drugs. But everything changed when I met my foster parents. I experienced the support of a caring family and learned about college. At the age of 11, I moved into my foster parents' home with two of my five siblings. It was my third foster home in one year. I thought, "Oh man, here we go again. I need to start all over again, new school, new friends and a new family." I was nervous, but as soon as we moved in, my foster dad made jokes. I saw that my brothers David and Ray were laughing and I relaxed. My foster dad helped my brothers unpack and my foster mother helped me unpack, which is something my previous foster mothers did not do. This made me feel welcome. While my foster mother and I unpacked my clothes, she talked about her family and asked me questions about my family and what things I liked to do. It was important for me to live with a married couple because my parents never married, and it was something I wished they had done. I guess I thought that if they were married, there could have been more stability and maybe we could have been a closer family. Before we went into foster care, my siblings and I had been living with my grandmothers. How come we didn't live with my parents? Well, let me inform you. My mother

PHOTO BY TEREZA HIDALGO. IF YOU WOULD PREFER TO WATCH HER GRADUATE FROM SIERRA VISTA HIGH SCHOOL, THEY ARE FROM LEFT, HER FOSTER FATHER ARMANDO GONZALEZ, TERESA, HER FOSTER MOTHER ROSA GONZALEZ, AND HER FOSTER SISTER, DIANA MEDINA.



24 L.A. YOUTH September 2005

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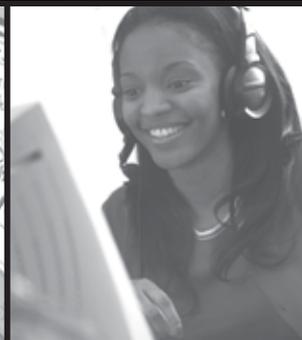
Contact Editor
Amanda Riddle at
(323) 938-9194
or ariddle@layouth.com

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D R E A M B I G



I'll never forget Shiri

PHOTO BY MOLLIE MORROW, 16, MONTCLAIR PREP (VAN NUYS)

Fred organized a party for Shiri's 16th birthday.

By Frederick Scarf

16, BIRMINGHAM HS (LAKE BALBOA)

I met her in study hall at the beginning of freshman year at Montclair Prep. Everyone was sitting with their friends, and they barely noticed this skinny girl in a wheelchair with a John Kerry sticker on it. She hopped out of the chair and sat at the desk right next to mine. Shiri had a kooky high voice, and pretty gray-green eyes. We started talking about recent films, and within minutes we had plans to see a movie.

Before the movie I went to her house. It's not always fun to meet a girl's parents because they tend to jump to the wrong conclusion. They think high school boys only want one thing, which isn't true in my case. As it turned out, they were really nice, and even seemed grateful that Shiri had a friend from school.

Gil, who was Shiri's friend, babysitter and medical assistant all in one, took us and hung out with us at the movie. Before the movie, Shiri told me everything about her life. She was in a wheelchair because she had osteosarcoma, which is bone cancer. In fact she had been sick since she was 11. She had been through chemo and had been held back a year—she had been in the hospital so much, she had barely attended class. Not only that, but her mother had died of a heart attack not long after her diagnosis. It was shocking to hear, but she said it so casually, it was like she had told her story many times before.

While she was talking, I was speechless. I knew that kids could get cancer, but to have a friend be a cancer patient was totally different. I listened carefully but at the same time I wondered, how do I react to what she's telling me? I didn't want to say the wrong thing and make her feel bad. I wanted to act casual, but not so casual that it seemed like I didn't care! I told her I was really sorry and if she ever needed anything, I would be there. She thanked me.

When I went home I couldn't stop thinking of the hardships that she had faced. I thought about all the

things that she was missing because of her illness, like driving, dating, playing sports or even being alone. (She had to have a babysitter with her all the time, just in case.) Even though I felt bad for her, I admired her strength.

The next time I saw her in study hall, she was staring at all the girls around her. I asked her what she was looking at, and it was their long, straight hair. Her cancer treatments made her hair fall out.

I started wheeling her between classes. Sometimes I'd pretend to wheel her into the wall, or down some stairs, and she'd start screaming. I'd laugh and she'd tell me it wasn't funny and hit me. Sometimes she would laugh, too. Many people told me I was doing a great thing being friends with Shiri, and I always told them that it wasn't community service and even if it was, she should be getting the hours for tolerating my lame jokes.

PRETTY SOON EVERYONE KNEW HER

As the months went by, Shiri became semi-famous on campus. Everybody would say hi, and she always had plans for lunch with different friends. It's hard to explain her charisma; she was as charming and fun as Tweety Bird, with a mischievous side.

I'll never forget the day we spent at Universal Studios. Of course I've been to Universal many times, but with her it was a new adventure. After we went on the Back to the Future ride, my friend and I started wheeling Shiri full throttle down the exit ramp. We were all laughing and yelling until a security guard appeared out of nowhere and said, "Don't ever do that again or we'll kick you out of this park!" We said, "Oh, OK sorry!" It was a blast being a troublemaker with Shiri.

Later that fall, when Shiri was hospitalized for chemotherapy, I visited her frequently. She spent most of December in the hospital. On Christmas Eve, my family stayed up with her, building gingerbread houses out of graham crackers and pink frosting, exchanging presents, watching TV and taking photos. As the night

wore on, the lights turned off in the other rooms and it seemed as though the only other people who were awake were the nurses. It felt like we were having a secret party. Later, when Shiri fell asleep I gave her a little kiss on the cheek.

She soon came out of the hospital, but she wasn't well. Since she wasn't at school much, I decided to throw her a party for her 16th birthday and invited all her friends. When she walked through the doors of California Pizza Kitchen holding her walker, there were 17 of us waiting for her. We started clapping. Everyone in the whole restaurant turned to look and started clapping too. She said, "Stop it, you guys are going to make me cry!" She looked shy and happy, and so pretty in her white outfit, bandanna and gypsy makeup.

During the party, friends tried to get me to kiss Shiri. They'd say, "Ooh, look at those lovebirds!" We just brushed it off and Shiri said, "I'm not kissing anyone!" We spent the whole night goofing around, pretending to fight each other with our table knives and having a blast. I later found out that she had been planning her outfit for a week. It was a big deal for all of us, because I knew she couldn't go out much. In the back of my mind, I thought this could be her last birthday.

Later that spring, Shiri started to have seizures and her parents rushed her to City of Hope hospital, which specializes in cancer treatment. This is when they found out that there were 12 tumors in her lungs.

My family and I started to visit her once, twice or three times a week in the hospital. It was sad to see her hooked up to an IV tube, and she always seemed tired. It was harder to have hope, but I was always thinking that the new medicine might help.

On the 4th of July, my family had a party with her family in her hospital room. Shiri was her spunky self, taking pictures with us, making fun of people on TV and nibbling the delicious food that Shiri's stepmom made, from salad to chips to burritos.

Soon after that party, Shiri seemed to get worse. She was rarely awake, and when she was, she was drowsy and had trouble sitting up. Sometimes she was delu-



Shiri (left) goofed around at the pool with her friend Alexandra.

PHOTO BY GIL PROLZE



She posed with her fallen “gingerbread house” made from graham crackers while she was hospitalized at Christmastime.

PHOTO BY ALEXANDRA SCARF, 16, MONTCLAIR PREP

She was as charming and fun as Tweety Bird, with a mischievous side.

sional, and didn't know who everyone was. The most conversation she could manage was “Hi.”

One time, Shiri was laying there with her eyes closed and asked me “Fred, when are we going on our date?” “When you get out of the hospital we will go,” I said. I wasn't too surprised because I had a feeling that she had a crush on me. Then Shiri asked, “What are we going to do?” “How about a movie?” I said. Shiri cried, “That's it? You cheapskate!” I was laughing and said “Fine, *dinner* and a movie.”

As her condition became more critical, she was given more drugs, which blurred her vision. One time, my family, Shiri's brother and sister were gathered around her as she slept. When she woke up, she seemed disoriented and asked if she could go to Disneyland. Her sister said “Soon we will go when you get better.” Shiri started crying and begging to go to Disneyland. Her sister started crying and tried to explain that Shiri had to get better first. Trying to distract her, she said, “Look, Fred's here!”

“Fred?” she asked.

“Hey Shiri,” I called out. Shiri turned her head in my direction, not sure where I was. Heartbreaking isn't even a word to describe how painful it was to see my best friend like this.

One night in August, after my sister got back from the hospital, I asked her how Shiri was. She said, “She was in her prettiest, pinkest dress, and she told me to tell you that she is ready for that kiss.” My parents told me that the doctor had said that Shiri probably only had 48 hours left.

The next morning, I got up early to take the bus to the hospital, but as I was waiting, my dad called to say that Shiri had passed away during the night. It didn't sink in at first. I walked back home and when I got

home I cried on the living room couch. The thing that was so devastating was that I never got to say goodbye to her.

The word spread quickly. When I looked at MySpace, all kinds of random people had posted bulletins about her death on their pages. People called me to find out if it was true. Even as I was confirming that she had died, I couldn't believe it myself. Even after her dad asked me to speak at her funeral, and I started writing down my thoughts, I still couldn't believe that she was gone. At first, I wondered what to say. I didn't want to give a big emotional speech. I wanted to show everyone what it was like to be Shiri's friend, and what a big goof Shiri had been, and I decided to wear white rather than black to celebrate her life.

I DIDN'T WANT PEOPLE TO SEE ME CRY

Within a week, the funeral was held at Forest Lawn in Glendale. As I looked at the photos of Shiri set up near the podium, and listened to the slow, peaceful sounds of the harp player nearby, it suddenly hit me that Shiri wasn't here anymore. I felt really empty, like I was dead, too, in a way. I was so shattered, I went to the bathroom and cried. But I didn't want anyone to see me and make the day even more emotional, so I pulled myself together and went to talk with some friends who had arrived.

When it was my turn to speak, I approached the podium and looked out at the sad people dressed in black. Some were sobbing. Many of Shiri's friends from Montclair came, even the principal. When I tried to talk, I couldn't get any words out at first. Then I took a deep breath, looked down at my paper and read my speech. I talked about how Shiri and I were so dorky and funny,

and all the things we had done, like the time we went way too fast at Universal Studios, the times when we saw scary movies or ate unbelievably spicy pasta. Pretty soon people were laughing. Later at the reception, older people would come up to me and say, “OK, you don't know me but you are so great!” and they would give me a big kiss.

The thing I will never forget from the funeral was her sister's speech. She spoke about how Shiri always wanted long, straight hair, but every time she'd start growing it out, she'd have another round of chemotherapy and have to shave it all off. Her sister said that she could picture Shiri in heaven with her long beautiful hair being brushed by her mother. I thought it was the perfect thing to say, even though it made everyone cry.

Even now, a year later, it is hard to accept that Shiri is gone, that there will be no more dinners, beach visits or gingerbread houses with her. To many people, her death is a thing of the past, but I miss her every day.

In honor of Shiri, I have started a nonprofit foundation which is dedicated to raising money and awareness to support research for the cancer that killed her, osteosarcoma, which doesn't get as much attention as other forms of cancer. The goal of The Shiri Foundation is to raise money to prolong the lives of people with osteosarcoma. Ultimately, perhaps a cure for the disease will be discovered. Words could never describe the pain that Shiri and her loved ones suffered. To prevent others from suffering that much pain would be a dream come true for me. I love you, Shiri.

Fred, who transferred to Birmingham High this year, is in the process of building a Web site for The Shiri Foundation at www.shiri.org. Check it out.

HELPING IN NEW ORLEANS

My youth group was shocked at how bad things still are, but glad that we could be do our part



Melissa's church youth group volunteered to help a New Orleans man remove the damaged floors and walls of his house.



Wrecked houses, homes marked with the spray-painted "X" left by flood rescue workers, and piles of garbage still dominate the landscape in New Orleans, Louisiana, a year after Hurricane Katrina hit.



PHOTOS BY MELISSA ETEHAD, 15, SANTA MONICA HS

By Melissa Etehad
15, SANTA MONICA HS

When I told my friends that I was going to New Orleans this summer to help Hurricane Katrina survivors, they seemed puzzled. "You know, you're not going to have fun," one told me.

It's hard to explain why I signed up for a week of construction work in New Orleans with my church youth group. I think it was the memory of those images on TV after the levees broke and the city was flooded, the desperate people pleading for help on their rooftops, and bodies laying on the street, covered with towels, because there was no way to bury them. I wanted to be part of the solution to rebuild New Orleans. I wanted to make a difference.

When our group of 16 teens and five adults flew to New Orleans in July, we were optimistic. I figured that there would still be some areas in the city that needed help, but a year later, that things would be getting back to normal. As we drove from the New Orleans airport to the church where we would be staying, we learned the truth.

Everyone in our van was quiet, looking out the windows. My mouth dropped open as I saw houses with

missing roofs and shredded siding, still marked from the high flood waters and rescue operations. The rescue workers had spray painted each house with a large "X" and a number to indicate how many people died there. Many survivors were still living in trailers or even tents. There was so much destruction, I almost felt like I was watching a movie. My friends were shocked too:

"Wow."

"Oh my gosh."

"Look at that house—it's completely gone."

That night we laid out our sleeping bags at Rayne Memorial United Methodist Church, which has set up its choir room, youth room and lounge areas as a type of hostel for volunteers who have come to help since the hurricane. We were hungry, excited and ready to get to work.

The next day, we went to Bethany United Methodist Church nearby, where the pastor greeted us with hugs and a wide smile. Our church, First United Methodist Church of Santa Monica, has been trying to help Bethany through this crisis by sending donations and volunteer help. Our team quickly got to work on the landscaping, removing rocks and weeds and planting trees, grass and flowers. While we were working, the local newspaper, The Times-Picayune, came to photograph us and interviewed several members of the team.

I didn't get interviewed, though. I spent the day on my knees, pulling out weeds in the rain. By the end of the

day I felt exhausted and my back was aching, but I was happy. Seeing the pretty green grass and flowers in the middle of a ruined neighborhood, I felt like it was sending a message of hope to the whole community.

As we were finishing up, a man from the church approached us. He explained that the church was everything to him, and we were making a difference, and he started to cry. Even though we were all covered with mud, he gave everyone a hug and kissed us.

That evening after dinner, we all came together in a circle. One by one, we stood, holding candles, to describe our most memorable moment of the day. It was emotional as some people talked about finding the inner strength to do this work. One said she had regained her faith. I talked about the man who had approached us in tears. A lot of us were teary-eyed. We were beginning to realize what a big deal it was, just for us to be there and help out.

THE HOUSE WAS DEVASTATED

The next day our work began on the house we were assigned to. It was awful to see the damage. The floodwaters had been more than six feet high and everything in the house was still there, the pictures, furniture, clothes and dishes. Our first step was to put on our safety gear—respirators, goggles and Tyvek suits, which are kind of like space suits. We had to protect ourselves from the toxic flood waters that had soaked the house



Melissa's youth group danced in a circle every time they finished demolishing a room in the house.



The volunteers posed for a group shot, some still wearing the masks and white Tyvek suits intended to protect them from the mold and toxic substances left by the floodwaters. Melissa is in front.

and the mold that was everywhere.

As we gathered our crowbars and hammers, the owner of the house showed up. The expression on his face was numb and his eyes seemed glazed. His voice was hollow and monotone as he politely thanked each of us for being there. He asked us to just throw everything away. He stayed for 15 minutes and left. It seemed like he didn't want to be there too long.

Before we could get to demolishing the house itself, we cleared the debris—everything that was destroyed in the flood. We made huge piles on the front lawn of furniture, his wife's wedding dress and fancy clothes, a collection of hats, towels, dishes, bills, cans of food, toothbrushes, medications. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) would come by later to pick up the trash, which we had to sort into clothes, wood, ceramic and glass, and drywall, which is the stuff walls are made of.

In spite of what the owner had said, we saved the family photos, a Mother's Day card, Biblical scriptures that had been tacked to the wall, and the ornament from his wedding cake. Our counselor put them in a box to give the owner later.

Then we started the actual demolition—we had to remove everything but the bare wood structure of the house. Our counselor assigned two people to each room. In my room, I didn't really know where to start. My friend took the hammer and slammed it into the wall and I copied her. After about four to five hits, I took the back end of the hammer and pulled the drywall toward me and half of the section of the wall suddenly came down. It was fun to see the walls crash down, but after an hour, my Tyvek suit and respirator were drenched with sweat. Feeling claustrophobic, I took off my face mask and the sour, decaying smell of the house hit me. I had to step outside to get a breath of clean air.

We spent the next four days demolishing walls and floors, shoveling the debris into a wheelbarrow, and rolling the heavy material outside. Each time we finished a room, our counselor would call us over to do a "jig," a funny dance where we hopped around in a circle, which was a great way to keep our spirits high. We sang songs and checked on each other to make sure we were doing OK. That was important because two of my friends actually collapsed with heat exhaustion and had to rest in the car with the air conditioning on.

When people drove by, and saw us with our face masks and Tyvek suits, they would honk to show their support, or drive slowly, say "Hi" and wave. Some people stopped their cars to look through the debris on the front lawn for anything usable.

At the end of each day, I was exhausted. None of us had ever worked so hard in our lives. My counselor, who had been doing such service projects since he was a teenager, said this was the hardest one he had ever done.

THE SCENE OF THE DISASTER

One day after work, we drove through the Lower Ninth Ward, which is the neighborhood right next to the levees. The unreal images I saw that day will haunt me for the rest of my life. Entire houses had been taken off the ground and slammed on top of cars, and shoved next to other houses. One house was laying on its side, exposing its basement. A year before, the whole place had been under water. We saw the holes people had chopped in their own roofs and climbed out so they wouldn't drown in their houses. The lawns were scattered with clothes, bikes, wood, tires and rusty cars with broken windshields. Four-lane roads stood empty of traffic.

I saw a busful of tourists, taking pictures. One tourist got out and posed, smiling, next to a house smashed by

a tree. We saw signs such as "Tourist free zone," "Not as seen on TV" and "Need Help and Donations." Some homeowners had spray painted red or black messages on their houses, such as "Where's FEMA?" and "This was my home."

But that wasn't the worst of it. The area close to where the levees broke was like a ghost town. The houses that once stood there had been shoved back hundreds of yards and all that was left were the foundation bricks and scattered wood. It was literally block after block of nothing. I felt a surge of emotions—shock, fear, sadness. I imagined the thousands of families that had nothing. I thought about the destruction stretching for hundreds upon hundreds of miles, and nothing was being done to fix it. It made me want to help even more.

After four days, our team had finished all the rooms. We left the ceilings and some floors for the next volunteer crew. Once that was done, the house would be ready for new floors and walls and be liveable again. I was relieved that it was over and really proud of the work we had done.

Looking back, I can honestly say it was fun. Not fun like going to the movies, or the beach, but in the sense that I know I made a difference. When I was working with everyone on our team, I felt so connected and powerful. Even though we're not used to doing demolition, we did it the right way and we got a lot done.

Seeing the losses that people in New Orleans suffered has also made me appreciate what I have. It has made me more aware of how fragile life is—not just our lives, but our communities as well. One day, everything could be normal, and the next day, everything's changed and won't ever be back to normal. But I also know that if it happens, there will be people out there who do care. Maybe not FEMA, but someone will care.

Rebel looking for a cause

S.E. Hinton's books almost took over my life

By Brett Hicks

14, LOYOLA HS

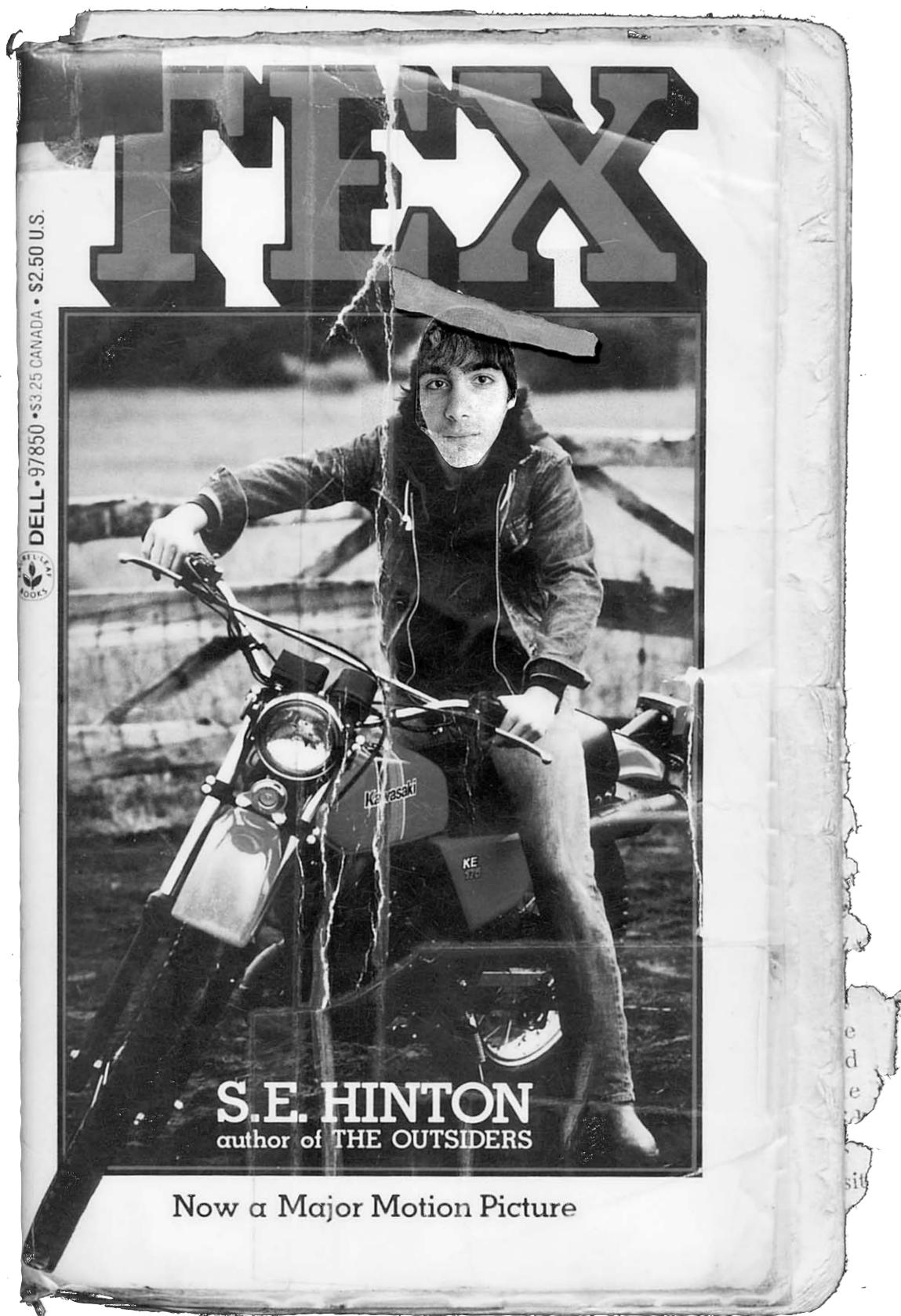
When I was in seventh grade, I entered my "jackass year," a year I will always regret but as I look back, it seems almost funny to me.

My older brother introduced me to an author, S.E. Hinton, who wrote books like *Rumble Fish*, *The Outsiders* and *Tex*. The characters in these books grew up on the wrong side of the tracks, fighting, selling drugs, dropping out of school and even committing murder (but only because they had to). It seemed so appealing compared to my boring life. For me, every day was the same: wake up, have breakfast, go to school, have dinner and go to sleep.

Rusty-James in the book *Rumble Fish* was one character that inspired me. He was a rebel who lived in a crummy apartment in the inner city. I read the book over and over to be more like him. He would go to parties and get drunk and get in fights. He was quick on his feet and always knew the right thing to do at the right time. For example, when he fought a rival gang member who held a blade, Rusty tried to get the knife away from him. He won the fight, but his rival slashed him across the ribs. Then Rusty's brother joined the fight and his enemy backed off.

The fights I got into were nothing like that. One time, my friend told me he wanted to fight me in the school bathroom, I didn't know why. He punched me in the back and I pushed him against the wall, he jabbed me in the stomach and I tried to get one of his legs but then it was time for class so I just left. After all, I did not want to get a broken bone or get in trouble.

In another scene, Rusty-James and his older brother break into a pet store late one night and set all the pets free, even the fish. The brother had a plan to take the fish to a nearby river, but the police came. I knew they would—you are going to get busted if you act that way. The older brother gets shot and the younger one gets arrested. It seemed so pointless to see them get that harsh punishment just because they wanted to set animals free. It was hard to read that part of the book but I loved reading it. Whenever I read the book, I formed an image in my mind of a dark, mysterious city with smoke rising



from the sewers. I imagined a life where I would fight, drink and smoke constantly, get beat up—you name it.

I couldn't get my mind off those books. I photocopied the book covers and taped them inside my locker, sort of as a shrine. I felt a sense of freedom that I had decorated my locker, especially since my school told us not to. It was like a little tiny place where I could escape.

My parents would go into my room and find me reading the same S.E. Hinton books. They kept telling me to try some different genres. You think I listened? I would bring the books to school every day, and friends made fun of me. They asked me, "Do you SLEEP with those books? Do you go to the bathroom with them?" Whenever my family took us on trips, I took the books, hidden in my backpack so my parents wouldn't find out. I didn't want another lecture about how there are more important things in life than kids who live in the country, screwing around and messing up, and you don't get anywhere from that.

The character, Tex, fascinated me because his life was such a struggle. He lived in the country. His dad had abandoned him so he lives with his 17-year-old brother. To buy groceries and pay bills, they sell their horses and have summer jobs mowing lawns and cashiering at a grocery store—a life that I wanted to have. I wanted to prove that I was not a rich, spoiled brat who does not know anything about the real world. But it didn't seem fair to have my family go into debt just so I could see what it would be like. My parents fought to give me opportunities that I couldn't just throw away.

I WASN'T VERY GOOD AT REBELLING

I liked the idea of being violent and extreme—I wanted to be a tough, struggling rebel so people would respect me—but somehow it did not fit my life. For one thing, I went to St. Martin of Tours, a strict Catholic school where nothing ever happened. For another, I didn't want to end up arrested or maybe even shot. So I did my best in DRESSING and TALKING like the characters I read in those books. While all around me kids were wearing baggy shorts and Led Zeppelin T-shirts, the clothes I wore to imitate Tex were plain T-shirts, tight jeans and New Balance tennis shoes. I would tuck in my shirts. My friends asked me, "Are you gay?" And my brother asked, "Why the hell are you tucking in your shirts?" Every sentence I would use the word "ain't." I rebelled in little ways, like decorating my locker. I occasionally talked back to my parents. I came late to history class one day (and had to write a long essay on why I should not be tardy).

My biggest rebellion came during a religious service at school. During that year, I became good friends with a classmate who was an atheist. We were both in school mass on Ash Wednesday. During the Holy Eucharist, when everyone was going to the altar and receiving the host (a wafer that represents the body of Christ), I saw my friend stay in his seat. I decided to stay in my seat also so I could find out what would happen.

My principal noticed us sitting there. She walked over to us and told us to go up to the altar and stop disrespecting the church. I went up and received the host and got the ash on my forehead. I don't know why but Catholics always get ashes on Ash Wednesday. After mass, I washed it off but left a little bit on. The principal then called me to her office and asked me, why are you

here if you're not Christian?

I didn't say anything, but I thought that was pretty stupid since people of all religions should be welcome at my school. Plus, I thought taking communion was optional. When I told my mom, she was livid. She kept yelling at me that I was not supposed to speak out saying that I was an atheist. She asked me how I would get into Loyola if I got kicked out of St. Martin? I started to get scared, and I began to wonder if maybe I had disrespected my religion, as my principal said.

IT WAS TIME TO CHANGE

Over the summer, it seemed to me that I was going too far. Being a follower of S.E. Hinton's stories was controlling my mind, and I was turning into a jackass. I knew I was not going to get anywhere by trying to live by what I read in a book. I wanted to be myself again, an individual who had the courage to have his own opinions, make his choices by himself, dress how he wanted to dress, talk how he wanted to talk. I was not about to have a goddamn 150-page book ruin my life.

It was complicated and hard to be normal; trying to put the books down and read other books that challenged my S.E. Hinton-like mind. I read *The Things They Carried*, a novel about the Vietnam War, and *The Catcher in the Rye*, and the whole time I was trying to see if they related to S.E. Hinton. Just like someone quitting smoking, I had to resist the temptation of going back to what I knew.

My interests have branched out. Today, I would rather watch movies than read. I like science fiction, drama, military/war, comedies and movies on surviving in the ghetto. I am a big 1980s fan, am into the skate scene, admire my brother at times, and have become an environmental, hippie-like liberal. I watch the old TV show *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air 24/7* and I'm into classic rap albums like *The Chronic*, *Doggystyle* and the music of Tupac. I support racial equality, freedom of religion, women's rights and gay rights. I also collect hats from the early 90s.

Devoting my time to L.A. Youth has given me a chance to meet different kids with their own problems, which lets me know I am not the only teenager with problems. I also hang out with my friends, sleep constantly and never do my homework just like a regular teenager. Instead of wishing I could read S.E. Hinton, I wish I had a TV in my room (my parents feel it would distract me from my homework).

If you want to read S.E. Hinton, go ahead and have fun. But don't be stupid enough to follow something that's just written on paper. You have the choice of reading a book and letting it rule your mind, or putting it down and saying, "That's a good book, now I'll find another book to read."



Brett thinks teens should earn respect in positive ways, like sports or being a good person.

An excerpt from Rumble Fish by S.E. Hinton:

“We have decided that we can no longer tolerate your kind of behavior.” [The guidance counselor] went on to list all the things I'd been sent to the office for that year: fighting, swearing, smoking, sassing the teacher, cutting classes...

“It was quite a list, but I already knew about it. He acted like he was telling me something I didn't know about. My mind went kind of blank. There was something about Mr. Harrigan that made my mind go kind of blank, even when he was swatting me with a board, like he had two or three times before.

“All of a sudden I realized that he was kicking me out of school.” (page 62)

Back in line

Years of back pain have inspired me to become a chiropractor

By Esther Oh
16, CLEVELAND HS

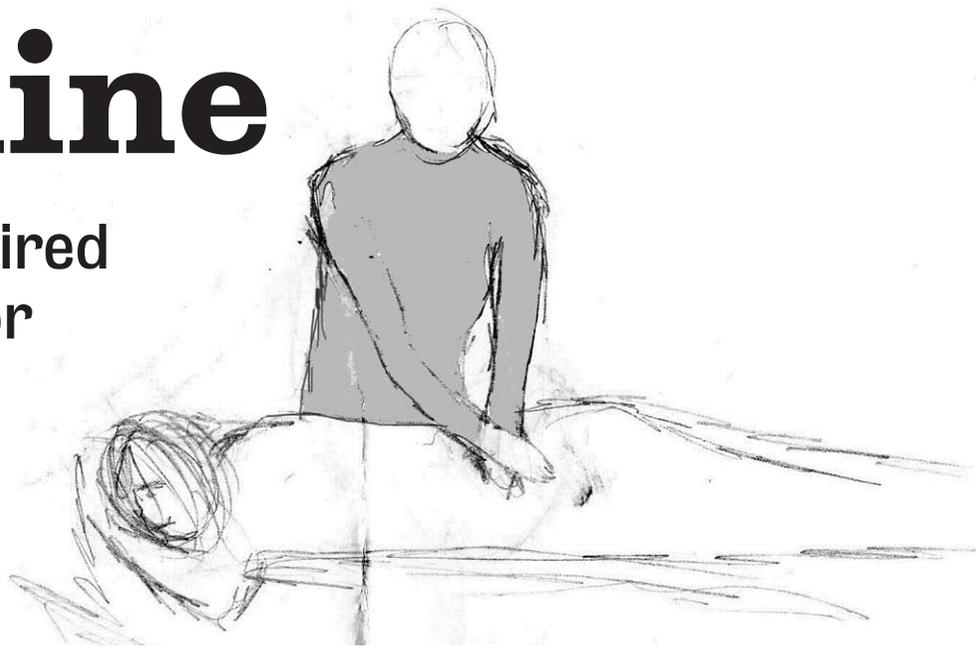


ILLUSTRATION BY ESTHER OH, 16, CLEVELAND HS

When I was younger, I never considered a career in medicine. I hated math and science; my interests were art, media and literature. However, my views about healthcare and my career changed after a chiropractor helped fix years of back problems in a few weeks.

I've had back problems since I was a kid. I would get a stiff neck when I studied, washed dishes, or just concentrated for five minutes. When I tried to lift things it would feel like knives stabbing into the base of my neck, and the muscles along my spine turned into knots. Some nights I couldn't sleep because of agonizing pain—the only way I could go to bed was if someone gave me a massage or my little brother stepped on my back!

It never occurred to me that these problems were unusual for someone my age. I thought that I had pain because of bad posture. I tried sitting up straight sometimes, but it didn't help.

In seventh grade, I learned that I had scoliosis. I didn't know what it was, but it sounded scary. When I went to the doctor for an X-ray I saw that the lower half of my spine was curved to the right, and that the upper half was curved to the left (like an "S"). This caused my left shoulder to be higher than my right, and my right leg to be longer than my left. Looking at the X-ray, I could finally see my problem and not just feel it.

Unlike a regular doctor visit, no one gave me pills, syrup or ointment to treat the problem. I was told that my curved spine was a birth defect and that it wasn't bad enough for me to wear a back brace. Basically I could do nothing to correct it. I wasn't too upset. I didn't want a back brace, and I had lived with the pain for so long.

I wasn't the only one in my family with back problems. At the end of seventh grade my mom was severely injured. She fell backwards and ended up bed-ridden for months. An MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) scan showed that the tissue inside my mom's pelvis was infected—the result of years of downplaying her pain.

For the next three years my mom couldn't drive. I had to ask for rides everywhere, take the bus or walk. She couldn't do housework and had to quit her part-time job, making our family's budget tighter. Trying to take over for her and be a student exhausted me. But after a few

months I got used to the constant pain and stress.

Then last December I started having stomach pains and problems digesting food. For the next few months, I got stomachaches almost every time I ate. I tried antacid or Pepto-Bismol, but nothing worked for more than a few days. I eventually started to hate eating.

MY CHIROPRACTOR MADE ME FEEL MUCH BETTER

In April, my mom and I got into a minor car accident and we went to a chiropractor to get checked out. I thought it would help with my car accident injuries like whiplash—I didn't realize the chiropractor would have such a big impact on my life.

After taking a couple X-rays it was my turn to be examined. The chiropractor, Joy, pressed her hands under my ears and asked me if I had pain there. I did. Then I turned over on my stomach and she pressed her fingers down my spine. She asked whether I had any digestion problems.

"Yeah, I do!" I said, amazed that she could figure that out after a few seconds of touching my back. She explained that my curved spine was pressing against my pancreas, affecting my digestion.

At my next appointment, the X-rays showed that two bones in my neck were fused together, appearing to be one large bone instead of separate ones. This explained the sharp pain and stiffness in my neck. Later, I learned that one of my upper ribs wasn't straight, also contributing to my neck pain. It was so cool that she could diagnose me after some quick observations—I wanted to be able to do that, too.

My mom and I spent the next six weeks going to the chiropractor. At every session, we'd lie down and Joy would attach small pads to our backs and necks to send electric currents to relax the tense muscles. Then we'd each take turns getting something cracked by the chi-

ropractor, which is called "being adjusted." Knowing I'd get nervous if she warned me ahead of time, Joy would crack my neck without warning during our conversations. The crack was loud enough to sound like it should hurt, but it didn't—it actually felt really relaxing immediately after. Soon, I stopped getting stomachaches, and my mom's back started to get re-aligned.

I was surprised to see that my chiropractor seemed to love what she did. I hadn't understood that medical jobs were fueled by a passion to help people. And I was wrong about doctors being stuffy and boring—Joy is a mom with cute kids, who likes interior design, art (just like me) and pizza.

The rapid improvement of my mom's and my health and a strange curiosity about the human body have inspired me to become a chiropractor. Right now, I'm doing as much as I can to learn about the body—I read basic books about health and try to catch stuff on TV. To incorporate the things I've learned into my life, I stretch and get a massage every day. I plan to take college-level anatomy and physiology classes during high school. I want to major in biology in college and then get a doctorate in chiropractic medicine. One day I'll open up my own clinic, and perhaps write a book to educate the public about the importance of spinal alignment. But for now, I'm enjoying getting a good night's sleep without needing my brother to walk on my back.



Esther thinks that people shouldn't ignore their back problems (like she did).

How do you become a chiropractor?

Education: Four years chiropractic college, during which you'll study classes like anatomy, physiology and pathology as well as learn techniques for adjusting someone's spine.

Average salary: \$102,000
Source: www.MakeItInScrubs.com

Two chiropractic schools in Los Angeles County

Cleveland Chiropractic College
590 N. Vermont Ave.
Los Angeles, CA 90004
(800) 466-CCLA
www.clevelandchiropractic.edu

Southern California University of Health Sciences
16200 E. Amber Valley Drive
Whittier, CA 90604
(800) 221-5222
www.scuhs.edu

A burning question

Is it a crime to burn the American flag as an act of political protest?

The correct answer is **no**. The Supreme Court ruled in *Texas v. Johnson* (1989) and in *United States v. Eichman* (1990) that burning the flag is protected free speech. Unfortunately, in an L.A. Youth survey in January testing readers' knowledge of their First Amendment rights, only 43 percent answered this question correctly.

In late June the U.S. Senate fell just one vote short of approving an amendment to the Constitution that essentially would have made burning an American flag a crime.

Sixty-six U.S. senators, including California Senator Diane Feinstein, voted in favor of the amendment. California Senator Barbara Boxer voted against the proposed amendment.

L.A. Youth decided to find out what some teens in Los Angeles thought of flag burning and whether it should be illegal. These interviews were conducted by Melanie Boysaw, 15, S.O.C.E.S.; Azadeh Hosseini, 17, California Academy of Math and Science; Chris Lee, 16, Walnut HS; Shannon Matloob, 15, Beverly Hills HS; and Lily McGarr, 16, Santa Monica HS.



ILLUSTRATION BY SAHYIM "SAGE" CHUNG,
L.A. YOUTH ARCHIVES

SHOULD FLAG BURNING BE ILLEGAL?



"I don't think it's right. Why would you do that? I mean, I know some people who would die for the flag. You must really, really, really, not like your country. It's disrespectful."

Jashon Hampton,
17, FAIRFAX HS



"I would feel disrespected if someone I knew burned the flag. I'm totally offended. Yet, I understand how it is protected by the First Amendment."

Jacob Bouzajlou,
18, SANTA MONICA COLLEGE



"No, because it expresses what people think and it's freedom of speech. Even though it's OK to do it, I would never because I think it's disrespectful."

Gemina Rustrian,
16, LOS ANGELES HS



"Yes, because ... it [the flag] represents the country."

Margarita Dimatulac,
17, MARSHALL HS



"I'm not offended by flag burning at all, it's an individual's choice and it is protected by the First Amendment."

Riza Soriano,
16, FAIRFAX HS



"No, we have rights and we should be able to have the right to burn flags but we should have limits."

Markus Lingao,
18, DANIEL MURPHY CATHOLIC HS



"No, it interferes with the First Amendment rights."

Jill Casimiro,
17, BEVERLY HILLS HS

First Amendment: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

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Sending aid to Lebanon



Alana Folsom, 15, of Marshall HS; Ana Tenorio, 16, of Orthopedic Hospital Medical Magnet HS and Sarah Evans, 16, of Temple City HS, packed boxes with rice, sugar, cooking oil and lentils to send to refugees in Lebanon.



Background on the recent conflict

Violence broke out in the region after Hezbollah, which the U.S. considers a terrorist group, sent fighters from Lebanon into Israel, where they killed three soldiers and took two hostage on July 12, according to news accounts. Israel responded with bombs and troops. Hezbollah launched rockets into northern Israel.

Israel dropped leaflets throughout southern Lebanon, urging people to leave home so they would not be bombed. This led an estimated 850,000 to head north or go to neighboring Syria.

More deaths were reported each day. By the time a United Nations-initiated ceasefire began August 14, about 1,000 Lebanese and 159 Israelis had been killed, according to BBC news reports. People who had fled Israeli bombing in southern Lebanon have returned home and the U.S. government has since pledged \$230 million in aid to Lebanon.

To make donations, contact:

- WorldVision.org
- MercyCorps.org
- Catholic Relief Services (www.crs.org)
- New Israel Fund (nif.org)

In July, after war broke out between Israel and Hezbollah, one of L.A. Youth's writers, Beeta Baghoolizadeh, asked our teen staff to help send humanitarian aid to displaced people in Lebanon and the Palestinian territories. Her request was prompted by the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), which had issued an appeal for humanitarian aid. "A strong humanitarian response by the American people will send a powerful message of hope and support to the Lebanese and Palestinian men, women and children caught up in the current humanitarian disaster," said CAIR Executive Director Nihad Awad in the organization's official press release.

As the Bush administration was describing Israel's fight against Hezbollah as part of the global war on terror, we sent an e-mail to the 90 members of our staff asking for food and diapers.

Three teens responded right away that they would be helping out. Another wrote to ask why we were sending aid, wasn't that just encouraging the violence? He decided to write something on why he opposed sending aid. A few days later he changed his mind, saying, "I guess I'm just upset because the Middle East is home to two of the oldest religions and it angers me that some do the opposite of what they're taught."

Ultimately, nine teens responded to our appeal, contributing 100 pounds of food and diapers, and \$80 to help cover shipping costs. Here's what some of them wrote about why they contributed:

I wanted to help others caught in the violence

I followed the news closely the first few weeks of the conflict. At one point, I broke down in tears because of the disturbing articles I was reading about the death toll and number of refugees struggling to find a haven. When a friend asked whether I was interested in sending some flour and sugar to Lebanon, I knew that I had to help. We're blessed to live in America, and because of this blessing I feel it's our duty to help other people in need.

I realized that sending a few bottles of cooking oil on my own wasn't going to make much of an impact. I wanted to get others to care about what's going on. I wanted to make a difference.

As an L.A. Youth staff writer, I decided to ask L.A. Youth to help organize a food drive among the diverse staff. I didn't consider that someone might think we're taking a political stand or trying to help terrorists. For me, it was a matter of reaching out to people who need my help. I felt like it would be the best way to get assistance from people who may not have otherwise done anything for Lebanon. Beyond that, it would catch the attention of the students on staff, and maybe others would organize food drives.

My expectations for the food drive were realistic—I knew only a handful of people would show up. But I didn't expect so much support during the staff meeting afterward. No one at the meeting seemed to oppose

what we were doing. Everyone recognized the importance of looking beyond race and religion and seeing humans, just like us.

—**Beeta Baghoolizadeh**, 18, Palos Verdes Peninsula HS (graduated)

I didn't see it as choosing sides

Donating food to Lebanese relief efforts isn't choosing Lebanon over Israel, nor is it commending Hezbollah. I feel that by donating food I am helping innocent people who have been affected by this war. When I see child-size coffins on the news I realize that this war has far outreached captured Israeli and Lebanese soldiers, and political affiliations in the Middle East.

—**Alana Folsom**, 15, John Marshall HS

Our project was worthwhile

Trying to help a tiny sliver of the millions of people innocently trapped in the violence seemed so pointless to me at first, but through this project I feel like I've come to understand a little bit more about what's going on. And it's not politics, it's people, just like me, who, regardless of their race, backgrounds, religion or anything that could divide us, need help. Even just understanding this point and being tolerant helps.

—**Machiko Yasuda**, 17, Palos Verdes Peninsula HS (graduated)



Pipe cleaner creations



By Brad Marx, 17

I like to make things from pipe cleaners. You might call it an obsession if you went to my room. On the dresser there are four green dragons. Two totes at the foot of my bed are filled with pipe cleaner soldiers, monkeys, video game characters, samurais and guitars of every color. On the desk behind my computer monitor, there's a bunch of pipe cleaners, felt, knights in armor and samurais, and there's a drawer full of pipe-cleaner Pokémon and Halo characters.

It started when I was 11. My parents decided to homeschool me, so I was just home all the time. The only time I got to leave was to visit the store or the bank. I randomly decided to make monkeys with pipe cleaners from Rite-Aid. Pretty soon, I was making 10 or 20 Pokémon a day. I developed callouses on my fingertips because I spent so much time making pipe cleaner creatures.

When I was working on my creations, I was in my zone. I wouldn't call it a high—I was at peace. I was in my own little world, the only person in it, and nobody could bother me.

By the time I was 12 or 13, I was going through 300 pipe cleaners a week. I discovered that Michaels had a whole aisle of pipe cleaners along with felt. Immediately I began planning to make felt wings for dragons. I started making dragons with so much detail—teeth, scales and wings—that people wanted them. I used

nail clippers to cut the pipe cleaners exactly where I wanted. The first comments I got were from my mom's friends. "Wow, this is amazing!" "You made this?! You're so talented!" "You should sell these!" "You should make more of these."

It was shocking to hear it. Then it started feeling weird. People were making the same comments. Was my mom telling them to say this stuff?

After that, I started keeping my creations in my room, away from the public eye. I wanted to judge my own stuff for myself and decide if it was worth keeping. Wherever I went, I had some pipe cleaners and a nail clipper in my backpack.

THE PIPE CLEANERS TOOK OVER

Slowly I was turning into a nut case. I had no one to talk to while I spent hours making perfect intricate animals out of furry wire. I noticed that I had made a menacing black dragon with serrated teeth that looked like the spawn of hell. I realized I was a pretty weird guy and I had no life. I used to joke that I was making my own friends out of pipe cleaners, and if I didn't like them any more, I would destroy them.

I started taking classes at Los Angeles City College, and my classmates and teachers sometimes saw me making something out of pipe cleaners before class. They thought it was great and crazy, but I never talked to them. I was a solitary kind of guy. By the time I was

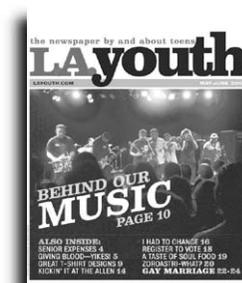
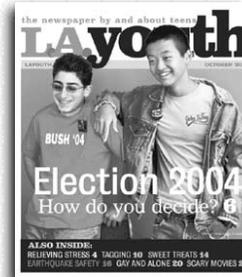
16, I had made so many creations that I had run out of ideas. It sucked to be surrounded by unused pipe cleaners with nothing to make.

Then I ran into some old friends at L.A. Youth. My friends have probably been the best creative spark because they wanted me to make miniatures of them. I made figures of them as soldiers, Pokémon trainers, even Lord of the Rings characters. I was like the master toymaker. I could make just about anything I wanted. I made video game characters from The Legend of Zelda, Sonic The Hedgehog and even Halo and Halo 2. For the Halo creations, I made all of us as Spartan super soldiers with the corresponding colors we had in the game (black, blue, maroon and white). I made vehicles and rocket launchers, grenades, swords—every weapon in the game. Then we'd play Halo on the living room floor, in which soldiers had to fight off aliens and parasitic life forms. Childish, but awesomely fun.

Then I went into a feudal and medieval craze. I made armies of knights, elves and orcs. I had hundreds of mini-warriors at my command but I got bored with them. I then entered the samurai phase. I made many different samurai each with unique armor, clothes and weapons. My current favorite is a sparkling red foot-tall samurai with an eye patch and a bandanna—all made of pipe cleaners and felt.

Nowadays I take requests. Recently I made a dragon, a duck and guitars for other people. People still think I'm a nut case, but my work kicks plenty of ass.

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essay contest Overcoming a fear

1ST PLACE \$50

There is no cure

Name Withheld

I sat in the doctor's office awaiting my test results for my AIDS test. My eyes wandered around the room at all the anti-AIDS posters. My heart started to race when I saw the girl ahead of me come out in tears. My first thought was, does she have AIDS? Did she pass it to me, because I was talking to her? We were sitting pretty close.* At that moment my hands started to sweat and my heart was pumping a hundred miles a minute. A tall pale woman walked out of a small door that looked like a tunnel to the land of sickness and death. The woman flipped through some pages and then called my name. "The doctor is ready for you. He'll be waiting in room 203." I was so scared. When I walked into room 203 my heart just stopped.

AIDS is my biggest fear. It's a leading killer among African Americans old and young. African Americans make up 12 percent of the population in the United States, but 50 percent of new diagnoses of HIV/AIDS are African Americans. I try so hard to recognize the ones who have AIDS, but I can't. AIDS is deadly because you can't see the destruction and damage that it does until it's too late. I dread going to the doctor, but I now go as often as every six months just to be on the safe side. I never thought AIDS would strike in my family. I thought AIDS was a make-believe thing that people say to scare you into not having sex. I thought that until my stepsister told me she was HIV positive.

She was my role model. I wanted to be just like her. She had all the boys and everyone loved her. She took me everywhere with her—shopping, movies and even to her older friends' houses. When she first told me she had HIV it scared me. I didn't want her around me. I called her all types of names because I didn't know how to deal with it. I avoided her for about a year. She called

and came by my house constantly, but I didn't give her the time of day. I was hurt and it truly killed me. One day she caught me coming from a male friend's house. She nearly knocked me down trying to pull me into her car. She went crazy and started telling me how dangerous it is to have sex and all the things that can happen to you if you have unprotected sex.

On the ride home she scared me

straight with horror stories about what she has dealt with since she contracted HIV. I wish I hadn't heard the stories. She scared me into not wanting to have sex. AIDS to me is not just a deadly disease. It's my fear and what I dread most in life. So many lives have ended because of AIDS. Black youth and young adults have been affected by this. I just hope and pray that I won't be the next victim.



ILLUSTRATION BY LOBSANG RIOS, L.A. YOUTH ARCHIVES

One year at my school it was known that someone had AIDS. Everyone was so scared because my school is generally a Hispanic school, so all the African Americans know each other. Which is not a plus because there are more girls than boys, so all the girls want the same boys. This leads to fighting, and sex. The most popular boy among the girls was the one who was infected with the virus. He had been with mostly all the senior girls, some protected and some unprotected. When the rumor got out, it was a big deal and everyone wanted to get tested. A lot of people were crying and saying that if they had the chance, they would go back and do things differently, like use protection. Later in the year it was announced that the boy did not have AIDS—it was just a rumor. He had a sexually transmitted disease that was curable. Every girl who was stressing was relieved and vowed to practice safer sex. Not all the girls did though, so we heard another person was infected, but the second time it was not a rumor.

AIDS is the deadliest thing in the world. You can't see it; you may not have any warning signs until the final stages of the disease. I can't bear the thought of having something like that. I think it scares me because it's for life—there is no cure. Sure you can live with it, but who wants to take a lot of pills every day? Who wants people being scared of you because of the virus you have? Not me. I can't live with the thought of having AIDS and knowing that I could die any day.

I will always practice safe sex because I don't want my fear to come true. I will always choose the right partners and not just hop into bed with anyone. My fear will never come true if I have any say in it.

**(Editor's Note: You cannot get AIDS from speaking with or sitting near an infected person.)*

SEE PAGE 24 FOR MORE ESSAYS.

Our essay contest winner's fear of AIDS inspired L.A. Youth to dedicate this page to AIDS education.

AIDS Q&A: 'Be aware of how to protect yourself'

By Mindy Gee

16, L.A.C.E.S.

Ray Fernandez is the coordinator of AIDS Project Los Angeles's Mpowerment Program, an HIV prevention program for young gay, bisexual and questioning males. I talked to him about HIV/AIDS.

How can you contract AIDS?

You don't contract AIDS, you contract HIV. AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is a stage in the disease. On average a person may live with HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) for 15 to 20 years. AIDS is the end stage.

Does a condom protect you against HIV/AIDS?

A condom is highly effective when used properly. Always check the expiration date. Carry your own (especially for women. They think men should be the ones to have the condoms ready). Use your hands to open it, not your teeth. Store it properly at room temperature, don't just throw it into the glove compartment in the car or put it in your wallet. It's important to carry your own because you don't know what the other person did to the condom or how the other person cared for it. Don't use oil-based lubricants, use water-based.

Can HIV/AIDS be transmitted through oral sex?

There are no known documented cases of HIV being transmitted through oral sex. It's considered a low-risk behavior as far as HIV is concerned. What could put someone at risk is poor oral hygiene—sores, cuts or bleeding gums. But there are plenty of other STDs (sexually transmitted diseases) that can be transmitted orally, such as chlamydia, gonorrhea and syphilis. Oral sex is not a risk-free activity.

Who should get tested and how often?

If you are sexually active, get tested every six months. Some people don't consider oral sex to be sex, and these are people who also should get tested. Even if you haven't had sex, it would be nice to find out what the test is like. It's like going to the dentist.

How do you ask about your partner's sexual background?

You yourself have to be open and honest. The more knowledge, the better. The primary thing is to protect yourself and never put [your health] in anybody's hands. Many base it on what their partner says. Common logic, "I'm a virgin, I don't need to use a condom." When somebody says "I've had 15 partners but used condoms and have been tested for HIV," you only hear the number 15. Regardless of what your partner has to say, you are the

most important thing. Be honest with each other.

Where can you get an AIDS test?

You can get tested for HIV, not AIDS. You can get tested anonymously, there's no need for parental consent and you can be under 18. You can get tested at any county clinic. STD hotlines also can direct you. (The Los Angeles County STD/HIV hotline is (800) 758-0880)

If you have HIV, will you automatically get AIDS?

You can have HIV for three to seven years on average without any symptoms. After that, depending on whether you're getting treatment or not, the disease can develop into AIDS.

Are there symptoms and how long does it take before they appear?

With HIV, you may have cold-, flu-like symptoms, night sweats, fever, a rash across the body or abdominal area, or none at all. Weight loss, fatigue and diarrhea are also some other symptoms.

Is there a cure?

Currently there is no cure for HIV.

Statistics suggest that new cases of AIDS are most commonly reported among people who contracted HIV as teenagers. Is that true and why is it happening?

Every day, it's estimated 14,000 new cases of HIV emerge all around the world. Of those 6,000 are youths under age 25. The numbers have increased. It is because of lack of education and limited access to information. Some adults don't want kids to know. A lot of abstinence-only programs are failing miserably. STD rates are higher where there is such a program.

Some teens think that AIDS is something they tell you in health class to scare you into not having sex. What would you say to those teens?

I think a lot of HIV education is centered around fear. That's totally inappropriate and ineffective as far as getting people to want to learn about HIV and the way it's transmitted so they can make choices based on reality and facts, as opposed to misinformation.

A lot of young people think, "I have a boyfriend, I'm safe, we don't need to use protection." But across the board, so-called monogamous situations are where STDs turn up because people aren't being clear to each other or honest about what monogamy means.

Yes, it's a very real disease that you have to be educated about. Be aware of how to protect yourself.

WHERE TO GET TESTED

These clinics offer free or low-cost confidential HIV testing. A complete listing of clinics also is available by calling the STD/HIV hotline at (800) 758-0880. Health educators can answer your questions Mon.-Fri. 9 a.m.-5 p.m. They also will mail free condoms to your house in an unmarked package. Or go to aidshotline.org to find a clinic near you that offers HIV tests.

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essay contest Overcoming a fear

2ND PLACE \$30

I never thought I'd be on the streets

Name Withheld

One fear I had was living on the streets. Growing up, I never thought I would sell myself to survive. I thought I would have problems, but never that I would be homeless and have to survive by selling myself. I said I could never let myself prostitute or sell myself to get by.

I lost all my friends to this even though friends are supposed to stick with you until the end. Being a prostitute changed my life completely. Instead of being a fear I ran from, it became a reality I lived in. Every day I try to overcome this fear that I might have my string of life cut short. It's hard because my fear was something I ran from and said I would never do. Now that I'm doing something I feared, it makes it hard.

I'm currently detained from the fear I had of "prostituting." I have chosen to overcome it by staying wherever I'm placed when I get out of juvenile hall. My problem with this was looking for love in all the wrong places. Sitting in juvenile hall showed me that not all love is good love, so as I get ready to be released, this won't be a fear, but something that has changed me to be more than someone people can use and abuse to their own advantage. Try to stay loving myself.



ILLUSTRATION BY SARAH EVANS, 16, TEMPLE CITY HS

3RD PLACE \$20

Horse riding is now my passion

Jamilah Jabali
WILSON MS (GLENDALE)

I remember once when I was very young, going on a pony ride at a carnival. I remember the man who carefully walked me in circles while my mom waited for me outside the railing. It was really fun and I decided that *I liked horses!*

About 10 years later, the police department in my city offered an after-school horse program that was on a big ranch in the country. When I asked to join the club, the officer asked me if I had any riding experience. "Of course! I used to ride when I was little!" It wasn't a lie, just a mere stretch of the truth. On the first day, I was very confident as we drove in the van all the way to the countryside. I bragged to my friends that I had ridden in the past and was so excited.

When we arrived at the ranch, I was handed a brush, a hoof pick and a 40-pound saddle and told to "saddle up." It wasn't like my previous experience when I was lifted onto a pony without any effort.

I dragged the saddle over to a hitching post where

the biggest horse I had ever seen was waiting for me. As I reached out to say hello, the horse jerked its head into the air and made a grunting noise while spitting green debris on my clothes. Absolute terror went through my bones. I really didn't want to do this anymore. But I knew I couldn't call my mom to come get me because we had driven nearly an hour to get to the ranch. The ranch hand reassured me that the horse was friendly and was only testing my confidence. I stood there completely surprised that I was afraid and in a position to either give up and face embarrassment or suck it up and keep trying.

I felt like the tiniest midget next to the horse. I carefully brushed its sides and neck without any fear. I knew I had accomplished the first step. As I remained determined to conquer my fear, I wrestled with the saddle and the bit but managed to get through it. At first I was so excited that I did it! I really did it! I saddled my horse! Then I remembered that I still had to get on and ride the monster.

The butterflies in my stomach returned immediately as I walked the horse into the arena. It didn't seem like any of the other kids were having second thoughts.

They all laughed and talked amongst themselves while I concentrated only on the horse. I certainly couldn't let them know how afraid I was. I sucked in a deep breath, stuck my left foot in the stirrup and swung myself onto the horse. It felt like I was a million miles off the earth. At first I thought it was pretty cool until the horse started to move. My balance felt awkward and there were no handlebars to steady myself. I listened to every word of the instructor as she told us the basics of horsemanship. Unlike school, where I am usually a talkative distraction, I gave the instructor my undivided attention because my life depended on it. By the end of the session, I had the greatest sense of accomplishment because I didn't give up. I paid attention and pushed myself to do something I really didn't want to do. I am learning that these are the same qualities that are necessary in everything I do in life.

I have been riding for three years now in the Blue Shadows Mounted Drill Team and have earned the respectable position of Stable Sergeant Jabali. I have many horse show ribbons to show how I turned my fear into my greatest accomplishment and passion.

HONORABLE MENTION

Alone and waiting for death

Maritza Ocampo
FREMONT HS

My biggest fear is being old. You're in your 60s, 70s or 80s, your family members have lives of their own, your spouse might be in a bad condition or has passed away and you are just waiting. I'm not afraid of death, but knowing that I might die alone—well it's not exciting. You seem hopeless. You can't do much at that age. You have to see if your body can take a walk around the park or concentrate on a simple drive. Yes, not every senior is in bad condition; some people can be healthy at that age. But there is a certain point where you can't take as much as you

used to. It seems like you become a baby again, needing assistance. I don't want to be lying in my bed, unable to do much. Is that how I'm going to die, is this how I'm going to leave this world?

I don't understand why being old scares me. I even cry about it because it seems so sad. I see seniors in nursing homes, in wheelchairs or that have Alzheimer's and I think, "Man, that could be me one day." What really frightens me is that I don't want to wait for death, I want my death to happen when it's time.

The only thing I can do is just go along with my life. That's how it is—life is given to you and then it's taken away. As long as I have faith and support I'll be OK.

HONORABLE MENTION

What if I marry the wrong person?

Moises Lainez
JEFFERSON HS

She had a knife in her hand. My oldest brother was pulling her back. She wanted to kill my dad for cheating on her. She couldn't believe that after 25 years of marriage, her family was falling apart. Neither of them thought about it when they were young. They both let their feelings cloud their minds and married each other. That was their worst mistake.

Everybody in the family was affected by my parents' breakup. My siblings and I were traumatized. For the youngest ones, it was a complicated matter, something impossible to understand. The older members of the family labeled the situation a "family problem."

I have witnessed a lot of breakups in my family and neighborhood. I have been through suffering and have barely escaped the hands of death. However, I am told that this is something everyone goes through. Despite all the explanations I am given, there is only one fear that keeps me thinking day and night. That is: committing the mistake of marrying the wrong person. Going through what my own parents went through. Experiencing the same thing that my uncle, my brother, my sister and even my neighbor experienced. This is the fear that I want to overcome.

I don't need to commit the same mistakes in order to learn. There are more than enough examples in my life

already. Marriage is not something to play with. It is the most difficult and important decision an individual could make. Extra thinking must be taken when making such a decision. However, there's no solution to my fear. I fear my future will be shattered apart simply because of a wrong decision.

The most common advice I receive when I ask what to do is a four-letter word. WAIT. I'm told to wait for the right person to come. To wait for the right moment to get married. Not to mess with my future for a moment of pleasure. Perhaps my fear can't be overcome. Maybe I'll have to take a risk in order to really overcome it. However, something inside me refuses to believe that there has to be another broken heart or another shattered family. I don't accept that I have to go through what my family and I already went through. I cannot allow my old world to haunt me forever; my life must be different, but that is up to me.

Besides my own suffering and pain, there's something else that concerns me more. Children are the ones who suffer the most with the decisions adults make. They are the ones who pay the unfair and painful consequences. I am afraid to make my own flesh and blood suffer the same way as I did. The last thing I would like is to see my kids crying over something they have no control over and is not their fault. Marrying the wrong person is like signing my own death certificate. Even though I know at the end I'll die, I want to die the right way.

ESSAY CONTEST

Reflections on MIRRORS



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY IRAN BOLANOS, L.A. YOUTH ARCHIVES

**WIN
\$50**

Mirrors say something about ourselves and the world around us. Some people always look at their reflection when they pass a mirror, others hardly take a glance. Tell us what you think about mirrors. Be creative, there are many ways you can write your essay. You could share a funny or sad experience that involves a mirror. You could explain how mirrors help you—some people get pumped up before a big event by looking at their reflection. Or you could explain why you don't like mirrors—maybe they remind you of something you don't like about yourself. Or be symbolic and write about how mirrors reflect life or distort reality.

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 telephone 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 issue and put on our Web site at www.layouth.com.

MAIL YOUR ESSAYS TO:

L.A. Youth
5967 W. 3rd St. Ste. 301 Los Angeles CA 90036

**DEADLINE IS
FRIDAY, Oct. 13, 2006**

Essential soundtracks



PHOTO BY SARA DIAMOND, 18, BEVERLY HILLS HS

Katie recreates her favorite scene from *Say Anything*, in which John Cusack's character tries to win back a girl by playing Peter Gabriel's "In Your Eyes."

By **Katie Havard**
16, BEVERLY HILLS HS

Like most stories involving my life, it all begins with John Cusack. Well, more importantly, it starts with Lloyd Dobler. Lloyd is John Cusack's character in the best 80s movie ever made, *Say Anything*. He plays the most perfect man since Indiana Jones. But unlike Indy, Lloyd is no lady-killer. Instead he pines away for the valedictorian, Diane Court. At one point, he gets her, then he loses her.

But Lloyd Dobler, kickboxing aficionado, does not give up easily. In what has been called (by me) one of the most romantic scenes in any 80s movie, Lloyd stands outside Diane's house with a boom box over his head, blasting Peter Gabriel's "In Your Eyes." Now, any normal guy would get the cops called on him. But Lloyd Dobler is not any guy—he's John Cusack. Just look at that face. Aw.

Once exposed to his adorable, boom-box-lifting self, I could not get enough of Cusack. At the tender age of 12, I discovered *High Fidelity*. In this movie, Cusack's character, Rob, is hardly the perfect guy, but he makes a damn good mix tape. The entire movie is about good music, and a decent chunk of the movie is about how important mix tapes are and how to make them well. After that, I took a stab at making my own with burned CDs and playlists on iTunes. And they were awful. I ignored some of Rob's most important mix tape rules (you can't put two songs by the same artist in a row; rather than a jumble of songs that you like, a general theme should be implemented, and so on). And so I decided to go out and get the *High Fidelity* soundtrack. I fell in love with it. The thing about movie soundtracks is, they are professional mix tapes. And when you find a good one, it is awesome.

I know that everyone was wetting themselves over the *Garden State* soundtrack two years ago, but it is time to move on. In true *High Fidelity* style, I made a list to help you create great mix tapes.

FIVE BEST MOVIE SOUNDTRACKS

(In no particular order.)

High Fidelity (obviously)

Best track: "Always See Your Face" by Love

Theme: Breaking up and getting back together. Boy loses girl. Boy listens to sad Bob Dylan songs like "Most of the Time." It tries to be all I-didn't-really-like-her-anyway but we know that really, Dylan is hurting: "I don't compromise and I don't pretend/ I don't even care if I ever see her again/ most of the time." Boy gets girl back, listens to The Kinks, is exultant. Jack Black serenades boy with cover of "Let's Get It On." Basically, your classic love story, duh. However, the movie, while excellent, is hugely overshadowed by the phenomenal music that flows through it. Listen to this soundtrack. It is amazing, seriously.

Almost Famous

Best track: "I'm Waiting for the Man" by David Bowie (covering The Velvet Underground)

Theme: The 70s, man. This soundtrack is like a textbook for the greatest age of rock and roll that ever was and never will be again (as long as Fall Out Boy are the reigning kings of radio). Cameron

Crowe is *The Man* when it comes to soundtracks. Even his movie, *Elizabethtown*, which was sparkly but substance-less, has really cool, twangy music. He also directed *Say Anything*, which gives him 10 billion gold stars.

Romeo + Juliet

Best track: "Talk Show Host" by Radiohead

Theme: Obsessive love. Think way, way back to when you were in middle school and you liked that one kid so much that ohmigawd, you would just DIE for them. Remember when that person sat across from you at lunch and it made your day? But then that night, they were all "g2g" right after you IM'd them and they signed off and you thought that maybe they blocked you so you had your best friend check on their screen name but no, they had signed off for real but still, it hurt your feelings like totally a lot, you know?

Yeah, it's kind of like that.

This soundtrack captures all the highs and lows that come with having a really huge crush on someone. It's good for when you feel like the girl in the *Cardigans'* song "Lovefool." "So I cried, and I begged for you to/ Love me love me/ say that you love me/ leave me leave me/ just say that you need me/ I can't care about anything but you."

Love songs for stalkers hopeless romantics.

The Rules of Attraction

Best track: "Sunday Girl" by Blondie

Theme: In this movie, reasonably attractive, C-list alumni of WB melodramas do a lot of morally reprehensible things to a set of really bizarre technomixes from composers tomandandy.

The rest of the soundtrack is like a less kitschy version of the *Pretty in Pink* soundtrack, complete with a song from The Cure, "Six Different Ways."

Oh, and I know you saw *Anchorman* and then couldn't stop listening to that song, "Afternoon Delight." Well, *The Rules of Attraction* has it, too, and this soundtrack will look cooler in your CD sleeve. ("Sky rockets in flight"—whoooo!)

Wicker Park

Best track: "Retour A Vega" by The Stills

Theme: Recovering from heartbreak. I have never, ever seen this movie, but I came across the soundtrack and it's pretty awesome. When one is on a quest for great movie soundtracks, trivial factors like "seeing the movie" are irrelevant.

The only thing that matters is the tracklist—and what a tracklist!

You Zach Braff worshippers rejoice—*Wicker Park's* got rare and unreleased tracks from the Postal Service ("Against All Odds") and The Shins ("When I Goosetep"). Also, there's a fairly decent Mates of State cover of Nico's "These Days" which, if Wes Anderson soundtracks are your thing, you'll recognize from "The Royal Tennenbaums."

When you can subliminally communicate, "Hey, I think you're really hot and I like you and if you reject me I will break your soul with the force of a thousand suns" through a playlist—then you're there. Consider movie soundtracks training wheels for your mix-tape-making skills. Listen to enough of them and you'll be able to get your point across when you finally hit "burn."

Tribute to TUPAC

As September 13, 2006 marks the 10th anniversary of the death of rap artist Tupac Shakur, many teens talked about why they still listen to his music.

Do you still listen to Tupac? Tell us how you feel about him and his music by e-mailing your thoughts to editor@layouth.com. Please include your first and last name, age and school for publication.

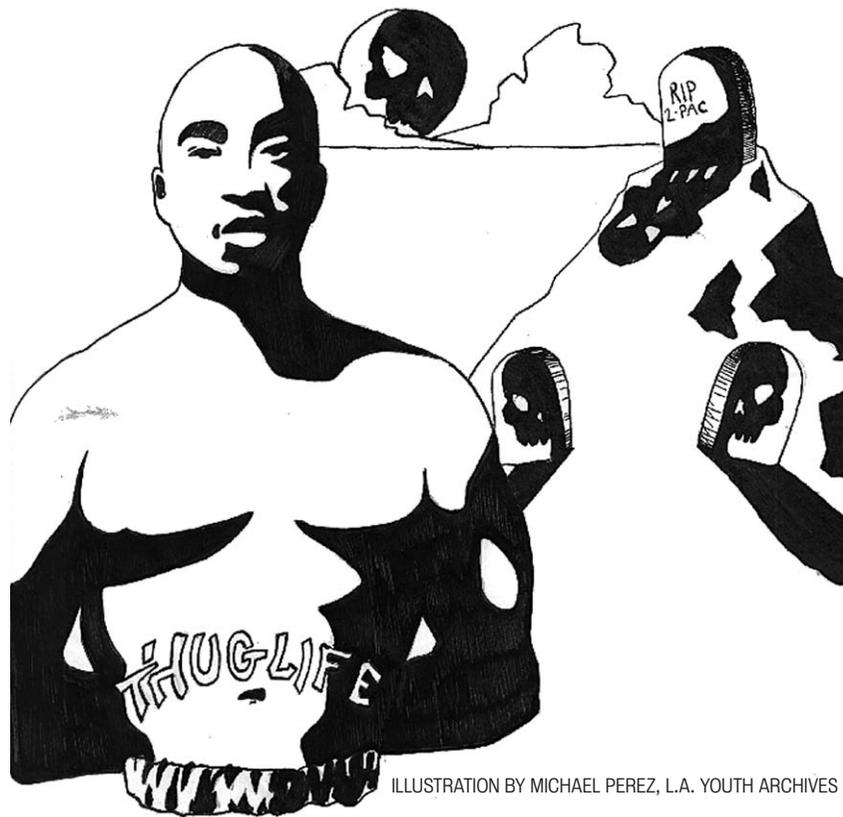


ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL PEREZ, L.A. YOUTH ARCHIVES

“Only time we chill is when we kill each other / It takes skill to be real, time to heal each other”

—From “Changes,”
Tupac Shakur

Helped me keep my sanity



Tupac Amar Shakur is one of the greatest music legends in my opinion. Back in my teenage rebellion days, I remember lying in my bed at night wrapping my thoughts around one of Tupac’s hit songs. Tupac helped me keep my sanity at times. It gave me a sense of comfort knowing that someone out there felt the same emotions that I felt. So why do teenagers idolize Tupac? It gives teens a positive feeling to have someone understand them. For some teens, all they have is people like Tupac.

Brittany Hines,
16, LITTLEROCK HS (LANCASTER)

fortunately though, a majority of people didn’t realize this until after his death. And it was then that he actually blew up into the rap legend that he is today.

Whether or not he’s the most talented rapper ever can be argued, but he made a great contribution not only with the large number of songs he made that are still coming out today 10 years after his death, but as an inspiration to other music artists as well as ordinary people such as you and I. Maybe this is why people regard him as the best rapper ever.

Monrad Cawich,
17, DORSEY HS



My favorite

Tupac is my favorite rapper. He made one whole CD talking about his mom. It shows that he cared about his mom. Other rappers don’t talk about their family. They talk about killing people. He wasn’t really into singing about killing people. He wasn’t into drugs all that much. Tupac had a whole bunch of nice songs.

Joel Muñoz, 18

Thought-provoking

He was a very important figure in rap music. Although he had his kinda “normal” rap (you know ... the songs about partying, girls, trouble and all that good stuff) he also made many inspirational and thought-provoking songs as well. He had his fun at times, and had his violent moments as well, but there were times where he actually put thought and feelings into his music to try and get his point across when it was needed. Un-

Gifted



Tupac Shakur is a truly gifted, inspirational individual to me and many others. Last year I saw the documentary Tupac Resurrection. The strongest thing that came across to me was that he fought, not just for minorities, but for all people who face disadvantages, just as his mother had in the Black Panther movement. I love Tupac’s songs about his love for his mother, and wanting to change the world. No more hurting, no more poverty—to me that’s what Tupac stood for. Once I tried to explain to my dad why Tupac is inspirational, but he said, “Well, he’s still one of those gangbangers.” Because Tupac was shot, a lot of people view that as proof that he was a gangster. To me, anyone can get shot. But how many will still be remembered 10 years later?

Brett Hicks,
14, LOYOLA HS

Inspirational

Tupac has inspired the youth of today in a positive but also realistic way. He talks about what lots of people growing up in ghettos have to deal with everyday. And even if it isn’t all good, there’s always hope.

Axel Colon,
17, DANIEL MURPHY CATHOLIC HS

The best lyricist

His music was the type everyone could relate to. Sure you had your typical songs that talked about girls, money and etc. But his music had much more meaning than that. He saw life and told it through his music. ... [he] never saw himself as more than just another brother trying to hit it big. He’s hands down one of the best lyricists of all time. He’s seen as one of the greatest rappers who ever lived. [There’s] something about his songs they can relate to ... whether it be big or small.

Sergio Guevara, 17,
DANIEL MURPHY CATHOLIC HS



Ahead of the game

He is inspirational and revolutionary in the rap—no, as a matter of fact in the hip-hop community—and a lot of stuff he said is going on today. His lyrics were ahead of the game ... Ya mean!?

Erin Washington,
17, MARLBOROUGH SCHOOL

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