

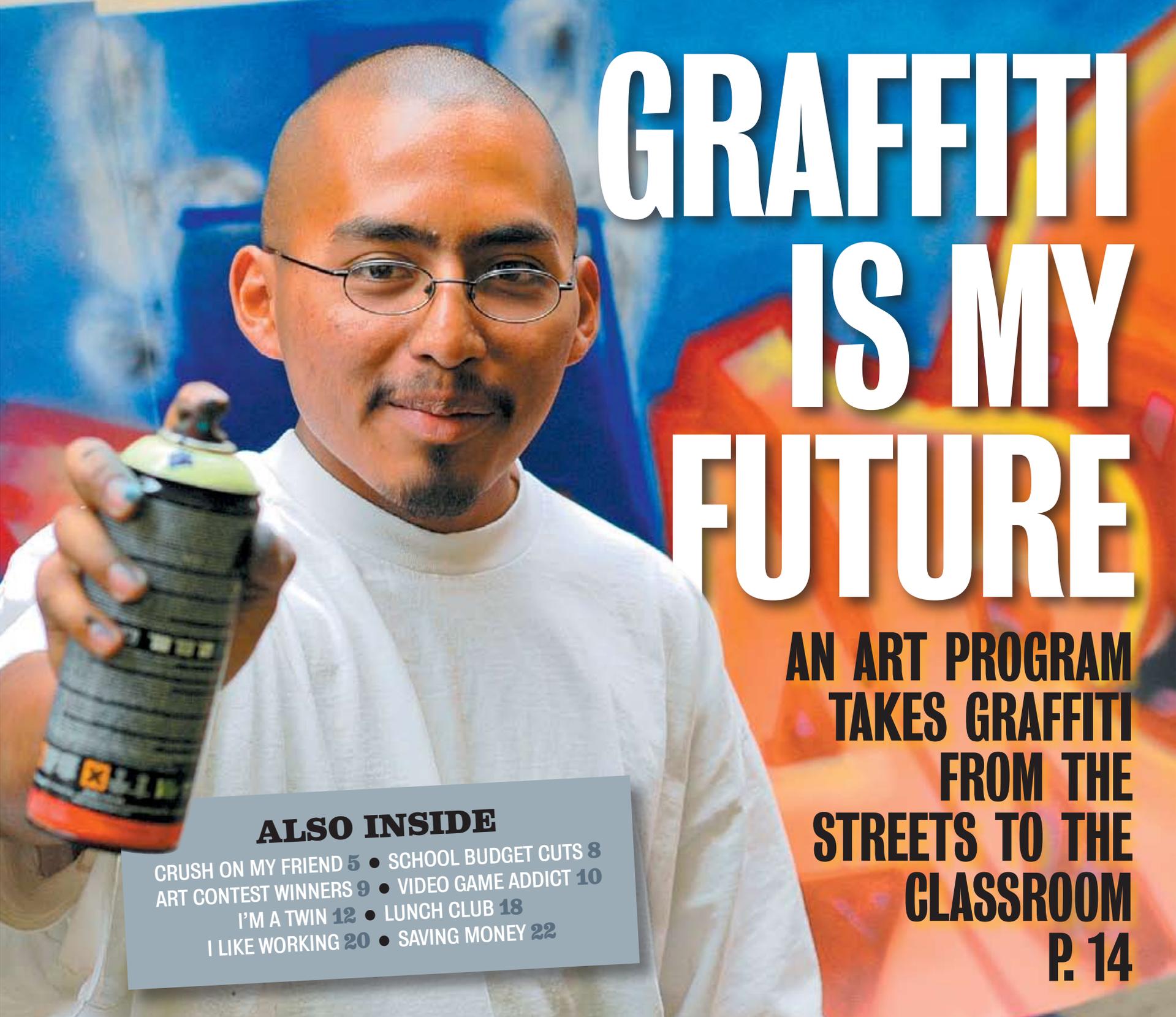
20

YEARS OLD AND STILL GROWING UP!

L.A. youth

MAY-JUNE 2008
WWW.LAYOUTH.COM

the newspaper by and about teens



GRAFFITI IS MY FUTURE

AN ART PROGRAM
TAKES GRAFFITI
FROM THE
STREETS TO THE
CLASSROOM
P. 14

ALSO INSIDE

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About L.A. Youth

How did L.A. Youth start?

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

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L.A. youth

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mail

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

I RAN AWAY

As I was reading the article "Anywhere but home" I realized how similar my life is to the author's. I also have problems with my family because my dad is very strict and my mom is not the type you can sit and talk to. I sometimes think of running away but after reading this article and seeing what types of problems the author got into, I changed my mind. I really enjoyed reading this article because I can feel her pain and relate to it. It has helped me change my mind about my life. I'm glad I have my best friend to talk to about my problems.

*Diana Akseralyan
North Hollywood HS*

The article "Anywhere but home" really stood out from the rest of the articles. I was really into this article and felt that reading it once wasn't enough! I could easily connect with the author because I could see myself in her shoes. I think that I have a complicated life as well, but after reading this article I realized that there are people who are in worse situations. Even though I don't have a "perfect" life, this article made me look more deeply into it.

*Izabel Kurtoglanyan
Wilson MS (Glendale)*

It really touched me to know that this person faced

many challenges, obstacles and struggles. This article is really heart-warming because she explains how the world is tough when you're out there alone. It shows how running away can't solve your problems, but hopefully talking to an adult will. I am glad she decided to make a change after being placed in a placement. Now she has someone to confide in, which is important so she can get help or advice.

*Cindy Valladares
Cochran MS*

This article was very interesting. I, too, sometimes think about running away, but I forget about it the next day. There are times when I think running away will solve my problems but then I know the only way to deal with problems is by facing them.

*Raul Pizano
East Valley HS
(North Hollywood)*

I really connected to the article "Anywhere but home." There have been times when I've gotten into huge arguments with my parents and I childishly thought about running away and living in the park or something ludicrous like that. When I read the article about this young lady I thought, "Wow, I am lucky." I also think that this article is good for teens who get mad at their parents for dumb fights that might end the next day and think of running away. There is always a dark side to running away.

*Tigran Ghukasyan
Wilson MS*

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Send your letters to L.A. Youth



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MAY-JUNE 2008



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mail

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MY FIRST DATE

I think the article "My first date" helps because not everyone knows what to do on the first date. Stacey's tips will really help in the future. I remember my first date. If I would have read this article it would have helped to me think it through.

Ana Karen Esquivel
East Valley HS

This article reminded me of my first date so much. We acted just like they did and he was the most nervous. He had never kissed a girl before and thought I was going to kiss him on the lips and I went closer and kissed him on the cheek. We didn't kiss on the lips until the third date. That's when we thought we were in love; you know the little teenage thing.

Whitney Batcher
Cochran MS

I like the article "My first date" because it's really cool that their parents let them go out to the movies. What I learned from this article is not to get nervous when you're talking to girls. It will also be nice if you offer them a drink or some ice cream. Thank you for sharing your article with us because we can

learn from mistakes and I learned a lot.

Josue Prado
Cochran MS

This was a good article. If I was on my first date I'd be nervous like the guy because I would probably barely know the girl. At the same time I'll be a man and try not to be nervous because girls don't like guys acting that way. They want a man not a kid!

Martin Lopez
East Valley HS

TOLERANCE FOR GAYS AT SCHOOL

When I was reading the article "Is your school accepting of gay students?" I was shocked. I have a few friends who are gay or lesbian. What really bothers me is how there would always be someone who would be so immature to start calling them names. Even when we would go up to them and ask them politely to stop, they would just laugh at us. A few of my friends are used to it but I say getting judged and picked on for who you are is nothing to get used to.

Katherine Salvari
East Valley HS

I really enjoyed this article even though I'm not gay. I knew a boy at my old school who was gay. People used to make fun of me because I used to hang around him every day. They used to say, "You are going to turn gay." So I'm just saying if you see someone who is gay, don't judge, make fun of them or fight with them just because they're gay.

Ryan Pool
Cochran MS

MY BROTHER IN IRAQ

I think that Brandy is right about the war. It is stupid and unnecessary. I really don't get why we're still at war. It is costing many lives. I think that if one of my family members went to war I would be very depressed because they could die any day and for a stupid reason. Although if I don't have the grades to go to college I might take the Army into consideration.

Oscar Amezcua
East Valley HS

My favorite article is "My brother in Iraq" because my dad is in Iraq. My story is very similar to Brandy's because she talks about how she has to e-mail her brother on MySpace and anxiously

wait for him to reply. It's the same situation for me. My dad has been in Iraq for six months. Brandy is very lucky that her brother came back home safely.

Genesis Stewart
Cochran MS

I have an uncle and a friend in Iraq. Sometimes I feel the same as Brandy. I wonder where they are, what they are doing and if they are OK. I think the war is bad because people are getting killed and their families are sad and get worried about them. War is not the answer and it should stop!

Ismael Sanchez
Cochran MS

FIGHTING CANCER

By reading "A cause close to my heart" I learned about a disease that I didn't know existed and even learned about someone who actually started a foundation and went a long way to help a cause. I never thought a teen would actually take the time to start a foundation but I was wrong. I guess all teens have the potential to do anything, especially to start a foundation or help the sick.

Tiffany Orrego
East Valley HS

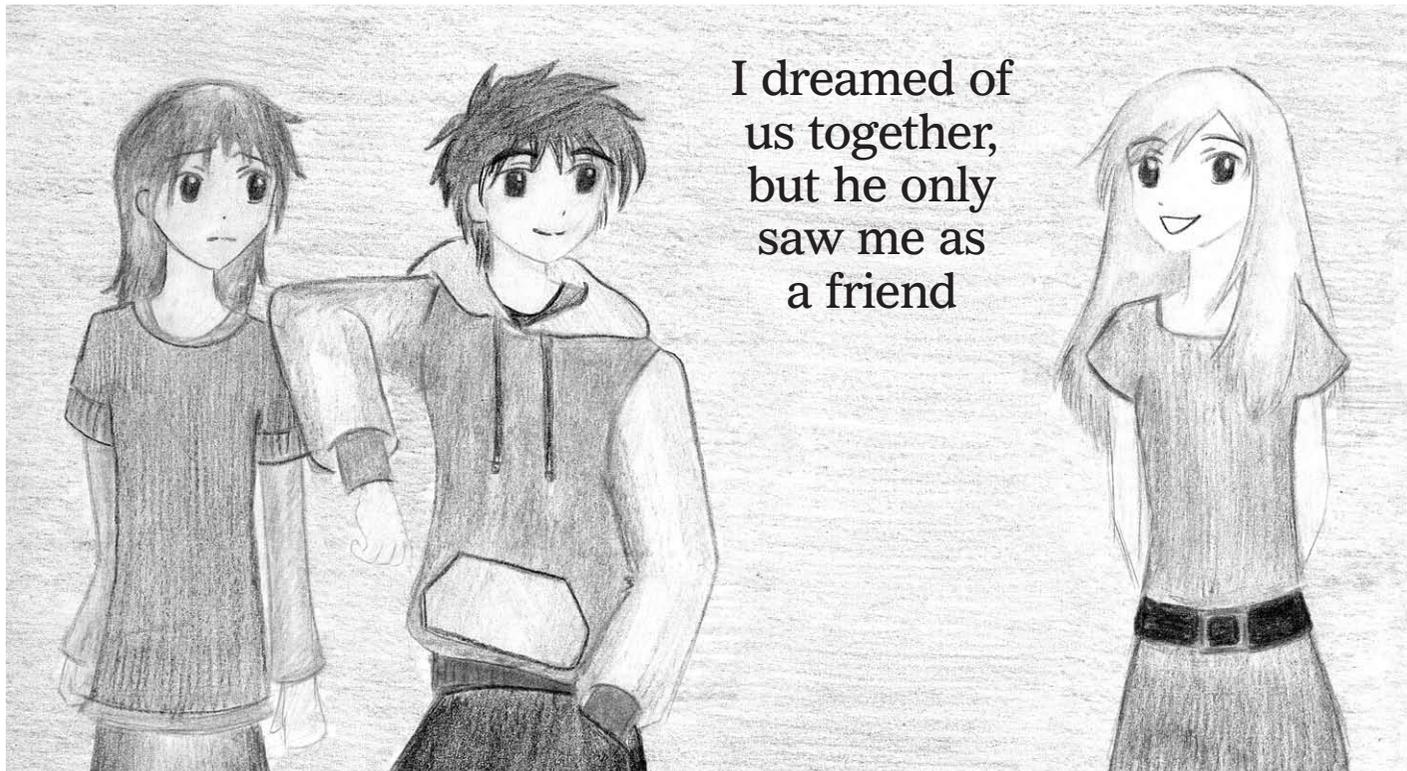
The screenshot shows the L.A. Youth website interface. At the top, there's a navigation menu with links like 'HOME', 'ABOUT US', 'NEWS BOARD', 'ENTERTAINMENT', 'TEEN STAFF', 'PARENTS', 'MEDIA', 'ADVERTISERS', 'SEARCH ARCHIVES', 'GET CONNECTED', and 'VIDEO'. Below the menu, there's a search bar and a 'NEWS BOARD COVER STORY' section. The main content area features an article titled 'MY FIRST DATE' with a photo of a couple. To the right, there's a 'teenspoll' section with a poll question: 'What is the most common risk tee drivers take?'. The poll options include: Speeding, Talking on phone or texting while driving, Just talking to friends in the car, Driver and/or passenger goofing off, Racing other cars, Play music too loudly in the car, and Pack way too many in the car. There are also 'VIEW RESULTS' and 'Get Connected' buttons.

STAY CONNECTED THIS SUMMER AT LAYOUTH.COM

What are you doing this summer? Our website, www.layouth.com, can help you decide what movies to see, suggest good restaurants to try and recommend books to read, and also keep you informed about news that is important to teens.

To make sure you're alerted when new stuff gets posted on our website, go to www.layouth.com and register. Registration subscribes you to an e-mail list alerting you when new stories, reviews and polls are posted on layouth.com. Your e-mail address will not be shared with anyone.

'Just friends' forever



I dreamed of us together, but he only saw me as a friend

ILLUSTRATION BY CECILIA CHO, 16, BURBANK HS

By Michelle Paik

16, PALOS VERDES PENINSULA HS

About two years ago, I started hanging out with a boy who had been dating one of my friends. He was cute (perfect teeth, adorable dimple) and funny. I was surprised how giddy I felt when they broke up. I invited him to come along whenever I hung out with friends and took every chance to talk to him. After a month of hanging out at the beach, watching movies and talking on the phone, I fell hard for his smile and fun personality.

My hopes were high. He called at least once, if not three times, every day. My friends would tease me, "He totally likes you!" I loved the way he looked in a plain T-shirt playing with his baseball, and seeing him act like a total geek obsessing over the computer game Counter-Strike and his favorite anime, Naruto, was just too cute. Little did I know, I had set myself up for a trip to the hell of relationships, the "friend zone."

The friend zone is that gray area of relationships where the guy or girl you're attracted to fails to see you as anything more than a friend. It is a misconception that the friend zone is only for men. People seem to assume that because guys are usually the ones who ask the girl out, they face the risk of heartbreak and rejection that we girls don't have to worry about. But we have all been its victims.

The first stage of the friend zone is denial.

As we got closer, he started to ask me for advice about girls. On the phone he would say, "Oh man, I just farted." Are you serious? I'm a girl too, can't you hold back a

little? I convinced myself that he mentioned girls to make himself seem unavailable, and therefore more desirable. I decided that only because he felt so comfortable with me did he openly proclaim his bodily functions.

The next stage of the friend zone is misinterpretation of their caring actions.

In January, winter formal had the entire school excited. One by one my friends were all finding dates and I desperately hoped he would ask me. One day while chatting online, my prayers were answered—kind of. A message from him popped up on the screen: hey. After waiting a few moments (I didn't want to seem like I had been waiting for him), I answered back with a casual: hey wsup? He said: I need to ask you something. Then I saw the words I had been waiting for: will you go to winter formal with me?

MAYBE HE DID LIKE ME

Not wanting to sound too eager, I told him that if he brought me a Rice Krispies Treat I would go with him. The next day at school he tapped me on the shoulder. I turned around and saw him holding a box of about 30 assorted Rice Krispies Treats. I was so excited I got dizzy and I could barely say "thank you."

Preparing for winter formal was like a dream. He called to ask what color dress I was going to wear, so he could pick a matching bowtie. He asked what color corsage would match me best and how many flowers I wanted. I felt as if I were his girlfriend.

The dance was a blast, although not exactly what I had imagined. He mostly stuck with his guy friends. At the first slow song I waited for him to ask me to dance, but he

ended up getting a soda. After four more slow songs, I saw he had no intention of asking me. The last slow song was "Irreplaceable" by Beyoncé. We watched as our friends paired up to dance until one of our friends nudged him. "Why don't you guys dance?" I pretended to fix something on my dress. He laughed and said, "Well, if she wants to." My mind went "YEAH!" but I just laughed trying to seem "whatever" about it. Eventually our friend forced us to dance, and at that point all the disappointment I had experienced earlier was forgotten. My cheeks turned bright red at having him hold me. I turned my face to the side hoping none of our friends would notice.

The last stage of the friend zone is enlightenment. You realize you are in the friend zone and you're never getting out.

After the dance I waited for weeks for him to ask me out. Looking back, I realize that the girls he would have asked to the dance had already been asked, and that I was his closest female friend. If he had truly been interested in me, he would have known better than to ask me online.

I watched with envy as he flirted with pretty girls. I noticed how hard he tried to impress them, but around me he would burp and tell stupid jokes. If I was appealing enough to

be friends with, why wasn't I appealing enough to like? I made him laugh and we had fun together, so what was missing? After a while I understood. I had guy friends who I loved hanging out with. I would never consider dating one of them. To him I was his friend, never a girl.

I gave up because I knew there was little hope of success. A guy had liked one of my close friends for four years before he recognized that he was nothing more to her than a friend. I debated telling him how I felt many times, but I didn't want to lose our friendship.

To all those friend-zoners, my advice is to decide whether you appreciate the person more as a friend or as a love interest. If you choose the former, keep what you have because finding a good friend is rare. If you choose the latter, try telling them; don't get ignored as just a friend.

It took me four months to get over him. I forced myself to see him less often and I slowly forgot my feelings. That crush is a distant memory now, and other guys have come and gone since then. I don't even feel embarrassed to share his name: Brandon. It's all out there now. I've survived the friend zone.



Michelle says not to worry if your friend doesn't magically realize you are The One, like in the movies. Those fairytale endings are fake.

He doesn't scare me anymore

Years after my uncle raped me, I found the strength to tell

Author's Name Withheld

Sometimes, I can't believe I'm alive. After being raped by my uncle and neglected by my family, I had no idea how I would make it through.

When I was younger, I moved around from family member to family member because my mom was in and out of jail. When I was 10 I moved in with my aunt. My older brother and my mother also lived there. I didn't expect it to be a happy family reunion because I barely knew that side of the family. It was just another move to me.

A month after I moved in my uncle (my mom's brother) came home from jail. When I was 7 he had introduced me to crack cocaine. He didn't tell me that it was a drug, he just said to inhale then exhale. I had no idea what was going on. I liked how it relaxed my body and numbed me. I thought nothing was wrong with it because he was family and I didn't think he'd do anything to hurt me.

Now he was back and so was the cocaine. At first he was the nicest uncle on earth. He bought me all types of Hot Cheetos and Now and Later. Then one day I was chilling in my bedroom when he came in and asked, "Do you want to have those feelings again?" I told him that I didn't mind. He melted white rocks into a pipe. I smoked it and was lost in my world. I felt so far away from myself and I liked it.

I was only 10. I didn't know, but I was becoming addicted. I felt a rush for it, like I had to have it and I couldn't focus on anything else besides the drug. Whenever he came to give me some, it was like teasing a dog with a steak. It had gotten that bad. One night he made sure that I was totally high and out of it. My aunt was in her room, two doors down. He pulled me onto the floor in front of the couch and started to have sex with me. I started to cry. He told me to shut up and I tried but I couldn't stand the pain. He raped me. I yelled even louder and he stopped.

I took a bath to clean myself up because I was bleeding between my legs. I went to bed with an irritated, painful feeling between my legs. I tossed and turned that night wondering if I was pregnant or not. I was scared and I felt dirty.

The next day my uncle gave me more drugs than usual and I was not in control. He raped me again. I was scared. It happened almost every day. My mom was always out and my brother and my aunt were usually at work. I felt as if no one was there to help me and I had no choice but to do what my uncle said. He told me that if I told my brother or my mother, he would hurt them and me.

On Sundays I still went to church with my grandmother (my father's mother). One Sunday, my uncle



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

raped me just before the church van came to take me to church. I threatened him that I would tell my family that day at church. He pulled out his gun and said if I did he would kill me. I was terrified. I believed him because I knew he was crazy since he was raping me. And since my uncle was in a gang I knew it would be easy for him to hurt me.

After six months I told my uncle that I wanted him to stop. I told him I just wanted the drugs. He said OK. I was surprised. Maybe he agreed because he was tired of raping me too. Then I understood why he would give me drugs. It was because he knew that when I was high and out of it, he would have an opportunity to have sex with me. I think he stopped because he knew I was at the point that it didn't matter what he said anymore, that I would tell someone regardless of what he was going to do.

The next week I went to school and talked to my fifth grade teacher. I was too afraid to tell him about what my uncle had done to me. If I told my teacher, I didn't know what my uncle would do. So I told my teacher that I was being neglected. I didn't even know what "neglected" meant. I just knew it was bad. I told him no one was taking care of me at home, that there wasn't always food in the house and I mostly only ate at school. He sent me to the counselor's office. I didn't know what would happen, but I wanted someone to know something was wrong.

A couple of days passed and a social worker came to my house. The social worker told me to pack enough clothes for four days and I moved to my first foster home.

The foster care system saved my life. If I would have stayed I think my uncle would have killed me or that I would have overdosed because I was addicted. But leaving didn't make my life all better. I wanted to be happy to be away from my uncle, but I was still scared because I wasn't sure if he was going to come and find me.

YEARS OF SILENCE

The secret was locked inside of me. There were many times when I could have told someone about what my uncle did to me, but I didn't. I wasn't ashamed or embarrassed or feeling like I'd done something wrong. I was scared of my uncle coming after me.

After living in three foster homes in three years, I moved to a group home when I was 14. I was slowly starting to open up. I told my therapist about my uncle and I also told the girls in my group home who had been through the same thing. One night the staff members at the group home took us to see a Kirk Franklin gospel concert. Franklin asked the audience if we needed to forgive someone or needed to ask for forgiveness. I thought of my uncle and what he had done to me. I used to tell the girls in my group home that I wanted to kill him for what he did. I knelt down at the altar and prayed, silently asking God to forgive him. I cried because I knew that forgiveness was the right thing to do. I realized that even though he had hurt me it wasn't my place to punish him. Even though I forgave my uncle for what he did, I still wished he would pay for the crime. I believed that God would take care of my uncle's justice, and I didn't worry about it anymore.

When I was 16, I went to visit my mother at my aunt's house because I hadn't seen her in a while. I thought my uncle might be there, but I wasn't intimidated because I didn't think he'd do anything while my mom was there.

I realized that even though he had hurt me it wasn't my place to punish him. Even though I forgave my uncle for what he did, I still wished he would pay for the crime. I believed that God would take care of my uncle's justice.

I told her I was a lesbian but I didn't plan on telling her about my uncle raping me. While asking about my sexuality she asked if a guy had done something to me when I was younger. (I guess she thought me being a lesbian was a result of something that happened to me as a child.) I told her yes. My mother started to name family members. She got to my uncles. When she said his name I stopped her and said yes. She went ballistic and started screaming out his name.

He was in the back of the house where he stayed. He came in and my mother confronted him. It was weird to see him again because he was acting all cool like he'd never raped me. She asked him to confess but he didn't. His face was blank. I think he got scared and I was too. Seeing him again made me wonder if he was going to yell at me or hit me. I couldn't understand why he lied. But in the end, he didn't lay a hand on me.

I was proud of myself because I had the courage to tell my mom. It felt good to see my mom stand up for me. She had never done that before and I was surprised.

Last summer, almost a year after the confrontation with my uncle, I was ready to talk to the police because I felt like he couldn't hurt me anymore. I mean, five years had passed and he hadn't hurt me. I went to the police station with my therapist and made a report about my uncle. It went pretty OK. I felt in control. An officer sat me down for a quick interview to get basic information like how old I was, what happened and where. At the end of the interview he told me that I would hear from a detective soon. Three weeks later, a detective called to schedule another interview. I asked my assistant principal to go with me because I wanted adult support.

When we got to the police station I was so scared. I knew that this time they would ask me to go into a lot more detail. I started to panic. I had no idea what they were going to ask me. I followed an officer through steel doors into a room with a small table with two

chairs on one side and one on the other. Two officers sat in the chairs across from me and asked questions for about 20 minutes. Did you have oral sex with him? Did he return it to you? Did he penetrate? What did the crack look like? The questions shocked me a little because they were so explicit. I didn't have trouble answering and did so in a clear voice. I wondered if they would ever prosecute my uncle. I wanted him to get locked up.

I was relieved that I finally got it out and told the police. Afterward, I was able to start telling my friends. I felt free and able to share my story.

I WANTED TO HELP OTHERS

My best friend asked me to write a poem about being raped for a program at the women's center where she worked. I wanted to be open about being sexually abused. I wanted this poem to really help someone out there having the same problem.

The day I was to present it, I broke down in tears at school. I realized that this had really happened to me. I had separated it from myself as if it never happened to me. I couldn't believe I really went through that. It felt like it had happened to someone else. I wanted to be a person who was in control of my body and the girl I used to be wasn't because I didn't have control over what my uncle did to me.

When I got to the women's center I was so nervous about speaking in front of people who didn't know anything about me. When it was time for me to read my poem, my stomach dropped. It was completely quiet. I read, "I now believe in Strength not weakness, Love not hate, Freedom not captivity. I couldn't smile then, because I couldn't find who I was. But I smile now because the past made me who I am now and has made me a better and wiser person for the Future." When I finished, there was thunderous applause and a shiver of joy went through my body. I was done. I shared it with the public and I felt that I could share with anyone after that. I felt like I was reaching out to someone else who had been through what I'd been through. I realized that I was a victim but that doesn't prevent me from succeeding.

It would be OK if the police don't ever get my uncle. I'm not afraid anymore. It's taken a long time for me to get over this, but I thank God I had the strength to do it.

WHERE TO TURN

If you've been a victim of rape, sexual assault or domestic violence, you can get support and referrals to counseling centers by contacting:

Los Angeles County Rape & Battering Hotline (24/7)
(310) 392-8381
www.peaceoverviolence.org

National Sexual Assault Hotline (24/7)
(800) 656-HOPE (4673)

Find a rape crisis center in your area at this website:
www.centers.rainn.org

Don't cut our education

L.A. Youth writers say the state budget problems could mean larger classes and less money for programs at their schools

The governor says he has to cut funds from schools because the state faces a \$15.2 billion budget deficit, meaning it has more expenses than money to pay for them. This means school districts will get less money than they need to pay for teacher salaries, classroom supplies and programs. L.A. Youth writers interviewed their principals and teachers to find out how their schools plan to deal with the proposed budget cuts.

Next school year Kennedy High School will have six or seven teachers retiring. Principal Clark said, "We will replace some." That means more classes will become overcrowded, but the principal doesn't know by how much yet. One thing is for sure, Kennedy doesn't need any fewer teachers. This year the average class size was 32 students. The classes with the good teachers are filled up. In my algebra class, there are more than 40 students. I have no desk. I sit in a chair off to the side. I feel like a vulture sometimes. The bell rings and I think, "Who's absent? Can I get an empty desk?" Next year, will I even have a chair? I'm worried.

To see if supplies would take a hard hit, I interviewed teachers with classes that use a lot of material. Woodshop instructor Mr. Hazard, whose popular class runs all six periods, said the principal warned him that "this year was semi-bad but next year it's extreme bad." The class requires students to pay a lab fee but that alone cannot cover all the essentials. Mr. Hazard said there wouldn't be money for glues, nails or screws without the school's aid, and the old equipment won't be replaced.

My school is recognized for its architecture magnet program. Mr. Kahlenberg, the architecture teacher, said next year he's not getting the \$1,500 he usually gets for supplies like paper and pencils. He will have to impose a lab fee for the first time and is searching for donations.

—**Javier Rodriguez**, 16, KENNEDY HS (GRANADA HILLS)

A few months ago rumors began to spread about departments, courses and teachers being cut at Beverly Hills High School. I heard about the potential cut of the French department and that my dance company's teacher would be fired and the program might be eliminated. Everything that excited me about going to school was rumored to be gone and I was upset.

It felt like the Beverly Hills school board didn't understand what was important to the students. I made a speech at the board meeting in February defending the dance and French programs. More than 100 students showed up and defended their passions too.

Due to the large number of students, parents and teachers at the meeting, the French department has been saved. However, our dance company still doesn't have a teacher. According to Mr. Bushée, a chemistry



ILLUSTRATION BY SARAH EVANS, 17, TEMPLE CITY HS

teacher and the president of the teacher's union, the board has decided to cut an art teacher, two history teachers and one P.E. teacher at my school next year.

I know that the board has to make cuts. It's not the cuts that are going to hurt our schools, but what they choose to cut. I feel as though teachers are more important than administrators. Although administrators are essential, we can survive with a few less. By cutting teachers you are cutting a student's educational potential, and that is unacceptable.

—**Liana Gergely**, 15, BEVERLY HILLS HS

Class sizes at Leuzinger High School have already been affected. Classes have gone from an average of 36 students to an average of 41. Mr. Divinagracia, an instructional coach for teachers at Leuzinger, said this was done at the start of this semester to prepare for the budget cuts. Long-term substitutes were fired and their students were put into other classes. I think the district had not taken into consideration how hard teaching a class of 36 students was, let alone teaching 41.

When I spoke to Ms. Carriaga, an English teacher, she agreed that the frustration among teachers and students has gone up. With 40 students, a teacher is spending more time managing the classroom rather than

teaching, she said.

For students who care (like me), more students in class means we learn less. Even I find it hard not to talk with others when everyone else is talking.

Last month, a group of 30 students, led by Ms. Carriaga, met to find ways to stop the budget cuts. I hadn't seen the cuts as a big deal, but after speaking with her I saw that I too needed to speak up to protect education.

The budget cuts mean Leuzinger will never be able to grow out of the negative stereotypes that label us a "dumb school" full of students who don't care.

—**Solange Rubio**, 17, LEUZINGER HS (LAWNDALE)

Our school had a Budget Cut Awareness Day in mid-April, during which all students and staff were asked to wear red, not just to represent our school, but all the schools that are going to be affected.

The Leadership Committee (a group of students at our school) also asked the English teachers to have their students write letters to Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger protesting the cuts. In my letter, I ranted about how the budget cuts could mean extracurriculars would be cut and we wouldn't have field trips to places like the California Science Center and those are really important.

"It is a travesty of justice for the governor to take this money away," our principal, Mr. Weinberg, said. "It shows that he doesn't care about the students' education in LAUSD."

He said he didn't think teachers would be laid off. But he added that there would be fewer extracurricular activities and field trips.

Just because the state has a deficit doesn't mean the government has to take away money from something as important as education.

—**Stacey Avnes**, 13, SHERMAN OAKS CENTER FOR ENRICHED STUDIES

Many departments at Warren High School are facing hard times. My school's athletic director told me that my school district has told certain departments that they cannot spend any more money this year.

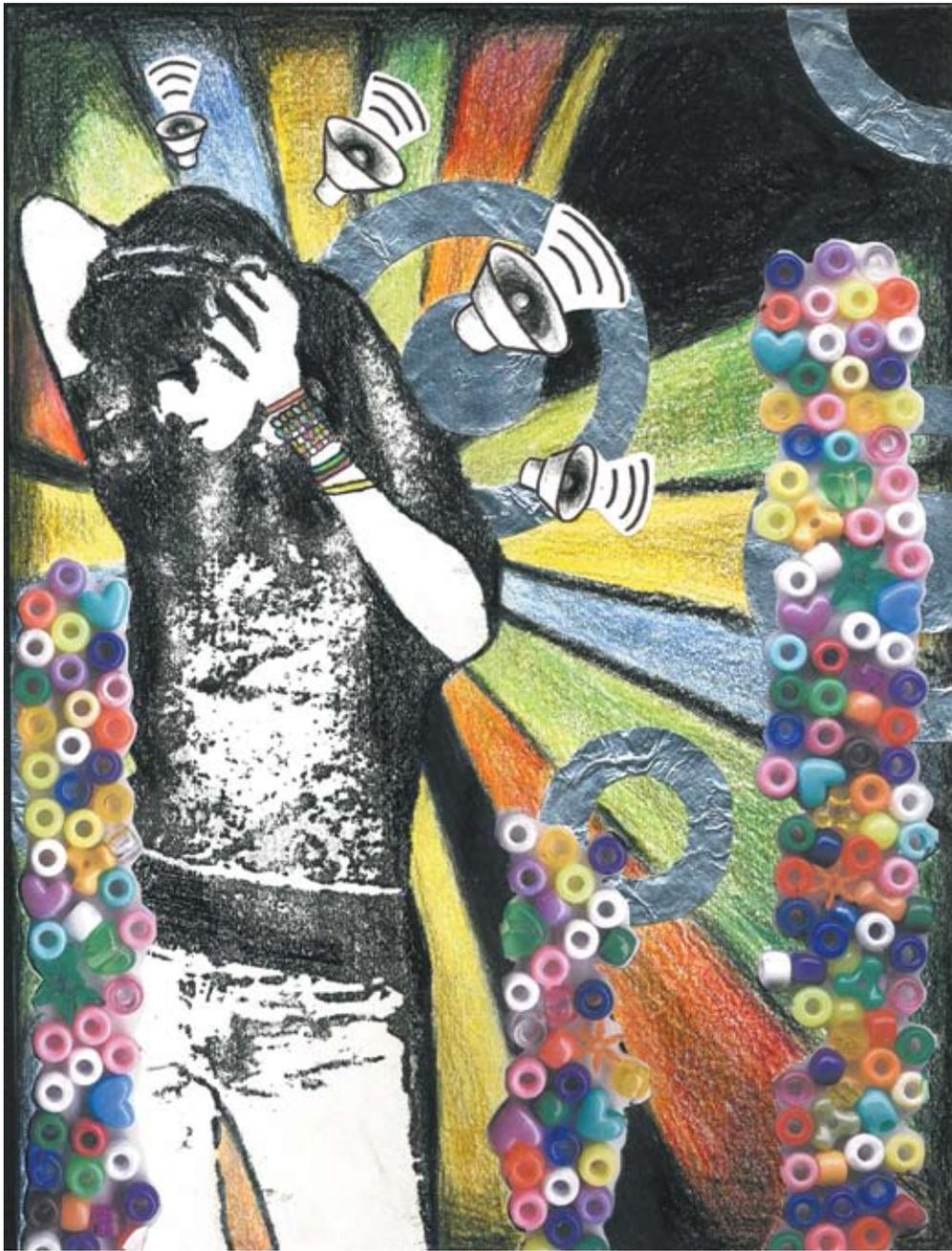
During a school board meeting in April, the superintendent said that many extracurricular activities could be cut next year, including art, music and athletics, according to the Downey Patriot, our local newspaper. And if a department isn't eliminated, then it could be reduced.

The Downey Unified school board has held many meetings to address the budget issue and ways to prepare for the worst-case scenario, which could include closing an elementary school, the superintendent said in the same article. When I asked my principal about the budget, he said that at this point none of these cuts are definite.

—**Britawnya Craft**, 17, WARREN HS (DOWNEY)

Art contest winners: My culture

The L.A. Youth teen staff chose these images as the winners of our annual art contest. The theme “My culture” could express the artist’s ethnicity or race. But it could also express who they are and how they identify themselves in other ways, such as their hobbies, interests or what they’re passionate about. The first-place winner received \$75 and the second- and third-place winners received \$50. Please visit www.layouth.com to see the images that won honorable mention.



FIRST PLACE: *Modern Teen Rave Culture*
Carol Liao, 17, Palisades Charter HS
Teacher: Susan Curren



SECOND PLACE
Emily McPeek, 16, Sherman Oaks Center for Enriched Studies
Teacher: Sheree Woods



THIRD PLACE
Natasha P. Nguyen, 14, South El Monte HS
Teacher: Margaret McCray

Just one more game

I couldn't stop playing video games, even though I was almost failing school

By **Cameron Warfield**
13, WILDWOOD SCHOOL

I love playing video games because I get to do things I could never do in real life, like jump off a 20-story building or punch it to the ground. I love sports games such as Madden NFL and NBA Live and online games like Zwok and World of Warcraft.

Sports games are fun because you can build your own franchise and make it a dynasty, drafting players, signing free agents and winning the Super Bowl. Online games are fun because I can play against people all over the world.

If I'm in the middle of a game and my parents say it's time for dinner, I say "no" and keep on playing. Then I have to eat dinner alone. I never thought one of my favorite things would turn into an addiction and almost mess up my life.

I have been playing video games since I was 5. My uncle, who lived with us, was 19 when I was born and has always been a kid at heart. When he was playing I was playing. When I got older, video games were the only thing I could do at home because I didn't have a backyard. So every day when I got home from school I'd play Pokémon Stadium and NFL Quarterback Club on my Nintendo 64. When I was out I would play Knockout Kings and Pokémon Gold on my Game Boy. I thought that everyone was staying up until 1 in the morning playing like I was. I would wait for my parents to go to bed. Then when I saw their light go off, I would sneak upstairs to play in the loft. I even memorized the squeaky spots on the floor so I wouldn't wake up my parents. The games got so intense I couldn't press the off button.

TOO TIRED FOR CLASS

All those late nights made school a blur. By sixth grade I spaced out in class so much I would have no idea what the lesson was about. I'd daydream about games. What if they made a game with people who could fly or be invisible? My teachers talked to my parents because I couldn't pay attention in class and I wasn't doing my work. I was failing. I don't know how many times I was lectured by my parents and people at church about my grades, but I didn't care because I was hooked.

One night I was playing and my PlayStation 2 broke. It sucked! After about two months my dad finally took

the game system to the repair shop. I had time to do extra credit work and I got my grades up to As and Bs.

In seventh grade, I still didn't care about school or doing my homework. My mom didn't know how much I was playing because I was so sneaky.

I got Ds on all my Spanish tests. I was assigned a project to create a timeline of Holocaust events. I didn't have anything ready so I got a timeline off the Internet

My mom always told me I'd get kicked out of my school if I didn't do well but I never believed her.

The hardest thing for an addict is to admit that they have a problem. I had tried to ignore it but I couldn't anymore. I had to do something.

I came up with a plan. Beginning in eighth grade, I could play only on weekends and as long as I wanted except on Sundays. On Sundays I could play until 6 p.m. so that my mind was not stimulated with violence or action. Luckily I had my mom there saying, "Cam stop." Now she lets me monitor myself. Like if I don't have homework, I'll play but I watch the time and stop by 7:30 p.m.

WEEKENDS WERE GAME TIME

I missed my video games during the week but on the weekends I went wild. I'd start playing at 9 or 10 p.m. I put the sleep timer on the TV so it would go off after two hours so when I did finally fall asleep it would automatically turn off. When there was one minute left I'd add another two hours. I'd stay up until 5 a.m. on Saturdays and until 1 a.m. on Sundays, because sometimes I respected the fact that I had church the next morning (but sometimes I didn't).

Now I pay attention in class and my mind is focused on school. I had convinced myself that I was an athlete not a scholar. Now I can see myself going to college, getting a degree, becoming a lawyer, opening up my own restaurant ... even becoming president.

After writing this article I realize that what seemed logical when

I was under the influence sounds outrageous now. It's funny to sit here and admit that wow, I was really addicted to video games. Now I can step away from a game and not be so caught up in it. I still take my PlayStation Portable with me and on the weekends I play Super Smash Bros. Brawl with my friends online. I'm still a gamer but I'm not an addict.

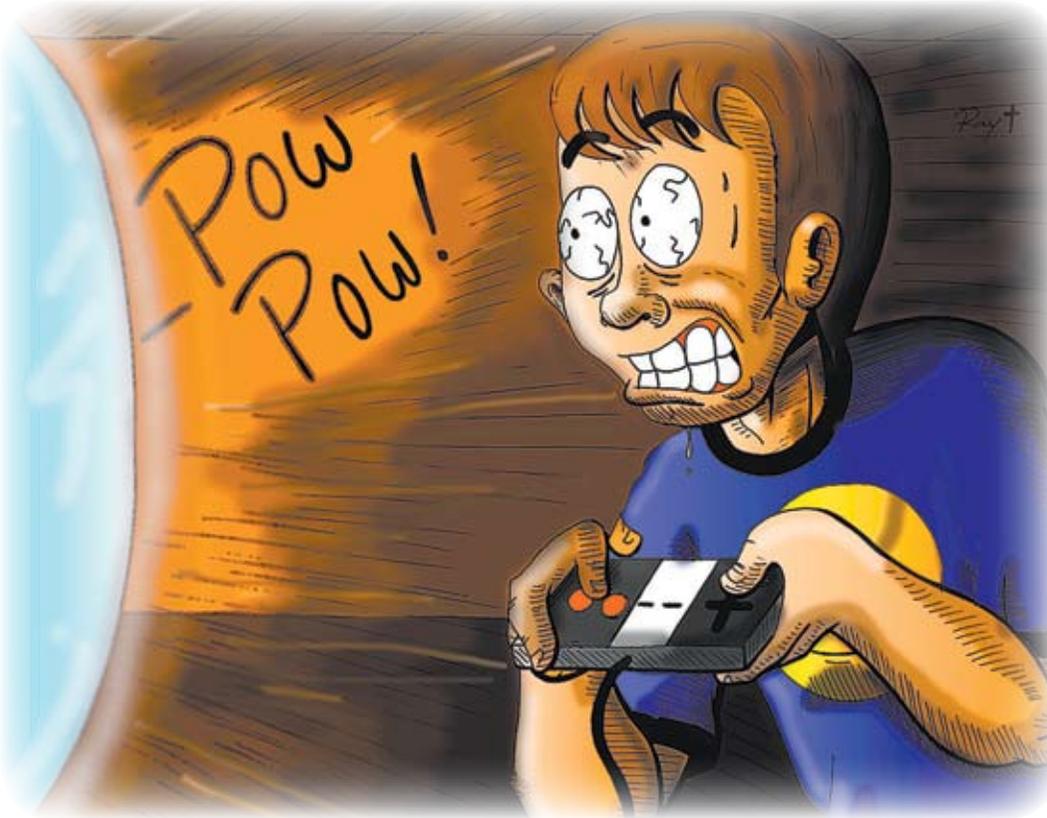


ILLUSTRATION BY RAYMOND CARRILLO, 18, POLYTECHNIC HS (SUN VALLEY)

instead of doing one myself. I got caught. It didn't go on my record, but I still feel bad because I am not a cheater but I acted like one.

Then, the game before the last game of the football season, my coach kicked me off the team for having two Fs and two Ds. I felt so horrible. As captain, I let my team down, but my grades didn't change.

Later in the year, I was grounded with no electronics. I was mad at my mom, but I took my anger out on my work and passed most of my classes. That's when I noticed the pattern—that something at the end of each school year would happen that forced me to stop playing and I would pass.

The final sign for me was when my mom told me that a family friend was kicked out of college because he wasn't doing what he should have been doing. Whoa. He had everything planned out and he got kicked out?



Cameron challenges you to play him online (his Wii number is 8883 8753 2225 2178).



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 age 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

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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

My twin is my best friend

Although sometimes it's hard being my own person, I love sharing my life with my sister

Helen Trejo

18, DOWNTOWN MAGNETS HS

Being a twin isn't as fun as it looks, but I wouldn't have it any other way. My sister, Nidia, and I are always being compared, confused and asked silly questions like, "Who's the evil one?" and "If I hit you, could she feel it?" Lots of people see being a twin as being so lucky since I always have someone to talk to and I never get lonely.

But there's a down side to being a twin too. In a way we've meshed into one person. We look, speak and think alike. We finish each other's sentences. Sometimes when we tell a story, we alternate telling it between pauses. We also speak at the same time, like we're one person. When people say "hi" to us, we say "hi" back at the same time and it's weird even to us. We both like to draw, we like the same TV shows, movies and food, and we share almost everything. We have similar habits like grinding our teeth and we cry when we see the other crying. These similarities are great to have, but it makes it harder for me to stand out as me.

What's special about being a twin is that we're best friends. I know without question that our friendship will last forever because we know each other really well. I don't have to struggle to find a person who appreciates the same things I do since she's by my side most of the time. Her presence comforts me because she makes me think I will never be alone.

I USED TO FOLLOW HER LEAD

Things weren't always this way. When we were younger we were competitive over who learned how to do things first. Unfortunately, I learned how to do everything second since I am the younger one by four minutes. Nidia learned how to tie her shoes first and how to tell her right foot from her left foot first.

My sister used to be the bossy one. She was the "leader" when we played. I didn't care because it was better to play with a bossy sister than to play alone. She once persuaded me to eat her broccoli and hard-boiled egg because she didn't want to. She told me to like yellow instead of pink because she liked the pink Power Ranger and said, "You can't copy me." I felt second best, but when we started school, I started to feel equal to Nidia because it became obvious how much we were alike. I didn't see it before we started school because we seemed like complete opposites at home. When we were in kindergarten we were both good at spelling our names and drawing. Who learned how to do things first didn't matter anymore.

We grew out of our "leader/follower" stage in third grade when Nidia was in an ESL (English as a Second Language) class and I wasn't. She wasn't learning as fast as I was so I tutored her. I taught her how to spell long words like airplane and automobile, and how to subtract. I finally knew what it was like to be the "leader" because I was like her teacher. I felt needed. She was very nice to me when she was vulnerable, but I didn't take advantage because I knew that if she was asking me for help, it was



PHOTO BY NADINE CHOE, 16, NOTRE DAME ACADEMY

Helen (left) and Nidia always study together in Helen's room.

serious and I needed to do my best to help her. We began to see ourselves in each other and we developed a new connection. We became equal.

Going through the same experiences has also brought us closer. In fourth grade we went to the eye doctor together and found out that we both needed glasses. When we were 11 we learned how to ride bikes together and later we developed our artistic skills by learning from each other. She's taught me how to shade and I've taught her how to draw fashion figures. In eighth grade, we both got braces and felt the same pain. By knowing what my sister was feeling I felt like her actual twin. Before I just felt like her sister, but after all we've experienced I feel lucky to have someone to share the same experiences with.

WE PUSH EACH OTHER TO DO BETTER IN SCHOOL

We're still competitive but now it motivates both of us and it doesn't make one feel superior over the other. We have a lot of classes together. At times she gets better grades than me and other times I get better grades. I don't get jealous if I don't get grades as high as my sister, but it pushes me to try harder. To help each other

do better, for example, we read and correct each other's English essays before we turn them in.

At times I worry about Nidia and I growing apart in the future, but we've developed a plan to keep us close. We're going to UC Davis in the fall and we want to pursue careers in the fashion industry. We hope to have our own business someday and I'm sure we will have our own unique ideas to keep us from being the same. This year we are developing completely different collections for our school's annual fashion show. The theme for my collection is mystery and I am using the colors purple, red and black. I'm hoping to show a collection that redefines mystery. My sister's theme is centered on a bumblebee. She is using yellow and black and she hopes to show a collection that is innovative and beautiful.

When we get older and go our separate ways, I won't be terrified of leaving my sister. I want us to live close enough to visit each other every day, but I don't want us to suffocate each other by always being together for the rest of our lives. I want us to continue to share memories, but I don't want her to be in every single one. I love being a twin because I know that as long as she lives, I'll never be alone and she'll always love me back.

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

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

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From Bach to rock

A cool music class has given me the freedom to play U2, Coldplay and Jay-Z on my cello

By **Sam Landsberg**
14, HAMILTON HS

When I was in middle school, I wanted to play rock music on my cello, but I never really got anywhere. I would sit in my living room and try to play simple songs, like “Iron Man” and “Smoke on the Water.” The side of my cello was covered with scratches from playing it with a guitar pick (I now have a new cello). I could figure out little bits of my favorite songs but it wasn’t very satisfying, because I could only get the main riff. I’d give up. It didn’t sound like the song.

I wanted to play more than just the classical pieces my school teachers told me to play. I liked rock—AC/DC, Queen, Led Zeppelin—and that’s what I wanted to play. I was drawn to rock because of its roots. I grew up listening to the blues, jazz and early rock n’ roll, and rock has roots deep in all of these kinds of music.

Then one day my dreams came true when two professional musicians, Robert Anderson and Jacob Szekely, came to my middle school last year and played a mini concert for my orchestra class. Robert plays the violin and Jacob plays the cello. They played like I had never seen anybody play classical instruments. Well, “classical instruments” is a bit of a stretch. Robert was playing a top-of-the-line Jensen electric violin and there was so much equipment and so many cords, that it was mesmerizing. They played with effects and distortion in a way that I thought only guitarists could play. I was sold by about the third note.

Robert and Jacob opened String Project Los Angeles, a studio in West Hollywood for string players to play rock, jazz, funk and hip-hop—almost like the School of Rock for violin, viola, cello and bass. When they were around my age, they wanted to play rock, jazz and funk music on their classical instruments, but they had no way to play the music that really interested them. Bach is great and all, but it can’t possibly be as much fun as Jimi Hendrix or Guns N’ Roses.

I WAS FINALLY ROCKING OUT

My first experience with String Project was a one-day Hendrix class last year. I’ve always loved Hendrix and to play his music myself just seemed divine. We learned “Foxy Lady” by Hendrix. It was an amazing experience. They gave us some background on Hendrix and the sheet music for “Foxy Lady.” They taught us techniques commonly used by guitar players, such as bending—how to slide between notes instead of playing two separate notes to get a different sound. As I sat there with another newcomer, I was surprised at how much I



PHOTO BY NADINE CHOE, 16, NOTRE DAME ACADEMY
Sam concentrates during practice for an upcoming performance.

could do. Just a couple hours later I was jamming to the music of arguably the greatest guitar player ever.

I went back to String Project at the end of the summer for a new weekly class called Alternative String Group, which was even better. The alternative group included teens in middle school and high school. We played “Sweet Child O’ Mine” by Guns N’ Roses, “Yellow” by Coldplay, “My Cherie Amour” by Stevie Wonder and songs by James Brown and Ray Charles. We even got to play a full concert along with some professional guest musicians at one of L.A.’s famous jazz clubs, the Jazz Bakery in Culver City.

A lot of the music is easier than what I play at school in orchestra, but we have to learn how to groove together as a group. Although we’re reading sheet music, we’re able to feel each other’s playing and follow each other even if we take a detour with the song. To sound really good, it takes a lot of work. It took me a while to learn how to do that but now it feels like second nature.

I have learned a completely different way to play and the music isn’t as rigid as orchestra music. There isn’t as much classical technique, but we learn things that any musician who wants to play music besides classical music needs to know. For instance, we learn how to follow the form of a jazz piece, what to do when another musician is soloing and a whole slew of jazz and rock vocabulary. We also get to improvise (making up music as you go). I love improvising. It gives me freedom and it’s really fun. You can’t just play whatever you want though. One rule is that you have to play in the same key as the music.

SHREDDING LIKE MY GUITAR HERO

I returned for the fall semester. We played even more great music including songs by U2 and Jay-Z, and we played “Foxy Lady” by Hendrix again. I got to play a Yamaha electric cello, one of the coolest instruments ever. The electric cello looks a lot like a traditional cello with a neck and strings but instead of a body, there’s just a wooden outline of one. An electric cello allows you to play louder, use effects like distortion, and it looks cooler. Now that I was shredding (a rock music term associated with fast excited guitar playing) with the same effects as Hendrix, had a lot more experience, and was playing with other stellar students, the music only got better.

We played at the Jazz Bakery again in January. This time the concert was a lot bigger, with more performers and special guests. We had a DJ for the hip-hop songs and a percussionist for the other music. The place was packed. The crowd loved the music and cheered loudly after each song and unlike at a classical concert, during each song. It was cool to feel a connection to the audience.

I plan to continue going to String Project and I think it will expand. And I’ll continue playing in my school orchestra because I still like classical music.

My friends are surprised when I tell them that I can play rock on my cello, but music isn’t confined to the limitations of form. Rock isn’t confined to guitar and strings aren’t just for Bach, Mozart and Beethoven. The instrument doesn’t really matter. What really matters is how you play the music you play and even more importantly, the music you want to play.

Spicing up lunch

A weekly potluck with my friends has turned lunch at school into a food adventure

By Alana Folsom
17, MARSHALL HS

The leftover, a food feared by some, can become the most coveted lunch ... if you have a microwave. Microwaves magically make foods that would taste disgusting cold (lasagna or rice and beans) delicious in their piping hot goodness. Since sophomore year, my friends and I have eaten lunch in a teacher's classroom for this reason. That microwave opened up new possibilities for lunch: we were no longer confined to sandwiches five times a week.

On one particularly bad day sophomore year I had the king of leftovers: falafel and hummus. Unfortunately, I had it for about three seconds before my friends stared me down, literally pointed at their hungry bellies and promised that this time would be the last time they asked for part of my lunch. Once again, tired of the whining and feeling tag-teamed, I handed over most of my food.

After months of having lazy friends steal our food, my friend Mari and I decided that we would try to stop all the lunch stealers whose nibbles would progress to bites and whose bites would progress to missing plates of food. It had now become a long-running joke—the kids who shirked the disgusting cafeteria food or decided to do homework in the morning rather than pack a lunch, were the ones with the full bellies, while we, the people who brought our lunches, were stuck staring at empty Tupperware containers.

WE HAD TO STOP THE MOOCHERS

Mari and I resolved to protect our leftovers, Trader Joe's salads and microwave burritos from the vultures, while also guaranteeing that, for at least one day, our seemingly starving friends could have a decent meal. Our potluck was born.

That first Friday, one person was assigned the snack, another drinks until we were making up courses so all eight of us were included. As I prepared the apples and washed the berries for my fruit salad, I worried that our idea would fall flat on its little foodie face. I feared that when my friends forgot to bring their courses (which I saw as inevitable), I would be forced to become yet another moocher, reduced to begging for food. Despite my worries, it went smoother than I imagined. As expected, the moochers didn't bring enough food the first time: there weren't enough pizza bagels to go around because Joana

had brought only one box and we had to share our cookies because Andy brought only six. However, they promised to bring double what they had the next time, and gave up their food to us for the first time. The weekly potluck began. We named it Food Society.

At first people brought things that were easy to make, like my fruit salad. But the full-sized fridge we used in Mr. Chase's room was soon packed with elaborately decorated cakes from Porto's, Armenian pizza, Filipino desserts no one could pronounce and Italian food. We started taking orders, because one friend's dad was a chef at a restaurant, and we began demanding certain foods from certain people. Joana's mom's crazy garlic pasta and my mom's signature pesto sandwiches were common requests. But ethnic foods were popular too, because we didn't have the ingredients or know-how to make them at home: hummus and pita and falafels, tamales and enchiladas, spaghetti, and everyone's favorite, the halo-halo drink from Rose's mom (a mixture of seemingly every single thing found in a Filipino grocery store, from plantains to red beans, in a cup with ice cream. Trust me, it's delicious.) As we got more excited about Food Society, we began branching out. Out of some of the Tupperware containers came home-made wontons and spring rolls, peanut butter cookies with the authentic criss-cross fork design and even baklava (a Greek pastry). All the differ-

Halo-halo

- 1 ripe large sliced banana or plantain
- 2 ripe mangos or 1 cup canned mango
- 1 cup pineapple (or other fruit-flavored) JELL-O in cubes
- 1 cup canned jackfruit (a yellowish sweet fruit from India and Malaysia, available at Filipino grocery stores)
- 1/2 cup canned sweet corn or chick peas, also called garbanzo beans
- 1/2 cup kidney beans
- 1 cup shredded coconut flakes
- 1 cup canned, cooked yams or purple yam (available at a Filipino grocery store), cut into 1-inch cubes
- 2 cups shaved ice
- 2 cups evaporated milk
- 4 scoops of favorite ice cream
- 1/2 cup chopped peanuts or Rice Krispies

- 1 Prepare 4 tall glasses.
- 2 Peel mangos and slice into 1/2-inch cubes.
- 3 In each glass place 1/4 of each ingredient, adding layer by layer starting with banana or plantain, then mangos, JELL-O, jackfruit, sweet corn or chick peas, kidney beans, coconut, yams. (The order of the layers can be changed.)
- 4 Top with 1/2 cup shaved ice.
- 5 Pour 1/4 cup evaporated milk over shaved ice and top with a scoop of ice cream.
- 6 Sprinkle nuts or Rice Krispies.

ent food made lunch a happy experience, not one where we had to be protective of our food.

Our own cooking developed later, and was made better by the cooking class my friend Rose and I took during intersession. Nelson's pho (Vietnamese beef and noodle soup) was an amazing accomplishment, especially from a boy who had previously made only cereal. I usually made desserts because I love to bake. One flourless chocolate cake that I slaved over for hours—beating the egg whites, slowly measuring the messy melted chocolate—ended up a lumpy, dry heap, and left a weird scrambled eggs aftertaste. The center's sad, sunken-in hole only justified my friends' disgusted faces. As I served my chocolate disaster to my friends, their gagging sounds and faked deaths

didn't deter me from future baking endeavors.

Food Society posed one big problem—where to put the food. None of us had any classes near Mr. Chase's room, where the fridge and microwave waited for us, so we managed by storing the food in other teachers' classrooms and lockers.

WE STUFFED OUR FOOD INTO ONE LOCKER

However, we suffered some casualties. Six of us shared a "miracle locker" that normally held 15 notebooks precariously balanced on top of textbooks and the occasional sweater. This already crowded locker was a hazard on Food Society days: animal crackers were shoved into every available cranny, Tupperware was wedged between history and chemistry books, and the last person to reach the locker would shove their books in and slam the door hoping nothing tumbled out.

Surprisingly, it wasn't until second semester that a container fell, smashed on the floor and spit its crumbly Filipino pastry all over the first-floor hallway. After that unfortunate event, and glaring looks from the janitor, we always made sure someone stood behind the locker door to catch anything that attempted escape.

Our rules were always evolving, despite the fact that a majority of them were unspoken: you have to carry around the drink, because it gets hot in the stuffy locker and takes up too much room; you cannot have the same



PHOTOS BY CHARLOTTE TOUMANOFF, 16, MARSHALL HS
 The Food Society enjoys the final potluck together before graduation. (From left) Charlotte Toumanoff, 16; Alana Folsom, 17; Joana Abad, 17; Charity Abujo, 18; and Marvin Diaz, 18.

duty twice in a row, you cannot eat if you forgot to bring food, and you cannot offer Food Society food to outsiders. With our food assignments rotating, it would get too complicated to incorporate other people. Plus, after we had gloated for so long about Food Society's success, it seemed wrong to allow the people we taunted with our food to join.

Food Society evolved with the advancing recipes and rules. Junior year we abandoned the classroom for outdoor benches and our group changed so there were new faces and dishes. We needed to maintain our eight-course norm (we were spoiled). We lost Danny, who graduated and always brought the most amazing Italian food, but we gained Kristelle who would always bring something from the Thai restaurant down the street from her house.

BORSCHT WAS BAD

Every so often I came across a dish I found just plain gross, like borscht, a Russian soup Mari brought. We were all equally disgusted, but pretended to like the heavy, beet-filled fish stew. Our wincing and constant reminders of the better foods she had brought (anything else), ensured we'd never have to pretend to like Mari's borscht again. The good thing about Food Society is that we have so much food, if someone doesn't like one thing he or she can always find something else to eat. So even with the Borscht-incident, we were still able to fill our bellies with Pocky stick snacks (pencil-like cookie sticks that you dip in chocolate or strawberry frosting) and chicken salad sandwiches.

There were dietary challenges, too. This year my friend Rose decided to become what we called a bird-itarian, so the only meats she eats are chicken and turkey, and my friend Charity hates cumin, and Joana will not eat red peppers. But, in the end, each of us could usually make food that everyone liked or bring a different, maybe even lesser, food like a grilled cheese sandwich (which heated up fine in the microwave) for the picky eater.

Dessert could be especially tough, because I decided to go on a chocolate fast for five months last year, so whoever made dessert would joke that they would bring a chocolate cake because they knew my weaknesses. But in the end, I got Gummi bears and everyone else teased me with their Milano cookies. These simple moments bonded us. During one Food Society, Danny, who brought the main dish, forgot to bring plates. To make matters worse, it was raining. We all sat on the hallway floor around the container and dug in. Ravioli with tomato sauce is not something you can eat easily with fingers but we made it work. It was very messy and really, really funny. When we went to our fifth period, our hands and faces, even our clothes, were covered in marinara sauce. After that, no one forgot plates.

Next month my friends and I are graduating. When we scatter to different colleges this fall we will all miss the smorgasbord of foods from our Friday celebrations. However, I know I won't miss that bloated feeling from being full during fifth period.

More than a paycheck

Having a job since I was 13 has taught me to work hard and not give up, which will help me in my future

By Christina Quarles
18, PALISADES CHARTER HS

Many of my friends and peers are just now getting their first jobs. They come to me and explain how nervous and excited they are to go on their first interviews. I tell them to relax and try to show off their best qualities. Most people and even I find it remarkable that I have been working since the age of 13.

I remember when my Aunt Lecie opened her soul food restaurant in Inglewood. Every Sunday her restaurant would be full of people coming in after church to try some of my aunt's delicious soul food. She served French toast, burgers, jambalaya, chitterlings, baked and fried chicken, peach cobbler, cornbread and German chocolate cake that would make your mouth water.

She covered her restaurant with Christian decorations, which reminded me of how important God is to my family. In the front near the register there was a giant brown cross on the highest shelf. She had framed Bible quotes on the walls and a giant screen TV that showed a Christian network.

My aunt allowed many of my older teenage cousins to work as cashiers, servers and busboys/girls. It seemed as though my cousins made a fortune. Every week they would come to school with the latest Jordans they'd bought with their earnings from tips and wages. Unlike most kids my age who simply wanted to watch TV or hang out, I wanted to work side-by-side with my cousins. When I was 12 I thought it would be really cool to work in the restaurant with my family, and I knew I would be able to buy all the luxuries I wanted, such as video games and expensive clothes that my parents would not buy. However, my aunt told me that I would have to wait until I was 13.

I WAS FINALLY OLD ENOUGH TO WORK FOR MY AUNT

Once I turned 13 I was ecstatic to begin working that summer in my aunt's restaurant. I showed up 30 minutes early on the first day. I had to wear black shoes and pants with a white button-up shirt and a green apron. I started out as a busgirl. On the first day I was shown where everything was and how to make drinks and clean off the tables. My aunt told me I would have to memorize the menu, learn how to balance a tray and clean the tables quickly before I could become a waitress, or to be politically correct a "server." I tried to absorb as much as I could on the first day.

Everything came fairly easy to me—balancing trays, serving drinks, cleaning tables, etc. The most difficult task was appearing naturally friendly to the customers. My aunt told me that my smile seemed "forced," which it was because I (and many other members of my family) tend to have a very stern look. But I did my best and my aunt and older cousins



Christina has gained experience while working as a cashier at Sizzler, her most recent job.

PHOTO BY KATIE HAVARD 18, BEVERLY HILLS HS

recognized it.

I would come in about three times a week and would work for five hours on slow days so I could get the hang of it. Even though minimum wage was \$6.75 at the time, my aunt paid us \$6 an hour. However, she didn't take out taxes and called it even. For lunch we got to eat for free, but only the cheaper, easier-to-make items like burgers.

Once my aunt noticed that I was catching on she decided to have me work on their busiest day, Sunday. The restaurant would be so crowded that I would often have to help the other servers serve food. I would be frantically walking around getting one person napkins while someone else asked me for a drink. I pushed a cart with a bucket on the inside and filled it with dirty dishes from the tables. Then I swept under the table, wiped it down, and reset it with a placing. Sometimes customers would look at me and ask how old I was, and I would simply reply, "13." They were very surprised and questioned why I was working at such a young age. I explained to them that my aunt owned the restaurant. Some looked reassured, others seemed concerned. But either way I knew what I was doing was rare and I was very proud.

I INHERITED MY FAMILY'S STRONG WORK ETHIC

The best part about being a busgirl was receiving 10 percent of all the servers' tips. On a busy Sunday I would sometimes receive \$40. The bad part was that being a busgirl is often the most tiring position in any busy restaurant. One day after work I got home and immediately plopped down on the couch in the living room. The aches from standing for so long settled in. I shifted, desperately searching for relaxation. I glanced at my father's favorite chair in the house; he was in it, fully reclined, in a deep sleep. I gazed at his paint-splattered clothes, tattered old work boots and blistered hands. I knew not to disturb him, and instead I watched his chest rise and fall with each deep breath he took. I saw that he too was exhausted after a long day of construction work.

A faint grin emerged from the corners of my mouth. I was reminded of how endurance is one of my family's characteristics. The Bible says, "Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope." (Romans 5:3-4). This scripture has manifested in my life and within my family. My grandfather did not receive a high school diploma; yet he overcame, and even became one of the first black contractors in Los Angeles. My grandmother indefinitely postponed her dream of going to college so that she could raise her 16 children. My Aunt Lecie was the third of those children and my father was the last. I lay there, gazing at my father, feeling the pressure of my eyelids steadily increase. The thought of my family's history eased some of my weariness. Slowly, I drifted into a peaceful sleep.

After seven years of running her restaurant my aunt grew tired and decided to close it. I had worked there for only four weeks. The following summer, I was involved in the Summer Youth Employment Program, which was basically a program that found jobs for 14- to 21-year-olds around the city for eight weeks out of the summer. I was in this program for three years. The first year I worked at the Inglewood DMV. I didn't like the work—filing papers and shredding files. I would have much rather preferred to be running around my aunt's busy restaurant cleaning the tables as quickly as possible. My next summer in the program was spent on the UCLA campus sorting mail and stamping envelopes. During my final summer I worked at the Boys & Girls Club of

Venice supervising children. Working with kids was a hassle but it forced me to be patient and showed me how much of an influence I can have on a child's life.

Now I work at Sizzler as a cashier and it's actually the fifth job I have had. I've been working there for 10 months, the longest I have ever had a job. I applied for more than 10 restaurant jobs and went on so many interviews but Sizzler is the one that hired me. I know that Sizzler is giving me the experience I need to move on to a higher-end restaurant or better job opportunity. I am currently searching for a new job, and once I find one I will stop working at Sizzler. I want a new job because I'm still just a cashier after 10 months. I know that with the experience that I have I can find better opportunities elsewhere. I'm going to miss working at Sizzler, serving

There have been times when I didn't like my coworkers and many times when I've wanted to give up. But I haven't, and I won't, because just like my grandparents, I will continue to endure and achieve.

my regular customers and laughing with my managers and coworkers, one who has become a friend. But I also know I need to do what is best for me. Sizzler got me to where I am now and I am grateful for that. However, I don't believe anyone should stay in a place that prevents them from growing or progressing to the next level. It is simply time for me to move on.

Working in general has taught me responsibility, how to handle money, how to be punctual and how to be professional. More importantly it has tested me. There have been times when I didn't like my coworkers, times when I've wanted to give a rude customer a piece of my mind, and many times when I've wanted to give up. But I haven't, and I won't, because just like my grandparents, I will continue to endure and achieve.

All of these jobs have been a great experience, but none of them are quite like my first job. I can no longer get angry at my cousin Tiffany for leaving too many plates on the table, or compete with my cousin Breynne over who can clean the best and the fastest, or complain that my cousin Akida is too bossy. And I can no longer proudly proclaim to customers, "My name is Christina Quarles, I am 13 years old, and this is my aunt's restaurant." I cherish the memories I have working with my family.

Today I am embarrassed, yet at the same time proud, to say that I have been working since I was 13 years old. I'm embarrassed because I don't know anyone my age

who has worked like that. When I tell people (which is rare), I worry that I'm giving them the impression that my family is poor or that I was forced to work to help my family, which is not the case at all. The truth is I begged my aunt when I was 12 to work but she would not permit it. I saw my cousins who went to school with me working with my other family members, and I wanted to join them. I wanted to make \$6 an hour, which is a fortune to a 13-year-old, and \$40 cash just from tips and be able to spend it on whatever I liked. Right now, the money I earn from working is going toward a car I intend on buying (with my parent's help) before college. I am proud because I believe my family epitomizes the results of perseverance and hard work.

Throughout my life my mother has always told me that everyone is dealt a certain hand in life, and all I can do is make the very best of what has been given to me. I know that I have been blessed and I took advantage of my resources as best as possible. Statistically speaking I'm not supposed to have achieved what I already have. I come from humble beginnings. I spent the first 13 years of my life in South Central and I am the first person in my immediate family who will receive a bachelor's degree. I have and will continue to achieve. Some may call it luck, others may say it is self-motivation, but I know that my achievements are blessings due to the values and work ethic my family has instilled in me.

Now I know that I am ready to go out into the real world and accomplish goals my parents and grandparents always dreamed of. I will never forget the values of family and work ethic that I learned working in my aunt's restaurant. It helped me in school and at the other jobs I had afterwards. I will learn, I will succeed, so that my children can have an easier beginning in life.

CHRISTINA'S TIPS FOR BEING A GOOD EMPLOYEE

1) Pick a job you're interested in. If you wake up dreading going to work every day it will have a negative impact on your performance.

2) Make sure you are always on time. Showing up five minutes early is a great way to ensure that you'll be ready to begin on time. It also demonstrates your dedication to your tasks.

3) Respect your coworkers. You do not have to like everyone you work with but respecting one another is essential to working as a team and creating a hospitable environment.

4) Learn from your mistakes. When you first begin it is only natural to make mistakes. Don't view a mistake as failure, but as an experience to learn from and correct.

5) Respectfully stand up for yourself. Do not let your employers or fellow coworkers feel that they can manipulate or take advantage of you for being young. All workers deserve the same treatment and opportunities.

Saving is priceless

GameCube: \$200

Soccer ball and jerseys: \$120

Learning how to save money: much more rewarding



By **Se Kim**

17, PACIFICA CHRISTIAN HS (SANTA MONICA)

In ninth grade, I needed a lot more money. My \$10 weekly allowance didn't get me far. I would go to Johnny Rockets, Subway or a nicer restaurant and spend all my allowance on a meal. My friends were getting a lot more than I was so I asked for at least \$15. My mom said yes but my dad said, "You should work for it."

A week later, my dad approached me about getting a job at his clothing distribution business the next summer. I felt like I would be letting him down if I said no. So I said yes, but was reluctant. I didn't want to wake up early in the morning. Even worse, I was going to be a box boy—making, opening and moving boxes. I hated physical labor. I just hated sweating. My mom said, "It will be a great way to learn the importance of making and managing your money." I ignored her. It was one of her long lectures on the important things in life that I never listened to.

Summer began and soon it was my first day at my job. I woke up at 7 and went to work with my dad. I've been to my dad's business countless times, but this time was the worst. I worked hard. I sealed plastic over clothes and moved boxes of clothes from one area to another. The day went by really slow. At the end of the day, my dad gave me \$55.

I COULD FINALLY BUY WHAT I WANTED

I was so happy to earn money. At the end of the week, I gathered up the \$200 I had made and bought myself a GameCube with some games. It was great buying my own GameCube with my own money, but I ended up not really playing it. I was never a game person. I bought it only because all my friends had it.

The next Saturday, I bought an expensive Manchester United soccer ball and two soccer jerseys that cost around \$120 all together. I was obsessed with soccer and wanted the latest European jerseys. I spent the rest of my money on food.

Every time I got money, I spent it. It was different when I had an allowance. Because I had a limited amount of money, I always decided whether I really

wanted to buy something. Now I was wasting money on whatever I wanted. Spending was almost compulsive. If I liked something, my mind told me to buy it because I had a lot of money with me.

My parents noticed how much I was spending and confronted me. I had made about \$400 and had only \$40 left. My mom said in Korean, "Se, you need to learn to save some money." I usually ignore my mom,

deposit money by myself without my dad. My dad said I could keep \$20 for my allowance but should save the rest so I deposited \$180. For the next couple of weeks, I deposited most of my money in the bank. Saving felt better than spending. Spending gave me short-term happiness, but saving made me more confident as I started to see my account balance go up. Although I wanted more than \$20 each week, I had no doubts about what I was doing. I felt happy seeing the money in my account grow.

Tips for opening a savings account

Did you know that many banks will let you open a savings account in your name as a minor? Even though you are under 18, you can open a savings account without a parent's signature. This means you are the only person who will have access to your money. It's important to check out several banks because different banks will have different interest rates, minimum balance requirements and fees. Call, check online or visit at least three banks before you decide which bank is best for you.

Be sure to choose a bank that:

- Will help you earn the highest interest on your savings
- Does not charge fees for using your account
- Makes it convenient for you to add to your savings

Questions to ask when choosing a bank:

- What is the minimum amount of money I must have in my account at all times?
- Are student or youth accounts available?
- How much interest will my account earn?
- How much will I be charged if I don't keep the minimum balance, I make a deposit or withdrawal or if I use an ATM?

Source: Money Talks—Should I Be Listening?, University of California Cooperative Extension, www.moneytalks.ucr.edu

but this time I actually took in what she said. I had a lot of new stuff but these things weren't really important to me. I realized that I had worked so hard only to spend my money on stupid, trivial things. So I made a pact with my mom to cut down my spending and start saving.

The next weekend, I went to the local Bank of America. My dad and I applied for a savings account for teens. It was free to open an account and there was no minimum amount required. I could withdraw and

MY SAVINGS GREW

I had a little less than \$1,000 in the bank by the end of the summer. I was proud of myself and happy that I saved so much rather than spent everything.

My dad then asked if I wanted to invest my money. He said, "As a person growing up, you need to know when to invest and make your money grow." I agreed. It made me excited. Having my money in a bank account and seeing it progressively grow was good, but seeing it double or grow even more would be even better.

My dad invested the money in stocks. Although I can't touch the money, the value of the stocks did go up a little. We get reports from my dad's accountant on how the prices of the stocks have changed. I was fascinated to see the money go up and down and eventually level off.

I know this experience will help me as I get older. As I start to make money, I will save, invest and be frugal. I'll spend money, but try to do so on what I really need, not on what I want. My dad always says, "It's not how much money you make, but how you spend it." I made a little, but ended up saving a lot.



Se says you can save and still spend money wisely.

Tips for getting a job

Advice on where to apply and how to impress your interviewer, from L.A. Youth writers who have looked for jobs



Work hours for teens ages 14 and 15

Work hours

- 7 a.m.–7 p.m., from Labor Day–June 1
- Not during school hours
- 7 a.m.–9 p.m., from June 1–Labor Day

Maximum hours when school is in session

18 hours a week, but not more than:

- 3 hours a day on school days
- 8 hours a day Saturday–Sunday and holidays

Maximum hours when school is not in session

- 40 hours a week
- 8 hours a day

Work hours for teens ages 16 and 17

Work hours

- 5 a.m.–10 p.m. when there is school the next day
- 5 a.m.–12:30 a.m. when there is no school the next day

Maximum hours when school is in session

48 hours a week, but not more than:

- 4 hours a day Monday–Thursday
- 8 hours a day Friday–Sunday and holidays

Maximum hours when school is not in session

- 48 hours a week
- 8 hours a day

Apply at places where you know someone who works there. You have a better chance of getting hired. I recently applied to work at Gelson's supermarket in Century City during the summer. I have a very good chance of being hired because my mother has known the manager for 22 years. I talk to her whenever I shop at Gelson's. Also, because my family has been shopping at Gelson's for several years and I know the environment well, I know I will be comfortable working there.

Brett Hicks, 16, Loyola HS



Brett

For interviews remember to relax and come prepared. The first time I went on a job interview, I was extremely nervous. I dressed in jeans, gave very short answers and didn't make eye contact. I knew there was no way I had gotten the job. The second time, I practiced answering interview questions that I had been taught in my life skills class (my mom even had me do a few practice interviews at home). I dressed professionally in a plain skirt, shirt and sweater. I made sure to smile and shake the interviewer's hand before sitting down. I felt great about the interview. The woman who interviewed me even said, "This went very well." I ended up getting the internship.

Melanie Boysaw, 16, Sherman Oaks Center for Enriched Studies



Melanie

Think about your interview like an essay and bring up examples. For a program I did that's designed to give high school students jobs in finance, we had mock interviews. I told the interviewer I was very social and confident. But she said anyone could say that. So I said it was easy for me to speak to anyone and for confidence I said that after running a marathon, I feel like I can do anything. At the end of the interview, ask, "What do I do next?" to let them know you're interested in the job.

Richard Aviles, 17, Foshay Learning Center



Richard

Find jobs that are teen-friendly. Last summer I called H&M and places at The Grove shopping center. They told me I couldn't work there because I wasn't 18. This year I heard from a friend that the Hollywood Bowl hires teens so I called them. I got the job.

Gabe Andreen, 15, Pilgrim School



Gabe

When my friends are worried about their first interview, I remind them that they're already pros. Every time you talk to someone, whether you know them or not, you're in an interview. What you talk about with friends is usually what interviewers want to know. What have you already done? What do you plan to do, and how is that important to you? It's easier to say, "relax and be yourself" than to do that under interview pressure, but it's worked well for me in my two interviews.

Sylvana Insua-Rieger, 16, Beverly Hills HS



Sylvana

Don't seek jobs that are out of your league. I'd never applied for a job before. I applied online at H&M and American Apparel. These are big, well-known companies and they don't want someone with no experience. I filled out an online application and never heard back from them.

Nadine Choe, 16, Notre Dame Academy



Nadine

essay contest: favorite day of the week

1ST PLACE \$50

In jail, every day is a gift

By M. D.
JUVENILE HALL

Being in juvenile hall, I can't say I have a favorite day. What makes a day special to me is that I wake up and know that my family is OK. So I don't really have a favorite day, but any day could be one. For instance, I could say a court day is my favorite day because I find out what's going on with my case. But I guess right now every day is my favorite day because I'm still alive.

When I'm at home, it's a totally different story. Every day is always special to me but Saturday is my favorite day because I go to church (I'm Seventh-day Adventist)

and that is important to me. Another reason I like Saturdays is because I have plenty of free time. Being the writer that I am (I write poetry and music) this extra time comes in handy.

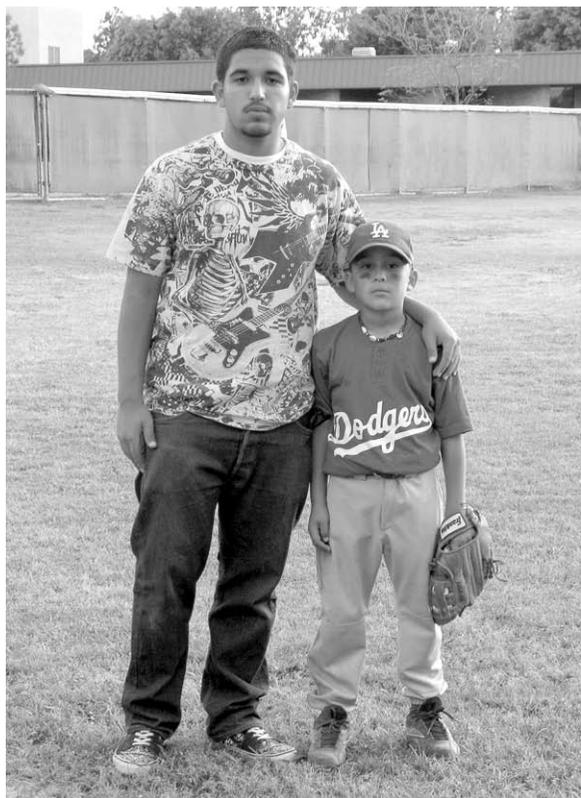
Besides church and free time, what really makes my Saturdays great is spending time with family and friends. This by far is the greatest thing to do on any day, but with my busy schedule and me living in group homes and places like that, it makes it hard to spend time with my folks. It's always good to spend time with the people you care about because it not only makes you feel good, but it makes them feel good as well.

The only downside to Saturdays is not being in school. Since I want to become a professional writer,

child psychologist, criminal lawyer and computer technician, I really need all the schooling I can manage. School is what makes picking a favorite day hard for me because I love school too much to need a favorite day.

Being in juvenile hall has opened my eyes to a lot of things. Mostly it has taught me to be thankful for every day, week, month and year because you never know when you will lose it. That is the main reason I don't like to single days out, but instead see them as gifts that can be given or taken away.

For the rest of my life I believe that Saturday will always be my favorite day. But just like I don't judge a person before I get to know him or her, I don't like to judge a day before I see how it ends.



2ND PLACE \$30

Looking forward to game days

By Brian Huizar
BIRMINGHAM HS (VAN NUYS)

“Here we go Dodgers, here we go!” This is the chant from the fans in the stands on Saturday afternoons, but the sound is not coming from crazy fans at Dodger Stadium. It is coming from mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, cheering for their young Little League players. I am one of those cheering fans. And there is no better day for me than Saturday when I get to cheer for my little Dodger.

Ever since my brother Evander joined a Little League team, Saturday has become my favorite day of the week. That's because Saturday is the day he has games. I just love going to his games and going crazy every time he gets a hit or makes a great play. One of the best parts of my Saturdays is when people ask who number 14 is. I love being able to say, “That's my brother.”

PHOTO BY CANDELARIO HUIZAR (BRIAN'S DAD)

Brian Huizar (left) and his brother Evander after a baseball game.

A typical Saturday for me starts by waking my little brother up. While I'm making him breakfast, we always joke around. He is always talking about how he is better than me, but it's cool. He knows who taught him everything he knows.

After breakfast, we're off to the baseball field. I help him warm up his arm by playing catch. Then we go to the bench and relax for a while.

I help coach the team sometimes, so I am always in the dugout talking with him about the game and answering his questions. But to be honest, the only reason I stay in the dugout is so I can be the first to congratulate him after a great play.

Before we had our baseball-filled Saturdays, my brother and I would fight a lot. We had nothing in common. But now we share a common love of sports. We never have time to fight anymore because we are always practicing. This is all because of Saturdays.

I love Saturdays because they have brought me closer to my little brother. There is no better feeling in the world than the feeling I get on those Saturday afternoons when I see my little Dodger run out on that diamond.

3RD PLACE \$20

I miss Saturdays in Mexico

By Mayra Islas
ANIMO JUSTICE CHARTER HS

Saturdays have always been special to me. When I lived in Mexico, Saturday was the most hoped for day of the week. I remember that my cousin and I were always wishing for the school week to end and for Saturday to begin. Every Saturday morning would start the same way: my cousin would come to my house to wake me up. Around 10 a.m. we would go out of town to my family's ranch. Once at the ranch, we enjoyed a variety of activities. The sun shone down on us, as we lived out our wonderful Saturdays away from the city.

We would play soccer, run with the dogs and sometimes hunt birds and lizards with my uncle. There were occasions when we got to help my uncle sow (plant seeds) corn or chiles. Those days were hard, but we still enjoyed them. When we came back from work, we would be rewarded with warm bowls of my grandma's pasta and beans, accompanied by handmade tortillas and mugs of *chocolate caliente* (hot chocolate). After we ate our delicious feast, we would retreat to the lone pine tree behind the house to climb the branches and rest, at last.

Usually in the afternoon my uncle would take us to the lake; the water was icy cold but it did not matter since there was nothing comparable to the fun that we had at the lake. There was a garden just a few miles away from the house, and often on Saturdays we would go there. Following our swim in the lake, we would eat luscious fruit from the trees. For two hours or more, we would savor sweet peaches, mangos, juicy oranges and sweet guavas. Then, we would return to the house at sunset. On our way back, my uncle would let us ride the mule, since the journey was long. At last, my family would gather around a bonfire to tell scary stories under the starry, dark sky. All of these meals and excursions were such heavenly fun—it is easy to see why Saturdays in Mexico were the most exciting days of my life.

My Saturday experiences have changed since arriving in the United States. Here, there is no longer my cousin to spend the day with

me; however, I have my family and a boyfriend, who always tries to make Saturdays a different experience than the rest of the week. Now on Saturday I usually wake up around 9 a.m. and take a peacefully lengthy shower. Then, I sit with my family at the table to eat a delightful breakfast that my mom prepares for us. Sometimes I go with my family to play basketball at the park, where we indulge in meals of carne asada. Once in a while we go to the beach or visit my aunt in Ontario. When we go to Ontario, my mom and I go shopping with my female cousins and my aunt. Then at noon my uncle and father cook for us and we have picnic at the park near my aunt's house. We spend the whole day with them and return home late at night.

Also, there are some Saturdays that I spend with my boyfriend. He is not only my boyfriend, he is my best friend, my companion and my comfort. The Saturdays spent with my boyfriend are even more meaningful than those spent in Ontario with my aunt and her family. My boyfriend and I go to the theater to enjoy a movie or just stay home sharing the happiness and misfortunes of the week with each other. No matter what we do, our time together makes my Saturday a special day.

I prefer Saturdays over other days of the week because I find harmony within myself. My life is always filled with so many things to do; on every other day I never seem to have a minute of peace. Monday through Friday I dedicate every waking moment to school, work and community issues. On Sundays I volunteer at a museum. Therefore, Saturday is my favorite day of the week because it is wonderfully different from my routine. Additionally, on that day I have the opportunity to spend time with my family and to demonstrate my love and appreciation toward them.

There could never be another day of the week like Saturday. Saturdays are exceptional for me; they represent unforgettable memories from my past that I continue to preserve in my heart and mind. I will never forget those amazing weekends with my cousin in Mexico. They are memorable moments that make my Saturdays in the United States (almost) as enjoyable.

ESSAY CONTEST

The street that means the most to me

There are a lot of famous streets in L.A. They are immortalized in movies, overrun by tourists and have historical meaning—Melrose, Sunset, Olvera and Rodeo Drive. Those may be famous and mean a lot to other people, but we want to know what street means a lot to you. It could be the street where you learned how to ride a bike or the street you stand on every day waiting for the bus. Maybe your favorite taco stand or flea market is there. Or, you could just like the name of the street. Tell us a story about what makes that street special to you. Give us details describing what it looks like and what you do there. Make us feel like we are there with you so that we can see why it's your favorite street.



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

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

MAIL YOUR ESSAYS TO:

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5967 W. 3rd St., Suite 301
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DEADLINE IS
FRIDAY, June 20, 2008

We received more than 200 essays from our readers about their favorite day of the week. Some days were more popular than others. Here are the days, with the number of votes each day got.





PHOTO COURTESY OF CHALLENGERS BOYS & GIRLS CLUB

The rapper Jibbs was one of the celebrities Brandon (left) had fun interviewing.

All-access pass

Interviewing celebrities who came to my Boys & Girls Club helped me become more confident

By Brandon William
13, ST. EUGENE CATHOLIC SCHOOL

There was sweat on my forehead. I was standing a foot away from singer Chris Brown. I had just finished interviewing him and I wanted him to critique my singing. I started to sing and the first thing that came out of my mouth was "Let me talk to you/ Tell you how it is," from his hit song "Run It." He started beatboxing. I got excited and I started to sing louder. I never wanted the moment to end.

When I started going to Challengers Boys & Girls Club I never thought I'd get to interview famous people like Chris Brown and Kanye West. It's been fun

case I had to film something. I learned the dos and don'ts of interviewing, like don't waste a question by asking someone how old they are because it should be in their bio. You should ask if they're working on something new or who they'd like to work with, because people might want to know what to look for from them in the future. It took me about a month to learn and I kept practicing and practicing. Sometimes I speak too fast and people can't understand me. I slowed down and practiced my enunciation. I would read a question out loud and ask Kellen if it was good enough. He would say, "Keep practicing, but it's very good." It made me feel better about myself because a lot of people at school said I couldn't do it, because they didn't believe I'd really get a chance to meet celebrities.

meeting celebrities, but the best part is that I'm more respected, have gotten to know teens at the club and feel I can do anything I put my mind to.

I'm not shy, but sometimes I get nervous around a bunch of people. I wanted to get involved at the Boys & Girls Club, where I go every day after school, to get to know people, make a name for myself, earn respect and have fun, so I decided to do video production.

Famous people have been coming to the club for a while, but no one interviewed them before. Kellen, the coordinator of the video production program, had the idea to record interviews with them. He said we would show the interviews on the TV in the lobby of the club for the parents and the kids to see. I was the only one who volunteered. No one else said they wanted to do interviews until later when they saw the cool people they could meet. I've interviewed rappers Kanye West, Three 6 Mafia and Jibbs; singers Chris Brown, Sean Kingston, Lloyd and Stevie Wonder; comedian Katt Williams, and civil rights activist Amelia Boynton Robinson.

Kellen taught me how to interview and how to work a video camera in

My first interview was with the hip-hop group Three 6 Mafia. That day, when I got to the club, Kellen told me that Three 6 Mafia was in the building and that I would be interviewing them. I couldn't think straight. I was so nervous because it was last minute and I wasn't prepared. Kellen was looking up stuff on the Internet about Three 6 Mafia. He found out they won an Oscar for their song, "It's Hard Out Here For A Pimp." Kellen told me to ask about the Oscar and why they were at the club that day. Kellen said he was going to test me so I couldn't use my note card and had to remember my questions. I was worried because I thought I was going to mess up my first interview, but Kellen told me not to worry. That made me feel better because he had faith in me. I had never met a famous person and when they walked in I was so excited. I almost cried because I was happy.

I met the group in the video room. I introduced myself and talked to them as Kellen set the camera up. I asked them what they did before they became famous. One of the guys said he was in high school. The other one said he worked at a pizza place. He asked me if I liked pizza and I told him I loved pizza. He asked me if I liked pepperoni. I said I was more of a cheese guy. The other guy was cracking up. I asked them what advice they had for the kids at Challengers, which is how I now end all of my interviews. One of them said, "Keep your trust in God. If you get knocked down all you have to do is get back up, and don't let anybody put you down."

I FELT PROUD, BUT I WANTED TO DO BETTER

After the interview I felt good about myself because I felt that I'd done something important. I learned I needed to have my questions written down on the note card because I forgot one of them. I also needed to practice them before the interview.

Last November, I interviewed Kanye West. I talked to him for about five minutes. I asked him what his favorite CD was and what was his favorite song on it. He told me the reason he wears the teddy bear suit is because he thought it was cool and wanted to put it on his album covers. It was fun because every time I asked him a question, I would put the microphone too close to his mouth and his friend started laughing and it made him laugh.

Now when I meet a famous person, it's like, there's nothing to scream about. I used to think interviewing them would be like a dream where you'd be dancing and talking with them and they'd become your best friend, maybe you'd even get to spend the day with them. But they're just people and knowing that makes me less nervous.

People at the club know who I am now. They see my interviews on the TV at the front desk. They come up to me and tell me, "You did well." It makes me feel good about myself and now I've started talking to a lot of people at the club who I wouldn't normally talk to.

I feel like the possibilities of what I can do are unlimited now. I want to sing R&B professionally and I believe I can do it. I feel like I can pretty much do anything if I put my mind to it.

reviews: music



LUPE FIASCO

CD: Lupe Fiasco's The Cool

By Francisco Sandoval
16, NOGALES HS (LA PUENTE)

Lupe Fiasco's *The Cool* is unlike most other hip-hop albums. It doesn't include senseless swearing or songs about girls. Instead Lupe raps about some of society's toughest issues—wars, poverty and fear of the streets—with an infectious flow and fast beats.

The album starts off with "Free Chilly," a tribute to his friend Chilly, who is in jail. The song is only a minute long but Lupe clearly demonstrates how much he wants his friend back. The song has a very dramatic feel to it, with elaborate production and background singers, and it sets the tone for the rest of the album.

"Streets On Fire" is Lupe's perspective on how seductive street life can be. Lupe depicts the streets as a seductive female: "Death is on the tip of her tongue and danger's at the tip of her fingers." Perhaps the most powerful track on the whole album is "Little Weapon," a song about child soldiers in South America and Africa. Lupe gives us insight into how kids only in kindergarten are exploited. "Well I'm like 10, 11 been fighting since I was 6 or 7." And when Lupe raps "And AK-47's that they shootin into heaven," I had no idea that kids were being used as weapons of warfare. It's disgusting; why would you abuse a kid in such a way?

Lupe Fiasco is the conscience of the issues facing humanity right now. We need more rappers like him.

Lupe raps about some of society's toughest issues—wars, poverty and fear of the streets—with an infectious flow and fast beats.



MGMT

CD: Oracular Spectacular

By Nadine Choe
16, NOTRE DAME ACADEMY

In an age when indie music no longer means bands that are unsigned or on a small independent label, bands are creating whole new genres by incorporating several influences. MGMT, a band fairly new on the indie music scene, meshes grungy riffs, synthesized melodies and a psychedelic sense to create *Oracular Spectacular*.

If you listen to Indie 103.1, you may have heard MGMT's (pronounced "management") catchy single, "Time to Pretend." Lead singer Andrew VanWyngarden croons about youth and the rock star lifestyle, "I'm feeling rough, I'm feeling raw, I'm in the prime of my life/ Let's make some music, make some money, find some models for wives." The anthem is relatable because it talks about feeling young, fresh and newly independent.

The title of the funkadelic "Electric Feel" describes the song accurately. It's catchy, electronic and makes me tap my feet. With lyrics such as "Ooh girl, shock me like an electric eel," VanWyngarden sings about attraction, a concept anyone can understand. The 70s disco feel and the tribal drums on this track create a surprisingly compatible concoction. "Weekend Wars," another popular single on *Oracular Spectacular*, has a more mellow melody. In contrast to the other synthy, electronic-esque songs on the album, this song is more raw and relaxed with its acoustic guitars and scratchy vocals.

Oracular Spectacular is the epitome of up-and-coming indie music. MGMT takes cues from older psychedelic bands such as Spiritualized and creates a sub-genre that is unique and eccentric (in a good way).

Oracular Spectacular is the epitome of up-and-coming indie music.



PANIC AT THE DISCO

CD: Pretty.Odd.

By Lauren Corona
18, GARIFELD HS

Panic At the Disco is back. They've lost the makeup, the ruffles from their clothes, the tongue-twisting song titles and lyrics and even the "!" from their name but thankfully, not the quality of their music. They have matured and become better musicians since their first album and *Pretty.Odd.* is the proof. The album can be listened to from beginning to end without having to skip songs.

While the melodies on this album appear to be happy, the lyrics aren't. "Folkin' Around" with its bouncy, country-like melody reminds me of love gone wrong. I think most of us can relate to that feeling of loss and heartbreak. "Where summer's lasted longer than, longer than we do/ And nothing really mattered except for me to be with you/ But in time we all forgot and we all grew."

The majority of the songs have great imagery, such as "She had the world upon a string/ But she didn't ever hold me/ Spun the stars on her fingernails" in the song "She Had The World." The band has described this song as something out of a Shakespeare play, which is completely different from the raunchy burlesque sound the first album has. The songs on this album are a good combination of classical instruments like violins and trumpets, guitars, sweet melodies and catchy choruses. They feel like pieces of art.

The band has said that the new album was a group effort unlike their first album, which was written solely by guitarist Ryan Ross. They have most definitely made a classic.

They have matured and become better musicians since their first album and Pretty.Odd. is the proof.

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