

the newspaper by and about teens

L.A. youth

LAYOUTH.COM

MARCH-APRIL 2007

Prescription for depression

p. 10

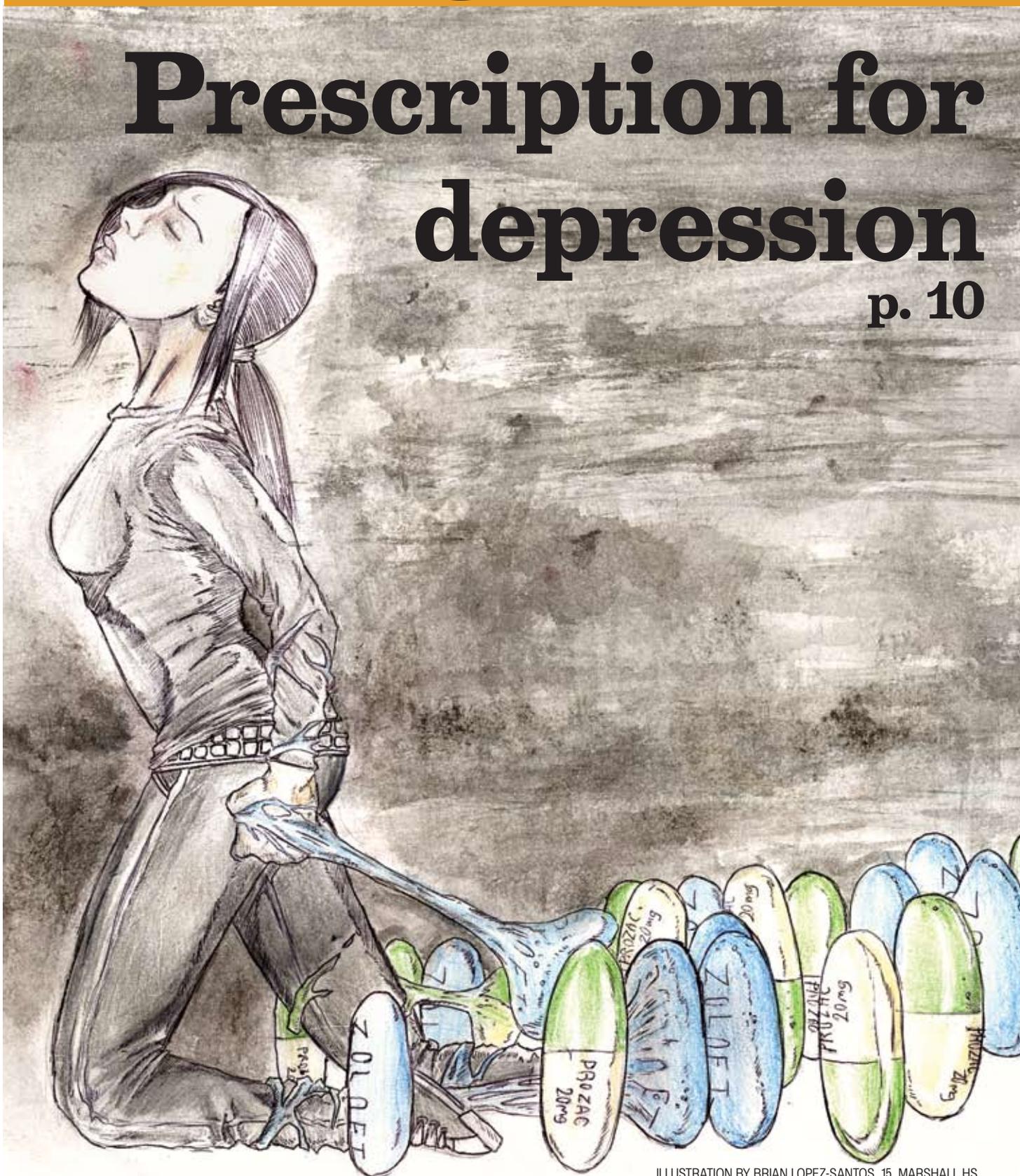
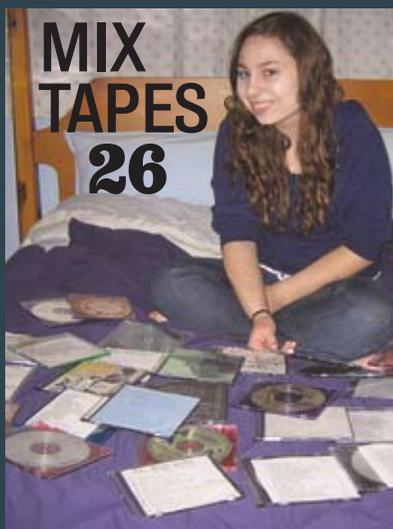


ILLUSTRATION BY BRIAN LOPEZ-SANTOS, 15, MARSHALL HS

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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 19th year of publishing.

How is L.A. Youth doing today?

L.A. Youth now has a readership of 500,000 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. Many 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 free six times a year to high school or middle school teachers in most of Los Angeles County. Teachers also can look

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L.A. youth

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mail

These are letters we received about stories in the January-February issue of L.A. Youth.

WANT TO LEARN? READ THE NEWSPAPER

Reading the newspaper gives us ideas about how other countries are struggling around the world and how they are trying to fix problems and also other things that they're doing. In addition to this, newspapers can also be useful in other ways like improving our spelling and grammar. Reading the newspaper can also help us do better in school in many ways, because people can learn new vocabulary. Therefore, I believe that by reading a newspaper you can learn many things.

Misael Sanchez, Wilson MS
(Glendale)

EVANESCENCE IS GREAT!

I strongly disagree with the writer about Evanescence's new CD, The Open Door. I think the change in the band's music is awesome, because it has given more feeling to the songs. I also did not like when the writer mentioned that "it sounds like someone scratched a chalkboard" when describing Amy Lee's voice. When I listen to it, her voice sounds full and strong. I would definitely recommend Evanescence's new CD to anyone and everyone.

Kimberly Scott, Hutchinson MS
(La Mirada)

'ENOUGH' VIOLENCE IN OUR LIVES

The article "Enough" got me thinking of all the violence around our area. We live in the quiet city of La Mirada, about 40 minutes from Los Angeles. But sooner or later there is going to be violence here, too. This article made me realize that anything can happen anywhere. This article also taught me to be safe more often and not be stupid all the time.

Tyler Brush, Hutchinson MS

I was touched by the article "Enough" because it reminded me of when I used to live in Norwalk. All of the drive-bys and stuff, the shootings and too many murders happened.

This article also reminded me of my brother. He was involved in gangs and violence and was always getting in trouble with the cops and my parents. As a little girl, I didn't know what to do as I watched my brother get beat up by gangs. I sometimes cried while I watched. I remember my brother always telling me, "Baby, go back inside." My brother means the world to me because he's my only brother and I would give my life for him.

After we moved to La Mirada it's been peaceful and quiet. No robberies. Now my brother's a well-behaved man. He's married, going to college and has twin babies on the way. He's really smart now. Since we set foot in La Mirada he's changed. He's a good influence in my life.

Name withheld, Hutchinson MS

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Send your letters to L.A. Youth



L.A. Youth
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or editor@layouth.com

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I really like the article "Enough." My cousin Jackie lives in East L.A., an area known for kids dropping out and getting pregnant. That's probably why she got pregnant at 14. One time I slept over at her house for two days and by 8 p.m. everything grew dark and all I heard were gunshots, dogs barking and people cussing. About half an hour later, I went out to see a bunch of boys getting out of a car. They beat up a teenager and took him with them. I don't know what could have happened to him, but I do believe Christina Quarles was right in her story, when she said that bad things happen everywhere. I think my cousin was affected by the other kids dropping out and getting pregnant at a young age.

*Yessica Cortez, Wilson MS
(Glendale)*

THE WAR IS WRONG

Dear George W. Bush,

I have been around death. Somebody in my family died because of your war. I cry because of death and you have caused more than 3,000 deaths. Think

about how many people you have made like me. I'm lucky, I have a great life. But war and death still affect me. Think about the wounded, the men and women without legs and arms who are still scared. You have made a big mistake.

I know you can't just pull the troops out. But try to find a way to stop more deaths. Stop the war. Think more about things like global warming and listen to Al Gore. With my humblest feeling, listen. I hope you agree. Most sincerely,

Oliver Dane Heffron, Westland School

COURAGE TO BE SHY

The article "The courage to be shy" was my absolute favorite. It reminds me of when I really liked this girl. I thought she was the nicest person and had the best personality. That girl was very pretty but that was just an extra good thing about her. I used to accidentally run into her in the hallways and walk her to her next class. Whenever I was right next to her, I would barely talk because, like Paul, I thought I was going to say the



wrong thing. After reading this article, it made me realize that you shouldn't be afraid to say things.

Also, I was very lazy and once I read the part where Paul said that he had a homework plan and that it was helping him, I thought about it and said to myself, "I really want to graduate this year." So lately, I've been doing all of my homework and trying not to get distracted.

Diego Llontop, Wilson MS

I have been shy all my life. When I went to someone's house I would just sit on the chair until someone came and told me that we had to leave. Even when we had to go to a relative's house who I knew really well, I still wouldn't say

anything except "hi" and "bye." I'm still shy, but not as shy as I used to be. Sometimes when I go to parties with my three older cousins, I just sit in a corner and don't do anything except watch my cousins dance with their girlfriends or watch other people dance. Sometimes I talk to people who I don't know and most of the time I'm too shy to talk to people who I already know. That's weird isn't it? Well, I'm getting less shy every day and it's actually cool to talk to others and not be shy or nervous wondering what they're thinking about you.

Fiuneh Aleksandr, Wilson MS

SYMPATHY FOR A GIRL WHOSE FAMILY TREATS HER COLDLY

After reading the story "I don't need 'em" I felt like I needed to take a look at my life and be grateful for what I have. This story really gave me the opportunity to humble myself and thank God that my family loves me and takes care of me.

This story is about Shimia's life growing up without parents and a family that cares about her. Despite that, she stays positive throughout. She has really inspired me to be thankful for what I have and to be more determined to actually be someone when I grow up. I really admire Shimia for being so optimistic through such tough times.

*Esther Gonzales, Hutchinson MS
(La Mirada)*

This story made me realize how important my family is. Even though my sister and I fight a lot, there is still love in our relationship and I think that is important. I believe that everyone should have a close relationship with his or her parents. I would not be able to handle not having a mom and dad and never seeing them. I would feel devastated to know that I lived my life without my real parents and had to stay at a foster home not being able to talk about my feelings with my loved ones. Without family, people would be lost and would feel that they have no hope or future. My family is my influence in life and they guide my steps as I grow older. I think that everyone deserves a good family and a good life.

Elliot Kim, Wilson MS

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SAT diary

By Mindy Gee

17, LOS ANGELES CENTER FOR ENRICHED STUDIES

Ahhh! The dreaded junior year is here, and it would not be complete without standardized testing. When I woke up to my mom's voice on a Saturday morning, I knew it was going to be a long, long day. It was the day of my SAT, and I had overslept. It was already 7:15, so I only had time to throw water on my face and had to run out of the house with a granola bar.

7:45 a.m.

My dad stops the car in front of John Marshall High School, where I will take the test. I haven't had a full eight hours of sleep since summer, and I am not happy about sacrificing four hours of sleep for a test. I unwillingly get out of the car. There are already about 50 people congregating near the entrance. I try to see if there's anyone from my school. I see no one. Not only am I sleep-deprived, cold and angry, but I'm also alone.

7:50 a.m.

People are beginning to line up at the gray entrance gate. As I'm walking over to the gate, I see Rizwan, a friend from L.A.C.E.S. While we're exchanging our "I want to go home" complaints, my friend Sandra sneaks up behind me. Sandra and I try to talk about more pleasant things like graduation, but our conversation somehow leads back to how we didn't study enough for the SAT.

The gate is supposed to be open by now, but of course, we're still standing outside in the cold. The gate gives off an eerie vibe as if I'm standing in front of a prison instead of a school. I see a paper taped to the gate that tells me what room I've been assigned to take the test. I'm in cell number, ahem, I mean room number 421.

8:15 a.m.

A middle-aged man checks my student ID to make sure I'm not impersonating anyone. Then the gates of hell finally open. Now I really feel like a criminal. I mean, what's with the gate? I'm not even good enough for a doorway?

I find room 421 and take a seat in the back. Rizwan is also in my room, and he sits next to me. While he is showing off all the shortcut functions and formulas he put into his graphing calculator, a random guy to my left joins in on our calculator conversation.

8:40 a.m.

The proctor passes out the test and the answer sheets. We are asked to fill out our information on the answer sheet, which takes almost 20 minutes. Once again, I am asked to verify that I really am Mindy Gee and that I swear to never cheat by signing a "contract."

9:00 a.m.

The first section of the SAT is the essay. The proctor says mechanical pencils are not allowed because some cannot be read by the Scantron. All students know that that's a lie, since we've all taken Scantron exams at school with mechanical pencils without any problems. Usually, proctors let students use whatever they want at their own risk, despite what testing policy says. But our proctor actually goes around the room to check that no one has anything other than a number 2 pencil.

10:15 a.m.

Break time! Five minutes is all we get, most of which I spend in a line to the girls' restroom. I make it to the bathroom and return to the testing room to get ready to start on the math section. I haven't run into any major problems on the test so far, and I'm hoping the rest of the test will go just as smoothly.

10:20 a.m.

I'm not happy about being separated from my mechanical pencil. I'm a messy writer, so a smudgy number 2 pencil isn't my favorite thing in the world. Nonetheless, I manage to stick it out for the essay and two multiple-choice sections. But when we reach the math, I secretly take out my mechanical pencil.

10:40 a.m.

I am stuck between the words "diaphanous" and "viniferous." I know that the guessing game isn't my area of expertise, but I figure since I already narrowed my choices down to two answers, it was worth the adventure. (I incorrectly chose "viniferous," I later find out when I look it up at home on dictionary.com).

The stories on the critical reading section are interesting enough to keep me awake. When I'm about halfway through the section, I look to my right and see Rizwan already finished. With a bit more than 10 minutes left before time is over, he goes to sleep. I panic a bit and glance around the room. Everyone else is still working furiously. I, too, continue working, marking my last bubble when time is called.

11:05 a.m.

I finish my writing section very early, so I have time to go over my answers. I let myself get distracted for a while by a poster that tells me I can save a life by turning in people who are carrying guns. It makes me wonder just how many lives this poster saved.

I look at my Scantron and realize that I bubbled in five "No errors" out of 14 spot-the-error questions. When I go back to look over the questions again, I begin to talk myself out of previously marked answers. What seemed to be right now seemed terribly wrong, and what seemed wrong at first now seemed right. I decide I should just leave everything as it was. I have never felt so insecure in my life.

12:10 p.m.

I'm stuck on a math problem about bees. Not even a year of calculus could help me solve that one.

By now, I'm even more tired and grumpy. I see a can of Red Bull belonging to a student across the room. I realize I should have brought coffee or Red Bull. But it's almost over, and I'll be able to go home soon.

1:00 p.m.

Finally, the last section! There's a light story about a young woman resisting her uncle's attempts to push her into an unwanted, but socially favorable, marriage. There is witty dialogue, and I actually have fun reading the excerpt.

1:15 p.m.

The SATs are officially over (at least for now).



SAT words:

Diaphanous - *adj.* sheer and light, almost transparent.

Viniferous - *adj.* of or related to wine making.

Mindy's SAT tips

1. Don't stress. You can always take it again.
2. Bring a snack for breaks, such as a granola bar or a Red Bull, a drink with tons of caffeine.
3. Don't try to cram vocabulary or mathematical equations right before the test. Start studying at least a month in advance.
4. Get a lot of sleep the night before and eat a light breakfast.
5. Focus. Don't get distracted because every section has a time limit. Taking practice tests will help you get used to sitting through 3 ½ hours of testing.



Mindy says that although the SAT is important, remember, it's just a test.

essay contest:

What has changed your life?

1ST PLACE \$50

My little brother means everything to me

Jonathan Kuperberg
15, AGOURA HS

Everyone has had an event that has changed his or her life. Mine was the birth of my little brother, Matthew. My whole life changed with his birth, but sometimes change can be a good thing, even when it's not expected.

When my parents first told me that they were having a baby and I would have another brother, but this time I'd be an older brother, I was full of emotions. I was happy and sad at the same time. My whole life was going to change and I wasn't sure if I was ready. Back then, I did not know what a positive impact this event would have on my life.

When Matthew was born (I picked out his name, by the way) I could not stop smiling. There, in the bed, was this little "creature" my parents called their son. Not until I picked him up did I feel the weight of his life on my shoulders, and the weight of the effect I would have on him. I immediately felt I had more responsibility, and I was ready to do anything for my little brother.

My whole family took care of him, even the cat, and life was somewhat peaceful during those first few weeks. When my mom went out for the first time in months, I fed him a bottle, and although he spit up most of it and only drank a few drops, it was just as satisfying for me as for Matthew. I was there when he rolled over for the first time, and I was there when he took his first steps. I saw his first tooth come in, and I will soon see his first tooth fall out. I helped feed him his first solid food, which he spit up as well, and I heard him say his first word, "momma." Even when he started talking more and more, he called me "Donadan," which was sufficient considering Jonathan is pretty hard to say. At least he was making an effort to talk to me.

That was seven years ago, and Matthew and I are closer than ever. My older brother is a senior in high school and getting ready for college, so he does not get to spend much time with us. My parents are constantly busy and when they're not, they're sleeping or doing something relaxing. And something relaxing in my house is anything that

doesn't involve Matthew. So that leaves me to spend time with my brother, which, although it is often difficult and tiring, is quite gratifying. He may cheat in checkers, but he is only doing that to win and get respect from his big brother. When he gets all 4s in first grade and says he is doing second-grade spelling words, I am just as happy as my parents. I baby-sit him constantly and we have fun, even though he is pretty much in charge.

It's a wonderful feeling knowing that my little brother idolizes me. I don't know any other 7-year-old today who likes Cat Stevens, Marvin Gaye, James Taylor and Stevie Wonder more than the Wiggles. He knows all the words to dozens of Ray Charles songs, and he even has his own blues-y voice. But more than just my music rubs off on Matthew. When I got an electric piano for Hanukkah, so did he. I haven't had the time to schedule lessons, but Matthew is learning to play every week. Of course we still play our "Heart and Soul" duet whenever we can. Like me, he would rather watch *Scrubs* and *Seinfeld* on TV than *SpongeBob*, although I'm pretty sure he

doesn't understand them at the same level that I do.

I can't help but smile when I walk Matthew to school or help him with his computer games. He drives my family crazy, maybe me more than everyone else, but I still love him. I teach him things every day and he teaches me things too, most of them about myself. I've grown as a person since my brother was born, not just in age, but in responsibility and morality. He comes before everything else in my life and rightly so. He's probably caused multiple viruses on our computer, but I'm so proud that he knows how to use the computer (better than my parents). Every site I visit on the Internet he bookmarks in his folder.

Although Matthew can still relate to kids his age, he is probably more mature than most of them just for having spent so much time with me. Although I am in intense classes and busy in my sophomore year, I sometimes feel like a little kid again as I unleash my inner child when I'm with Matthew. Everything we do rubs off on each other. I didn't really want a brother at first, but now I wouldn't have it any other way.



2ND PLACE \$30

I will never have a mother

Natalie Reed

13, WILSON MS (GLENDALE)

A lot of things have changed and affected my life. The most life-changing experience was the death of my mother.

When I was young, around 5 years old, my sister Alisha died. Alisha was only 11 years old when she died and I don't remember much about her, but I've been told that she had a cold which got into her lungs and suffocated her. Right now, Alisha would probably be starting college. My mom was so depressed about Alisha's death that she committed suicide. I don't remember a lot about my mom, just the way she looked, how she stood in front of the mirror putting on makeup, the Rice-A-Roni dinners and the smell of bacon and coffee in the morning. I remember once, while we were in line to get food from El Pollo Lo-

co, she was eating M&M's and her tooth fell out. She just looked at it for a second and stuck the tooth back in her mouth! I thought she was crazy! It was so funny, but gross at the same time.

Some people tell me that when you commit suicide, you go to hell. I don't know if I don't believe it, or just don't want to believe it. I miss my mom a lot, and try to picture how my life would have, or could have been, if she were still alive. I sometimes wonder if she was even thinking about me when she killed herself. Did she not care? Did she think that it would be best for me? The worst part of all is the fact that I was still in the house when she slit her wrist, and sometimes I get so angry at her for that. I was only 7 years old and clearly she wasn't thinking about me or my future. When I get married, she won't be there for my wedding. My kids will never have a grandmother from my side of the family.

I will never have a mom to go shopping for bras with, and I will never have a normal life. I will always be haunted by the memory of what she did.

Whenever someone describes slitting their wrist or anything about veins and arteries or anything that has to do with the details of it all, I get squirmy and chills go down my spine, and sometimes there is a tingle in my wrist. It irritates me until I calm down or forget about it, and I fear that the feeling will never go away. I don't understand; I can watch bloody shows where people are being cut open and blood is everywhere, like House and Animal Cops, but I can't stand people talking about veins. It gets spooky, and I wish that she would have thought twice before she did anything. My life will never be the same, and I will never have a mother.

3RD PLACE \$20

My father's death still hurts

Michelle Stevenson

16, JOHN R. WOODEN HS (RESEDA)

I know exactly what can change a person's life in an instant. What, you may ask?

When I was 12 years old, my father was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. At this age I wasn't very aware of what cancer was or what it could do to a person. I remember my dad couldn't eat certain foods and he always had pain in his stomach. I remember my father would always help me with my schoolwork and was my best friend. He taught me everything, from how to use a computer to how to fish. He was the best blessing God gave me. No one could ask for a better father. He always went out with my sisters and me to go salsa dancing. As a family we would have the best times in the world. When he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, my two sisters and I formed a salsa group called Triple Threat. That year we performed in the fourth annual Salsa Congress. Unfortunately, during the month of April my father failed his chemotherapy and was

admitted to the hospital.

I remember going to the hospital every day after school. He was so weak. On May 17, 2003, God decided to take my father to heaven. I was too young to understand what had happened. Of course I was devastated, crying every day. My mother forced me to go to school the next day. She said my father had always wanted me to do well in school.

At that age it didn't hit me as much as it does today. I miss him so much. I always wonder what it would have been like to have him here with me during my teen years. There's not one day when I don't think about him. I still cry at times. It's so hard to lose a person that close. I was the most tomboyish of my three sisters, so that's most of the reason I was closest to my father. Nothing can take away that pain.

The other day my mother and I were talking. She, a widow at 42 years old, said she would try hiding her feelings and grieving from me because she didn't want to show me her pain. She said she would cry every day after dropping me

off at school. She would try her hardest not to cry in front of me and it showed me how strong she is. Then when we were talking it hit me ... I don't have a father. After three and a half years, that just hit me. I will never have my dad to walk me down the aisle. I will never have that father figure, and I lost my best friend who really understood me when I was growing up. It hurts me so.

Although I may not have all those things, I try every day to realize how beautiful life is. Ever since his death, my family has gotten closer. We realize that we have each other, and that's what matters most. We have learned that family comes first before anything. In that way it helped. I have also been really independent. I work, I do well in school, I pay for my own phone bill and soon will be able to afford my own car, and I dance. I also try every day to appreciate that I have a beautiful family and a loving boyfriend. So in my opinion a death, no matter who it is, can change lives. My father was my hero. I thank God every day that he was in my life.

ESSAY CONTEST

Letter to an inanimate object

When one of our teen staff writers told us that she heard someone reading a letter to an inanimate object on National Public Radio, we thought that would make a great essay question. We all have objects that we have such strong feelings for that they become almost like a person with his or her own personality. Here is your chance to tell them how you feel. Write a letter to an inanimate object to tell it what it means to you.

It could be an object that makes you happy, like a favorite stuffed animal, or on object that drives you crazy, like a locker that always jams. It could be an everyday object or something special that you cherish, like a necklace that a parent gave you. Share how it has affected your life in a positive or negative way.

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 May-June issue and put on our Web site at layouth.com.

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

DEADLINE IS
FRIDAY,
April 20, 2007

PLEASE VISIT WWW.LAYOUTH.COM TO READ ESSAYS THAT WON HONORABLE MENTION.

Confronting the n-word

Just because blacks use it a lot, it doesn't mean we should

By **Trayvione Travis**
17, OFMAN LEARNING CENTER

The first time I said the slang version of the n-word when I was 10, my cousin told me not to use it. But it was the thing to do because everyone around me was saying it. I would be at the mall or walking somewhere and I would see someone I knew and say "what's up my n—ga." I felt tough.

When I saw on the news late last year that actor Michael Richards was at The Laugh Factory and he repeatedly said the n-word when two black people booed him, I thought, "What a racist jerk." I was shocked because as Kramer on Seinfeld he didn't seem like that type of person. He said "50 years ago we'd have you upside down ..." That's like a slap in the face to all blacks. It made me feel disrespected.

Most of the time blacks get upset when someone who is not black uses any form of the n-word. They feel that the person who said it does not have the right because either they were trying to be disrespectful or they have not walked in a black person's shoes so they shouldn't say the word. I don't even know all that my ancestors went through. But I know what it's like to be black, what it's like to be in my skin. Some people don't understand how hard it is, how people look at you and assume you're a gangbanger or you steal. Because of that, I felt I had the right to use that word.

Where I grew up in Los Angeles, everywhere I turn it's "n—ga." But we don't use the word disrespectfully. By changing the spelling we mean it as "what's up?" I never thought about how negative the word was. I knew the n-word ending in -er was a putdown but if it had a -ga at the end then it was OK with me. I thought they were two different words.

A HATEFUL HISTORY

Before the civil rights movement, white people would use the word all the time in a derogatory way. Back then, blacks and whites couldn't go to the same schools or use the same restrooms. Blacks could not sit in the front of the bus and if a white person wanted to sit down, a black person had to get up. Black people even had to get off the bus after they paid their money and walk to the back of the bus. That blacks had to go through this just to get where they are makes me mad. It should not have taken so much protesting for blacks to get civil rights. But as blacks got more rights and whites and blacks started to get along better, the word was used less.

That's why it was very surprising when Richards said the n-word. Later he said that he was not racist and that he was just in character, but I felt that he was lying just to make everything calm down. He should have walked off the stage when they taunted him instead of exploding.

The next day, everyone was talking about it, kids and teachers at school and people on the bus. I started to think about the word. I noticed that when a black person said the word over and over, it started to get on my nerves. I thought about how it's a putdown toward my ancestors. If blacks continue using it, that gives people who aren't black the impression that it's OK to use it.

A few days later, Jesse Jackson called for a boycott of the word. I think a boycott is too extreme. Be realistic. People are going to continue using it. When comedian Damon Wayans was at The Laugh Factory, he said that if he used the n-word, the comedy club was going to fine him. So every time he used the word he threw money out on the stage. I thought it was funny the way he was proving his point that no one could stop comedians from saying the word. His main point was that everyone has freedom of speech.

I knew that I would not be able to stop using it altogether because I was used to saying it, but I decided to use it less. Now I say, "what's up" to my friends and then their name, like "What's up, Devon?" Just to be funny I might say, "What's up, my brother from another mother?"

I have used it less, but it's hard. When I get around my friends I forget because they say it and it gets inside my head. I don't even notice when I'm using it. The word just slips out. The other day I was upset at someone and he said he'd fight me and I got mad. I kept referring to him as that "n—ga." Afterwards when I calmed myself down I realized how many times I said it.

Over time I hope to use it even less because I'm trying to make a positive change in myself. I'm being more respectful of my culture and the people who fought for blacks to have rights, like Martin Luther King Jr.

I'm taking steps, but I don't tell my friends they shouldn't say the n-word. They'd say, "We're not white, we have the right to use the word." I know I can't control anybody's mouth. I just want to get my voice out there and let others know how I feel. I hope that people who read this will think twice about using it.



Trayvione says that using the n-word less makes him feel more mature.

What do you think about the n-word?



"I really don't care. It's just how you say it. Some people use it to be derogatory. Some people say it as [part of] everyday conversation. I have a white friend who says it. I don't care because it's like they're black. They're not meaning it in a derogatory way."

Martinique Usher
19, EL CAMINO COLLEGE



"I don't like the word myself. There's no reason [to say it]. I wouldn't talk to my boss like that. I don't see it getting you anywhere."

Darius Stone
16, VIEW PARK PREP



"It depends on how they sound when they say it. When one of my friends says it, I know they are just playing around. If a stranger says it, I would get angry and be upset with whoever said it."

Jo'Visha McGee
13, AUDUBON MS



"The n-word is very offensive to me in some ways because it makes me feel like they don't care about what black people had to go through for our freedom."

Jahselyn Williams
14, DORSEY HS

The Top 8 shuffle

By **Nattalie Tehrani**
16, SOUTH HS

Last year I met some new friends and we hung out almost every weekend, going to the beach, shopping and going out to dinner. When they added me to their MySpace Top 8s I was one of the first four. It felt good. It gave me a sense of confidence and belonging. A few months later two of them took me off their Top 8s and put people on who they hadn't seen for months. I wondered why they'd moved me. I felt left out and I questioned how close we really were. Since then I have been on and off their Top 8s so I just avoid looking at their pages.

When you get moved off your friend's Top 8, you're just another person on their long list of "friends," right beside some guy from Arkansas who they haven't even met. And as much as most of us would like to say we don't care where we are on our friends' Top 8s, deep down we do. It's our generation's way of confronting one another or showing how we really feel about each other. Top 8s are your key to what your friends think of you. All the moving around makes you feel like an object. It's a way teens show their feelings toward each other and the truth can be painful.

When I first got my MySpace the summer before eighth grade, the Top 8 didn't exist. I posted pictures of myself and friends, listed my favorite shows, books and movies, and left my friends goofy or random comments. A couple months later, MySpace added Top 8 to the Web site, and that is when all the drama began.

When I first made my Top 8, I put up the people I spent time with the most. Then I noticed that some close friends of mine didn't have me on their lists. That made me think they didn't feel the same way about me as I did about them. But I didn't say anything. I had seen them argue and gossip when they got moved around on someone's Top 8 and I knew that if I moved them, it would get blown into a big fight.

There were people at my school who spent lots of time putting everyone in order. One of my friends moved me one spot over just because I hadn't seen her for a week. She took the time to move me one spot over! What's the difference if you're in spot two or three? Why would you take the time to do that?

My biggest issue with Top 8 is that I can never be sure why I get moved, because I don't do anything to make my friends angry. I went to leave a close friend a comment, and I noticed that she had moved me from second place to last place. We have never had an argument so I thought, "What did I do for her to move me?" I sat there, looking back on times when I could have said something to offend her or make her feel bad. "Maybe I should call her and ask." "But, what if I'm overreacting and starting a problem when there wasn't one to begin with?" "But surely there is a reason why she moved me." These thoughts kept running through my head and it was driv-

L.A. YOUTH'S Friend Space

L.A. YOUTH has 177 friends

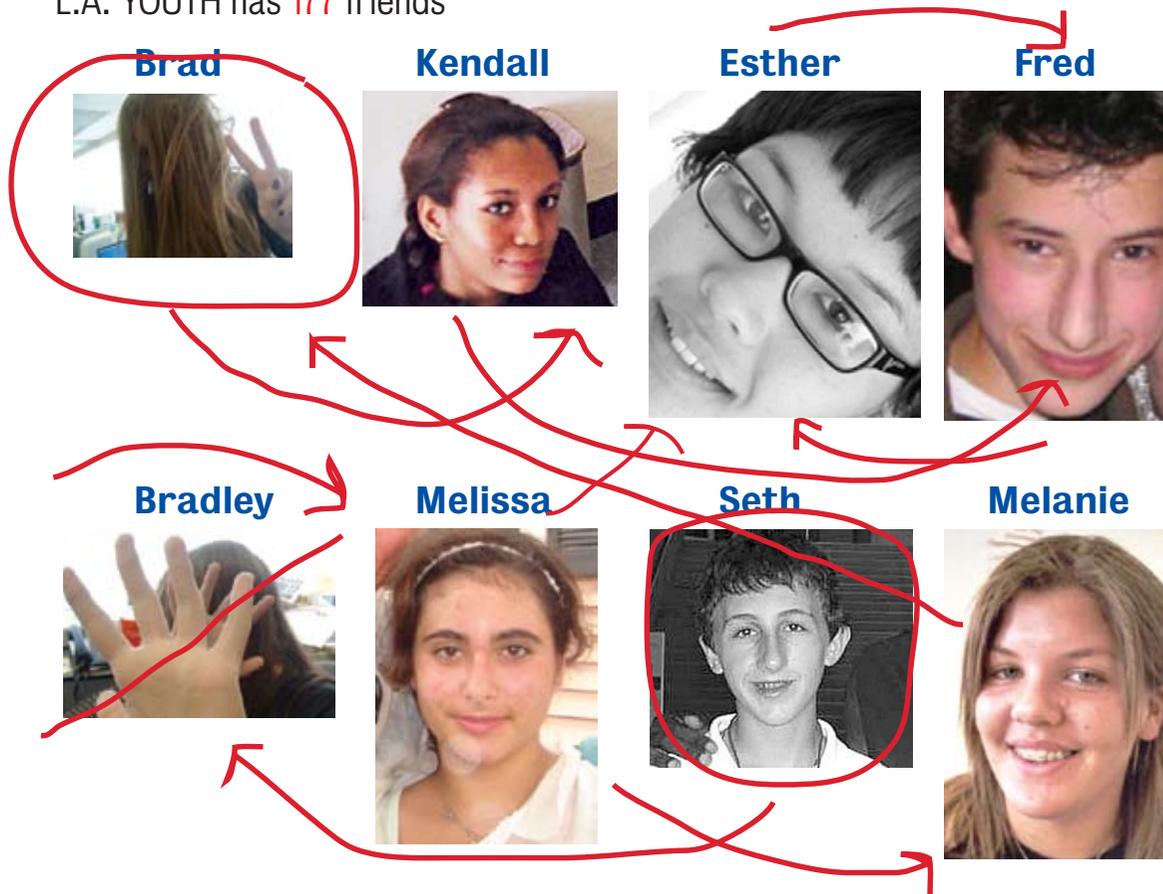


PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY DESIGN CONSULTANT TOMI NELKIN

ing me crazy. It felt like I had developed an obsession! I wondered if all my friends felt this way about me. I was in a bad mood all day. Not only because I felt that one of my good friends hated me, but also because I cared so much about what others think.

I WISHED I HAD MORE CONFIDENCE

During lunch a few days later, someone brought up how foolish Top 8 was. My friend happened to be there so I thought I should say something. I said, "Even though people say it isn't in a specific order, we all know it's a lie and we move people around when we're annoyed with them." She looked at me and said, "Oh, by the way, the only reason I moved you is because I know you wouldn't care, but others do. So to end the drama with my other friends I put them higher on the list." I felt stupid and relieved.

My friends think I don't care about being moved around because I never complain about it. But they are oh so very wrong. It drives me crazy. It makes me feel unconfident when I can't deal with being moved. Maybe it's not Top 8 that's the problem, but our lack of confidence.

Last summer, I found a way to end all the chaos. My friend told me about codes you can copy and paste into your profile that hide your top friends, so when people view your page, they no longer see your Top 8. You can find these codes online by searching "hide MySpace comments." Now more than half my "friends" on MySpace have their Top 8s hidden. I'm happy that my friends have hidden their Top 8s because I have stopped overanalyzing my friendships. A more recent feature is

displaying from four to 24 people on your page.

Although all the hype around Top 8 has died down a bit, there is always going to be drama on MySpace, whether it's posting nasty bulletins or leaving cruel comments. It seems easier to be mean to each other on MySpace than face to face. But people forget that what they say on this site can still hurt someone. The main difference between a Web site, rather than in person, is that on MySpace, the whole world can see. Talking to friends and sorting things out isn't the first step teens take when they have an argument. It has to be blown into this big ordeal of back and forth commenting, messaging and whatnot. It almost seems as if our generation has forgotten how to communicate verbally. My advice is that before posting things on MySpace, take a minute to calm down and stop yourself from publicizing your arguments with people.

I try to remind myself though, that in the end, MySpace is nothing but a Web site, and it's not worth countless hours of worrying.



Nattalie says that caring about what other people think of you is just going to drive you crazy. You have to be happy and confident with who you are.

Prescription for depression



ILLUSTRATION BY BRIAN LOPEZ-SANTOS, 15, MARSHALL HS

By Susan Hernandez
15, MONTEBELLO HS

I was assigned a therapist when I was 12 years old. Because I was in foster care, the system thought I needed someone to talk to. My therapist saw that I wasn't talking and playing as much as I used to, so I started seeing a psychiatrist. My siblings and I would see him once a month in an office in a big building. The sessions were boring. He'd ask me the same question over and over, "How do you feel?" I'd just say OK.

I had a lot of reasons to be sad. My mom was in jail. I never met my father. I liked my foster parents but it wasn't the same as being with my real parents.

On the fourth visit to the psychiatrist, my therapist and my psychiatrist asked me if I was sad. I said I was. My psychiatrist asked, "Do you feel more sad sometimes than you do other times?" Yes. Then he drew a roller coaster on the paper and said "You're on this part" and pointed at the lowest part. He said, "If you're on medication it's going to go like this" and he drew smaller curves. They said I was depressed and that they had something that would help me feel less sad. I didn't know what "depressed" meant. I went home and looked it up in the dictionary. It said "extreme sadness." I thought, I'm sad, but I'm not extremely sad.

My therapist said she'd give me a day to think about taking Prozac, which is an antidepressant medication. I wasn't sure what to do. I thought that if I took it, the emotion of sadness would be gone. But I was concerned about whether it would change me, whether I would act different. My foster mom said to take advantage of what the county was giving me because not all children get to take medication for free. I still wasn't sure. Then later that day, I was listening to the radio and I heard The Offspring sing, "Prozac can make it better." I decided to take it because people were saying it was good.

I WITHDREW FROM LIFE

My therapist and psychiatrist never told me the side effects. It made me cranky, I got headaches and it took me a long time to fall asleep. Life seemed dull and gray. I started thinking everything was a routine and what's the point if you do the same thing over and over again? I would go to school but I wouldn't go to all my classes. I would go to the bathroom or ride the bus to a fast-food restaurant and buy chili cheese fries. When I got home after school I'd grab a bag of Hot Cheetos and go to my room. I'd turn on the radio and look at the ceiling. I didn't do my homework. I'd be somewhere else in my mind, in an imaginary world. Sometimes I'd think about my future. I figured I would end up in the streets because I'd always be depressed.

Every day at school my teacher would announce in front of everyone, "Susan, you have to go take your medication now." I felt embarrassed. The other kids asked me why I was taking medication. I'd say that my teacher was kidding or she wanted me out of class or my foster mom wanted to talk to me. I felt different from everyone else, like Edward Scissorhands when he was all alone in his house.

Therapy didn't help either. I didn't like talking about myself. We would play games or my therapist would take me to the batting cage and ask me questions about myself. I'd change the subject. I'd ask, "How fast do the balls go?" or bring up my homework.

Then on top of that, I had to deal with more changes. My foster mom started getting headaches and her back hurt a lot. My foster parents blamed it on me and told me I put too much stress on her. So my sister and I moved and my brother moved to another house. I felt it was my fault, that my depression made everything miserable.

At my new foster home, my foster mom and I were always at each other's throats. Another thing that was difficult was that my other brother was getting adopted. I felt sad because we were really close.

I tried to keep my mind off the pile of things to be sad about, so I started going to school but still wasn't doing my work. I kept busy reading books and doing other people's stuff, like my friends' homework.

Eventually, because I wasn't getting along with my foster mom, I went to yet another foster home with my little sister. Everything was going downhill. My grades had slipped to Cs and Ds. I've always been an optimist. But on the medication, I couldn't look at the bright side of things.

All I'd wear was black. I started hanging out with the goths because I felt at home with them. I found out that they cut and I started cutting too. Whenever I got mad I'd go to the restroom and cut myself. No one knew because I always wore sweaters.

I DIDN'T WANT TO ADMIT I WAS DEPRESSED

I wanted to talk to someone but at the same time I didn't want to say I had a problem because I didn't want to admit it to myself. My social worker and therapist asked me what was bothering me. I didn't talk to them because I thought they would blame me. But I didn't have anyone else to talk to because my siblings all had their own problems. And I moved around so much that I didn't have close friends.

One day I overheard my social worker and my foster mom talking. My social worker asked my foster mom if I was getting any better. My foster mom said she thought I was getting worse. She said there might not be any hope for me, that I was going to end up in a mental hospital or end up killing myself.

I saw all of my dreams floating away, my dreams of growing up, being happily married, having kids, being a veterinarian, making life better for my siblings. I thought that since she'd lost hope, maybe I should too.

I thought about killing myself. No wait, I thought, I can't do it. All of a sudden there was a voice in my head that said, "It's better for everyone. There's no hope anyway. What's the point?" That side of me made sense so I just gave in.

I tried to strangle myself, but my sister walked into our bedroom and stopped me. She looked startled, like she was afraid of me. She kept on saying my name over and over. I told her "nothing happened" to calm her down. I made her promise not to tell my foster mom because then I would have to move or be sent to a mental hospital.

A week later I tried again. They had to take the bathroom door down to get me out. A few days later, after the third time when my foster mom walked in and saw me cutting myself, they called my social worker. She came to my house when I was doing my homework on the patio. She said I was a good student and I had a lot to work for. I thought I was letting her down so I didn't want to

talk to her and admit that I was unhappy.

She asked me, "Why do you look so sad?" I said "I'm not sad." I was smiling but my eyes gave it away. She asked me again and told me not to lie to her. I said I felt like I was worthless, like I didn't have a reason to live. She asked if I was going to do anything again. I said I did have thoughts of suicide. She said she had to call the cops. I said no. She said then I'd have to sign a contract. I refused so she called the cops.

The cops tried to take me to a mental hospital, but my social worker wouldn't let them. I signed the contract and then my social worker signed it and the cops signed it as witnesses. It said I wouldn't try to kill myself for a year and that if I did, I would go to a mental hospital for my own good.

While taking the medication, a part of me had been lost. Now, I'm happy and I'm bubbly.

I went to my room and cried. I was mad. I felt they were interfering in my life. But a couple days later I realized that if my social worker went through the trouble of calling the cops and got me out of going to a mental hospital, then she did believe in me. It made me think there was hope left and that I could get better.

Looking back, it's strange to remember all that stuff. I feel like that wasn't me. It feels like I am telling a stranger's story. Back then, I felt so alone. Now I know that people care for me. Now I'm glad they stepped in.

My foster parents said I needed more help than they could provide. I went to a new foster home without my sister. I was starting over again. My new foster mom threw out my black clothes and bought me new clothes. I started high school at La Puente High. At first I felt like an outcast because I didn't know anyone, but then I started getting a little better because I made friends. Plus I had a contract to keep.

Around the same time they switched my medication to Zoloft, another antidepressant. Zoloft was better. It made me less sad, but I still didn't like it. I felt like it was controlling my emotions, like I would get mad over anything.

Then one day one of my friends gave me a newspaper article that said that a study showed that some medications for depression could cause thoughts of suicide in children. For the first time, I realized my depression wasn't my fault. I was happy because I understood that I didn't really want to die, that it was the medication talking. I was also mad that they had prescribed me something without knowing what it would do to me.

As soon as I got home I called my social worker and read the article to her. She said I should stop taking the medication and that I should tell my psychiatrist. I said

I didn't want to because they'll think I'm in denial about my "illness." In the end, she talked to my psychiatrist for me.

She also argued with my foster agency when the agency said I needed to stay on the meds. She and my pastor were the only people listening to me. He talked to my foster parents and finally convinced them I didn't need to be on medication.

BACK TO MY OLD SELF

A month later, they took me off the medication slowly by decreasing the milligrams. My head would hurt. But a few weeks later, I could be myself again. I felt like I was coming out of a dark tunnel and seeing the sun for the first time.

While taking the medication, a part of me had been lost. My friends would want to do something and I would say no because I would be too bored or tired. Now I'm like, "Let's go." I'm happy and I'm bubbly. Like before tests, I make up songs and rap in class about what we're being tested on.

That wasn't the only good thing. I had to leave my foster home because they didn't have space for me anymore. My new foster mother is supportive.

But I was still feeling like that sad person was a part of me. A few months later, a speaker came to our school and talked about how he had partied and used alcohol when he was in school but he grew out of it. He said "the past is history, the present a victory and the future a mystery." He had a point. I felt like I wasn't tied

down anymore. There wasn't anything holding me back from making my dreams come true.

I believe I didn't need the medication. I needed someone to talk to. If I hadn't been on the medication, it would have been easier for me to talk to people because I wouldn't have felt there was something wrong with me. Talking to someone helps you get things off your chest, which makes you feel better. After I saw how much my social worker battled for me to be off the medication, I felt like she would listen to me. Now whenever I need to talk, I call my social worker. I also have opened up to my new therapist.

Still, I can't blame them. None of us knew that I would get so bad. I believe everything happens for a reason. The reason I went through this is to tell others not to believe what people say if you don't feel it's true. Even though it may look like you are in a dump, it will be OK. You should never give up hope. Sooner or later it's going to get better.

Editor's note: Some people are helped by antidepressant medication. If you are taking antidepressants or any other medication, do not stop taking your medication without a doctor's supervision.



Susan says that teens should trust themselves because only they can know what's best for them.

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Good nutrition is on the menu

From anorexics to diabetics, patients need dietitians to help them learn to eat right

By Chris Lee
17, WALNUT HS

Registered dietitian Netty Levine of Cedars-Sinai Medical Center spoke to L.A. Youth about the job opportunities in her field.

What do dietitians do?

A dietitian educates people on how to eat right. I help them change their eating habits.

What kind of patients do you treat?

There are inpatients such as patients who have a gun wound and need a special diet and outpatients such as patients who need or want to change their eating habits.

What problems do your patients encounter?

Some patients are overweight or anorexic and need or want to change their eating habits, and others may have diabetes and need a special diet. I also get some patients who are pregnant and want to know how to properly nourish their child.

What is difficult in solving these problems?

Different people have different needs. Some may be taking diet pills and not losing weight. Others may be going to Souplantation to eat too much salad. One challenge is that patients are culturally diverse. They all have the same basic problem, but they involve different ethnic foods. It is a bit of a challenge solving the problem [when there are so many different factors].

Do dietitians only work in hospitals?

Dietitians can work in hospitals, clinics, health clubs or spas. Dietitians can also work at health magazines or general magazines because health and diet are popular topics.

Does this field have good job opportunities?

Sometimes I get to work with celebrities or other famous people. You can even become an administra-

tive dietitian who manages budgets, staffs the floor or decides what's on the menu.

How do you treat a patient? Do you set up an eating plan?

I do not make a calorie plan or a schedule in the beginning. First I figure out the problem [causing obesity, malnourishment, etc.]. Sometimes I feel like I am a psychologist or marriage counselor because eating problems come from other problems, such as different eating habits when a patient lives with divorced parents. After I find out more about the patient, I start making changes such as portion control and meal control depending on the patient.

What kind of training is needed to become a dietitian?

It usually takes four years of college and one year of internship. Some colleges like Cal State L.A. offer special dietitian programs. I was a biology major and easily switched into being a dietitian by taking some nutrition classes and finishing my internship.

How much do dietitians make?

According to the American Dietetic Association, dietitians make \$35,000 to \$46,000 per year in the first five years and can increase to incomes above \$72,000.

Is the job flexible?

Yes, it is. When I was pregnant I asked to work four five-hour work days. Some people work part-time or full-time.

Are dietitians predominantly female?

Yes, dietitians are mostly female. It would be nice if there were more males. There are a few males in the field, and they usually rise to the top.

What is the best part about being a dietitian?

When a pregnant patient comes back to me and asks if I want to see their healthy baby or babies. Or when someone who has diabetes comes back with a healthy blood sugar level.



PHOTO BY CHRIS LEE, 17, WALNUT HS

Netty Levine, a registered dietitian at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center's Nutrition Counseling Center in Beverly Hills, displays some of the plastic food models she uses to demonstrate correct portion sizes and balanced meals.

Would you like to know more about how to enter this field? The California Dietetic Association Web site at www.dietitian.org offers listings of two-year and four-year colleges that have degree programs for registered dietitians and dietetic technicians, along with internships, a scholarship application form and questions and answers about the field. Click on "For Our Students."

Finding my place

Selecting the right college was difficult for me, but I am thrilled with my choice



PHOTO BY ROSA SEIDELMAN, 18, WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY

Even the winters are fun when you go to a college that you love, says Andrea Domanick, who attends Wesleyan University in Connecticut. She graduated from Harvard-Westlake School in North Hollywood last summer.

By Andrea Domanick
19, WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY

After the grueling college application process and graduation from high school, I was left with one question: What shoes does one wear for an East Coast winter? With February bringing inches of fresh snow, my Converse and vintage flats just wouldn't cut it. On those sub-zero treks from my dorm to my 9 a.m. Spanish class—looking like a burglar bundled in my ski mask, parka, gloves and boots—I often find myself reflecting on what made me decide to leave the glitter and bustle of my West Hollywood hometown for a small town in Connecticut.

The night I sent in my last application, I celebrated over pancakes with friends. We toasted to surviving the Harvard-Westlake “college mill,” to our future, and to Second Semester Seniorhood. “Well, we can't go wrong from here,” I said to the clinking of our Coke glasses.

Contrary to my high school's reputa-

tion, I was not going to have a nervous breakdown if I didn't get into an Ivy League school. From my safety schools to my highest reaches, I knew I'd be happy no matter where I ended up.

My optimism helped me get through the nail-biting months until our decisions arrived. However, when they did, I found myself in unforeseen territory: of the 16 schools I applied to, I got only one rejection. I expected to get into about half, but I ended up accepted at 11 schools and waitlisted at four. I had figured that I might as well try my luck; the worst that could happen would be that rejections would help me narrow down my choices. An embarrassment of riches? Certainly. But now things got complicated—reality kicked in, and financial aid, location and post-graduate connections tore me between what I wanted and what was supposedly better for my future.

It seemed easy enough at first. When the big envelope came from the school that had long since been my first choice, Wesleyan, I jumped around like a sugar-up 8-year-old and ran the gamut of my friends' names in my phone book. Wesleyan was my scholarly heaven, a

place where people were ambitious but not cutthroat, intelligent but sincere.

MY PARENTS WERE DRAWN TO THE BIG-NAME SCHOOLS

My parents, however, didn't completely join in my enthusiasm. They had never pressured me to go to any “type” of school and supported my love for Wesleyan, a “Little Ivy.” But after decisions arrived, my parents were seduced by schools with more well-known names such as UC Berkeley and Columbia (to which I was admitted and waitlisted, respectively). Unexpectedly, my family and I faced an assortment of schools oozing with internships, alumni connections and a shiny name on my résumé.

Financial aid played the first big role in narrowing my selection. Seeing as I had no interest in my parents taking out a second mortgage on our home, I immediately crossed off schools such as NYU and Reed College that expected us to pay upwards of \$30,000 a year just for tuition. With that out of the way, I was left with about 10 schools—including five UCs—all within the \$20,000 price range.

Location was the next factor. My family tried bribing me with a new car and even my own apartment to get me to go to UCLA, but it was just too close to home. Some students dread leaving their family and home behind, but I was ready to get out of California. It's not that I don't love my family—whom it was incredibly difficult to leave—or that I don't enjoy living in West Hollywood, but I wanted to see what life is like in other parts of the country. I've always felt that an essential part of education is beyond what one learns from books and professors; that the people we meet and the places we go define our minds and characters as much as any freshman 101 class. So I crossed four UCs off my list, and turned my thoughts east.

About half of the East Coast schools were located in small towns. While most were not more than a two-hour train ride from a city, that would be a strange adjustment for this city girl. Some colleges, like Oberlin in Ohio and Vassar in upstate New York were just too small (about 2,500 students), too isolated and too freezing for me. My parents and I worried that, despite a highly active campus life, other

small-town schools wouldn't have the access to jobs and internships that schools in places like New York City would. Unfortunately, Wesleyan—in Middletown, Connecticut—fell into that category.

In light of this, the question of prestige again came into play. If I went to Barnard (a small women's college) or got off the waitlist at Columbia College, both in New York and part of the elite Columbia University, I would have better opportunities, such as United Nations internships. I also knew that many companies would be eager to hire Columbia students. In addition, I went to both public and private schools, and I've grown to appreciate the intimacy of the small classes and devoted professors that they would have at Barnard but not as much at Columbia or Berkeley. But if Barnard seemed so great, why couldn't I stop thinking about Wesleyan?

Suddenly, the level-headed approach I had taken to the select-a-college process felt more like I was lost in a horror-movie fun house. My head spun. It never crossed my mind that I might have difficulty getting into grad school, or finding a great job. Call me naïve but isn't hard work and a strong drive, in addition to attending a first-rate college, enough?

EVERYONE'S ADVICE INCREASED THE PRESSURE

My formerly firm convictions were being tossed around like a rag doll. One moment my parents' support of Columbia's structure made it seem like that was best; the next moment my headmaster would tell me he could really see me as a Wesleyan student. And while my teachers' "You-can't-go-wrong" attitudes were reassuring, all of the counseling I sought ultimately left me feeling empty, and for the first time, frightened about my future. When it got to the point where I'd be seized by headaches and a lump in my throat at the mere mention of college, my family and I decided to take drastic measures.

It is often said that you have to visit a college campus to feel in your gut if you could belong there. Well, my parents and I visited many campuses the summer after junior year, and the only feelings I got were hot, sweaty and anxious. I loved all the schools in a sort of "That seems nice. Pretty architecture. Enthusiastic tour guide," kind of way. We made the mistake of visiting when the schools were out of session. And so the week before my senior AP exams, I gathered an overnight bag and frequent flier miles and set off alone to visit the final three contenders: Columbia, Barnard and Wesleyan.

More than seeing the campus life,

the time away helped me realize what my priorities were for my education. As wonderful as Columbia is, a part of me felt like choosing it for its status and connections would be selling out, relinquishing the whole reason I applied to the schools I did: to learn for learning's sake. While I could do that individually at Columbia, I feared I would also be sucked into a world of pre-professionalism and cutthroat competition that I resented in high school.

VISITING WESLEYAN SEALED THE DEAL

Unlike the other campuses, I knew no one when I arrived at Wesleyan. I was given a map, a class schedule and a place to put my suitcase, and I walked into one of its castle-like buildings. Within a few hours I participated in several engaging class discussions and was adopted by a group of freshmen eager to show me around and tell me all about Wesleyan. This school made me excited. It made me want to push myself and to explore interests, like student government, that I had always felt too overwhelmed or too intimidated to try before. Even freshmen started thriving campus groups, such as a poetry workshop and club water polo. Because Wesleyan was smaller (2,700 students), and the students focused on competing with themselves rather than each other, I finally found the kind of nourishing environment that could fuel me to become a leader in a community.

Additionally, as untrue to myself as I felt about being concerned with connections, my parents' input made me realize that I had to be practical. The visit quelled those concerns as I discovered Wesleyan had strong alumni connections—one music major I met got an internship with Sony BMG Music Entertainment—and an extensive job resource center. What really won me over about Wesleyan, though, was how it kept surprising me. Its students are often stereotyped as "activist hippies" or "snobby art hipsters," but I discovered there really wasn't a Wesleyan "type." Just when I thought a person was the "artsy" type, she would tell me about her soccer practice in the rain; when a student seemed like a prep-school jock, he brought up his passion for developmental psychology. There was no mold; students carved out their own unique paths, and I could see myself truly growing in the company of their curiosity and ambition.

Sitting in the airport at the end of my journey, I found myself thrilled by Wesleyan but still clinging to what attracted me to the other schools. As I was about to call my mom to discuss my

Andrea's tips for selecting a college

- Don't lose sight of what YOU want in a school—this is the next four years of your life; make sure you enjoy and make the most out of them!
- Listen to your parents—contrary to what most teens think, parents DO understand us on at least a basic level. They also have more life experience and know what may be best for you in the long run.
- ... But not too much. Though my parents wanted the best for me in pressing for an Ivy League school, I knew in my heart I wasn't going to be my happiest there. That goes for all people you turn to for advice—listen to them but don't be pressured out of your own needs.
- Take a break. If you find yourself getting overwhelmed or more confused as the decision process continues, take a few days "off" from thinking or talking about colleges. Your head will be clearer when you start again.
- Don't overlook gut instinct! Your initial feeling about a school is often the most genuine one.
- Most colleges are reasonable with financial aid. Often, they'll negotiate with you if a college of similar ranking has offered you a better package.
- As much as you should follow your heart in choosing a college, remember to be practical. If going to the school of your dreams means you'll still be paying off student loans when you're in a retirement home, maybe you should forgo that option.
- Talk with current students. Admissions offices are more than happy to put you in touch with undergrads so you can get more honest, extensive opinions on life at that school. Talking with freshmen at each school I looked at was extremely helpful and played a big role in my decision.
- Last but not least: don't forget what a big deal it is to even be going to college! If you're worried about not being as successful because the school you choose is not a big-name university, stop. Remember that any college is an incredible educational resource; ultimately, your life's success is up to your ambition to make it happen.

thoughts, I had a moment of clarity: wasn't it up to me, no matter what school I chose, how successful I became? If success was all about name and connections, the majority of people in the world wouldn't have the kind of jobs and enjoyable lives that they do. There was no point in getting frightened and overwhelmed—all I had to do was return to what I wanted in a school and from my future.

I chose Wesleyan because, despite its small-town location, it was what was right for me academically, socially and professionally. It seemed I knew it from that first day in April, but the soul searching I did in the following month led me to know myself, my abilities and my priorities better than I ever have before.

Now it's late February and I'm lounging in my cozy dorm room, listening to the drip of the icicles on my porch window. It's a spectacular day, though six months ago I couldn't imagine considering 35 degrees so warm and lovely. Scattered around my room are a few of the little things I miss about L.A.—a tin of tea from The Coffee Bean, a bag from Amoeba Records, some Polaroids of my friends. I couldn't bring the sunshine with me, but the crisp Connecticut air seems so far to be a fair trade. I'm still figuring out the whole dressing-for-winter thing, but my experiences with my classes, professors and peers have been just right. From my first day on campus, Wesleyan has felt like a natural part of me—and I've never looked back.

The war in Iraq

March marks the four-year anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq. More than 3,400 U.S. troops have been killed to date, and President Bush plans to send 20,000 additional soldiers to Iraq to help defeat the insurgents and stabilize the country.



How do you feel the U.S. government has handled the war?

"Well, I've always felt that the war in Iraq was not justified in any way whatsoever. To make matters worse, we have really been unable to deal with the problems that have arisen in Iraq. We originally went for weapons of mass destruction, but then changed our minds and toppled Saddam Hussein.



And then, we decided to rebuild Iraq. This sort of mission can really take a toll on our principles and ideals."

Adam Large, 17, SHERMAN OAKS CENTER FOR ENRICHED STUDIES

"I don't necessarily agree with the actions that the U.S. has made. But hopefully they're making the best ones. I just hope that the soldiers come home safely. But I do think that they need to be over there to keep the peace."



Adriana Padilla, 17, SANTA MONICA HS

"In the beginning of the war it seemed like they handled it well, but it's gotten more out of control. There have been too many people killed and too many families on both sides hurt. I disagree with the idea of sending more troops in because why send more of the future of our country to war and basically [to] die."



Zeno Robinson, 13, WEBSTER MS

"Well, the U.S. government initially entered the war for noble intentions, and the American public supported it. I don't blame [the U.S. government] for not being able to predict the difficulties we now encounter, but I believe that the Iraqi people should stand on their own two feet."



Winston Feng, 16, WALNUT HS

"I don't think that the U.S. government has handled it the way that they should have. They shouldn't have gotten involved at all. I think President Bush was just finishing what Daddy didn't. He should have just left Iraq alone."



Dominique Fuster, 16, GLENDALE HS

"I think because it was rushed so rapidly, it has made it hard to implement any plans that would bring about real improvement in Iraq, and that is very evident today. I think we have far-fetched optimism for the future. I don't think they've handled it as a war. In wars you go in and have a purpose and try to take care of it, but they aren't trying to take care of anything, they're trying to sort things out while making more problems. The deaths of the soldiers aren't equaling any progress, so therefore the government is doing a bad job."



Kent Williams, 18, WEST VALLEY CHRISTIAN JR./SR. HS

"I think that the war has been worth it. Our troops in Iraq are actually helping. If we leave now, the war will get worse. I think that the main reason we should be there is oil. If Al Qaeda takes over, it will eventually lead to terrorist attacks in the United States."



Lucas Neumann, 13, LOS ANGELES CENTER FOR ENRICHED STUDIES

"I think the way they have handled the war is wrong because the idea was to stop Iraq from making nuclear weapons that could be used in the future against the United States. But they haven't found anything yet. There are soldiers there that are being killed by terrorist groups and as more time passes by, more soldiers are killed."



Nancy Hernandez, 15, HIGH-TECH HS (LAKE BALBOA)

For more interviews and to read what teens had to say about military recruiters on campus and Bush's plan to send additional troops to Iraq, go to www.layouth.com.

Photos and quotes gathered by Christina Badalian, 17, Glendale HS; Jennifer Carcamo, 17, High-Tech HS (Lake Balboa); Chris Lee, 17, Walnut HS; Selina MacLaren, 17, West Valley Christian Jr./Sr. HS; Lily McGarr, 17, Santa Monica HS; Chelsea McNay, 14, Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies; Sammie Richards, 15, Sherman Oaks Center for Enriched Studies; Malik Smith-Thompson, 13, Webster MS.

Call to duty

A young Marine explains his decision to enlist in a time of war

By Selina MacLaren

17, WEST VALLEY CHRISTIAN JR./SR. HS

I work at a gym, and one day I spoke to a Marine, 19-year-old Tim Taylor, who graduated from El Camino Real High School in Woodland Hills. We chatted about the Marine Corps and the Iraq war. I called him later for an interview while he was stationed at Camp Pendleton, a Marine Corps base in San Diego where he was waiting to be deployed to Iraq. As someone who doesn't support the way the government has handled the Iraq war, it was interesting to hear the opinion of someone willing to fight. Even though we had different opinions, I respected his devotion to the Marine Corps and learned a lot about the motivations of soldiers.

Why and when did you choose to join the Marine Corps? What challenges did you face in making the decision?

I wanted to join the Marine Corps when I was about 14 years old. I wanted to join the Marine Corps specifically because of the opportunities it offered you, the band of brotherhood. Opportunities to travel all over the world, to experience new countries, to take in all kinds of challenging moments, and to have a sense of pride toward yourself and a sense of commitment toward oneself and his brothers and sisters.

There were so many challenges. My first challenge was to bring my body to the best physical shape it could be in, to bring my mind to the most mentally stable state, to overcome emotional situations, and to be able to drop everything I was doing to answer the call.

[When I was 16] I got sent to a lockdown place for kids that did stupid stuff when they were younger. I wasn't very respectful when I was younger, got in a lot of fights, very disrespectful toward women, and I learned a lot of values toward women in the Marine Corps. It taught me a lot. Not just values toward women but values toward life. It boosted my confidence and my self-esteem, and in the one year that I've been in the Marine Corps, I've learned that there is nothing



PHOTO BY TIM'S MOTHER, NICOLE RADOUMIS

Tim Taylor, 19, (left) joined the Marines like his brother, Cpl. Christopher Radoumis.

that I can't do. The Marine Corps sets you up to face anything: financial, physical, anything. Discipline is the main thing.

Tell me more about the lockdown. What did you do to get sent there?

I got expelled from a junior high school. I got in trouble because I hurt the kid when I got in a fight with him. I drank in high school and I was disrespectful, belligerent. I got sent there when I was 16, left when I was 18.

What did you have to do to join the Marines? Who helped you?

To be a Marine, first off, you have to have a good record legal-wise, and if you don't, you have to have a waiver, which they look at to see if you even are legally allowed. If you committed murder or rape for example, you aren't allowed. You have to meet physical requirements. Just to get into boot camp, you have to run a mile and a half in 13 minutes, do 54 crunches in two minutes and do two pull-ups. That's just to get in, but once you're actually a Marine, it's a lot different. Your average Marine runs three miles in 19-20 minutes, does about 125-150 crunches in under two minutes, and averages about 17-20 pull-ups.

My brother, who is a Marine, helped me. And my father. My whole family and all my friends supported me.

How did you feel when you first heard about the war?

I felt that it was a very just cause. I feel that the way the media represents the war is that they basically post a lot of the bad stuff, and they don't post the things that represent why we're actually there. I think that the terrorists' goal was to take Americans and bring their will down and make Americans fight against each other. When they crashed the plane into the building, it did the exact opposite. It brought Americans together and showed us that we have to stick together. We need to support our troops because it's not easy being in a foreign country, being away from family for 10 months, being away from wives and girlfriends. Support is very important, support is what drives us in what we do. I feel that a lot of Americans don't support the troops enough. I don't think they really understand the process of what we're doing. I do what I do so you and your friends can do what they do. A war on terrorism is not a simple war where we can just kill a couple bad guys and say the war is done.

Why did you join in a time of war?

I felt that there was a calling. A lot of people say I'm crazy because number one, I joined the Marine Corps, and number two, I joined the hardest MOS (job), which is infantry. I felt that all I had to do was build up courage to join and have no fear in what I'm doing. I want to have kids one day, and I want to deal with the problem [terrorism] now before it gets worse.

When did you find out that you had to go to Iraq?

I found out that I'm going to Iraq a couple days ago [February]. I'm going this year. The unit I'm going to is called the 1-9. They call them the Walking Dead because this is the unit that has been wiped out in every war.

Are you afraid of being sent to Iraq in the Walking Dead unit?

No, I look at it more as an honor to be in it. It's my goal to make a new history [for] it. I could die just like anyone else. It's not my goal to keep myself alive, but it's my goal to keep my brothers alive.

Do you agree with President Bush increasing troop levels?

I agree with it because the more troops we have over there, the more support we'll have, and the faster we'll get the job done. If we leave now, it [terrorism] will build back up and come out again in another 10 years. I don't want it to be there when my kids are alive.

What have your Marine friends said about Iraq?

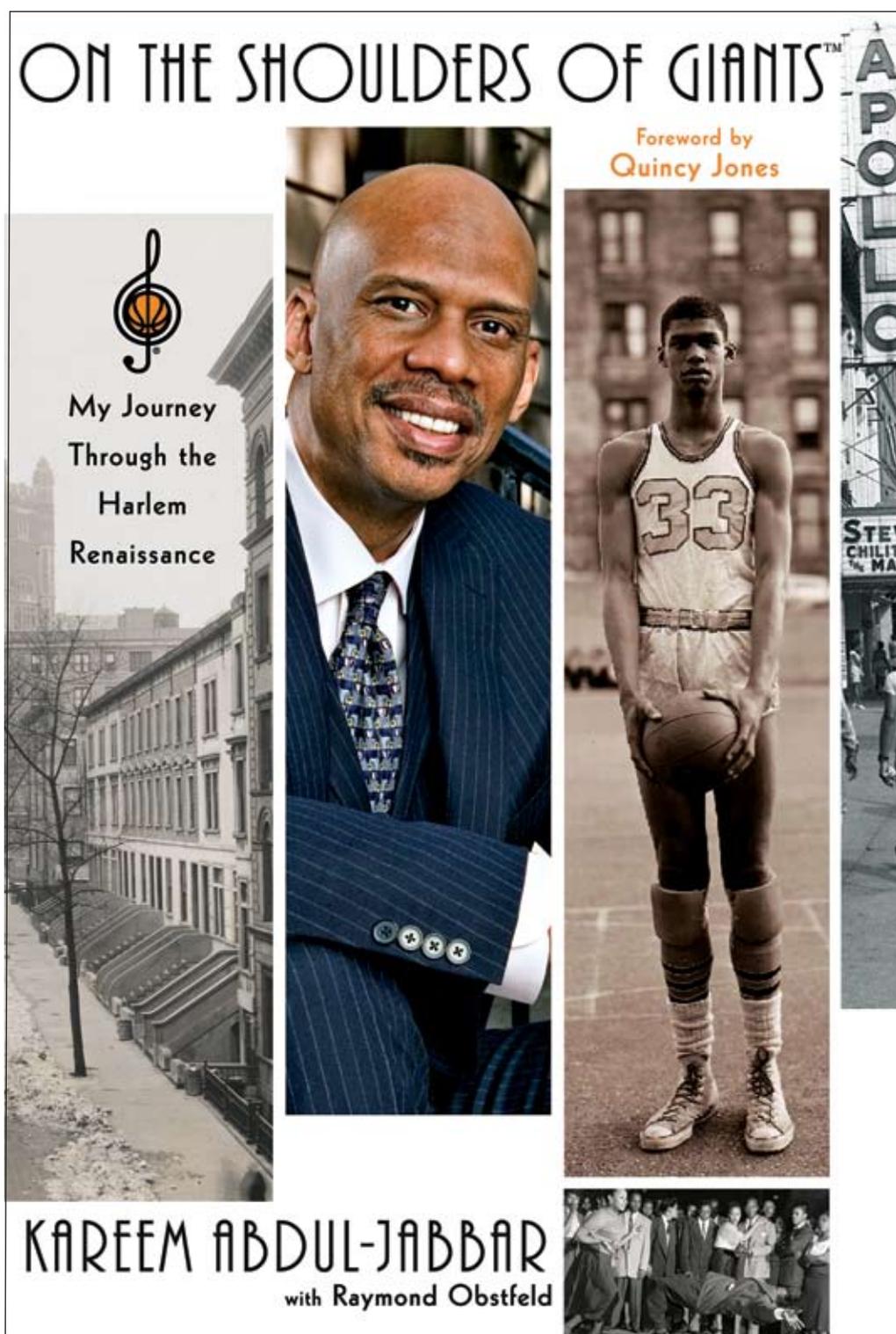
Watch out for improvised explosive devices (IEDs). The terrorists or insurgents will make a bomb out of 155mm artillery shell—which is like an artillery round—wire it with a cell phone or some hand-held device, and it'll blow up a car or someone. A lot of snipers also, even from other countries.

It's hot. But in general, a lot of my friends never really complain about it. They're Marines, they do what they're trained to do.

Any last words to students?

I think a lot more people should start supporting the Marine Corps. I think a lot more people should try to join the service if they think they got what it takes.

Kareem's perspective



Basketball star and author Kareem Abdul-Jabbar honors the many blacks in history who paved the way for minorities to achieve their goals

By Sam Rubinroit
14, MALIBU HS

Kareem Abdul-Jabbar is one of the elite basketball centers of all time. Here in L.A., he is known best for his stunning Lakers career, during which he helped win five championships, as well as having been one of UCLA's greatest players, leading the Bruins to an 88-2 record and two NCAA championships. Standing 7' 2", he was the first overall pick in the 1969 NBA draft, and later that year won the NBA Rookie of the Year Award. Over his career, he racked up six Most Valuable Player awards, and was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1995. He is currently an assistant coach for the Los Angeles Lakers, and has served as an inspiration for many of today's top centers.

Not only is Abdul-Jabbar a basketball player, but he's also a historian and author. His newest book, *On The Shoulders of Giants*, is his sixth. Most of his writings tap into the expansive history of some of the most influential African-Americans, and many of the unsung heroes of the past.

In *On the Shoulders of Giants*, Abdul-Jabbar connects today's hip-hop generation with its roots in Harlem and the music's jazz forefathers. He leads us through his childhood where he encountered the giants of the Harlem Renaissance, a period when blacks in the art and music world demonstrated that they are just as competent as whites, and paved the way for much of today's writing, music and lifestyles.

Each chapter of the book is divided into two parts. First, Abdul-Jabbar discusses a historical aspect of the Harlem Renaissance. Then he shows how it influenced him and the world today. He describes how the accomplishments of some of Harlem's musicians and authors helped blacks flourish in sports, music, literature and business. He explains the immense struggles that those before him endured to provide him and other blacks with opportunities many take for granted today.

Along with discussing the history of Harlem, Abdul-Jabbar talks about how he developed a love for sports, and also who influenced him most. He speaks of how his first love was truly baseball, and how he only used basketball to escape bullies who tormented him. He describes the origination of the "sky hook:" he was surrounded by defenders, and using his height, he put the ball above his head and let it fly. The shot didn't go in the first time he tried, but it eventually became his most popular move.

This book really affected me. I am a rabid basketball fan, and being from L.A., naturally I'm a Laker fan. Since I was never able to see Abdul-Jabbar play, this book gave me insight into his life. He discusses in

depth how he was affected by the early basketball team the Renaissance Big Five, and how they fought as blacks to break through in a white sport.

He also talks about how many see him as aloof, but he feels the press should judge him on how he played on the court, not after the game. He explains that he became like this because at the time when he played, blacks were supposed to be grateful that whites allowed them to play, and gush thankfulness, but he wasn't going to stoop to their level.

Even someone who isn't a big basketball fan will enjoy this book for the insight it gives into black history and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar's first-hand account of how it made him the man and author he is today.

Along with my brother Seth, I spoke with Abdul-Jabbar about his new book, and his life on and off the court.

In your newest book, *On the Shoulders of Giants*, you say, "Basketball never defined me, it gave me an opportunity to define myself." How would you define yourself?

Kareem Abdul-Jabbar: I'm attempting to be a Renaissance man. That would be my easiest definition.

You discussed a lot about how jazz influenced you growing up. What do you think of the effect of rap today and the violence behind it?

Well, rap hasn't always had a good record because of the people that have been involved with it. Some of the people involved with it have great reputations; I think Mos Def is someone who has used that format to encourage people. But other people have glorified violence, misogyny [hatred of women] and criminal enterprise, so it all depends on who's talking.

How much do you think the Harlem Renaissance did to show that blacks are as talented and as capable as everyone else?

The Harlem Renaissance enabled black people to show America and the world that they had unlimited potential. It did a great job of getting that message out to people. In those years there was a burst of production that has been unparalleled in American history in terms of one ethnic group.

Do you think there is any significant racism in America today?

Yes.

What kind?

The traditional kind. The racism that was here when the founding fathers were still here. There are still traces of it and people have work to do to eliminate it, but I think we've made a lot of progress in America, and that's very important. Sometimes, people lose sight of the fact that we have been able to change and make it a better place.

In your book you talk about how you would see your favorite jazz musicians in town and getting groceries just like everyone else. Do you think that athletes and musicians have a responsibility to be role models for kids?

Well, I think there is no way you can escape being a role model ... People are going to look at you that way

whether you want that to be the case or not. You don't really have any choice.

Do you think players should be judged more on how they play on the court or how they play out in public?

I think it should all come into the picture. Sometimes great players are a little nutty, and you need to understand that that's the way they are.

How do you think you would have fared if you had gone in the direction of baseball rather than basketball?

Well, I think I could have been the early Randy Johnson. When I was in the eighth grade the scouts knew who I was and they put the gun on me and I pitched like 95 miles per hour.

This book establishes you as a historical writer. Do you want to be remembered more as an author/historian or a basketball player?

I'm proud and happy that I've been able to distinguish myself as both. I can't be the athlete that I want anymore but I'm still able to be a writer, and I'm glad to have that opportunity.

Your shared love of poetry bonded you with Coach John Wooden. How much did John Wooden and your UCLA experience help prepare you for life?

I think my experience at UCLA really helped me to round out my education. I think UCLA was a great academic institution when I went there.

If you were playing today, how different do you think your career would have been?

Who knows? There aren't very many good centers left, so when I played, there were some really good centers. But that's not the case anymore. People just don't play the game like that.

Do you think that can change in the future?

Yeah, I think it will probably end up being a cyclical thing. When people realize that that's an effective way to play the game, people might get into it.

You're working with one of those centers in Laker Andrew Bynum. How are you enjoying working with him?

I'm having a good time working with Andrew. He has a good attitude, he works hard, and he has the physical talent so it's about him learning and developing.

If someone like Shaq had a work ethic like yours, how great do you think he could have been?

Well, he would have made a lot more free throws (laughing). He wouldn't have been hurt as much, because I don't think Shaq trains to the point where he can run all season. That's a difficult thing to do. He has such an overwhelming advantage in terms of size and strength, but he relies on that too much.

Do you think players today are losing the love of the game making millions of dollars?

There are a lot of players today that don't understand the extraordinary opportunity they are being given, but that doesn't necessarily mean that they don't love the game. I see a lot of them who do love the game. But it is difficult to keep everything in perspective, it is very

Excerpt from Kareem Abdul-Jabbar's *On the Shoulders of Giants*:

'Harlem Renaissance leader Marcus Garvey said, "A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots." This has been my guiding principle in choosing what to write and how to approach the material. For some, history is a drab and dusty subject; for me it is a powerful stimulant, arousing our passions about past injustices and infusing us with strength to fight present ones. The only way I know how to share my passion about history and its power to affect our lives is to write these books.'

hard to be able to play the game, all the preparation you have to do in terms of training. It really takes a lot out of you.

So I think over a long period of time a lot more of them will appreciate what they've been able to do. Sometimes you have to go through it and realize the opportunities that everyone else got that don't compare, and you understand the opportunity you've been given.

What do you think the biggest lesson from your book should be?

That a whole lot went into making the NBA what it is today. If players from today had to play basketball in the 1920s or 1930s, they'd be very shocked. They don't realize how good they have it.

Take our survey!

You could **WIN \$100** by answering the following questions about dating and technology.

Teens and technology go hand in hand. Everywhere you go, your iPod or cell phone goes too. Instant Messaging, texting and MySpace are part of everyday activities. But what does always being connected mean when you're connected to someone else? What happens when MySpace becomes our space and the person you're seeing spends more time on your page than you do? L.A. Youth wants to know more about what teens think about dating and technology. How does it help you communicate, and when is it all just too much?

Three entries will be randomly chosen to receive \$100. To enter, fill out this survey and mail it to L.A. Youth. You can also fill out this survey online (check for the link at www.layouth.com). Please fill out the survey only once on paper or online. To be eligible for the drawing, your name, address and phone number must be included and all questions must be answered. All information will be kept confidential. The deadline is Tuesday, May 1, 2007.

To be eligible for the drawing to win \$100, please fill in the following information. Your information will be kept confidential. It is used only to mail checks to winning entrants. The deadline is Tuesday, May 1, 2007.

Name _____
School _____ Grade _____
Home street address _____
City _____ Zip _____
Phone () _____

Mail the survey to: ★ L.A. Youth, 5967 W. 3rd St. Ste. 301, Los Angeles CA 90036

1) Are you Male Female

2) How old are you? ____

3) What is your ethnicity?

White Black

Latino/Latina Asian

Other (write-in) _____

4) What are your current living arrangements?

Living with parent(s)/adoptive parents

Living with relatives

Living with foster parents/in a group home

Detention center

Other (write in) _____

5) Where do you attend school?

Public

Private

Parochial

Nonpublic

Continuation

I don't attend school

DATING

6) Have you ever dated someone or been in a relationship?

Yes

No

7) Have you ever gotten in an argument or fight with the person you're dating?

Yes

No

8) Have you ever argued with the person you're seeing or dating over any of the following? (Check all that apply)

Money

Other girls/guys

Your friends

Your tastes

Jealousy

Stupid little things

Other (write in) _____

None of the above



DATING and TECHNOLOGY

9) Do you have or use any of the following? (Check all that apply)

iPod or MP3 player

Cell phone

Computer

Texting

IM

None of the above

10) Have you ever argued or been involved in drama because of? (Check all that apply)

How often you or the person you were seeing called each other on the phone

How often you or the person you were seeing texted each other

How often you or the person you were seeing IM'ed each other

They weren't paying attention to you because they were listening to their iPod

They weren't paying attention to you because they were watching television

Something that was on your or their MySpace or Facebook page

They texted or IM'ed someone else

Other (write-in) _____

None of the above

11) Have you or someone you know ever used technology (cellphone, texting, IM, MySpace) to: (Check all that apply)

Make someone jealous

Avoid a fight or argument

To argue

To talk tough

To blackmail someone

To embarrass someone

To make up after a fight

To say mean comments about someone

None of the above

12) If you have dated someone, which best describes what role technology played in your last relationship? (Check all that apply)

Helps us communicate

Makes it easier for small arguments to get out of hand

Helps us keep in touch whenever we want

Causes too much jealousy

Is no big deal

Is too much sometimes

None of the above

13) Has any of the following happened to you or someone you know? (Check all that apply)

A person you broke up with wouldn't stop calling, texting, e-mailing or sending you MySpace comments.

A person you were dating called, texted, e-mailed or left comments on your MySpace so much that it scared you.

A person you were dating called, texted, e-mailed or left comments on your MySpace so much that it made you angry and/or caused you to break up with them.

A person you were dating called or texted you every hour to ask where you were and who you were with.

A person who you weren't dating, but who was interested in you, wouldn't stop calling, texting, e-mailing or sending you MySpace comments.

None of the above

This survey is sponsored by the Blue Shield of California Foundation.



L.A. youth SUMMER WORKSHOP

Sign up for the L.A. Youth summer writing workshop, an intensive six-week experience during which you will write an article that will be published in L.A. Youth, as well as conduct interviews and do research. You will complete your story while working one-on-one with a professional adult L.A. Youth editor.

To apply, you must be a Los Angeles County teen aged 15-18 attending high school in the area. No journalism experience is required, but you must have an interest in writing for L.A. Youth to participate. The workshop is unpaid. Public high school students will be given preference. Apply early, because a limited number of spaces are available.

Expectations:

- In this workshop, you are expected to meet weekly deadlines involving reading and writing, and attend field trips. Students who do not meet the deadlines will be asked to leave the writing workshop and encouraged to remain involved with L.A. Youth in some other way.

- You are expected to generate material for the September issue of L.A. Youth.

- You must attend group meetings at the L.A. Youth office every Wednesday from 2 to 5 p.m. from July 11 to August 15. You also must arrange weekly two-hour individual meetings with your editor. The first group meeting will be held at 2 p.m. on Wednesday, July 11, 2007.

How to apply:

Submit this application form with a **one-page writing sample** about one of your interests, hobbies or activities, as well as the **\$75 application fee**. Scholarships available. Tips for the writing sample: submit one of your best essays from school or write an original one-page statement that tells us something about you and gives us a sense of your writing style. After you submit your application, we'll call you for a short **interview** before you are accepted into the workshop. To prepare for the workshop, we strongly encourage you to read past issues of L.A. Youth on our Web site. Go to www.layouth.com and click on "Archives."

The application deadline is **Friday, June 8, 2007.**

Application for L.A. Youth summer writing workshop

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

ZIP CODE _____

HOME PHONE _____

E-MAIL ADDRESS _____

SCHOOL _____

GRADE YOU WILL ENTER IN SEPTEMBER _____

DATE OF BIRTH ____ - ____ - ____

Send application with \$75 fee and writing sample to:

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

Calling all foster youth in Los Angeles County

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

L.A. Youth is looking for foster youth ages 14 to 19 who want to write an article to be published in L.A. Youth.

By joining L.A. Youth, you can:

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



Foster Youth Editor Amanda Riddle (right) works with a writer on his 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. Their house was beautiful and I had my own room. 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 even 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 grandmother. How come we didn't live with my parents? Well, let me inform you. My mother

PHOTO BY TERESA HIDALGO, SIERRA VISTA HIGH SCHOOL. TERESA'S FOSTER FAMILY WAS PROUD 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.



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

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



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

Read this story →
to find out how Martha copes with never having known her father

Would he love me?

I've always wondered who my father was, and if he knows I exist

By **Martha Guzman**
13, BERENDO MS

When I was growing up, my grandma, who raised me, said wonderful things about my biological mother, who lives in Mexico. She'd say "Oh Martha, your mother can't wait until you visit" and "She loves you." But she wouldn't say anything about my dad. It was like I didn't have a dad. I sometimes imagined that my dad was dead because my grandmother never talked about him. Sometimes I thought my dad was alive and would come and see me one day.

When I was 9 years old my friend asked me, "Where is your dad?" I ran home and sat my grandmother down and screamed, "I want to know where my dad is. Why is he not here with me?"

"Calm down, let me explain," she said. "It's a very long story."

My grandma told me that my mom was a secretary at a petroleum company that my dad owned in Mexico. To me it sounded like their love was a love of the wind—it touched her face and then it left. My mom got pregnant. At the same time, my dad had to leave because of his job, but my mom couldn't go because she had two other kids to take care of. From that day on, my mom hasn't heard from him. When my dad left, he didn't know that I was on the way.

My whole world changed when my grandma told me this. I wished I had never asked. I felt like I was stabbed in the back because all those years I had thought I didn't have a dad, but my dad was alive. Before, I could imagine talking to my dad through God. Now, I don't know what to think about my dad. Would he love me if he knew he had a daughter? Would he care about me? Does he have any other kids?

Knowing the truth hurts more because I think millions of thoughts about him. Most girls have dads who take them to their practices, buy them things and play with them. Why can't I have that? I think about my dad every day, especially when my grandmother and I argue. If

my dad were here he would defend me. Sometimes I fight with my cousins and my grandmother takes my cousins' sides instead of mine. But I believe that if my dad were here he would defend me and not my cousins, even if I was wrong.

But the time that I missed my dad the most was my First Communion when I turned 13.

The morning of my communion, I went to the beauty salon and got my hair done in a ponytail with curls. Then we went to the church. I was dressed all in white with a long dress, shoes and even a crown with beads in the shape of flowers. I felt like a real princess.

The church was packed and I was really nervous. I wished my dad could be there with me, asking me how I felt and telling me how proud he was. I imagined seeing him by my side during the Mass, telling me he loved me.

At the party afterwards, I had fun hanging out with the kids and playing in the jumper castle. But my dad is always in my heart and in my mind, even when I'm having fun. I hated myself for spending time thinking about him rather than having fun. I just wanted him off my mind.

I WISHED I HAD SOMEONE TO TALK TO

I didn't tell anyone how I felt. No one in my family knows how I feel about my dad. My grandmother and I can talk about school and joke around, but we've never talked about personal things. Once I said "I want a dad," but she said, "Not right now" because she was worried about my sister, who has severe asthma and lives with my mom in Mexico. She doesn't take things in my life seriously because I'm young and therefore my life shouldn't be difficult. But there's no minimum age for suffering.

My real mom doesn't talk to me about my dad. She calls me only once or twice a year. Sometimes I miss my real mom but other times I don't because I don't have a relationship with her. I don't know why I wasn't raised by her but it's OK because I have my grandma, who is like my mother to me. When I tell my mom I want to know about my dad, she says in a sarcastic way, "Why?" I say, "Forget



ILLUSTRATION BY ADONIA TAN, 17, WALNUT HS

it, it was just a stupid question." For four years she's been saying she would send me a picture of him but the picture has never come. I don't know why she won't tell me about him. Maybe she is keeping a secret from me. Maybe it hurts her to talk about it.

I just want to learn about my history. I was talking about my dad with a mentor and he said that his last name came from Europe. It made me want to know more.

I wonder what he looks like. My grandma told me that his eyes are blue, he has blonde hair and he's tall. I know his name and that he's from Denver, Colorado. I want to know what his personality is like. I mean, I get angry really quickly with my grandma and my family. I think that maybe I got my anger from my dad. I also think about what it would be like to live with him. Would I fight with my dad? Would it be the same as living with my grandmother and my other family members, or would it be a better relationship?

Last year I tried to find my dad. I went on the Internet and typed his name and Denver into yahoo.com. But it felt like there were a million people with that name. I gave up because I didn't have all the information I needed to find him.

Sometimes when I see some girls or boys with their dads, I feel sad. Other times I tell myself to be grateful for what I have. At least I have my grandmother

and my sister in Mexico. For them, I want to work hard and study and be someone in life. I also have a family—my aunts, uncles and cousins—all of whom I love very much.

So don't feel sorry for me. Then I'll feel sorry for myself and I don't like when that happens. I only want him to know that he has a daughter. At least he'll know what he left and what he has. If there's a chance, I want to get to know him. If I never do, there will be a reason why, like maybe he wasn't the perfect dad and he wasn't supposed to be with me.

I'm not going to let thinking about my dad bring me down because then I would never accomplish my goal to be an actress and a singer. I want him to be with me, but 13 years have passed and I've made it without him. I could live more years without him and be strong enough to take care of myself in good and bad times. But he will always be in my heart. He is my dad and I will always love him.



Martha says that growing up without a dad has made her more independent.

My tunes

Creating mix tapes lets great songs speak for me

By Nadine Levyfield
17, EAGLE ROCK HS

Mix tapes are a music geek's most valuable form of communication, acting as musical confessions of what they're willing to share with another person. And I am a music geek. My mix tapes reveal who I am through a tangled mass of songs.

I can't pinpoint my first mix tape, but I've been making them for a few years using iTunes. I started because I love the process of personalizing my own mix, searching for the right songs and their perfect pattern for certain moods or occasions, like a restless afternoon or a road trip to Berkeley. I love sharing what I listen to and incorporating my own eclectic music taste into familiar mix tape themes like "music to wake up to" or "getting ready to go out" mixes, or starting from scratch to make a soundtrack that captures who I am right now. (Of course, when I say mix tapes, I actually mean mix CDs, but it feels more nostalgic to say mix tapes.)

In making a mix tape for someone else, you're completely exposing yourself. You're sending a message through music, making this the most challenging part of creating a mix, especially since the person receiving the mix could interpret a song in a different way than you do. I try to include a balance of songs that are special to me and songs that will stand out to the person I share it with. For my friend Frankie's birthday I included the song "Hollywood Freaks" by Beck, because we used to sing it walking around school and we knew every word. I also included some songs I knew she'd never heard before that were special to me by more obscure bands like Doves or Say Hi To Your Mom.

Since I've made around 50 mix tapes for other people, my next task was making an autobiographical mix tape—a time capsule to remind myself of what I listened to during my junior year and to record who I am right now. Artfully choosing 20 songs to represent myself was challenging. There were so many songs that I didn't have enough room for or that I realized I'd outgrown. I couldn't



PHOTO BY ELISABETH GUSTAFSON, 16, IMMACULATE HEART HS

believe I didn't make room for a Doors song, since I was obsessed with them in eighth grade and used to listen to them every day. But I've moved on from that particular music phase, and this mix represents that transition.

SOUNDTRACK TO MY JUNIOR YEAR

The first song on a mix is like the first shot of a movie: it sets the tone. I chose "Come Together" by The Beatles because it's a spine-tingling song and one of my absolute favorites. I know all the words. The beat is catchy and the tone awakens feelings of freedom and possibility, which is a symbolic starting-off point to a mix tape chronicling this time in my life.

Songs 2-5 are all equally energetic and remind me of experiences and moments with friends, especially Spoon's "The Way We Get By," a high school anthem which has been the background music for many late-night drives with everyone singing along at the top of their lungs. "1979" by the Smashing Pumpkins is reminiscent of adolescent ups and downs: "Shakedown 1979/ Cool kids never have the time/ On a live wire right up off the street/ You and I should meet."

Songs 6-8 are classics from the 60s and 70s that I listen to when I have a lot on my mind. They give me perspective about what's going on in my life—proof that good music doesn't become dated.

Can I really complain about juggling my AP classes when Nico's crooning about how she's "stopped [her] dreaming these days?"

Songs 9-12 are songs I've listened to when I'm confused about dating catastrophes, whether I'm in a cynical or hopeful mood. For every crush I've ever had, I've listened to Weezer's "Say It Ain't So." Despite the title, I've always interpreted this song as feeling hopeful rather than frustrated. Something about the electric opening chords, drawn out melody, and blunt yet meaningful lyrics, "I can't confront you/ I never could do/ That which might hurt you/ So try and be cool ..." really gets to me.

Songs 13-14 are my homage to Los Angeles. I'm a second-generation Angeleño and I love my traffic-filled hometown. The Red Hot Chili Peppers are the definitive Los Angeles rock band, and Elliott Smith's sad song "Angeles" explores the dark side of promises made in the City of Angels: "I could make you satisfied in everything you do/ All your secret wishes could right now be coming true."

Songs 15-17 are slightly depressing songs with lingering beats and understated lyrics about failed relationships and frustration. But "It Ain't Me, Babe" by Bob Dylan stands out. It sums up my philosophy about love, which is that I'm a realist, not a romantic. The lines "I'm not the one you want, babe, I will only let you

Nadine's junior year mix

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Come Together
by The Beatles | 12. Under My Thumb
by The Rolling Stones |
| 2. Black and White
Town by Doves | 13. Scar Tissue
by Red Hot Chili Peppers |
| 3. 1979 by Smashing Pumpkins | 14. Angeles
by Elliott Smith |
| 4. Cause=Time by Broken Social Scene | 15. Unmade Bed
by Sonic Youth |
| 5. The Way We Get By by Spoon | 16. Car
by Built to Spill |
| 6. Sweet Jane by The Velvet Underground | 17. It Ain't Me, Babe
by Bob Dylan |
| 7. Castles Made of Sand
by Jimi Hendrix | 18. Stella Was a Diver and She Was Always Down
by Interpol |
| 8. These Days
by Nico | 19. Under Control
by The Strokes |
| 9. Dramamine
by Modest Mouse | 20. Where is My Mind? by Pixies |
| 10. Say It Ain't So
by Weezer | |
| 11. Is This Love? | |

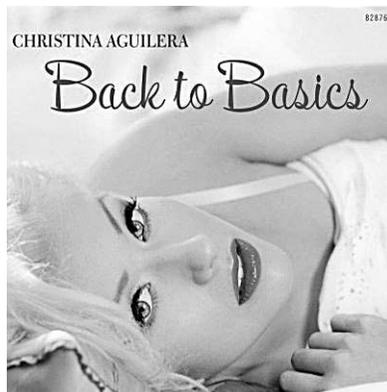
down" could be my slogan.

Songs 18-20 are "Stella Was a Diver and She Was Always Down" by Interpol, "Under Control" by The Strokes, and "Where is My Mind?" by the Pixies. The beauty of a mix tape is that an offbeat indie favorite can be followed by a reassuring rock song and then by an enduring alternative anthem.

The last song on a mix should be especially meaningful as it's the end of the musical journey. I ended this mix with the Pixies' classic "Where is My Mind?" because to me, it's a song about growing up, becoming independent and making up your own mind. "With your feet in the air and your head on the ground/ Try this trick and spin it, yeah/ Your head will collapse/ But there's nothing in it/ And you'll ask yourself/ Where is my mind?"

Now that the mix tape trip is over, I've learned a lot. Ultimately, the names of songs on a page don't mean a thing until you're listening to them at top volume. The purpose of music is to get lost in it; songs should evoke memories and be the ideal blend of overwhelming sounds and state of mind. The perfect way to combine music and memories is through mix tapes, and I hope this will be one of many biographical mixes. Who knows what I'll think of this mix in 10, 20 or even 30 years. But at least I'll have a record (literally) of who I was during my junior year.

reviews: music



CD: CHRISTINA AGUILERA
Back to Basics

By Liberty Zabala
17, EAGLE ROCK HS

Christina Aguilera goes Back to Basics on her most recent album, which debuted at number one. On hits like “Hurt” and “Mercy on Me,” Christina emotionally engages listeners in self-reflecting songs while reverting to the foundation of her musical career: ear-popping, soul-rocking vocal power.

On Back to Basics, the former “Xtina” strips off most of her “dirty” image for a classy Marilyn Monroe-esque look. On her Grammy-winning song, “Ain’t No Other Man” and Pepsi-commercial hit “Here to Stay,” she combines jazzy brass arrangements with her signature make-you-wanna-get-up-and-dance beats.

Christina masterfully blends early jazz and blues in songs like “Understand” and “I Got Trouble.” She incorporates swing, beautiful harmonies, bouncy doo-wop and hip military sound-offs in the club single, “Candyman.” The second half of her two-disc album gets even better. The self-proclaimed “Baby Jane” (she dropped “Xtina”) indulges in Moulin Rouge-style cabaret music. It’s bold and edgy to explore those exciting sounds and mix them with her sassy pop.

Christina would have done better without the flashy fillers like the lyrical diss “F.U.S.S.” about record producer Scott Storch. Also, the song “Back in the Day” has a great beat but name-dropping Marvin Gaye and Etta James seems like a poor attempt to boost her credibility. However, she successfully plays around with the sounds of old vinyl records and theatrical strings with a modern twist to create one of her best records yet.

... Aguilera combines jazzy brass arrangements with her signature make-you-wanna-get-up-and-dance beats.



CD: GUNS N' ROSES
Appetite for Destruction

By Brad Marx, 17

Appetite for Destruction is one of the landmark hard rock albums of the last 30 years. It’s full of kick-you-in-the-gut, guitar-driven songs about the hard rock lifestyle like “Nightrain,” a song praising cheap wine and “Mr. Brownstone,” about a struggle with heroin addiction. But there’s also “Welcome to the Jungle,” one of the band’s greatest hits, which exposes the truth of L.A. life: “Welcome to the jungle/ it gets worse here every day/ you learn to live like an animal in the jungle where we play.”

There is also a softer side to the band. The love songs “Think About You” and “Sweet Child o’ Mine” transform this album from a good album to a great album. “She’s got eyes of the bluest skies as if they thought of rain/ I’d hate to look into those eyes and see an ounce of pain” was originally part of a poem Axl Rose wrote for his then-girlfriend. This is an ideal song to play for your girlfriend.

The last song, “Rocket Queen” is a perfect ending. The song starts fast with sleazy lyrics like “I’m a sexual innuendo in this burned out paradise/ and if you turn me on to anything, you better turn me on tonight.” Halfway through the music shifts: “Don’t ever leave me/ say you’ll always be there/ all I ever wanted was for you to know that I care.”

When Gn’R came out, people thought they were another long-haired, leather-pants-wearing band. But Guns n’ Roses’ music was always about real stuff. They’re an original band full of that energy and fun that makes me love the music.

Appetite for Destruction is full of kick-you-in-the-gut, guitar-driven songs.



CD: OF MONTREAL
Hissing Fauna, Are You The Destroyer?

By Hayden Jacques
15, CLEVELAND HS

Lead singer Kevin Barnes has called the indie band Of Montreal’s latest release a concept album—the first six songs reference his problems such as his divorce and not being able to see his child. He performs the final five songs in his glam rock stage persona, Georgie Fruit. The 12-minute, “The Past is a Grotesque Animal” explains the transformation between the two. It’s an interesting idea but it just doesn’t work.

Part One starts off with the incredibly annoying “Suffer for Fashion,” which gets more tiring on a second listen. The song sounds like a mix between 80s bubblegum trash and a bored kid banging on dishes.

The best song on the album, “Heimdalsgate Like a Promethean Curse” has Barnes begging his chemicals to “switch back to good again.” It reminded me of Kurt Vonnegut’s Breakfast of Champions, in which he explained that his characters’ motivations were determined by the person’s chemicals being in or out of balance. The theme is summed up in a fun and poppy way that might have seemed whiny in the hands of Death Cab for Cutie’s Ben Gibbard.

Part Two, however is unforgivably terrible. “Bunny Ain’t No Kind of Rider” and “She’s a Rejector” are funny and interesting love songs. But the remaining three tracks are examples of how bad music can get, cliché-filled and too much synthesizer.

Overall, the new album is uneven. The best songs are great but the worst songs are pretentious. Sorry Georgie Fruit, you’re no Ziggy Stardust.

The best songs are great but the worst songs are pretentious.



PHOTO BY LIBBY HARTIGAN, MANAGING EDITOR



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No experience necessary. Come with your story or drawing ideas and bring a friend to L.A. Youth at

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E-MAIL editor@layouth.com

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