

20

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L.A. youth

SEPTEMBER 2008
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the newspaper by and about teens

My life on

MET

I FINALLY GOT HELP GETTING CLEAN P. 10

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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 May-June issue of L.A. Youth.

LEARNING GRAFFITI IN AN ART CLASS

When I read the article, "The art of graffiti," I became pretty excited because I had wanted to learn how to make paintings using a spray can. I think that graffiti could be someone's future. I liked this article because it teaches that graffiti can also be an art form, rather than just simply tagging. People always see it as a crime, but to others it is a way of expressing themselves and getting away from problems. I really believe that graffiti is a way of expressing yourself, and this article motivated me to take a class.

J. Timothy Alegria
Wilson MS (Glendale)

I like how the author portrays graffiti and tagging as different. I see graffiti as art and a way a person expresses themselves. To tie into that yes, graffiti is vandalism, but it may be the only way a person can show their emotions.

Robert Legaspi
Wilson MS

This was my favorite article because the people [in the class] can express themselves through art, with spray cans. I used to think tagging was only when people mess up their community, but sometimes it helps other people. The article

really touched me because people aren't throwing their lives away on the street. They're being very productive.

Genesis Stewart
Cochran MS

RAPED BY HER UNCLE

I really liked this article. It was sad that her uncle raped her and gave her drugs. I never really cared about other people's lives, but when I read this it opened my eyes to how many people need help. I thought to myself, this could have been someone I knew, like a close friend or even me. She's a hero to me because she had the courage to tell people her story and confront her uncle.

Erika Grijalva
Cochran MS

I read the article "He doesn't scare me anymore" and it was a shock to read about how a young girl got raped by her uncle. If I were her I would feel the same—disgusted and terrified. Knowing that her uncle threatened to hurt her family if she told anyone is probably a reason she kept quiet for a while.

There are a lot of young teens out there who get abused or raped by their family members and they end up not saying anything. But the teen in the article finally had the courage to tell someone and no longer kept quiet.

Erica Davis
Wilson MS

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Send your letters to L.A. Youth



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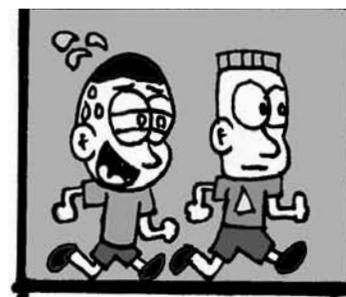
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I feel many young ladies can relate to this story based on what is going on in their lives. I know how hard it must be to reveal a secret that has been going on in your life for years. I'm proud of all the young ladies who come forward to tell the world their stories.

*Shanice Martin
Cochran MS*

It's sad how her uncle abused her. I hope that this article helps a lot of young girls who are also victims of rape. I think that most girls stay quiet because they're scared. If you are being abused, tell someone right away. You're not alone.

*Merlyin Cernas
Cochran MS*

This article made me feel gloomy. I can't believe a family member would do that. Also, I can't believe she did drugs at the age of 10. At the end I was proud of her because she had the guts to tell her mother about what her uncle did to her. Also, she was strong and brave to tell other people. She was opening up to people and talking about her past. That made me realize I should appreciate the things I have now.

*Roslyn Ruiz
Wilson MS*

A BOY ADDICTED TO VIDEO GAMES

I really connected to this article. I love watching TV and sometimes find myself replacing my homework or sleeping with watching TV. Although it doesn't affect my performance in school, it takes a toll on many other things. I find myself spending less time with my family and friends, which I hate. Even during my busiest times, I'll still try extra hard to squeeze in some TV time. I'm trying really hard to break my addiction and find it inspiring that Cameron minimized his own addiction. I also agree with Cameron that the hardest thing for an addict to do is to admit they have a problem.

*Ninette Mirzakhanian
Wilson MS*

I really liked this story. I'm addicted to my PC game World of Warcraft and I don't study. I lie to my parents, tell-

ing them I have a project to do on the computer. Games are my life; without them, life would be kind of boring. I play games from 7 a.m. to 1 a.m. on weekends. If I wake up at night I get up and play my games. This article made me realize that I have to focus more on school than playing games.

*Namirud Yegezu
Cochran MS*

THERE'S MORE TO A JOB THAN A PAYCHECK

This article gave me an idea. I have an aunt who owns a Salvadorian restaurant and I want to do the same thing Christina did and work in my aunt's restaurant. Her restaurant is always full of people and it is really hot in the kitchen. I hate that because then I start sweating and I don't like that. But I think I'll give it a try because then I'll get to know new people, hang out with my aunt and get experience. Having a job is important because I could buy my own stuff.

*Allan Granados
Cochran MS*

LIKING A FRIEND WHO DOESN'T FEEL THE SAME WAY

I like this article because I can relate. I have a best friend who I used to like. We grew up together. I never told him [I liked him] but I thought he had to know. He told me he loved being my best friend and how it was great just being my friend. Ever since then I just keep it to myself, but now we are great friends. I would've told him the way I felt but our friendship would've been ruined.

*L. Allen
Cochran MS*

I really liked the way Michelle handled the friend zone. She eventually forgot, not like most girls who get depressed. I know it's hard but you have to get over it. In the end, you end up meeting someone lots better. Just move on and forget about him. That's the best way.

*Cindy Valladares
Cochran MS*

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK

Hey L.A. Youth readers,

We want to know what you think! Is there an article in L.A. Youth that you identify with? Have you had an experience similar to one of our writers? Do any stories in L.A. Youth make you angry or make you laugh? Tell us about it.

Send us a letter and your opinion could appear in the next issue of L.A. Youth or on layouth.com.

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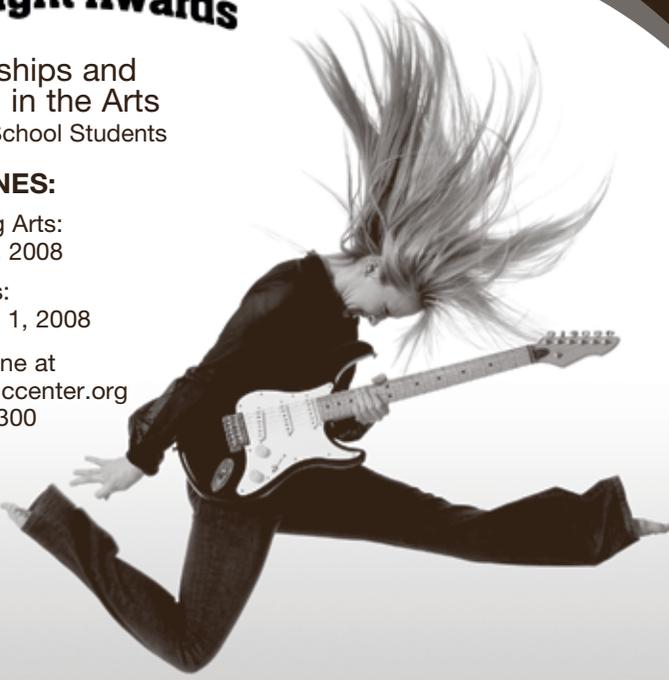
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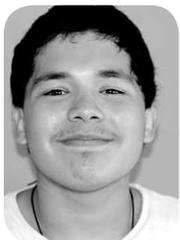
High gas prices slowed us down

Summer is usually the time of year when you can ditch the books and head to the beach. At least, that was when gas prices were lower. The price of a gallon of gas is a dollar higher than a year ago, making it more expensive for teens to get around. We asked our teen staff writers how high gas prices affected them this summer.



My friends appreciated me giving them more gas money

Before gas prices went up, whenever I went out with my friends, I'd make sure to have \$5 in my wallet to give to the person driving. I am a big believer in gas money, as I rarely drive myself. It makes the driver appreciate you more and want to drive you around again. I live in Baldwin Hills, which is near Culver City. When my friends and I go out we drive to Melrose Avenue, Malibu and Hollywood. But now, because of higher gas prices, I have to reach into my wallet and pull out five more dollars for my friend who's driving me around. That's \$10! That means every time I go out, I'm losing 10 extra dollars that aren't even going to the "me" fund. I go out at least three times a week. That's \$10 a day, \$30 a week and \$120 a month on GAS ALONE.
—Alex Key, 16, Besant Hill School



The bus is a cheap way to get around

My family doesn't drive. We take buses and the subway so the price of gas doesn't affect us. Taking the bus and subway, I travel to school, to The Grove to hang out with friends and to church almost every Sunday. Despite the price of gas, I've been able to go to places I want and need to go. This summer I took an art class at Los Angeles City College and visited my mom at USC where she works. It's not good for the



PHOTO BY JENNY NGU, 17, EL MONTE HS

Amanda Ly, 16, of Mark Keppel High School took an online class this summer, which was one of the ways that teens tried to save money on gas.

economy that the price of gas is going up, but I believe that teens have much to learn from using the buses and subway instead of relying on an adult to drive them or driving themselves. I feel as though I am more self-reliant. Yes, using the Metro system requires planning your trip, knowing how often the bus comes and how many stops it is to get from one place to another. It took me a few days to figure it out by looking online at mta.net and finding the routes to places I wanted to go, but taking the bus and subway rather than paying for gallons of gas makes it worth it.
—Aaron Sayago, 17, Fairfax HS



I found fun closer to home

Whenever my friends and I hang out and don't know what to do, we usually ask the friend who is driving, "How far are you willing to

drive?" When gas prices weren't so high, my friends were willing to drive as far as The Grove shopping mall, about 30 miles from where I live in Hacienda Heights. Now they usually answer with something like "five miles." We've had trouble deciding where to go because of high gas prices. I didn't even get to go the beach this summer!

One time my friends and I decided to grab some frozen yogurt. We parked and sat in the car in the parking lot of a local Target, eating our frozen yogurt, stumped about what to do next. We wanted to do something adventurous and out of the ordinary. We threw out suggestions like Birch Street in Brea (16 miles from us) and a shopping plaza in Whittier (7 miles away). But most of them were answered with, "Next time we can do that." We ended up eating at a local Vietnamese restaurant and hanging out at a friend's house. I wouldn't call that adventurous, but I can't say that I didn't have fun. My friends and I aren't able to have out-of-the-ordinary adven-

tures anymore, but we've found things to do close by that we probably wouldn't have thought of if it weren't for high gas prices.

—Allison Ko, 16, Wilson HS (Hacienda Heights)



Nickels and dimes didn't get me very far

My friend drives a Mustang and I borrow my dad's Tahoe. During the summer we'd try to make plans to go out but ended up debating on the phone over whose car has more gas. Whoever had more gas would be responsible for driving. Sometimes these debates continued all day, and I'd go multiple days without seeing my friends. Gas prices have been so insane that most of the time I found myself sitting around the house watching movies.

One of my most embarrassing times was at a gas station in Downey. All I had was \$2 for my empty gas tank. I paid the gas attendant in nickels and dimes. She looked at me as if I was crazy considering gas was almost \$5 a gallon at the time. I bought less than half a gallon, but I only had to go a quarter mile to my house. When I got back to the car my best friend laughed at me and didn't stop until we got home.

—Britawnya Craft, 17, Warren HS (Downey)



Online classes saved me money

This summer to get a taste of college, I took classes through East Los Angeles College. But rather than take traditional classes, I took them online because of the outrageously high gas prices, which approached \$5 per gallon. By not driving my 1990 Nissan Maxima (which gets about 18 miles per gallon) to and from school four times a week I saved about \$25 on gas each week. With the money I saved, I was able to drive a longer distance to hang out with my best friends at the Rose Bowl flea market in Pasadena and The Americana shopping center in Glendale.
—Amanda Ly, 16, Mark Keppel HS (Alhambra)

I'm a loner but not lonely

It was worth the struggle to make friends, even though I still like spending time by myself

ILLUSTRATION BY RAYMOND CARRILLO, 18, POLYTECHNIC HS (2008 GRADUATE)



By Ernesto Pineda

16, ANIMO FILM & THEATRE ARTS CHARTER HS

Being around people has always been hard for me. In middle school I liked going to the library and reading at lunch. Or I would wait outside of the school building for the bell to ring to go to class. I'd lean against the wall looking down, thinking about homework that I should have done.

I've always been this way. My dad is a controlling person so whenever I was helping him fix the car and I would screw up on accident, he'd say, "You're not doing it right." If I dropped the milk, he would get mad and

hit me on the arm, which wasn't painful but made me feel useless. It made me think I wasn't good enough for anyone.

When I started elementary school I stayed away from the other kids because I thought they wouldn't like me or might yell at me too. I wanted friends but I was too shy so I kept to myself. One day in fourth grade I was walking around school and saw a group of kids sitting on the ground with a bottle in the middle. A boy asked me if I wanted to play. I was curious about what kind of game they were playing, and kind of surprised he asked me to join. But the girls said no, giggled, and before I could sit down they all left without giving me another thought.

Going into John Adams Middle School, the only thing

I had on my mind was getting through school. I didn't want to meet people. I believed I didn't need friendship. If anyone tried to talk to me I believed they just wanted to be the polite person and didn't mean it. When I was alone during lunch people would ask me, "Do you have any friends?" If I were by myself after class they'd ask, "Are you OK?" I didn't like those questions because they were implying that there was something wrong with me because I didn't like being around people. I didn't think there was anything wrong with me; I just wanted to be alone.

Everyone had gotten used to my silent treatment until I went to math tutoring (I didn't do well in the first quarter) and met Odrige. His first words to me were

something simple like, “Do you have a pencil?” or “I guess you’re stuck in this class too?” At first I thought, “Why is he talking to me?” But I started getting used to talking to Odrigde. We’d sit next to each other and write notes about videos games or the math homework or make jokes.

MY FIRST GROUP OF FRIENDS

In seventh grade, Odridge left the school and I was going to end up alone again. I decided to try to get to know his friends, Brian, Wayne and Jesus. I thought they might be as friendly as Odridge.

It was hard to get to know them because I didn’t know how to talk to people. I’d get my lunch and go outside, sit down at their table with them and start eating. It was nice to be with people I knew, even though I didn’t talk much.

We’d sometimes go to a corner near the main building. I’d lean against the fence a little bit apart from them and listen to their conversations. I’d leave after I finished eating and go to the library, where I would read until the bell rang. I liked the solitude from all the noise outside of the library—people talking and yelling too much.

There was often part of me that wanted to be alone because there is always that person in the group who you get into fights with. Jesus was that person. He was a jerk. He would bother me about things like my weight. I usually just ignored him, but one day as I was heading toward the locker room Jesus was behind me and said “move.” I turned around and told him to be quiet. He pushed me and I pushed him back and we got into a fight. I had his head under my arm and he was hitting my stomach and then a classmate stopped us. We didn’t want to get caught so we stopped.

After the fight I was angry. At first I didn’t want to talk to anyone. I stopped hanging out with them and I would sit alone at lunch. But Brain and Wayne were friends and I didn’t want to stop being their friend, so then I talked to only Brian and Wayne. Eventually Jesus and I got over the fight. But I didn’t trust him, even though I had decided to sit at their table again.

After our graduation ceremony I knew I wouldn’t see them again because we were heading to different high schools. I asked for Wayne’s e-mail because part of me wanted to stay in touch but I lost it so I lost contact with them. I wasn’t sure how it was going to be in high school. I didn’t know what kind of people I would meet and if they’d be friendly.

I WASN’T THE ONLY ONE WHO SHIED AWAY FROM PEOPLE

One day that summer I was watching Adult Swim on Cartoon Network and I caught the end of an anime that I thought had a catchy name, Neon Genesis Evangelion. I didn’t think much of it until the Anime Network showed an ad for a remastered version and it seemed interesting. It was about a teenager named Shinji (SHIN-gee). He was a loner. He didn’t have any friends and avoided people. I looked for it on the Internet. I spent two days watching all 24 episodes and the alternate ending on Google Video.

In one episode, the other characters said Shinji was afraid of getting hurt and explained the “hedgehog dilemma,” which means that when hedgehogs get close to each other, they hurt each other because of their spikes so they separate. It made sense. I was like Shinji. I ran away from people because I was afraid of being hurt. It showed me that I wasn’t the only one with this problem.

In the end, Shinji realizes he can get to know people and even if they hurt him, he can still be happy because there are other people who are going to be there for him. I had always thought I could make it through life without getting to know people and it would be fine. But watching the anime made me realize that I could open up.

High school was a fresh start. I decided to try to hang out with people, to not hide who I was and not let people put me down because I’m different. I figured, “If this doesn’t work out I can go back to the way I was.”

On my first day at Animo Film & Theatre Arts Charter High School it was strange being around all these faces I had never seen before. I waited by myself near the wall while everyone was in groups trying to make new friends or saying hi to old ones. I decided that I

I had always thought I could make it through life without getting to know people and it would be fine. But watching the anime made me realize I could open up. I decided to try to hang out with people and not hide who I was.

would at least try to say hello to someone. I looked at the person in front of me and thought, “Let’s try this.” I finally stopped myself from looking away and said “hi.” He said “hello” back. But after that I didn’t know what to say. We stopped talking and then a minute later I tried again and asked, “What school did you come from?” He responded but then I dropped it because I didn’t know anything about his school. Trying to make friends was a stupid idea. It didn’t feel right. I didn’t try for the rest of the day. I wasn’t even sure I wanted friends.

I had been pushing people away from me for so long that I didn’t know how to make friends. But after a while I started to talk to people more. My school had activities in which you had to say your name and something

about yourself. Through those activities, I started to get to know the other students and it was easier to talk to them. I have also gotten to know some students because my school is small so I see them a lot.

I WAS ACCEPTED FOR WHO I AM

A month later I started being friends with Juan. I met him in homeroom when I moved to a table next to him. I don’t remember how we started talking but when I started a weird conversation he would continue it with me and he didn’t freak out like other people. I thought, “Wow, he is weird just like me.” We started getting into deeper conversations. We talked about all kinds of things, like what we thought of manga or what movies we wanted to watch. I asked Juan how to beat parts of Halo. We liked talking about things that people don’t normally talk about, like how we believe that some cartoons may have subliminal messages. It was easy to talk to him because we had so much in common and we accepted each other.

During summer school we met Emmanuel and the three of us started to hang out. Emmanuel and I talked about manga and anime a lot, like if Eva Unit 01 from Evangelion would be able to defeat Guyver from the anime Guyver. I’d say, “Guyver has a Megasmasher (a weapon that blows up everything in its path).” He’d say, “Eva has the power to use the AT Field (a shield).” Then there’d be a long conversation about who could beat the other and eventually we’d agree on how the fight would end. I had made friends who I could trust and felt comfortable talking to.

Now I have friends. There are about 10 of us in the group. My closest friends are Emmanuel and Juan. Emmanuel tells me about anime shows to watch and we play the card game Magic before school. Juan is the crazy friend. He comes up with weird ideas, like how lighting steel wool can look like a firecracker. We sometimes are able to make fun of each other. I’m short and overweight so they tease me. I know they don’t mean it and aren’t trying to hurt me. I make fun of them too.

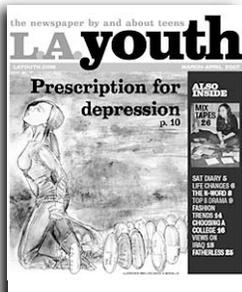
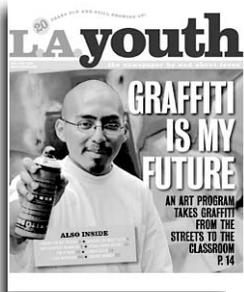
I never thought I could meet people who were nice, but I have. I’ve realized I need to give people a chance so I can get to know them and see if they’re cool.

Having friends makes me feel better. There are more people who understand me than I thought there could be. I don’t feel as alone as I used to. But it’s still not easy being around people. When I have a bad day I don’t talk to anyone. And I like being alone more than being with people because when I’m alone I don’t have to impress anyone and I can think to myself.

I’ve made friends but at lunch after I’ve talked with them, I walk around the school. This lets me have space for myself. Whether I decide to be with people or be alone, either way I’m happy. I still feel like a loner even though I have friends. I don’t see what’s wrong with being alone.



Ernesto’s favorite things to do when he’s by himself are reading, listening to classical music and playing the computer game Guild Wars.



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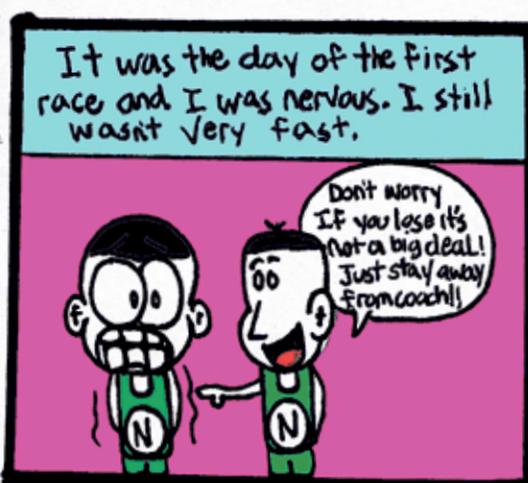
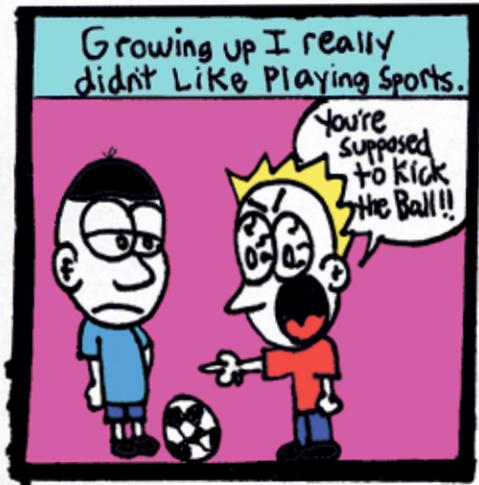
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SURPRISE FINISH



Francisco Sandoval, 16, of Nogales HS created this comic about joining the cross country team.

My life on

METH

I was angry, out of control and only cared about getting high until overdosing finally pushed me to get clean

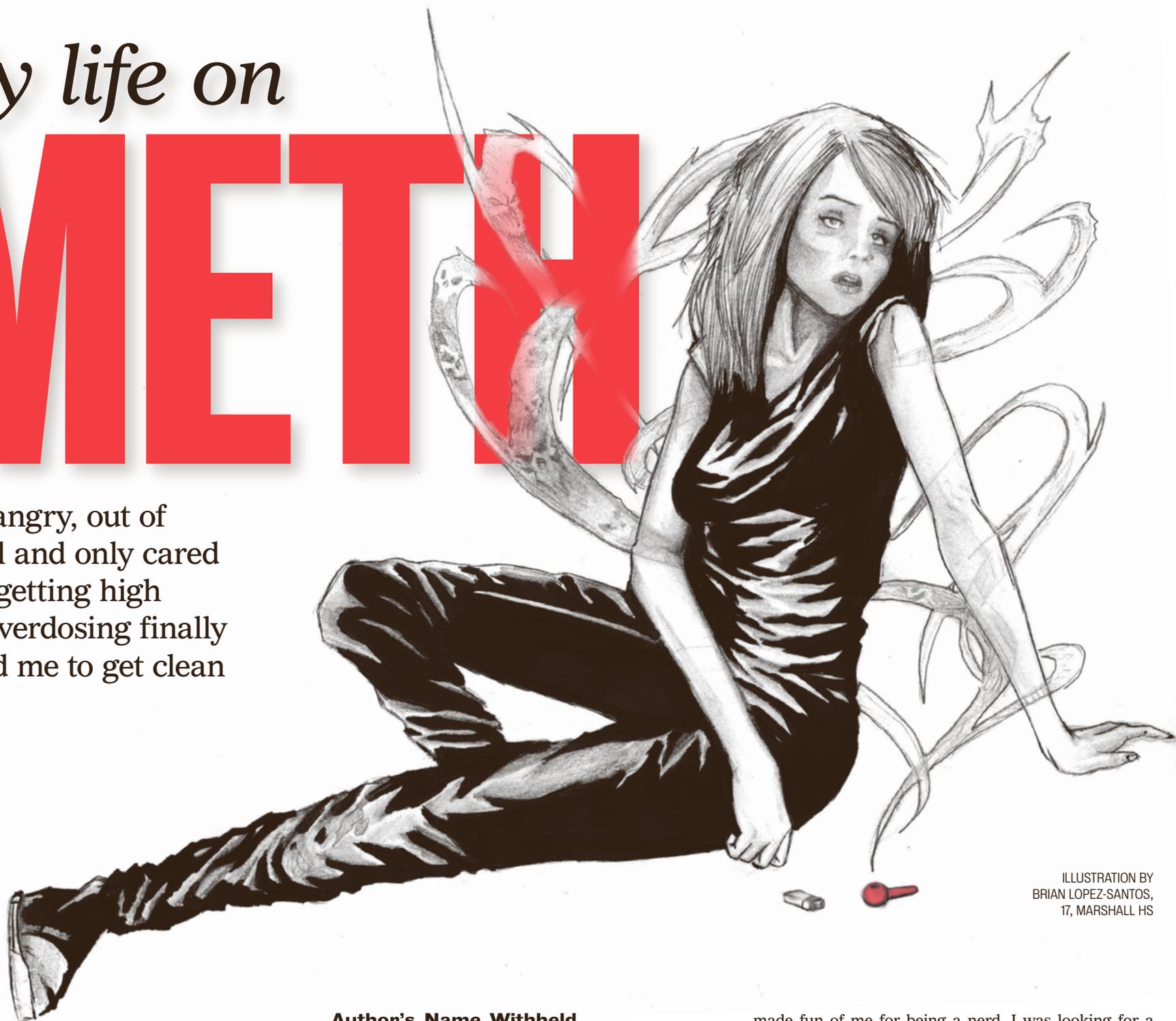


ILLUSTRATION BY
BRIAN LOPEZ-SANTOS,
17, MARSHALL HS

Author's Name Withheld

**To protect the people involved the names have been changed.*

One of my dad's girlfriends introduced me to weed when I was 13. The first time I smoked I loved it. I started smoking multiple times every day.

Before I started, I'd wanted to get away from everything. I always felt like I didn't fit in. My life was going downhill. My grades were getting worse and worse. School sucked. People

made fun of me for being a nerd. I was looking for a place to belong. But when I started smoking, I thought my life was complete and that all I needed was weed to truly feel happy.

I started making friends with people who smoked weed. Drugs were easy to get. There were two drug dealers on my block and three more down the street. I always had a way to get high, whether I was spending my allowance or sharing weed and smoking with my friends. I started going to school high and sometimes smoking weed during school. Eventually I skipped classes to get high.

My older brother Kevin didn't smoke cigs or any-

thing. He was a good boy. I thought it would be funny to get Kevin stoned. I begged Kevin to smoke. He kept saying no, until he finally gave in 20 minutes later. From that day on my brother and I were partners in crime, always on a mission to get high. We covered for each other so neither of us would get in trouble.

Two years later, Kevin started using meth. I yelled at him and I told him I hated it. I wanted him to stop and told him, "Don't you see we lost everything due to meth? Look what happened to mom and our brother. Why do you think they aren't here?" Kevin looked at me and then he looked down, but didn't say anything. My mom was a meth addict and left when I was 3. My oldest brother, also a meth addict, got locked up when he was 14 and is still serving time.

EVERYONE ELSE WAS DOING IT, WHY SHOULDN'T I?

I blamed myself for a lot of Kevin's drug use. Six months later he went to rehab in Northridge. I thought I would never do meth. I thought, "Why is everyone leaving me? Why is everyone choosing this over me?" My mom and my brothers, my dad's old girlfriends. What's so great about meth? I decided I wanted to try it.

The first time I used meth was at Birmingham High. My brother Kevin had gone there and people thought I would be like him. At lunch this girl came up to me and we started talking. She asked me what drugs I used. I lied and said meth. We went to the bathroom. We went into a stall, locked the door and she pulled a glass pipe out of her bra and passed it to me and said, "You hit it first." I didn't know what I was doing. I smoked it wrong and nothing happened. We hung out for about 10 minutes and she told me to meet her by a tree after school and we could kick it. The next day, I started to get the hang of it. When I smoked I really got high. The world was so different. It felt like I was in a dream. Things I thought I was imagining were actually happening. I loved it way too much. Later I was walking home and all I could think about was how good I felt.

I never thought I would get addicted. Seeing what meth did to everybody else, I thought that's them, I'm a different person. I saw people lose weight fast. Their teeth would rot and they were angrier. I thought I was stronger than that. But instantly, I was using every day. I couldn't stop. I felt depressed and sick when I wasn't high. My body told me I needed it to feel better.

I used to be this polite girl—so nice people would take advantage of me. After I started using meth I completely changed. Every day I was fighting people (mostly guys). My knuckles were always bloody. I also wasn't taking care of myself. I wasn't eating. I was really skinny. I was like an empty skeleton roaming the world, just taking up space. I didn't care about how I looked. I would just throw whatever on. I loved to wear tutus. I also remember walking around in a nurse costume with duct tape strapped around me. I had a thing for freaking people out. I would jump in trash cans, say and do anything. I didn't care how bad it made me look as long as I got a rise out of them. Nothing mattered as long as I was high.

I WAS TALKING TO PEOPLE WHO WEREN'T THERE

One day at school I was sitting in the middle of the football field hallucinating. I thought I was talking to people, telling them not to use drugs. School let out and people came outside and saw me. I don't know how long they were standing there. Then it hit me that

I wasn't talking to anyone. It felt like the whole school was watching. I opened my eyes and saw the world for what it was.

Everything I used to love, I hated. I stopped singing, writing, playing sports and being with my true friends. I just wanted to be with people who were getting high.

I lied to everyone to hide my drug use. I only went to school about seven days a month. I made up friends to talk to my dad about so it would seem like I was going to school. I could tell in his eyes that he knew I was lying. All of us were meth addicts—me, my mother and my two brothers. I think he didn't want to see my life falling apart, so he played it off as if everything was all right. I wish he would've stopped me and helped me get better.

Nine months after I started using meth, I overdosed. I was with a friend and she dropped me off on the street not far from my house at 2 a.m. I started walking home. I started hallucinating. It was scary. I was hiding underneath cars and trying to climb on roofs. I thought a swarm of cops and dogs were after me. I was running. I hallucinated that a cop dog had gotten me and that's when I fell in the middle of street. I don't remember what happened after that. Someone called the police. My dad was in the ambulance with me. He told me that my eyes

Getting clean was really a struggle, but it's the best thing I have ever done.

had turned yellow, I wouldn't stop screaming and I kept throwing up. They thought I was going to die.

At the hospital I woke up in a diaper and thought, "What the hell?" I felt like I was back to being a baby. I couldn't do anything on my own. Two nurses would come and put me on a plastic toilet and I had to learn how to walk all over again. I had messed up my body so much. After I overdosed I thought, "I've just been caught for every bad thing I'd done."

My dad told me I needed help, but I told him, "Whenever you send me I'll get out." First, my dad sent me to a rehab facility in Santa Clarita where I stayed for three months. There would be days when I wanted to be clean because I had almost died. I'd be dedicated to getting better some days and other days I'd wake up and wonder, "Why am I still here? Why don't I pick up the phone and call my friends to come get me?"

Then my dad sent me to a rehab facility in Provo, Utah where I couldn't run away. It was a lockdown facility where I couldn't leave, had limited visits, was told when I could do anything, had to walk in single file lines, even my clothes had to be approved. There were about

120 girls there. They spent a month teaching everyone all the rules. It was really, really strict. You had to sleep under the sheet and the comforter. You couldn't sit and look out the window because they thought you were coming up with ways to escape. And they made you change rooms a lot to see how you got along with different people in different settings. I thought, "I have to do good, I can't mess up because I have to get out of here." I wanted to be perfect so my dad would take me home.

AT REHAB I MISSED MY FAMILY

After being in Provo for three months, I started missing my dad. That hit me really hard. It made me realize how much I missed out. I would stay up at night crying. When my cousin got pregnant she said she wanted me in the delivery room. I wrote her back, "Because I was getting high, I can't be there." It sucked not being there.

At the table in the cafeteria, the other girls would tell stories of good times in their lives. The rules were that you couldn't talk about getting high or anything negative. I didn't have any stories. I couldn't remember a lot of times because I had been high. I missed out on life because I got into drugs at a young age. They would talk about going to the park and actually hanging out, not getting high. I started realizing my whole life was wrapped around drugs. All I could say was, "Me and my brother used to go skating in Panorama City." I don't know how people could stand talking to me because I always said the same thing.

After a year in Provo I had shown I was responsible and trustworthy. I'd become a mentor for other girls. My therapist told me I was ready to go home. I moved back to L.A. I was really excited to come home because I had more freedom. But I didn't know how it would feel to be sober and not have people watching over me 24/7. I was afraid I'd go back to using. To help with the transition, I moved into a group home with five other girls—some of them have behavioral problems and some have drug addictions like me. The staff is always there, but they're not always on our backs like in Provo. I've been back for a year and I've been clean for more than two years.

Now that I'm sober I love skating, writing, hanging with my new friends and spending time with my dad. I'm president of student government and on the newspaper at school. I really enjoy all those activities. They make me feel like I have a purpose in life and that I'm not just taking up space.

Getting clean was really a struggle, but it's the best thing I have ever done. I had to get rid of my old friends and not go to the places where I used to hang out because they would trigger the feeling of wanting to get high. Whenever I pass by a friend's house or see one of them walking down the street, my mindset changes and I start to fall into who I used to be. Sometimes when I'm sitting somewhere or watching a movie, I'll say, "I wish I was high" or "This would be funny if I was high." Then I think, "Just get that thought out of your head." It took time for me to be able to ignore those thoughts. Even though I want to be clean, I know there's a part of me that loves drugs. But I think of the consequences. I think about my dad and how much my life has changed for the better since I got sober. I've worked so hard to change and it would be stupid to throw it all away.

Turn the page for an interview with a doctor on the dangers of meth and how to get help.

Meth Q&A: 'It's highly addictive'

L.A. Youth interviewed Jonathan Whitfield, the medical director of Phoenix House California, a facility that treats drug and alcohol abuse. As a child and adolescent psychiatrist and substance abuse specialist he works with teens recovering from addictions.

What is meth?

Methamphetamine is a stimulant drug. It causes a euphoria. People [on meth] don't feel like they need to eat. People seek out pleasurable situations. A lot of times people are more sexually active or they engage in risky behaviors. When you use a lot of methamphetamine, what ends up happening over a long period of time is you can start to have paranoid thoughts, you can start to have hallucinations, hearing voices. It can cause people to become psychotic.

Why is meth dangerous?

It's very, very highly addictive because it hits all the centers of the brain that cause pleasure and addiction. When people are using a lot of methamphetamines, they're often not thinking rationally. They're often only caring about using more drugs, having more fun, having more sex. They're oftentimes not sleeping. They're not drinking enough water. They're not eating. They're engaging in risky sexual behaviors. That combination can often lead to a very deadly circumstance because people put themselves into situations that result in them not making good decisions and also put a tremendous strain on the body.

How long does it take to get addicted to meth?

If there's a family history of substance abuse, oftentimes other people in the family will get hooked on drugs quicker. When you start getting into using it on a weekly basis, then it can quickly become something that becomes a lot more frequent. Then people are finding they're using it on a daily basis and you know, they're completely dependent on it.

How common is meth use among teens?

[At] the facility where I work, the Phoenix House, it's one of the more common drugs that I see being abused. Marijuana is number one, but meth is a very high number two.

How can you tell if your friend is using meth?

If you notice any personality changes. They might be more irritable. Their speech may be rapid. They [may] start hanging out with a different crowd of people or start changing their behavior in terms of not going to school or they start having a lot of sexual relationships ... not doing their work, staying out all night partying.

Some teens will lose weight, maybe see bags under their eyes if they're not sleeping. Oftentimes when the drug is really becoming a problem, they'll develop a lot

of skin problems—rashes on the skin, rashes around the mouth, bleeding gums. If they're snorting it, they might have problems with their sinuses.

How can I talk to someone I know and help them?

The best way to help somebody who you know is abusing drugs is to express your concern about the changes you see in them and to tell them what you know about drugs and how harmful they can really be. Oftentimes coming from a friend, it's going to mean a lot more than coming from the school or the parent or even law enforcement. There are teen hotlines about drug use and getting help.

What does it take to get clean?

You need to be in some sort of treatment program. There are many programs throughout the city. Going to a drug treatment program where you're learning about the drugs, where you're meeting with other people that have drug problems, you're talking about how it affects your life, possibly getting drug tested, at least a few times a week attending meetings. That's one way to start.

Where to get help

24/7 drug treatment program
referrals: (800) 662-4357
TeenLine: (800) 852-8336



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Here are some recent poll results from layout.com:

- 32 percent said parallel parking is the hardest part about driving.
- 57 percent said the media is in favor of Barack Obama.
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Go to layout.com and click on the Foster Youth link to learn more and read stories written by foster youth.

Take action: register to vote

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VOTING FACTS

Who can register to vote?

According to the California Secretary of State, to register to vote a person must:

- Be a citizen of the United States
- Be a resident of California
- Be at least 18 years of age as of the day of the election
- Not be in prison or on parole for the conviction of a felony
- Not be deemed by an appropriate court to be mentally incompetent

How do I register to vote?

You must complete a voter registration form, which can be obtained by:

- Calling a local county clerk's office and requesting a form
- Filling out a voter registration form online (a pre-typed registration form will then be mailed to you, which you must sign and mail back.) www.sos.ca.gov/elections/votereg1.html
- Calling the toll-free voter registration hotline at 1-800-345-VOTE (8683) and requesting a form

For more information check out:

- Rock the Vote www.rockthevote.com
- The Los Angeles County Clerk www.lavote.net
- Declare Yourself www.declareyourself.com

By Mindy Gee

18, LOS ANGELES CENTER FOR ENRICHED STUDIES
(2008 GRADUATE)

During the school year, my friends and I often had discussions about current events, like the war in Iraq. And now that most of us are 18, we will be able to voice our opinions by voting in the next election.

I've always looked forward to being able to influence government policy. With a presidential election coming up this November, I was thrilled to know that I could finally take part in choosing the next president. But before I could vote, I had to register.

To find out how to register, I Googled "California voter registration" and clicked on the first government link that came up: www.sos.ca.gov. Since only official government sites can use the ".gov" ending, I knew that this link would be a good place to start. When I opened the page, I saw that it was the California Secretary of State's website, which assured me the site was a reliable source that was not run by a random organization out to get my personal information.

I found that it was free to register, so I followed a link on the website to the online registration form. Any United States citizen who will be at least 18 by the next election is eligible to vote. I was surprised to see how simple the California voter registration process was compared to the countless applications for college, scholarships and financial aid I had to fill out during my senior year. Registering to vote requires only one form, which took me about five minutes to complete.

I COULD CHOOSE TO BE REPUBLICAN OR DEMOCRAT

The form asked for basic contact and identification information, including my date of birth, home address and phone number. There was also a section that asked about my political party, where I could choose to be a Republican, Democrat or a decline-to-state voter. I spent a while on this question because I knew that registering for certain parties could limit my ability to vote for other parties' candidates in primary elections. In the end, I chose to be a decline-to-state voter because I didn't want to commit to a single party. But this means that I will have to pay attention to changes in state policy before every election. In the general election, however, all voters are free to vote for any candidate.

There are three ways to register. I chose to fill out the registration form online, which seemed to be the most convenient option. A week or two later, I received the form in the mail with the information I submitted online. Since the form was already addressed and had pre-paid postage, all I had to do then was sign the form and mail it back to the local county elections office.

Another option is to go online, download and print

the registration form, then mail the signed application to the county elections office. The last alternative is to pick up the form from the elections office, and either fill it out there or mail it to the office. Registration forms can also be found in public libraries and post offices. Once the application is processed, the elections office says that you should receive sample ballots in the mail before Election Day.

Registering online worked for me because I registered long before Election Day. You should keep in mind that the state requires all voter registration forms to be post-marked at least 15 days before the election. To be eligible to vote in the presidential election on Nov. 4, you need to postmark the form by Oct. 20. To make sure you meet that deadline, stick the form in the mail by Oct. 19.

There are several websites you can turn to for more voter information, but the one I have found to be most

THE STATE REQUIRES ALL VOTER REGISTRATION FORMS TO BE POSTMARKED AT LEAST 15 DAYS BEFORE THE ELECTION.

helpful was www.sos.ca.gov. Everything I needed was available on this website, which also explained the registration process and answered frequently asked questions (FAQ) about voting. It mentioned that once I was registered, I would not have to re-register unless I changed my name, moved to another address or decided to change my political affiliation. I especially liked this site because it had a link to a list of county elections offices and told me everything I needed to know, like how to find my polling place. I was glad to find that I could also download a vote-by-mail application on www.sos.ca.gov, since I will be out of state for college this fall.

I'm excited to know that I finally have a say in what goes on in the country, but registering also left me with the reminder that to be a responsible voter, it was up to me to be knowledgeable about current events. Being an active voter is so important because it encourages you to stay informed, and I hope that all eligible teens take the first step and register.



Mindy hopes that all teens who are able to will vote in the upcoming election.

By Casey Peeks
16, MARLBOROUGH SCHOOL

For the past year, stories and talk of the 2008 presidential election have been everywhere I turn. It's in the magazines I read like CosmoGIRL!, which has stories on women in politics like Hillary Clinton; it's on the news I watch with polls describing who's in the lead; and even at the dinner table when my parents discussed who Barack Obama should choose as a running mate.

I find the election interesting because I am now old enough that I care and have my own opinions on many of the issues, like the environment and when the U.S. should get out of Iraq. I often feel left out when my parents and other adults discuss the election because I am 16, too young to vote. I feel even more left out because this will be the first presidential election that my brother and many of my older friends can vote in. My friends talk about registering to vote and my brother, who is away at college, talks about filling out an absentee ballot.

So when my history teacher announced an opportunity to volunteer for the Los Angeles County Student Pollworker Program, right away I wanted to join. He said the program is designed to help teens get first-hand experience with politics by working at the polls on election day. I was curious about how an election worked. The only thing I knew about the polls was that they gave you the "I voted" stickers that I always see on election days.

I volunteered for the June election. It was hard getting up at 5:30 a.m. to be at the polls to set up by 6, especially because it was my first Tuesday of summer break. I didn't want to get up, so I hit my snooze button. But my mom came into my room a few minutes later, telling me I had to wake up. Once I was up I got excited because I was finally going to find out how voting works.

Entering the auditorium at Valley View Elementary School (just five minutes away from my house), I became nervous when I noticed I was the youngest person there. Everyone looked like they were my parents' age or older. Once we got started setting up the polls my nerves cooled. My fellow poll workers were nice and impressed that a high school student was volunteering an entire summer day. Everyone included me in the conversations and even gave me tips. They told me this election was going to be

An inside view of voting

It was cool to volunteer as a poll worker on election day

slow and not many people would come out to vote. I didn't even know what they were voting for. It turned out the election was for judges and some state propositions.

I HANDED BALLOTS TO VOTERS

Each poll worker had a specific job. Mine was to hand people their ballot once they had signed in at the head of the table. Each party had a different ballot and I would have to ask the voter which party they were registered with. If the voter was a Republican, I would hand him or her a Republican ballot. It was funny when my parents came in to vote on their way to work. I got to help them and give them their ballots.

It got boring when no one was coming in to vote but I had books to read. When it was really slow right before lunch, I got the chance to "vote" with the demonstrator In-

kaVote Plus (the device used for voting). All day I had seen people vote and I wanted to.

Even though it didn't count, "voting" was fun because there was a fake ballot where I could vote for Abraham Lincoln or Thomas Jefferson for president. The InkaVote is really easy to use. The device has pegs to hold your ballot and an ink blotter to mark your vote. "Voting" was definitely the highlight of my day, along with eating pecan pie one of the poll workers baked for the polling place team.

The polls closed at 7 p.m. We stayed to pack up the supplies and count the ballots. There was a machine that checked to make sure all the ballots were valid and counted them. Then we double-checked by counting the ballots by hand. Luckily there were only 66 ballots. I was done with my day by 9.

I was surprised that it was such a slow day, but I'm glad it was because I had time to learn everything. Even though it got boring, I'm glad I did it. The poll workers were fun to listen to (when things got really slow they looked through the book of registered voters to see how many celebrities lived in the area) and I learned a lot about the voting process.

I can't wait to work during the Nov. 4 presidential election. It could be the election when the first black president is elected and a lot of people will be coming out to vote. I will be there to help make sure everything runs smoothly and to help people get their voices heard.

I recommend volunteering at the polls to any teen (you have to be at least 16 years old). If that's not enough encouragement, you get a \$105 stipend (but you must attend a two-hour class in advance), and it may be an excused absence from school.

The deadline to apply to be a student poll worker is Sept. 26. For more information, call (562) 462-2840 or go to www.lavote.net and click on "Apply to be a Pollworker."



Casey
can't wait to volunteer and be part of the Nov. 4 presidential election.



"I really don't care. Because when I hear about the presidential election on TV, I don't really feel like it'll make a difference to me."

Natalie Rodriguez
14, HUNTINGTON PARK HS



"No, because I can't vote anyway."

Hakeem Profit
15, FAIRFAX HS



"Yes, it's different. We might have a black president. Obama seems like he cares more about the country and he wants to stop the war."

Luren Montellano
17, FAIRFAX HS



"Yes, because I think Obama will make a difference if he wins because when I hear him speak he inspires me. He'll change the future."

Chloe Chaidez
13, BLAIR HS (PASADENA)

Do you care about the presidential election?

His lessons live on

Before my favorite teacher died, he challenged me to think for myself and encouraged me to pursue my dreams

By Daisy Garcia

17, MIDDLE COLLEGE HS (2008 GRADUATE)

I had Charlap as an art teacher my freshman year. He seemed so different from all the other teachers. Skulls hung everywhere in his classroom (Dr. Skull was his nickname) and on the blackboard he had written: “NO EATING, NO MAKE UP, NO A.C.” (Attempted Comedy, he was the only comedian in class). If he found evidence that somebody had cheated, he placed their paper on his door window with a big red “F, BUSTED, CHEATER!” The entire school would rush to his window to see who cheated. His restroom pass was a toilet seat. We were limited to three restroom passes per semester, after that you got a Depend diaper and a “good luck.” He passed out “complimentary” Extra gum signifying that you had extra time after class. He gave you detention if you spoke when he was talking or if you were being a N.G. (Naughty Girl) or N.B. (Naughty Boy) in class. Charlap called roll like I’d never heard before. The mandated response was “NAAAAAH!” meaning that you were not there or “YAAAAAH!” meaning present.

When I heard his rules on the first day, I was laughing. I thought, are you kidding? But I was glad to have him because my brother and sister used to talk about him at the dinner table. I could tell that even though they had fun in his class they were learning as well.

He picked on me because I knew him through my siblings and he knew I wouldn’t take it seriously. When I’d say a joke to my friends he’d throw gum at me and say, “No A.C. What, did you have Goof Nut cereal for breakfast?”

But he was more than just a cool teacher. Charlap helped me examine my life. He pushed me to get interested in reading, which allowed me to see that life was more than just my surroundings in South Central. The ghetto isn’t a horrible place to be brought up but there are distractions that are easy to get into like fighting, drugs and gangs. He gave me something better to reach for.

At times that year I would walk into his class upset because I didn’t do well in English. I wasn’t a good speller. I felt I didn’t have a chance at becoming a writer, which was my dream. He’d say, “Don’t let that stop you. Just read more and you will get better.” In class I’d ask him, “How do you spell this?” He’d hand me a dictionary and say, “Look it up.” (I got so used to this that I now carry an electronic dictionary in my purse.)

WHY ARE WE STUDYING THIS?

I had Dr. Skull again in 10th grade, for English. One day after we were done reading the novel *Steppenwolf*, he asked us what we thought of the protagonist. Part of *Steppenwolf* was interested in establishing relationships; the other part didn’t see a meaning to life. Charlap said we were going to talk about existentialism, which is a philosophy that emphasizes individual existence, free-



He had become more than a teacher to me. He was a friend who changed my life. By the end of the year his skin was pale and he began to lose weight. He didn’t joke around as much. But I never asked how sick he was because it didn’t seem appropriate.

dom and choice; he told us some existentialists didn’t believe in God, others did. When he finished, everyone was confused. “Existencia-what?” “Are you serious about this? How does this apply to us?” they said. I grabbed a chair near his desk and sat down. “This is stupid, why are you making us learn this?” He said to the class, “Good, that’s what I want. You guys are at an age when it is easy to get influenced and where discovering who you are and what you believe in will be crucial factors of the man or woman you become.” I thought, “Whatever. It’s just another thing we’re going to learn in class.” I didn’t think it applied to me.

But I didn’t like not understanding something taught

in class so to better comprehend existentialism I decided to read a book by an existential writer. I picked *The Stranger* by Albert Camus because it was short. I was surprised I finished the book because I didn’t like novels. I thought it was a waste of time to read something that wasn’t factual. I kept reading because I wanted to know if the main character was finally going to be passionate about something and fall in love with the woman, or become apathetic about life and maybe kill himself.

I felt lonely and empty like the characters in *The Stranger* and *Steppenwolf*. When I was in eighth grade at Henry Clay Middle School, I was in a tagging crew and we’d tag up the school. I ditched and constantly got into fights. I stopped doing drugs, fighting and tagging because I didn’t want to get locked up. I wanted more out of life. But when I tried to change, nothing made me happy. I felt like I would always be a “failure” and that I was missing something in my life. I started

asking myself: Is life worth living? Is there a God? I had so many questions, which made me want to learn more about existentialism. I didn’t understand a speck of it though.

In class I would hurry through my work to finish quickly and talk to Charlap about the books. Usually he asked “teacher” questions like: Why do you think the author ...? Who is the antagonist? What’s the protagonist’s purpose? Afterwards he’d find a way to make the questions personal. He would ask me, “What’s your purpose in life?” I would think about my past and all the mistakes I had made. I worried because I didn’t think there was a purpose. I didn’t say anything to him but I’m sure he knew I was thinking about his questions because I’d be quiet.

I never thought that the questions I asked myself were discussed among philosophers as well. I thought I was crazy, that I shouldn’t ask myself those types of questions. The philosophers seemed courageous for asking questions.

I LEARNED IT WAS OK TO QUESTION MY BELIEFS

That gave me the courage to ask questions too and to leave the Catholic Church. My older brother Gustavo, who was Christian, had been talking to me about his faith. I liked the direct relationship he had with God through Jesus Christ. He didn’t need saints or priests to intercede for him like the Catholic Church taught me. I began to question Catholic traditions. I couldn’t explain why we had to put our trust in a priest to have a better relationship with God if Jesus was God’s sacrifice for us. I wanted a deeper relationship with God, which I believed could not be attained in Catholic theology.

One day in class I was quiet. Charlap asked, “What’s wrong Duzzy?” (one of his nicknames for me). “Nothing,” I said. He asked me to stay after class. I told him, “I am kinda afraid to tell my family that I am not Catholic



PHOTO BY NADINE CHOE, 16,
THE WILLISTON NORTHAMPTON SCHOOL

Daisy will always remember her teacher Charlie Charlap's love for life. At left, a favorite activity for seniors at Middle College High School was posing with Charlap before they graduated.

anymore." "What made you question it?" he asked. "Existentialism." Charlap was surprised. I guess he didn't expect students to take it seriously. He told me, "You can't be afraid of speaking up for what you believe in. In the process you only get to know yourself better and improve as a person or the person you want to be." Somehow, Charlap could always say the perfect words that made me feel better.

He had become more than a teacher to me. He was a friend who changed my life. By the end of sophomore year he walked slower, his skin was pale and he began to lose weight. He didn't joke around as much. But I never asked how sick he was because it didn't seem appropriate.

Junior year I saw less of Charlap because I didn't have him as a teacher. One day Mr. Strauss, my AP English teacher and a good friend of his, answered a student's question about Charlap during class. He said, "Charlap is sick and he does have cancer. He has leukemia." The entire room remained quiet. My eyes watered but I didn't want to cry. I began to text someone on my phone. I didn't know how serious leukemia could be. I thought it was curable with treatment and a couple of pills.

Each time I saw him he had lost more weight. He missed school a lot to receive chemotherapy and when he returned to school, he was losing his hair. Mr. Strauss

shared classrooms with him so we sometimes saw him. I would say, "Hi, Charlap" very enthusiastically. But when he'd walk away I'd say to myself, "What if he dies? No, I'm not going to think that."

I NEVER GOT TO THANK HIM

The last time I saw him, I wanted to cry. He looked so skinny and sick. He was wearing a mask on his face to protect him from the construction dust. I walked with him to his car. He said, "Things don't look so well. I will be going under the knife again." Then he said, "Pray for me, that everything goes well." I was surprised because he had been an atheist but he must have had some sort of faith to ask that. I smiled because for once I knew that the man who was an atheist believed in Christ. If he died, it was going to be hard but I knew he was going to be in a better place because he believed and trusted in God. I felt honored that he requested that of me. I didn't want to say goodbye as he got into his car. I wanted to hug him and tell him how much he meant, but I didn't. I just shook my head because I didn't know what to say.

When he was hospitalized the summer after my junior year I never went to see him. I always used the excuse that I was busy or that I would go see him next week, next month or when he returned. Truth was that I was a coward. I just couldn't say goodbye.

On Aug. 11, 2007, when I was at a wedding, I received a call that Dr. Skull had passed away earlier that day. I called everyone I knew to find out if it was true. I left the wedding reception and sat in the car for the rest of the night. I cried and smiled at the moments I had shared with him—the times he made fun of me, when he gave me "complimentary" gum and the times I carried the toilet seat. I kept thinking about how much I was going to miss him.

A couple of weeks later, we had a memorial service at school. The room overflowed with people. Former students, teachers, staff, even previous principals, were there. It looked almost like a dream: a white room full of people, some crying, some smiling, and flowers everywhere. A screen projected pictures of him with his family, students and friends. Teachers and previous principals spoke, then they had an open podium.

I never told him how much he meant to me and I wasn't going to let this chance go by. I wanted to cry, but I didn't because as I spoke images of him came to my mind and I smiled. I said I never thanked him for everything he did and taught me. I explained how I learned to laugh and be thankful when times are hard. I even shared that I was once one of the cheaters on the "wall of shame," but how that made me grow as a person and taught me to be accountable for everything I did. I looked at his wife in the front row and said that Charlap helped me get a little closer to my dream of writing because he believed in me. When I sat down, I felt that I could breathe again. I had finally expressed how much he meant to me.

In my bedroom I have his memorial card with a picture of him. Every time I am bothered by something it gives me courage to say, "It's not so bad" and I smile. Other times I look at the picture and cry. It's been a year now but I still miss him.

At graduation I remembered Charlap a lot. It was difficult, but seeing his wife there supporting us made me smile. Although I finished high school and received various recognitions like honor roll and the Charlap Scholarship, nothing was as rewarding as having Dr. Skull as a teacher. Charlap's love for life showed me that it was possible to leave things behind—like the person I used to be. A classmate once shared an encounter he had with Charlap, which encourages me even today. He said, "Charlap, you're losing your hair." Charlap said, "Big deal, T.F.B." (too f***ing bad) and he laughed. As I go off to college and study journalism, I find not having fear of the truth and life extremely powerful. I am not afraid to be distinct, to think differently or to take the time to help others. Only those individuals make a difference in people's lives as Charlap did in mine.

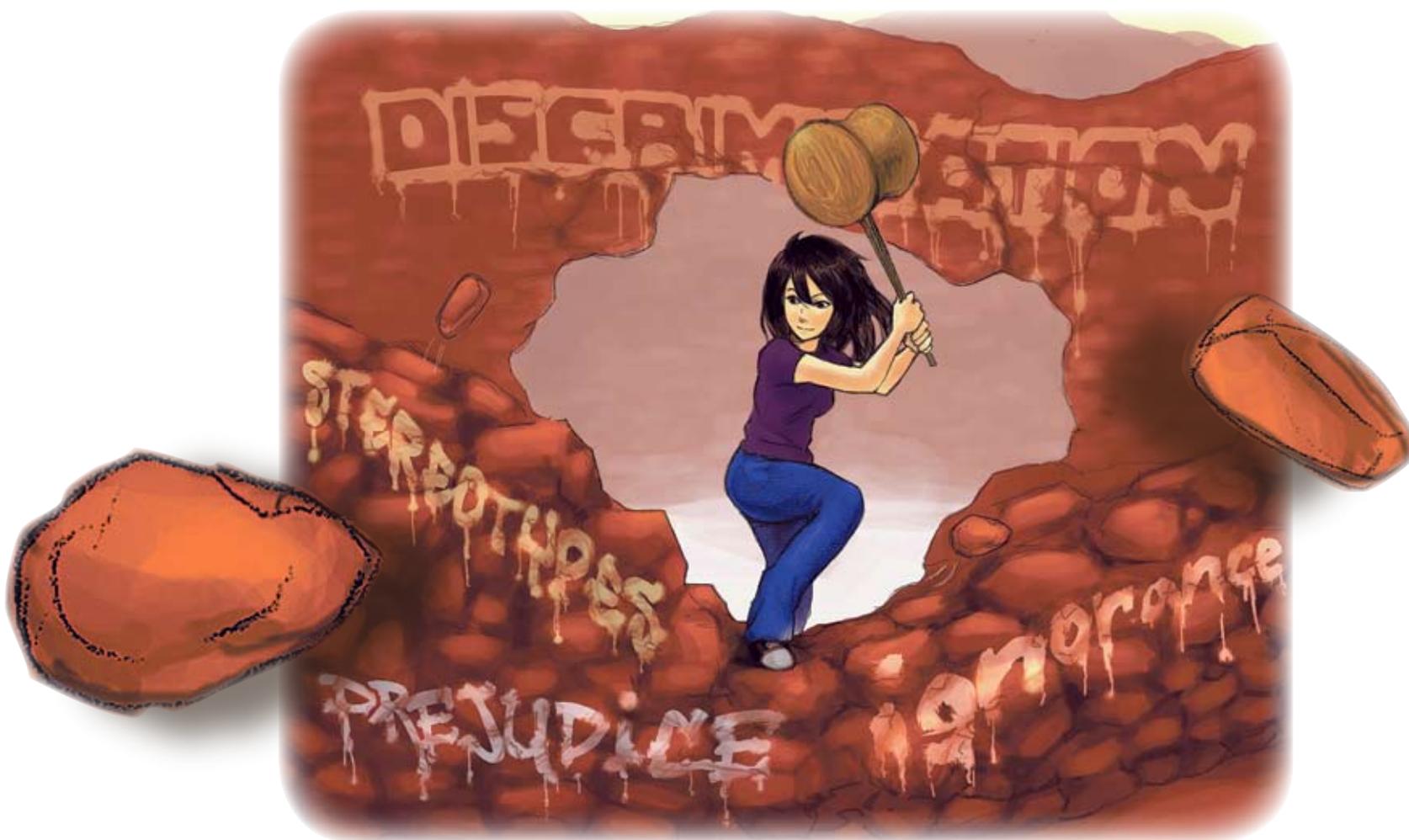


ILLUSTRATION BY
SARAH EVANS, 18,
TEMPLE CITY HS
(2008 GRADUATE)

Shattering stereotypes

Recognizing our prejudices will help us eliminate them

By Lia Dun
16, MARSHALL HS

“I hate white people,” one of my Latino friends said to me during class freshman year. I was confused, but nodded in agreement because I always think my friends will get mad if I disagree with them.

“So do I,” I replied.

“Yeah,” my friend continued, “they’re so stupid.”

At this point he launched into a speech about his reasons for hating white people. “They’re so rich,” he said, “and ugly.”

Soon, I found myself nodding along with him. After all, I’m Chinese-American and therefore, one of those people The Man holds down. I thought I had every right to agree with him, and I even offered up my own reasons for hating white people.

“The teachers always favor the white kids,” I added because in my history class, the teacher always called on

the lone white boy even when the rest of us raised our hands. “Those white people, I hate them so much because they’re snobby.” I remembered the stuck up white girls at my Catholic middle school squealing, “Oh my God! You’re gonna get shot!” when I told them I would be attending a public high school.

My examples seemed to satisfy my friend, and soon the bell rang. I was out the door and halfway down the stairs when someone tapped me on the shoulder. It was a friend of mine. She was white.

“Hey, Lia!” she said.

“Oh,” I said, looking at the floor, “hi.”

My friend noticed my discomfort. “What’s wrong with you?”

“Nothing,” I said quickly. As we walked to our next class together, I felt guilty. I called this girl my friend and yet I just spent five minutes putting down her race. I had believed everything I’d said about white people but felt that that most of those stereotypes didn’t apply to my friend specifically. I realized then that I’d been making

generalizations, and I resolved to quit stereotyping my friends.

That same day at lunch, I was talking to that same friend when she asked me, “What’s the difference between Latinos and Filipinos anyway?”

I wasn’t sure what to say to her. “Well ... Filipinos are Asian.”

“Oh,” she said, sounding unconvinced, “I get it.”

“Yeah,” I said and realized then that both my friend and I were ignorant about race.

I don’t think that only my friend and I have prejudices, though. In the back of each person’s mind, there are stereotypes and generalizations that influence his or her opinions about different races and nationalities. I’ve walked into classrooms, seen a group of Asians and thought, “Great! They can help me with my homework!” I know that a lot of my friends do this, too, because of the stereotype that Asians are good students.

Also, almost everyone I know has either told or laughed at a racist joke. This doesn’t necessarily make them bad

people. It just means that they, like everyone else, have biases. I don't think it's something that can be cured completely, but we can all learn to recognize when we're acting prejudiced and try to understand why.

We need to discover why we make assumptions about each other, so that we can eliminate the source of our preconceived ideas. That way, when we meet each other, we won't judge each other so quickly.

HAVING DIVERSE FRIENDS DOESN'T MEAN WE'RE TOLERANT

The most pathetic excuse I've heard people use to prove they're not prejudiced is "But I'm not racist! I have [insert race of choice] friends!" Just because you have friends who are a different race does not mean that you understand them. It's impossible to fully understand a race or culture if you're not part of it. In fact, having friends of different races can just delude people into thinking they're being tolerant, while still making secret generalizations and assumptions.

I can't even count the number of times that my friends have made offensive remarks about Asians or Chinese people in front of me. When I was in seventh grade, my school was having a cultural festival, and all of the students were supposed to wear clothing from different cultures. One of my best friends at the time was a white girl and she wanted to wear a Chinese dress.

We decided to trade cultures: She would be Chinese and I would be European. We discussed how we would do our hair and what make-up to wear. Then my friend mentioned changing her eyes. I asked her what she meant.

"I'll have to pull them back," she said, pulling the corners of her eyes back with her fingers.

I felt like jumping up and down and screaming, "Hey over here! Have you ever looked at me before?" My eyes aren't huge, but they're double-lidded and not shaped like slits. Even my friends with single lids have slightly round eyes that look nothing like what my friend would have looked like with her eyes taped back. So why hadn't my friend noticed that?

The cultural festival was supposed to be about sharing and understanding each other's cultures. I wondered how much "sharing and understanding" my friend was doing by assuming that all Asians have slanted eyes. Instead she could have learned that in 1882 the United States passed a law that barred Chinese from entering the country, consequently creating a bachelor society because men couldn't bring over their wives and children. She could have also learned that before China opened to America in 1972, the majority of Chinese-Americans were American-born, not immigrants, because people could not move between the two countries. But instead she chose to stereotype Chinese people. And if she was stereotyping, how could she be open to learning more?

I was too scared to say any of this, though, because I didn't want to lose a friend. I didn't know how to confront her. Saying "Hey, that eye-pulling thing is racist, so don't do it again" wouldn't explain why I was offended and would probably make my friend think I was insulting her. After all, who wouldn't be insulted if they were accused of being racist?

I ended up saying, "I don't have anything to wear that looks European. It'll be easier if I just wear the Chinese dress," because it was the easiest way to keep her from reducing my culture to rice-shaped eyes and those tight little dresses that choke you, while not having to confront her. I ended up wearing the Chinese dress. Later, I was embarrassed to realize that by wearing the outfit, I was reducing my culture to a stereotype as well.

Another time, in seventh grade, a classmate I had just met asked me what my first language was. When I told her English, she blinked at me and told me to be serious.

"I am being serious," I said, annoyed because even though I had lived in the United States all my life, people still considered me a foreigner who grew up speaking a different language. "I'm third generation Chinese. My parents were born here, so they've always spoken English to me."

"But you must have spoken another language before," my friend said.

"Before when?"

"When you were little."

"When I was little," I tried again, "I spoke English."

"You know that's not what I mean."

Almost everyone I know has either told or laughed at a racist joke. This doesn't necessarily make them bad people. It just means that they, like everyone else, have biases. I don't think it's something that can be cured completely, but we can all learn to recognize when we're acting prejudiced and try to understand why.

It didn't seem like she would ever believe that my first language was English, so I gave up. "My first language was Chinese. I spoke it to my grandmother."

My friend smiled and looked relieved that I had finally understood her question. "See, that's what I meant."

I learned an important lesson from that experience: It is impossible for an Asian person's first language to be English.

I feel like people who believe things like that should be sent to their own little island where they can't bother anyone. But then again, they'd probably have to send me too, because one of the reasons I was afraid to confront my friends about their frequent stereotyping was because it made me feel like a hypocrite.

I make judgments based on stereotypes all the time. Koreans, in particular, intimidate me because they're intelligent and always perfectly dressed. I wish I were that smart and fashionable. In school, the people at the top of the class are always Korean. One of my Korean friends told me that Koreans are rude, shallow and materialistic, and that description has stuck with me. Whenever I see an Asian person who is perfectly groomed and is carrying around an expensive-looking cell phone, I always think, "That person must be Korean."

Usually, I'm correct, but that's probably because most

of the Asians at my school are Korean. I'm sure if I lived in a community with a large number of Chinese I would see lots of Chinese people with expensive cell phones. Materialism applies to everyone, not just Koreans.

I once told my cousin about the people at my new middle school and how much I disliked the Korean girls because they spoke Korean all the time when no one else could understand them. My cousin stared at me for a few seconds and shook her head. "Aren't a lot of your friends Korean?" she asked.

"Yeah," I said. "So?"

Looking back, I'm embarrassed that I hadn't understood what my cousin was really asking: "Why are you stereotyping your friends?"

My ninth grade English teacher once said, "Tolerance isn't trying to understand someone you don't like. It's keeping yourself from punching him or her in the face." Her definition of tolerance bothered me because it could make people think that they're not prejudiced because they're not committing hate crimes or using the n-word.

LEARNING ABOUT OTHER CULTURES HELPS US CONNECT

It's because I was just "tolerating" my white and Korean friends that I was able to put them down behind their backs. My friend who had wanted to "dress up" as a Chinese girl was maybe doing a little more than tolerating my heritage, but she wanted to regurgitate a stereotype, not learn anything new about my culture. Neither one of us took the time to understand each other's cultures because we believed the little understanding we had of them was enough to "tolerate" them. We should all try to learn what other people's cultures mean to them. A classmate once showed me a picture of her favorite Korean singer. Normally, with people who don't speak Korean, this classmate talks only about school. I was flattered that she felt comfortable enough with me to share part of her culture.

I think that's why I don't like it when people say, "I don't care what race my friends are," because it implies that they don't care about their friends' cultures, and since culture is such an important aspect of most people, I find it difficult to believe that these people know their friends that well. These people, myself included, are often too afraid of offending others or appearing prejudiced to actually get beyond, "I think racism is bad. People of different races should mix more, and it'll get better," when they discuss topics like school integration and therefore they are unaware of whatever stereotypes they have.

Well, the only way to deal with a problem is to acknowledge that it exists. I've become more aware of when I use stereotypes. Last semester, my friend was talking about going to a \$5,000 summer program, and I remember thinking, "Of course you can afford that. You're white." Before, I wouldn't have caught that I was thinking such an obviously prejudiced idea. I think that if I keep noticing myself doing that, I'll eventually stop stereotyping.

Prejudice comes from ignorance, and I don't know many people willing to admit their stupidity. But I'm good at being stupid, so I'll go first: "Hi. My name's Lia, and I'm prejudiced."



Lia feels like she's making fewer assumptions about people, but knows there's room for improvement.

My sugar-free life is still pretty sweet

I used to hate having diabetes,
but now I've grown to accept my disease

By **Wendy Chan**
16, CHATSWORTH HS

My friends and I sat down at our usual lunch table and just as I was about to take a second bite of my chicken teriyaki, a boy I know who was standing near us asked, "Isn't teriyaki sauce sweet?"

"Um, yeah," I replied.

"Can you eat that? It's really sweet," he said, knowing that I have diabetes. Suddenly I felt a pang of guilt, because my mom usually does not allow me to eat sweet stuff at home. Diabetics have problems processing sugar and this can cause the blood sugar levels in their bodies to rise to unhealthy levels. If not treated, high blood sugar levels could eventually lead to serious health problems. I told him that I could have a little sweet food once in a while.

As someone who has diabetes my pancreas makes little or no insulin, which is needed to maintain normal blood sugar levels. I must eat healthy foods, take medication and see my doctor several times a year because diabetics are more prone to other diseases and complications. For example, if my blood sugar is low and I don't treat it, I could faint.

When I was a kid, I despised having diabetes, and I was embarrassed to tell anyone. It made me feel like an outsider, because I couldn't do things all the other kids did and had to do things none of them did. Over the years, however, my attitude has adjusted. It's still frustrating sometimes, but it doesn't overwhelm me.

There are two types of diabetes. People with Type 1 diabetes cannot produce any insulin, so they must get insulin shots to keep their blood sugar levels normal. This type is usually passed down from previous generations. Those with Type 2 diabetes produce some insulin but not enough, so they must take oral medication to supplement it. Generally Type 2 occurs in adolescents and adults who are overweight, do not exercise enough and have poor eating habits. Strangely, nobody in my family has ever had diabetes, yet I was diagnosed with Type 1 at age 2.

I HAVE TO WATCH WHAT I EAT

Diet is the biggest issue. Obviously, since diabetes affects the body's ability to process sugar, I can't eat many sweets. I get low blood sugar when I eat too little, take too much insulin (insulin helps digest sugar, but when a diabetic takes too much, low blood sugar results), or am too active. Physical activity requires energy, and sugar supplies energy. Therefore lots of physical activity decreases the sugar in the body, leading to low blood sugar. When I have low blood sugar, I feel dizzy and have a hard time concentrating. When this occurs I have to eat or drink something with sugar.

As a child, my parents took my doctor literally when he said NO SWEETS. I was deprived of candy and desserts. Whenever my blood sugar was low, I was allowed



A sandwich, milk and fruit is a typical lunch for Wendy, who has to avoid eating sweets.



PHOTOS BY SHERRY CHAN, 14, CHATSWORTH HS

only a cup of fruit juice or a piece of fruit.

My mom planned all my meals, which were almost always the same—plain oatmeal, scrambled eggs and milk for breakfast; white rice, steamed fish, green vegetables and homemade soups for lunch and dinner. In elementary school, she brought lunch to me every day. Sometimes I felt so isolated because I ate by myself in

the nurse's office while all my classmates ate outside. I always had lunch inside because my mom didn't want me to be outside, where I could be tempted to eat anything out of my normal diet. And as a kid in elementary school I never disobeyed this. Even though I knew that she meant well, I would resent her control.

I wished so hard that I didn't have the stupid disease. I would get mad every time I found out that my cousin or sister told one of their friends I have diabetes. I didn't want people to think I was a contagious freak. Every year, I wished on my birthday candles that I wouldn't have diabetes anymore.

I COULD TAKE CARE OF MY HEALTH ON MY OWN

My attitude started changing in middle school, when we lived an hour away from my school and my parents couldn't check up on me as closely. My teachers knew I had diabetes, but they never "monitored" me like my parents did. I was allowed to leave class to go check my blood sugar or take a shot at the nurse's office. When my blood sugar got low, I would substitute a piece of candy for juice or fruit. I could finally indulge. I felt rebellious and proud because I knew that I could take care of myself without my parents' overwhelming restrictions.

Fast forward a few years and now most of my classmates know that sweets are forbidden unless I'm careful. Often, after I tell them that I have diabetes, they gasp and say, "Oh my god! Doesn't that mean you can't eat candy? That sucks!" Yes, it does mean that I can't eat candy regularly. But it does not suck. Candy isn't good for anybody, and it's not as if candy is in the biggest part of the food pyramid.

And then there's the fruit question: "Don't fruits have sugar?" Of course fruits have sugar! "So why can you eat fruits?" My doctor told me that my body can process the natural sugars found in fruit.

Aside from the diet part of diabetes, there's also the medication aspect. I have to do that "pricking the finger and blood comes out" thing at least four times a day to monitor my blood sugar, and I have to take shots of insulin whenever I eat anything. These things are part of my daily life, and unlike what most people expect, they don't hurt. After doing it all for so long, it's just life.

Sometimes when I'm reading articles in *Diabetes Forecast* magazine, I worry that I might develop neuropathy (nerve damage), retinopathy (eye disease) or kidney disease, which are some of many complications that diabetics could develop if they don't monitor their health closely. However, as long as I manage my health well, such occurrences are rare.

I don't wish not to have diabetes anymore. I have accepted that everybody has setbacks, and mine just happens to be this. For the past several years on my birthday, I've begun wishing simply for health and happiness.

Take our survey!

You could be one of three to win \$100 by answering our questions about violence



Many teens live with violence in their everyday lives, neighborhoods and schools. Much of the violence comes from gangs, drugs and racial tensions. L.A. Youth wants to know more about the violence teens see and experience.

By answering this survey, you will help L.A. Youth learn more about the types of violence teens face, where they turn for help and what they think can be done to help make their communities safer. Three winners will be randomly chosen to receive \$100 each. To enter, fill out this survey and mail it to L.A. Youth.

Or you can also fill out this survey online (check for the link at www.layouth.com). Please fill out the survey

only once on paper or online. To be eligible for the drawing, your name, address and phone number must be included and all questions must be answered. All information will be kept confidential. The deadline is Saturday, Nov. 1, 2008.

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

To be eligible for the drawing to win \$100, please fill in the following information. Your information will be kept confidential. It is used only to mail checks to winning entrants. The deadline is Saturday, Nov. 1, 2008.

Name _____

Age _____ Sex M F

School _____ Grade _____

Home street address _____

City _____ Zip _____

Phone () _____

Your race or ethnicity: Latino Black White Asian Other (write in) _____

Community violence

1a Have you ever seen or experienced violence in your community?

- Yes
- No

1b If you answered yes, what types of violence have you seen or experienced in your community? (Check all that apply.)

- Someone being jumped
- Someone being threatened
- Shootings
- Drive-by shootings
- Theft
- Gang tagging
- Other (write-in) _____

2 How often do you see or experience violence in your community?

- Every day
- A few times a week
- Once a week
- Once a month
- Hardly ever
- Never

3 How has violence in your community affected your actions? (Check all that apply.)

- I'm unable to go where I want
- I go directly home after school
- I don't go out after dark
- When I go out I look around for people who might cause trouble
- I've gotten involved in illegal activities
- I haven't changed my behavior because I feel safe
- Other (write-in) _____

4 How has violence in your community made you feel? (Check all that apply.)

- I worry about my friends and family members
- I have trouble concentrating at school
- The littlest things get me angry
- I want to fight other people when they make me angry
- I worry about my future
- It doesn't affect me
- Other (write-in) _____

5 How do you feel about violence in your community? (Check all that apply.)

- It's ruining my community
- There's nothing anyone can do to reduce it
- I wish there was less violence but it could be worse
- There are times when someone deserves it
- My community feels safe
- Other (write-in) _____

School safety

6 Do you feel safe going to and coming from school?

- Yes
- No

7a Do you feel safe at school?

- Yes
- No

7b If you answered no, why don't you feel safe? (Check all that apply.)

- Gangs on campus
- Bullies
- Racial fights
- Students bringing weapons onto campus
- Students making Internet threats against other students or the school
- There are not enough security guards
- Gang tagging
- Violence in the surrounding neighborhood spills into the school
- Other (write-in) _____

8 How often do you see or experience a conflict, such as fights, riots or someone making threats, at your school?

- Every day
- A few times a week
- Once a week
- Once a month
- Hardly ever
- Never

9 How does your school respond to situations involving violence? (Check all that apply.)

- Teachers and staff take too long to respond
- There aren't enough security guards to control things
- Students don't feel safe reporting violence
- The security guards don't do anything
- Security is effective

10 What do you think would help teens be safe in their neighborhood? (Check all that apply.)

- More after-school activities
- More police
- More places to hang out like parks and libraries
- Keep schools open later
- More adults involved in teens' lives
- Other (write-in) _____

11 What do you think would help teens stay safe at school? (Check all that apply.)

- Requiring students to wear uniforms
- Stricter security
- More encouragement to care about school from teachers and administrators
- More discipline when students do something wrong
- Keeping gang members off campus
- Random locker searches
- Weapons searches
- Other (write-in) _____

Where to turn

13 The last time you felt unsafe, how did you handle it? (Check all that apply.)

- Talked to a friend
- Talked to a family member
- Talked to a teacher or other trusted adult
- I reported it to the police
- I kept it to myself
- I haven't felt unsafe
- Other (write-in) _____

14 Do you know of anti-gang or violence prevention programs in your neighborhood that help teens keep safe?

- Yes but I don't have transportation to get there
- Yes but I'm afraid of retaliation if I were to join
- Yes I'm currently involved in a program
- Yes but I'm not interested in joining a program
- I'm not sure if there are any programs where I live

15 How do you feel about the police? (Check all that apply.)

- They don't respond quickly enough
- They don't arrest the people who are the cause of the problems
- There aren't enough police officers in my community
- They're doing all they can
- They harass teens
- They make me feel safe
- There are too many police officers in my community
- I don't know

16 What do you think could reduce violence? (Check all that apply.)

- More police officers
- A peer-to-peer mediation/conflict resolution program at school
- Harsher punishment for criminals
- Active neighborhood watch programs
- There's nothing anyone can do because there will always be violence
- Other (write in) _____

essay contest: my favorite street

1ST PLACE \$50

Carefree times on Virgo Street in the Philippines

Mary Pace
MARSHALL HS

Virgo Street, located in a small town in the southern part of the Philippine Islands, is the street that means the most to me. Every day, as I would wake, I could vividly hear the birds chirping, the thick bushes and leaves rustling as the wild wind passed gracefully through the greenest trees I had ever seen. By then, the whole town's awake—every house acting alarmed by the clocks ticking, and the clatter of glasses, heavy metal spoons and forks creating a harmonized melody as everyone would madly rush to go to where they needed to: work, gossip ears and perhaps even summer school.

I, on the other hand, would run to my friends' houses and bang on their gates, summoning them to come and play with the rest of us. We would all bring a unique piece of entertainment that we would share: a tall blue mountain bike, a pink Barbie bike, a rusty clanking metal bike, a football, soccer ball, basketball ... you name it. We would all run to our one and only Virgo Street, which is the street in front of our houses, our turf, and have the most fun any kid could ever imagine. Some of us, mostly the boys, would climb on the thick brown raspy branches. We even made a mini swing that would swing us so high we could almost touch the sky. Sometimes my girlfriends and I would make time capsules and bury them in the empty brown lots on the sides of the street,

then create colorful maps to locate them someday. We would also bring books like *Little Red Riding Hood* or *Tom Sawyer*. But when we were kids, we didn't know how to read, so we made up stories to the drawings in the books.

Sometimes, when I was lonely, I would climb a tree or ride our little swing and soothing relaxation and calmness would sweep over me. When I was a kid, knowing that every summer I could freely run around the street that I knew by heart, was enough to give me the feeling of security, the feeling of being warmly welcomed, the feeling of being home. For most of my younger years my world existed only in Virgo Street. There wasn't a need to dream and imagine farther.

So many things happened for the first time in my life that I could never forget them. Like when I had my first fight with Hanzel, my closest friend, because I didn't let her ride our swing. I felt like it was the end of the world when she didn't talk to me for days. When I had my first crush on the next-door neighbor when I was 12. And when I was the first person to almost accurately draw the view of our street, which my friends put in a time capsule and buried in the street somewhere. Too many adventurous memories suppressed because I had been too young to care, but these memories I've written are ones that I can never forget. I will keep and cherish them forever.

Little did I know the summer I was 13 would be the last summer I'd ever spend



Virgo Street and its tropical land filled with adorable white flowers, thorny red roses, pink chrysanthemums and the brownest and greenest soil was the only land that existed to me.

on Virgo Street. My mother announced that we were moving to a place called California USA, for good, forever. My heart was devastated, mostly because my friend Dominique still hadn't give me back my *Goosebumps* book collection, but also because I had no idea of a world outside Virgo Street. I was like the people from the past, who didn't know that there was a round, spherical world despite the deception of its vast flatness, and I was afraid to take a step, to move forward, because I might fall.

For the first 13 years of my life, Virgo Street and its tropical land filled with adorable white flowers, thorny red roses, pink chrysanthemums and the brownest and greenest soil was the only land that existed to me. And leaving this, my childhood, my innocence, my street, was more than I could bear.

Now Virgo Street is only a remnant of the past, a fragment of my memory. Yet I am still deeply honored to have lived there. I was once part of a beautiful country and I'm thankful for it.

2ND PLACE \$30

My twisting curvy road

Aimee Erlich
SHERMAN OAKS CENTER FOR
ENRICHED STUDIES

MY HANDS ARE UP and I am screaming at the top of my lungs. My eyes stare in utter bliss at the road in front of me, watching it twist and bend with personality. I am strapped in tight, but I still get tossed around as if I am caught in a strong current, letting it take me where it wants with no resistance. I have become one with the road. I am filled with excitement as my adrenaline level heightens and my heart rate quickens. My brother is sitting next to me in the back of our red and white minivan while my mom drives us down

this long and winding road. Every one of us is laughing uncontrollably in unison, in unity. Valley Vista Boulevard in Sherman Oaks can have that effect on people.

The street is shaded by its massive willow and snowy white birch trees. Not much sunlight can peak through the canopy of green, yellow, white and brown. The curb of the street and lushly green lawns of the neighbors are covered with an abundance of diverse species of flowers. They help disguise the ugliness of Valley Vista, with its dank, grey shade and cracked asphalt. But still, the history that I have with this street makes its beauty shine

bright. I did not learn how to ride a bike on this street, I do not even live close to it. All I know of Valley Vista is the feel of our tires on the gravel as we drive this empty road and the spirit of elation inside of our car as we conquer this roller coaster.

As we make that final bend, I look back and wish that I could take just one more ride before we leave this amusement park, but I know that is out of the question because, well, ... gas is expensive. Even though the ride has ended, the street remains, the bond remains, the memory remains. Valley Vista is waiting. It longs for our laughter once again.

3RD PLACE \$20

This street is for the birds

Desiree Jacoby
BIRMINGHAM HS (VAN NUYS)

PEACOCKS ARE indigenous to India. However, there are peacocks in Arcadia walking around. Now I don't know about you, but just the thought of a street, Coronado Drive, having peacocks running around it makes me love it already.

This street reminds me of a utopia because it's beautiful and peaceful. All the lawns are cut short and perfect. There are white picket fences around most of the houses. Around every house there are flowers, planted in just the right way to fit each house. Then there are

the gorgeous blue peacocks walking around. But hey, I guess it's a regular thing to see them and it's not strange to the residents.

Every other weekend when I go to my dad's house (my parents are divorced), I beg him to go down "Peacock Street" because it's on the way to his house anyway. He automatically knows what I am talking about. When we go down Coronado, I feel like a secret agent! We slow down and pop our heads out of the car windows. We might as well have binoculars. We look for the peacocks and we stop if we see any. My dad does this whistle and I look at him and

say, "No, you have to do the bird call." Then I do this crazy bird call, like CUCAWW!!! CUCAWW!!!

As we are doing our secret-agent moves around the peacocks, we take a bunch of photos. Then after that mission is over, we stroll around the street. I wish I could live on that street. It is so beautiful that I look forward to going down it when I head to my dad's. The trees are so lush and green. I also love animals, so the peacocks add more love.

This street is special to me because of its memories and how it somehow manages to become a brand new world each time I venture through it.

ESSAY CONTEST

How has violence affected you?

Unfortunately, there is violence around us. Some of us see racial tensions leading to fights at school. Some of us have gangs in our neighborhoods. Maybe you see tagging crews fighting over turf. We want to know how living with violence has affected you. Do you feel safe on the streets? What do you do to try to stay safe? Whether you're a victim of a crime or witness it, violence has a tremendous impact. How does it make you feel? What is your experience with violence in your community and how have you dealt with it?



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.**

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Also: Go to page 23 to take our survey on violence for a chance to win \$100.

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DEADLINE IS
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Awed by nature

Visiting the Grand Canyon was a great escape from my South L.A. neighborhood

By **Jabbar Saddiq**
14, DREW MS

Most of the places I go are pretty close to my home, which is an apartment building near Broadway and 51st Street in South Los Angeles. Across the street is a church and a big empty parking lot. There's also a market, a clothing store and a TV shop. We have a few trees, but none that are really big. I don't see much sky because there are so many buildings. There are lots of lights and cars. I don't spend a lot of time outside because there's not really anything to do.

So I felt excited when I heard about a free trip I could take to the Grand Canyon in Arizona with the Boys and Girls Club last fall. This would be my farthest trip out of Los Angeles. I knew that the Grand Canyon was a really big hole in the ground, but I didn't know much else.

A group of about 50 kids and staff members from the Challengers Boys and Girls Club got on buses and left the club on a Thursday morning. I also had the job of recording the trip on a video camera. We were going to make a DVD for everyone who didn't go.

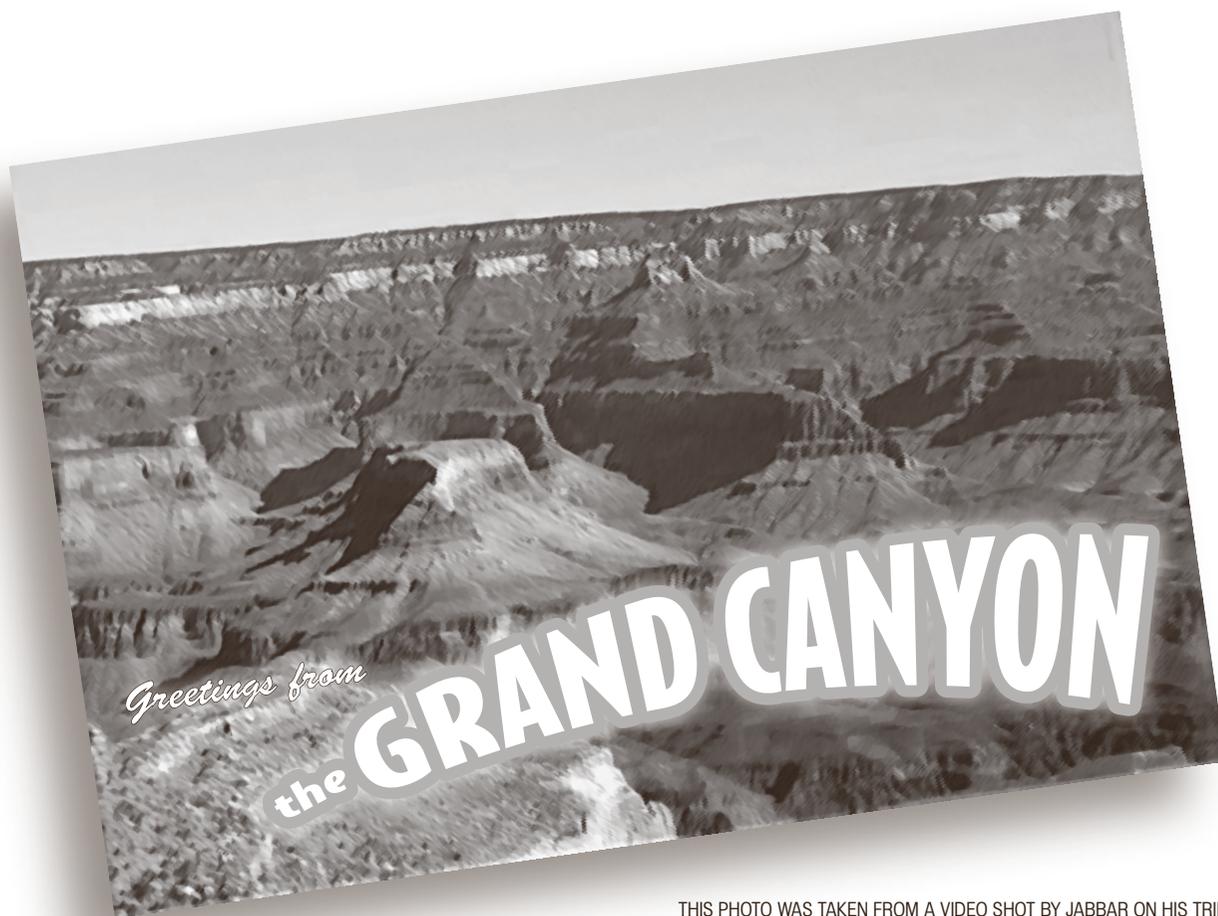
After a couple hours on the bus the scenery started changing. There weren't a lot of houses, lights or people as we drove through the desert, mostly just dirt, rocks and hills. It was so different from my neighborhood that I wanted to stay there.

We got to our hotel around dinner time. My two roommates and I stayed up late, because we were talking and watching TV. We woke up at 6 a.m. for breakfast, excited to see the Grand Canyon.

It took about 20 minutes to get to the Grand Canyon from the hotel. During the bus ride I kept wondering how big the canyon would be. Would there be houses or stores? Would there be horses and mules? I wanted to see what kind of people lived near the Grand Canyon. I was picturing a blue sky, reddish mountains and desert.

I turned on the video camera as soon as we got off the bus at the Grand Canyon. At first everything was different than what I had imagined. Instead of a big blue sky and red mountains there were a few buildings, a train station, equipment for the mules and old-fashioned-looking stores. But when I went through the souvenir store and came out the back then I saw the Grand Canyon I had expected.

Immediately, I could see the orange, yellowish and red rock walls of the canyon, trees (like Christmas trees) and the biggest, bluest and clearest sky I had ever seen. I felt so glad to be there, because this was so different than



THIS PHOTO WAS TAKEN FROM A VIDEO SHOT BY JABBAR ON HIS TRIP.

where I live.

When I saw the canyon I thought, I need to film as much as I can. I had to show everybody at the Boys and Girls Club that there are more things to see in the world than Los Angeles. I went to the widest angle view with the camera and very slowly spun around to get as much of the view as I could. I didn't want to move too fast because it might mess up the shot.

THE CLEAR BLUE SKY WAS ALL AROUND ME

The canyon was so huge. It made me feel so small. I'd film one part and think that's it, and then I'd turn and there'd be more. The sky, which didn't have any smog, was so huge that it was like I was closer to it. I thought that something this big could be created only by God.

For one shot, I slowly walked toward the edge while pointing the camera at the ground. When I got to the edge I leaned over to show the drop. (I made sure that I had a good grip on the camera.) I wanted the people watching it to think, "Is he going to fall?" The canyon was the deepest thing I'd ever seen. I could see the Colorado River a mile below at the bottom and it looked like a tiny stream.

The park ranger told us about how the water in the Colorado River carved the canyon thousands of years ago. The ranger took us on a walk and talked to us about the canyon. He said mules, a mix of a horse and donkey, usually carry stuff like clothes or supplies up and down the canyon to people spending the night at the bottom.

Our guide told us about the different animals that live in the canyon, like a fat kind of squirrel, bobcats, vultures and eagles. I saw the fat squirrels just a few feet away from me. They were cute and furry. We also saw mules inside a gate. A man was inside taking care of them. I wanted to ride a mule, but when I smelled them, no.

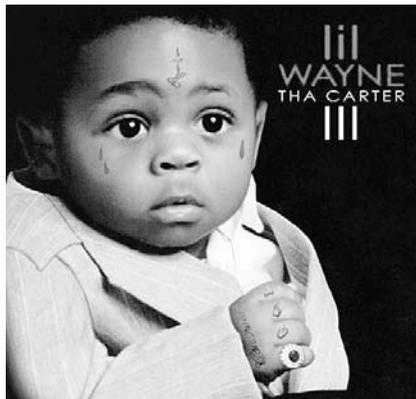
I was listening to the guide but I wasn't really paying attention. I couldn't take my eyes off the canyon because it was so beautiful. I would record the guide talking and then shoot video of the scenery and then shots with the guide talking with the scenery in the background. I wanted that mix of the guide, who was talking, and the scenery because that makes a better video. It's telling a story.

I felt like I could've stayed a week not just a day. If I had a whole week, I could have seen more places along the canyon and shot more footage. I would like to have gone down into the canyon or taken a plane ride above the canyon. It's so big that I couldn't do it all in a day. I would like to go back just to see that scenery again.



Jabbar says no matter how many times he sees the Grand Canyon, he'll never stop being amazed.

reviews: music



LIL WAYNE

CD: Tha Carter III

By Francisco Sandoval
16, NOGALES HS (LA PUENTE)

I love and I hate Lil Wayne's Tha Carter III. It's got awesome beats and an intense flow, but lyrically it's nothing more than an excuse for Lil Wayne to brag about himself. Lil Wayne just proclaims over and over again that he's the best. He never raps about life's issues, such as poverty or his personal life, the way Lupe Fiasco or Kanye West do.

The best song on the album is "A Milli," an energetic song in which Lil Wayne flaunts his millions and claims that he's one of a kind. "Dare me/ Don't u compare me/ Cause there ain't nobody near me." Unfortunately, the production tends to get a little annoying with the constant repetition of the phrase "A Milli."

On "Mr. Carter," Lil Wayne raps alongside hip hop legend Jay-Z. Lil Wayne boldly compares himself to other hip hop greats: "And next time you mention Pac, Biggie, and Jay-Z/ Don't forget Weezy baby." It will take him a few more great albums until he can compare to them.

The song I can't stand is "Lollipop." It's annoying and nothing but a sexual innuendo, "Shawty wanna li-li-li-lick me/ like a lollipop." Songs like this give people the idea that most rappers have only sex on their minds.

Lil Wayne may claim to be the best but I disagree. I hoped this would be the best album of 2008 like many critics claim, but once I listened carefully I found out this wasn't true. But in the end even though the lyrics are weak, I really love the beats.

Lil Wayne never raps about life's issues, like poverty or his personal life, the way Lupe Fiasco or Kanye West do.



ALESANA

CD: Where Myth Fades to Legend

By Brett Hicks
16, LOYOLA HS

emo/screamo band Alesana's sophomore album Where Myth Fades to Legend was the album I was most looking forward to hearing this year. This album is way more exciting than the band's debut album On Frail Wings of Vanity and Wax.

Alesana sings and screams fantastical stories both well-known and unusual. In an interview with the band that I saw online, I learned that the first track, "This is Usually the Part Where People Scream," is about a man who is in love with a woman, and then finds out he's a cannibal. The song is an internal struggle to let her live or to eat her.

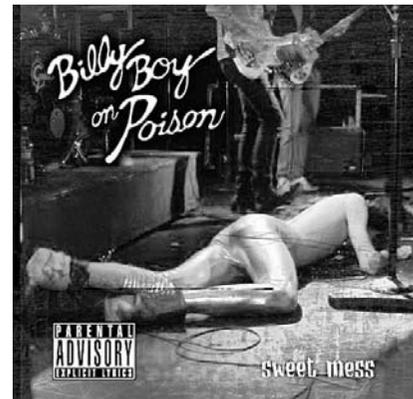
The thing I liked was that Shaun Milke (vocalist) sings more than on their first album, rather than Dennis Lee (lead vocalist) and his screaming. The instruments generate rhythmic sounds that give me goosebumps. The guitar riffs are exciting and loud, and Lee's screaming makes my heart beat quickly.

Tracks such as "The Uninvited Thirteenth" and "Obsession is Such an Ugly Word" are different from the other songs on the album because in the middle of each song the music changes completely. It feels as if you aren't even listening to the same song! I was in awe and confused, which I enjoyed.

Love is a main theme on the album. In "All Night Dance Parties in the Underground Palace," Milke sings about his love to his girlfriend, "the stars are for you my angel."

This is the greatest album I have ever listened to. Each track makes me feel as if I'm in a different world with different possibilities!

The instruments generate rhythmic sounds that give me goosebumps.



BILLY BOY ON POISON

CD: Sweet Mess

By Samantha Richards
16, SHERMAN OAKS CENTER FOR ENRICHED STUDIES

After the first few seconds of listening to "Standing Still," on Billy Boy on Poison's first EP Sweet Mess, I was instantly captivated by the band's unique sound, a fusion of hard rock with indie-like qualities. I couldn't peel away from my iPod because their music had me in a haze.

Songs like "Dirty Bomb" and "On My Way" have lyrics about teen angst and rebellion ("Parents just don't understand" from "Dirty Bomb") set to a sound that exhibits a rebirth of the New York Dolls punkish edginess. Featuring killer guitar solos along with the mesmerizing voice and screams of lead singer, Davis LeDuke, Sweet Mess is distinctive from typical indie rock.

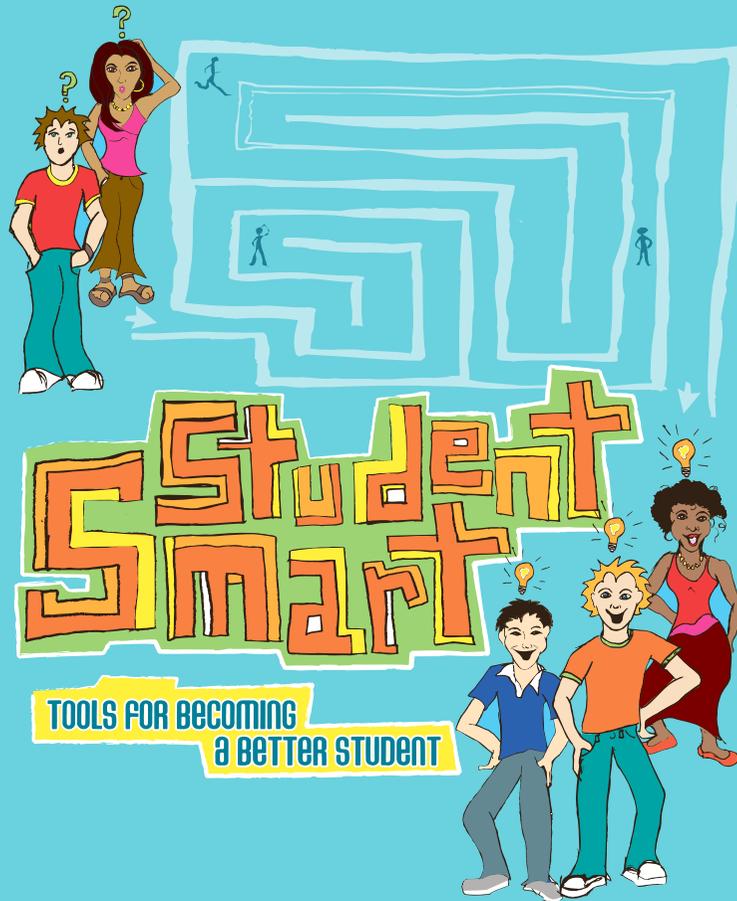
When I caught one of their shows at The Whisky this summer, the audience jumped up and down, swishing their hair and banging their heads to the fast beats and rhythms.

One of the reasons why I enjoy this band's music so much is because I can relate. The band members are still in high school and because I understand the frustration and angst of teenagehood, the songs have a personal meaning. But not all the songs depict rebellion with some badass attitude. "Angry Young Man" sounds like it would, but it's actually about how "every young girl needs an angry young man."

Sweet Mess only foreshadows the success to come for this band, which is still a newborn in the underground music scene.

Because I understand the frustration and angst of teenagehood, the songs have a personal meaning.

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