

20

YEARS OLD AND STILL GROWING UP!

L.A. youth

MARCH-APRIL 2008
WWW.LAYOUTH.COM

the newspaper by and about teens

Looking for love

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ILLUSTRATION BY RAYMOND CARRILLO, 18, POLYTECHNIC HS (SUN VALLEY)

About L.A. Youth

How did L.A. Youth start?

Former teacher Donna Myrow founded the nonprofit teen newspaper in 1988 after the Supreme Court Hazelwood decision, which struck down student press rights. Myrow saw a need for an independent, uncensored forum for youth expression. L.A. Youth is now celebrating its 20th year of publishing.

How is L.A. Youth doing today?

L.A. Youth now has a readership of 500,000 in Los Angeles County. Hundreds of students have benefited from L.A. Youth's journalism training. Many have graduated from college and have built on their experiences at L.A. Youth to pursue careers in journalism, teaching, research and other fields.

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

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

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

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

Where is L.A. Youth distributed?

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

How is L.A. Youth funded?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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L.A. youth

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mail

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

DOING TIME IN JUVENILE HALL

Most teenagers take everything as a joke. I know I do sometimes, but this article is nothing to joke about. If I were in Peter's situation I would probably go crazy thinking about what I should've done differently. I'd think about why I'd made such a stupid mistake. I think every decision comes with a consequence. Now I think before making a decision that might affect my future.

*Itzel Rayas, East Valley HS
(North Hollywood)*

I really like this article because I can relate to it. My father was locked up six months after I was born. Dad was sentenced to 25 years to life. I never got to see him for my birthdays. He would write and tell me that he loves me and misses me and that jail wasn't the right place for him. But he also told me he didn't realize what he had until it was gone. That's why I loved this article because it was the truth. Hopefully everybody understands this.

Name Withheld

When I read "Doing time" I thought to myself, "What will I do in the future? Will I go to a good college, have a great family or will I end up like this?"

Many people are very smart, but they just hang out with the wrong people and they can't get their act together. I don't even want to think of how my life would turn out if I made bad choices.

*Elmer Claros,
Hutchinson MS (La Mirada)*

AN UNLIKELY FRIENDSHIP

As I was reading "Giving friendship a chance," I thought Charlotte and Darby would never become friends. But as I kept reading I found out that I was wrong. I think this is the type of friendship that will last a lifetime because having different personalities makes it more fun and they learn from each other. It's kind of funny how you judge someone in a bad way and then the next day you're best friends.

Karen Vela, East Valley HS

I really enjoyed this article. It's true that people do really judge others like that. First impressions are really important to people. I remember once this new girl came into our tech lab class. My friend and I hated her because we thought she looked annoying and mean. Once we got to know her I really liked her. So always give friendship a try because you never know if you will end up being best friends.

*Kristina Babakhanyan,
Wilson MS (Glendale)*

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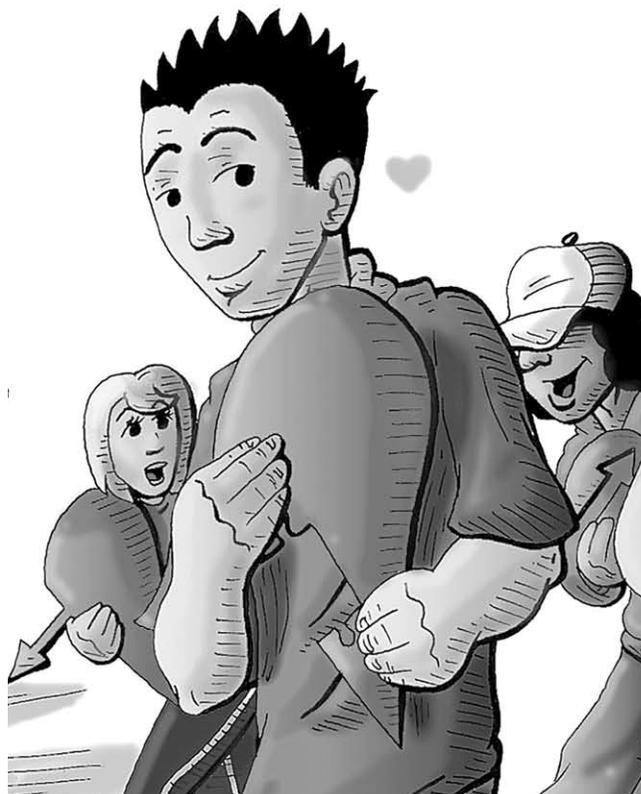
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A LOVING FOSTER HOME

I enjoyed this article. It's nice to know that Raul has a loving home now. He deserves it after all he's been through. I hope he has a better time in his foster home than his group home now that he has a loving family to look up to instead of all the fighting he had in his group home.

*David Ortiz,
Excel Charter Academy MS*

I really liked the article "I'm finally in a loving home." I thought it was sad at first but it had a happy ending. I think that Raul is lucky that his foster parents are very nice and that they care about him. Everyone needs someone to care about them and to love them, somebody you can talk to and open up to, someone who you can tell your secrets and feelings.

Lilit Ayvazyan, Wilson MS

This article reminds me of my step-sister. She used to work in a group home and was so giving to the kids there. She really felt sad when she heard their stories. I remember she even spent Christmas Eve with them. She always told me to be grateful for my friends and family. They might not be perfect, but they're

always around when I need them most.
*Sara SantaMaria, Excel Charter
Academy MS*

When I read "I'm finally in a loving home" I realized being a foster child is a challenge. In a group home there are many restrictions and limitations. Many children are not treated fairly. I feel sad for children who have to live in a foster home, but I know that in some cases it has to be that way. If parents would take on their responsibilities as parents then there would be no need for foster care.

Darius Williams, Cochran MS

A CONCERT CELEBRATING GAY PRIDE

While reading this article I was thinking of one of my best friends who announced his homosexuality last summer. He said he knew for a long time, but he was afraid to come out because of the discrimination gay people face. On top of that, my aunt is a lesbian. She's not the "typical" lesbian. She is different in a way that made me see the real her and something other than the TV stereotype. Both of them helped me realize it doesn't matter if a person is gay—love is

love. Why can't people understand that?
Katie Theobald, Wilson MS

I really enjoyed this article. Even though I'm not gay, I can understand how being gay is difficult. I also liked this article because his mom accepted him for being gay. Many parents don't have the same way of thinking. They don't accept having gay or lesbian children, but Paul's mother accepted him.

Carolina Gonzalez, Cochran MS

VISITING A NUDIST COLONY

I loved the article "The naked truth." It explains how nudity isn't as bad as people think. Yes, there are some who aren't comfortable in their own skin, but it's better than people judging you based on the clothes you wear. Those labels don't matter in the nudist world.

Diana Garcia, East Valley HS

I think that being naked in front of everybody would be embarrassing because all the girls could see you. I would wear a leaf (like in the illustration) to cover myself. I would never be naked in front of everybody! I think the article is really cool because it will help kids

think about other places. In my opinion it's still a nightmare to be naked when everybody can see you!

Esvin Monroy, Cochran MS

Kel must have been very brave to actually go naked, not knowing the reactions he might get. I was really fascinated by this story because nowadays no one really talks about the nudist community. Reading this article I've learned so much about their way of life and that their way of life may be better than mine!

Donna Hiam, Wilson MS

REBUILDING A HOME AFTER KATRINA

I think this article is very inspirational. It taught me that I should help people even though they may be across the country. I thought Christina was very selfless when she spent one week of her time doing backbreaking work for people she didn't even know. I think a lot of us can learn from her because some of us don't even help the people we know and love. I think that if there were more people like Christina in the world it would be a much better place.

Ninette Mirzakhanian, Wilson MS

Teachers congratulate L.A. Youth on our 20th anniversary

Congrats, L.A. Youth! My classes are proud recipients of your fabulous, well-written newspaper. Keep up the good work! Teens need to have their voices heard! Happy 20th anniversary!

Jennifer Herron, Edwards MS (Whittier)

Congratulations to L.A. Youth newspaper! What a delightful venue for our young people to express mature opinions on controversial issues and to encourage creative student writing! Keep up the wonderful tradition. Thank you!

Sister Rose Marie Wilson, Cantwell Sacred Heart of Mary HS (Montebello)

Thank you L.A. Youth, on your 20th anniversary. You supply students with interesting articles written by people who are close in age. You discuss issues that many avoid. It is a real read for young people. Keep up the great work!

Sharon Myers, Slauson MS (Azusa)

Thank you L.A. Youth. Your efforts have contributed greatly to the literacy skills of young people throughout Los Angeles.

Harry Haskell, Orthopaedic Hospital Medical Magnet HS

Is your school accepting of gay students?

Last month 15-year-old Lawrence King was shot to death in his Oxnard classroom by a classmate after recently telling other students he was gay. Students told the Los Angeles Times that he was often teased, and he'd had a confrontation about his being gay with the suspect a day before he was killed. His 14-year-old classmate was arrested and charged with murder in his death. A recent California Healthy Kids Survey said that every year in the state more than 200,000 students are harassed because they are gay or lesbian or someone thought they were. We asked the teen writers at L.A. Youth if their schools are safe and accepting places for gay students, and how to make schools more tolerant. Below are responses from five students.

My school, Crossroads, supports different ethnicities and sexualities, even if they aren't in great abundance. FLAG, Friends of Lesbians and Gays (of which I'm a member), and People for Ethnic and Cultural Diversity are thriving clubs on campus. The administration allows FLAG to host monthly movie nights featuring films with gay characters, such as *Transamerica* and *Quinceañera*.

I think that in relation to other schools in Los Angeles, Crossroads offers a very safe environment. There are several kids who are openly gay, and they are respected. My friend Charlie, who came out last year, said he received support from students and faculty. While, unfortunately, "gay" is still used as a negative slang word, I've never heard of people using any hateful slurs.

That said, there are a number of closeted kids, according to FLAG advisor Adam Behrman. It's hard to say why; coming out can be affected by so many factors, like attitudes at home. I think, however, that there's a subtle stigma attached to FLAG, in that a kid who was afraid to come out, might worry that attending a club meeting would confirm for others that he or she is gay.

FLAG tries to solve this by encouraging straight allies to share their voices, which is how I became involved. There are many straight people in the club, some supporting friends and others fighting for what could be considered the civil rights movement of our time. I'm proud to be part of a school that maintains a supportive, safe atmosphere for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) community.

—**Sasha Jones**, 18, CROSSROADS SCHOOL (SANTA MONICA)

When I heard about the Oxnard shooting I felt very upset because some people are not open-minded to others' differences. I am glad to say, though, that I don't think something like that would happen at Venice High. There have been openly gay and lesbian couples and nothing has happened to them that I know of.

Some people use "that's gay" to mean "that sucks" or they'll say "no homo" when they want to make it clear that something they've said that might make them



ILLUSTRATION BY ALBERTO PALOMAR, L.A. YOUTH ARCHIVES

seem gay doesn't mean they are. But I have never seen anyone get picked on because of his or her sexual orientation.

I do not mind when people say "that's gay" because I feel that the phrase has taken on another meaning. However, I understand that it can be offensive to people and I try not to use it.

Venice also has an active Gay-Straight Alliance and the members have organized days of silence when people do not talk for the whole day in recognition of the struggles the gay community faces. I think kids at my school joke around with the word "gay" but accept people who are lesbian or gay.

—**Jennifer Velez**, 17, VENICE HS

I think that a good way to stop violence and create a better, more inviting environment for LGBTQ teens is to create or join a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA). My school is small and this is the first year we've had a GSA. I am very proud to be a member because I have learned so much, like the struggles and difficulties LGBTQ teens face and their courage in facing them. Because of this, I understand their situation and would never do anything to hurt them, and I would help stop others from verbally or physically hurting them.

To get the entire school involved with the club, we

did a Valentine's Day activity called "Get Hitched." Anyone could marry whoever they wanted and however many people they wanted. There was a huge turn out! People were lining up the second the lunch bell rang and when the ceremonies began, people even began to cut! There was a happy, excited mob around the aisle.

Students really liked the activity and it showed that if clubs like the GSA reach out to the school, students will also reach out to them and be great allies, even though they are not members of the club.

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

Gay students at Hollywood High aren't very accepted. Students make comments and jokes behind their backs. At a pep rally recently there was a guy on the drill team doing the booty pop and everyone, including me, started laughing at him and saying things like, "Look at that fag." I didn't think there was anything wrong with these types of comments because the person we were talking about was not around. But coming to L.A. Youth and having an open discussion about the Oxnard shooting has opened my eyes. I realized that even though I believe the gay lifestyle is wrong, who am I to judge them? I also realized you're still attacking people even if they're not around because if one person hears you making fun of someone, other people are going to and it might lead to you saying something even when they're around. I think everyone can help by not making jokes. This is how closed-minded I think my school is: I kinda feel scared and feel like I'm going to get clowned in school for even writing about this.

—**Luis Pineda**, 16, HOLLYWOOD HS

My school's GSA had an emergency club meeting about Senate Bill 777 the week we came back from winter break because churches in our area were petitioning against the new law, which took effect Jan. 1. SB 777 protects students from discrimination for various reasons including sexual orientation. When our GSA advisor told us the bill was being petitioned, I was shocked. After learning about SB 777 I didn't see how it could've been bad. I was glad that those who were against it didn't gather enough signatures to get a referendum on the ballot to repeal the new law.

My school is an accepting place for most students. One of my former classmates came out and everyone was really supportive of him because he was all right with who he was. People didn't make fun of him, call him names or pick on him because he was gay. Still, it is important to have a strong law protecting gay and lesbian students from discrimination because it allows them to feel safe at school. SB 777 is needed to remind students to be tolerant and let gay and lesbian students know there are laws to protect them.

—**Amanda Ly**, 16, MARK KEPPEL HS (ALHAMBRA)

essay contest: friendship

1ST PLACE \$50

Finding my true friends

By Courtney Lee
ARCADIA HS

It all began when I was caught in the middle of that awkward phase. The one where your two front teeth stick out, the one where you're debating whether to ask your mom to buy you your first training bra, and the one where you still don't quite know the difference between hairspray and hair gel. You are, however, old enough to know what it feels like to be self-conscious and aware that there is in fact such a thing as being labeled "cool" and "un-cool." I'm talking about elementary school, fifth grade to be exact.

As cliché as it sounds, true friends are very hard to come by. It's a trial and error process that can be as rocky and painful as mine was, or, for the lucky ones, quick and effortless. When I look back and reflect on my adolescent years, I can't help but overlook the good times and mope about the sadness, hurt and drama that constantly surrounded me. The girls that I called my friends were not who I was meant to be with. They were just names and faces that I told myself I should look like, names and faces that I tried to be like. In fifth grade all I cared about was being in the so-called popular group. They were the pretty blonde girls decked out in Limited Too who always had their hair in perfect little braids. I remember I'd watch them with envy and think to myself every day, "Wow, I want to be like them!" So I did. I began hanging out with them during lunch, during recess and outside of school. I started wearing my hair in braids and bows and I completely changed my tomboy self into a girly girl. I did anything and everything possible to be around them so that I could look cool and popular, just like them. I stayed with this group for the rest of fifth grade and continued even when we entered junior high.

It was a whole new jungle. The campus was larger and the student body was older, meaning that the pressure to look cool was even more intense. This was when the problems really began. I would come to school not knowing if my so-called group of friends would talk to me. It seemed as if every day brought up a whole new fight over ridiculous things such as who



Courtney Lee (second from left) hangs out with the good friends she made on the Arcadia HS volleyball team.

bought a certain T-shirt first, or who claimed which boy before who. Even though I knew that I really didn't care about these types of things, I frequently found myself caught in the middle or many times the target of it all. I would have liked to blame hormones for these constant emotional battles with my peers, but I know that puberty wasn't the only culprit; it was my own distorted interpretation of friendship and how I had chosen to act upon it. It took me sitting down and really thinking hard about why I had stuck with this group of girls that I found I had little to nothing in common with for so long. It was my own fault for prioritizing popularity over true friendship. But when I asked myself what true friendship meant, I couldn't define it. I had never experienced it. Despite this realization, I still stuck out the rest of junior high in this group of complete opposites at the expense of many sleepless nights and tears. Then it was high school.

The transition to high school was even bigger than junior high. There were now nearly 4,000 new faces

and hundreds of activities that I knew I could join as a way for me to pluck myself out of this old group of friends. If someone asked me what one decision completely altered the course of my high school career, I would reply, "volleyball" without the slightest hesitation. The friends that I met in this sport did, and still do, amaze me. The best girls from the three local middle schools meshed to create a volleyball team like no other. Sure, we're good, but what truly defines my high school volleyball experience is all of the constant laughter and pure companionship I find with my family. Yes, I call them my family. For the first time, I feel what it is like to say whatever you want and not be scared of being made fun of. For the first time, I feel what it is like to kick back and relax with day-old clothing and unwashed hair and still feel like a princess. For the first time, I feel what it is like to be in a true friendship. I would never trade any of these girls for all the Limited Too outfits in the world. These are my girls, these are my sisters, this is my family.

2ND PLACE \$30

I'm not alone anymore

By **Julius Gutierrez**
WORKMAN HS (CITY OF INDUSTRY)

There is only one reason I am who I am today and it is because of someone I met. This person not only changed me, but also the people around me.

It started when I entered sixth grade at Grandview Middle School. Most of the people I thought were my friends in elementary school had changed, some of them acted as if they didn't know me or they didn't want to. I was alone, an outcast. I ate my lunch alone and spent most of my free time in class doing nothing but just sitting there quietly. Then one day I noticed someone in my class who was popular, well-liked and got along with everybody. I looked at him and envied how he was so popular and how everyone knew him. His name was Clifford.

The teacher changed the seating arrangement one day so that we could meet different people in the class and I was seated next to Clifford. At first we didn't say anything to each other and just worked quietly, but after a couple of days we started to talk a little bit to each other. I found out that he was kind and easygoing and I guess that was the start of our friendship.

One day I was sitting alone eating my lunch when Clifford walked up with someone I didn't know. I expected him to tell me that he couldn't hang out with me that day. I thought I would have to be by myself during

lunch for awhile or forever, listening to people having fun around me or looking at people who had many friends. But instead he introduced me to the person. I thought about how no one had ever introduced someone to me before and from that day on I never ate lunch by myself again.

The friends he had were all unique and each one had their interesting quirks. He introduced me to almost all of them. He had a lot of friends to introduce me to and I started to get the feeling that I was being accepted. Clifford and I started to have our own little place to hang out with all the people I had met and all of them wanted us to hang out together.

Knowing and meeting Clifford has changed something inside of me, something that was always constant. Clifford's actions have helped me learn to trust people more than ever before in my life. He has given me hope for a future that is not lonely and never will be. Because of him I am the person I am today. I am no longer the person who walks around pretending to have somewhere to go. Clifford helped me see that.

Even to this day I am still with people I trust. I knew that when I met Clifford that day back in sixth grade that he would help me be a better person and I was right. He has given me hope to have a future with someone always by my side, someone who will make life better and someone who will help remind me that I am a human being.

There was a tie for second place. To read the essay from our other second place winner, Yana Pavlova from Hollywood HS, go to www.layouth.com

ESSAY CONTEST

What's your favorite day of the week?

Some days are better than others. We at L.A. Youth love Saturdays because it's when we have our staff meetings and everybody gets together to talk about what's going on in our lives and in the world.

Maybe you like Thursdays because that's when you have soccer games and forget about your worries while you're on the field. Sundays might be fun because you always have a big meal with your family after church. Or, you might actually like Mondays because you can't wait to get back to school and see your friends. What is your favorite day? What happens on that day that makes it special? What makes your favorite day of the week better than the other days and what does it mean to you?



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

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DEADLINE IS
FRIDAY, April 18, 2008

VJ for a day

It was a dream come true cohosting the Latino version of TRL

By Jennifer Velez
17, VENICE HS

As I walked into the television studio it was filled with so many bright lights that I felt like I needed my shades to see everything clearly. After taking in the cameras, the audience and the energy, I turned to a huge window looking out at Times Square in New York City, a setting I had seen only on television. Dressed in a black, short-sleeve blazer, a peach American Rag top with jeans and a pair of gold Steve Madden heels, I felt like a star. I had never imagined that one day I would be about to introduce Prison Break's Amaury Nolasco to Mi TRL's audience and to America!

This adventure started in May 2007 when I grabbed a pile of homework on the table and turned the TV to MTV Tr3s (*tres*), a music network that fuses my favorite types of music: Latin, indie rock and hip hop. I saw a commercial with Carlos Santos, the host of Mi TRL, a Latino version of the MTV show TRL, announcing the Mi TRL/Acuvue VJ for a day contest. The winner would get a trip to New York to co-host the show. Just thinking about it gave me goose bumps.

I had been watching MTV Tr3s, the first bicultural/bilingual music channel, like crazy since its launch in September 2006. For the first time there was a channel that represented Latino youth. Now I wouldn't have to flip the channels to see a Julieta Venegas video, which is rarely on mainstream American TV, and then flip back to see a Modest Mouse video. What I like about MTV Tr3s so much is that it breaks the stereotype that Latinos only listen to one kind of music. It broadcasts indie bands from all over Latin America that have songs in Spanish or in Spanish and English. Having the opportunity to work with people who promote Latino diversity would be an honor.

To enter, I first answered 10 questions on the MTV Tr3s website. These questions varied from who would be on my perfect Mi TRL guest list (Julieta Venegas, Shakira, Zoé and Alejandro Sanz), to what I believed made me stand out in the crowd. (I wrote that I'm not easy to stereotype as someone who listens to only a certain genre of music by the way I dress.)

DID I HAVE A CHANCE AT WINNING THE CONTEST?

Once I clicked the "submit" button, I realized that I really wanted to win. This channel introduced Latino diversity to white people and also to me. MTV Tr3s opened my eyes to Puerto Rican culture, which I learned was a lot like my Mexican heritage. But after two weeks passed without hearing anything I gave up.

A few days later someone from MTV called and told me I was one of 15 finalists. I jumped up and down and quietly said "Yesss!" The next step was to send a video of myself introducing two of my favorite artists and saying

things like what was in my iPod and what I did for fun.

At the kitchen table my mom, sister, brother and I planned where to shoot the three-minute video, which had to make me stand out from the others. We decided to film at *La Placita Olvera* (Olvera Street) because it is an amazing cultural part of Los Angeles.

I chose to introduce Julieta Venegas because I love her unique look and music and Zoé because that's one of my favorite bands. I kept messing up my lines so we did more than five takes for each section. I felt really stupid saying my lines over and over again in front of people who stared at me. We wanted people in the background to capture the busy, culturally rich street scene of La Placita Olvera.

Several days after sending in the video I received a phone call from a lady at MTV. My heart began to race. She called to tell me that I had won! My heart stopped and I jumped up and down as I hung up. I ran through the house screaming. I told my family and they began to scream too.

I left Los Angeles at 9 a.m. on May 14 and arrived in New York around 6 p.m. The first thing my mother and I did was go to Times Square. It was my first time in New York City and I walked for hours. The next day I woke up at 8 a.m. to get tutored for four hours. Then I met Jessica, the person who would be in charge of me, in the hotel lobby and we walked to MTV studios.

EVERYONE AT MTV TREATED ME SO NICELY

We arrived at the Viacom building where the studios were. I had never seen anything so tall. Jessica told me that I was going to a live taping of TRL to see what my job would be like. I couldn't stop smiling as I wondered who the celebrity guest would be.

I was introduced to several people who worked for MTV Tr3s. They all seemed very excited to meet me with their big smiles, warm hugs and lots of questions. Suddenly my mouth dropped. There in front of me was Enrique Iglesias, one of the most talented and good-looking people in the world, saying "hi" to me! I was so astonished that I couldn't even say "hi" back. He must get that a lot since he just smiled and waved bye. He was promoting his new album on TRL. Growing up, I heard his songs on the radio and loved hearing his Spanish accent. I knew he was good-looking but never really had a crush on him until I saw him in person.

When the show started, the audience got pumped up. All the bright lights added to the energy. It was so cool seeing TRL taped and learning what goes on between commercials—backstage, Mi TRL host Carlos Santos was hanging out with the celebs appearing on the show. During breaks he made everyone laugh with his jokes. Once the show was over, I got a tour of MTV studios. The studio is much smaller than it looks on TV.

Then I had to practice my lines, which varied from introducing the videos to telling the people at home

Several days after sending in a video I received a phone call from a lady at MTV. She called to tell me that I had won!

what number to call so they could vote for their favorite videos. Carlos and I began practicing our lines, acting as though we were in front of the cameras and audience.

"*Hola, mi gente*" (hello, my people). Carlos spoke his line that I remembered hearing every time I watched, except this time it made me nervous since I was next to him.

"Today we have a special guest all the way from California, please welcome your Mi TRL Acuvue winner, Jennifer Velez."

I was so into listening to Carlos that I forgot that was my cue to enter. It was weird saying my lines in front of the producers and acting like Carlos and I were on stage. But as soon as we started the video countdown it was cool.

"All right, so our first video comes from a crowd fav," I said, barely believing I was actually saying this. "Here is Daddy Yankee!" I couldn't wait to say something similar in front of the real audience.

As we rehearsed, Carlos and the producers edited the script. We practiced for an hour until I finally got the feel for it. Leaving the building, I couldn't wait until the next day.

The next morning (after doing some French and Algebra homework) I practiced my lines in front of the mirror while I brushed my hair and even pretended like the brush was my microphone. Mom was my audience.

When we got to the studio I was surprised at how excited the MTV Tr3s family was for me. I did not think a big company like that would make me feel as if I were around my family and friends.

Before I got started, I had to do an interview with a local New York newspaper. On the way I saw 50 Cent. He was walking around the studio with his bodyguards and entourage. After the interview, I practiced once more with Carlos. Then I got to the most exciting part, the dressing rooms. When I stepped inside there were several outfits to choose from. I loved them all and was sad I could choose only one. There was one with a cute hat and black Jessica Simpson pumps, there were a lot of shiny accessories that matched the colorful tops and there was even a dress. Right after picking my outfit I got sent to hair and makeup. One hour until show time.

Coming out of hair and makeup I felt almost like a celebrity. Everyone was so excited for me, told me not to be nervous and said I looked very nice. After a few

PHOTO COURTESY OF MTV



Jennifer (center) and Mi Tr3s host Carlos Santos (right) talk to Amaury Nolasco about his roles in Prison Break and Transformers.

touch-ups I was lead to the studio where we would have a practice run before the big show.

I couldn't believe I was about to interview and meet Amaury Nolasco from Prison Break, Judy Reyes from Scrubs, and talk to Paulina Rubio through a webcam.

The camera people walked me backstage and told me to wait until Carlos announced me. That was my cue to walk into the studio. While waiting to come out, I thought to myself "Whoa, I'm actually here, how crazy." It was worth the difficulties, like missing school and even rescheduling my AP exams. My mom and my counselor were very supportive because they understood this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity!

I FED OFF THE CROWD'S ENERGY

"All the way from Los Angeles, please give it up for Jennifer Velez," I heard Carlos say and that's when I stopped thinking and walked out into the lights and cameras. I literally ran into the crowd, high-fiving the audience across the rows until I reached Carlos. It was amazing how I could feel their energy. I got introduced to the audience and everyone watching at home. As I began to speak I got nervous.

"Hey Carlos, I'm so excited to be here," I said and suddenly I wasn't so nervous anymore because all the energy from the crowd pumped me up.

My VJ job finally started when I introduced the number 10 video by Daddy Yankee. After introducing another video, it was finally time to introduce Amaury. I got the honor of introducing him and asking him a few questions. The fun didn't stop there. Since he was there to promote his new movie Transformers, he and Carlos played a game to see who could transform their Transformer first. I got to referee and announce the winner.

"And Amaury wins!!!" I shouted as the crowd went wild.

When the segment ended, there was a commercial break. Once the show began again I got to introduce Judy Reyes and Carlos interviewed her while I was backstage. Everyone kept telling me that I was doing such a great job, including Amaury and Judy, who told Carlos what a natural I was while she was being interviewed. I had not seen my mom since makeup and wondered what she thought. This lady told me that my mom was so proud she almost cried when I was introduced. This made me happy and also proud. Before I knew it, it was time to talk to Paulina Rubio, a huge Latina pop star, through a webcam.

I asked her about her tour and things of that sort. The interview went by really fast and soon enough it was time to announce the number one video and say goodbye. With a shoutout to my friends and family, we ended the show. By this time I was so energized that I didn't want it to end.

Afterward I was sad that it was all over, but at the same time amazed at all I had done. My TV dream had come true and I had done something I never thought I would be able to do. It was harder than I imagined. While practicing in my head I would tell myself not to be nervous so that I could say my lines correctly, but during the taping I could not help it and even stuttered saying my lines once or twice. Carlos, being a pro, makes everything look so easy but being in front of all those people, lights and cameras makes it hard not to get nervous. I was so happy that MTV Tr3s had given me this opportunity and experience and had no way of thanking them. I was so glad I actually went for the contest because if I hadn't I would have missed out on one of the best experiences of my life.

My first date

It was more awkward than I imagined, but I still had fun

ILLUSTRATION BY
BRIAN LOPEZ-SANTOS,
16, MARSHALL HS



By Stacey Avnes

13, SHERMAN OAKS CENTER FOR ENRICHED STUDIES

When I was little, my grandma and I used to watch movies on Lifetime. I would see couples going on dates and calling each other on the phone every night. The guy usually asked the girl out. Women wore dresses and high heels, and they'd go to fancy restaurants.

I wanted to date because it seemed mature and I wanted to feel like an adult. There was a guy I had liked for a while. I liked him at the beginning of the sixth grade and he was in a couple of my classes. A few months later, I was at a friend's house and he and I were instant messaging.

Him: hey i got 2 tel u somthin

Me: wat?

Him: I like u

Me: ok...

Him: ur probly laffing at me now.

Me: NO! i think its sweet, but i got 2 tell u somthin 2

Him: wat?

Me: i like u 2

Him: really?

Me: yaa...

I really liked him. He was nice, sweet, honest, just the kind of guy I imagined going out with! He asked me if I wanted to see the new Harry Potter movie with him. I said yes. I was so excited! I wondered if my mom would actually go for this. When I told her that a guy asked me out she kept telling me how happy she was, but nervous at the same time. She asked me everything I knew about him—his family, friends and grades.

After my mom said yes, I started dreaming about what our date would be like. I imagined one of those Lifetime love stories. My mom and I would pick him up, he'd give me flowers, then our date would whiz into him opening the door for me, reciting poems and telling me how wonderful I am. Now doesn't that sound clichéd?

My mom gave me our mommy-daughter chitchat the day of the date while I was getting ready. She said, "No kissing ... at all." We couldn't hold hands, hug or have any other physical contact. Being in sixth grade, I didn't really mind this. Then my mom warned me about the dangers of early dating, about how "early dating can lead to pregnancies, then you'll drop out of high school ... have no life ... blah blah blah." She was speaking so seriously that it almost seemed like she was mad at me! Of course I took it seriously because those things really do happen, but I think

she needed a chill pill. Luckily, my mom trusted me.

The day of our date I put on my cutest outfit (which I look back on and frown). It was a dark green mini-skirt, with a lime green shirt, and these ugly, uncomfortable black flats. My mom told me I couldn't wear any makeup other than lip gloss. My mom and I picked him up from his house. At the movies, we met up with my friend, who was on a date too, and a bunch of friends. My date and I sat separate from the group because we wanted privacy so we could talk without the constant questioning from my friends. But I was nervous because we weren't talking. I wondered what he was thinking, what he wanted to say to me. I think he was nervous too. I would try to ask him questions about himself and he gave only one-word answers.

SHOULD I LET HIM PAY?

After the movie we went to the mall to eat and hang out. When we went to get food at a Japanese place called Sansai, we were standing in line talking as if we were friends, which made things easier. Then he did something I didn't expect. He offered to pay for my food! I said, "Umm," because I didn't know what to say. So I said, "No, I'll pay for it. I'm fine." I felt like a complete idiot. When we were eating he explained that his mom told him to pay for my food to make a good impression. All I could say was "Aww, really?" but what I really wanted to say was, "You've already made a good impression on me, why do you need another one?" I blushed. After we ate we got ice cream and this time when he offered to pay I let him. It was really sweet.

While eating we talked about things I would usually talk about with friends: the latest gossip at school, grades and siblings. I felt that since he wasn't talking enough I should talk more, which I did. When I caught him staring at me like I was an idiot, I asked him, "Am I talking too much?" "Yes, but that's OK," he said. I had a feeling he was nervous too. Sometimes when he was talking he would ask me if what he said was OK, which made me laugh, then he would blush.

My mom picked us up at about 7:30. He said, "Good-bye, see you at school on Monday!" I expected a hug, but didn't mind I didn't get one. I had a lot of fun and that's what counts. I learned a few things, like if you're really nervous, and you're babbling, stop yourself before it gets worse. Also, if the person you're with doesn't talk as much as you'd like them to, don't worry because they are probably just as nervous as you are. When I was on that first date I wish I would have relaxed about the silences. Silences give you a chance to think about conversation starters, like "What are your favorite bands?"

It wasn't like the Lifetime movies, but I thought it was pretty close for a sixth-grade version. I thought if all dates were like this I was definitely ready to date.

I waited for a couple weeks for him to ask me out again. When he didn't, I thought of asking him out. But when I tried, I would choke up and make an excuse to walk away. We never went out again. Why? I don't know. Oh well, his loss.



Stacey says her perfect date would be a movie night at home with loads of junk food.

Alone again

By Daniel Weintraub
18, BEVERLY HILLS HS

“I’ve found another guy,” my girlfriend said, fighting back tears. I guess I was naive. I thought we’d always be together. We stayed up all night talking on my back porch while I tried to figure out what I would do without my best friend. Who would I talk to late at night? Who could I cuddle with when it rained? I was on my own again.

The first couple weeks she dominated my thoughts. If I saw a couple kissing on TV, I’d change the channel. At the video arcade, I remembered the times she would distract me from playing video games by kissing me. I remembered how she saved the first roses I gave her until they turned black. Sometimes I’d stand outside at night, hoping she’d drive up in her red Explorer.

One day I snapped. I started listening to U2’s “With or Without You,” sipping a beer (which tasted like warm urine), and staring at an old picture of us from a photo booth. I went to my room and cried. It was the first of many depressing lonely nights.

One night I went to a dance club by myself. When I got to the door I wasn’t sure if I wanted to go in or not. But the ticket guy said that pretty soon the place would be “crawling with girls.” All I remember about that night was the loud, annoying band and a bunch of drunk women grabbing onto some guy with greased back hair and ugly yellow pants.

Then my friend had the brilliant idea of going to a strip club. While we were around the little table that the girl dances on, the other guys started tossing down dollar bills so she would dance in front of them. We were all staring at the same piece of skinny, high-heeled fantasy. I just couldn’t enjoy myself. What might have drawn the girls to becoming strippers? What if they were abused or molested as girls? If this was the case with these girls then I felt ashamed for enjoying it. I left \$40 poorer and feeling worse than when I came in, while my friend was glowing all the way back to my house, because he got the private lap dance.

DESPERATE FOR A NEW GIRLFRIEND

One night I went to the beach and started admiring the calm movements of the waves, the moon shimmering on the water. I noticed a girl who was sitting alone. “Maybe I can talk to her and she’ll be my new girlfriend,” I thought. We spent the night talking and walking around. After a while I started to realize that she wasn’t my ex-girlfriend and had no qualities resembling her. I bought her dinner, got her phone number and promised to call. When I got home, I threw the paper away.

Then I met a girl in an SAT class. When the class ended, we exchanged numbers and went out twice, but then

I stopped returning her calls. It felt good when she called and I didn’t want to talk to her, and I just shooed her away. It was like a power thing. I really acted like a jerk.

There was another girl in my Spanish class. The first couple weeks of school I didn’t even notice her but as time went on, with the teacher babbling on, I started to get interested. I asked her if I could have her phone number in case I had any problems with my homework. The same night I called. She totally blew me off. She said she had to go because she was watching Beverly Hills 90210!

As I sat near her in class, I heard her talk about how good she looks and how she would only date a guy who dressed well. She talked about her manicures and what toenail colors best matched her blouse. I kept trying over and over to convince myself how superficial she was, but for some reason I still found her attractive. I don’t know, maybe it was the challenge of the whole thing. When a

ILLUSTRATION BY RICARDO ALCARAZ, L.A. YOUTH ARCHIVES



girl consented and liked me, it almost seemed too easy.

Then I remembered a girl I used to like a few years ago. She was still around. I agonized over how to approach her. First I sent her a Valentine. She came up to me and said, “Oh, that was very sweet.” That seemed like a green light, so I started following her around. I noticed where she parked her car. One day I waited for her by her car. “Um ... I was just wondering if you would like to go out with me sometime?” She looked down at the ground and (while I was planning our marriage and what to name our kids) she said, “Sorry, I already have a boyfriend.”

I smiled politely, feeling so small that a cockroach could feast on me. As I walked away, I bit my big, white notebook as hard as I could, leaving huge tooth marks. I felt so bad that I started seeing things—weird shapes and colors. Everyone who passed me looked disfigured. I heard screeching voices in my head. I tried my best not to think about the incident, but I knew that I was in for several days of sorrow. I imagined a banner in front of the school reading “DANIEL GOT REJECTED.”

Reprinted
from
1997

THIS YEAR WE ARE CELEBRATING
L.A. YOUTH’S 20TH ANNIVERSARY
BY REPRINTING SOME OF
OUR FAVORITE STORIES

I called my old girlfriend once in a while, but it was painful to talk to her when we weren’t really close anymore. Finally I started dating this other girl for about a month and a half. We went to the movies and went out to eat and talked on the phone. Finally I asked her what she thought of me. She said that she just thought of me as a “friend.” A friend? Just a friend? I dropped my head in disappointment. I knew that I wasn’t going to be calling her anymore. She said, “I’m sorry if I hurt you but I still want to hang out. I feel bad because I value our friendship.” That pissed me off even more. How naive could she be? Did she think I was spending time with her just so I could be her friend?

So here I am still waiting for that “special someone.” And let me tell you I’m tired of waiting, tired of playing games, tired of being rejected. I have heard all the advice on why you should ask someone out:

- “If you don’t ask her out, then you’ll never know what might have been.”
- “It doesn’t matter if you get rejected by 10 girls, as long as one says yes.”
- “What’s the worst that could happen, she takes out a gun and shoots you?”
- “When you finally find the right person, you’ll appreciate the relationship more.”

All of these little motivational tools sound nice and dandy but nothing I could write down will help make a rejection feel better.

But the truth is that I really didn’t get rejected as many times as I thought. When I first got the idea to write this story, I

thought I’d be writing a three-inch novel. I discovered that I didn’t get rejected that much and when I did, I magnified the effects of it in my head. If I just felt like asking a girl out and I didn’t, I would consider that a rejection even though it really wasn’t.

Someday there’ll be a girl for me. She’ll be caring and open-minded. Maybe she’ll be different from me. Maybe she’ll be pretty. I’m not sure. This much I know: she won’t reject me.



Daniel (photo from 1997)

is now happily married and a teacher in Inglewood. He said, “I am a bit embarrassed over how I obsessed over this girl. Today things that are important to me are my wife, kids and being a good father. Funny how times change.”

You like them, now what?

L.A. Youth writers share their advice on dating and asking someone out

Girls, when a guy asks you out, try not to be too harsh when you tell him you're not interested. You could say "I see you only as a friend," "I think you're really cool but at this time I'm not looking for a relationship," or "You're really awesome but I just don't see us meshing." Try to be nice when you're gonna turn down a guy because it's nervewracking enough to ask you out.

Luis Pineda, 16, Hollywood HS

Be friends before you start dating. When both people know each other from the start of a relationship, there are no pretenses or skewed expectations. Everything will be more natural and fun. No matter what happens, whether feelings start to fade or not, at least you will know you have a good friend.

Edison Mellor-Goldman, 16, Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies

On a date it is important to be organized.

You don't want to go somewhere and have no idea what you're doing, so plan ahead!

Stacey Avnes, 13, Sherman Oaks Center for Enriched Studies

One time my friend had to ask out a girl he liked when she was in a big group of other girls. When he asked, the girl was really mean and he got his feelings hurt.

My advice is to the person being asked out, take it easy and don't embarrass the other person.

Aerick Newman, 14, CALS Early College HS

Don't try to look like a big shot or be a show-off; it's annoying. It seems like you're trying to get me to like you for the wrong reasons and if we had a relationship it would be superficial.

Sarah Lacey, 17, The Linden Center

Tell people the truth, even if it will hurt them. Especially if they like you but you don't like them back, because eventually you'll have to tell them and that will hurt more—on top of not being liked, they were lied to.

Gabe Andreen, 15, Pilgrim School



ILLUSTRATION BY RAYMOND CARRILLO, 18, POLYTECHNIC HS (SUN VALLEY)

I met a girl while I was working with my mom and she asked me for my number. I gave it to her and she called an hour after we left. She calls every day. Wait at least a day to call because if you don't, you're rushing it and sound desperate.

Cameron Warfield, 13, Wildwood School

Don't get in a routine. Choose diverse themes for your date—be creative and spontaneous and use your imagination. For example, instead of the average "dinner and movie" date, go to the beach or an amusement park. If you both have dogs, walk them together. There is a world of activities to pursue in L.A. so why bother getting in a routine!

Brett Hicks, 16, Loyola HS

Guys, please don't ask us out in front of a crowd. One of my friends asked me to a school dance in the middle of class. I would have loved to tell him I didn't dance (read: I am a giant klutz) but still wanted to hang out with him, but the whole class was listening in! So I just mumbled, "Uh, I don't dance."

Emily Clarke, 14, Palisades Charter HS

It's important when you have a boyfriend or girlfriend to be friendly with their friends. I have a friend whose boyfriend ignores us completely. He doesn't make any effort to be nice or to get to know us. This makes us feel like our friend shouldn't be dating him, because he comes across as harsh and mean.

Chelsea McNay, 15, Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies

It's said that girls like confident guys, but cockiness and arrogance turns us off. We have already noticed (or will soon notice) whatever flaws you're hiding, and if we still talk to you it means we're fine with them. What you may think is unattractive could be some girl's fantasy, so just accept all of yourself and know that someone else will too. People who don't like you for you won't be fun on dates anyway.

Sylvana Insua-Rieger, 16, Beverly Hills HS

Are you in foster care in Los Angeles County?

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Journalist in the making

A disorganized journalism class and being censored were frustrating, but still taught me what it takes to be a newspaper reporter

By Jennifer Carcamo

18, HIGH TECH HIGH—LOS ANGELES

My dream is to become a journalist. I started realizing this while taking journalism as an elective freshman year. Since then I've had a lot of great experiences with my school's journalism club and an internship at the Los Angeles Daily News. Unfortunately, I've also had some negative experiences—a disorganized journalism class and having my writing censored. Despite all that, I still want to become a journalist because I love to write and express my ideas.

I used to dream of writing fiction, because I love to tell stories. But while taking journalism in ninth grade, I realized my passion was telling real stories. Journalism let me write about current events I care about, like the immigration debates. I am a naturally shy person, but writing my thoughts motivated me to investigate things further and gave me a reason to ask questions.

Unfortunately, my articles were never published, so the students at High Tech High—Los Angeles, which places emphasis on computers and technology, were never able to read my stories. The journalism class never updated its website because most of the articles weren't well-written and the students didn't try to improve them after the teacher gave back edits. Eventually, the class was discontinued in the spring of my freshman year. However, I still got a lot of out of the class and wanted to continue with journalism.

So I started a journalism club at my school. I dreamed that the journalism club would be everything the class should have been. It would give students a place to express themselves by publishing stories about local and national issues. We were going to start a new online newspaper that we would update and produce a yearbook. I wanted the journalism club to be one of the biggest things going on at HTH, right next to our widely acclaimed robotics team.

In the end, we never created a newspaper because we didn't have the support or guidance from a teacher. But we managed to produce a digital yearbook on CD at the end of my sophomore year. The school finally granted us permission to do the yearbook in May and then the club members spent the next four weeks meeting practically every day after school and working eight-hour days on

weekends. The teachers and students congratulated us for doing it so quickly and creatively. I was immensely proud that I had been in charge of the club that created HTH's first official yearbook.

Because of the stress involved in putting the yearbook together, I thought it would be easier for the club to have its own advisory, which is similar to homeroom, during junior year so we could devote more time to it. I asked our principal, Mrs. Rybin, for an advisory. Instead, the school gave us an elective class for the next academic year. I was concerned that the elective might attract students who thought it would be an easy class.

"We offered it as an elective because that's the way I wanted it," said Ms. Rybin, in an interview I conducted last fall. "I wanted the traditional way a journalism class operates in a traditional high school and that is that it's a class."

The journalism elective began with 14 students—11 of the original club members and three new ones—in the 2006-2007 school year. To the staff's surprise, the elective quickly gained popularity. By the end of the second week there were 29 students.

In late September, our journalism teacher, Ms. Guevara, informed me that the journalism club was being discontinued. No one asked the members of the club their opinions. I felt like I had worked really hard the previous year and getting replaced by a class didn't seem fair. The former club members said they felt the same, but did nothing about it.

I WASN'T ALLOWED TO WRITE THE ARTICLE I WANTED

I questioned how the school had a right to shut down a club so abruptly. I decided to write an article opposing my school's decision as an opinion piece for the HighTech Times, HTH's new online newspaper managed by the journalism class. I turned in my first draft to Ms. Guevara and she handed it back to me almost immediately. She told me it was inappropriate and to rewrite the whole thing. She didn't give me any instructions. I was upset, but did as she told me. I deleted more than half and added some good things about the elective. I turned in my second draft and when I got it back, the small part I had kept about the club being discontinued had also been deleted. My opinion piece was transformed into a promotional piece that said the elective was great.

Feeling like I had no other option and fearing for my grade, I let her publish the revised article on the newspaper's website. I thought it was an infringement on my First Amendment right to freedom of speech, but as a student I didn't object because I wasn't sure of my rights.

A few weeks later, I researched the subject and learned that according to *Tinker v. Des Moines* (1969) students do not "shed their Constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate." This made me think that I wasn't crazy in believing I had a right to freedom of speech even within school. But then I learned that in 1988 the Supreme Court ruled in *Hazelwood School v. Kuhlmeier* that schools were granted the power to censor articles that could be considered disruptive to learning.

I realized that I didn't know anything about my free speech rights. There are so many court cases about freedom of speech and I had never been taught any of them in either of my journalism classes. I wondered why not.

As the year progressed, my fears became reality. The elective was going nowhere. Half of the students didn't seem very interested—they complained about having to write in the class. How can you join journalism and not want to write? We spent our time on busywork like writing current events summaries and mini-magazine projects that ended up gathering dust on the classroom shelves. As I edited the other students' work, they were listening to music or doing math homework. We didn't create a yearbook or keep an up-to-date online newspaper.

The response we usually received from Ms. Guevara about why we weren't writing stories or working on the yearbook was "We have all year to plan it out." I was so frustrated. The students didn't seem to care and my censored article haunted my thoughts. The class had gone from a marvelous opportunity to a horrible let down.

So while writing this article for L.A. Youth a year later, I finally decided to ask my teacher, Ms. Guevara, why she didn't let me publish my original opinion article. Her response surprised me.

"As a journalism teacher, you're between the wall and the sword," Ms. Guevara said as she looked at me thoughtfully. "You can give the students a certain amount of rights, but then you also have to go by school law and our regulations set on us by the state ... person-



Jennifer wrote several stories, like the one on the left, during her Los Angeles Daily News internship. She's using what she learned to make this year's journalism class better.

ally I felt it was more of a journal entry than an article because it felt like you were more upset about something more than writing professionally.”

The truth was I had been going through very tough times during those early weeks of school last year. I was struggling with my family and with myself. As a result, my opinion piece was filled with sarcastic comments about the discontinuation of the club and unfounded accusations that blamed other people for shutting down the club, even though I didn't have any evidence. Now I know that's unfair and poor journalism not to get the other side of the issue, which I learned after writing more articles for other publications.

However, I still don't think that I should have been censored. It would have been better if my teacher had tried to help me with my article. Sadly, no one at school did and I found myself feeling defeated. In the end even I didn't put in the effort in class. Looking back now, I wish I had taken more initiative to make the elective work back then and talked to Ms. Guevara about the problem.

When I interviewed Ms. Guevara, she said that one of the reasons we never updated the online newspaper was because she wasn't very fond of online publications. Nonetheless, I feel that given the limited funds we had, having an online publication would have been the best for us since we are HTH's journalism elective. She also said that the reason we didn't have a yearbook was because we didn't have the support or money for it.

Ms. Rybin, our principal, said that students less in-

terested in journalism ended up in the class because she was trying to make sure that all the electives had enough students. “I think that if we'd just had the core people that were interested in producing something and working collaboratively it would have been a lot smoother,” Ms. Rybin said. I couldn't have agreed with her more.

An ideal journalism class would be one in which everyone is participating and they publish a good newspaper. The students would learn and practice the basics of journalism—fairness and libel law, writing in journalism style and our First Amendment rights. Everyone would be enthusiastic about researching and talking about court cases involving freedom of speech. Everyone would want to read up on current events and write in-depth articles about their experiences and thoughts.

I LEARNED THAT BEING A GOOD JOURNALIST REQUIRES DEDICATION

After everything I went through, I do not regret the experience. Discovering my passion for journalism, founding my club, getting the school to create a journalism elective, writing my opinion piece, and finally realizing how much everything, even family problems, can change how you perceive things helped me become a stronger person and writer. I worked on this article and have seen it transform so much from the first draft. I have researched, interviewed, analyzed, edited, deleted, rephrased and written out all my thoughts for everyone to read: that is what a journalist does.

Last fall I interned at the Los Angeles Daily News and wrote articles that were published in the newspaper and online. I really enjoyed my internship and learned a lot about writing articles and what it's like working for a newspaper with reporters constantly stressing over deadlines. The experience I gained working at the Daily News helped prepare me to be Editor-in-Chief of HTH's newspaper.

A couple months into the new semester, the journalism newspaper staff has managed to publish several issues of the HighTech Times, which have been distributed through e-mail, every couple weeks. Also, the yearbook staff, another branch of the journalism elective, has raised \$500 so far for the yearbook. Although time is running short, I know we'll get it done on time.

At first, students were overwhelmed with the new structure of the class, but now they are willing to work. Teachers have congratulated us on every issue. Since everyone at school is finally recognizing the journalism elective as more than a class, students are taking pride in being a part of the class's accomplishments.

I want the elective to prosper because this is what I want to do with my life. I've been admitted into Hawaii Pacific University's College of Communications where I plan to study journalism this fall, and this experience has helped me prepare for that. Writing this article and studying at HTH have helped me see what is in store for me when I pursue a career as a journalist: outrage, controversy, hardship, millions of edits, realizations and surprises. It is something I have come to expect and accept.

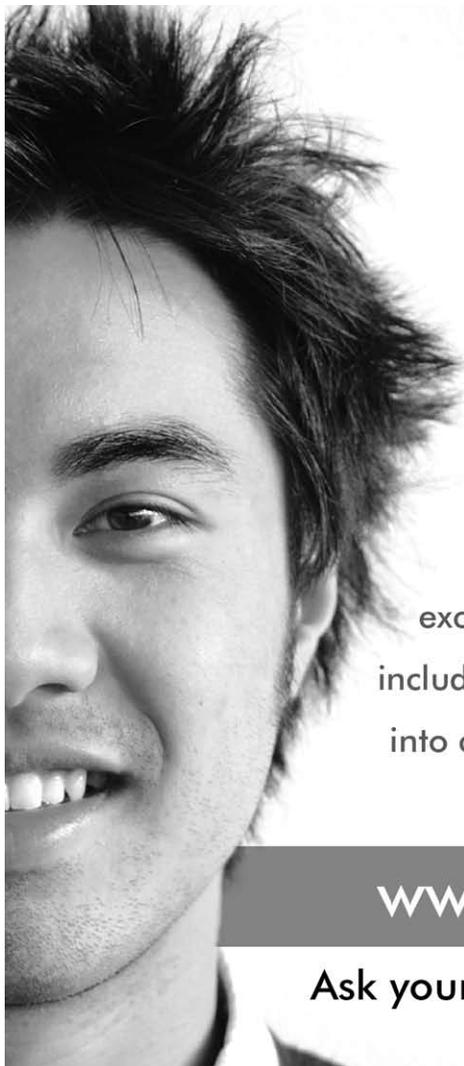
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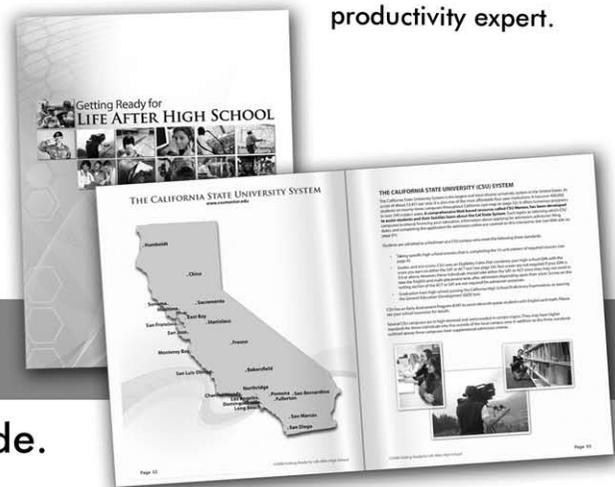


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School pride

My new school has new books, fewer fights and smaller classes, which is helping me learn more

Jo'Visha McGee

14, LOU DANTZLER PREPARATORY CHARTER HS

I like my school. It's strict, but the classes are small, we have new books with no marks or scribbles—just our names written inside the front covers, and the students listen to the teachers and do their homework.

Things at Lou Dantzer Preparatory Charter High School are better than at my old school, Audubon Middle School. The desks at Audubon had gum under them, some students wore jeans some days even though the dress code said gray pants, and we didn't have enough books. Sometimes I felt like the school didn't care about the students. So the students didn't care much about the school.

Once I asked someone who dropped food on the floor, "Why are you being so lazy?" The trash can was right next to her. She said, "I don't feel like picking it back up." I was angry with her. She didn't have to add more trash to the ground.

That would never happen at Dantzer because if you drop something the teachers would see and tell you to pick it up. But also, the students care more about the school, because they feel like the teachers care more about them. Sometimes during lunch the teachers find the students who need extra help with their school work and bring them to the classroom to work with them.

THE FIGHTS AT MY OLD SCHOOL WERE DISTRACTING

I liked Audubon. I had some good friends and teachers, but I wished that it had been smaller. There were too many kids, often 30-40 in a class, and it seemed like there were fights almost every day and that made it hard to learn. At the beginning of eighth grade they told us not to fight or we'd get suspended. But students didn't really care about getting suspended and fought anyway. All those fights say that a school isn't good.

With so many students, the school didn't have enough books. In our math class we had to share with the person sitting next to us. And the books were old with some pages that were folded or torn. People had

written all through the books—curse words and gang names. When we showed the teachers they told us to get another book. But they didn't have any more books.

Also, I didn't really feel like I was learning that much. Students would talk on cell phones and throw stuff in class. Even I talked in class because everyone else did. In math, my grades went from Bs and Cs to Ds and Us, because I didn't do some assignments. My teacher called my mom and my mom was mad. I started

the school. I decided to go to Dantzer.

There are about 200 students at Dantzer, in sixth and ninth grades (because it's the school's first year). The rules are strict: no chewing gum in class, no cell phones and they enforce the dress code. You have to wear gray pants, black shoes, a white collared shirt that has to be tucked in, a tie, a navy blue blazer and a belt. On Fridays we wear a polo shirt, but only on Fridays. I like that I've learned how to tie a tie.

If someone violates the dress code the punishment is strict. The first time you get a referral to go to the office and your parents have to bring a change of clothes. The second time you're suspended for a day. But it's good that the school is strict. People definitely behave better than they did at Audubon.

I'm learning a lot more this year than I did last year at Audubon. I have new and better books in math, science and history. And it's smaller. We have about 20 students in each class. The good thing about having fewer students is fewer troublemakers. Now, since the teachers can spend time teaching and less time telling students to behave, I'm learning more.

I'M FINALLY LEARNING IN MY SPANISH CLASS

In Spanish class in my old school, we learned simple words and phrases like "hola" and "como estas," but the teacher couldn't pay enough attention because students in the class threw papers, pencils and spitballs at each other. The teacher spent most of the time trying to calm students down, but they didn't listen. I didn't feel like I learned that much. I didn't know how to speak any sentences or how to write in Spanish. But now I can write a little and I can even speak in simple sentences, like "*Me gusta usar la computadora.*" (I like to use the computer.)

My mom thinks that I made the right choice. She says that she likes the teachers because they're strict. We didn't get much homework at Audubon or if we did it was assignments out of the book, like finding definitions, which was too easy. My mom would tell me that the teacher should give me more homework. My mom likes it now because I get one to two hours of homework a night. I don't like doing homework, but it's good because it'll help me get smarter and prepare me for college. I think I made the right choice, too.



New books, like this one for her science class, are one of the things Jo'Visha likes about Lou Dantzer Prep.

doing my assignments and was able to get my final grade up to a C so I could pass eighth grade.

When it came time for high school, I thought that I would be going to Crenshaw High School. But in the summer my mom told me that the Lou Dantzer Challengers Boys and Girls Club was opening a new charter school (Lou Dantzer Prep) and she asked me if I wanted to go. I didn't know. I had wanted to go to Crenshaw because my friends were going there. But I knew Dantzer would be a lot smaller than Crenshaw. I like the Boys and Girls Club, so I figured that I'd like

A cause close to my heart

After my best friend died of a rare form of cancer, I was inspired to fight the disease



PHOTOS BY ALEXANDRA SCARF, 17, BIRMINGHAM HS

Left: Teens dance at a prom that Fred's foundation held for patients with life-threatening illnesses. Above: Fred does interviews like this one on a teen talk show to raise awareness about cancer. Right: Fred with a T-shirt and donation box he made.



By Fred Scarf
17, BIRMINGHAM HS (VAN NUYS)

I was the first speaker at my best friend's funeral. When I walked to the podium and saw the people in the crowd filled with so much sadness, I knew that I had to do something to help prevent others from suffering the way she and her loved ones did.

I met Shiri Gumbiner in study hall my freshman year. We soon became best friends and, though she was in a wheelchair and had been diagnosed with osteosarcoma, a rare form of bone cancer, there was nothing that we didn't do together. We were troublemakers at Universal Studios, we covered each other's eyes during scary movies, we were always dreaming about the future.

Later that spring, doctors found 12 tumors in Shiri's

lungs. Her weight continued to drop despite aggressive treatments. By August, the doctors said she had two weeks to live. It was horrifying to know it was only a matter of time before she passed away. I was outraged. It wasn't fair. It wasn't right for someone so young to have her life taken away. Was there really nothing I could do?

When she died the following week, her death was unreal to me. I couldn't accept that I would never see her again. I felt heartbroken and empty, like I was dead, too. I couldn't stop thinking that people would forget her in a year. I didn't know how to keep alive the memory of the girl who would always sing along to songs on the radio, which made me laugh and join in. Sometimes I recorded her singing, but she always made me delete it.

I got an idea of what I could do when I was at Barnes & Noble in Encino. I saw a book titled "How to Form a Nonprofit Corporation." I immediately grabbed the book and flipped through it but I was too excited to even read a page. Starting a nonprofit seemed impossible, yet the perfect way to honor Shiri. Driving home from the bookstore, I thought of the impact a nonprofit could make. I could raise money to help kids who are battling osteosarcoma. I could help people cope with their

struggles with osteosarcoma. I went back the next day and bought the book.

I had no idea if I could do it. I was 15 and was planning to cure cancer. Even to me, it sounded kind of outrageous. I told a few of my friends I was starting a foundation, but they didn't really understand and would respond, "What ... huh?" So I decided to keep my efforts to myself. My parents supported the idea but didn't believe me at first because I always have big ideas and dreams. Still, they offered to help me.

I started the foundation to find a cure for osteosarcoma, which is a rare form of bone cancer that affects less than a thousand young adults every year. Osteosarcoma has even been nicknamed the "orphan disease" because it is so rare and receives little attention. In 2007 the federal government cut funding for cancer research by almost 10 percent. These cuts affect second- and third-stage clinical trials (the testing of drugs and other treatments), which now rely heavily on cancer-related foundations like mine. What makes the foundation's fight so challenging is that there aren't many organizations battling this type of cancer and there isn't much awareness about this disease. That's why our objective is to raise awareness and money to donate to promising research to treat osteosarcoma.

I HAD SO MUCH TO LEARN

Starting a foundation was challenging. Very challenging. I bought a few how-to books and had to learn about the different types of nonprofits, the steps to starting one and how to run a nonprofit. If I read something I didn't understand, I wouldn't move on until I figured out what I was reading. I would re-read and re-read and look up things in a different book. Sometimes I would

even e-mail questions to family friends.

I had to fill out many forms to establish the nonprofit. When I got the paperwork it weighed more than me! I spent almost my whole sophomore year filling out the paperwork. Every day I would do my homework and save a few hours to fill out paperwork and make sure I was doing everything right.

I had to form a board of directors, the people who are legally responsible for oversight and administration of the foundation. I also wanted a less formal adult advisory board because I know donating to a teenager's foundation may be a little unsettling. As I spoke with family friends and adults who have been in my life, I discovered that many people I'd met had been affected by cancer in some way. When I asked if they would like to be involved, they would ecstatically say, "Of course!"

When I got a letter telling me that the paperwork had been approved, I felt excited, happy and motivated. All those nights of hard work made receiving that letter gratifying. I was ready for the next step.

I started a MySpace page and a website (shiri.org). I update the website every day. Interacting with people and talking about Shiri is work that I really enjoy.

I have responsibilities as executive director. In addition to doing homework, a typical weekend includes replying to an e-mail from a person from another country whose relative was diagnosed with osteosarcoma, applying for a grant (money given to nonprofits to help their causes), and discussing new ideas with my board of directors. It can become pretty stressful when I have foundation responsibilities, homework and extracurriculars, but I really love what I do. I have been affected by this cancer in such a way that I started this foundation to change lives and ultimately save lives. So staying up a few extra hours every night is something I really don't mind.

MANY PEOPLE ASKED TO HELP RAISE MONEY

I've learned the best way to get the word out about the foundation is through the media. I write press releases and e-mail newspapers and radio and television stations. I've even e-mailed Oprah. (I'm still waiting for a reply.) I've been interviewed by KABC Channel 7, the Los Angeles Daily News and radio station KNX 1070. It's pretty neat to see people's reactions. A lot of people e-mail, call, write letters and sometimes send donations. The most touching reaction I received was from a man who was diagnosed with osteosarcoma. He thanked me for what I was doing and offered to help.

After learning about us through the media, students have contacted me to help raise money. I'll never forget Rachel from University High School. She asked if we could give her Key Club donation boxes. Even though we didn't have any donation boxes, I said sure and asked how many she wanted. "How about a hundred?"

That weekend I went with my mom on an official business trip to get donation boxes. We found small wooden boxes at Michaels. We went to every Michaels in the city to get 120 boxes. We also got bright pink spray paint so people could see our donation boxes. I spent that whole weekend spray-painting them in the street. After an hour of painting, most of my body was pink.

I wanted to give people who knew about the Shiri Foundation the opportunity to keep the story of Shiri close to them. So I designed T-shirts that say "I'm fighting bone cancer by wearing this shirt." All the money goes toward the Shiri Foundation. People throughout the country have purchased shirts online. We have raised about \$9,000 through our shirts.

Schools and churches help us raise money and



We went to every Michaels in the city to get 120 boxes. We also got bright pink spray paint so people could see our donation boxes. I spent that whole weekend spray-painting them in the street.

awareness by selling T-shirts and organizing bake sales. Also, school plays donate some of their revenue to the Shiri Foundation. A couple in a small town in Louisiana even started a chapter to raise money. I am touched that so many people from so many places are so supportive.

One of the biggest challenges I've faced is fundraising because it is so competitive; there are so many nonprofits trying to raise money for their causes. I don't want to give small amounts of money to hospitals; rather, the Shiri Foundation plans to raise \$183,400 by 2010 for research. I began exploring research opportunities by connecting with people in the osteosarcoma community as well as hospitals and other nonprofit organizations. In the next few years I plan to establish a partnership with a hospital, add an oncologist (a doctor who specializes in cancer) to the advisory board who will help us review current osteosarcoma research, and

fund research to find a cure.

Through individual donations, shirts, grants and awards, the Shiri Foundation has raised more than \$20,000 to date. I'm so proud of this number, but am more determined to meet our goal of \$60,000 this year. This year I'm launching the 2008 Key to a Cure Campaign. The foundation will sell royal blue, decorative keys that will be sold at boutiques and retail stores. Now that the Shiri Foundation is tax-deductible, I'm also looking for corporations to support us.

WE THREW A PROM FOR SICK TEENS

A meaningful project for the Shiri Foundation in 2007 was organizing a prom for teens with life-threatening illnesses. Shiri and I had planned to go to prom together. I realized that there will always be teens like Shiri who will not be able to go to their prom. The purpose of our prom was to give patients the opportunity to go to prom, a night that everyone looks forward to and remembers.

I looked for a venue that was close to the hospitals from which the patients were coming. I also wanted a hotel where the prom's theme, "A Night in Hollywood," would come alive. The Renaissance Hollywood Hotel, in the center of Hollywood, fit the bill because it is modern, stylish and glamorous. I worked with a prom company called Wow! Special Events, which found vendors, caterers and photographers. I worked with organizations including the Make-a-Wish Foundation and Ronald McDonald House to spread the word to more patients.

I shivered with excitement when I saw the first patient walk up the red carpet under the shimmering archway of gold, black and silver balloons. She had a look of wonder as she took in the gorgeous room with the Oscar-shaped balloons, lighting and stars everywhere.

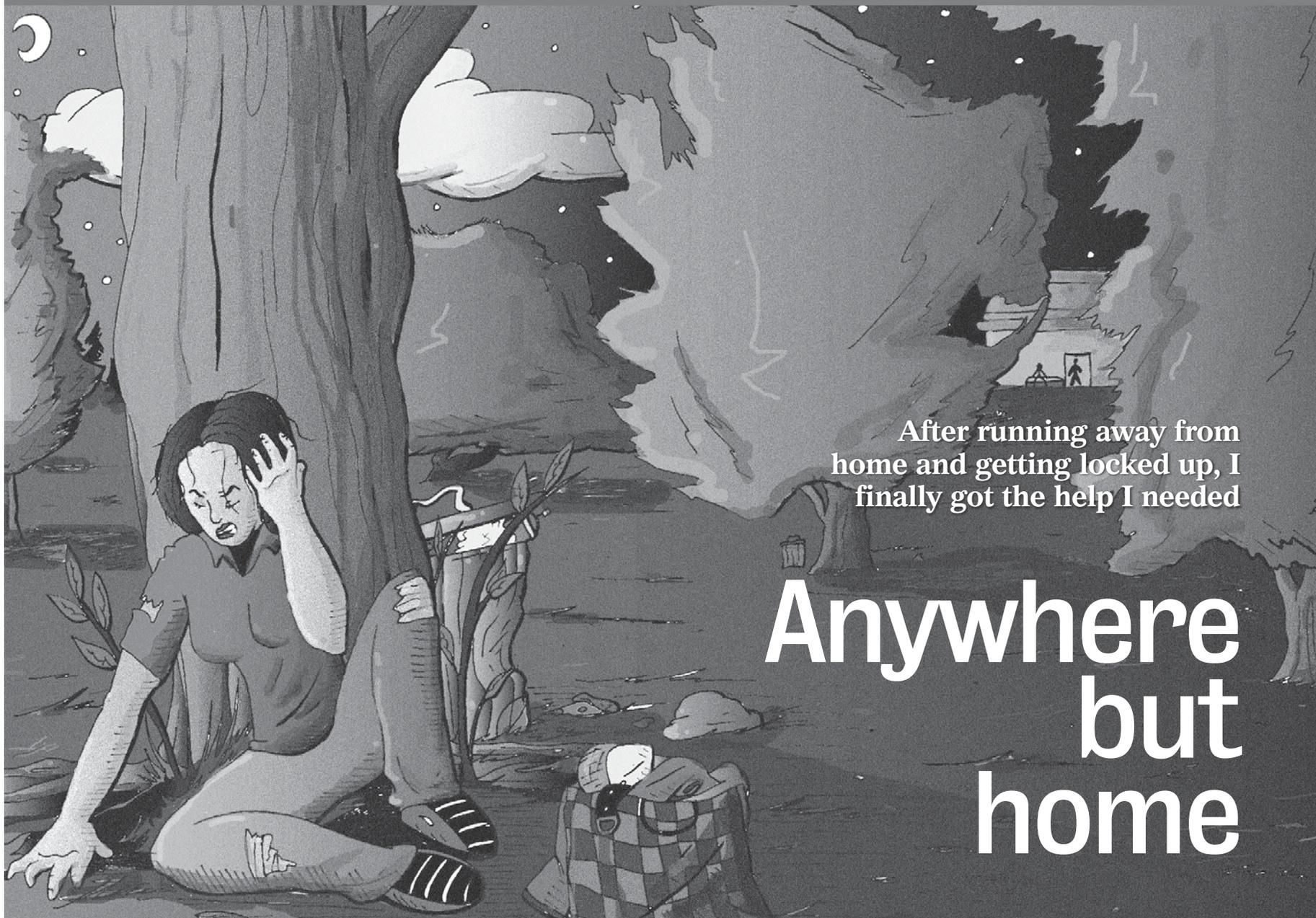
I loved seeing all the teens entering shyly, then sitting and laughing and talking. As the night wore on, I'll never forget seeing the well-dressed teen volunteers on the dance floor with the patients, teaching them new moves and asking them to dance. We had about 16 patients and 18 volunteers and plan to double those numbers for our prom this May. Some of the patients even took off their shoes and high heels. Everyone was laughing and dancing together, and then everyone on the dance floor yelled, "Come on Fred! Join us!" I had a blast dancing with everyone. Toward the end they were exchanging MySpace addresses and phone numbers. It was the kind of prom Shiri would have loved.

Though the Shiri Foundation is an important part of my life, I never really talk about it with my friends. I don't want anyone to feel that he or she hasn't accomplished a lot or that I am smug. I want to do great things, but I don't want to set myself on a pedestal. I value my goals and dreams, but I also value connecting with people and trying new things.

Since starting the Shiri Foundation, I have tapped into every talent and skill that I possess and have developed new skills. I've taken the painful feelings from Shiri's death and turned them into something beautiful. I want to continue to bring people together to find a cure for osteosarcoma, so no child, parent, or loved one will have to endure the horror of this type of cancer again.

While I continue to honor Shiri, I miss her every day. When I hear a new song on the radio or watch a new TV show, I wonder what she would think of it. Though I will never know what she would say about my efforts with the Shiri Foundation, I think Shiri would say, "Good job, Fred."

To learn more about the Shiri Foundation and to find out how you can help, go to www.shiri.org.



After running away from home and getting locked up, I finally got the help I needed

Anywhere but home

ILLUSTRATION BY RAYMOND CARRILLO, 18, POLYTECHNIC HS (SUN VALLEY)

Author's Name Withheld

The first night, I stayed at a park in a playhouse for kids. I couldn't sleep. The metal under the floor of the playhouse was hard and hurt my back. It was cold. I kept thinking, "I can't believe I'm sleeping right here." I started thinking about why I had run away from home. I thought about the arguing, the money problems, the problems I had at school. It was all too much. I thought running away would make it all go away.

I was never happy growing up. I had problems opening up to anyone, even my mom. Everything that happened to me got held inside.

First of all, my family didn't have a lot of money. It got worse in ninth grade so my mom started working more. When she got home, she'd be too tired from work and she'd go straight to sleep. It was like I didn't know her anymore.

Then something even worse happened that I kept inside. My friend's 19-year-old boyfriend sexually assaulted me. After that, he started popping up at my school in Long Beach waiting for me. I didn't go to

school so I could avoid him and my grades dropped. I didn't tell anyone because he threatened that he would kill me if I told.

At home it was like war in my house, fighting every day. We always broke out into arguments at the dinner table. It would start with something simple like "You're passing too slow" or questions like "How was your day?" and someone would be rude. Why couldn't we just be a happy normal family?

I also argued all the time with my stepdad. He was strict. I was never able to use the phone. He'd say, "You saw your friends at school. What more do you have to talk about?" I tried to go outside but he'd say to come in the house. I never ate at school and when I got home I'd be hungry. He did crazy stuff like hide food and cut off the gas for the stove so I couldn't make anything. "Why can't you leave me alone?" I'd ask. "You think you're grown, wait until you get out into the real world," he'd say.

Sometimes he would lie to my mom about me, like say I started an argument. She didn't listen to me. It's like she chose my stepdad over me. "You always believe him," I'd yell.

I couldn't stand to be in the house. So I started doing what I wanted. They would tell me to be home after school but I wouldn't listen. I wouldn't come home until some time between 6 and 9 p.m. They tried grounding me in my room with no TV, they took away my tight jeans and cute clothes and said I couldn't drink soda, but nothing worked. I didn't listen. When I was out, I was hanging with gangbangers, smoking marijuana and drinking. It was fun; I had nothing to worry about.

By 11th grade, when I was 16 years old, I was tired of my life.

AT FIRST, I THOUGHT I COULD MAKE IT ON MY OWN

On Dec. 12, 2006, I went to the movies with my cousin and my boyfriend. I never returned home. I didn't plan it but as the hours went by I was having fun and I thought, "This is better than being at home." When the movie was over I lucked up. My cousin allowed us both to spend the night. The next day I left after dinner and I went to my best friend's house. I thought I was just going to go home late, but as it got later, I decided I wasn't going to go home at all.

When I left her house I began to walk, to where I didn't know. I decided to go to a big park I knew of. That's when I began to think, "I can't believe I'm doing this." Some people might have been scared but I was happy because I wasn't in my house arguing with my stepdad. I wasn't thinking about my future.

After a day I stopped going to school because I knew my mom was looking for me. That first week, I didn't have anywhere to go. I walked at the beach. One night I tried to sleep on a bench next to the bathroom. I was in front of the water so it was extra cold and I didn't have a blanket. It's dark on the beach, you don't know who's lurking. I kept hearing footsteps, people walking by. It was too much. At midnight, I left, tired, and eventually went back to the park where I had spent my first night.

There were no rules on the streets. At first I had fun. The people I was hanging out with would buy me alcohol and drugs. I wanted to hurry up and get drunk because I thought that if I got drunk or high I wouldn't have to worry about my problems. But it didn't work. I'd wake up and my head would hurt.

I was living a double life. I would go to my friends' houses or cousin's house after they got out of school. Later I'd say "I'm going home now," then I'd leave and go back to the park. One time I slept in my best friend's laundry room. I tried to act normal but my friends asked a lot of questions. I wanted to tell them but I didn't. They had problems of their own.

Sometimes I'd steal food, like chips, from the store. At McDonald's when someone would say "order number 417," if it took the customer a while to come, I would grab it. I felt bad. I don't like stealing but I needed to.

I'd go in McDonald's and wash up in the sink. One time I used the outdoor showers at the beach. But I didn't have deodorant so sometimes I still smelled. I stopped hanging out with people for a few days because I had only the outfit I was wearing the day I left and some clothes I had at my cousin's house. I was borrowing clothes from friends and stealing them from Fashion Time.

I felt so alone. When you're a runaway you walk down the streets and see people at home and happy with their families. But you're by yourself.

WAS MY MOM WORRIED?

Most of the time I was around the corner from my house. I'd walk by to see if my family was outside. One time I saw my younger brother on his bike and I wanted to say "come here" and ask him how he was doing, ask "How's mom?" But I didn't. I was still stubborn.

I had so much anger built up in me that I didn't care. I was just trying to survive. I was thinking about what I was going to do next, how I was going to get food. I didn't think about my family or going home, except a few times. One night I tried to imagine being in my mom's shoes, sleeping at night without one of my kids there, not knowing if they're alive or dead. I started to see how she could be worried. It made me feel sad. I had left and didn't give her a warning.

Toward the end of the month, I would go to the beach at night to walk around. I'd think, who am I? What have I become? I was tired of living on the streets and felt like it wasn't going to end. I never thought this would cross my mind but I thought about young women who prostitute. I was not going to do it but I felt that they had the easy way out, making money doing the things they liked the best.

Then one day I was talking to my cousin and the conversation turned serious. I told her, "I've been living on

I didn't care. I was just trying to survive. I was thinking about what I was going to do next, how I was going to get food. I didn't think about my family or going home.

the streets." Her eyes started watering. She said, "We're calling your brother." He was 18 and had his own place. I asked him if I could stay at his house and he said yes.

I now had somewhere to go, but lying down at night I'd think there was something missing. I lived there for three months until six of us got in a fight and were arrested. We were charged with assault with a deadly weapon. I faced four years in prison. The court sent me to a placement (a facility where you live with other girls who are on probation or in foster care), where I finally started working on my relationship with my family.

When I first came to the placement, I gave everybody attitude. I didn't want to be there. But I had a lot of time to think. I started thinking about what I did as a runaway, the drugs and alcohol and stealing. I started thinking about changing. I didn't want to go back to my old habits of running from my problems.

I started slowly. I would say good morning and sit down and talk to the adult staff members. I started playing board games with the girls and talking to them. All my life I had always felt isolated. At my placement I realized I wasn't the only one who had problems.

What also helped me were the staff members who actually cared. The most devoted was Bill. The first time I met Bill, he smiled and took the time to talk to me. It took months to open up to him. I'd take him away from the other kids and talk to him alone. We'd start off small. I'd tell him about how my day went. Then I started asking him for advice, like questions about my boyfriend.

The staff saw a big change in me. I didn't fight as much. I stopped cussing and was more respectful to others. I was smiling. I was less angry.

MY FAMILY AND I STARTED GETTING ALONG

I started getting back on track with my family, which I didn't expect to happen. It started with talking to my mom on the phone. She asked me the questions she should have asked when I came home from school, like "How's your day?" I'd tell her, "I'm trying to hang in there." I'd yell at the girls while I was on the phone and my stepdad gave me advice. He said not to hit them. It

showed me that he wanted to get along.

My mom said me going to jail opened their eyes. It made her and my stepdad realize something was wrong and they needed to improve. She said she needed to talk to me more. She said my stepdad agreed he was too strict.

Then my mom started coming to therapy sessions. It was nice to see her more. We played board games that were kind of like Monopoly; you landed on a space and picked up a card that gave advice or asked you to reveal something. We laughed and had fun so it was a good way for me to get stuff out. Once my mom picked up a card. The advice said, "You work too much. You need to take time." I told my mom she works too much. She agreed. It showed she was listening.

When I went home on weekends, we all ate at the dinner table and talked, there were no arguments.

After six months in placement I went home. I have peace now. I can talk on the phone and go where I want as long as I'm home by curfew, which is 10 p.m. I have more privacy, privileges and respect from my mom and stepdad. It makes me feel good.

My mom and I talk every night on the couch. Being able to sit and talk is something I've been wanting for the longest time. She read this story and I told her about why I had been drinking. She didn't know my depression was that bad. I'm starting to talk to her about more stuff now, like why I broke up with my boyfriend. It's a relief having someone to talk to.

I feel a lot lifted off of me because I've worked things out with my family. But I'm still depressed thinking about the past. I'm still trying to get over it.

People think that when you run away it's a gateway to freedom. It's not. It's a trap in the long run because you end up on the streets and in the juvenile justice system. Still, I don't regret running away. Sometimes making mistakes can help you. I'm no longer running from my problems. It's also shown me I am a strong person and I know I will be able to handle the obstacles in my future.

Where to turn

If you are a runaway or homeless youth, be safe by staying off the streets. Call the National Runaway Switchboard at (800) RUNAWAY to be referred to a shelter for young people.

Or call one of these local shelters:

Covenant House's Hollywood shelter
1325 N. Western Ave. (800) 999-9999.

Angel's Flight's emergency shelter provides a place to stay for 21 days for ages 10 to 17.
357 S. Westlake Ave. near MacArthur Park in Los Angeles. (800) 833-2499.

Los Angeles Youth Network's Hollywood shelter provides a place to stay for up to 90 days for youth ages 12 to 17
1550 N. Gower St. (323) 957-7364.

By Brandy Hernandez
17, HAWTHORNE ACADEMY

Next to my bed I have a picture of my big brother, Anthony Luna, in his combat uniform, sitting on rocks eating the dry food that you add water to. Anthony was in Iraq for 10 months. When I looked at his picture I would cry, thinking about how anything could happen to him. I would think back to how we would always joke around at home, like play fight, get into water balloon fights and how he let us play his Xbox. My mom has six kids and growing up everybody in my family loved my brother, who is the oldest.

He had just turned 18 when he decided to join the Army. He didn't graduate from high school and was living with my mother. He never talked about what he wanted to be. I didn't think about the war. I was proud that he was doing something for himself and his future.

But when I got the call from my mom saying my brother was going to Iraq, my heart sank into my stomach and stayed there for two days. I cried and prayed that the military would change its mind, but it was no use. He left for Iraq in February 2007.

I started watching the news constantly and reading the newspaper because I didn't really know what was going on over there. I had to know more about why we were at war, what was happening and when it would end. When I would read that more soldiers had died, it made me think about my brother and that it could happen to him too. But I didn't stop reading. I wanted to know what was going on and why he was sent to war. I thought maybe I'd see my brother in a news photo.

I missed my brother a lot. I would check my MySpace every day hoping he had left a message. I felt really, really happy when I got a message. I would ask him how he was doing but I didn't ask specific questions about Iraq. What if it was sad to him? He didn't share too much. He wrote that he was doing OK and couldn't wait to come home. He would ask me how school and my life were going. I always told him about my grades and how I was doing. I would give him updates on our family, like when our cousin's girlfriend got pregnant.

WHY HADN'T I HEARD FROM HIM?

One time I sent him a message and he didn't respond right away. It made me nervous. I sent him another one a couple days later saying, "You'd better be OK." I called my mom but she said he hadn't called her either. Could he be hurt? What's going on? I tried to stay positive, like thinking his Internet went down.

When I heard from him again, after two weeks, I had a huge smile. He said he had been in another city doing training for a week and a half and didn't have access to a computer.

I never knew that him being in Iraq would change things, but it did. Before, my mom and I were having major problems. We could not even be in the same house



Brandy kept this photo of her brother on the wall by her bed.

My brother in Iraq

It was scary not knowing if he was OK while he was serving in the war

because we were fighting, so I had to move out and into a group home, which is a home where I live with five other girls and adult staff. But when I went home on weekends, I wouldn't argue with my mom because she was really worried about my brother and didn't need more stress. She was always saying, "I hope he's all right."

Oh my god, I was really happy when I found out that he was coming home. I thought about him all day and

what we were going to do when he got here, like take family pictures (which we didn't get to do before he returned to his base in Texas). I got frustrated and mad because the Army changed the date three times. Then one day I was at my mom's house and we got a surprising call. It was Anthony. "Mom, they're not going to let me come home." "What?" "I'm just playing, I'm in Texas right now." She started crying. We were so happy.

He came home two days before Christmas. Everybody in our family was at the airport. He was the last one off the plane. Everyone mobbed him, hugged him and kissed him. His friend Fernando started crying. I hugged him for five minutes.

We had rented a big ol' black limo. We had fun on the way home, bumping to music and talking. We had a sign that said, "Welcome back from Iraq Private Luna" hanging from the porch. We had decorated the house with "welcome home" balloons and red, white and blue balloons. The whole block came by. Everyone was giving him hugs and telling him congratulations.

He was taller, was nothing but muscle and had a buzz cut. He'd say "please" and he had a softer, calm voice. He went from a boy to a grown man.

Later Anthony told us about Iraq. He would drive tanks and go on patrols. Sometimes he wouldn't get any sleep because he'd have to stay up all day and patrol all night, or because there was shooting and yelling. They had to find shelter in abandoned houses. Sometimes he slept on the floor. One time there was a shootout and an innocent kid was almost caught in the crossfire. They thought they shot him so Anthony stopped shooting. When he saw the boy was alive he was so relieved.

He told us some good things. He made friends from all over the United States. Then somebody asked him what was the worst part. He said it was when one of his friends from his platoon was shot and died. He didn't talk about it long. I don't think he wanted to. I thought, "I could never go through what he went through."

I wish no one had to die. I think the war is stupid and unnecessary. It's not like Iraq bombed us on Sept. 11. We should have gone after just Osama bin Laden. People's lives are on the line when they go to war. It's tough for families to have to go through worrying about their loved ones dying.

Still, I'm proud my brother had the courage to fight in Iraq. He came through it and is fine. He's tough, he's strong.



Brandy says she's thankful her brother came home safely from Iraq.

Tuned out

I felt bad that I stopped paying attention to the Iraq war, but it was depressing and hard to relate to

Chelsea McNay

15, LOS ANGELES CENTER FOR ENRICHED STUDIES

Though March 19 marked the fifth anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, up until recently I have felt very disconnected from the war. I'm not someone who didn't care about the war, but I hardly ever found time to read articles about it.

"5 soldiers slain," "Explosion kills 80." Even while these headlines were upsetting, I had problems relating to the stories about grieving over dead soldiers because I don't know anyone who has ever been there, or has even been in the military.

When I paid less attention to the war, I realized I could live without daily news about Iraq. But I felt bad that I had stopped following the war and I missed being informed. Recently though I've started paying attention again and I am glad because I feel like I know what is going on in Iraq, and I think that this awareness is important.

Two years ago things were different. My history teacher had us debate the war, and I read articles every day. I learned that President Bush declared war in 2003 because the "axis of evil" (North Korea, Iraq and Iran) was posing "a grave and growing danger" to the United States and had possession of, as the president constantly put it, "weapons of mass destruction."

Our teacher told us statistics, such as that almost 2,000 soldiers had died in Iraq, and almost 40,000 Iraqis died from violent deaths as of 2006. I was shocked. I didn't know that so many people had died, after only three years into the war. I felt like I should've known that already, and that I should've been reading articles about it.

The facts I read seemed to support my parents' opinions—that the United States should never have gone to war in the first place. The president talked about "weapons of mass destruction," but none were found in Iraq according to any of the articles. He said that certain countries were threats to the United States, but there hadn't been a terrorist attack since 2001. Even though I was learning interesting and important information, I still didn't

feel connected to this war happening so far away.

But a little later my dad and I listened to a radio interview with an Iraqi woman, who was a physician and was part of a relief organization working in Iraq. She talked about how explosions could be heard from inside their homes, and that most people kept their children from going to school because they could get hurt or killed. The woman also mentioned that the violence in Iraq was not caused by Iraqis; it was caused by the United States and its allies invading Iraq and bringing war to their country. This made me angry. I sympathized with the Iraqi civilians, because they seemed like normal people. I hadn't heard any interviews with Iraqis before this one, and it was clear to me that there needed to be more of them, because these types of interviews could help Americans learn something about what's happening in Iraq.

I gradually stopped following the news though, because I felt like there was nothing new going on, and worse, no improvements. It was just too depressing for me.

When L.A. Youth was planning how to cover the fifth anniversary of the Iraq war, I volunteered to write an article. But I realized that to write about it, I needed to keep up with current issues.

SOME OF THE NEWS WAS ENCOURAGING

I spent a week reading every article about Iraq in the Los Angeles Times. Headlines seemed to be much more optimistic than before. On Feb. 6, there was an article with the headline, "Iraq works to clean up national police." It discussed how training and "anti-corruption efforts" (as the article put it) were aiming to make the Iraqi police competent and reliable. In Iraq, there is conflict between two sects of Islam, Shiite and Sunni. The police in Iraq used to be a largely Shiite group, and some police would kill Sunnis. But the new police includes both Sunni and Shiite Muslims. Jasim Kamil, an Iraqi resident, told the Times, "Now, there is a huge difference in the national police force's attitude toward the people. They are greeting the people at the checkpoints and treating people with respect."

This made me feel like maybe the United States was making a difference. Maybe the U.S. occupation wasn't such a bad idea. I was so used to thinking that the occupation was extremely stupid, and when I started to think that it wasn't, it surprised me.

A NEW PERSPECTIVE

Along with that article were some disheartening ones, such as one about how nine people were accidentally killed in a U.S. air strike, and one about a U.S. Army soldier who killed an Iraqi civilian. However, my hopeful feeling didn't die. Even if the U.S. is making more mistakes than we are helping Iraq, there is still the chance that the whole war wasn't for nothing. We could help stabilize the Iraqi government and stop violence there.

My friends and I still argue about it sometimes though, like whether we could withdraw all of the troops at once, what the United States is really doing to help in Iraq, should the troops stay there and what will happen if a Democrat is elected president? Most of my friends think that we should have never invaded Iraq in the first place, and that the United States shouldn't have thought that it could stop world terrorism single-handedly.

Through writing this article, my opinion of the Iraq war has changed. I don't think of it as a horrible decision, but rather as a more complicated one, with good and bad aspects. The good being rebuilding the police force and the removal of Saddam Hussein, the bad being the continuing violence. I know it's hard to read all the articles about Iraq in the L.A. Times, or to keep up with issues there, but it is worth it to try. Even reading a couple articles a month can help you stay informed about the war, and maybe change the way you see Iraq.



Chelsea says that after reading more about the war, she's not as opposed to it as she used to be.



The war in Iraq: five years later

The United States invaded Iraq on March 19, 2003. President Bush said Iraq was trying to develop chemical, biological and nuclear weapons (weapons of mass destruction) and that Iraq was a threat to the United States. In the five years since, no weapons of mass destruction have been found. Iraq's leader, Saddam Hussein, has been executed and a new government has been elected. Here are some facts and figures about the war:

3,988

Number of American soldiers killed as of March 19, 2008.

29,451

Number of American soldiers wounded as of March 19, 2008.

Source: U.S. Department of Defense

82,000 - 89,000

Number of Iraqi civilians and soldiers who have died, according to Iraqbodycount.org, a site that tracks Iraqi deaths listed in Western news reports.

600,000

Number of Iraqis who have died, according to researchers at Johns Hopkins University who surveyed households in Iraq.

The Iraqi Ministry of Health estimates more than 400,000 have died.

\$600 billion

How much the U.S. has spent so far: A professor at Columbia University estimates the war will eventually cost \$3 trillion when you include the cost to bring troops and equipment back to the United States, health care costs for veterans, interest on paying off the debt on the war and other costs.

reviews: books

ECLIPSE

By Stephenie Meyer

By Destiny Jackson

15, MAYFAIR HS (LAKEWOOD)

Eclipse, the third installment in the vampire series by Stephenie Meyer, is packed with a love triangle, action, tragedy and even comedy. I read Eclipse in one day and didn't do my homework, which got me in trouble with my math teacher. I told him "The vampire ate my homework." What could I say? I was addicted to each chapter, and couldn't wait to find out who Bella would choose.

In the two previous books in the series, *Twilight* and *New Moon*, 18-year-old Bella Swan wants to become a vampire like her vampire love Edward Cullen. She tries to convince Edward to change her into a vampire, but Edward breaks up with Bella so she'll change her mind about wanting to become a

vampire. Bella, distraught and on the rebound, befriends Jacob Black, who just happens to be a werewolf. Later Edward returns and Jacob and Bella stop dating since vampires and werewolves don't get along.

I like that Meyer writes vampire stories that leave out the sexual tension that other teenage romance books have. She also abandons the idea that vampires can't be in sunlight and that they live in coffins and don't have reflections. She adds twists and turns to the old vampire tale, by creating more hardship for Edward to be with Bella.

Eclipse begins with Bella agreeing to marry Edward. However, Bella is uneasy about the wedding because she's keeping it a secret from her best friend Jacob, who is Edward's worst enemy. Bella's downfall is that she doesn't realize her true feelings for Jacob. Bella finds herself in a love triangle, and her inner battle begins. She has to choose between the one she loves (Edward) and the one who is completely in love with her (Jacob). If she chooses Ed-



ward, she has to give up everything—her family, her friends and her life since she would be a soulless vampire. If she

chooses Jacob, her life will be normal and she won't lose the people she loves to be with him.

Just when I thought this book was just a love story, it gets more complicated. In the midst of Bella's confusion, an evil vampire on a quest for revenge invades Seattle. Bella is in trouble and everyone she loves is in danger.

Eclipse is the best book in the series. It has more humorous dialogue. When Jacob takes Bella on a bad date, she asks to use Jacob's phone to call Edward to pick her up. He responds, "Sorry, I don't want any leeches on my speed dial." There also are more dramatic themes. When Edward kills a major character in front of her, Bella becomes hysterical because she thinks that if she becomes a vampire, she'll turn evil, and Edward will probably kill her.

If you love dark, bittersweet novels filled with excitement, danger and a romance so real you can't believe it's fiction, then I recommend this exciting page-turner.

MY SISTER'S KEEPER

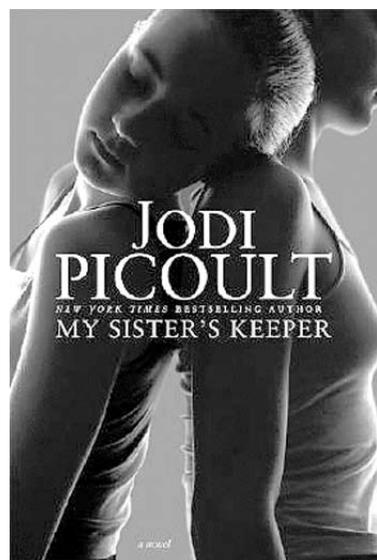
By Jodi Picoult

By Jisu Yoo

15, GLENDALE HS

Jodi Picoult begins the intense *My Sister's Keeper* by telling us Anna Fitzgerald's purpose in life—to save her older sister, Kate. Kate Fitzgerald was diagnosed with a rare case of leukemia when she was 3. Her parents decided to have a test tube baby, Anna, to serve as an organ and tissue donor for her sister. Whenever Kate needed something like bone marrow, or blood, it was Anna's time to donate. But when Kate needs a new kidney, 13-year-old Anna refuses for the first time and hires renowned lawyer Campbell Alexander.

Anna's decision sends the family into chaos. Anna ends up going to



court to try to get control over her body. During the trial, Anna goes against

her mom, Sara, who is asking Anna to donate her kidney and save Kate's life "one more time." Alexander represents Anna for free and argues that Anna, who has spent almost as much time in the hospital as Kate, has never been asked whether she wanted to be a donor.

Throughout the story Anna has mixed feelings about her decision not to donate. She doesn't even tell Alexander the precise reason for refusing to save her sister until the end, where the unexpected twist comes (my absolutely favorite part of the book).

When I read *My Sister's Keeper*, I felt as if I knew each character because Picoult tells the story from the perspective of each main character. I was blown away by Sara, who happens to be exactly like my mom. They're both aggressive and stress out over little things. For a time, my mom was too focused on my little sister, who has cerebral palsy, to pay much attention to anything else.

Then there's Jesse, my favorite character. Anna's and Kate's older brother is the bad-ass rebel his parents gave up on, who plays with fire to get attention. The one who turned to drugs and cigarettes. I'm much like him in the way we thirst for attention. Many families, I think, have an unequal distribution of love among the children. This is true for Sara. She always says that she loves both Anna and Kate equally, but her mind is so caught up with Kate that she fails to pay attention to Anna and Jesse.

My Sister's Keeper is my favorite book because the characters are relatable and it has sarcastic dialogue. It's also ingeniously plotted so that it raises questions about controversial issues like relationships between siblings and couples, family courts, test-tube babies and control over one's body. The book was intense and it helped me realize that I'm not the only one who can't answer these questions.

reviews: music



BRITNEY SPEARS

CD: **Blackout**

By **Brandy Hernandez**
17, HAWTHORNE ACADEMY

I've always been a Britney Spears fan but I didn't think I was going to like her new album *Blackout*. I thought she was going to make a lame CD because her life wasn't going good. I was wrong.

The album is great. The beats are funky and up to date. "Gimme More" is one of those club songs that get the dancing mood started when you're at a party.

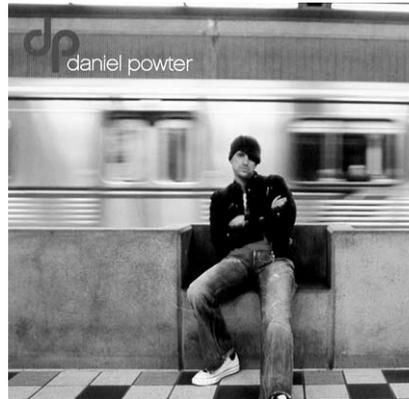
Blackout is more autobiographical than her other albums. In "Why Should I Be Sad," one of my favorite songs because the lyrics are true, she sings about her ex-husband Kevin, "Even got the drop Ferrari/ Filled up our garage for you." She's saying why should she be sad about their breakup because he was just using her.

My other favorite song is "Piece of Me" because she tells everybody off—the paparazzi, Kevin—saying this is who she is, what are you going to do? I love her attitude. "I'm Miss bad media karma/ Another day another drama/ Guess I can't see the harm/ In working and being a mama/ And with a kid on my arm I'm still an exceptional earner/ And you want a piece of me?"

There are slower songs too. My favorite of these is "Heaven on Earth." The techno beat in the beginning reminds me of Marilyn Manson, who I like. She talks along with the beat, like she's out of breath. "Your touch/ Your taste/ Your breath/ Your face ... You're heaven on earth."

I like *Blackout* better than Britney's other albums. It shows she can still make good music despite what she's going through.

She tells everybody off, saying this is who she is, what are you going to do?



DANIEL POWTER

CD: **Daniel Powter**

By **Crystal Hua**
17, GABRIELINO HS (SAN GABRIEL)

Most of the songs on Daniel Powter's wonderful, self-titled CD offer delightfully catchy beats and flowing lyrics that I keep replaying in my head.

The opening track, "Song 6," showcases Powter's spectacular songwriting talent as well as his smooth voice, which beckons you to "lie in the sun." And it keeps getting better—just wait until you hear the songs "Free Loop" and "Bad Day," which add jazzy piano melodies, providing the perfect fix for pop junkies.

"Bad Day," which was his biggest hit, and was used as the goodbye song on *American Idol* a few seasons ago, is the highlight of the album because of the memorable music and meaningful lyrics. It feels as though Powter uses his songs to show how "you fall into pieces" but can "sing a sad song to turn it around," too.

Like many great albums there are tracks that sound out of place, like the three songs following "Bad Day." I remember hearing a sudden jump in volume of Powter's vocals on his song "Suspect" when he sings about some "funky '65." Listeners will wonder what he's singing about, because the words become hard to understand after that line. Powter continues in the same high-pitched voice on "Jimmy Gets High," causing his cool voice to screech, making me reach quickly for the fast forward button.

Despite this somewhat minor hiccup in the middle, the CD is a great beginning to the Canadian singer's career.

The opening track showcases Powter's spectacular songwriting talent as well as his smooth voice.



JAY-Z

CD: **American Gangster**

By **Malcolm Parker**
16, MAYFAIR HS (LAKEWOOD)

Jay-Z's latest, *American Gangster*, is inspired by the blockbuster movie *American Gangster* and like the movie, the album has its emotional highs and lows. Jay-Z's vision of an "American Gangster" is an emotional one.

In the intense "Pray" the American gangster Jay-Z portrays is distressed at the gangster life he feels he didn't want. "Everything I seen made me everything I am/ I didn't choose this life/ this life chose me."

Clearly, there is much more to his lifestyle than getting bling, money, girls and slinging drugs. These are aspects of Jay-Z's album but it is not what defines the music. What dominates *American Gangster* is his compelling honesty. On "No Hook" he admits "That the streets was my second home/ Since I never got my dad back." Jay-Z doesn't express his emotions in an overbearing way either; he rhymes as if he's narrating his own life. Unlike most rappers who rely on production to convey the feeling of a song, Jay-Z does the opposite on this CD. On "No Hook" he harshly states that "This is not for commercial usage/ Please don't categorize this as music/ I'm more Frank Lucas than Ludacris."

The exciting thing about the album is not only how Jay-Z redefines the idea of a gangster but how he humanizes the image of the gangster. On *American Gangster* Jay-Z presents the reality of the streets without any compromise.

In the intense 'Pray' the American gangster Jay-Z portrays is distressed at the gangster life he feels he didn't want.



L.A. youth

SUMMER WORKSHOP

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

To apply, you must be a Los Angeles County teen aged 15-18 attending high school in the area. No journalism experience is required, but you must have an interest in writing for L.A. Youth to participate. The workshop is unpaid. Public high school students will be given preference. Apply early, because a limited number of spaces are available. If you have questions, call (323) 938-9194.

Expectations:

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

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

- You must attend group meetings at the L.A. Youth office every Wednesday from 2 to 5 p.m. from July 9 to August 13. You also must arrange weekly two-hour individual meetings with your editor. The first group meeting will be held at 2 p.m. on Wednesday, July 9, 2008.

How to apply:

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

The application deadline is **Friday, June 6, 2008**.

Application for the L.A. Youth summer writing workshop

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

ZIP CODE _____

HOME PHONE _____

E-MAIL ADDRESS _____

SCHOOL _____

GRADE YOU WILL ENTER IN SEPTEMBER _____

DATE OF BIRTH ____ - ____ - ____

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

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