

20 YEARS OLD AND STILL GROWING UP!

# LA.youth

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2008  
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the newspaper by and about teens

ANNIVERSARY ISSUE!



# mail

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

## BUILDING A SOLAR-POWERED CAR

I am pleased knowing young people my age are trying to save our planet. If everyone tried to make environmental advancements such as solar-powered cars, global warming wouldn't be a threat. I can't make a solar-powered car, but this article has inspired me to try and do things that can save our planet one step at a time.

Brennan Boyack,  
Wilson MS (Glendale)

## EMBRACING DIVERSE FRIENDS

The article "Embracing diversity" is interesting to read and learn from. Many people use stereotypes, but they're not true. One of my classmates says, "All Asian people cannot drive correctly." That isn't really true. Some Asian people are excellent drivers. The more we think and say stereotypes, the more it affects the way we think. I hope that we stop using stereotypes because they are the wrong things to believe.

Matthew Murillo, Excel Charter Academy

I liked Victoria's article and have a similar connec-

tion. When I was in school in the second grade I thought all Asians were from the same culture and they were all Chinese. But I was wrong because there were students who were Korean, Japanese and Chinese. The stereotype is that they act smart and get perfect grades, but one of my friends didn't get good grades and wasn't very calm. That's when I realized everyone has a unique personality and doesn't act the same.

Enrique Rosales, Excel Charter Academy

## I DON'T LIKE YOUR DOG, OK?

When I read this article I was shocked. I love all animals, especially dogs, and I couldn't understand why Shannon despised them so much. I then realized that everyone is different and that everyone has their own likes and dislikes. You can't just force someone to do something they aren't comfortable doing. I still don't understand why she doesn't like dogs, but I do respect her fear. Sometimes you have to put yourself in the other person's shoes to understand and relate to their problem. I hope Shannon will grow to like dogs. In the meantime however, I hope that people will stop harassing her to pet their animals.

Talia Avedisian, Wilson MS

This article reminded me of myself except I don't like cats. The reason why I don't like cats isn't from a childhood

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## Send your letters to L.A. Youth



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memory, I just don't like them. Many of my friends try to get me to hold their cats, but I just say no. I really hope my friends understand that I just don't like cats.

Katherine Salvari, East Valley HS  
(North Hollywood)

## I COULDN'T TAKE BEING HARASSED ANYMORE

I believe that every teenager should read this article because we have to learn to accept the fact that there are gay people in this world. We have to learn to respect people for who they want to be and how they feel about certain things. As I was reading this article I pictured myself in Trayvione's shoes and how awful he must have felt. I wouldn't like to be treated like that either. It was very emotional to read. What was really important was that he was brave enough to step up and write about his struggles with being gay. I hope that this article influenced many teenagers because it influenced me.

Izabel Kurtoglyan, Wilson MS

I know a lot of kids at my school who are homosexual or bisexual and I always see them being teased and being made fun of. Sometimes I'm the one making fun of them. Before, I never thought they would get so angry and upset about being teased because of their sexuality. We should respect them and treat them the way we want to be treated. Now that I know that they got hurt by the jokes I made, I have stopped teasing them and started treating them like normal human beings.

Nilou Jafari, Wilson MS

I agree with Trayvione that people shouldn't harass others like that. It's not fair. It was really cool for the cops to come [to his school] and say that you can report harassment and that gays can report it, too. It was also cool that they all got along after that.

Anthony Perez, Excel Charter Academy

This article is sadly true. I don't think it's right for someone to be judged for being who they are. I have many gay



ILLUSTRATION BY BRIAN LOPEZ-SANTOS, 16, MARSHALL HS

friends and I see when they are being harassed by immature students around campus. I often stand up for them, but I can't always fight their battles. It's good that they have rights so they can stand up for themselves.

Ledy Lopez, East Valley HS

Harassing someone in any way is wrong. If I was in Trayvione's situation, I would feel very angry and probably react the same way he did. What I don't understand is why people harass others. I don't think they would like it if they were being harassed. I think the schools should enforce rules against any kind of harassment.

Oscar Amezcua, East Valley HS

## I LOVE TO WATCH WRESTLING

I loved the article "I love to watch wrestling," because it's about time that

a girl says she loves to watch wrestling. I am a girl and like Nidia, I love to watch the WWE. It helps relieve stress just by watching. My favorite is Raw because it has my favorite wrestlers, John Cena and Jeff Hardy. Reading this article made me feel better because Nidia isn't afraid to say that she likes to watch wrestling.

Tiffany Orrego, East Valley HS

## MY MOM RULES AT HOME AND SCHOOL

Samantha seems so calm about her mom checking in on her at school. I don't think I would survive. I wouldn't like my mom knowing every little step I take or every little breath I breathe.

Ashley Barrientos, East Valley HS

*For more letters see our website,  
[www.layouth.com](http://www.layouth.com).*

*What do you think of stories in L.A. Youth?  
Like a story? Hate one? Tell us what you  
think by going to [www.layouth.com](http://www.layouth.com)  
and leaving a comment at the end of a story.*

# Building hope

When I went to New Orleans to repair a home damaged by Hurricane Katrina, I realized that helping others strengthened my faith



Christina (far right) and other volunteers from her church, the Cottonwood Christian Center, stand in front of the home they helped repair in New Orleans.

By Christina Quarles  
17, PALISADES CHARTER HS

**W**hen I learned my church was sending another mission team, its 18th, to help rebuild homes in New Orleans last August, I felt compelled to go. I was surprised that survivors of Hurricane Katrina, which struck New Orleans two years before, still needed help. My older cousin Melvianne had gone the previous year. She told me I would work harder than I ever have. I felt that I had to go, that someone there was waiting for me to help them, and they would help me as well.

My church's mission leader, Joey Beason, organized my team of six to spend seven grueling days volunteering for the Christian organization, Service International (S.I.). For the first two days we mowed a church lawn for hours. The sun beat on our backs while we hacked away at the 13-inch-tall grass. I had never worked so hard in my life. On the third day we started work on a home.

That afternoon, as we were driving through New Orleans I noticed houses had a large X with numbers sprayed on the front door. The numbers at the top, "9-15," represented the date the house was searched. The numbers at the bottom, 0, 1 or 2, represented the number of people found dead inside. It was unimaginable. But it was easier to suppress my feelings than to deal with them in the moment.

Then we arrived in front of a one-story house with boarded windows. Inside I saw that rebuilding had begun: the walls were painted white and the floors were tiled, but the house wasn't expected to be finished for three months. Our tasks were to fill in cracks and holes in the doors and cabinets, then sand and paint them.

Fixing the holes took only a few hours, then we started painting. I reached high and low to paint every door, cabinet and crevice in the three-bedroom house. My arms got tired, but we took breaks. I went slow, trying to make sure I wouldn't spill paint on the newly tiled floors. This was more gratifying than mowing because working on the house helped people directly.

During the day drivers honked and shouted praises out of their windows to us. A police officer even pulled over to thank us. I realized that we were spreading hope even to those whose homes we weren't working on.

A few days later we visited the Lower Ninth Ward—the most devastated area of the city. The image still haunts me. Shattered windows, boarded up doors, caved in rooftops, grass and weeds that stood 7 feet tall, upside-down cars, mounds of rubble, and mold growing outside the houses. Shockingly it looked exactly the same as the news had shown it two years before; the only thing missing was the water that flooded the streets. "There are hundreds of homes," I thought. "And the one home I'm working on is merely a drop in the bucket." I knew it was impossible but I wanted to help them all.

The next day when we went back to the house, I heard

an unfamiliar voice and saw a woman smiling at me. I knew who she was immediately, the owner, and I ran to embrace her. This was Shaquita, the 48-year-old mother and grandmother who lost everything during the storm. Sad is an understatement of what I saw when I looked at her. I saw the pain in her eyes. But then she spoke with gratitude. She said, "I still cry at night because our own people rob and take from one another. But people like you fly across the country to help us. Thank you so much." That's when I realized that these homes were more than just wood, plaster and a roof; these homes which had been destroyed, held generations of family memories and legacies. Shaquita is one more person whose prayers have been answered and family has been restored, who's been given not only hope, but a home, a place to live, to start over.

## HELPING THOSE IN NEED IS WHAT I SHOULD BE DOING

That night I opened my Bible and as I was reading I felt a gratification that I had never felt before. I knew that my aches and pains contributed to helping someone believe that if one has faith and trusts God with all their heart, he does answer prayers. I felt a deep calmness and assurance; I knew that if God helped this family, he would surely help me with the barriers in my life. The Bible teaches that people reap what they sew. I did this not only to help others, but to find myself, and the place God has in my life.

On our last day working on Shaquita's house, I stood in her dining room and closed my eyes for a moment. I could see her family sitting at a new table saying grace before a meal. As they thanked God and asked him to bless all the volunteers, they also thanked him for their food and new home.

Before I left for New Orleans, some friends and family questioned why I would pay \$500 to fly across the country to work in the thick Southern heat to help a family I had never met. Seeing the joy in Shaquita's eyes made it worthwhile.

I had remembered seeing images from Katrina, but TV did not capture how bad the devastation was. After being around the destruction, I no longer care about sharing a room with my younger sister; many people in New Orleans didn't even have a roof over their heads. Before this trip I always thought people who were blessed should help those less fortunate. I never felt it was my obligation to do so, but now I do. It's what I want to do. Going to New Orleans gave me a new perspective on life. "To whom much is given, much is required." (Luke 12:48). I realized how this scripture pertained to my life.

This year I am going to go on more mission trips with my church. Hopefully we will continue to spread hope and the word of God. This trip was one of the most satisfying acts I have ever done.

A version of this article first appeared on madashellclub.net, a website for essays.

# Proud to be here

As a gay teen, going to a concert celebrating gay pride broke down my stereotypes and opened my eyes to our fight for equal rights

By Paul Uhlenkott

18, HAMILTON HS (2007 GRADUATE)

**W**hen I realized I was gay I felt so different compared to the gay people I had seen on television and in the media. I didn't have that gay accent or the fashion sense or anything a stereotypical gay man had. I had this misconception that if I were to hang out with a lot of other gay people, I would be so different from the people around me, that the typically shy me wouldn't belong. That was until I went to the True Colors concert this past summer.

My mom and I bought tickets because the Dresden Dolls were performing. But a couple weeks before the show I looked online and saw that True Colors was a concert celebrating gay pride, which made me a little nervous.

My mother, who has several gay male friends, wasn't much help. She told me that these types of events could get wild. My imagination did the rest. Images of people making out in front of everybody else ran through my head. I have a hard time as it is with new and different experiences and I got more worried now that this could turn out to be a wild party, another thing that I have a hard time with. I felt like I would not only have to defend myself, but possibly my mother, from this craziness, even though she had been to events like this. In the end my mother said it would still be good to go. She figured large social events are unavoidable in life anyway.

When we got to the Greek Theatre, where the concert was held, they gave us purple rubber bracelets that said "ERASE HATE" and listed a website, "www.MatthewShepard.org." I hadn't heard of Matthew Shepard and figured this was some kind of promotional item for a business. But I liked the bracelet's purple color and rubbery feel, so I wore it.

## I FELT COMFORTABLE IN SUCH A DIVERSE CROWD

As we entered, I was surprised that about half the audience looked nothing like how gay men and women are usually portrayed in the media. There were big, burly men who seemed as straight as rulers, but had their arms around other men's shoulders. There were women who looked feminine and petite, talking to their girlfriends. Television and movies show gay men as skinny, with feminine accents. They talk like Valley girls, and wear incredibly tight clothes. Lesbians are all butch, large with short hair, maybe a piercing in the nose, or five piercings in both ears. Seeing that a lot of people were like me, not flamboyant, but wearing jeans and T-shirts, and not fitting the stereotypes, I felt more at ease.

The first band sounded pretty good. If the crowd

went crazy later, I thought that at least the music would be there to comfort me. Margaret Cho, a comedian who I've since learned is big in the gay community, came on during the intermissions between acts. Her jokes spanned everything that you would not want little children to hear. She swore a lot, and talked about sex toys and her sexual habits. It freaked me out hearing these kinds of jokes while sitting next to my mother. But as I saw my mom laughing, it helped me relax and enjoy myself. It amazed me that Cho felt free and open enough to joke about those subjects. I could not have done what she did, even if it were casually in a small group of friends. You could tell everyone loved her by the way they yelled and laughed at everything she said. She described her perfect female lover, and the two women next to us yelled, "Call me!"

When she finished, the Dresden Dolls, who were the main reason we had come, were ready to play. Overall, the performance was good, not great. The lesbian couple next to me drank wine and would randomly start making out. This embarrassed me for a minute, but then it became charming. I liked that they could show their affection in public and not be judged. I was thankful my mom encouraged me to come to the show because I had found a place where I could kiss another man if I wanted to, and receive the same respect straight people do.

**I liked seeing everybody so light-hearted and open about being gay. It felt nice that there was a sacred space where gay people could express themselves so freely.**

After Deborah Harry from Blondie performed, Rosie O'Donnell did a hilarious comedy act. She told jokes about her size, and about life as a lesbian with children. She talked about how she picked up her son from day-care, and her son's friend didn't understand why her son had two mothers. He said that his parents were gay, but his friend didn't understand. The child said, "You know how when you hook up the trains, and there's one that just won't hook up, no matter what you do? That one is definitely gay." Everybody loved her, and screamed out her name during the whole thing. I liked seeing everybody so light-hearted and open about being gay, which I had usually been hesitant to mention. It felt nice that there was a sacred space where gay people could express themselves so freely.

## EVERYONE STARTED DANCING—EVEN ME

When Erasure, the 80s electronic pop band, took the stage next everybody stood. My mother and I were the only ones sitting, and I felt like the only one who didn't understand why everybody had gotten up. As soon as they began playing, everybody cheered and started dancing. The girl next to me moved like she had just suffered a stroke, and kept hitting me in the face with her rainbow boa, which is a feathery, light scarf. As for the band itself, I loved the music. The electronic beats and singing were fast-paced and fresh.

I eventually got up and started dancing, something that I'd never done before. Sometimes I would dance in my room, but never publicly. However, my mom encouraged me, and it did look kinda fun. I felt embarrassed because I had no idea what I was doing. Eventually though, I got over my uneasiness and just closed my eyes and did whatever felt right. I figured that if I could do something as bold as come out of the closet, then dealing with a little public embarrassment from my dancing was no big deal. Plus, everyone was dancing, and some of them danced worse than I ever could. And nobody seemed to be judging anyone or cared how they looked dancing. I had so much fun, that time flew by and Erasure had finished.

When Margaret Cho finished telling more jokes, Cyndi Lauper took the stage. A screen on the left wall started showing slides that contained information about hate crimes against homosexuals, including teens brutally attacked by their peers. First, it would show either a family photo or picture of the crime scene, followed by the person's name, age, where they lived, and a description of what happened. I could hear the crowd gasping. A lot of the victims were killed on the spot or later died from their injuries. I had heard of crimes like this, but it became much more real for me in that moment. Each slide was shocking and disgusting, and it was enough to make me hate the people who could do such things. By the last slide, anger boiled inside of



ILLUSTRATION BY SARAH EVANS, 17, TEMPLE CITY HS

me. I could not stand the thought that somebody could do such terrible things to somebody else, just for liking a certain gender.

#### **WE ALL MUST 'ERASE HATE'**

When the screen faded out, Cyndi told us the story of Matthew Shepard, a 22-year-old man from Casper, Wyoming who was tied to a fence and beaten, and left to die, because he was gay. His parents started an organization, called the Matthew Shepard Foundation, which had been trying to get a bill passed that would extend the meaning of "hate crimes" to gays, transgenders and people with disabilities. This would mean that if something like what happened to Matthew happened again, the punishment would be severe, and the police could invest more time in tracking down those who committed such acts.

Though I was glad to hear of the proposed law, I still felt angry that this bill was not only taking so long to get passed (it still hasn't passed after being introduced last April), but also facing so much opposition from religious conservatives. Some religious leaders have argued that such an act would discriminate against their

beliefs, because they think homosexuality is a sin. Then Cyndi said something that changed my feelings.

"Erase hate."

Everybody around me was silent. So simple, yet the thought never came to my mind. A wave of seriousness subdued the rowdy crowd that sat at the Greek just 10 minutes earlier.

Erase hate. If I didn't let go of my hatred, would I be any better if I hated those who hate me? Wouldn't I be as bad?

Erase hate. It echoes through my mind even now. I realized it's not about what other people do. It's about what one can do to make sure the past is never repeated. Just by not wasting my energy disliking a kind of person, I could put that energy to something greater, and become someone better than they could ever be.

It doesn't matter if I'm gay. Sure, it's a part of who I am, but it's not the whole portrait. I have ambitions and fears and loves just like anybody else. A lesser person would focus on hate and allow it to become them, and I decided then and there that I would not be this lesser person. I realized that's what brought us

together. It didn't matter that we were gay or young or old. What mattered was that we are all real, unique people, and it's a loss for anybody who can't see that for themselves.

On the way home, I told my mother how wonderful it was to be around other gay people. I told her that, though I felt uncomfortable a few times, I also felt at home, like at a family reunion with all of your crazy cousins. Though I always knew that I was not the only one who was gay, it felt reassuring to see physical proof by the hundreds. I left with a small feeling of pride for who I am, so the concert definitely did its job.



**Paul**  
hopes that society will accept gay people for who they are.

# Giving friendship a chance

The things I thought were odd about Darby became why I like her so much

By Charlotte Toumanoff  
16, MARSHALL HS

**A**lthough we have different accounts of the first time we met at our sixth grade orientation, Darby and I both decided from the first moment we met each other that we had no interest in being friends. Darby told me that when she met me, her initial impression of me was pretty bad. She remembers standing in line with her mother to get her P.E. clothes, when a strange woman (my mother) and her daughter (me) stepped in line behind her. "This is my daughter, Charlotte," my mother said, and started talking about me. Darby said her most vivid memory was wishing that we would go away and noticing my "freakishly long hair and fingernails," and "leopard-print bedroom slippers peeking out from underneath my jeans."

When Darby told me this story, I couldn't remember our exchange at all. Over time, however, little snapshots began coming back to me. I had spent that night stumbling behind my mother in a frightened daze, mortified at how enthusiastically she was trying to help me make friends. When she introduced me to Darby and her mother, I was instantly put off. It was written all over Darby's face how much she wanted us to leave, and when she looked at me I felt as though she saw all my flaws.

For two years Darby and I barely shared a conversation, even though we were part of a close group of friends. We would speak during conversations with mutual friends, but our one-on-one conversations were usually limited to calling each other for homework. We had all the same friends, but I didn't like her.

## SHE DID HER OWN THING

At parties it offended me how, when Darby was bored she would leave the conversation or activity to entertain herself in some other way. She seemed stony and unwilling to join the group if we weren't up to her standards. It confused me that she could be incredibly rude at a party and everyone still adored her. If I were to do that they would assume I was mad or attacking them, and I couldn't understand what it was about her that made people like her. No one else was resentful of her behavior. "That's just Darby," they would say if I asked. I couldn't understand why it didn't bother them.

Darby's actions especially irritated me at my friend Molly's birthday party in sixth grade. Bored after hours of dancing and jumping on pillows, Molly brought out a karaoke machine. We spent about an hour listening to people sing off-key before it began to lose pizzazz and we went outside to sit in the Jacuzzi and talk. Darby decided to stay inside and play karaoke by herself. Every so often people would go inside to see what she was doing and to try to convince her to join us, but they would always come back empty-handed. Even I popped my head inside and asked if she wanted to come out. She gave me a small shrug of her head and turned back to



Although they didn't like each other at first, now Charlotte (right) and Darby Barton, 16, who goes to North Hollywood High School, are best friends.

PHOTO BY SASHA JONES, 18, CROSSROADS SCHOOL (SANTA MONICA)

the karaoke screen, softly singing into the microphone. I assumed that her spending the evening with herself was a rejection of the rest of the people at Molly's party. That made me angry, but no one else seemed to mind; they'd known Darby for years and were used to her ways.

When it got too dark to stay outside, we found Darby still sitting in front of the television. Darby sang privately to herself for another half hour, giving people a turn whenever they asked for one, but not participating in the other group activities. I wondered how my friends had so many wonderful stories about her, because I had never really seen Darby talk or participate enough to be the vibrant, fun girl I kept hearing about. I also knew that she was a good friend because I hadn't heard anyone complain or gossip about her, but I still couldn't understand how she was so close to people when she wasn't involved in the party.

At school I would hear stories and offhanded remarks from my close friends about how much fun Darby was, and how she could turn any dull day into a roller coaster ride. Glancing at Darby when I heard this, she would have a small smile on her face, looking as though she had never been wild in her life.

### SURPRISINGLY, WE GOT ALONG RIGHT AWAY

Darby and I were always polite to each other, but we did not become friends until the last day of seventh grade when I was caught without a social plan. I called my friends, but they were all busy, leaving me stuck in a friendless celebration, alone at the end of school. I spent my day whining to my mother about my lack of plans. She went through the school roster naming off all my friends, until she discovered Darby was the only one I hadn't called, and threatened me with no computer time unless I asked Darby to come over. I called and Darby reluctantly agreed. She later told me she had her mother come as an emergency backup to drive her home in case I was as awful as she imagined.

As I waited for her to get to my house, the feeling of doom was in my stomach. I thought, "Oh god, here we go, three hours of awkwardness, three hours of pretending that we're both having fun. At least I get to tell my mom, 'I told you so.'" When Darby came over with her mom, we separated from our parents and went up to my room. We started talking, and something just fell into place.

Darby surprised me with her wit and how funny she was. She wasn't standoffish at all, but would keep up with my crazy rambling (something which made me immediately like her) and provided excellent conversation. As a die-hard Buffy The Vampire Slayer fan, I made sure to dedicate a few hours of our day to introducing Darby to the wonders of the Buffyverse and had her drooling over Spike, the devilishly bad, extremely hot vampire, before dinner. I had two episodes of the show downloaded on my computer. Later that night we were on my computer watching people lip sync to "Baby Got Back" on YouTube when Darby turned to me and said, "You want to know something weird? I haven't been bored all day. I'm usually really bored when I'm at someone's house, but I've been fine." I was shocked to realize I was having a lot of fun too. (About a year later Darby and I had a conversation about how horrible our impressions of each other were, and how glad we were that our parents forced us to spend the day together.)

When we got back to school we quickly became

closer and closer. We talked every day at lunch and in P.E. We went everywhere and did everything together. We were best friends. Qualities that I had found irritating suddenly became my favorite things about her. I admired how she refused to take nonsense from people and was not shy about giving them a piece of her mind, like when a mutual friend talked badly about someone we knew. Instead of trying to ignore the confrontation, Darby told them flat-out they had the wrong impression and stuck up for our friend in a way that had the other person apologizing in the end. I saw how well she knew herself, and that she saw no point in doing things that made her unhappy.

I realized that Darby's policy of not doing things that made her unhappy applied to people trying to push her around. I have never seen her conform to peer pressure or change her opinion because she was the only one who thought it. Keeping that in mind, I stopped letting people play on my guilt to get things from me, like demanding that I upload pictures for them overnight at the cost of my precious few hours of sleep.

Before, I was a major pushover, like editing my friends' essays so they would like me better. I would spend an entire class period helping people and even take a few essays home. I would lose two hours of sleep editing them. One time someone gave me an essay and I didn't have time to edit it. I tried to call her and tell her I didn't have time, but had to leave a message. The next day she came up to me and said, "Where's the essay! It's due today!" I thought, this isn't right. Obviously my reputation as someone easily convinced to do other people's work led her to believe that no matter what, I would finish and print out her essay for her. After that, I started telling people I didn't have a lot of time and refused to do anything I couldn't easily fit into my schedule. My friends stopped giving me as much work and now I hardly ever have a problem finding time to help a friend.

### I'M MORE COMFORTABLE WITH WHO I AM

Spending more time with Darby, I understood that not letting people push her around doesn't just make her happy, it makes people like her more. She is admired by her friends for not letting peoples' negative opinions influence her. Before we became friends, I was loud, overcompensating and almost desperate to get people to look at me, but I slowly began to change.

I've realized that I don't have to do anything special to get attention—that people enjoy someone who will take the time to listen to them much more than someone who is trying to impress them with how smart and funny they are, and overpowers them with jokes or pearls of wisdom. I'm much happier being more comfortable with myself. Spending the time to try and appear to be this person that everyone else likes instead of just being myself was exhausting. This year, I was myself—I didn't care what people thought of me. As soon as I let my guard down and stopped being something I wasn't, something switched and people started to talk to me more, like sharing embarrassing stories and discussing each other's interests and dreams. My life changed from a constant struggle to make friends when I started going to a new school, to getting to know new, interesting people every day. Making friends has become much easier.

I have changed a lot since I became friends with Darby. I owe so much to her, and I'm lucky to be friends with the girl I used to think was weird.

## WHAT DO YOU LOOK FOR IN A FRIEND?



"Honesty and respect because without those two you wouldn't have a real friendship."

**Katherine Soriano**  
13, VIRGIL MS



"I look for honesty, a good sense of humor and if they are worried about you. If you get hurt, they care about you."

**Daniel Torres**  
13, NIMITZ MS (HUNTINGTON PARK)



"I want someone who respects my opinion and I respect them back. And we always have each others' back. We're always there for each other to help one another out."

**Ashley Carpio**  
13, NIMITZ MS



"I look for someone who leads me in the right direction and looks out for my best interest. If I was going to get into a fight, they'd say it's not worth it instead of encouraging me to fight."

**Frederick Christmas**  
18, POSEIDON SCHOOL



Raul has learned a lot from his foster father, Oscar, pictured here in their kitchen in Downey.

PHOTO BY CHRIS LEE, 17, WALNUT HS

# I'm finally in a loving home

Thanks to my foster parents, I feel like part of a family and have a more stable life

**By Raul Flores**  
15, LEEWAY SCHOOL (ALHAMBRA)

**P**eople have different meanings for a family. A family to me is having a dad and a mom who care about and love you. Living with my foster family, I am finally in a home that feels like a family.

I was placed in the foster care system when I was 4 years old because my mom was abusive. She used to hit us with anything that was there, like belts and shoes. When it was time to shop for clothes, we got only one shirt and one pair of pants. Then she would keep the rest of the money for herself. My big sister Julia was the one who took care of me and my siblings as if she were our mom. She would cook for us and help us with our homework. She would protect us when my mom would try to hit us.

When I first got into the system, I lived in a foster home with my other sister, Susana (who is a year older than me) but we were separated because I was fighting with her. They put me in a group home, which are facilities where foster youth live with adult staff members. Julia and my older brother Juan were put

into separate group homes.

I spent five years in one group home in San Dimas. It felt like a nightmare that would never end. I hated the way the staff treated the foster kids who lived there. Like if I were to ask, "Can I go outside?" They would automatically say, "No!" That's not fair, they should compromise. If you discuss it and the answer is still no, at least you talked about it. And their food, yuck! They would get frozen food and warm it up. The worst part was they wouldn't even give you seconds because they thought the kids were getting fat.

I acted really bad because I was angry and I didn't want to be there. I wouldn't go to school, I'd stay in my room and I wouldn't listen to the staff. If I got angry, I'd leave and go AWOL (absent without leave). I'd always walk to the canyon behind the group home and try to cool down for half an hour. There were times we would go somewhere fun like Six Flags, Knott's or Raging Waters, but someone always acted bad and ruined it so we couldn't go anywhere else for a while.

#### THEY TOLD ME THEY FOUND A HOME FOR ME

I would always wonder when is it my turn to go to a foster home. Two years ago, on my 13th birthday, my social worker said, "You're leaving to go to a foster home." I was very happy and I started packing my stuff. But the staff told me not to pack because the foster agency could change its mind. I kept packing, but sometimes I would stop to think about if I would actually get to go. Once before, another social worker had told me I was moving to a foster home and I ended up not moving. They just called and said there'd been a misunderstanding and that I wasn't going.

This time, my social worker came back the next day. She asked me what kind of people I wanted to live with. I didn't care. It had to be better than the group home. She said there was a home in Downey and that it was a good family, so we went to visit. We pulled up to the house and I said, "That house is big." It was two stories, white with green trim, a back yard, front yard and seven bedrooms. I remember standing in the living room and being impressed. They had a really big TV. While I was there, Yuri, one of their foster sons, came home from school. He said, "What's up?" He looked my age and seemed like a cool kid. The foster dad told me, "Whatever is mine is yours." It felt like they wanted me to be there.

The next day was moving day and I was already packed. I had a few huge duffle bags with my clothes, shoes and my toys. I even took my betta fish because I knew that if I left him, he would get flushed down the toilet. I left my bike and my scooter because they wouldn't fit in my social worker's car. But I didn't care. I had a smile all the way there. I was asking a lot of questions about the house. Are there going to be a lot of people there? Are they friendly? How old are the kids?

When I got there, no one was home but my new foster parents. They asked me if I wanted anything to drink. I was shy and said no. They asked me if I needed help unpacking. I said no. They took me to my room and showed me the closet to put my clothes in. My room was small with bunk beds. I was excited to get the top bunk. When I had to go to camp with the group home, I always had to sleep on the bottom bunk.

They turned out to be a big family. I have three foster brothers (including Yuri), two foster sisters, my foster

parents' two sons live there and I have a foster cousin who lives across the street. There are two dogs and seven cats too. It's cool. Everybody gets along. Now I am in a family.

It took some time to get used to being there. At the group home I had to ask to go to the fridge, to go outside or to get a drink of water and sometimes they said no. At my new foster home, I would go to my room and wait until I saw Yuri getting stuff out of the fridge. I'd ask him to get something for me, and he'd tell me to get it myself. It took me three months to get used to getting things myself.

I was getting comfortable living there. I was helping out, washing dishes, cleaning my room more. And I was talking to the family more and getting to know them.

My foster dad loves to tell fibs. One time he told me

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is my foster dad,  
I still look up to  
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I never had a  
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every day.**

that he was in the Army and he was hungry and lost. So he ate his finger and then his men found him. I started to laugh. Then he said, "Hey, hey, what's so funny? Am I a comedian?" He made a funny face and I couldn't stop laughing.

Even though he is my foster dad, I still look up to him as if he were my own dad. I never had a dad to look up to. I have long talks with him every day. He takes my foster brothers and me to the movies and on other trips. I can even go to work with him at swap meets where he sells clothes and jewelry. I learn how he sells. Plus, he gives me money for helping him.

I love my foster mom as much as I love my foster dad. She takes care of me. She makes the best food ever. When I first tasted her posole (meat soup or stew) it was like a chef had made it in a restaurant. She makes it with chicken, which is my favorite. She also uses some kind of corn that tastes so good! Then lemon and the best hot sauce in the world, Tapatio, that gives it flavor. When I'm about to take the first bite, my mouth waters. Unlike in the group home, I can eat as much as I want. She's also teaching me how to speak Spanish. I really appreciate that.

I also love to hang out with my foster brothers and my foster cousin. We always play games like tag or hide and seek, but my favorite is when we play with BB guns in the front yard. We have so much fun, when everyone has a gun and starts shooting each other. (It's just a plastic pellet and stings a little.) I think these are the best friends I've ever had. They're always around. We don't get into fights like I did with the boys when I lived in the group homes.

#### MY FOSTER PARENTS CARE ABOUT MY LIFE

Once when my foster parents told me to clean something, I said, "No, I don't want to do it." We got in an argument. I left the house and I came back two hours later. I went to my room and my foster dad came to talk to me. He said, "You've never been like this. You're a good kid. Everybody gets mad sometimes." Then I started to calm down.

Living here has changed me a lot. My foster parents have helped me control my anger by talking to me when I'm mad or just leaving me alone and letting me calm down. My foster parents talk to me about everyday stuff and if there's a problem I can talk to them about it and I don't have to keep it inside.

This is what I think a family is—a group of people, spending time together. It's important to me because I never had that. When I lived with my mom, no one ever gathered around the table for dinner. It's a time when everyone expresses their feelings about how their day is going. It makes me feel good. If you don't have anyone to talk to, there's no one to listen to you and no one knows how you're feeling.

A month after I moved in, I told my foster parents that I usually go to my sister Julia's house in Long Beach on the weekends to see my family. The group home used to take me on Saturdays and come back to get me on Sundays. My foster parents said they could take me on Fridays and pick me up on Sundays. I was happy because that meant I got to spend more time with my siblings. It also showed me my foster parents care about me.

I love to go and visit my siblings. We have so much fun. When I lived in a group home it was a hassle to visit them. When it rained they said I couldn't go because it wasn't safe to drive. Even if we are broke we plan something like going to the park or walking around. If not, we get comfortable and watch movies in the house. Sometimes we go to the zoo. It's so much fun when we do because we joke around. Then we go out to eat somewhere. I also help my sister clean her house.

I don't see myself as having two families. I think of it as one. My family is very important to me because they are the ones who are by my side. With my foster family, I'm a normal teenager. I don't try to be extra perfect. It feels good that my foster family opened the door for me when I needed it and let me be part of their family.

Ever since I've been in foster care it's been kind of rough, but some people have it worse than I do. I think I have it pretty good because I live in a foster home that I like. I'm more stable now and I feel that I can live normally. Also, some people in foster care don't get to visit their birth families like I do. It feels good to be able to see them; I don't feel like I'm alone. I'm thankful that I have a family that will do all these things for me. I feel better about myself. I'm a happier person and I've learned how to get along with people better. That's why I appreciate my foster family.

# L.A. YOUTH IS 20 YEARS OLD!



#### POPULAR MUSIC

George Michael, "Faith;" Guns N' Roses, "Sweet Child O' Mine;" Bobby McFerrin, "Don't Worry, Be Happy;" Michael Jackson, "Dirty Diana."

#### POPULAR TV

The Cosby Show, A Different World, Cheers, Growing Pains, Who's the Boss?

#### POPULAR MOVIES

Beetlejuice; Big; Colors; Coming to America; Die Hard; Good Morning, Vietnam

#### POPULAR FASHIONS

acid-washed jeans, jelly shoes and bracelets, neon colors, leggings, baggy T-shirts

1988



2008



#### POPULAR MUSIC

Soulja Boy Tell'em, "Crank That (Soulja Boy); Fergie, "Big Girls Don't Cry;" Kanye West, "Stronger;" The White Stripes, "Icky Thump;" anything from Timbaland

#### POPULAR TV

The Hills, High School Musical, American Idol, House, Lost, America's Next Top Model

#### POPULAR MOVIES

Superbad, Spider-Man 3, Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End, Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix, The Simpsons Movie

#### POPULAR FASHIONS

vintage T-shirts, leggings, skinny jeans, hoodies, ballet flats

It all began 20 years ago when the U.S. Supreme Court struck down student press rights, giving school officials broad powers to censor student newspapers. That afternoon in 1988, L.A. Youth was created to give an uncensored voice to Los Angeles teens. What began at a kitchen table and 2,500 copies has grown into a newspaper with a readership of 500,000 delivered to 1,300 teachers who share the paper with their students.

To celebrate our anniversary, we read through our

archives going back to the first issue to select stories that represent our best writing, and which still have the power to connect with teens today. You can read three of these stories in our special anniversary section on pages 14-26. We're celebrating our anniversary all year, so look for more "Best Of" stories in every issue of 2008.

Also, on pages 20-21, we look back at stories we've published about the struggles teens face, from depression to eating disorders to dealing with the death

of a loved one.

And we are also proud to be publishing throughout these pages, quotes from respected journalists who support what we do.

L.A. Youth has done a lot of great work during the past 20 years, and we're proud to be celebrating our anniversary with you.

*—L.A. Youth staff*

REPRINTED FROM 2002

# Doing time

**By Peter M.**

17, CENTRAL JUVENILE HALL

I open my eyes from a restless night's sleep and stare at the nightlight on the ceiling of my dirt-saturated room. I try not to touch the yellow stains running alongside my bed, because I have no clue where they came from. I nestle up to get in a couple of extra zzz's but to no avail.

Soon I hear the jingle of keys, and the door unlocks while the detention services officer yells at me to get dressed and wash up.

This has been my morning routine for the past 18 months.

Being a 17-year-old facing prison time is not easy—especially when I'm looking at 12 years. I'm locked up in Central Juvenile Hall on charges of a home invasion robbery with possession of a firearm. I face a maximum sentence of 30 years in state prison. I'll take a deal for the minimum amount of time I can serve for my crime—12 years with one strike. If I run a good program, hopefully I'll be out by 2010.

I got arrested a month after I turned 16 and it was a big joke to me. When they read my charges and how much time I was facing, I laughed in the courtroom.

Now it's not so dumb. It's reality.

I still haven't come to truly grasp it, but my mind is starting to perceive it. It's just hard to believe that a first-time offender, especially a juvenile, can receive such a harsh punishment.

Now I'm in the dark with no hope of starting a family, going to the beach with my friends or even relaxing at home with my family in the near future. What makes it even harder is knowing that when I get out, my dad might not be there to hold me in his arms.

My dad was diagnosed with terminal intestinal cancer in early 1999 and has since undergone four operations. His left kidney is failing and he has a tumor. If the doctors cut it out, he risks the loss of movement in his leg. In a few months, he will be operated on again to remove the damaged kidney. It's pretty much downhill from there.

I can't think of a more severe pain than knowing that one of your loved ones will not make it with you through your times of distress.

I had a better childhood than most people could wish for. My parents were there for me through thick and thin, never letting me down. I've played classical music

on the piano for nine years and was a child prodigy. The only reason I stopped was because I got locked up. I have awards, certificates and ribbons that can fill up a wall and had a scholarship to go along with them all.

If you knew me on the outside, you'd need a minute for the surprise to pass before you could believe that I was arrested. I never had a criminal past, and all of my family and relatives refer to me as a well-mannered, polite, smart kid who always had a hand out to help.

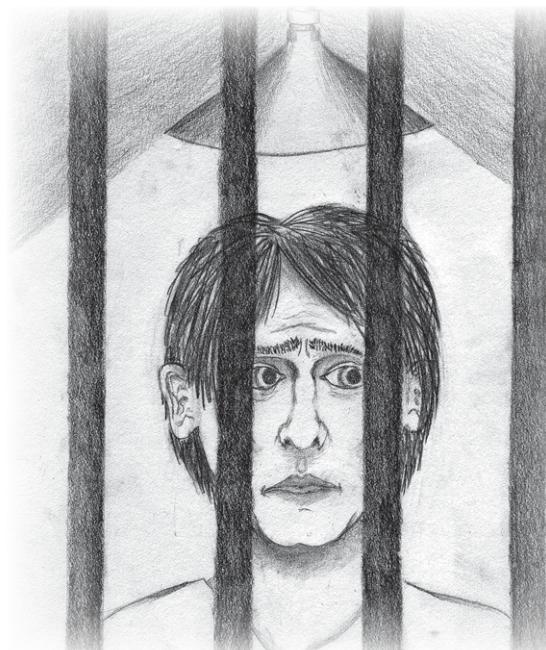


ILLUSTRATION BY EDISON MELLOR-GOLDMAN, 16, LOS ANGELES CENTER FOR ENRICHED STUDIES

I grew up as the kid who made friends with everyone and made everybody laugh. I never hung around the gangs or the junkies. I hung around with a crowd that had the resources to do anything.

When I take my 12-year deal, I will have a felony on my record and a strike that will stick with me for the rest of my life. I'll have to live with being discriminated against and looked upon as a criminal for the rest of my life, because of a stupid mistake that was made in the past.

Life in juvenile hall has been uncomfortable because

I'm always being told what to do. They tell me when I have to wake up, when to eat and drink, when I can use the restroom, when I can talk and when to go to sleep. I'm in my room all the time and the four dirty white walls of my 8-by-11-foot closet are confining.

## I TRY TO STAY POSITIVE

Believe it or not, juvenile hall has its upside also. The school system is one of the best in Los Angeles County, and they offer you a slew of programs that keep you occupied and educate you at the same time.

I'm in an art class, a GED class, photography and film class, a college class and my favorite, the writing class. It's called Inside OUT Writers. My teacher, Duane Noriyuki, is a staff writer for the Los Angeles Times. He is also my mentor. Through his wisdom and knowledge, I learned to unlock my writing skills, to express my heart and emotions through essays and poetry.

But all this is a front to hide the real problem of the halls: prejudice, discrimination, corruption, hatred, anger, violence and scandalous politics. There are at least two fights a day, one riot a month and racial tension is always present. Some staff who are supposed to be here to protect you only care about the money they make and consider you a nuisance that someone else should handle.

I've seen 16-year-olds get life and smile the next day like nothing happened.

But at night we all cry. The mask comes off and you don't have to hide anymore.

Life in the halls is not all fun and games like some people assume. It's where you wait to be sent to places like county jail, youth authority and state prison. You have to grow up and mature real fast, because if you don't your life could very well be over.

The most important part of my life is gone. I would give anything to get it back. So far, I've spent my 17th birthday in here, two Easters, two Christmases and will spend every holiday incarcerated until some time in 2010.

I get lonely in here because I only get to talk to my parents on the phone for 10 minutes a week and only see them one hour on Sundays.

Every day since I heard about my sentence, I ask myself only one question: Will I be able to hold my family in my arms if I make it out of prison?

It's hard on my soul, but they gave me no choice and left me without any options.

**Congratulations to L.A. Youth newspaper: 20 years of helping young people become better writers, thinkers, readers and citizens! —CNN's Larry King**

REPRINTED FROM 2003

# Where I'm from

*L.A. is the easy answer but there's more to it*

By Guianna Henriquez

16, MARLBOROUGH SCHOOL

**I**t was cold as my dad drove us to my SAT prep camp at UC Berkeley. I was excited, but since I was coming from L.A., where it was hot, loud and colorful, this little city seemed boring, boring and boring. I knew that I would have to somehow endure 10 grueling days of college and SAT prep before my relaxing summer break began.

I slowly descended the stairs leading to the camp registration area, while my mom followed with some of my bags and my brother closed the car door. There was a line of white kids in the front of the registration area. A 16-year-old girl and her mom turned their heads curiously toward me. Was that mom giving me a dirty look? In her pearls and navy pumps, she seemed so intimidating. Did she know, by the color of my skin, that I had a scholarship? I began to feel hot embarrassment; I must, just by walking in, be doing something wrong. I began to check for any stains or peeking bras and underwear as stealthily as possible. I was fine, so I turned to check my mom and brothers, who were waiting in line behind me but weren't doing anything out of the ordinary. Everyone was standing so quietly—was it because of me? The mom and her daughter weren't looking at me anymore, but I still felt their piercing glances. It was like they were letting me know that I didn't belong. Did they think I was an illegal immigrant? Images of cops hassling Latinos on the street or in the desert flashed through my head, but I hadn't done anything illegal. Somehow I wasn't Guianna anymore; I had transformed into a chola straight out of the ghettos of L.A.

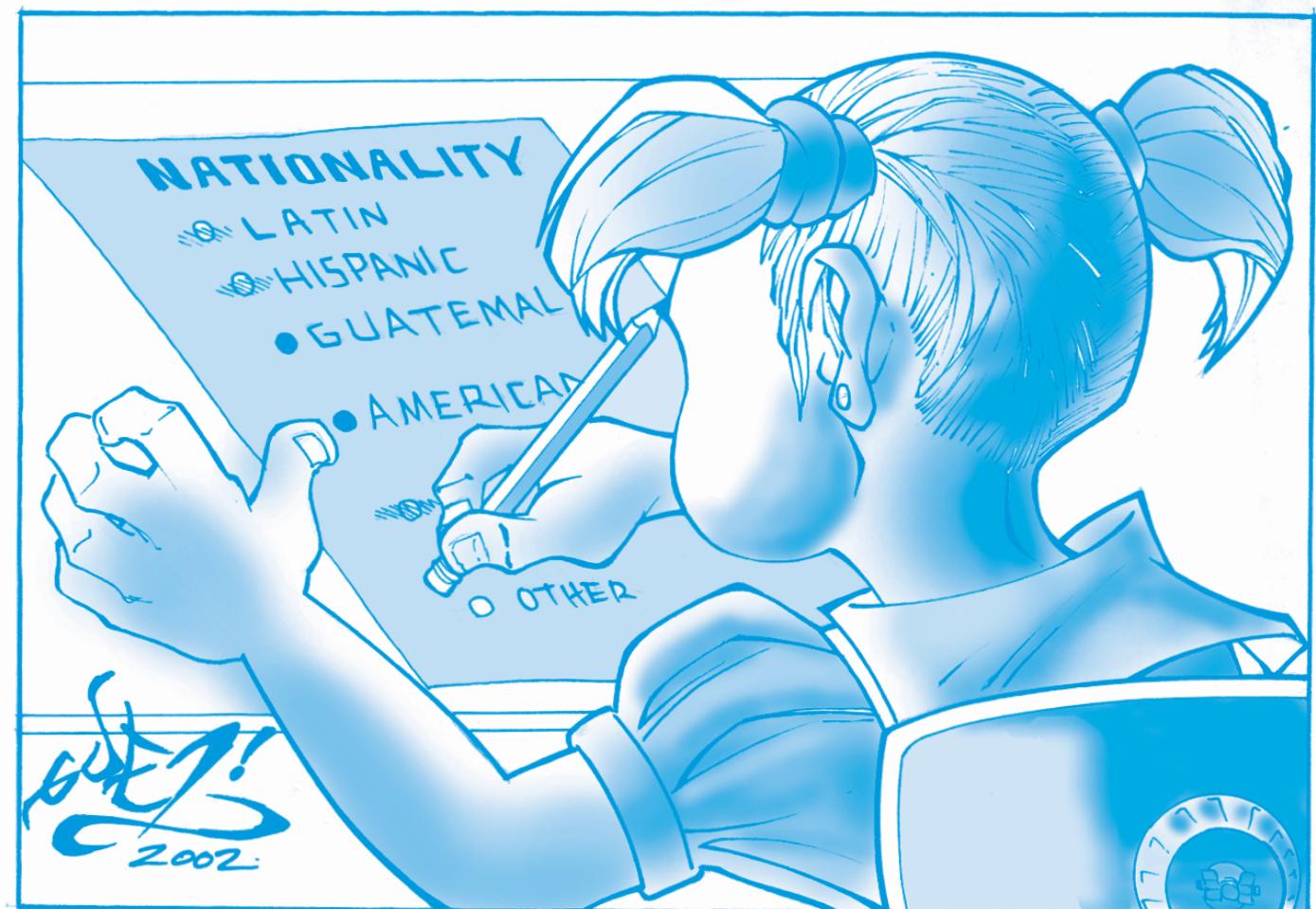


ILLUSTRATION BY OSCAR RODRIGUEZ, 19 (L.A. YOUTH ARCHIVES). OSCAR, NOW A SENIOR AT CAL STATE LONG BEACH, WILL GRADUATE THIS YEAR WITH A BACHELOR OF FINE ARTS IN ILLUSTRATION. HE WANTS TO BE A PROFESSIONAL ILLUSTRATOR.

Why were they judging me like that?

I tried to calm myself down. OK, OK, whatever, I said to myself. The 16-year-old girl had already gotten her key and left with her mom. I started to feel kind of

silly for having been so suspicious of a few meaningless glances. My mom and I went upstairs to start unpacking, but I didn't tell her about my momentary panic. She would start asking questions and I didn't know

*I congratulate and wholeheartedly applaud L.A. Youth newspaper for 20 years of motivating teenagers to become journalists. I was fortunate indeed, to have had that opportunity in high school and it set my course for life. It is vitally important for our young people to become active in our country's civic dialogue, giving their voices to those issues that affect their environment and their lives. The future of America depends on it. And, I might add, it also bodes well for the future of journalism. —Walter Cronkite*

# INSTEAD OF SAYING I WAS LATINA, I'D SAY, ‘MY MOM IS FROM GUATEMALA AND MY DAD FROM EL SALVADOR, THOUGH I WAS BORN HERE IN L.A.’

how to deal with it. Perhaps I just didn't belong with these American kids—you know, white kids.

## SO WHERE ARE YOU FROM?

As it turned out, the girl who had stared at me that first day was a pretty nice person. The other campers were nice too, and they weren't all white. When they asked me where I was from, I intuitively knew they were just trying to start a conversation to get to know me. Sometimes I'd say, "I'm from L.A." I know others perceive me as a Latina, and I am, but that word is not specific enough. Other times, instead of saying I was Latina, I'd say, "My mom is from Guatemala and my dad from El Salvador, though I was born here in L.A."

But deep down, the question really worries me. Who am I? Why did I get so panicked that day at the SAT prep camp? I wish I could just not worry about where I belong. I'm continually trying to straighten out the two main aspects of my identity, shifting between my American and Latino selves, but just when I think I've found a balance, another SAT camp mom pops up and threatens it all with one meaningless glance.

My "Latinoness" is hard to define. Through music, I feel connected with my culture. I listen to everything and anything from merengue, salsa and Latin pop to my favorite, rock en español. Whenever I go to a party with my cousins, my primary connection with other Latinos isn't the language but the music and the dancing. You can't go to a Latino party and not dance; believe me, I tried it once and I was dragged onto the dance floor by a huge group of people.

However, my hanging out with some Latinos doesn't mean I'm accepted by them. My cousins from Central America, for example, were raised differently from me. I'm into Jack Johnson and Jaguares, and they're into Christian rock music. I like to read and they don't. They hadn't heard of Harry Potter before I told them about it—everyone has heard of Harry Potter! Who are these people? Sometimes I feel like we're strangers to each other, even though we're family and we all look alike. I know my cousins make fun of me behind my back because I "talk like a white girl." Once, my Latina friends said that to my face. We laughed, but then I realized that

they considered me a white girl because I kept saying "Oh my God!" That seemed so silly to me. I just brush it off, because it's not something I can change. But it's kind of lonely when I spend time with them. I'm with them, but I'm not one of them. I don't really feel like I fit in.

Yet in mainstream "white" society, I often get subtle messages that people look down on me. At school, there is a certain level of respect attributed to all of the students. But once I am outside of this bubble, that respect disappears. My mom and I went shopping once at Nordstrom, looking for a dress. Even though I go there pretty often with my friends, one of the sales clerks seemed like she was about to approach us with a product, but then decided against it. Did our ethnicity suggest that we weren't going to buy anything from her? Maybe, maybe not. It was something small, but it showed what she thought of us—that we were less worthy. If I had been white, tall and blonde, would the sales clerk have tried to sell me something, assuming that I was educated and well-off? I guess I should just be strong and not worry about what other people think. But I can't help it. I'm always wondering—are they judging me? Do they think I'm too white? Too chola? Lazy and uncultured? Poor? That I'm not wearing the right clothes? I always have to fight these stereotypes—I can't just meet someone and be me.

## STUDYING, A CAREER, HIKING— THAT'S MY FUTURE

The real me is more than my Latina heritage and my love of rock en español. If I could tell people something important about me, I would want them to know I'm a hard-working student. I'm aiming to go to a great college and pursue a career and become a successful professional. I dream of hiking the 221-mile John Muir trail at Yosemite National Park. I want to travel to South America and maybe Africa. I'd like to go to every continent, actually—who knows if I will? I believe that with hard work, you can succeed. I believe in equal rights. It bothers me when I see that not everyone in America gets the same opportunities.

When I really think of where I come from, I remem-

ber that I grew up in Los Angeles, and that I spent my summer days riding to and fro on my pink bike with the flower basket in front. My brother and I were taken to the library every weekend, followed by a trip to either Pan Pacific or Griffith Park. We walked along the many isolated trails at Griffith in the afternoon, often getting lost with a dad who would take little-known shortcuts leading to endless paths. One time, we went to see the Hollywood sign when some family members came to town just to see the white letters set along the hilltop. So aren't I a typical California girl, an American, as much as everyone else?

When I meet someone, instead of asking me where I come from as if I don't belong here, I wish they would just find out about me first. I wish they would take the time to get to know me instead of making assumptions based on stereotypes. Then I would feel like I was part of everything, instead of being subtly excluded.

It feels good to be able to get all this out in the open. I know I haven't sorted this out completely, but I'm starting to realize it's not my fault. I'm OK, even though I don't fit into a neat category.



**Gianna Henriquez**  
is a senior majoring in international relations and Spanish at Stanford.

She says this article continues to inform her ideas on identity, on a personal level and generally.

*From an old bugger who is computer illiterate (nearly), I congratulate L.A. Youth for trying to make certain that objectivity, responsibility and devotion to factual reporting (not Lou Dobbsian or Rush Limbaughian) is their ultimate goal and what they must continue to honor. —Mike Wallace, CBS News Correspondent Emeritus*

**By Kel Baker**  
19, CITRUS COLLEGE

*“And as they ate it, suddenly they [Adam and Eve] became aware of their nakedness, and were embarrassed. So they strung fig leaves together to cover themselves around the hips.”*  
—Genesis 3:7 (*The Living Bible*)

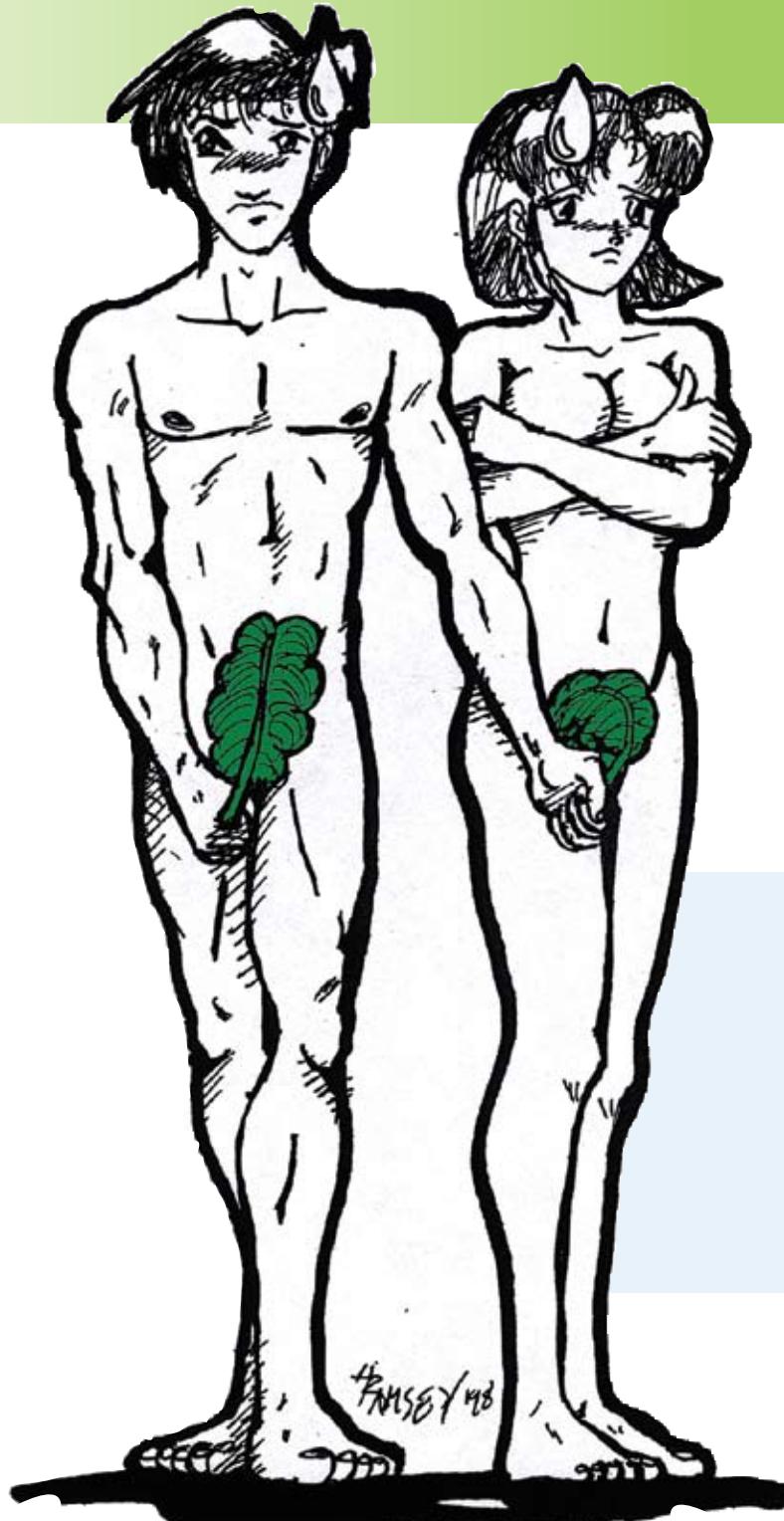
**W**hen I was 10, I remember feeling ashamed of my body. The 13- and 14-year-olds at summer camp would make fun of us younger boys for not being as developed.

I attended a Baptist high school where they scared us with a lot of talk about sexually transmitted diseases. We thought that homosexuals and sexually active people all had AIDS and we could get it if they breathed on us. And we thought our bodies were something to be hidden. We’re supposed to try to follow the Bible.

Although I attended a Baptist school, and I’m a church-going Christian, I have a mind of my own. When I learned that there are families that live a nudist lifestyle, and it’s just as normal as any other lifestyle, I didn’t see it as sinful. I wanted to know more about it.

I went about calling several different nudist residences throughout Southern California. I used my most professional speaking voice. “Hello, this is Kel Baker from L.A. Youth, I’m trying to do an article on social nudism and ...” Now that’s when they would say “L.A. what?” or ask how old I was. Their first instinct was to write me off as a joke caller. I made about five calls before I had some success. I called a nudist resort in the Riverside area. The director, Dick Stephens, really caught me off guard when he invited me over that same weekend. I’m a bit of a procrastinator (that’s why you are reading this now, and not three issues back).

I accepted the invitation and I went to the nudist



#### To learn more about nudism

If you want to learn more about nudism, use the search words “Naturist” or “Naturism” or “Nudism.” Unfortunately it may also be easy to access pornographic websites in the search for information on the naturist lifestyle. Usually nudist websites have information, not naked photos.

**REPRINTED FROM 1998**

# The naked truth

*I am heartened to see young people speaking out with their creativity, wisdom, passion and energy. Over the past 20 years, L.A. Youth has provided so many young people an opportunity to express themselves, from issues about their neighborhoods, schools and families, to those of human rights, war, the environment and so many others. Thank you to the staff and young journalists of L.A. Youth, for sharing your experiences, raising your voices and joining with others who are taking this world to a better place.*  
—Mary Beth Tinker, who, as a teen, helped win protections for student free speech rights

resort dressed very nicely and met two men "barely" dressed in sandals and shorts—Dick Stephens and his associate. "Are you 18 or over?" they asked suspiciously. I showed them my ID. When they found out that L.A. Youth was distributed to L.A. high schools, they became leery. They didn't want high school students coming down there and disrupting their way of life, especially students from the "city." Dick Stephens pointed out that they came to the Riverside area to get away from city life. I asked how many people 21 and under visit their resort. No more than 5 percent, he said, and minors 17 and under must come with a parent or legal guardian. He stressed that they're extremely careful to monitor any photos of youth and children or anything that might be interpreted as child abuse.

In my opinion, it's a healthy environment for a young child. Nudist kids think no more of seeing each other's private parts than you or I would think of seeing someone's face or hands. I think there's probably less chance of molestations because the kids are not too curious about it.

#### I WOULD HAVE TO TALK TO NAKED PEOPLE

Then came my big interview. I was invited to a different nudist residence in Palm Springs. Raymond Lovato, owner of Desert Shadows Inn in Palm Springs, and a representative of the Association for Nude Recreation, invited me. For this interview, there would be two major differences worth mentioning:

- #1. I would be around naked people and
- #2. I would be naked. (Read on, read on!)

I made some special preparations. I started wearing one of those plastic suits for an hour every day. I wanted to lose five pounds before my big visit. I also tried to get someone to go with me. But neither plan worked. I lost only two pounds, and my friend sheepishly backed out at the last minute. I was on my own!

When I got to my destination, I saw a man and a woman talking to each other in the nude. I was surprised, even though I was in a nudist camp. They didn't even know me and they were completely comfortable standing there talking.

I was greeted by Mr. Lovato wearing only a sweatshirt. Later a naked young woman came to join the conversation. It felt weird but the awkwardness

quickly faded. Very soon it made no difference that I was carrying on a conversation with a half-naked man or that this young woman stood before me completely nude. I had made it over that hurdle. After we talked long enough, Mr. Lovato figured I should go to my room and get dressed, which in this case meant getting undressed. I went to my room, undressed and looked at myself in the mirror. I said to myself, "Well, this will have to do."

I apprehensively opened the door and stepped outside. The wind was blowing over me in places where it doesn't usually go. I couldn't go back—I had already shut the door.

I walked over to an area where a volleyball game was in progress. As I walked over I checked everyone out to see if they were staring at me. Nobody seemed to be looking, so I talked myself out of running back to my room. I sat down on the grass and someone started a conversation with me, this time not even concerning nudity. Someone else came up and offered me some sunscreen. She said sometimes her husband gets sunburned in sensitive areas.

As we talked, I felt more and more comfortable. The warm sun and the wind now felt good. I watched the volleyball game a little while and eventually got into the pool. I met a lady who told me that Palm Springs was the "greatest place to vacation" for her and her family. I couldn't believe I was naked in a swimming pool talking to a naked lady and we talked about vacations and the "good weather" in Palm Springs. Then I joined the volleyball game, and I was more concerned with my volleyball skills (not terribly good) than my nudity.

In a nudist environment with people of all ages, shapes and sizes, where there is rarely a perfect body, you don't feel like you are being evaluated, because nobody can judge you by your clothes. They do not know if you are rich or poor. The males seemed to feel comfortable not having a Hulk Hogan or Arnold Schwarzenegger-like physique and the females seemed content not having a body like Tyra Banks or Miss America.

I felt it was a purer way of living. Sex doesn't take as high a priority. Mr. Lovato told me that when a beautiful woman comes, men'll look once, and that'll be the end of it, whereas in the clothed world, men might look and undress her in their minds and fantasize about her—or even act out their fantasies.

Later that day Mr. Lovato asked me if I noticed how nudist books and magazines with pictures of families doing family things would sit right beside the trashy porn magazines when the two hardly have the same goal in mind. I remembered how, in doing my research for this article, the only materials on nudism I could find were in the porn sections of stores.

#### BEING NUDE ISN'T A BIG DEAL

He also told me that some local hotels wouldn't display the pamphlets for his nudist colony because of a tiny photograph of a couple turned backwards with their butts showing—even though that is the one "private part" everybody has. I thought, it's just a butt. Why is that such a big deal? You have a butt, don't you?

I think if nudity were the standard, there would be fewer sexual crimes and healthier self-images. Nudity can free you from a lot of labels that clothes put on you. Nudity in itself is innocent—it doesn't have to be sexual or dirty. Nudity is just being naked.



**Kel Baker** earned his bachelor's degree in social science and is now living in Newfoundland, Canada doing voice-over work. He's thinking of returning to California to teach or pursue voice-overs as a career. He said he had a lot of fun researching and writing this story and still brings it up among friends.

SOMEONE ELSE CAME UP AND OFFERED ME SOME SUNSCREEN.

SHE SAID SOMETIMES HER HUSBAND GETS SUNBURNED IN SENSITIVE AREAS.

A salute to the journalists and leaders of L.A. Youth. For 20 years you have brought the voices of L.A.'s most dynamic young writers, photographers and artists to both journalism and the public. It's important work, and well-done, with great creative energy. So congratulations! And here's to your next 20. —**Sue Cross, Vice President/Online, The Associated Press**

# GIRL TROUBLE



By Francisco Sandoval, 15,  
Nogales HS

Marty

# Making Chile my home

At first it was hard living in a foreign country, but I grew to love my new friends and culture



Photos from top:

Katrina (third from left) with her classmates; Katrina and her friend Martin Fazio, 15, in downtown Santiago; saying goodbye to her cousin at the airport after five years in Chile.

**By Katrina Escudero**  
17, MARYMOUNT HS

My dad said he had a big surprise so my mom, brother and I all crowded around the phone. As I stared at the telephone I heard, "We're moving to Chile!"

My dad, who is an FBI agent, told us he was being transferred to Chile, a country in South America, and we'd be living there for five years. It was the first time I had to move and I was excited. All I could think about was meeting new friends and having new houses to hang out in. I didn't know how hard it would be to move to another country, where I would have to make new friends who spoke a different language.

We left for Chile in January 2001, three days after my 11th birthday. My mother is from Chile and all her family lived there, so we stayed at my grandmother's house for the month of vacation before school started. (In South America seasons are reversed, and December, January and February are the months of summer vacation.) I spent days by the pool and played video games and soccer with my cousins. At the same time I was nervous about starting at my new school, Nido de Aguilas (which means "Nest of Eagles" in Spanish). Not only was it a new school, it was an international school, which meant that students were from around the world and the classes were taught in English. The same thought kept going through my mind, "What if I don't fit in because I don't speak Spanish?"

On the morning of my first day of fifth grade, when my mom pulled up to Nido de Aguilas, I was fascinated with the hundreds of colorful country flags lining the long driveway—some I recognized and others I had never seen. As I walked to my classroom, a group of students walk by and I whipped my head around to stare. They were speaking English, Spanish and some other language I couldn't identify. Everyone seemed to have their own bizarre combination of languages that I didn't understand. I felt sick to my stomach because I didn't know what to expect from my new classmates.

To my surprise, I was not the only new student in the class. When I shared that I was from California, everyone fired questions at me like, "What age did you learn to surf?" and "What movie stars have you met?" After introductions, I sat down and asked the kids around me where they were from: Korea, New Zealand, Australia, Colombia, South Africa, and those were only a few. Most of my classmates moved every few years because of their parents' work. One of my classmates had a father who worked for Coca-Cola and was relocated every few years. Other classmates were "Army brats" and moved based on their parents' assignments.





Since everyone was used to new students, they welcomed me and I made friends quickly. One weekend my friends were talking about what to do and decided to go to the mall and see a movie. I expected kids from other countries to have a different definition of fun. I laughed to myself because it's exactly what I would have done back in L.A. I liked my new friends and my new house because it was bigger than my old one. But I missed little things about L.A., like being able to buy Limited Too clothing and watch TV without subtitles.

### I WISHED MY FRIENDS SPOKE ENGLISH AROUND ME

I was also struggling to understand my friends. I connected more with the students who were native Spanish speakers from Chile and other Latin American countries. They seemed more like the friends I had in L.A.—they were laid back and wanted to have fun.

My friends spoke Spanglish, a rapid mix of English and Spanish. I understood only bits and phrases. My friends would tell jokes or stories and they went over my head. It would sound more like a bee buzzing in my ear, "Cachaiquebeacheschuchequé." I would ask my friends to slow down or speak English and they would roll their eyes and try for a while, but then they would drift back to speaking Spanglish. Even though I spoke to them in English, I knew that if I didn't push myself to understand Spanglish I would lose my new friends. I decided to try to learn.

I thought that if I listened to my friends' conversations, I could teach myself. After a couple weeks, I tried using the Spanish slang word "bakan" (pronounced baa-can), which means "cool." But I sounded like a baby attempting its first word: "bukooon." Things seemed to move in slow motion as I saw the weird looks on my friends' faces and heard them say, "Whoa, were you trying to say ...?" Inside I wanted to curl up in a ball. I never wanted to try speaking slang again.

I was so frustrated that at the beginning of sixth grade I stopped calling my friends during the weekend or hanging out with them. Instead I hung out with classmates who spoke only English. But I missed my old group of friends, so after three months, I decided to stop hiding and hang out with them again.

But my attempt to learn Spanish wasn't showing any success. At the end of sixth grade, my friend Camila invited me to her apartment and said she had a surprise for me. I had no idea what it was. I got to Cami's house and saw that she had prepared a poster board of all the slang words, what they meant and how I should use them. I was so grateful that I was speechless. One of the first words Cami taught me was "cachai." "OK so, when you hear 'cachai' you need to think of 'to catch,'" she said. I just stared at her. "Yeah, because 'cachar' means 'to understand.' So you can use 'cachai' at the end of a sentence instead of saying something long like 'Do you understand?' So pronounce it, ka-chai." I took the poster board home. A couple times a week I would lock my bedroom door and repeat the words over and over again. Since my friend had shown her faith in me, I was confident I could learn this slang. After that, I worked much harder. I listened to my friends and tried to use the language more. Slowly it became normal for me to use slang around my friends.

Thanks to practicing with friends and my Spanish classes, entering eighth grade I was placed into a native-speaking Spanish class. At the beginning of the school year when everyone compared schedules, my



## At the airport, I stopped crying and tried to smile because inside sat 20 of my friends holding poster boards filled with pictures and letters.

friends would usually ignore me because I was never in their Spanish class. This year when my friends said they had Period 4 Spanish together, I chimed in "I have Period 4 too." Everyone was so excited. They asked, "What? You're in our class now?" In my head I couldn't stop cheering myself on but I just replied, "Yup." I didn't want to make a big deal in case I wasn't ready for the class. I didn't have to worry. When I got my first test back and saw that I got a 95, I stuck it on my fridge.

### I FINALLY FELT I BELONGED

Being able to speak Spanish opened up a whole new world. I could now go to restaurants and order my own meals, read billboards, connect with family members who didn't speak English, and especially speak Spanish with my friends. As simple as those activities seem, not being able to do them made me feel like an outsider in what was suppose to be my home. I felt comfortable and no longer focused on how I didn't belong, but on how perfectly I fit in.

Santiago was now my home. On weekends in high school I would dance till 2 in the morning in clubs for teens, go to ski resorts to spend the day snowboarding with friends, take a two-hour drive to spend weekends at the beach and go to concerts.

Going to an international school, I became used to saying goodbye to friends once or even twice every year. Every time one of my friends would leave, I would think, "If it's so hard to say goodbye to one friend, how am I going to feel when I have to say goodbye to all of my friends and this country?" Each goodbye made me feel sad because it reminded me that my time to leave was coming closer.

During my last month in Chile I begged my dad on

the verge of tears, "Please Dad, somehow please get your job extended for one more year." Or in the highest times of desperation I informed my parents that I would be willing to stay in Chile and live with my grandmother while they went back to the U.S. As you could guess, my parents immediately said that was not an option.

On my last night in Santiago, the drive to the airport felt like the longest hour of my life. In a minivan with my family, I turned on my iPod and listened to "Time Of Your Life" by Green Day on repeat. I stared out the window and tried to take in everything. The snow-covered Andes mountains triggered my first tear.

Arriving at the airport, I stopped crying and tried to smile because inside 20 of my friends held poster boards filled with pictures and letters. It showed that they weren't going to erase me from their lives; we would be friends for life. I hugged my friends one last time. I began to cry even harder, this time from sadness and anger. I didn't want to go back to L.A. I hadn't kept in touch with my L.A. friends. My life was here and I didn't want to start over again.

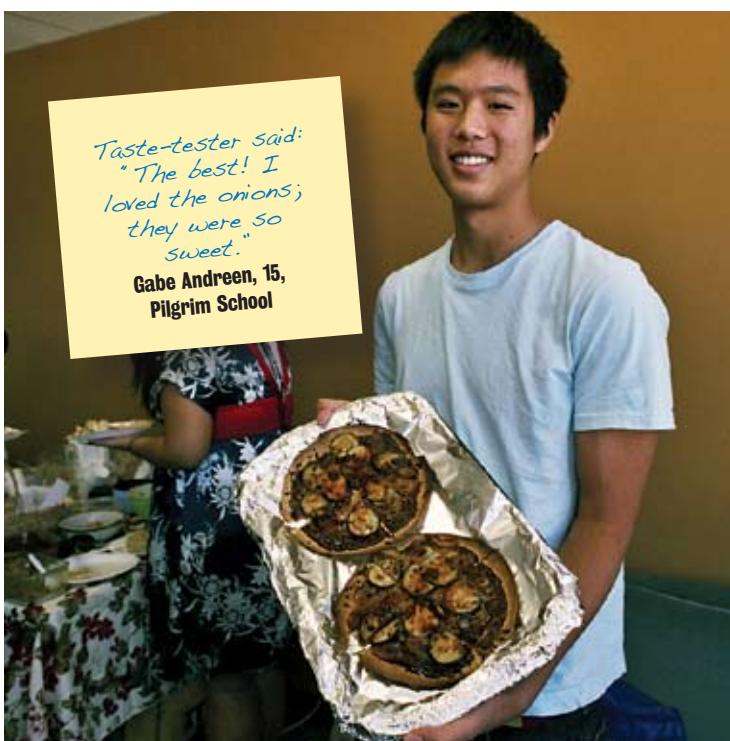
### I CAN HANDLE ANY CHALLENGE

While waiting for take-off a flight attendant asked me what was wrong. I told him I just had to say goodbye to all my friends. The flight attendant looked at me, with my bloodshot eyes and drippy nose, and looked at my posters and gifts and said, "Honey, I would die to be in your position. It looks like you will always have a home here in Santiago and friends waiting for you." I began to calm down by thinking about how grateful I was. Living in Chile helped me realize that there are so many different people in this world and that it is all right to be unique. It taught me there isn't anything I can't do and to take advantage of every day because you never know when things could change.

I had a difficult time adjusting to L.A. I missed my friends. It was my sophomore year of high school and I thought, "What's the point in making new friends if I'm going to college in two years? I'd rather not get attached and then have to say goodbye again." Then I reminded myself that I wasn't happy when I first moved to Chile, but when I let go of my fear it turned into a great experience. It showed me that I should do the same in L.A. I made a great group of friends and now couldn't imagine my life without them.

People ask me, "Where would you prefer to live, Los Angeles or Chile?" I don't think I can answer that question because there are good and bad things in every country. I love how in L.A. the beach is only 10 minutes away and the water is not below freezing. At the same time, I love how in Chile there was a ski resort 20 minutes from my house.

I love living in L.A. but I also do things to make me feel like I'm back at home in Chile, like watching the Copa América, a South American soccer tournament, celebrating Chile's independence day and speaking Spanish with one of my best friends who is Argentinian. I visited Chile a year after I moved and also spent last Christmas there, hanging out with my friends. It felt as though I had never left. I still talk to my friends in Chile at least once a week and stay in touch with my family. I am a girl with two homes, one in the United States and the other in Santiago, Chile, and I would never trade that for anything.



## Thin-crust pizza

adapted from Simply Recipes by Elise Bauer

"I chose this recipe because it's so easy to make. Usually, we think of pizza as a food that is delivered in slimy 250-calorie slices. But what I liked most about this recipe is its simplicity. Anyone can make it. My friends and I make it at parties."—Chris Lee, 17, Walnut HS

### Ingredients:

Olive oil  
1 small red onion, halved and thinly sliced  
Pinch of sugar  
2 large wheat tortillas  
1 cup shredded low-fat mozzarella cheese  
Honey barbecue sauce  
Pinch of salt  
(Equipment: rimmed baking sheets with some parchment paper)

### Directions:

- 1 Preheat oven to 450°.
- 2 Heat 1 tablespoon olive oil in a small pan on medium-low heat. Add the sliced onions and cook, stirring occasionally, until the onions begin to soften and caramelize (when the onions are brown; about 15 minutes). Add pinch of sugar and salt, cook a few more minutes and remove from heat.
- 3 Line two baking sheets with parchment paper and brush with olive oil. Place a tortilla on each baking sheet and brush each with olive oil (just enough to cover it).
- 4 Spread a thin layer of barbecue sauce on each tortilla. Sprinkle each tortilla with cheese and the caramelized onions. Add any other toppings you want (I added roasted zucchini).
- 5 Place the baking sheets in the oven. Bake until the crust is crisp and brown all over (the time varies, start with 10 minutes and check). Rotate the sheets to ensure even baking.
- 6 Cut with a pizza cutter or a knife.



Caramelized onions

## Cactus salad

"I transformed this traditional side dish into a tostada salad. Cactus is healthy, high in fiber and perfect in taste but I decided to add more ingredients to make it into a main course. Buen Provecho, Disfruten!"—Daisy Garcia, 17, Middle College HS

### Ingredients:

1 pound of shredded Mexican cheese  
Juice from 1 1/2 to 2 lemons  
4-6 large jalapeños diced  
3-4 tablespoons of jalapeño juice  
3 large tomatoes diced  
1 onion diced  
One bunch of cilantro  
2 avocados diced  
2 pounds cactus  
2 cups pinto beans  
2 pounds boneless, skinless chicken breast  
Lawry's seasoning salt and black pepper  
Any type of tostadas

### Preparation:

- 1 Peel the cactus, clean them and dice them. In a large pot, boil them in water with three slices of onion. Boil on a low flame for 30 minutes or until cooked well (they should be tender). Drain the cactus very well and allow it to cool.
- 2 Use a can of pinto beans or boil your own.
- 3 Clean the chicken, add Lawry's seasoning salt and black pepper. Cut the chicken through the middle and cook in a medium pan for about 25 minutes on medium-low heat. After the chicken is cooked, let it cool and shred it with your hands.

*Taste-tester said:  
"Amazing flavors and somewhat spicy. Delicious!! I've never tasted any salad like it! I can't believe it's healthy!"*

**Jennifer Carcamo, 17,  
High Tech High-L.A.**

*Taste-tester said: "Extremely delicious!"*

**Malcolm Parker,  
16, Mayfair HS  
(Lakewood)**

### Directions:

- 1 Place the drained cactus in a large bowl.
- 2 Add the onions, tomatoes, cilantro, avocado, jalapeños, jalapeño juice and lemon juice. Mix it together.
- 3 Add the shredded chicken and mix everything up.
- 4 Top with the shredded cheese.
- 5 The guests add the beans on top of the salad for themselves.
- 6 Enjoy and eat with the tostadas!

# Healthy... and delicious

We challenged L.A. Youth writers to make a healthy recipe to show that cooking healthy isn't hard, and tastes good too. If they can do it, so can you. For more recipes, go to [www.layoutouth.com](http://www.layoutouth.com).



## Peach crisp

adapted from How to Cook Everything by Mark Bittman

"This dish sure was delicious."—Sam Landsberg, 14, Hamilton HS

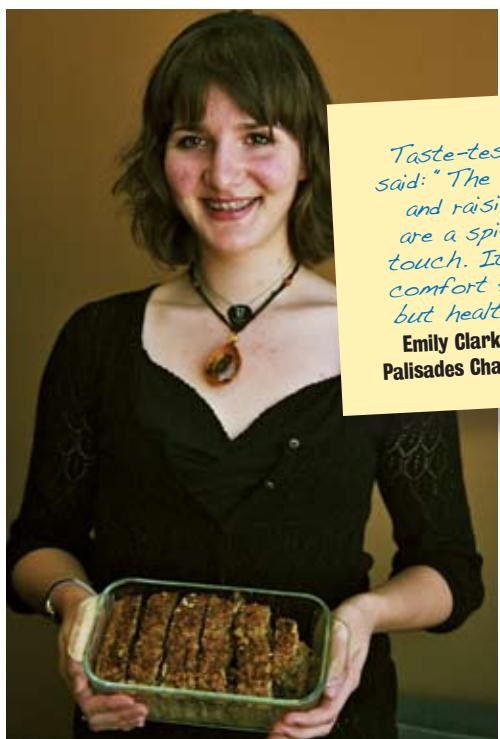
### Ingredients:

6 cups peeled sliced peaches  
2 teaspoons ginger  
Juice of 1/2 a lemon  
2/3 cup brown sugar  
Cooking spray (such as Pam)  
2 1/2 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into bits  
1/2 cup rolled oats (yum, healthy ...)  
1/2 cup all purpose flour  
1/4 cup chopped nuts  
Dash of salt

### Directions:

- 1 Preheat oven to 400°.
- 2 In a medium bowl, stir whole wheat flour, rolled oats, flax seeds, baking powder, salt and brown sugar.
- 3 Add nuts and raisins.
- 4 Add and quickly mix egg, melted butter and soy milk.
- 5 Once dough is mixed thoroughly, place in a greased mold. Shake cinnamon and squeeze honey onto the top for added taste and a shiny and sticky top.
- 6 Bake for about 30 minutes.

Taste-tester said:  
"All aspects are perfect—an outer layer of crunchy and sweet oats, and a pool of peach slices below."  
Sylvana Insua-Rieger,  
16, Beverly Hills HS



## Nut bread

"I got the idea for this bread from my mom's old cookbook. One day, I was in a baking mood and saw a nut bread recipe and decided to make it healthier and more interesting. My version is rich in protein, fiber and omega-3 fatty acids (a healthy fat), and is relatively low in sugar and saturated fat. Plus, it's the easiest sweet bread to make by hand!"

—Sylvana Insua-Rieger, 16, Beverly Hills HS

### Ingredients:

2 cups whole wheat flour  
1 cup rolled oats  
1 handful flax seeds  
4 teaspoons baking powder  
1 teaspoon salt  
1/2 cup brown sugar  
1 1/4 cup nuts and raisins  
1 egg  
2 teaspoons melted butter  
1 1/2 cups soy milk  
Cinnamon  
Honey

### Directions:

- 1 Preheat oven to 320°.
- 2 In a medium bowl, stir whole wheat flour, rolled oats, flax seeds, baking powder, salt and brown sugar.
- 3 Add nuts and raisins.
- 4 Add and quickly mix egg, melted butter and soy milk.
- 5 Once dough is mixed thoroughly, place in a greased mold. Shake cinnamon and squeeze honey onto the top for added taste and a shiny and sticky top.
- 6 Bake for about 30 minutes.

"All the food I see here, that generally is unhealthy, has a different kind of fresh look. The food I ate seems lighter and definitely less greasy, which is a big plus in my book."

—WALKER ANDREEN,  
16, PILGRIM SCHOOL



# Family practice

I used to think acupuncture and herbal medicines were weird, but I've grown to appreciate my family's dedication to these ancient treatments



Photos from top: Lolly in front of a cabinet in her aunt's clinic where about 150 ingredients for tonics are stored; Lolly's aunt, Jamie Oh, takes Lolly's pulse, which helps her determine a patient's health; a needle placed in the foot treats stress.

**Lolly Lim**  
17, IMMACULATE HEART HIGH SCHOOL

**S**tep into my family's dining room. There is a small table in the middle of the room, a few shelves lining the walls, and our kitchen to the right. In the corner to my left there are about 50 unassuming plastic jars each about a foot tall, filled with ginseng, dried jujubes and other herbs. From the corner of my eye, I spot a half-full jar of something brown that looks like tree bark. It's labeled "steamed rehmannia root," whatever that is.

This is my dad's space. My dad, like my aunt, uncle and great uncle, is an acupuncturist. The best way I can describe it is he puts needles into points called meridians on the body, which correspond to other parts of the body—for headaches, needles often go into the legs and hands, not the head. Acupuncture can treat a lot of different things, ranging from pain relief to losing weight. When I tell my friends what my dad does, some of them reply, "That's pretty cool," but other times I get, "That's weird." For most of my life, I felt the same way—I never really appreciated acupuncture even though it was a part of my life growing up. In fact, I tried to avoid it, because whenever I got sick, my dad would come after me with some treatment I found ludicrous.

When I was about 10, I wolfed down a meal too quickly and felt nauseous afterwards. When I told my parents about it, my dad said to me, "Give me your hand." He then took a small piece of string and coiled it around my thumb. I was nervous as the tip of my thumb slowly changed color from beige to pale purple. "Um ... Dad," I said, "What are you doing?" He replied, "I'm going to prick your thumb just slightly with a needle. To ease the circulation of blood." Now this was going too far. I thought, "You're going to stab me? No way!" and tried to pull my hand away from his grip. "Now just hold on a second," he said to me. "This won't hurt much." Fighting back tears as best as I could, I toughed it out as the small sterilized needle pierced my skin and a bit of dark blood pooled around my finger. It didn't hurt and surprisingly, I felt a little better. Soon afterwards, my nausea subsided. Honestly I couldn't tell if my dad's trick with the needle was what really helped, or if my body had returned to normal on its own.

## EWWW—YOU WANT ME DRINK THAT?

This type of needle treatment was what I hated most about acupuncture. I mean, who would want needles forced into their body? The second thing I didn't like were herbal tonics. They just look straight up funky. Traditional Korean herbal "medicine" is more like a tea or tonic. Depending on your ailment, an acupuncturist will choose various ingredients (there are more than 300) and brew them with water. Unfortunately, these tonics look better than they taste; I think the taste is best described as something between tree bark and soil. Yum. As a kid, my parents would make me drink these brews to boost my immunity and improve my overall health. Every time my dad came up with a new concoction, my parents encouraged my sister and me to try them. "How does it taste? Does your stomach feel any calmer? Would you like more?"

"This tastes like crap. No I don't feel any different. And no, I would not like to drink any more tonics" were what we thought. But because we didn't want our parents to feel bad, my sister and I would drink them reluctantly. I'd usually make a sour face and down the drink bottoms up because candy or gum awaited me afterwards. But what I wished most of all was to just get a tub of vitamins (like the chewable Flintstones ones) like all my friends.

# I've learned about the importance of balance, and not struggling against the natural flow of things. I've accepted Eastern medicine into my life instead of fighting to push it away.

Growing up in a household that practices acupuncture, I learned lot about it even though I didn't appreciate it. As a kid, I never talked about it with my friends because I was embarrassed by all the herbal, "all natural," Eastern medicine things my family was into. It just seemed like not a lot of other people lived that way.

When I was in middle school, my friend Eileen came over to my house. When she walked in, she was fascinated. I showed her around my house and we came across my dad's study. Inside was a treasure trove of strange learning materials. Exhibit 1: three posters on the wall. Each poster had a diagram of a body with dots, dashes and Chinese characters all over it. The dots were acupuncture points called meridians, which show where the needles should be inserted. There are hundreds of meridians on the body (even on your nose!) so the poster looked pretty funny—naked bodies with constellations all over them.

Eileen and I stared at the wall in silence for a few seconds, then exploded in gut-busting laughter. We were immature middle school girls, and naked people hanging on the wall were funny. Exhibit 2: a small rubber doll about a foot tall that was standing on my dad's desk. This doll was basically a 3-D version of the posters on the wall; there were meridian points labeled everywhere and Chinese words that followed. "It's like an acupuncture Barbie," Eileen said. "Except it's naked..." Other things I showed Eileen were the herbal ingredients in their plastic containers and deer antlers sliced like pepperoni, which were in my freezer. "You eat those?" she asked. "They're another ingredient sometimes used in tonics," I explained, slightly embarrassed. Eileen said my home was funny and different, but really cool. After hearing that from her, I felt more comfortable with acupuncture and its role in my life. Everyone's family has different beliefs and traditions, I realized; acupuncture is ours.

Last year, I had a dizzying headache and the sniffles. I told my aunt about it. She took my pulse and agreed that I was coming down with a cold. She took a few needles out of a kit and stuck two in my right hand and two in my lower left leg. I was afraid it might hurt in my hand because there isn't much flesh in that area, but surprisingly it didn't feel too bad. Because the needles are hair thin, I could barely feel anything at first. My aunt gently twisted them a tiny bit further into my flesh; this freaked me out. I could feel a small but sharp pain for two seconds. As soon as she let go, the pain disappeared. So I sat perfectly still with these funny looking pins in my hand and leg and watched TV for about 20 minutes. My aunt then gingerly pulled the needles out. At first, I didn't notice much of a difference. A few

minutes later my aunt asked, "Do you feel any better?" I realized that my headache was gone. I had forgotten about the pain as it slowly subsided. That's when I realized how beneficial acupuncture could be.

For the first time I became excited to learn more about acupuncture. Acupuncture is a form of medicine that helps the body maintain balance. There are 16 different body types. There are those who have too much heat in their upper body and not enough in the lower body or vice versa. Most times, the human body is not completely "balanced," which can lead to headaches, skin problems or indigestion.

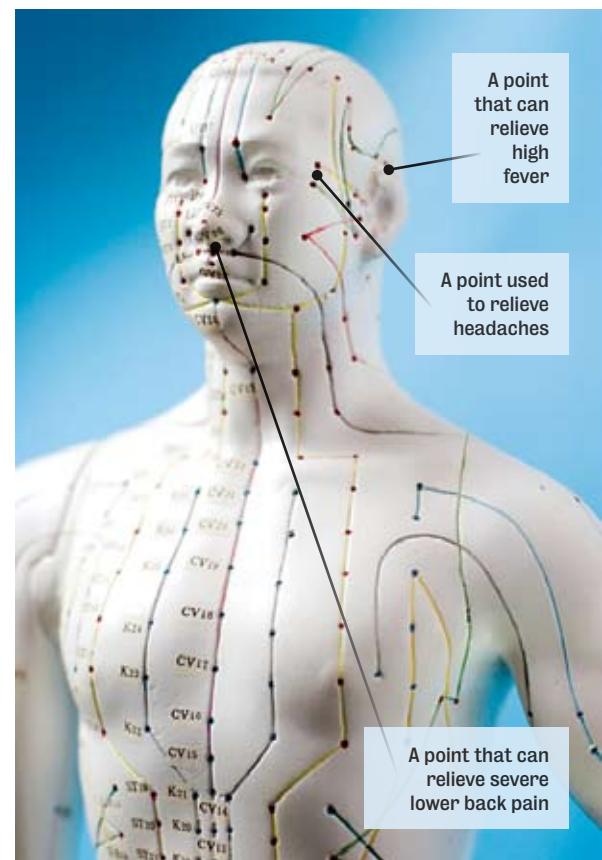
This type of medicine was so important to my family, but I had never cared enough to ask any questions about it. All I ever did was try to avoid it. When I began to talk to my family about acupuncture, I realized how embedded it was in their lives. My aunt met her husband while studying acupuncture and now they practice jointly in a small clinic in Koreatown. My great uncle immigrated to the U.S. from Korea with nothing in his pockets, but had an ambition to practice acupuncture. He started out treating a few patients free of charge. Today he is a respected acupuncturist in L.A. Knowing all these things finally helped me understand my family and their firm belief in and respect for the ancient medical practice.

## I'M PROUD THAT ACUPUNCTURE IS PART OF MY CULTURE

Even though I no longer think acupuncture is that weird, I bet others may think that my family is a bunch of kooky hippies who believe herbs and flowers will cure the world; but they're totally not. If I woke up in the middle of the night spewing blood, they'd take me to an emergency room ASAP! Most acupuncturists agree that there are some conditions that Western medicine is better at treating. Because the main principle of acupuncture lies within balance, and maintaining the balance of yin and yang in the body, I think that idea extends to my parents' lives. They stress a balance between Eastern and Western medicine (we do have Advil and other pills at home) and acknowledge the importance of both. And being Korean immigrants, they believe in the cultural balance of the Eastern and Western worlds as well. I think it's cool that my parents' belief in balance extends beyond the realm of medicine; they apply it to almost every aspect of their lives.

When I was younger I didn't give much credit to Eastern medicine because I'd grown up in L.A. and observed most things with a Western perspective. If something was wrong with my body, I'd try to zap it away with a pill or cough syrup. I wasn't in tune with my body and only focused on the immediate pain. Even though I still think the tonics taste like crap and the needles are kind of freaky, I've grown to appreciate them. I've learned about the importance of balance, and not struggling against the natural flow of things. I've accepted Eastern medicine into my life instead of fighting to push it away. Because acupuncture is something really important to my family and my culture, I proudly embrace it.

Acupuncture has been around for more than 2,000 years; to see my family practice such a traditional form of medicine makes me feel like a part of something ancient and more connected to my ancestors. Today as I walk past my dining room, I see bins of dried leaves, old tree bark, and perhaps my dad filtering through them thoughtfully. Instead of wrinkling my nose in irritation, I smile as the woodsy aroma of a deep forest fills the air.



## Acupuncture

### WHAT IS IT?

Acupuncture is a form of ancient Chinese medicine. Thin needles are inserted into specific points on the body to improve circulation and overall health. It can be used to treat problems such as asthma, ulcers, pain and allergies.

### HOW DOES IT WORK?

Meridian points (represented by the dots on the sculpture above) correspond with parts of the body. Inserting a needle into meridian points relieves pain, treats other symptoms, and improves blood circulation.

### WHAT IS HERBAL MEDICINE?

Herbal medicine can be used with acupuncture or on its own. Mixtures of roots, herbs, barks and dried fruits are cooked into tea-like drinks called tonics. The tonics are used for healing and are commonly used to treat stomachaches and headaches.

# Finding the right words

Four intense weeks at a summer creative writing camp taught me that writing is hard work

By Chelsea McNay

14, LOS ANGELES CENTER FOR ENRICHED STUDIES

I can't remember a time when I haven't loved writing. I wrote my first story in kindergarten, and after that I wrote everywhere: math class, music lessons and long car rides. I've written about an old lady who dies and sees her husband again in the afterlife and about a guy whose parents were acrobats. I love the infinite possibilities of what I can do with words.

But I have always had trouble showing people my writing. At school other students would read their poems loudly and clearly, even if they weren't perfect. But when I had to read my hands would sweat and my throat would close up. I was afraid that everyone would laugh at me. I wanted, and still want, to be a published writer. I realized at the end of eighth grade that to be a writer, I would have to share my work.

So this past summer I found the California State Summer School for the Arts (CSSSA), a month-long arts program for teens, in which you live on the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) campus in Valencia. The creative writing program sounded amazing and like something that could help me overcome my fear. I submitted five writing samples, two teacher recommendations and a school counselor's signature to apply.

## WOULD I BE A GOOD ENOUGH WRITER?

After driving an hour from our house in L.A. to Valencia last summer, my mom and I stopped for lunch. I was trembling. Would my roommates like me? Would my teachers like me? What if I got there and my writing was awful compared to

This page from Chelsea's notebook shows how chaotic the creative process can get. At right, Chelsea works on a poem in her dorm room at her creative writing camp.

everyone else's? Luckily, my roommates Justine, Cassandra, Nicolle and I immediately became close friends. They were creative writers too.

The second day, all creative writers attended a meeting. Traci, one of the teachers, introduced us to the other instructors: Zay Amsbury, a playwright and CSSSA alum whose works had been performed at the Impact Theatre in Berkeley; Tina

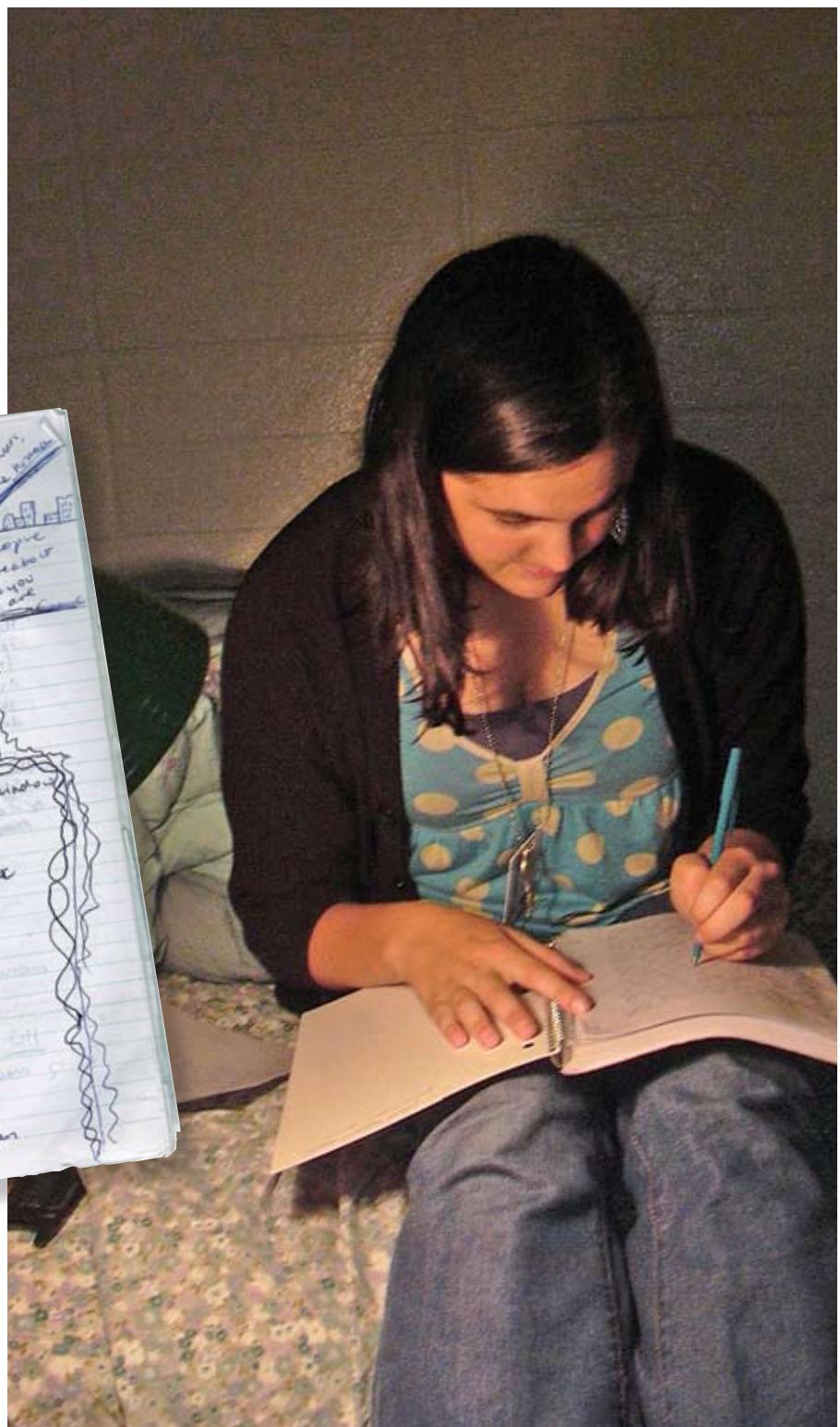


PHOTO BY JUSTINE YAN, 15, IRVINGTON HS (FREMONT)

Royer, a community college professor who was writing a memoir; and Julia Connor, poet laureate of Sacramento. They each presented the classes they'd be teaching. Classes met five days a week. I wanted to take Julia's Poem of Origin class, which she explained would help us "see into ourselves, and our souls." I was so excited to have such experienced writers as teachers. I was also nervous to

have to read in front of them. But this was what I was here for, right, to learn from professional writers?

Our first Poem of Origin class was intimidating but amazing. Julia's eyes sparkled when she talked about poetry and she seemed so wise. She treated us like equals, not students, because we were writers too. She told us that all writers have a large, fuzzy black monkey

on their shoulders that whispers insults in their ears as they write. This made so much sense. There were times when I wouldn't write, because I didn't think I could do it well. She told us that the only way you can truly write is by ignoring the monkey, and letting yourself write with no boundaries or ego. Julia also emphasized that good writing had to have style and craft, and how writing was much harder to do than just putting feelings down on a page. I had always thought that good writing just came naturally to talented writers, and I didn't think of it as being difficult for professional writers. I realized then that I would have to do drafts and drafts of my poetry to make it exactly how I wanted it to be. It made me feel a little scared, but excited and motivated too.

Then she showed us a poem by Gwen-dolyn Brooks titled "We Real Cool."

"We real cool. We  
Left school. We

Lurk late. We  
Strike straight. We

Sing sin. We  
Thin gin. We

Jazz June. We  
Die soon."

Julia used this poem to teach us "en-jambment," which is when you put the first few words of a sentence on the line above the rest of the sentence. She also taught us to read the line breaks, which had never occurred to me. At the end of each line of the poem you stop. For example: "We real cool. We (pause) left school. We (pause) ..."

This changes the way every poem sounds when you read it aloud. From then on, all of my poems used enjambment. I loved the way I could make the poem sound any way I wanted. If I were trying to make the poem more aggressive, I could use short choppy line breaks, to give emphasis to every word.

Then Julia had all of us write a story about an aunt who is a compulsive kisser. We couldn't take our pens off the page for five minutes. I glanced around, some people were already writing, and some were looking around blankly, like me. I panicked. I wrote whatever came to mind. When Julia told us to share, everyone looked around nervously. I wasn't the only one who was scared to read. A section of what I read (rather quietly and taking breaths every few lines) included, "I tread forward warily, wondering whether I had the authority to escape. Defying her small stature, she scooped me up into her arms, and her sticky wet lips pressed hard against my cheek. I writhed painfully, shrieking as she plastered sloppily

kisses all over my face."

After reading, I sat down without looking at anyone. My stomach started to hurt, and my face was flushed. "I bet it was awful," I thought. "No one liked it." But Julia looked up at me and smiled. She mentioned that she liked my imagery, but that some sections were awkward. I felt relieved, because everyone received about the same amount of good and bad comments.

My other class was with Zay Amsbury. In this class, we were supposed to learn all aspects of writing, from prose to poetry to playwriting. It was equally amazing and even scarier.

Our first assignment was to write about the first memory in which we were mad at our parents, but from the point of view of ourselves at that age. My first memory was when I was 4. It was hard to start. I ended up sitting in my dorm room, staring at a blank page of notebook paper for two hours.

Cassandra, who was also in Zay's class, was doing the same. How could I write as a 4-year-old? It seemed impossible, until I thought about journals I had written when I was 6 or 7. When I started to write my story I tried to copy the simplicity of that writing. I learned from this writing exercise that I had to completely understand characters before I wrote about them. The next day, we went around the room and shared our stories. A lot of the other writers and Zay liked mine—they laughed in all the right places. I started to feel a little more confident.

But the critiques in Zay's class got much harsher and soon I felt like they were attacking my writing and me. On one of my next assignments, Zay and the other writers told me that I was trying too hard to describe things (I was). Zay said that he didn't understand the characters. It was a letdown, because earlier in Zay's class I got compliments on my character development. "Be more simple. Be more streamlined," he said. I felt a little bit like I was going to choke, and I stayed silent, calming myself down as I nodded and said, "OK." But I was upset, and felt like my writing was awful.

#### I LEARNED THAT THE CRITICISM WASN'T PERSONAL

Later in the dorm, Cassandra talked about how she had gotten a harsh critique as well and even though it was kind of scary, it made her want to improve. She showed me that I had no reason to be upset. I told everyone else my honest opinions about their writing, and they did the same for me, to help me. And I did improve, drastically. Zay's class contributed the most to helping me overcome my fear of sharing my writing. We were forced to share (in Julia's class it

**I had always thought that good writing just came naturally to talented writers. I didn't think of it as being difficult for professional writers.**

was voluntary) even if we didn't think it was good, or if it wasn't finished. In the beginning, everyone got a lot of criticisms from Zay, but as time went on, we were given more compliments as well.

In both classes, I started to recognize my own writing habits, like my tendency to over-describe things and to repeat lines in poetry for emphasis. The critique was really helpful, because all the writers in my class could point out things I hadn't noticed, like an unintentional rhyme, strange grammar, or sections that just sounded a little bit awkward. Also, no one was allowed to say the phrase "I liked it." That taught us to find specific reasons for why we did or didn't like someone's writing. I could say something like, "I felt like I was in your poem," or "I think you should add more details." At first I was uncomfortable, and would just give compliments because I didn't want to make anyone feel bad, but eventually I learned how to give criticism well.

My writing became clearer, and I started to think the critique was thoughtful and refreshing. At school, English was my best subject, and I hardly ever got criticism from other students, and my teachers would give me As on all of my essays. But my writing didn't improve as much. We'd go over the same concepts over and over again, and I felt bored writing in the same styles, like

persuasive essays or research papers.

The ultimate purpose of the Poem of Origin class was to create our own Poem of Origin, which was eight to 11 poems we wrote and combined into one continuous poem. We were given prompts to write poems about our memories, ancestors and selves. Some of these included poems about the first memory of a room, in the point of view of an ancestor, about our family relationships, and memories of 9/11. For my 9/11 poem I wrote about my indifference to the whole situation (I was in third grade), and for the first memory of a room, I wrote about my room in our family's old house in Venice.

By the end of the four weeks, my Poem of Origin had become nine poems long. During the last week, I spent all my free time working on it in the library. In Julia's class, I began to think about small memories that I had forgotten. These little things inspired me, and I wanted to write more and more and make my Poem of Origin 20 poems long.

In our last class meeting, anyone who wanted to could read part of their Poem of Origin aloud. I read a couple poems. All of the finished writing was amazing, and we applauded for everyone. The applause made me feel great, because I felt like I had written all of the poems well, and that my writing wasn't "weird" or "stupid." This was when I noticed that a big change had come over me. I could breathe when I read, and I didn't get clammy or twitchy. I had no problem critiquing others' writing, and I had no trouble sharing my own.

And in a bang, CSSSA ended. The other creative writers and I formed the Writer's Assault Project (to assault the world with our writing!). We decided to meet every month so we could stay in touch and continue to work on our writing, which still continues. I hugged all my new friends, roommates and teachers. I couldn't stop sobbing the entire way home. I wanted to move back into my dorm and stay there forever, because I knew I wouldn't get the experiences I had found there anywhere else.

#### How to apply

In addition to creative writing, the CSSSA program offers film, visual arts, dance, theater, animation and music classes. To apply, go online to [www.innerspark.us/application.html](http://www.innerspark.us/application.html).

For questions, e-mail [application@innerspark.us](mailto:application@innerspark.us) or call (916) 274-5815.

Applications for 2008 must be postmarked by February 29, 2008.

Cost of tuition for California residents: \$1,415. Financial aid is available.

Program Dates: July 12 thru August 8, 2008.

# essay contest: the hardest part about relationships

1ST PLACE \$50

## Having a girlfriend was more stressful than I thought

By Dennis Broussard  
GARDENA HS

Dating is not as easy as it's made out to be on TV and in books. The pressure of picking the right girl and keeping things interesting can be overwhelming at times. My perspective on relationships has greatly changed as my experiences have grown.



like this crossed my mind rapidly because of stories my older brother constantly put in my head about experiences he had with girls cheating on him and his friends calling one of his girlfriends ugly. This all added pressure to our young relationship. It was the pressure of pleasing ourselves and our entourage. Something that started out with a smile and an "I like you" letter was twisted into this awkward challenge to satisfy our entire surroundings.

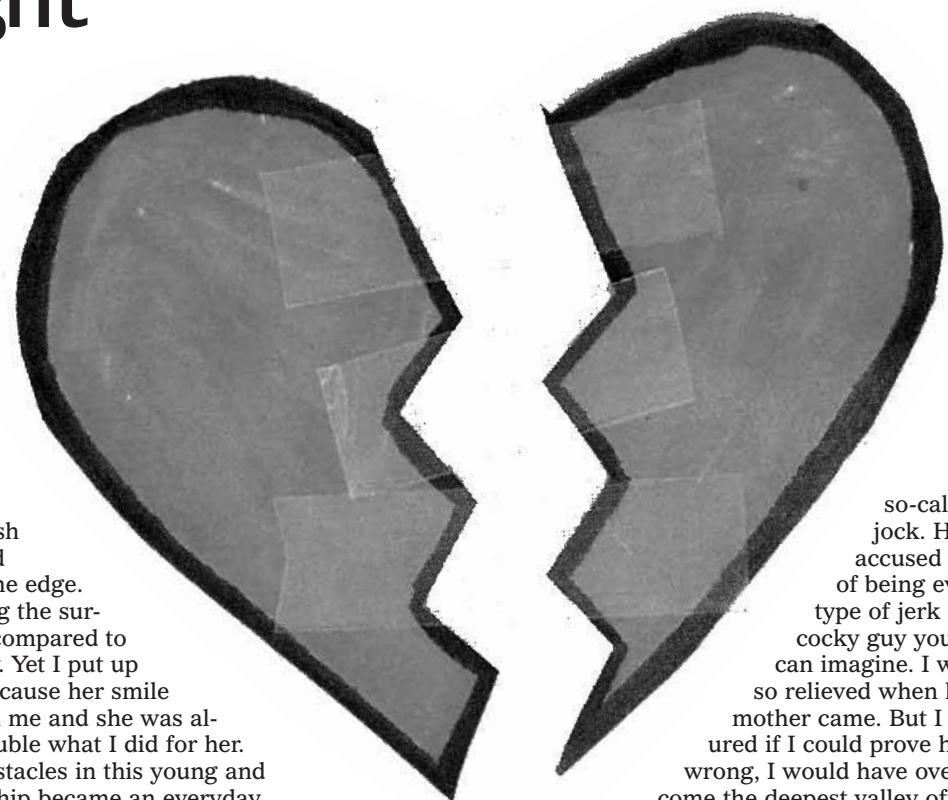
About a couple weeks into our relationship, I started to realize it wasn't as simple as I thought it would be. The weirdest things popped up on random days, like tongue kissing, questions about me touch-

ing her in certain places ... and the rest should go unsaid. The gossip, awkward feelings, meeting her needs when she was in a bad mood, dealing with her messy friends and carrying her English book to class could push a teen over the edge. I'm truly scratching the surface on this topic compared to living it day-to-day. Yet I put up with everything because her smile lifted something in me and she was always willing to double what I did for her.

Overcoming obstacles in this young and confused relationship became an everyday thing. But I hadn't faced the hardest one of all and that was meeting her dad.

My mere 5-foot-4-inch frame looked so tiny compared to his 6-foot-2-inch massive body. When I saw her dad standing in the hallway of the school, my face dropped and my heart skipped every possible beat. I thought things were cool as long as he stayed where he was and I stayed as far away as possible.

But that's when she hit me with the worst sentence I've ever heard: "Come meet my dad." I just stared at her with a look that said, "You can't be serious." I thought about how he would judge me and what he may have heard about me. We slowly approached her father and I reached out my hand. We exchanged a few words and broke the ice but it wasn't long before he judged me because I was a



so-called jock. He accused me of being every type of jerk and cocky guy you can imagine. I was so relieved when her mother came. But I figured if I could prove him wrong, I would have overcome the deepest valley of our relationship.

I had to deal with a lot of negative vibes from her family because of the things her father may have said to them. But by the time I had eaten dinner with them the third time, their overall image of me had changed. After spending time talking with the family, I had proven myself to be courteous and respectful.

I was very open with them about my theory of how a relationship should work and what is expected out of a relationship. By doing so I won over their hearts and gained the approval of her father, even though we broke up two days later over me smashing a bug on her math book. Gotta love high school relationships.

ILLUSTRATION BY LEE TOMLINSON, L.A. YOUTH ARCHIVES

2ND PLACE \$30

## Even though we were arguing, we didn't break up

By Guy Torres

SCHURR HS (MONTEBELLO)

Some of my biggest mistakes in life have been made while I was involved in a relationship. Although this may seem somewhat depressing, there is some good that comes out of bad relationships. The hardest part about any relationship is trust and knowing when to trust yourself.

I remember the first day that I worked up enough courage to talk to \*Gina. She was a sophomore and I was a freshman. We were both single at the time and I had seen her around school and was dying to talk to her. One day I saw her hanging out by herself, and I took the opportunity to get to know her. Everything was going well. We found out that we had the same taste in music and movies and shared common interests. After our talk I asked her if I could walk her home and I asked for her number. She said, "Yeah, sure" and I was excited to see what would happen with our newfound friendship. I walked her home for about a week and liked her so much that I asked her to be my girl. She said yes.

The next couple months went by very smoothly. We were still in the "honeymoon stage" of our relationship. But after being in a relationship with her for five months I noticed that Gina was very untrusting. I tried my best to understand her. The problems escalated from there because we were spending more time together and she was very demanding of me and wanted my attention for her and only her. I remember her yelling at me because I had hugged

one of my close friends. This is when arguing became a normal thing in our relationship and before I realized it, I was getting used to arguing with her on a regular basis.

My trust in her and my trust in our relationship was starting to fade. The relationship was taking me away from my friends and that was a bad sign. I decided to put time and effort into Gina rather than into myself. I tried my best to help her with her problems instead of caring about myself. This behavior was not healthy for either of us. Why we didn't stop the relationship there is beyond me.

My best friend \*Jenny and I were starting to get very close and I decided that I would break up with Gina and start dating Jenny. I tried my best to break up with Gina but in the end I couldn't bring myself to do it because she said that she needed me. That is where I made the biggest mistake of choosing Gina, who I had known for only a year, over my best friend who has been there for me since I was in elementary school. Gina made me pick her or Jenny and I chose to be with Gina.

My friendship with Jenny was never the same after Gina became a part of my life. Gina and I are no longer together and after a difficult breakup we no longer talk to each other. I realized that I can't let anyone come between me and my friends. I had a special friend who was trusting and kind to me and I took her for granted and learned this lesson the hard way.

*\*Editor's note: The names of the people in this essay have been changed.*

To read the third-place winner and honorable mention essay, go to [www.layouth.com](http://www.layouth.com).

## ESSAY CONTEST What do you think about friendship?

On pages 8-9, Charlotte writes about becoming friends with someone she didn't like at first. However, they became best friends and Charlotte said she learned a lot from her friend Darby and feels like she's a better person because of her. We want you to tell us a story about one of your friends or your group of friends. What drew you together? What's made the friendship last? What's made it special? Or if you're no longer friends, why did it fall apart? Friendship can teach us a lot about ourselves and the world around us. What has this friendship meant to you?

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

Essays should be a page or more. Include your name, school, age and phone number with your essay. The staff of L.A. Youth will read the entries and pick three winners. Your name will be withheld if you request it. **The first-place winner will receive \$50.** The second-place winner will get \$30 and the third-place winner will receive \$20. Winning essays will be printed in our March-April issue and put on our website at [www.layouth.com](http://www.layouth.com).

### MAIL YOUR ESSAYS TO:

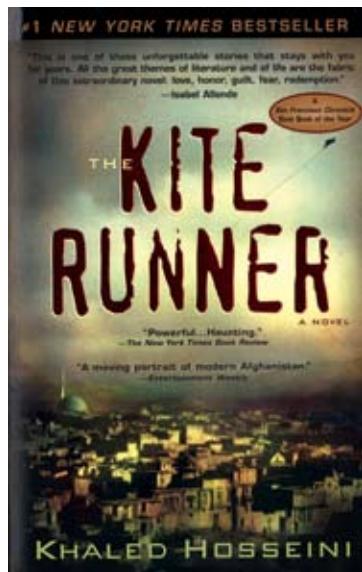


L.A. Youth  
5967 W. 3rd St., Suite 301  
Los Angeles CA 90036

**DEADLINE IS  
FRIDAY, Feb. 29, 2008**

# reviews: books

## A boy seeks redemption in this adventurous novel



**THE KITE RUNNER**  
By Khaled Hosseini

**By Gabe Andreen**

15, PILGRIM SCHOOL

I started reading *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini for school. Being forced to read it made me not want to do it, but it instantly drew me in. It begins in Kabul, Afghanistan, which is so different from America that I wanted to learn more about the city and characters. But the book is less about the locale and more about how one person can haunt your memory. The book was so amazing that I read it in two days.

*The Kite Runner* is about an Afghan boy named Amir and his friendship with another boy, his servant, Hassan. As a child in Kabul, Amir lives with his father and Hassan. Amir plays tricks on Hassan, like changing the stories he reads to Hassan, who is illiterate. I felt bad for Hassan because he was loyal to Amir.

Together, Amir and Hassan win the annual kite-flying contest. People

chase after the last kite to fall because it's good luck to possess it. This is where the title comes from: Hassan was Amir's kite runner, the person who chases the fallen kites. Hassan chases the last kite, but he's gone a long time.

I could tell something bad was going to happen because Hosseini created a setting that made me shiver with fear and tense up with anticipation. Amir frantically searches for Hassan, and sees him in an alley surrounded by a gang. No one sees Amir, so he hides as he watches Hassan get raped. The narrator says, "I had one last chance to make a decision, one final opportunity to decide who I was going to be. I could step into the alley, stand up for Hassan ... or I could run." In the end, Amir runs away.

I wanted him to step in, but I realized that his running away made the story interesting because otherwise it would have ended there. It was interesting to see how he searches for redemption, even if it takes a long time.

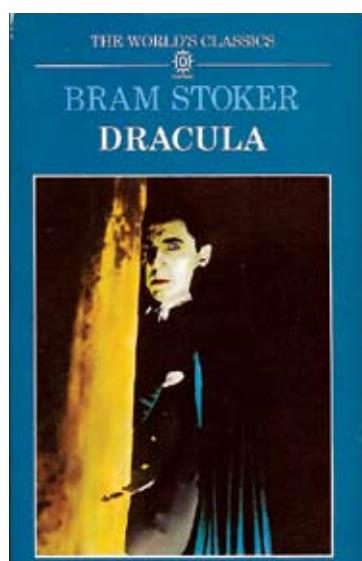
After the rape, Amir ignores Hassan because his guilt is so strong. A few months later, Hassan and his father leave. Soon, when Amir is 13, he and his father flee to America when the Russians invade Kabul.

For 30 years, while living and working in America, Amir doesn't think about Hassan. But after his father's death, Amir returns to Kabul. Hosseini makes you want to keep reading because the plot is exciting. The fact that Amir was going home made me realize something major was about to happen and I read quickly to find out what. Was Amir going to find Hassan and make things better?

I liked the ending because it was realistic and not sappy, like so many books.

I recommend reading *The Kite Runner* because Hosseini keeps your interest by making it feel like an adventure novel. The book was full of vivid details and plot twists that will keep you turning the pages.

## Classic horror is still worth a read



**DRACULA**  
By Bram Stoker

**By Helen Trejo**  
17, DOWNTOWN MAGNETS HS

**D**racula is about the quest to hunt down the vampire Count Dracula, and stop him from creating armies of vampires. I know there are no such things as vampires, but there was a point in the story when Bram Stoker's writing actually convinced me that vampires did exist a long, long time ago.

The story takes place in 19th century Europe. Count Dracula is centuries old and sleeps in a coffin in his castle. His body rises when the moon comes out, which is also when he feeds and is most powerful. He wants to introduce more vampires into the world because it will make him stronger as the leader of a new species.

Count Dracula has the power to put women into a dream-like trance. When he is invited into their rooms, he bites

them, drinking their blood and leaving them with two mysterious red marks that lead to their death. Then they turn into vampires, just like him.

One of Dracula's victims is a woman named Lucy, who gets very sick after he drinks her blood. Lucy's friends try to cure her, but she dies and becomes a vampire. Her friends learn

**The story is told through journal entries.  
I could see the emotions that each character had.**

that, to keep Lucy from creating other vampires, they have to cut off her head and drive a stake through her heart to make sure she is dead. This scene was

exciting because it was the first time a vampire is killed. After that, the hunt for Count Dracula begins. It is suspenseful because Dracula is immortal while Lucy's friends are not. Killing Dracula isn't easy because they have to find him and drive a stake through his heart.

I'm not a fan of horror and was surprised I liked this story. It is told through journal entries that are from the point of views of the main characters. I could see the emotions that each character had and I felt like they were telling me what they were thinking.

The book was originally published in 1897 and Stoker used words like "nay" and "whilst," and phrases like "If it will please you." Despite the old-fashioned writing, the story is a great read and enjoyable from beginning to end. It is full of suspense that kept me reading to find out what would happen next and how it would end.

# reviews: music



**JOJO**

**CD: The High Road**

**By Amanda Ly**

16, MARK KEPPEL HS (ALHAMBRA)

**I** can't stop listening to R&B singer JoJo's second album, *The High Road*. JoJo differs from many R&B artists and teen pop stars because her songs are serious. They deal with everyday situations, like breakups and lost faith.

The positive songs make the album more meaningful; they show that not all girls are lovestruck and carefree. It reminds me that life can be complicated and filled with various emotions.

The first song, "This Time," about a failed relationship, has an upbeat rhythm I can't get out of my head. I like this song because it reflects my most recent relationship. She sings, "Has my mistake caused me to miss this first chance at real love?"

JoJo has a highly developed voice for a 17-year-old. Her voice is rich and soulful. The songs "Exceptional" and "Note to God" are accompanied by soft music where her voice stands out. In "Exceptional" she sings, "You're beautiful but you don't know/ Can't see what's there inside your soul." The lyrics were true—people are not only beautiful but unique.

"Note to God" was my favorite because the lyrics are inspirational. I pray for the same things—ending war, finding our way, God giving us strength, eliminating hate and promoting love. Listening to it leaves me with a sense of empowerment; it only takes one individual to make a difference.

This gospel-like album is realistic. I find faith important and her songs give me a boost when I'm down.

**The positive songs make the album more meaningful.**



**COCONUT RECORDS**

**CD: Nighthtiming**

**By Devin Ruiz**

16, RAMONA CONVENT (ALHAMBRA)

**J**ason Schwartzman defies the stereotype that all actor/musicians put out terrible CDs.

From the moment I saw Schwartzman's film *Rushmore*, I fell head-over-heels. I knew Schwartzman had been the drummer and founder of the band Phantom Planet, known for "California," the theme song from the TV show *The O.C.* When I found out he had recorded this CD, I immediately bought it.

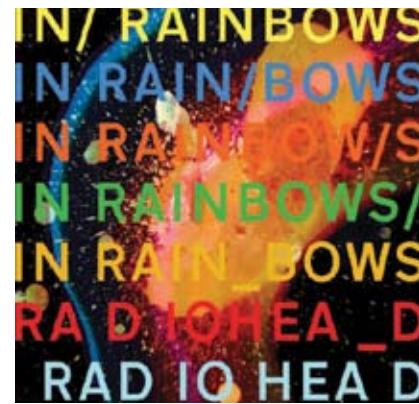
*Nighthtiming* is one of the best CDs I've heard in a long time. It's nothing like the over-produced music out now. Schwartzman plays all the instruments and sings all the main vocals, with backup from a few of his famous friends. The songs have simple, often sad lyrics that are offset by upbeat tunes.

The CD starts off softly, with a song of heartbreak and love called "This Old Machine." Kirsten Dunst accompanies Schwartzman's vulnerable voice as they sing about waiting for an old machine, which to me is a metaphor for a lover, either lost or recently found. "*Nighthtiming*" is a quirky flashback to 70s disco music, yet Schwartzman avoids the high-pitched voices; instead his voice is deep and soothing.

The lyrics paint colorful images in your mind. Like in "Slowly" he sings, "She looked sleepy as she sat in the sun then she started to cry/ And held me tightly as she started to sing this time's really goodbye."

The album's lyrics make your heart melt. You feel for Schwartzman, and want to just hug him ... well at least I do.

**Nighthtiming is nothing like the overproduced music out now.**



**RADIOHEAD**

**CD: In Rainbows**

**By Sasha Jones**

18, CROSSROADS SCHOOL (SANTA MONICA)

**I**t usually takes me a few listens with any album before I can make up my mind about it. Radiohead's latest, *In Rainbows*, was worth the hemming and hawing because the elegance of the arrangements and their delicate complexity soon grabbed hold of me. The album became my soundtrack to the end of 2007.

The first song I obsessed over, "Nude," is a haunting exploration of guilt and desire combining dream-like orchestration and desperately melancholy lyrics: "Don't get any big ideas/ they're not gonna happen." The rippling keyboard in "Weird Fishes/Arpeggi" complements the clarity of lead singer Thom Yorke's voice as he sings, "I follow to the edge of the earth and fall off." Recently, I've fallen in love with "Reckoner," a slowly building song that shows off Yorke's falsetto.

Since Radiohead is one of my favorite artists, I bought the discbox, which caters to Radiohead buffs. It contains the CD, a bonus disc with eight extra tracks, vinyl records of *In Rainbows* and a booklet of artwork. "All I Need" and "House of Cards" sounded much richer on vinyl. But ultimately the music is all that matters—discbox, CD or download, *In Rainbows* is worth a listen ... or several.

*In Rainbows* focuses more on lyrical songwriting, compared with Radiohead's recent albums, while still maintaining the musical idiosyncrasies that characterize all of Radiohead's work and which draw me back over and over again.

**The elegance of the arrangements and their delicate complexity soon grabbed hold of me.**