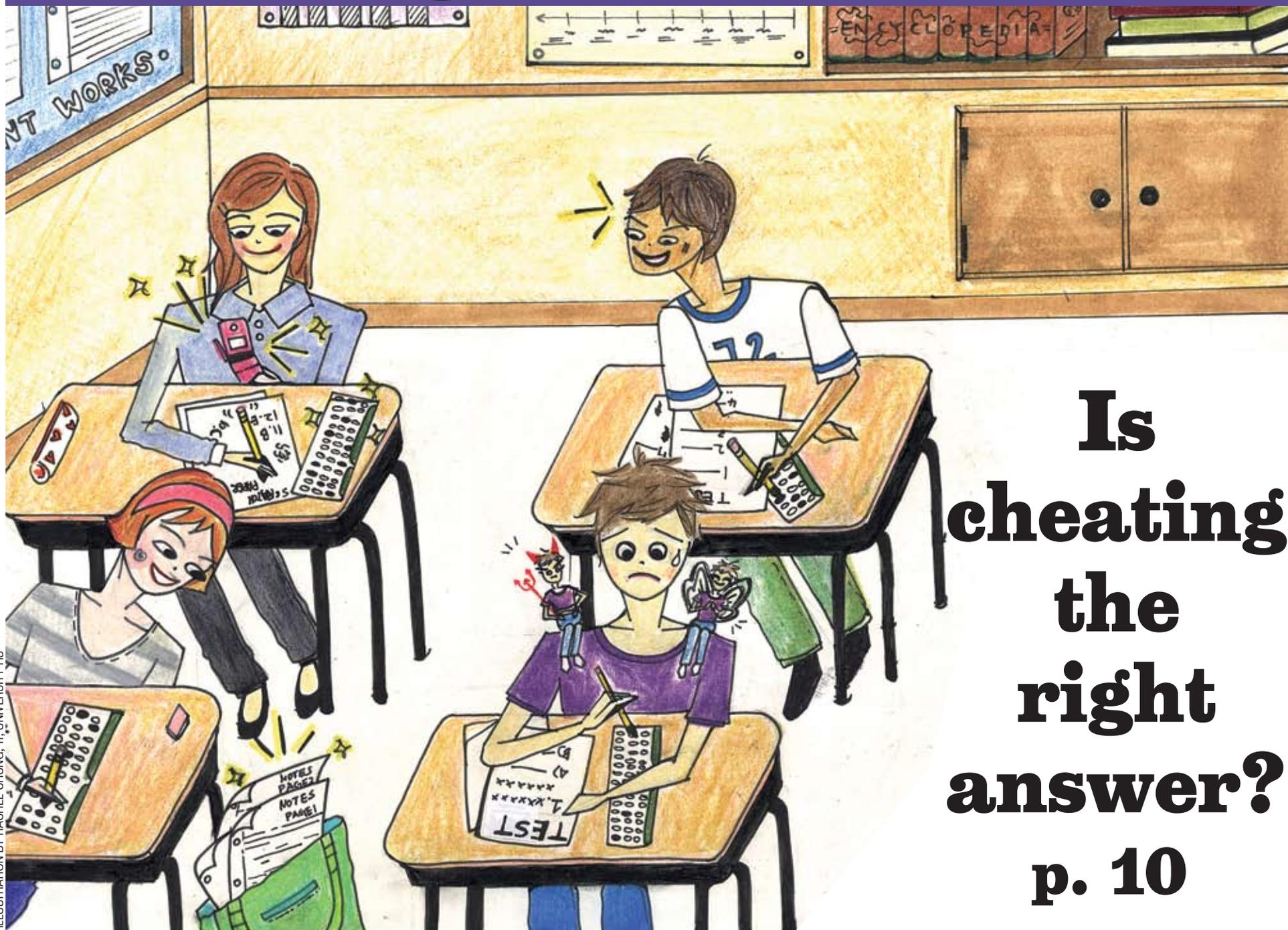


the newspaper by and about teens

L.A. youth

LAYOUTH.COM

MAY-JUNE 2007



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cheating
the
right
answer?
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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. They also get involved through our summer workshop for writers. Sometimes a teacher or parent will encourage them to get involved.

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

Where is L.A. Youth distributed?

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

How is L.A. Youth funded?

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

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

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

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

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

forward to getting a free copy of the L.A. Youth Teacher's Guide with each issue. We do not share your info with other organizations or businesses.

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L.A. youth

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mail

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

WOULD MY DAD LOVE ME?

When I read "Would he love me?" I related to how Martha felt about her father. I always wondered if my dad cared about me, or if he even loved me. I used to think about him all the time, especially on Father's Day. All the kids would be with their dads and they would ask me where my dad was, so I would tell them that he was out of town. That was all that I could really say because I didn't know. For all you kids who have a dad, tell him how much you love him, because there are plenty of kids who would love to have a dad.

Kasey Kaczmarek, Hutchinson MS (La Mirada)

This article describes everything about me and my life. When I was about 3 years old my mother and father had a big argument and got divorced. Now I'm 13 years old and I haven't seen my father in 10 years. Just like Martha, I don't know what he looks like now, whether or not he's gotten married to a different woman, or if he has children. No matter what, I will always love my father, Albert Abidian.

Armen Abidian, Wilson MS (Glendale)

After I read "Would he love me?" I felt terrible. I never thought about how life would be without my dad. When Martha talked about how "most girls have dads who take them to their practices, buy them

things and play with them," I thought, I am one of those girls. I never stopped to think about how there are girls like Martha who have always dreamed of having those things but don't have a father. After what Martha wrote I told myself I would always appreciate the time I spend with my dad because I am very lucky to have a dad who does so much for me.

Emma Ramirez, Hutchinson MS

LETTER FROM JUVENILE HALL

I am a juvenile fighting an adult case. I used to be a juvenile; now they refer to me as an unfit minor. I'm facing two life sentences. I am not scared of imprisonment. I am scared of losing my life to the system. I have faith in God that he will spare my life and one day I will be released to live my life.

I realize that I might not ever get out of jail, but I wrote this to reach somebody in jail or on probation. I also wrote this to reach somebody leading a safe life who could end up in juvenile hall, prison or CYA (California Youth Authority, youth prison).

Think before you make decisions that will lead you to negative aspirations. It's not worth facing two life sentences. Remember, life is a struggle because if you don't change the negative things they will take you down. If you get through them, you will be a better person inside and out.

I wish I could go back in time. Your life is not a video where you can rewind and fast forward to the parts you like

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Send your letters to L.A. Youth



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and change them. This is real life with real people and real struggles. This is chicken soup for the imprisoned soul.

Name Withheld

MEDICATIONS DIDN'T HELP HER SADNESS

I read this article because I know people who are depressed and think nobody loves them. Not long ago, I found out that two of my friends were cutting themselves. It really made me sad to see the cut marks on their wrists and blood-covered Kleenexes in their backpack pockets. I'm not sure why they would do such a horrible thing. "Prescription for depression," allowed me to better understand my friends. Although they're not foster kids and don't move from home to home, they have questions of their own they want answers to. I wish my friends would open up more to me so I could be there to listen and talk whenever. Starting now, I'm going to make sure that's going to happen.

Chan Bee Seo, Hutchinson MS

I feel that it is important for people to know what depression medicines can do to people. I think it's important because if people are dealing with depression and their psychiatrist is giving them the choice of taking anti-depressants, then they should know what it could do to someone.

Julio Jorez, Nimitz MS (Huntington Park)

THE WAR IN IRAQ

I strongly think the government should send more soldiers to Iraq. If we send more soldiers we can take out the ones who have already served their country. I also think we should try to finish what we started, and we need to finish it quickly before too many on both sides die.

Jeremiah Jimenez, Hutchinson MS

I think the U.S. government has handled the war horribly. In the beginning I thought it was OK that we were fighting this war. Now I believe differently because the insurgents are kicking our butts over there. It seems like this war is never going to end.

Sebastian Gomez, Hutchinson MS

A MARINE EXPLAINS WHY HE ENLISTED

After reading "Call to duty," I changed my opinion about President Bush increasing troop levels. Marine Tim Taylor has a point. We should give it all we got so that 10 years from now there will be no war. If we leave now, the terrorists will build back up. For example, he says that we don't want terrorism to be there when our



ILLUSTRATION BY BRIAN LOPEZ-SANTOS, 16, MARSHALL HS

kids are alive. I don't want my kids to be alive when there is still a war going on.

Maritea Hernandez, Nimitz MS

Reading the story "Call to duty" about Marine Tim Taylor reminded me of a citizen's duty during a time of war. He sees the option to serve as an honor, whereas most dread it. Tim was brave enough to join the Walking Dead unit. It's nice to see that American pride hasn't died out.

Timothy Kariger, Hutchinson MS

THE TOP 8 SHUFFLE

I really liked the article "The Top 8 shuffle" because I can relate to that dilemma. Although sometimes the problem is not a lack of self-confidence, in many cases it can be. We care about what people think of us in a variety of ways. Despite the fact that some people aren't even our friends, we put them on our Tops because they are the popular kids. As a matter of fact, we leave our real friends in the last places. I despise it very much when my friends get mad at me, and as a result this causes our little fights. That's the reason why on my MySpace I hid my top friends, because that way I'm the only one who knows who is and who isn't on my Top.

Andrea Gomez, Wilson MS

I believe Top 8s can be a benefit to you and your friends' relationships by reducing your chance of having a huge fight because fights usually start with little

things building up. I believe Top 8 can help you realize when your friends are mad at you because they'll move you a spot lower. Then instead of reacting negatively you can respond to the change positively. You can talk to your friends about why you're a spot lower. That way you get a chance to talk to your friends before grudges build up. I think Top 8 can encourage people to talk more and become closer.

Sophia Han, Wilson MS

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE N-WORD?

This article gave me a different perspective of the n-word. I admit I have said the word a couple times but that is because I grew accustomed to it. I am going to try and reduce my use of the word, if not get rid of it completely. In my opinion I think it is wrong to say the n-word, even for a black person. I learned not to say this word anymore because it is disrespectful to black culture. This has truly changed the way I think. Thank you.

Jonathan Platero, Nimitz MS

The n-word does not need to be put aside or forgotten. My grandchildren need to grow up knowing that word and forming their own opinions. I'm not saying it can't be used by white people or that other races have to fear saying it. What needs to be put aside is the blatant hate behind it. The word should not be boycotted or put aside. It simply needs to be understood.

Sabriyya Ghanizada, Wilson MS

This was a really good article. I am not African American, but I think it's disrespectful to call someone the n-word. Just as it's disrespectful to call another race a name. It may sound funny to us, but it's offensive to them. All races have to work hard to get where they are now. African Americans aren't the n-word.

Yvonne Garcia-Solano, Wilson MS

MUSIC LOVERS UNITE

I'm writing because I was really interested in the article, "My tunes." I think I'm a music geek, too. I listen to music 24/7. I could never live without music. Everywhere I go I'm always carrying my iPod. I love music and I'm thinking of one day making my own mix tapes. Just like the writer, I love the Beatles. They just rock! My favorite band is the Red Hot Chili Peppers.

Vivian Landeros, Nimitz MS

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

I felt their fear

Having survived an armed robbery, I felt a strong connection to the people at Virginia Tech

By **Se Kim**
16, PACIFICA CHRISTIAN HS

Like everyone, I felt sorry when I heard that 32 people had been killed at Virginia Tech in the worst mass shooting in American history. But my emotions went deeper than that. I also connected as someone who was held up at gunpoint during a terrifying restaurant robbery last year.

I learned about the shooting while I was at school a few hours after it happened on April 16. I saw a developing story on Yahoo! with the headline: "Virginia Tech Shooting: 32 Dead." I discovered that there were two shooting incidents. One was in a dormitory at 7 in the morning, the other, two hours later in a classroom building. I wondered whether this was the next Columbine, in which two Colorado high school students shot and killed 13 classmates and teachers.

Later that night I got sucked in. The students being interviewed on the news said that the killer walked into classrooms and started shooting people. This was the type of thing I would expect in movies, not on the news. I was stunned. It was inhumane to kill 32 people. They were innocent students and teachers at Virginia Tech.

As I thought about what happened in the classrooms at Virginia Tech, I realized that those shootings had parallels with what happened to me during a restaurant robbery last December.

I flashed back to a Wednesday night when my parents, family friends and I were eating at a Korean restaurant. We were enjoying dinner when suddenly I saw two waiters crawling on the ground. At first I thought they were picking something up, but then I heard two men yell and walk in from the kitchen. One was waving a handgun in the air telling everyone to "get down." I ducked under the table with my head down and was terrified along with everyone else.

"I have a gun with me, just do what we say. We want all cash, no credit cards, no checks, nothing else. All we want is cash," one of them said.

THEY THREATENED TO SHOOT SOMEONE

Immediately, I fumbled my wallet out of my pocket and took out \$12 and placed it in front of me. The second guy came around collecting the cash and when my friend's mom didn't have anything out he threatened her. "I want cash. Look lady, I'll shoot you if you don't give me the money."

It was obvious she couldn't understand what he was saying. The thought, "I'm going to die," ran through my head.

One of the robbers collected cash from everyone while the other emptied the register. Then they disappeared. We stayed on the floor until two people walked in and we realized the robbers had left.

This experience helped me understand how the people at Virginia Tech must have felt. You don't know if the

person is going to kill you. The feeling of "I'm next" had to be much worse for them than what I went through.

Even though in my situation no one died, I was still emotionally damaged. Every time I walk into a restaurant I think that I could be a victim again.

When I went to school the day after the shooting, people were talking about the latest news—the killer, Seung-Hui Cho, was Korean. My friend Raul said sarcastically: "Dude, Se, all I want to do is learn, come to school and be a regular student. I love you, man." He was implying that I was going to do something violent. I laughed knowing this was a joke making fun of my Korean heritage. I wasn't offended. But I still thought, why would he say that to me? My friend was joking, but what would other people, who aren't my friends, think?

Over the next few days, I heard reports on the Korean news of potential hatred toward Asians, primarily Koreans. These reports frightened my parents, who mentioned the L.A. riots when people threw rocks at Koreans.

Although I didn't think people would attack me, I was sure that Americans would view Koreans differently. When they'd meet me, or any other Koreans, their memories would always link back to this rampage and the crazy Asian killer. After the Sept. 11 attacks, even though I didn't want to think this way, when I saw a Muslim person, my thoughts traced back to the plane crashes and I made assumptions about this person.

Also, I noticed that the Korean media covered the tragedy differently than the mainstream media, like CNN and the Los Angeles Times. In general, the Korean media put more emphasis on how Cho's family reacted and how the Korean community could be affected as opposed to analyzing Cho. It was a very Korean response. In Korean society, parents are considered to be responsible for their children's behavior. But I felt the Korean media should have focused more on the victims or emphasized how we need to do a better job identifying and treating people who might be a danger to others.

They weren't mourning the victims; instead they were being defensive. Korean TV showed interviews with Americans and asked whether their views of Koreans would change. I think my reaction differed from other Koreans because of the robbery.

Now when I think about going to college I'm kind of worried that there could be another event similar to this. I believe the best way to prevent this from happening again is to remember this tragedy and to learn from what happened.



Se hopes that no one ever forgets what happened at Virginia Tech.

These are excerpts of some of the reactions to the shootings that L.A. Youth staff writers shared on our Web site. To read more reactions and contribute your thoughts to be posted online, please go to www.layout.com.



I somehow feel a surprising sense of pity for [the killer] Seung-Hui Cho, who took out his anger on innocent lives. Cho clearly felt like an outcast and didn't feel like he had a place to belong (look at the painful videotape he sent to NBC). Just seeing the eyes of those victims brings me utter sadness.
Malcolm Parker, 15, MAYFAIR HS (LAKEWOOD)



The worst and most tragic part is that pointing the finger at anyone won't save the people who were killed, people with limitless potential and a lifetime ahead of them.

Victorino Martinez, 18, DANIEL MURPHY CATHOLIC HS



Asian students are expected by society to be quiet, do extremely well in academics and to not express emotions or seek help. I'm sure the majority of Asian students do not take advantage of therapy or psychological help offered at school or in their community. However, I don't think the reason Seung-Hui Cho shot 32 people was solely because of pressure he felt as an Asian. He had mental and emotional problems because of his own experiences.

Esther Oh, 17, CLEVELAND HS (RESEDA)

essay contest: Letter to an object

1ST PLACE \$50

My retainer has me bent out of shape

Hana Jang
WILSON MS (GLENDALE)

Dear Retainers,

Why are you torturing me? I thought you were supposed to be keeping my teeth straight with the benefit of no braces! Yet I wake up every morning to see that my overbite is slowly coming back and the rows of teeth aren't aligned. Do you have any idea what I went through to get you? Now I don't think you're even helping me anymore.

First of all, I wasted two precious years of my life waiting for your arrival. Those braces were murder on my teeth. You didn't experience the pain I had to go through! Almost every week, I replaced my old wires, got a tighter one with a chain of rubber bands, and an additional two rubber bands to fix my overbite. By getting braces, I had the "wonderful" opportunity to choose from a wide variety of soups. The categories

stretched from tomato soup to clam chowder to delicious mushroom soup. For two years, 104 weeks, 728 days, soup became more than 90 percent of my diet. What do I have to show for my sacrifice? The object in repayment for my hurt is a hunk of plastic that doesn't really aid me in any way.

I will admit that you kept my teeth in order for a few months. However, recently I think you're snoozing on the job. After brushing my teeth and slipping you on, I see that you don't even fit correctly over my teeth anymore. During some nights, you don't even stay on the whole time. I wake up some days and feel nothing in my mouth. Then I have to take more time to thoroughly search my bed to see where you've hidden yourself. Do you realize how frustrated I am?

Don't even get me started on how you affect my language. If I were to say this sentence: "Can you pass me the bottle of water?" it would come out sounding like, "Ken you peth me the ball of wudu?" Now I don't even attempt saying

words like rewind, reconnect, replay or anything else that starts with "re." In general, you steal my ability to talk efficiently. In math class, I stand up in front of the students trying to explain a math equation, but do you know what comes out of my mouth? It's just a string of mumbled words and I have to use all my strength enunciating the repeated explanation. The ridicule I get from my friends is almost unbearable. My ears practically ache when I hear them mimicking my incorrect pronunciation. I can't stand it anymore!

You better shape up or I'll have to take action. I won't allow this kind of insolence anymore. I wash you, clean you and take care of you, yet this is how you repay me? I don't understand why it's so difficult for you to do something for me in return. If this continues, I'll be forced to replace you with something better.

Wanting some changes,
Hana



PHOTO BY VICTORINO MARTINEZ, 18, DANIEL MURPHY
CATHOLIC HS

2ND PLACE \$30

I can't stand my calculus book

Leah Robinson
SANTA MONICA HS

Dear Calculus Book,

Have I mentioned to you lately the deep loathing I feel churning within me as I suffer unwillingly through your cryptic pages? The unadulterated hatred I feel bubbling in my bloodstream when I am forced, day after day, to open your cover and stare at yet another foreign equation?

At the beginning of the semester, I was positive we would get along. Your brightly colored cover and interesting pictures enthralled me. Flawless graphs waited for me with every turn of a page. Challenging yet exciting new word problems greeted me at the beginning of every chapter. Within these past few months, however, I have come to realize that all these seemingly wonderful aspects are just a facade to cover your unacceptable, unexplainable behavior toward students.

You somehow manage to make even the simplest instructions seem miles above my head. Communication is vital in a serious relationship and I feel like we don't even have that. Sometimes, you will demand that I do something as simple as add four to both sides of an equation. Your wording though makes a simple step such as this completely enigmatic. After reading the directions you give me, I will be thoroughly and completely lost. It is impossible for me to respect you or our relationship if you barely even make sense to me.

Your dishonesty has also been a factor in the downfall of our love. Last week, for example, you told me that the easiest way to find a derivative was to use a specific equation. Yet, today in class you pretended as though you never said this and taught us an "easier" way to solve for derivatives. If you knew an easier way, why would you have tricked me into believing a treacherously intricate equation was the easiest route?

Throughout the semester I have flip-flopped be-

tween fighting with you and trying desperately to get along with you, each to no avail. In times of distress, I will slam you onto the floor or crash you into my desk. Other times, I will beautifully decorate your meticulously attached book cover. Regardless of the way I treat you, I get no results.

Because of you, my GPA is suffering and my entire future is on the line. I am usually very good in mathematical situations and have been told many times that I have a math-oriented brain. I have always received outstanding grades in my math courses and have never, in my 10 years of schooling, scored as low as I have on some of the tests based on your curriculum. I am a bright young woman, fully capable of earning an A in my calculus class, but you are making my goal impossible.

I hope you take these words to heart and do a better job in your next edition.

3RD PLACE \$20

Stop judging me, mirrors

Veronica Lopez

OPTIONS FOR YOUTH CHARTER SCHOOLS

How many times have I seen you, yet I never get tired of you? I try to think of a way in which I can avoid you since you are my tripping stone. You always tell me the truth, whether it hurts or whether I fall in love with it. You taunt me whenever I get a pimple and flatter me when I don't have one. You remind me when to use my Proactiv or tell me to get on the treadmill. It's funny how you've grown as a part of my conscience, and yet you only remember me when you see me; you replace me so quickly. As soon as you see someone else you take me out of the pic-

ture. Have you any heart to keep me in mind for at least a second longer after I leave? I guess not. And yet your opinion is the only one that matters to me every morning and every night.

You have made me change my habits. You make me try new hairstyles, you make me wash my face, you even tell me to get a new exercise routine. You only judge me on my physical appearance and I've set it as my goal to not let it get to me. You are like a poison that slowly eats away at my self-image, but I will prevail over it, and soon you will be nothing more than just my reflection. I have several of you, but I know you depend on me, because what is a mirror without a person?

HONORABLE MENTION

Lonely and sad in my cell

Anonymous

CENTRAL JUVENILE HALL

Dear Cell,

Well first of all, every time I step inside you, you are always cold with a weird smell. I look around and all I see is nothing but four white walls with graffiti on them, a little window at the far end, two beds (one made of concrete and the other one made of steel) and a light at the top of the room. As I sit inside you with nothing to do I start going psycho and I start dying of boredom. Some of the time you

make me feel sad and lonely because you keep me inside you and away from my loved ones. But most of the time I'm mad at you. You take my freedom away and you stress me out. The more time I spend with you, I feel like you are closing in on me, like you are trying to eat me. It's bad enough that you are small and I can hardly do anything inside you. Sometimes you are nice enough to give me a roommate and of course you give me a lot of time to myself. But the trip is that I can't even open you or close you because I'm locked up and they won't let me out.

The objects readers have strong feelings for

As we selected the three winners of the essay contest, we noticed that our readers shared strong feelings for many of the same objects. These are the most common objects among the more than 250 entries we received, whether the reader was praising the object or complaining about it.

Dear ...

Stuffed animal
Computer
Cell phone
iPod or MP3 player
Jewelry
Musical instrument

ESSAY CONTEST

My favorite flaw

Nobody's perfect, but just because you're flawed doesn't mean you can't embrace your imperfections. Tell us about your favorite flaw. It could be a physical characteristic or a personality trait. Maybe your teachers think you talk too much, but if you weren't so talkative, you wouldn't have met your friends. Maybe your parents think you're lazy, but without taking some time to chill, you'd be too serious. Or some may think you're too quiet, but you think that makes you a good listener. Tell us about your favorite flaw. Tell us why it's a limitation, but also why you like it and how it's made your life better in some ways.

WIN
\$50

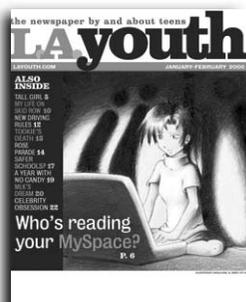
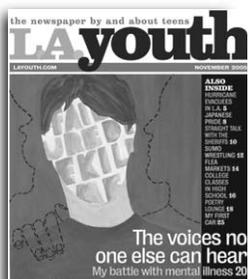
Write an essay to L.A. Youth and tell us about it.

Essays should be a page or more. Include your name, school, age and 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 September issue and put on our Web site at www.layouth.com.

MAIL YOUR ESSAYS TO:

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

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FRIDAY, June 22, 2007**



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ORIENTATION:
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11 A.M. - NOON

FOSTER YOUTH ENCOURAGED TO JOIN! CALL AMANDA (323) 938-9194

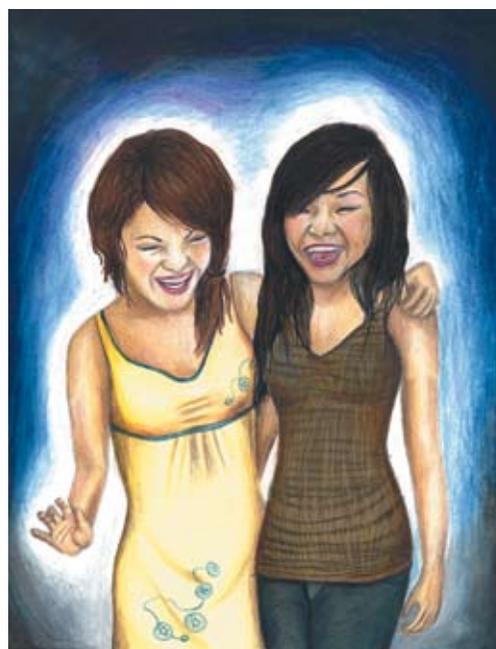
Art contest winners: Light of my life



FIRST PLACE
Nydia Mora, 17, Paramount HS,
Teacher: Mike Zwart



SECOND PLACE
Matthew Valdivia, 16, Bishop Amat Memorial HS (La Puente)



THIRD PLACE
Nadine Allan, 17, Atanian Art Center (Glendale)

The L.A. Youth teen staff chose these images from more than 200 entries as the winners of our annual art contest. The theme “Light of my life” was inspired by light—daylight, nightlight, lamplight or any light. It could express the sunshine of their life, what they love about a beautiful day or what lights up their life. The first-place winner received \$75 and the second- and third-place winners received \$50. Please visit www.layouth.com to see the images that won honorable mention.



ILLUSTRATION BY RACHEL CHUNG, 17, UNIVERSITY HS

An honest grade

Cheating is tempting when you see everyone else doing it, but I've chosen not to

By Fred Scarf
17, BIRMINGHAM HS (VAN NUYS)

Earlier this school year, I let a classmate copy my homework and thought nothing of it. It is very painful for me to tell you this. Even as I write about this, it makes me feel like throwing up. I'm nervous that when everyone reads this, they will think that I am just another cheater and a hypocrite.

When we got our papers back, the teacher had written on both of our assignments, "If I ever see this again,

you both will get a zero." My classmate had said, "Hey, can I check my answers?" I didn't know he was going to copy my homework word for word. I rarely let anyone copy my homework, and after that incident, I never will again.

The more I see cheating all around me, the more it bothers me. It is discouraging that I stress and stay up late studying while other students score just as high by cheating. It makes me wonder, what is the point of grades, going to class, or even the educational process?

One of the reasons I ask these questions is because of something that happened in my AP art history class. This is one of the hardest AP classes because of the tons

of material. On the first day, our teacher gave us the syllabus, which stated that there were only four tests for the first semester (including the final) and two for the second semester. I was nervous when I saw this, knowing that each test would make me or break me. I've never been in a class where there was practically no homework and just a few tests that would determine your grade. I knew this class had to be a priority and I could not fall behind. Our teacher wrote the grading system on the board and said that only a few people get A's. At that moment, I decided to strive to be one of those people. I knew it would be hard—our textbooks were nearly 2,000 pages and weighed 11 pounds.

Each day I would read the book and add to my study guide, filling it with extensive notes and details. I would Google each piece of art and paste it into my study guide, which is currently 600 pages. Before each test, I would dedicate two solid weeks to studying my textbook, study guide and a prep book called Art History For Dummies. Sometimes I would study with a friend, trying to think of stupid little tricks to remember each piece.

Although this class was pretty stressful, I was interested in learning and studying the material. As each test approached, I usually stayed up until 3 a.m. studying. I still remember what it was like when all the lights were off, except for my computer's monitor. I live near a very busy street and as the night wore on, I would eventually hear no cars driving by. I would hear only the coyotes howling in the dark canyons of Sherman Oaks. I felt like I was the only person in Los Angeles who was still awake.

The day before our art history final, the teacher gave us the class period to study. As we studied a million and one flashcards, my classmates and I felt the weight of the test approaching. Then one of my classmates said he hoped that the student who sat next to him would come the next day. "I need to cheat off of them," he said. I did not say anything, but all the frantic studying and late nights flashed through my mind.

In the end, my cheating classmate and I got the same grade in the class: a B. When he told me his grade, I tried to play it off as if I didn't care, but I was pretty upset. What did he do to earn his B? Glue his eyes to his neighbor's Scantron! I felt like my B didn't mean anything.

At the same time, I understand why someone would cheat. After being absent for a day, one of my classmates asked me during nutrition if I was ready for the history quiz that had been announced yesterday. I suddenly got that diarrhea feeling because we had signed a contract in the beginning of the year saying that we would always be prepared. During nutrition, I tried to study with another student. We started to study all the dates, names and battles that would be on the test, but I was too nervous to remember a single fact. The bell rang and history was about to start. "Whatever!" she exclaimed. "I'll just write this on my hand."

WOULD I GET CAUGHT?

I asked my teacher if I had to take the test even though I'd been absent and she said yes. That's when I thought about cheating or ditching. I had never ditched before, but wait, she had already seen me! OK, cross that plan out. I started to wonder if I would get caught if I cheated. How could I? I sit in the back of the class and the teacher is always eyeing a group of talkative boys. Plus she would never be suspicious because I have never cheated and am one of the more serious students. If I did cheat, no one would say anything and my grade would be a lot higher. Why not?

The teacher distributed the quiz. I heard some whispering and looked over. It was the girl who had answers on her hand. I saw people trying to look at other people's

papers and signaling each other's attention.

But I just could not bring myself to cheat. I would feel too sick and guilty. I left many questions blank and eventually got my score, which was 19 out of 87. That is a 22 percent. I was devastated because I have NEVER scored so low on a test, especially in a class I take so seriously. It really hurt my grade. But if I had cheated, who would I be?

Considering how common cheating is, I always admire those who take the hard way. My AP English teacher, Ms. Ahn, is known as one of the hardest AP English teachers. A week after our final, Ms. Ahn posted our first semester grades. When one of my classmates told me that she got a D, I was shocked. I asked her if she regretted taking Ms. Ahn's class and wished she had switched to another English class if she had the opportunity. "No, because at least I learned something," she replied.

But most students have a different philosophy on education. One day in another class we were taking a

quiz. As people were finishing up their essays, I heard one of my classmates whisper "Psst! What is this answer?" to another student. I'm not sure if he ever got the answers, but when he turned in his quiz, he was talking about how he wanted to attend an Ivy League college. When he said that, I thought that it was ironic that he plans to attend one of

the best schools in the nation but doesn't want to study for a quiz. It's kind of a joke. I saw him a few days later, anxiously trying to calculate his GPA and rank.

It's funny because this student wants the best education and isn't learning, while the girl in my English class is getting poor grades but she is learning. All the cheating I see makes me wonder if grades are a good idea. Sure, grades are a great motivation, but at the same time, grades are encouraging students to cheat and dwell on their rankings.

In a past class, I once told the teacher that most of her students were cheating. I expected the teacher to be furious, but instead he replied, "Well, cheating happens in every class." I felt like I was the only person against cheating in the class, but I can't be the policeman. If a teacher is not going to stop the cheating, who is?

A teacher told me in ninth grade that I should never check my grades and just strive to understand the material. I thought she was crazy. Now I understand her perspective, and agree that many students have lost their way. We have been caught up in the superficial benefits of grades without remembering that we should be learning.



Fred says cheating prevents students from learning, something that will give them opportunities and confidence.

Do colleges know if you've cheated?

By Fred Scarf
17, BIRMINGHAM HS

I noticed that many of the cheaters in my classes are determined to attend selective universities. Teachers make speeches about how "cheating is wrong," yet that doesn't stop students from cheating. I wanted to interview a college admissions officer to find out what colleges think about cheating. I spoke with Jessie Royce Hill, a Yale admissions officer.

Have you come across applications that state the student cheated?

Yale occasionally receives disclosures of disciplinary actions, including those taken for cheating. We use the Common Application, which asks both the applicant and the guidance counselor whether the student has faced disciplinary action. If the answer is yes, we expect the applicant to elaborate on the incident(s). In some cases, students themselves provide specifics.

I watched one of my classmates cheat on a quiz and right afterward he talked about the highly competitive colleges he wanted to attend. Do you think such a student could succeed at a highly competitive college?

A student who cheats might get by at Yale, but success is defined by considerably more than academic markers. Yale asks much of its student body and we find our students ask even more of themselves, both inside and outside the classroom. They are actively engaged in the life of their residential colleges, in research, community service, the arts, government, sports and the list goes on. I think that a student who couldn't keep up with the pace on his or her own merits would struggle to find a place in the Yale community.

I don't test well but do well in my classes. I'm nervous that colleges will be suspicious that I'm cheating. How do I prove to you that I'm not?

Standardized test scores are just one indicator of academic ability, and not on their own a very good predictor. Class standing and test scores don't always correspond. The bottom line is that your job is to pursue your high school education with robust energy and integrity. Get involved inside and outside of the classroom, follow your true interests and strive to be the kind of person you'd like to room with in college. The fact is there are many excellent colleges and universities out there and you'll land a spot at one of them.

I got caught!

Feeling unprepared for a quiz,
I peeked at my neighbor's paper

By Christina Quarles
17, PALISADES CHARTER HS

Throughout my life, teachers, parents and peers have imprinted the childhood saying "Cheaters never prosper" on my mind. For years, I was brainwashed into believing this cliché. In elementary school, I would even chant it when I would catch classmates cheating on tests and playground games. But recently I have started to question whether cheating really is unethical. When I look around me, it seems like cheating is helping a whole lot of people.

For the three years that I've been in high school, I have seen cheating styles evolve. Writing answers on your hands or formulas on the desk just before a math test is seen as amateur and primitive. Today, students take pictures of their tests with their cell phones or text-message answers across the room. In my science class, one student wrote the answers on the inside of a pencil box and another girl had a color-coded bracelet for specific answers. If the teacher allows students to use their own blank paper, many write answers beforehand, then erase them, then read the remaining smudges during the test. I've seen semester finals get stolen, then copied for distribution at a price. My history teacher told me that at another school during an AP exam, a study guide was placed in a trash can within the building for students to read while in the restroom. Not only do people cheat on academic tests, but in athletic competitions, the judicial system and even in marriages. I began to wonder if people were making conscious decisions to cheat. Maybe cheating was caused by tremendous pressure and was a natural reaction, which would explain why everyone was doing it without even thinking about it.

One day, I sat in my Spanish 2 class eagerly waiting for the bell to ring. "Just 30 minutes," I thought while glaring at the clock. "Tick, tick, tick," the second hand on the clock, hanging just above the whiteboard, was driving me insane with its sluggish movement. Then the teacher caught my attention, by screeching "POP QUIZ!" Those dreadful words rang in my head.

I COULDN'T FAIL!

I was completely unprepared. "Out of all the days to have a pop quiz, why this one?" I thought. As my teacher began to pass out the papers I could feel my palms begin to sweat. I quickly answered all the questions I thought I knew. After 10 minutes my paper was only half filled out. Half! That's 50 percent, which is still a fail. My heart began to race and I started to chew my nails. At that moment I decided that failing was not an option. So not being that technologically equipped, I decided to go with a classic cheating move. I call it the "lean n' peek." I leaned slightly to my left and peeked at a girl's paper. I quickly began to copy her answers. I wasn't scared of a student seeing me because snitching is taboo in high school.

I felt a sense of relief because now I knew I'd at least pass. At least until I heard my teacher yell "QUARLES!" (my last name). At that moment, time froze. I heard the ticking of the clock, the pounding of my heart and the gritting of my teeth. The word "QUARLES" replayed in my mind like a broken record. He marched over to my desk, snatched my paper, and in bold red ink drew an

"F" at the top. I began to plead and protest but he swiftly raised his hand signaling me to be quiet. He handed me a referral to the dean and said, "Get out."

The journey down to the dean made me feel like I was walking the plank. With each step, I felt my feet get heavier and heavier. My shoes were iron blocks. Once I arrived I nervously sat down and handed him the referral. My mouth suddenly went dry and I asked to get a drink of water, but he said with a stern voice, "No, get it later." I glanced around the room and saw students sitting down with their noses in the corner. It was a "time-out zone." "Cheating has evolved, but punishments sure haven't," I thought. After five minutes, which seemed like a lifetime, the dean handed me a detention. As I was on my way out the door he asked, "I never see you in here, why'd you do it?" I simply shrugged and replied, "I don't know." "Well, I better not see you back in here," he said. "OK," I said as I scurried out the door.

PEOPLE ARE CHEATING ON MORE THAN JUST TESTS

On my way back to class I thought about the consequences. I not only got caught, but also received an F and a lunch detention. Although I received the punishment I deserved, other people in our society are cheating on final exams, SATs, track meets and even their spouses! But none of them are getting busted. Just recently, I took my math final and watched as three students passed notes with answers on them. Of course they did well on the final and "earned" a B, while I, the person who did it the morally correct way, earned a C. Life is so unfair! I wondered why the one time I cheated on a small quiz I didn't prosper ... maybe that saying about cheating has a drop of truth in it after all.

I don't think cheating is instinctive. In my case, I knew what I was doing. I cheated consciously, and I shouldn't have. But I'm not horribly ashamed. Some things are worse than others. I don't think it's a big deal to copy someone's homework; however it is terrible if you hack into your teacher's computer and change your grades. If my views of cheating seem contradictory, maybe they are. But in a world full of cheaters, I've had to sort it out on my own. Everyone around me seems to think that cheating is OK. Instead of trying to learn, with the goal of applying that knowledge in the future, many students just care about getting the best grade without putting forth the required effort. Being surrounded by this attitude made it harder for me to do the right thing during that pop quiz, especially since I had seen so many people cheat and get away with it. I don't admire cheaters, but one thing I know for sure is that cheating is an art ... one that I'm not very good at.



Christina
learned the hard way
that hard work is more
rewarding than cheating.

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT CHEATING?

Editor's note: The photo and statement from a person who was accidentally misquoted have been removed from the online PDF version of this issue.



"It's a desperate measure because maybe they have to pass a test to graduate. I don't want to say it's acceptable but it's understandable."

Annette Serrato
16, WILSON HS (LOS ANGELES)



"I think it's wrong ... and they don't really learn anything from it."

Selenia Hernandez
13, WALTON MS (COMPTON)



"I think cheating is worth it when it comes to homework because it's just busywork, but when it comes to tests it's never worth it because [tests] grade your knowledge."

Irene Bambico
17, EAGLE ROCK HS



"I don't think cheating is morally correct but I think sometimes cheating is necessary to get ahead. I know that sounds pretty dark, but it's true."

Jenny Le
17, WALNUT HS

What are you doing with the rest of your life?

The health care industry needs you! Health care offers a variety of jobs and careers, with great pay and flexible schedules. Whether you plan to start working right out of high school, or go to trade school, community college or a university, you can follow a path directly to a great future.

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www.MakeItInScrubs.com

Funded by a grant from The California Wellness Foundation.

Hands-on work and helping others makes an orthotist's job creating supportive braces rewarding

By Mindy Gee

17, LOS ANGELES CENTER FOR ENRICHED STUDIES

Dan Snelson, a certified orthotist at Shriners Hospitals for Children—Los Angeles, described his job and career opportunities in the field, which involves making orthopedic braces to help people walk, improve their posture and strengthen weak body parts.

Can you describe your work? How does it differ from that of a prosthetist?

I'm a certified orthotist. I measure and fabricate braces for children. A prosthetist replaces a body part, and I take one that doesn't work and make it better. For example, scoliosis, I improve the curvature [of the spine]. I make braces instead of casts. The braces help a weak or uncontrollable part of the body.

Can you describe the type of patients you normally work with? Are they usually suffering from birth defects or acquired diseases?

Most kids have a birth defect. Some trauma, but mostly birth defects. Most common is cerebral palsy. Another example is arthrogryposis, a disease that causes stiff joints, such as in knees and elbows, etc. The muscles aren't really formed, they can't straighten.

How did you enter this field? Why did you choose to be an orthotist instead of a prosthetist?

My father was one, and my grandfather before that. I'm certified in both. But in the hospital, I work as an orthotist. It's very enjoyable.

Why do you enjoy your work?

Here, I get to help people. At the [Shriners] hospital, I don't have to charge anyone for it. I had parents in tears after seeing their kid standing for the first time.

I've heard orthotics described as a very small field, which allows each orthotist to make a difference. Do you think that's true?

You tell me [if we make a difference]. But I'll tell you this. There are about 10,000 certified practitioners in the U.S. Of them, 3,000 are prosthetists, 3,000 are orthotists, and 3,000 are both. It's a small field.

There are a lot of teens who say they want to be doctors, but it's not every day that you hear a teen say they want to be an orthotist. Why do you think that is?

Most people see doctors. You don't see orthotists or prosthetists unless you need them. So most orthotists/prosthetists were either amputees or had family members as amputees, or family members in the business. Now at Northwestern University [in Chicago] or the University of Washington [in Seattle] or the University of Texas [Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas], they have formal classes. Some people who can't get into physical therapy switch over. One of my classmates was a physical therapist and found out about it.

What do you think makes being an orthotist special and what do you get from this job that you can't get from another?

I get to use my hands making things. I get to help other people, do business-type work, like budgets. It's a little of everything. I get to work directly with kids, therapists and doctors. I can do what I want. Other orthotists have to charge, but I don't. Shriners Hospital gives free medical care.

What are some negative aspects of the job, if there are any?

Dealing with the public. Sometimes you just don't get along with them. Some come in with attitudes, like we owe them something because of their kid. Ninety-nine percent of people are thankful for us.

Do you think being an orthotist is a stressful job? How so?

It can be. I can't guarantee how many jobs I get this month. It depends on doctor referrals. I might only get a couple this month but a lot more next month, but the doctor still expects me to do everything in the same amount of time. We work pretty quickly on most. If we do a mold today, we'll do the fitting in two weeks.

How do some of these devices work?

It depends on what. For scoliosis, we help to control the back. Leg braces help legs hold the body up or protect a limb until it heals. Sometimes they protect from sores.



PHOTO BY VICTORINO MARTINEZ, 18, DANIEL MURPHY CATHOLIC HS
Dan Snelson, a certified orthotist at Shriners Hospitals for Children—Los Angeles holds leg braces he made for an 8-year-old girl, who has the birth defect spina bifida, to help her walk.

Would you like to know more about how to enter this field? The American Academy of Orthotists & Prosthetists Web site at www.opcareers.org offers listings of degree programs for orthotists, assistants and technicians and questions and answers about the field. California State University Dominguez Hills offers a four-year orthotics program. For more information, visit www.csudh.edu/oandp.

According to the American Orthotic and Prosthetic Association, the average salary for an orthotist is \$56,000 without certification and \$91,000 with certification.

The X-Men saved me

Graphic novels are interesting stories that helped me escape problems at school

By Lily McGarr
17, SANTA MONICA HS

I have always been into fantasy stories. I love the idea that people could move things with their minds, shape shift, talk to animals or fly. I wish I could.

My favorite has always been the X-Men. They were outcasts, and I felt like I could connect. They were ridiculed and hurt for being different, and so was I. They got mocked because they didn't look normal or act normal. I was mocked because I didn't act like the "cool kids." The comic books were a place I could go that would allow me to forget all that. It was an escape, a place where I could almost become super human. I could protect myself from all the people who hurt me.

One of my sixth grade teachers got me into graphic novels. I had fallen in love with the first X-Men movie and when I told my teacher that, he suggested I try



ILLUSTRATION BY BRIAN LOPEZ-SANTOS, 16, MARSHALL HS

reading the graphic novels, which are several issues of a comic in one larger book. I was a little nervous. I had never read a comic book before, let alone a graphic novel. Was I ready to read 200 issues in the X-Men series to catch up with the story? Would I be so behind in the story that I would get totally confused and give up?

A couple weeks after that conversation with my teacher, I went to Barnes and Noble. And, lo and behold, I actually found the first issue of Ultimate X-Men. I was excited because I could start from the beginning.

The next day I started reading Ultimate X-Men Vol. 1, "The Tomorrow People," while I was at my dad's house. We were outside, him with a mystery novel, me with X-Men. In the story, the government has created giant robots to kill mutants. The President of the United States thinks that mutants are too dangerous to be trusted and must be eliminated. The X-Men try to destroy the robots and try to let the world know that they are not monsters. After finishing, I had to find out what would happen

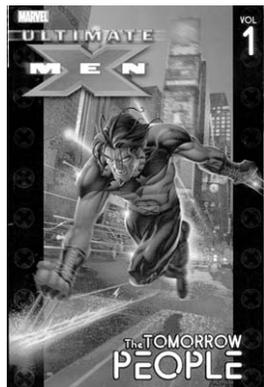
next. Would they win over the hearts of the human race, or be forever hated by the people they had to protect? The graphic novel did such a good job of transporting me to another world that I read the whole thing without stopping, which was unusual for me.

I had expected the graphic novel to look just a little better than a third grader's drawings, but the art caught me off guard. The bright reds and yellows, the soft blues and pen strokes captured an emotional intensity beyond what the movie showed. I felt like I was in the story. I wanted to get the next one immediately, but I had to wait a few days.

After that, I became an official comic reader. Reading the graphic novels allowed me to get away from some hard times I was going through. Boys started asking girls out but not me. And people made fun of me a lot for my bad acne, not being as pretty as other girls and the way I dressed. I was in an Avril Lavigne phase, so I wore lots of colorful layers. That was weird, I admit, but that didn't

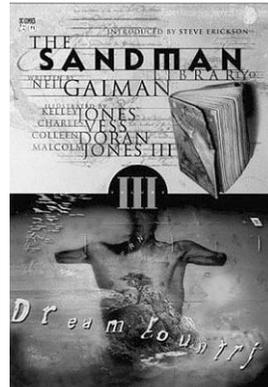
Four of Lily's favorite graphic novels

Ultimate X-Men Volume 1: The Tomorrow People



This is the one that got me into graphic novels. It's the first in a relatively new series, which Marvel comics published to revise how popular characters like the X-Men and Spider-Man originated. The Tomorrow People starts when the X-Men first banded together. It's great for anyone who would love to start at the beginning of the story, and the drawings are beautiful and bright.

The Sandman Volume 3: Dream Country



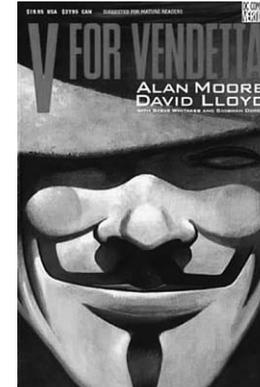
The Sandman series is one of my favorites. It's dark and scary, and great for anyone who is bored with Superman or who finds Spider-Man too corny. This unique graphic novel is divided into four standalone stories about dreams, including a story depicting a cat's dream and one that shows where Shakespeare got the idea for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Neil Gaiman, who is one of my favorite writers, created the series.

Watchmen



I recommend this series to anyone who likes superheroes less than perfect. It's set in an alternate United States, in which many superheroes are retired, and the world is edging closer and closer to nuclear war. Many of the superheroes are drug addicts, perverts or simply mad. Alan Moore wrote *Watchmen*. He is a wonderful writer, and most of his graphic novels have become famous.

V For Vendetta



This graphic novel, also by Alan Moore, inspired the controversial movie with Natalie Portman. The graphic novel is based in post-nuclear war England, which is under a fascist dictatorship, a dark metaphor for the English government under former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. This is for people who love their adventure stories with some politics.

give the kids free reign to make fun of me. At the time, I went to an expensive private school, but my family was never very rich. I couldn't afford to go shopping at Fred Segal and my mom wouldn't buy me an iPod. I think some of the kids saw how uncomfortable I was and they thought it was easy to pick on me.

I had friends, but still I felt that people weren't seeing the true me—the girl who would talk to anyone about their problems if they needed it. The girl who always tried to make sure people were happy. They didn't see the Lily who studied hard, who was quirky, fun and jumpy, too, like everyone else at that age.

By seventh grade, which was the worst year for me, I began to notice that there was more to X-Men. Not only did the comics let me escape, but X-Men also had an underlying message—tolerance and equality, which my parents have always taught me. It was amazing to discover this; I had always thought that X-Men was just a cartoon. I began to read and like the graphic novels more than the cartoons on TV, because they had this more serious message. The mutant powers that made the X-Men outcasts also saved the people who banished them. Even though the X-Men were fictional characters, I started to feel better about myself. I could understand and connect with X-Men more because I always believed in tolerance—which I didn't experience from the kids at school who made fun of me because I was “different” from them.

As I read the graphic novels more, Wolverine became my favorite because of his amazing sharp, knifelike claws that he can make pop out whenever he wants, and slice all the people that he's angry at. When someone made fun of me, or laughed at me, it would have been

nice to have a superpower.

Even though I loved the X-Men comics, I didn't want to tell other kids about it, because they might think I was geeky. At least I knew that I could trust my friends not to make fun of me. It came up casually, when we were talking about the X-Men movie in seventh grade. I said that the Wolverine character in the movie was different compared to the comic book. In the movie, Wolverine became a softer character, while in the comic book, he was harsh and mean. My friends weren't very interested in what else was happening in the graphic novel version of the story, but they were cool with it.

THE COMIC BOOK STORE WAS UNEXPECTEDLY NORMAL

Before my first venture into a comic book store, I had planned on going with a friend. I didn't want to be the awkward girl in there by herself. But the day we were supposed to go, she had to baby-sit. I ended up going to Hi De Ho Comics in Santa Monica by myself.

I expected all the stereotypes of a comic book store. The cashier would be a geeky-looking high-schooler with a high-pitched voice. The kind of guy who doesn't play sports and who knows a little bit more about the comic book world than he ought to. I thought the customers, except for me of course, would be little kids and their parents. I thought there would just be comic books, and nothing else.

But, when I stepped in, it was different. On one side were books about comic books and different artists. There was also anime. In the middle was a shelf with all the new comic books. And on the other side were graph-

ic novels and clothing—Batman, Wonder Woman and Superman shirts. And there were customers who were so swept up in the stories of the graphic novels they were reading that they didn't notice me pass by. The cashiers were actually college-age girls who were very pretty, and who you wouldn't expect to know anything about comics, let alone be working in a comic book store. The customers were different ages. All the employees and customers seemed like nice people. It allowed me to realize that just because I read comic books didn't mean I was a geek. I wasn't an outcast like I thought. I knew that I could come back again without feeling awkward.

Once I had escaped middle school, I felt a lot better about myself. I wasn't as shy and embarrassed and I found I had a lot more confidence. Though the bullying had not fully stopped, I ignored what was left of it. I didn't really care, because I had great friends who loved me. I was still reading comic books, except I didn't use them for an escape—just for entertainment. I still wanted to be able to fly, but I didn't want to fly away.



Lily recently began reading the *Hellboy* series after seeing the movie.

Keep religion and government separated

Despite my religious beliefs, I think abortion and gay marriage should be legal

By Hae Jin Kang

17, GRANADA HILLS CHARTER HS

I am a Christian and have grown up in a Christian household. I regularly attend Sunday service and Friday night Bible study. As a Christian, I also believe that abortion and homosexuality are wrong because of what is written in the Bible.

But even so, I feel that my beliefs shouldn't force other people to live a certain way. I believe that the precedent set by *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 Supreme Court decision which gives women the right to have an abortion, should not be overturned. And I think that same-sex couples should be allowed to marry. This is America, where the First Amendment separates Church and State and protects the rights of the minority.

However, I have observed that many people have become very intolerant. I worry about government leaders who support laws that would restrict the rights of same-sex couples and women seeking abortions, based on the views of some Christians. All but five states—Massachusetts, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York and Rhode Island—have adopted constitutional amendments or laws banning marriage for same-sex couples, according to the Human Rights Campaign, a gay rights organization. And the Supreme Court just issued a ruling, upholding a law that bans one form of abortion.

For the longest time, I did not want to get involved in these issues. I had my own opinions, but I did not want to judge others. I felt that these issues didn't affect me directly. These are private issues for individuals. I should not interfere regardless of my beliefs. This is why I wasn't too enthusiastic about becoming involved in this debate.

WHY WAS THE PRESIDENT AT AN ANTI-ABORTION RALLY?

But what motivated me to get more involved was seeing how our intolerant government was interfering in these personal matters. What specifically prompted me to write was reading an article about how President Bush appeared at an anti-abortion rally in January 2006 to encourage abortion opponents and the "rightness of [their] cause." Government should not advocate for the

causes of a religion, whether it is Christianity or another religion. Government leaders should not legislate their personal or religious views into laws that affect the entire nation.

Also, so many times when I read the news online, there were stories of states banning same-sex marriage. In San Francisco a couple years ago, the mayor granted same-sex couples the right to marry but later that summer the state Supreme Court ruled those marriages were illegal. I thought this was not right because the government should not have the power to interfere in the lives of same-sex couples.

NO RELIGION SHOULD INFLUENCE GOVERNMENT

The government should not listen to the beliefs of one specific religion—in this case, Christianity. Yes, Christians also have the right to express their opinions that abortion and marriages for same-sex couples should be illegal. But, this does not mean that the government should write laws based on those beliefs. The government should remain unbiased and "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion," as the First Amendment states. We do not live in a theocracy, (a government in which God is considered the ultimate authority).

This means that although I do not personally support abortion or same-sex marriage, I think that they should be allowed because the First Amendment separates Church and State. My beliefs are based on religion, so they should not be used as the foundation for making laws that affect everyone in the nation.

My views are not shared by all Christians. Still, I understand why some other Christians argue that abortion should be made illegal and that gay couples shouldn't be allowed to get married—I agree that a child is a gift from God to be cherished and that homosexuality is a sin.

My editor has also told me that some Christians believe homosexuality is acceptable. I disagree with them because the Bible specifically states that homosexuality is wrong and against God. The Bible says, "You shall not



ILLUSTRATION BY ADONIA TAN, 17, WALNUT HS

lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination." (Leviticus 18:22)

I also disagree with extremist Christians who have bombed abortion clinics. As a Christian, I believe that we should all try to live in peace, even with those who do not share our beliefs. It is what the Bible says as well. Hebrews 12:14 says, "Pursue peace with all men." And Thessalonians 5:13 says, "Live in peace with one another." The Bible also tells us to not judge others so that we will not be judged.

The fight against our government's regulation of homosexuality and abortion isn't just a fight for these two issues. Rather, they are symbols for everything we consider our personal "freedoms." If the American government feels that it can stop some individuals from pursuing their individual needs and personal happiness, the government may not hesitate to take other liberties as well.



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FIND YOUR HEALTH CAREER

A message from The California Wellness Foundation

Surviving senioritis

After years of sacrificing my social life for studying, I've slacked off (a little)

By **Mar Velez**
18, VENICE HS

I feel sick, but I'm not burning up. Chris, my boyfriend, leans in and talks to me. His voice sounds concerned, but I can't make out any of his words because I'm drifting slowly away. My vision blurs and everything goes dark. I take a deep breath to fight my sleepiness, but it's no use. I wake up to find myself at the end of my AP English Literature class. What's wrong with me? What's going on? I diagnose myself with senioritis!

As defined on Wikipedia, senioritis is "the decreased motivation toward studies displayed by students who are nearing the end of their high school or college careers. It is typically said to include slowness, procrastination, apathy regarding school work, and a tendency toward truancy." Since spring semester started, I have had all the symptoms except for truancy; at least I am still physically in class.

(But like a true 12th grader with a bad case of senioritis, I started writing this story the day it was due!)

Every day during ninth, 10th and 11th grades, I would come home from school, eat and start my homework. I talked on the phone for a couple minutes but other than that I was studying. I knew I had to work hard because I wanted to go to a good college. I would stay up until midnight to study for my AP art history tests so I knew every detail about the artists and architecture. I wrote practice essays and reviewed my flashcards at least 10 times! On top of all this, I live a 30-minute bus ride from my high school, so I was waking up at 5 a.m. to catch the 6:45 a.m. bus.

I also sacrificed my social life. Every Wednesday, my friends would talk about the previous night's episode of *House*. I barely knew who this "House" guy was. But the thing that really got to me was not being able to go to my boyfriend's band's shows. Chris's band, *Ars Poetria*, would play at least once every two weeks. He would say,

"You're coming to this one, right?" But my usual answer was, "Sorry, I have to study." While he was off playing the *Whiskey a Go Go* and cafés, I was home writing English essays.

But now that I've been accepted to college, things are different. I go to Chris's shows any chance I get—even if they're on a school night. *Ars Poetria*'s music is energetic and funky and makes me want to dance. As soon as I hear the intro to the song "Dada" I start rocking my head then dancing and waving my hands in the air and cheering along with the rest of the crowd. As I watch Chris getting into the song and the crowd, I can't help but scream one of my famous "AUW!"s. I sing along and I forget all of my responsibilities waiting for me in my backpack at home.

HOMework DOESN'T STRESS ME OUT AS MUCH

The "procrastination" and "apathy regarding school work" are my biggest problems. In math class I don't even do the "homework" anymore. I used to make sure that I did all the assignments and got every problem right before I went to sleep. This helped me pass my tests with As and Bs. Now, I breeze through my assignments in class so that I don't have to worry about them at home, and I don't really care if I don't finish all the problems. As long as I tried, right? I still manage to get As and Bs!

And when I get home, I eat and then go to my room to watch television until about 8 or 9 p.m. While I'm watching "Good Eats" on the Food Network, my homework assignments run through my mind. I always say, "OK, at 6 p.m. exactly I'm going to start my homework." But when 6 o'clock comes, I'm still watching television. After my daily dose of Alton Brown, the host of "Good Eats," I log onto MySpace and check my messages and comments. I comment back to a couple friends and sometimes start pointless conversations that just help me procrastinate



ILLUSTRATION BY JOELLE LEUNG, 18, LA CAÑADA HS

even more. By the time I get off the computer (around midnight), I barely have enough energy to walk to bed.

Other seniors have more severe cases of senioritis. In my math class a guy who is barely passing says, "It doesn't matter! I'm already going to college." There are also students who don't even show up to class for two or three weeks.

I'm not nearly that bad because in the end, no matter how much I ignore them, the work of six classes (including four APs), scholarship applications and my responsibilities as president of Peace and Justice Club still await me. I do a lot of my work at 4 in the morning. I either set my alarm or ask Chris to call me so that I can wake up, which is really difficult because I've been up most of the night. When I get out of bed, the house is quiet and dark. This helps because usually my house is loud with the noise of three teens and my 8-year-old brother. Also, there are no interesting shows that come on at 4 a.m.! It's only infomercials. I've seen the Magic Bullet Blender infomercial like eight times.

There are times when I see my hard work pay off, through college acceptances or senior awards. Now that I know that I'm going to college, it motivates me not to slack off too much. I can't imagine losing my acceptance because I was too lazy to do my Spanish homework!

So for now, I'll keep up my routine and catch up with my sleep in AP English Lit.



Mar says that even though she's become a procrastinator, she still makes sure she does well in school.

HPV vaccine: a shot of prevention

I'm glad I got the new shots that protect girls from getting cervical cancer

By Samantha Richards

15, SHERMAN OAKS CENTER FOR ENRICHED STUDIES

I was sitting in my living room watching TV late last year when a commercial came on. A bunch of middle-aged, perfect-looking, healthy women started babbling about a disease that I had never heard of—Human papillomavirus.

I was mostly ignoring the commercial, when I heard that this virus could cause cancer. I was captivated because cancer runs in my family. The commercial ended with “tell someone you love.” I told my mom about the commercial and that I was worried. She explained to me that Human papillomavirus (HPV) could lead to cervical cancer. But she also told me I had already received my first in a series of shots to protect me from the virus.

I couldn't believe no one had told me about HPV and the horrible things it could do. Also, I was irritated that I hadn't paid more attention to what was happening at my last check-up and that I didn't know what was being injected into my body. However, I was more relieved that my mom had taken precautions and already talked to my doctor about me and my sisters getting this vaccine.

I DIDN'T KNOW HPV IS SO COMMON

Following the conversation with my mom I researched HPV and what it could do. I learned that Human papillomavirus is transmitted sexually and in a small number of cases can cause cervical cancer. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), approximately 20 million Americans are infected with HPV. Although the number

is staggering, in most women the infection goes away without treatment and doesn't cause cancer. This disease was much more common than I had thought.

HPV can be spread through all forms of sex, including oral sex. Most HPV infections exhibit no signs or symptoms, so an infected person might not know that they are infected, according to the CDC. Yet they can still spread the virus to someone they have sexual contact with. In some cases people contract genital warts, or pre-cancerous cells begin to grow in the cervix. The virus is most contagious when warts are present. I found it astonishing that so many people were unknowingly infected with HPV. They could be spreading HPV to anyone. As I learned more, it made me appreciate my mom's attention to the disease.

When I went to my pediatrician's office for the third shot (the vaccine requires three shots spaced out at two-month intervals) I was still petrified of needles. But after the shot, even though I felt light-headed enough to pass out, I felt good that I was protected against cervical cancer (and that I didn't have to go through another shot).

It is estimated that, by the age of 50, at least 80 percent of women will have acquired sexually transmitted HPV at some point in their lives, according to the CDC. The vaccine, called Gardasil, protects against four types of HPV, including two that cause about 70 percent of occurrences of cervical cancer. Because this disease is so infectious, state legislatures in Massachusetts, Virginia and New Mexico among others are considering laws that would require girls to get vaccinated against HPV before enrolling in school. Texas Gov. Rick Perry issued an executive order requiring that girls enter-

ing sixth grade get vaccinated. I couldn't believe Texas, a conservative state, had adopted this law, while California, a liberal state, has not. Unfortunately, the Texas state Legislature overruled Perry and stopped the requirement. I believe that a bill like this, if passed in California, would be a great idea because the virus spreads so easily.

SOME THINK THE VACCINE ENCOURAGES TEENS TO HAVE SEX

From reading newspaper articles and Web sites, I learned that some parents and conservative groups have objected to a vaccine requirement. Linda Klepacki, an analyst for sexual health at Focus on the Family, a Christian organization, said that her group opposes making the vaccine mandatory.

“There is a difference between the chicken pox and HPV,” Klepacki explained in an interview published in Health Care News. “The four types of HPV covered by the vaccine are sexually transmitted. You can get chicken pox by sitting in the classroom. You cannot contract or transmit HPV in the classroom unless you are engaging in sexual activity. Therefore, there is no reason to mandate this.”

Also, some overprotective parents contend that girls will have more sex because this vaccination protects them from cervical cancer; this is completely untrue. Some teenage girls will have sex regardless of whether they get vaccinated. The idea that teens would become more sexually active just because they got a shot is ridiculous! Because HPV is less known, most teens would be more concerned with becoming pregnant or getting another sexually transmitted disease.

From the research I have done, I've

learned that an issue that California legislators and parents worry about is the cost. The three shots cost \$360, which is expensive considering that thousands of people in Los Angeles don't have health insurance. However, if the vaccine becomes mandatory, programs like Vaccines for Children (VFC) would cover the cost for eligible children under 18.

I feel that while yes, this vaccine is very expensive, it beats the medical costs for treating cervical cancer. For years people have wished for something that could prevent cancer and now that we have a vaccine that helps prevent at least one form, people shouldn't let the cost stop them from protecting their health.

Furthermore, some parents feel requiring a vaccine infringes on their parental rights and the government should not be telling them how to raise their children. I don't see it that way. I see this as the government trying to protect public health. My question to skeptical teens is, “Well, do you want to get HPV?” The obvious response to this question is, “no.”

After researching the disease, the last line of the commercial, “tell someone you love,” stuck with me. I felt it was imperative that I follow those words and do something. Almost automatically, I felt responsible for informing everyone I knew. I told my friends and cousins because I love them and I don't want them to become a statistic.



Samantha says teens should be more aware of HPV and ways they can protect themselves.

Should the HPV vaccine be mandatory?



“No, I'm personally afraid of shots and since the drug is so new there are probably harmful side effects that could arise later.”

Alana Folsom
16, MARSHALL HS



“Getting the shot is a personal choice that the girl and her family need to make. Instead of making it a law, I think that all girls should be informed of the high chance of getting HPV and of the existence of the vaccine.”

Stephanie Atienza
16, NOTRE DAME ACADEMY



“Yes, I think it should be required because it helps you as a girl and it reduces the danger of you getting cervical cancer.”

Kimberly Mazariegos
15, EAST VALLEY HS



PHOTO BY JENNIFER COLSTON, 17, WESTCHESTER HS
Samantha, center, who is 4 feet 9, poses with friends in front of tape on the wall that marks off 4 feet, 5 feet and 6 feet. Alex Key (left) is 5 feet 7 and Chelsea McNay (right) is 5 feet 8, while Brad Marx is more than 6 feet tall.

Growing pains

After years of wishing I were taller, I now embrace being 4 feet 9

By **Samantha Sumampong**
17, BISHOP ALEMANY HS (MISSION HILLS)

Being 4 feet 9, I've always been known by my height. My tall friends jokingly pet me on my head or say "You make such a good stand" and put their elbows on my head. When I meet new people I'm usually wearing heels, which makes me around 5 feet 1. But when they meet me and I'm not wearing heels they say, "Oh my god, you're short." When I was younger, I liked being short. I was in the front row in school pictures. During ballet, I could jump high and do pirouettes because I had a lower center of gravity. Adults and some of my classmates called me "cute" and "adorable."

But as I got older I grew tired of overhearing my relatives say that I would be prettier if I were taller or my mother say that if I wanted to be a successful journalist, it would better if I were taller.

My mother, who is 5 feet tall, told me that when I was born she thought I would be taller than her because my dad had the tall gene—he's 5 feet 7 ½, which is tall for a Filipino. My parents forced me to drink a glass of milk two times a day, until I complained of stomachaches.

I used to daydream and believe that someday I was going to be taller than my female cousins, who ranged from 4 feet 10 to 5 feet 5, and my relatives were going to say, "Wow, Samantha you've grown!" My daydreams of growing were crushed during eighth grade.

I missed a day from school to go to the endocrinologist, who I called the "growth doctor." I was 4 feet 8 and my mom wanted to know if I was still growing and if I could receive human growth hormone. When injected, human growth hormone can increase height. The doctor jotted down notes about how tall people in my family were, then showed my mom and me a height chart. According to the chart I was below the average height and only about 2.5 percent of people in the world were my height. At first I was excited because that meant there was rarely anyone like me. But then he told me that I likely wasn't going to grow anymore. And because I had started my period early, I couldn't have the growth hormone. I held back my tears. During the ride home, I kept thinking "Why me? Why me?" I blamed myself for not finding out about human growth hormone earlier.

I complained the rest of the year about my height. I couldn't help talking about it. I wanted people to say it was OK, it's not the worst thing on earth and we like you the way you are. Some people comforted me but I could tell it irritated my friends, especially my friend Donna who always told me, "Don't worry about it" or "It's not a big deal." I also was teased about my height. One of my classmates would call me "little girl" and "midget," which I didn't like because it was annoying to be treated as if I were 5.

I didn't get much sympathy from my parents either. When I complained to my mother about being short, she would tell me to pray so that God would make me taller.

I would say, “Mom, that isn’t going to work.” Her reply was, “You never know, there is such a thing as miracles.” I would sulk more because I believed that God granted miracles only for things that people needed, not what they wanted.

I HATED MY SPECIAL STRETCHES

My dad kept saying that he was short when he was younger, but because he stretched and did backbends, he grew taller. So my parents forced me to do backbends. My mom would yell at me from downstairs, “Samantha, do your backbends.” I’d hide in my room. She’d get louder and louder and then she’d scream, “SAMANTHAHHAAA.” Then I’d quickly run downstairs because I knew I’d get in trouble. My dad would hold my back while I bent backward. If I rushed through my backbends or “accidentally” hit my head on the floor so I wouldn’t have to do them again, my mom would bite her lower lip, glare and say “Do it again.” After one of my backbend sessions, I asked my mother, “Mom, why don’t you accept me for who I am?” My mom responded, “I accept you for who you are, but you need to help yourself.” It irritated me that my parents would tell me to accept myself, but they still wanted me to be taller, too.

When I got to high school, the teasing felt worse because I knew I wasn’t going to grow anymore. One of the worst times I was teased, we were playing soccer in P.E. and one of my classmates kept taunting me, “Hey, little girl, Hey, little girl.” It pissed me off. I told her “Shut up!” She yelled to the P.E. teacher, “Ms. Murrish, this little girl is yelling at me.” I ignored her but it still hurt because she said it in front of my classmates.

By ninth grade, I had been 4 feet 8 for three years and I was sick of it. I felt I was the only one out of my classmates who wasn’t changing. I would cry in bed because I was frustrated. I told my mother that I wanted to go back to the endocrinologist to see if I could receive the growth hormone. My mom agreed. But the doctor said the same thing—I couldn’t receive the growth hormone because I was already past puberty and my bones had stopped growing. I felt my eyes tearing up but I held it in. I just felt worse because it was final for me. The nurse told me that being short wasn’t so bad, that one of the most important people in the medical field was 4 feet 9. She said something about some woman on the national soccer team being short. But the nurse was 5 feet 4. She had no idea what it was like to be as tiny as me.

After that I became obsessive. I surfed the Net for other ways I could grow taller, and explanations for why I was short. I read that people who worried a lot tended to be short and that short people had a hormone deficiency disorder. There were these unbelievable Web sites that claimed people increased their height by taking pills.

I remembered my dad watching a television special about people who got their legs lengthened to make them taller. So I typed “leg lengthening” into a search engine.

I read that leg lengthening is a painful and long surgery because the bones of both legs are broken in order for pins and wires to be attached. The healing process lasts one to two years. I imagined having the surgery and sitting in a wheelchair with bolts in my legs. It made me hopeful because at least there was a surgery that had some degree of success. I found there was a hospital in Maryland that performed the procedure.

A few weeks later I was having one of those days when I was feeling really bad about myself. I printed out

the information about the hospital. I whined, “Mom, will you please call the hospital” and gave her the printout. My mom went along and even told me she was going to call. But then she told me to calm down and that being short wasn’t so bad. I eventually calmed down after 15 minutes and realized that it was impossible for me to have the surgery because it cost too much money and my family would have to relocate to Maryland. Later, I felt disappointed that my only chance was out of reach.

But other things helped me realize my height wasn’t as bad as I thought. I found a lot of famous short people on a Web site called shortsupport.org. One celebrity who had the same height as me was Édith Piaf, a French singer known for her song “La Vie en Rose” (which means life through rose-colored glasses). I didn’t know who she was but once I listened to her music she became one of my favorite singers. The list of celebrities made me feel better because they were people who concentrated on their talents instead of worrying about their height.

After that I went to the site nearly every day because by reading about other short people, I did not feel alone.

Thanks to the Web site, I was beginning to accept my height. At the end of sophomore year I was running for class secretary and I had to give a speech. I dropped two phonebooks on the ground and they made a thump. I stood on them and said in a loud voice, “You may know me. I’m the really short girl with the rolling backpack and I want to be your class secretary.” The audience laughed. I didn’t win the election though.

MY FRIENDS LIKE ME THE WAY I AM

Junior year, one of my friends told me, “The only reason people tease you about your height is because you talk about it a lot.” I realized that was true. People did not care. My friends would tell me that it would be odd if I were taller, that I was cute and it wasn’t a big deal. I was fed up worrying about my height.

I stopped feeling sorry for myself because I found there were other people in worse situations than I was. At least I was healthy, I had a stable family and friends who loved me for who I was. Plus, I’m a girl and being short is more acceptable for girls than for guys. My relatives still made comments about how I would be prettier if I were taller, but it didn’t bother me because it’s their opinion and I can’t control how they think. I can only control how I react, and I chose to ignore it or make fun of it.

When others teased me I shrugged it off. No duh. I also used these comebacks when people would be Captain Obvious and state that I’m short:

“I’m not short! I’m space efficient!”

“I’m endangered, there are only a few people in the world who have my height!”

“You tall people are polluting the air!”

Even though I had already accepted my height, I still had to deal with its troubles. During junior year, my 6-foot-2 friend asked me to the homecoming dance. We made an odd couple. When we went to take pictures, the photographer told me stand on a camera case. My date wanted to stand on his knees but the photographer wouldn’t let him because it would look awkward. Standing on the box, I was really happy. Yay, I thought, this is how it feels to be tall!

When my date and I slow danced, my face was near his crotch and he had to bend his knees. I looked up one or two times, but strained my neck so instead I turned my head sideways. After five songs, a friend offered to

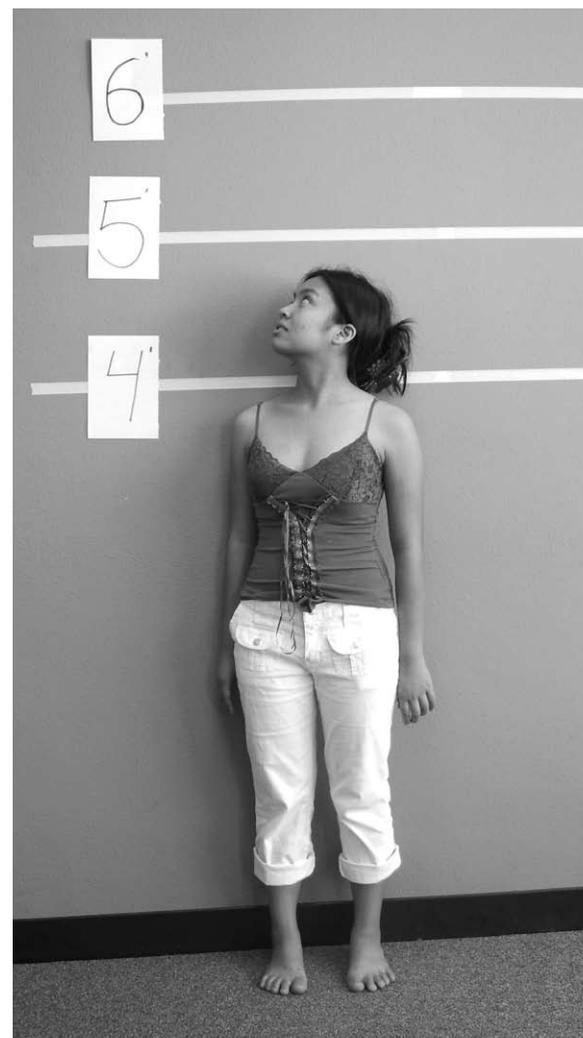


PHOTO BY CHRISTINA QUARLES, 17, PALISADES CHARTER HS
HOW TALL? Samantha stands next to tape on the wall to show her height. She’s three inches short of the 5 foot mark.

dance one song with my date in exchange that I danced with her 5-foot-4 boyfriend. It was a relief because I wasn’t dancing at his waistline.

Later that year, I went to my pediatrician for a checkup and found out I grew from 4 feet 8 3/4 to 4 feet 9. The next day I burst into my journalism class telling everyone “I grew! I grew!” My teacher said, “Finally, Sammi” and laughed.

This year I was voted “Most Likely to be Mistaken for a Freshman.” I liked that I won.

Sometimes it still bothers me that since I’m short I get labeled “cute.” It feels like they’re saying I’m not as strong emotionally, that I can’t handle that much. I’m still accepting that I’m never going to be taller but now I don’t care what other people think and I focus on my positive qualities. I have a spunky and outgoing personality so that I get noticed. I like to talk to people I don’t know and I’m not afraid to speak my mind. I believe I am a bigger person emotionally than what others physically see. Being short makes me unique. It makes me who I am.

An unexpected friendship

I have so much fun hanging out with my mentor, and she helps me with my problems, too



ILLUSTRATION BY ADONIA TAN, 17, WALNUT HS

By Brandy Hernandez
16, HAWTHORNE ACADEMY

When I first moved into my group home, one of the girls I lived with had a lady who took her out once a week. She told me it was her mentor. I asked, "What's a mentor?" She said, "It's someone who you talk to, hang out with and who takes you places." I wished I could have one, too.

I wanted a mentor because I didn't have anybody at home. I didn't want to hang out with the staff at my group home. They are just here to do their jobs, which is to watch us. They're like baby-sitters. I was cool with the other girls but I don't talk to them about personal stuff. I just say "hi" and "bye." And my mom had left for Hawaii with my sister and brother.

I kept bugging Ms. Francis, one of the staff people at my foster care agency, for a mentor. I had to wait a month until one was available. One day Ms. Francis told me, "I think I have one for you. She likes going to the movies and plays." I thought we'd just talk for a few hours in my room and then she'd leave or we'd go to the park or out to eat. But my mentor Emily has been more than what I expected. She's shown me around Los Angeles and done so many special things for me. She's given me good advice and we've had really good talks. When I'm with her, I don't think about what my family is doing without me. She takes my mind off all my problems.

The first time we met we went into my room and introduced ourselves. She was smiling and gave me a hug. I liked her happy personality. We listened to some CDs she brought. We liked a lot of the same music, like The Killers and alternative rock bands like Bush and Nirvana. The next time I saw her we really talked. I told

her I couldn't live with my mom anymore because we were always fighting and that's why I had moved into a group home. I said that my mom used to hit me and she would cuss at me. I felt really comfortable talking to Emily because she told me about her family, too. I liked that she was open even though she had just met me.

I started spending time with Emily every Sunday. She's a talent manager and we'd see movies with the actors she works for, like Jean Reno from the Da Vinci Code. We like the same movies except she doesn't like gore. She knew I liked Johnny Depp so she took me to see *Pirates of the Caribbean*.

WE DO SOMETHING NEW ALMOST EVERY WEEK

I was happy to get out of the group home. It gets on my nerves living with five girls who have different attitudes, which can cause arguments and fights.

When my group home plans outings, they suck. They're the same boring outings every weekend, either skating, bowling or the movies. I've done a lot of new things with Emily. She's taken me to the Grove shopping center, the Central Library in downtown and to my first real play at a big theater, the kind of things you do with your family. That's one of the extra special things about her. She wants to show me things I haven't done before.

When I was on restriction and wasn't allowed to go anywhere for a week, she brought over a brainteaser game and we played it. When I could go out with her again, she took me to Six Flags. I was so excited because it was my first time there. The best part was that we had Flash Passes so we could go to the front of the lines. One

ride didn't allow the Flash Pass so we had to wait two hours. We laughed and joked about how one of her clients was acting crazy, saying to her, "I'm better than you. I can be a famous actor."

When she brought me home I said, "Thank you very, very much," and gave her a big hug. I told her it was one of the best times I'd had. I hardly ever got to hang out alone with my mom because there was always a sibling tagging along. It made me feel special, someone dedicating their day to me.

After I had known Emily for five months, I felt comfortable turning to her for advice. I told her I didn't like a lady who worked in my group home's office. I said that she always had an attitude with me so I chose not to talk to her, and when I had to talk to her I wanted to curse her out. Emily said, "There might be people you don't like at a job but you can't curse them out." She said, "First, you have to respect her because she's an adult. Second, you have to pull her aside and tell her. You have to try to resolve the conflict." One day I didn't argue with the lady and talked to her more nicely when she told me something. Now we're OK with each other.

Around the same time I started getting frustrated with my group home. When I returned from visiting my mom in Hawaii for spring break, they had moved me to one of the other group homes. I was mad because they moved all my stuff without telling me. The staff was getting on my nerves, too. They wouldn't be respectful, like they wouldn't knock on my door before they entered. I told Emily I was mad. That helped because sometimes I let my anger build up and then one day I let it loose, yelling and screaming. By talking to Emily, I didn't blow up as big as I would have otherwise.

It's hard for me to talk to my mom like that because she doesn't listen to or understand me. But I always feel

like Emily is listening and she understands. She never gives me a negative response, like saying "So" or "OK, whatever."

SHE LISTENS TO WHAT I'M GOING THROUGH

One time Emily said she couldn't relate because she didn't know anything about the system. She said it seems hard and that she wished I lived with my mom and we could get along. I'd heard that before. Everyone I'd met in foster care, like the staff at my group home and social workers, said they wish I could get along with my mom. It doesn't mean anything coming from them because they say things like that to everybody. It meant more coming from her because I knew she meant it.

When I visited my mom last summer in Hawaii, my mom and I kept arguing. It was just like old times. I was crying a lot. When I got back to Los Angeles, I told Emily that everything went bad and I had to come back early. I told her I never wanted to go back. She said, "I'm sorry." After I told Emily, as well as my teacher and my school counselor, I wasn't as mad. When I'm around one of them, they make me forget that I'm in a group home. I feel happy to be alive. It's like the feeling you'd get if you won a million dollars. They're my million dollars.

But most of the time it isn't serious with Emily. We just try to have fun. She knows I like to read, so in November Emily suggested starting a book club. We went to Barnes and Noble and I picked out a fantasy book. It had 500 pages and I finished it in four days. For the second book, she called me to say she'd just started and couldn't stop reading it.

She's so nice to me. For my 16th birthday she gave me a vampire book, a CD and \$80. I opened the card and all this money popped out. I said, "That's too much money, Emily." She said, "No it's not." I was so happy. I spent the money on clothes because my group home doesn't give us enough money for clothing and my family doesn't support me either.

It's fun doing different activities with Emily, but that's not what it's all about. I asked for a mentor because I wanted someone to talk to. That's the real reason I enjoy Emily's company and hanging out with her. I hope she's my mentor until I'm 18. After that we can be friends.

Want a mentor? Big Brothers Big Sisters of Greater Los Angeles and the Inland Empire has mentors for boys and girls between the ages of 6 and 16. You can get more information at (800) 207-7567 or www.bbbslaie.org. A Place Called Home has mentoring programs for middle school and high school students who live in the South Central and downtown areas. Contact them at (323) 232-7653 or www.apch.org.



Brandy says that every teen should have a mentor because he or she is another person you can talk to and hang out with.

Are you in foster care 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"

Contact Editor

Amanda Riddle at

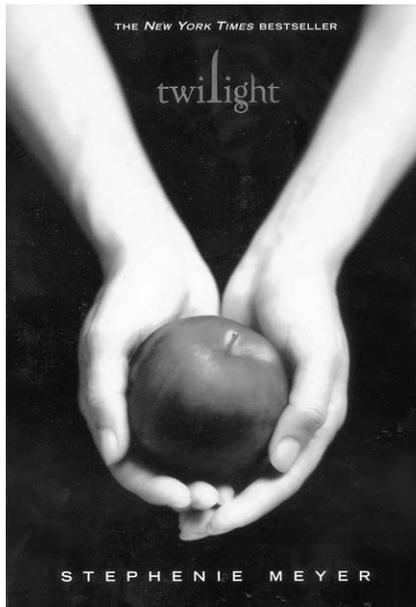
(323) 938-9194
or ariddle@layouth.com

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.

reviews: books



TWILIGHT

By Stephenie Meyer

By Chelsea McNay

14, LOS ANGELES CENTER FOR ENRICHED STUDIES

In the opening of the novel *Twilight*, Bella Swan is a normal teenager who moves from living with her mother in Phoenix, Ariz., to living with her father in Forks, Wash. She settles in comfortably with a group of friends, and learns to cope with the constant Washington rain. However, her life changes forever when she meets and falls in love with Edward Cullen. Especially when she finds out he is a vampire.

When a friend first recommended this book, I imagined it would be a sappy love story, filled with flighty crushes and break-ups. However, my predictions were wrong. This heart-wrenching yet humorous story was almost

impossible to put down.

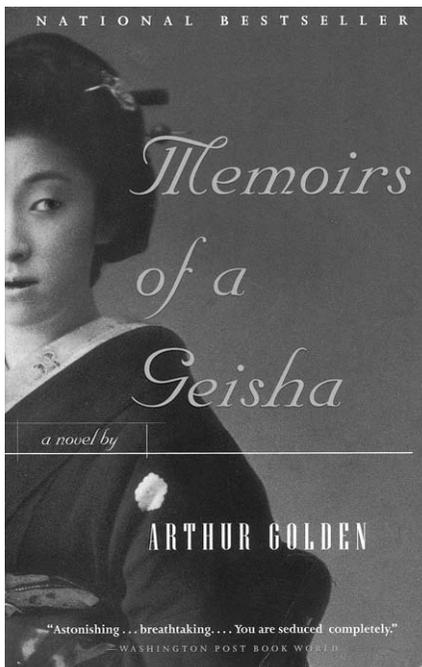
All of the characters are extremely believable and relatable. The characters are far from "perfect." They have typical teen arguments, such as whether *Romeo and Juliet* is a good movie. They also act irrationally throughout the novel, and their arguments are blown out of proportion, such as when Bella and Edward stop talking for days simply because of an argument about her car.

Twilight made me think about love. Bella and Edward love each other even when she realizes that he thirsts for her blood, and that he puts her in great danger just by being close to her. It showed me that love that powerful might actually exist. Near the end of the novel, Edward and his family are determined to protect Bella as another vampire hunts them, which means escaping with her to another city. When

the vampire finds Bella alone, she offers her life in exchange for Edward's and his family's safety. They care so deeply for one another that no circumstance could split them apart and they would sacrifice their lives for each other's.

Stephenie Meyer stated that with *Twilight*, she wanted to write a "vampire novel for people who don't like vampire novels," and she carried that out until the very last page. *Twilight* is not a stereotypical story with vampires portrayed as scary bloodsuckers. It is much more complex, leaving you to wonder which characters play the part of the "hero" and the "villain."

I would recommend this novel to anyone who enjoys a good story: one that will make them cry, laugh and everything in between. *Twilight* is truly a book with bite.



MEMOIRS OF A GEISHA

By Arthur Golden

By Tanya Vazquez

17, DOWNTOWN MAGNETS HS

Memoirs of a Geisha by Arthur Golden is really different from our daily lives. As Americans, we don't see tea ceremonies or kimono-wearing dancers. *Memoirs of a Geisha* gives Westerners insight into a geisha's world.

The way Golden pays a lot of attention to details and art made me feel like I was the geisha. I liked how he went into great detail to describe how Kyoto looked during that time (from the 1930s until Japan went to war with America) and what the kimonos looked like. Golden can sometimes take up to two pages to describe how the characters put on a kimono.

Before reading this book, I thought geishas were nothing more than prostitutes. I found out that geishas aren't only pretty faces; geishas create a secret world, a place of beauty. Geishas were entertainers for men in Japan trained in

the art of dance, tea ceremony and music until World War II, when the culture was destroyed.

The novel centers around Chiyo (later named Sayuri when she's initiated as a maiko, an apprentice geisha), a young girl who, along with her sister, is taken from her poor village to Kyoto. Chiyo struggles to become a geisha. She keeps getting in trouble with the head geisha Hatsumomo because Hatsumomo is jealous of her. For example, she gets blamed for a kimono Hatsumomo ruined that belonged to her rival Mameha.

What I found interesting is her determination to become a geisha. Sayuri wants to be a geisha to find her sister so they could run away together, and to attract the Chairman, a wealthy businessman she has fallen in love with. It was exciting to see Sayuri improve and strive for her goals. She isn't going to let anyone get her down.

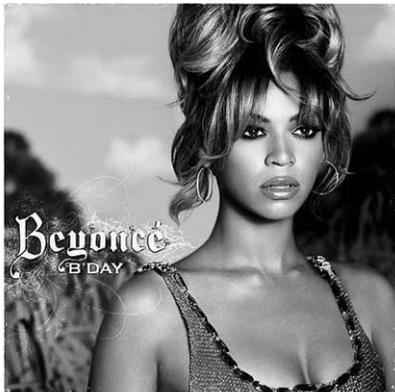
I finished reading this book in a few days. Golden's writing style makes it

easy to dive into the culture and makes you want to know more. Occasionally, I had to look up some of the cities because I didn't know where they were or how to pronounce their names, and there were some words in Japanese that I had to translate to find out what they meant, but I didn't mind.

Some parts are too exaggerated, like the bidding war for Sayuri's mizuage, which is a geisha's virginity. That didn't happen to every geisha; it depended on how they were treated by their geisha house. Still, the storytelling and Golden's imagination made me read faster to find out what happens to Sayuri.

Since I had an interest in Japan, reading this book meant a lot to me because it was one way I could immerse myself in Japanese culture. Geishas lived in an exotic world and it was fun to transport myself there. Even if you aren't interested in Japan, it's still a great book to read if you want to learn about a different culture.

reviews: music



CD: BEYONCÉ

B'Day

By Jahselyn Williams
14, DORSEY HS

Beyoncé Knowles' newest CD B'Day is off the chain. The CD was released Sept. 4, which is Beyoncé's birthday, and has produced the hit singles "Deja Vu," "Ring the Alarm" and "Irreplaceable." This album is way better than her first CD, because she knows more tricks to make her music better.

"Deja Vu" is a fast song with an edge that makes you want to get up and dance. It also has that flavor that Jay-Z brings to the song. The beats combined with his raps are like putting Tabasco Sauce on some Buffalo hot wings.

"Ring the Alarm" is another amazing but different type of song for Beyoncé. She sang this song out of anger, which showed her creative side. The song tells her man not to cheat on her. Some of my favorite angry lyrics are: "Ring the alarm/ I been through this too long/ But I'll be damned if I see another chick on your arm/ Won't you ring the alarm?"

The worldwide smash "Irreplaceable" has become an awesome anthem for women. Beyoncé makes women feel like no man can take their joy or pride away. We are not men's property. My favorite lyric is: "So since I'm not your everything/ How about I'll be nothing?/ Nothing at all to you/ Baby I won't shed a tear for you/ I won't lose a wink of sleep/ 'Cause the truth of the matter is/ replacing you is so easy."

Her CD is one of the best by a female R&B artist. And I will gladly tell you that Beyoncé is at the top of my list, 'cause that's how I roll.

Beyoncé makes women feel like no man can take their joy or pride away.



CD: BELANOVA

Cocktail

By Victorino Martinez
18, DANIEL MURPHY CATHOLIC HS

Belanova's first CD, Cocktail, has to be one of the most incredible Mexican alternative/ambient CDs I've ever heard. Lead singer Denisse Guerrero pours her heart and soul into every song. Edgar Huerta and Ricardo Arriola keep a perfect rhythm and beat. It's not hard to lose yourself in any of the band's songs. Even if you can't understand Spanish, you can still love their music.

But if you can understand Spanish the songs are even better. In "Y ..." Guerrero speaks of why an unnamed boyfriend can't simply call. The song gives me the feeling of how something so simple can mean more than anything else. "Un recuerdo gris,/ que me alivie el alma/ o tan sólo una ... llamada," which in English translates to, "A grey memory/ that can relieve my soul/ or at least ... a simple phone call."

The best song by far on this CD is "Tus Ojos," meaning "Your Eyes." Every note seems to calm the mind and the lyrics remain incredible as she speaks of the way her lover's eyes are the world to her. "Viendo tus ojos/ puedo descifrar el universo/ El viento suave, el azul del cielo/ al fin lo entiendo." In English this translates to, "Looking into your eyes/ I can decipher the universe/ the soft winds, the blue sky/ in the end I understand." On paper they sound like cheesy lyrics but Denisse's voice and the rhythm of the song make them so much more powerful and original.

I've never been so enthralled by an entire album. Belanova's Cocktail is a must-have CD to relax the mind and enjoy the rhythm and vocals of the group.

Even if you can't understand Spanish, you can still love Belanova's music.



CD: LLOYD

Street Love

By Andrea McKinley
13, FOSHAY LEARNING CENTER

Street Love by R&B singer Lloyd is my favorite CD—every single song is tight. This is a get-up-and-party CD because every song makes you want to dance. Yet his unique voice is softer than most singers.

One of my favorites is the slow song "I Don't Mind." It has a great beat and the way he sings is relaxing and smooth. The song is about a guy who doesn't mind doing anything for his girlfriend, even spending money on her. That's a good thing. I'm a girl. I gotta go shopping.

"Player's Prayer" is another slow song. The narrator was doing bad stuff and his girlfriend left him and now he wants her back. He keeps apologizing and praying she'll come back. When he sings, "Girl I'm on my knees/ I promise I'll be good" that would make me come back. If he gets down on his knees like that you have to take him back.

In the upbeat song "Killing Me," Lloyd likes a girl who he knows is not good for him. All she wants is money and fame, "A devil in a dress/ dressed to impress." The beat on this song sounds tight!

This album is the business! I listen to this CD all the time and even stopped playing my PSP for this. I can't focus on the games because all I want to do is listen to this CD. I spent my allowance on this album, but it was worth it.

When Lloyd sings, 'Girl I'm on my knees/ I promise I'll be good' that would make me come back.



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 the L.A. Youth summer writing workshop

NAME _____

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CITY _____

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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