

20

YEARS OLD AND STILL GROWING UP!

L.A. youth

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2008
WWW.LAYOUTH.COM

the newspaper by and about teens

COLLEGE

CHOOSING
THE RIGHT SCHOOL
PAGE 20

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Jennifer Carcamo, 18, moves into her dorm at UCLA with help from her boyfriend Will and aunt Elvia. Photo by Charlotte Toumanoff, 15, Marshall HS

About L.A. Youth

How did L.A. Youth start?

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

How is L.A. Youth doing today?

L.A. Youth now has a readership of 500,000 in Los Angeles County. Hundreds of students have benefited from L.A. Youth's journalism training. Many have graduated from college and have built on their experiences at L.A. Youth to pursue careers in journalism, teaching, research and other fields. Our Foster Youth Writing Project has brought the stories of teens in foster care to the newspaper. For more info, see www.layouth.com.

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

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

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

Where is L.A. Youth distributed?

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

How is L.A. Youth funded?

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

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

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

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

L.A. Youth is distributed free six times a year to high school or middle school teachers in most of Los Angeles County. Teachers also can look forward to getting a free copy of the L.A. Youth Teacher's Guide with each issue. We do not share your information with other organizations or businesses.

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L.A. youth

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L.A. Youth is published by Youth News Service (YNS), a not-for-profit corporation. Editorial offices are at 5967 W. Third St. Suite 301, Los Angeles CA 90036. Phone (323) 938-9194. Website: layouth.com. E-mail: editor@layouth.com

L.A. Youth would like to express its gratitude to the following individuals who donate their time, patience and expertise to our writers:

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Many thanks to our friends who made this issue possible:

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MAIL

These are letters we received about stories in the October 2008 issue of L.A. Youth:

GIVING UP MEAT

I REALLY ENJOYED reading "Going vegan was easier than I thought." I liked it because it amazed me that someone who loved meat and ate meat so much could possibly become vegan. I tried once to become vegetarian but couldn't. I give props to Addy for doing this because it is something you have to be committed to. It has to come from the heart. I am really glad there are people like this. It shows how much they really care about animals.

Ilice Lopez
Bell Gardens HS

GAY AND SEARCHING FOR ACCEPTANCE

IN THE ARTICLE "Gay and so alone" I felt sad for Marvin. Because he is gay, people pick on him. But the saddest thing of all is he thinks he is not normal. This is bad because it shows he puts himself down. Once, there was this kid in my school who was gay and they made fun of him. It just goes to show you the world can be so cruel. Why can't we just accept each other for who we really are?

Jorge Solorio
East Valley HS (North Hollywood)

ONCE I FINISHED reading "Gay and so alone" I couldn't have been more depressed. I felt as if I knew his perspective of being gay. It made me think of all the guys out there who just happen to be gay and how important it is to treat them as equals and with respect. I hated how Marvin had to face the world every day, getting beat up and made fun of at school. I thought to myself about the kind of people there are in

this world who don't understand how to accept people, even if they are homosexual. I loved this article and I'm looking forward to reading more.

Katia Hausepian
Wilson MS (Glendale)

IT BREAKS MY heart to see how someone can be so disrespected just for being different and that this is happening all over the world. People often blind themselves, pretending that there is nothing wrong, but we have to learn to accept people for who they are. You have the right to love whoever you choose because it's your life.

Gabby Rodriguez
East Valley HS

"GAY AND SO alone" was an inspiring story that many people can connect to. Marvin's experience showed me the struggles that many gay people have to go through. Facing all those people and issues at school must have been a tough battle. Not having anyone to rely on was even worse and living a life in denial and hiding who he really was made life harder. This article informed me about a student's experience of being gay. I understand the importance of living your life without self-doubt and just being yourself.

Maria Osorino
Bell Gardens HS

I FELT REALLY bad for Marvin because nobody liked him because he is gay. I disliked the priest who told him that homosexuality is one of the worst sins next to murder. When I read the part where he tells his mom that he is gay, the way she acted for months, it disappointed me. However, it made me happy

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when she finally accepted him. I'm glad he accepted himself later on.

Monique Torres
East Valley HS

TEENS CARE ABOUT THE ELECTION

THE ARTICLE "MAKING my vote count" was really inspiring to us because Fred cared about the election. He went online and tried to find out more information about the candidates who were running. Young people should care about the election because whatever the president does becomes our future. It matters for our education and our family members who are immigrants. We should also care about the election because the economy is being affected. This affects not only adults, but young people as well.

Adriana Villarreal and Hermelinda Calderon
Camino Nuevo Charter Academy

I LOVED THE article "Where do you stand?" because I think it's important for teens to learn about the election. Even though I cannot vote yet, I think it's important to understand what's happening in our world today because it will affect our lives in the future. It's important for young people to start looking at our problems because one day we are going to be the ones to fix them.

Lauren Hansen
Wilson MS

WE THINK YOUTH should care about the election because we should know how the election will affect us. We know that each candidate has different opinions about the environment, education, immigration, etc., and that the decisions they make will affect us. We both have family members who are immigrants, and we know that the decisions the future president makes will allow them to stay in this country or force them to leave.

Roberto Godinez and Erick Omar Guzman
Camino Nuevo Charter Academy

A GIRL STOPPED LIVING IN HER BROTHER'S SHADOW

I REALLY LIKED "Out of my brother's shadow" because I felt like I could connect with it. I too have older siblings—three older sisters. They have all accomplished so much that I feel like I will never compare to anything they have done. For example, one of my sisters graduated as one of the top students in her high school and is now attending medical school at UCLA. She was always pushing me and encouraging me to do more, so I hopelessly tried to be like her. I eventually discovered what Charlene discov-

ered, that I had to discover my own interests. This story helped remind me of how I have to become more independent and do what makes me happy.

Brenda Bonilla
Bell Gardens HS

I COULD REALLY connect with "Out of my brother's shadow" because I have two older brothers who are smart and really good athletes. Sometimes I feel like I have to measure up to their straight As, advanced and AP classes and math trophies. But I don't like having the feeling that I have to do good because my brothers do. This article inspired me to change my motivation so that I can measure up to my expectations, not my brothers'.

Kimberly Coffman
Wilson MS

BECOMING A BETTER PERSON THROUGH FAITH

I THINK THAT your comic "Finding my faith" was very interesting. I liked it because it relates to people I know. I have had friends who were bullies and have changed. They told me that when they would bully other people, they would feel better because they had been bullied. They also told me that they knew what they were doing was not right, but continued because of their friends. One of my friends did go the way of the Lord and said that he found peace and love and he did change for the good.

Cesar Diaz
Bell Gardens HS

I REALLY ENJOYED the comic. I could relate to the guy running around with the wrong people and getting into fights. I changed like Raymond did at the end. I always had God, so I didn't change because of God, but because of my mom. The comic made me think about my life and how I was going to end up. That's why I enjoyed it.

Gregory Tomas
Bell Gardens HS

TIRED OF BEING ASKED 'WHAT RACE ARE YOU?'

I HATE BEING judged by my race. Sometimes people come and ask me if I am of Mexican origin. I say yes, but it bugs me how people just come up to you and ask what your race is to judge you based on seeing you on the outside. I also get annoyed when I see kids call all Asians "Chinese" only by looking at their physical features. I feel sorry for them and everyone else who has been asked that rude question. If I could change something in the world, it would be having people

say "Good day" instead of "What race are you?"

Jesus Palapa
Wilson MS

WHEN I READ the article "Don't ask" it really caught my attention. I think race should not matter because you're a human and that's all that should matter to people. Also, I thought it was pretty messed up how some people care so much about Brandy's race. I thought it was a good article.

Angel Sijes
East Valley HS

I ENJOYED THIS story because I could relate. I'm German/Assyrian and for some reason, people think I'm Armenian. They act differently when they find out they are

wrong. Sometimes they're nicer, sometimes meaner. Does it really matter?! This story showed that people are being judged too fast. Your personality has nothing to do with your skin color or where you were born.

Allina Urumieh
Wilson MS

A FOSTER YOUTH ON HIS OWN AT 18

THIS ARTICLE MADE me think about the foster care system because many people don't realize that foster children aren't getting the knowledge they need to survive on their own. I think foster kids should be able to stay in foster care until they turn 21 and get the knowledge they need.

Jett Mosman
East Valley HS

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Teens react to Obama's victory

L.A. Youth writers say they're excited and hopeful about the future

AT FIRST I NEVER THOUGHT HE'D DO IT

In the beginning, I didn't think he would get this far. But going into Election Day I was sure that Barack Obama was going to crush John McCain. Everyone I knew, even if they were for McCain, would say Obama was going to win. When I heard the announcer say that Obama was our new leader, I did not have to worry anymore. I finally knew that the country's future was in great hands.

Taila Proctor-Jackson

13, Village Christian (Sun Valley)

OBAMA WILL TACKLE COLLEGE COSTS

I felt joy when I heard Obama's name called as the new president. Obama means change for me because he cares about the cost of higher education. The next four years will be a test for him to see if he can make sure that costs don't keep increasing each year. College is the most important thing on my mind because in just nine months I will be heading to college. We will see if Obama will grant America's and my wishes of change over the next four years.

Aaron Siegal-Eisman

17, Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies

MY CANDIDATE DIDN'T WIN

I was disappointed when the election was called for Obama even though I knew it was coming. I was still hopeful for McCain. Many people ask me why I am a Republican. My answer is simple: taxes. I just don't want my family to pay more taxes. But I commend Obama for mobilizing supporters with a perfect campaign. McCain had no chance against Obama ever since Sarah Palin's stupidity was revealed to the public. Obama will do his best for the benefit of the nation.

Elis Lee

16, Crescenta Valley HS

I WAS WATCHING HISTORY BEING MADE

I've supported Obama from the beginning. Watching him announce his candidacy, I felt inspired to care about politics and the future of our country. As he became the Democratic nominee, I was excited for the possibility of a huge change in America occurring during my lifetime: an African American becoming president of a powerful, predominantly white nation. And finally, watching Obama take key states, I was overwhelmed by that sense of his-

tory and a feeling of this country moving forward.

Sam Landsberg

15, Hamilton HS

FAITH IN THE FUTURE

I jumped for joy and did my victory dance. I am absolutely ecstatic that Obama won because his proposals, including increasing financial aid and getting us out of the war quickly, help Americans (including me) have hope for the future. Since 2000 we have suffered through George Bush's troubled presidency. Now that Obama is our new president, there is faith that America can recover from our economic, environmental and racial problems.

Stacey Avnes

14, Sherman Oaks Center for Enriched Studies

HE WILL BRING CHANGE

I was restless as I stared at the TV. I did not want to start to think about a potential winner (even though it was clear that Obama had more votes) because I felt it might jinx Obama's chances of winning. I know it sounds silly but that's how much this election meant to me. Obama becoming president means change and I believe he will lead America in the right direction. As a junior one of the things I'm concerned about is the cost of college. At 8 p.m. my heart skipped a beat as Obama was announced as our 44th president. Yes!

Stefany Macario

16, King Drew Medical Magnet HS

I WAS EXCITED TO SEE A MINORITY WIN

My pride and faith in the United States was reborn as Obama won the presidency. The dream of Americans, including mine, of seeing a minority win the presidency became a reality. This victory is not only for Democrats or even just the United States. It is a victory for everyone in the world. As Obama proved, you don't need to be white, come from a rich fam-

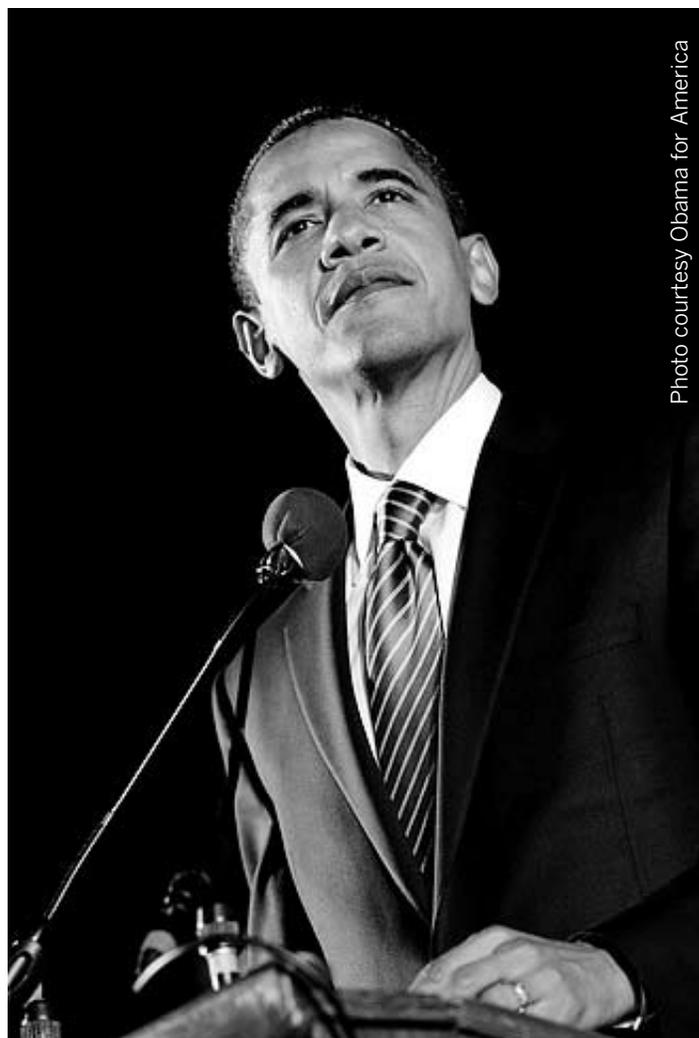


Photo courtesy Obama for America

ily or be a war hero to be a presidential candidate. All you need to be is an American willing to step up and be a leader.

ily or be a war hero to be a presidential candidate. All you need to be is an American willing to step up and be a leader.

Aaron Sayago

17, Fairfax HS

WE MUST WORK TOGETHER

As the polls closed and the votes rolled in, because my own vote went to Obama, I cheered along. But I was concerned with one thing. Obama stressed unity; it is a plan that involves everyone working together for the larger sake of our country. He encourages people to volunteer and wants to help people with issues such as college and healthcare. If we continue to be divided based on our political ideas,

Alexander Gleckman

18, South Pasadena HS

EQUALITY FOR EVERYONE

Obama's victory will prove to be a change for the better. His presidency will not only unite this nation, but will also end the war in Iraq. The election of an African-American president has also given me a sense of hope that people are becoming more open and less prejudiced. I think his main goal will be to have everyone treated fairly. That is what gives people hope.

John Lisowski

16, Laurel Springs School

WILL PEOPLE BE ANGRY?

I'm glad that Obama won, but not everyone feels that way. Almost half the country won't be thrilled by this result. We know that many Republicans are really upset and will feel cheated by the outcome. I'm excited about the changes that will be made, but at the same time, the worry about the unknown and the fear of others' anger adds anxiety to this otherwise happy occasion.

Fiona Hansen

16, Marlborough School

HOW WILL HE UNITE US?

At first I was an enthusiastic supporter of Hillary Clinton. However, Obama's message of unity and his maturity throughout the campaign convinced me that he was the candidate for America. Now it's time for him to fulfill his promise to Americans. His message of hope, change and unity should be reflected in his choice of a Cabinet that brings both Republicans and Democrats together.

Se Kim

17, Pacifica Christian HS (Santa Monica)

What do you think about Obama's election as president? Go to louth.com to share your view.

How has violence affected you?

ESSAY CONTEST WINNERS *

**The names of the winners and the people involved have been removed or changed to protect their privacy.*

1ST PLACE \$50

Sucked into the wrong crowd

Author's name withheld

Birmingham HS (Van Nuys)

I'm not close to most people. If you know me well, looking at the person I am now and always have been, you would've never expected the way I might've turned out! I could've never imagined this was possible—hanging out on Whitnall Highway, running from the cops, ducking from the bullets and watching them all get high and drunk. Was this all a dream?

Her name was Gabby. She was my closest friend. It was she who introduced me to the gang scene. Before I entered this unknown neighborhood, I never thought such negativity and cruelty could be in one place.

Me and Gabby met in the sixth grade. We were never really close then though. Two years later, in eighth grade, I found myself claiming her as my best friend. We hung out every day all day. Anywhere I was, she was. Anyone she knew, I knew. We were pretty much inseparable you could say.

As days went on we got closer and I was pretty much at her house every day having a blast, meeting new people, until one day I noticed I was meeting the wrong people. As I was sitting in her living room on the couch, three different guys were asking me where am I from? What the heck does that mean? Chillin' with them more and more, I soon found out.



Illustration by Brian Lopez-Santos, Marshall HS (L.A. Youth archives)

As months went by I began hanging around on Whitnall Highway. To me or you this is just a street, but to them it was an everyday lifestyle. Everyone that had no type of love at home, or was just under the influence, would be there. Gang members, graffiti artists, potheads, etc ... I think you get the point.

Although this was the most dangerous place I could be at the time, it felt like home! I felt safe, was accepted and found love. Wow, I guess you can see I was trapped just as much as they were—physically, mentally and emotionally.

So here I am on Whitnall Highway with

my best friend caught up in a few different problems. Getting in trouble with the cops all the time, eager to start smoking and drinking and having this "I just don't give a s---" attitude when I notice I'm sucked in as deep as possible, and I'm not even sure there's a way out. I'd been with people who could be charged with grand theft auto, murder, vandalism and much more. How could I possibly leave my second family and homies?

One day we were all cruisin' and saw someone from our rival gang. Before I could close and open my eyes I hear two thumps, six bullets and one siren. "Book it!" Those

were the last words I wanted to hear.

I soon realized that hanging out with the wrong crowd wasn't worth it. Losing all my friends—close friends at that—failing all my classes and being illiterate, and talking like an idiot was now over. I wasn't raised this way, so why live like this?

Sure, looking back I miss them, but I don't miss the violence at all. Cluelessly approaching this sanctuary-like area, never in my dreams could I have imagined seeing such foul energy all at once.

Oh, and if you're wondering what occurred during the two thumps, six bullets and sirens? Let's just say, rest in peace, Gabby.

2ND PLACE \$30

'Scared for my life'

Author's name withheld

Washington Prep HS

Violence has affected me since the day I was born. I grew up in South Central and most of my family is involved with gangs. It was so hard for me to survive because I was kidnapped, raped, abused; anything you can name probably happened to me. Where I'm living now, it's hard for me to even walk up and down the street because I get scared that somebody is going to try to harm me. All they do is fight and I can't even take out my trash without somebody fighting or shooting. It just doesn't make any sense.

I live near a gang. They are so disrespectful. When we moved into the area, they were already trying to fight us. They tagged their hood on my house, trying to tell us who they are and trying to scare us, and I am scared because who knows what they are up to. My family was threatened by one of them when a friend came over. They said if our

friend came back they were going to kill all of us. I don't even feel comfortable walking to the store because I know it's not safe. Nowhere is safe with violence.

When I lived in San Bernardino I experienced a lot too. We had riots all the time involving whites and blacks, whites and Mexicans, blacks and Mexicans. It got so out of hand that races were turning against each other. I had to go through that almost every day. I got suspended every week because of all the fights that were going on. I was a victim in a crime. Because of what I had on, some man put a gun to my head and told me if I wore those colors again, he would kill me. Do you know how that makes me feel having to hide in my room, having to cry myself to sleep, having to wake up in the middle of the night to check on my family to see if they are all alive? It hurts to know what this world has turned out to be.

I am so scared for my life right now. I pray to God every night hoping that someday the violence will come to an end. I'm just so tired of fighting my life every day and I'm tired of losing somebody who's close to me over violence. I want to make this world a better place for everybody. Then they won't have to be scared of leaving the house or just walking down the street because they will be safe. It just hurts me so bad to see all the violence that's happening to me and to you.

3RD PLACE \$20

My uncle was shot

Author's name withheld

Birmingham HS (Van Nuys)

"I'll make five grand a night! You don't even make that in a month!" These were my uncle's words to my mom. I saw my mom laugh with disgust and disappointment in her face. "I know ... but can you go to bed at night with the peace that I have? Knowing that people are after you, and they want you dead!" she responded. I noticed tears were flowing down her cheek. She had finally decided to realize her baby brother was selling drugs on the streets of Los Angeles. She accepted that her brother was no longer safe with the life he was living and the violence he was already involved in. There are only two ways out of that job—in a coffin or in handcuffs.

Seven years passed and we never heard anything from him. On May 7, 2004, the phone was ringing at about one in the morning. My mom chose not to pick up because she knew whoever was calling was gon-

na tell her bad news. "Ringgg ... Ringgg ..." was all I heard until she picked up the phone. It was the hospital informing us that my uncle had been stabbed and shot multiple times. They said he was in critical condition and they didn't know if he was gonna make it.

I had never seen my mom drive like this, she was going about 80 mph on the streets! I felt like I was going to die that night, either because I was so scared my uncle was gonna die, or because of how my mom was driving. I looked at her and noticed that her tears were coming down again. I asked her, "Mom, are you OK?" She looked at me and responded, "No! I am not OK!" I felt bad because of how she yelled at me, but I understood because her little brother was dying.

We pulled up to the hospital and parked the car. We ran inside with such desperation. We waited until he got out of surgery. The doctor came out and told us, "We're lucky he's alive, but there is some damage." I remember my mom saying, "Thank you, God." She said it with such relief.

My uncle was lucky, he lived to see another day. Violence affected me so much in that situation that sometimes I'm even scared to just sit outside my house because I'm related to him. It's been almost five years. We haven't heard anything from him or seen him. Because he lives a violent life, who knows if he'll be alive tomorrow.

NEW ESSAY CONTEST:

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DEADLINE: Fri., Dec. 12, 2008

Stuck between two worlds

After years of trying to pick one, I've learned to embrace both my Korean and American sides

By **Elliot Kwon**

16, Palos Verdes Peninsula HS

Growing up I never doubted that I was Korean. I knew the language, culture and history. I lived there from when I was a baby until I was 10. Most importantly, both of my parents are Korean. But during middle school in America I started to lose my Korean self. A trip back to Korea when I was 13 made it clear to me that American culture was slowly replacing my Korean side. I feared losing who I really am.

It started when I was 10, when we moved from Korea to Downey, a small city east of Los Angeles. I didn't fit in very well because my English wasn't very good. That inspired me to work harder. I watched American television. I tried to read the Los Angeles Times, and I slowly added English to my everyday life.

But as my English improved, I began to make more errors while speaking Korean at home. I figured that it was no big deal. Korean was my first language, and I would always be able to easily retrieve it. Besides, I could still understand everything when I watched Korean shows on TV, and I read the Korea Times every day. I was still clearly a Korean.

Before sixth grade, our family moved to Santa Monica, where I noticed that there were a lot more Koreans than in Downey. Many were like me—raised in Korea as kids but then they moved to the United States just before middle school. We were called the 1.5 generation because we were in between the first generation (people who came to the United States as adults) and second generation (people who grew up in the United States since they were very young).

These other 1.5-generation Koreans knew the latest Korean fashions and culture, watched Korean dramas on television and talked about new Korean bands. To me it seemed like they were shielding themselves from American culture, only hanging out with each other.

My attitude was different. Why focus so much on Korean things while living in America? I wanted to embrace my new culture. I tried hard to make a diverse group of friends, which

worked mostly. From them I was able to learn about American culture. We watched movies, hung out at the mall and partied at the beach. I never would have had those experiences if I socialized solely with other Koreans.

I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND AMERICAN SLANG

There was a problem, though. Even as I hung out with my American group of friends, I couldn't help noticing how Korean I was. I didn't know slang like "lol," forcing me to ask my friends what they meant when they used phrases like that. Plus, when I spoke, my friends sometimes would have to ask me to repeat myself because I still had a heavy Korean accent. Being around my American friends constantly reminded me that no matter how hard I tried to be an American, there would always be a distance between me and them.

Even though I wasn't totally Americanized, I felt my American side beginning to take over the Korean side of me. Whenever I tried to have a conversation with my mom in Korean, I would sometimes have to blurt out words or short phrases in English to complete sentences because I couldn't remember the Korean words. My mom would give me puzzled looks, partly because she didn't understand the English, but mostly because she didn't understand why I couldn't speak perfect Korean.

I felt embarrassed and grew frustrated with myself for not being fluent. I believed that speaking Korean well was the fundamental part of being Korean. Was I becoming less Korean? Compared to the other 1.5s, who immersed themselves in Korean culture, I felt like I didn't measure up. The second generation kids seemed to have it easier, too, because they identified themselves as Americans anyway. I felt like the only one questioning my identity.

I tried to reassure myself, though, that I was still solidly Korean. My daily diet included kimchi (spicy, pickled cabbage) and rice. I still knew the geography, history and the customs. Sure, my knowledge of the current culture may have been a tad outdated, but there was no way that I would forget everything else about Korea. As long as I spoke understandable Korean and knew basic facts about my coun-

try, I would always be Korean.

As I forgot more Korean words, I kept questioning my identity. Finally, the perfect chance to resolve this "identity crisis" came the summer after seventh grade when my mom and I visited Korea.

Visiting would prove that nothing had changed about my Korean identity. Or so I thought. In reality, my expectations deflated as soon as we arrived at the airport in Korea. While going through customs I felt this strange sensation of being watched. But when I looked at these nosey onlookers, they would quickly turn away. The further I walked, the worse it got. It felt as though I was a rare exhibit—the outsider.

I forgot all about it though as soon as I saw my hometown, Daejeon. I was ecstatic beyond words! The curving road climbing gently over

above my head that advertised where I came from. I wasn't sure how they knew. Didn't I look like other Koreans?

The answer came from an unlikely source: a taxi driver. After my mom and I visited our old favorite restaurant, we called for a cab to go back to our apartment. The taxi driver didn't say anything, which was unusual because taxi drivers in Korea were notorious for talking to their passengers too much. Since my mom and I were both bored, we talked to each other in Korean instead. When we were discussing the exact date of our departure and my mom's plans before we had to leave for America, the driver suddenly broke his silence.

"Oh! So you're from America?" he asked.

"Yeah. We're just here to visit," my mom replied.

"So that's why ..."

During middle school in America I started to lose my Korean self. A trip back to Korea when I was 13 made it clear to me that American culture was slowly replacing my Korean side. I feared losing who I really am.

the forested hill, the white, high-rise apartment complexes—it was almost exactly how I remembered. I was back and I would see that it was silly worrying about my identity.

I DIDN'T BELONG IN KOREA EITHER

But as the days passed I started to notice the way everyone, from vendors at the markets to even my friends, subtly hesitated and flashed uneasy looks whenever I spoke. Sometimes, people would even ask me if I was from America. It felt as if there was a bright neon sign

"What do you mean?"

"Well, at first I thought your son was kind of ... um ... mentally disabled but now I see why his speech seems kind of awkward. I see ..."

At that point, I really wanted to punch him, but I resisted. I was very angry at his rudeness, but I finally figured out why I stood out so much from the crowd. It was my pronunciation.

When I spoke Korean, I mixed in some English vowels and consonants, like how I always mispronounced the Korean consonant that has a sound between "r" and "l." Also, I had



Photo illustration
by Michelle Paik,
16, Palos Verdes Peninsula HS

left Korea when I was about 10 so my vocabulary and sentence structure were limited to that level. No wonder that taxi driver thought I was slow.

Even if I wanted to be a complete American, I knew I would never be one. Simple differences set me apart from my American friends, such as not being able to say things like “What’s up?” to a teacher and instead feeling the urge to talk in the formal “Good afternoon, teacher” fashion.

Rather than resolving my Korean identity problem, this trip only served to show how out of place I felt everywhere.

Questions about my identity haunted me up to high school, when my family moved to Rancho Palos Verdes. Almost half of the students at my school are Asians, a mind-blowing number for me. Some of them are 1.5s, but many grew up in the States.

At the beginning of the school year, I sim-

ply avoided other 1.5 Koreans. I feared that if I hung out with them, I would lose the little American side that I had. I would end up getting permanently stuck in between these two cultures.

Instead, I tried to make a diverse group of friends, but it didn’t work. At my school Koreans associate with Koreans. Chinese associate with Chinese. Even 1.5-generation kids associate with other 1.5-generation kids, the second-generations with second-generations, and so on. I ended up following that trend, too, and hanging out with the 1.5s.

I MET OTHERS WHO MADE ME MORE COMFORTABLE WITH MYSELF

After a couple months, I realized it was wrong for me to think that the 1.5s would talk only about Korea, because their conversations ranged from movies like *I Am Legend* to the difficult chemistry test we took that day. Their

interests were much more diverse than I imagined. They were like me; they spoke imperfect Korean, too. Since then, I’ve become friends with them.

Ironically I started to finally become comfortable with my identity through them. We all know that it’s impossible for us to speak perfect Korean. So we mix in English sometimes. The best part is, I don’t feel ashamed about it anymore, because we all are like that.

Just talking in Korean gave us a chance to take pride in our heritage and culture. The fact that I used my native language outside of my family made me feel like I was getting more in touch with my Korean side. Though my mom still wasn’t exactly proud of my Korean, she was happy to see me using the language more.

Being around people who had the same heritage and immigration experience as me helped me start to realize that I have a choice of how I wanted to identify myself. I didn’t have to

throw away one side for the other. Around Americans, I could speak English and talk about American pop culture. Around Koreans, I could speak Korean and talk about Korean dramas. I became more confident in who I am.

In the end, I’ve come to understand that no one has it any better. My second-generation friends in church sometimes admit that they wish they knew more about Korea and the language. They have it just as hard. It’s universal.

Talking with my friends about identity and finding where I belong opened up my perspective, allowing me to redefine “Korean.” I thought that the knowledge of history, current culture and language is what made a person a Korean, aside from the ethnicity.

But I realized the most important thing to being a Korean is to feel like one. The appreciation and maybe even the pride you feel whenever you see your

country on television or whenever the national anthem plays, your love and devotion to your own heritage define your true identity.

Now I’m not afraid to admit that I am going through this internal struggle, the feeling of not fully belonging in Korea or the United States. I am proud to encompass both my Korean and American identities. I am a Korean-American. I am my own.



Elliot says teens should define themselves and not let others tell them who they are.



When Michelle (center) got pregnant, it brought Solange and her closer together. Photo by Anisa Berry, 17, View Park Prep HS

My friend is a mom

I was shocked when I found out she was pregnant, but I realized she needed my support more than ever

By Solange Rubio

17, Leuzinger HS (Lawndale)

Every year at my school, Leuzinger High, I'd see a few pregnant girls. They all seemed to fit a stereotype—only the girls who didn't take school seriously got pregnant. But in January of sophomore year I got a shock. Rumors began to spread that Michelle, one of the girls in the college-bound track like me, was pregnant.

We all noticed that this very thin girl had suddenly grown a small belly. Michelle would tell people that she just had stomach surgery and it had become swollen. I believed her. Why would she go through the trouble of making

that up? That excuse stopped working a month later when her stomach got even bigger. I suspected that she felt ashamed and that's why she couldn't admit it to anyone. If I were pregnant, it would be hard walking into class with everyone's eyes on my belly and thinking every conversation was about me.

I felt compassion toward Michelle, who I had some classes with but wasn't someone I considered a close friend. But I have to admit that I was one of those who stared and whispered. I didn't intend to judge or be mean; I was just curious. This was the first time one of the pregnant girls was in my classes.

A few weeks later the rumors were dying off. I think everyone just assumed she was preg-

nant. But I had to know. One day I was sitting next to Michelle in class and we were talking about how school was stressing us out. I saw an opportunity to finally find out for sure. I knew I couldn't say the word "pregnant" in class because everyone would turn toward us. Instead, I told her that some people might be going through something hard but they might be trying to put on a good face and not show that anything is wrong.

As soon as the tears started streaming down her cheeks I knew the rumors were true.

"I'm pregnant," Michelle finally said. As soon as she said those words I saw the heads of nearby girls turn. I knew they were just in it for the scandal. Until that moment, when she revealed her secret to me, that's how I had felt when others talked about her pregnancy. But the other girls' reactions made me angry and forced me to reflect on my motives. Michelle needed compassion. I wanted to say something comforting but I didn't know how to react. I wanted to ask how, when, why? But we were in class and our teacher had resumed her lesson. So I just told her, "I'm here for you if you ever need help with anything."

I COULDN'T IMAGINE BEING IN HER SHOES

After class, I was still thinking about Michelle's pregnancy. Her tears showed me that these were hard times. I never would have guessed this could have happened to Michelle. We were taking the same challenging classes. That same day as I walked home from school, my boyfriend reached to hold my hand. Even though we were just holding hands, the part of me that would have freaked out if I got pregnant started thinking, "Oh my gosh, I'm never gonna kiss my boyfriend again!"

If it were any other pregnant girl, I wouldn't have been able to see how hard it was. All those other pregnant girls smiled and had friends encourage them through their pregnancies, but Michelle was in a different crowd. Her getting pregnant was looked at as an unfortunate event that would be her roadblock to college.

I wanted to show Michelle I was there for her. That's what I would have wanted had this been happening to me.

As Michelle's belly got bigger, the way people talked about her pregnancy got worse. When she brought a bigger bag to school all the girls would say she brought it to hide her belly. Then everyone started to point out that she no longer fit into the desk and had to sit sideways.

No matter how bad the gossiping was, the worst part to me was how teachers reacted. In AVID, a class promoting college, I got the sense that our teacher felt uncomfortable. Our AVID teacher is young and enthusiastic about her

job. She frequently tells us about obstacles she had to overcome before making it to college. Once Michelle's pregnancy was visible I could sense my teacher's disappointment. It seemed as if our teacher struggled to look at Michelle's face rather than her stomach. She also made comments about not needing any more pregnant girls in her class.

It wasn't until her eighth month that I began talking to Michelle about being pregnant. I asked her how it felt. She had a smile on her face, which was far from the tears I had seen when she confirmed to me that she was pregnant. She told me that her back and feet ached but that things were better than the first few months. She was already thinking about a name for her

baby girl. I asked if I could feel her belly. She told me her baby kicked, but I didn't feel a kick; instead it felt like a big, hard water balloon. I no longer felt bad, instead I was beginning to feel excited about Michelle's pregnancy. I knew Michelle's sweetness and patience would make her an amazing mother.

I DECIDED TO THROW HER A BABY SHOWER

As we talked more often during the next few weeks I felt a stronger bond of friendship between Michelle and me. I had been wanting to do something nice for her and it finally hit me what it should be—a surprise baby shower. Every time we talked after that I tried to sneak in

questions like what type of cake she liked best. Apparently I'm not the best detective because I never got a clear answer. But I decided that an ice cream cake would be perfect because it was early summer.

My friend Julie and I took three weeks to plan the baby shower. We collected enough money from our AVID class to buy a cake and decorations. We decided to keep it simple—gifts and food, but no games. It felt awkward buying baby gifts at stores. I didn't want to look at the clerks' faces in case they thought I had a baby and gave me disapproving looks. I couldn't believe that Michelle was going to have to do this regularly to buy what her baby needs.

My mom saw me coming in with bags full of decorations and baby stuff. I didn't want her to freak out thinking I was pregnant, so I told her about Michelle. My mother, who's pretty conservative, said she felt bad for Michelle. My mom took this as an opportunity to have the uncomfortable sex talk. My mom's questions and comments were painfully embarrassing, like asking what I would do if a guy wanted to be alone with me and explaining how things worked. However, my mom seemed to like how I answered her questions and saw me as more mature. Deep down I'm glad we talked. I feel I have someone to talk to about sex—someone who isn't an immature friend.

Continued on next page

'It's really hard'

I INTERVIEWED MICHELLE so teens could learn from her experience. I thought that with her mom's help, things were pretty easy. But she has worked harder than I ever imagined.

Solange: When you decided to have sex did it ever cross your mind that you could get pregnant? *Michelle:* I thought, it's not easy to get pregnant. I thought most of the time when you do get pregnant you plan for it to happen. The first time we did use a condom but then after a while we kinda got comfortable and then we stopped [using a condom] and that's when it happened.

What about birth control pills? I didn't use birth control at all. I didn't know about birth control.

Did you ever think about not having the baby or giving it up for adoption? No, I always thought of keeping the baby. I never had a doubt about aborting or adoption or anything. My mom and the dad's side of the family both wanted me to abort the baby. And when we found out, I was five months [pregnant] already. It was too late to abort the baby.

How did your family react? I'm pretty sure they were disappointed, but then I proved them wrong when I continued with school. I just kept bringing home the good grades.

Why did you hide it at first? I was in denial, because I was really scared. I did tell my boyfriend but we were both young and

didn't know any better. I kinda hid it because of shame.

How was being pregnant and giving birth? Being pregnant was not that bad. I would walk to school and walk home from school because my doctor told me that if you walk a lot it's easier to give birth. And being pregnant was joyful. Everywhere I'd go people would move for me, I could eat all I wanted and people wouldn't think I'm fat.

Giving birth was hard because I was kinda by myself. My boyfriend and his family both weren't there for me when I was giving birth. I called them but they didn't come until I was finished giving birth. In the labor room my grandmother was in there with me. My mom was in the waiting room because she said she was too scared to come in. The only thing that really was hard was the contractions. Being in the labor room and thinking, "Oh the baby's daddy isn't here" brought tears to my eyes, but to see that I had my grandma there was really a joy for me.

How are you able to go to school? My mom has to take care of the baby for me when school starts and after [school] she'll pick me up and then I'll have to watch the baby and do homework. So I'll basically come home and play with the baby for a bit, feed her, hang out with her then wait until she falls

asleep then do homework late at night.

What is it like raising a child and being a student? It's really hard. I can't join as many clubs as I wish I could. I did join a dance team—the Filipino dance team—at my school and every time I had practice I had to bring the baby. It was such a hassle because after practice I would come home with the baby and my mom would yell at me because she thinks that if I dance and bring the baby I'm not going to be into my schoolwork. I proved her wrong, but toward the end of the school year I had to stop dancing because of AP exams and finals.

How do you feel about sex education? I didn't have sex education. I didn't know what birth control was. Sex education should be forced in middle school because that's when we really don't think about it. When you hit high school, that's when they tell you about sex, but at that point it's already too late—everyone's already doing it.

How did you feel during anatomy class last year when our teacher brought up condoms? When he finally told us I was like, "You know you could have saved my life if you would have told me this earlier?" Why are you going to wait until junior year when I'm like 16 or 17? Then you're going to tell me how to put a condom on or that having sex is bad? Why did they wait to say that until the end of our high school years?

Are there times when you feel like you're too young to have a baby? All the time. I take the baby everywhere. I'm not ashamed of people seeing her. People always ask me, "Is

that your baby?" I'm like, "Yeah, of course that's my baby." And they're like, "How old are you? Aren't you too young?" I'm young but there's not really an age limit. No one is ever ready to have a baby. You could be 30-something years old, successful and [if] a baby is unexpected, you're not always going to be ready for it.

Financially do you think it's hard to be a teenage mother? I have to share a room, I have to cut back on shopping. And all the prices are going up, the powdered milk is expensive and [so are] diapers. Having my mom here we're going to get through it. And there's government programs out there, like WIC (Women, Infants and Children). WIC [which provides food and healthcare to low-income moms] helped me a lot. As long as you have your family then you're going to be happy.

Do you doubt your future plans at times? Every night when I go to sleep I think about it. Like, man am I really going to make it to college? What am I going to do with the baby when I'm in college? Who's going to take care of her? I think about it every night and it does hurt, it hurts a lot.

Last thoughts? If you have a baby [when you're] young then you should stay in school for the baby, not just for yourself but for the baby. I know school's not for everyone, but if you have a kid, school is your only choice. It's your only key to life, to success. If you make the baby, take responsibility for it—guys and girls. It's your baby, your own blood.

—*Solange Rubio 17, Leuzinger HS (Lawndale)*

Continued from previous page

To surprise Michelle, we convinced one of Michelle's friends to tell her that our AVID teacher, whose classroom we used for the baby shower, had to talk to her. As soon as she walked into the pink-decorated room she started to cry. Twelve of us greeted her with sparkly eyes from the tears we were holding back. The baby shower was only 20 minutes, but it didn't have to last long for her to know that she had people supporting her, even people who weren't in her usual crowd of friends. My friend Julie and I gave our presents to her first. We got her a beautifully adorned journal and a pink baby onesie that said on the front, "worth the wait." The rest of the gifts were very practical; bottles, diapers, clothes. At the end we took pictures and everyone hugged her good-bye.

About three weeks after the shower, Michelle gave birth to a baby girl she named Kaithlyn. She had texted a few friends and word got out while we were in second period that she had just given birth. I was happy she was well enough to text friends. This showed me that giving birth wasn't so agonizing that afterwards you couldn't even move. I didn't see her at school for the next two weeks. She had missed the AP world history final, but she had talked to that teacher long before to tell her she might miss it. It was weird when teachers mentioned that Michelle was on maternity leave. I had only heard of that for people with jobs.

When she came back, all the girls crowded around her to ask questions. "Did it hurt?" was the first question we bombarded her with. She told us that the contractions hurt and so did giving birth. But what I couldn't believe was that she had decided not to take the epidural (a shot that would have numbed the pain). She told us that after giving birth and holding the baby, she and her grandmother and even the doctor cried. I thought she was the luckiest girl, not just because of her healthy baby, but because she came back as skinny as she was before she was pregnant. I was glad she was back in school shortly after giving birth. This showed me that she was serious about graduating high school and going to college.

SHE HAS TO BALANCE HER RESPONSIBILITIES

When junior year started Michelle was the mother of a 3-month-old baby, and I saw how things were catching up to her. She was absent a lot from pre-calculus—which was hard enough even if you were there—because she had to take care of Kaithlyn or sometimes just needed a day off. She also had broken up with her boyfriend, which meant Michelle and her mom were raising Kaithlyn.

Junior year was also the year that we finally learned about birth control. As part of anat-



Photo by Anisa Berry, 17, View Park Prep HS

I knew Michelle's sweetness and patience would make her an amazing mother.

omy class we studied the reproductive system. While our teacher was reviewing the chapter summary, I looked over at Michelle and thought, "We're just learning about this and she's already gone through it." That put things in perspective for me and I finally noticed that she was really young and shouldn't have had to go through it. This was the only time I had been taught about sex except for fifth grade when they taught us that girls have periods and seventh grade when they popped in a video about abstinence.

Before our teacher ended the lesson on reproduction and sexually transmitted diseases, he demonstrated how to use a condom and said that it was very effective if used correctly. His stance on teens and sex was abstinence; however, he knew not everyone would do that and to those teens he recommended waiting six months so at least you know your partner. I thought that was more realistic than teaching abstinence only. Some teens are going to have sex and they talk about it like it's no big deal. They're not going to be like "I'm abstinent because a video in seventh grade told me so."

Now that it's senior year I know that Michelle is going to need my support and my friendship the most. With all the college deadlines and senior activities (homecoming, prom,

grad night, etc.) I want to be there for her and encourage her if she ever feels like giving up. If she ever needs a baby sitter during school I know my grandmother would be open to help. Even I would be open to staying with her baby if she ever feels like going out. So far her mom has changed her work schedule to baby-sit while Michelle is at school.

Michelle's experience has helped me mature. I used to have a bad impression of the girls who went to the special pregnancy school next to campus and sometimes I'd check to see if anyone I knew had enrolled. Now I understand that these are just girls who didn't think about the consequences of their actions. As a teen, it's easy to forget about your future. The farthest I've looked ahead is planning my weekends. Teens talk about sex—who's doing what and with who—like it's not a big deal. But no one seems to talk about pregnancy. Now I know there are greater consequences to the decisions we make in our lives. However, a mistake shouldn't define what person you are, rather it should be the decisions you make after. To me, Michelle is more than just a teen mother; she is a strong girl who has persevered. As she prepares for college, she reminds me every day that there is no reason to give up your dreams.

MORE THAN 400,000 teens have babies every year in the United States, according to the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. After 15 years of decline—attributed both to less sexual activity and increased use of contraceptives—the teen birth rate increased 3 percent between 2005 and 2006, and a further increase is expected when the 2007 figures come out soon.

WWW.TEENGROWTH.COM
Health information for teens.

WWW.SEXETC.ORG
Sexual health information by teens, for teens.

WWW.TEENSOURCE.ORG
List of clinics in California, birth control and STD information.

PLANNED PARENTHOOD
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Solange thinks teens need more and better sex education to help prevent teen pregnancies.



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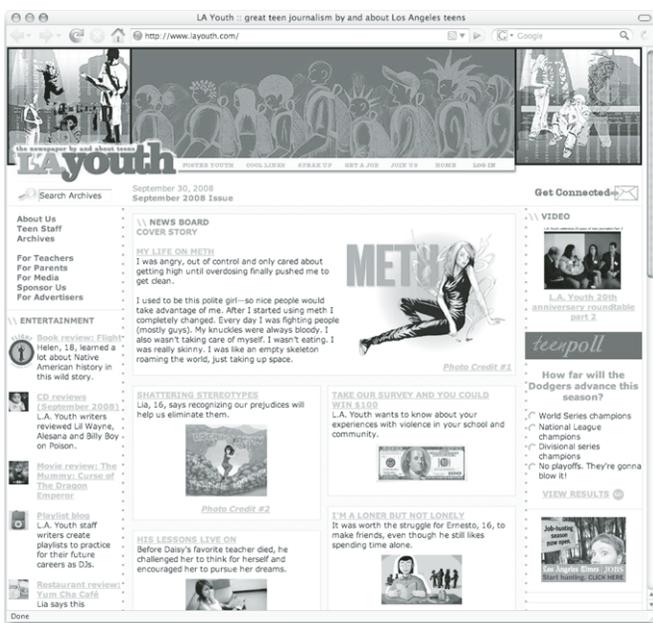
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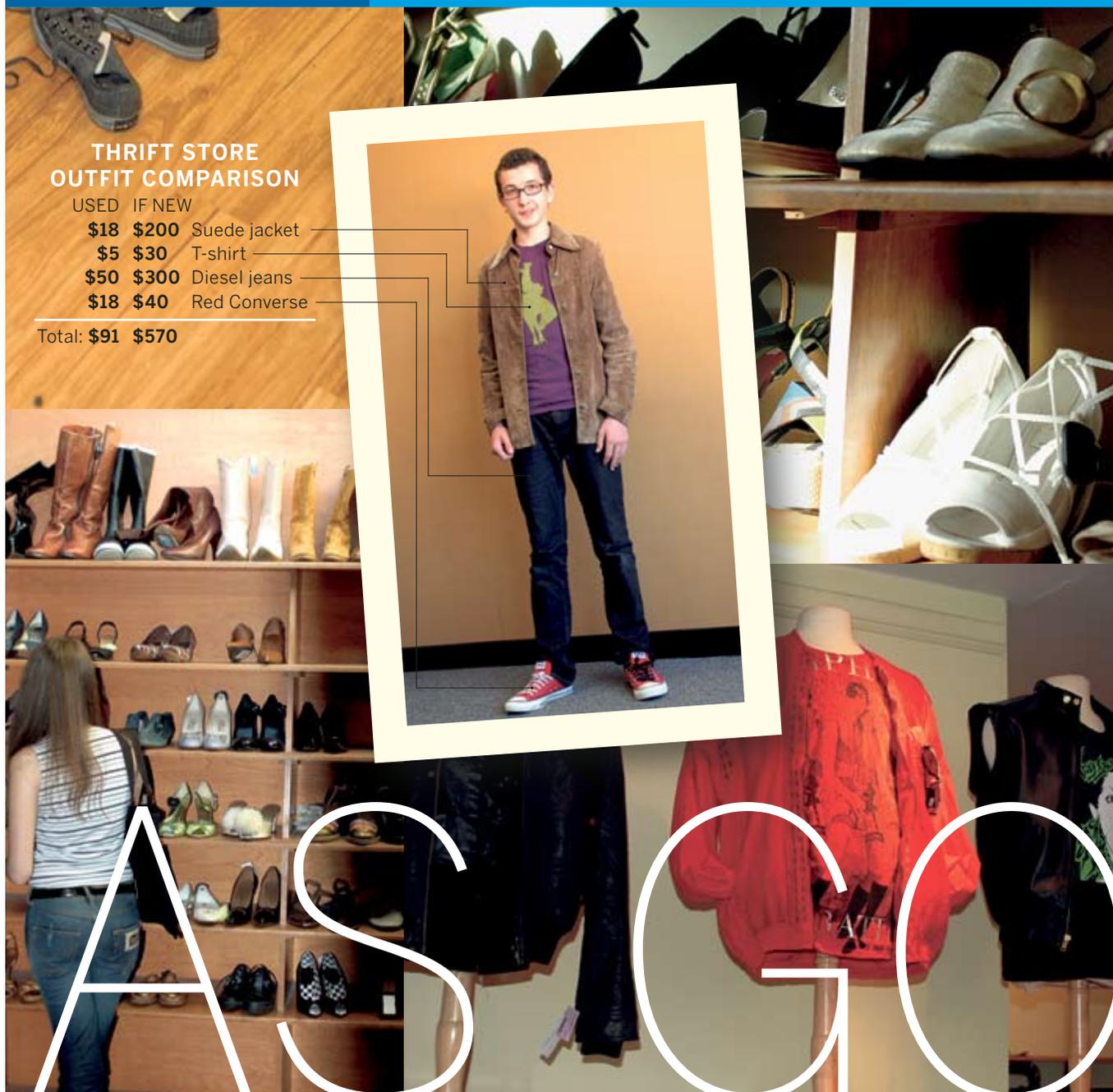
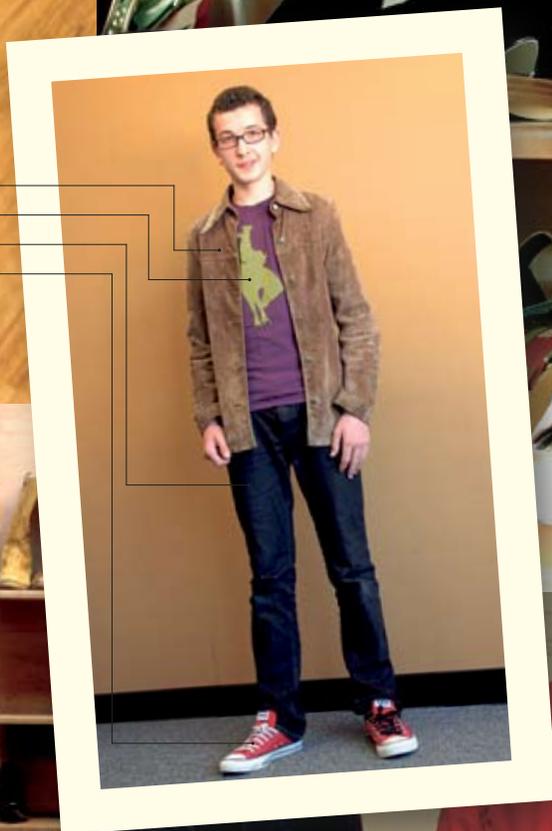


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THANK YOU MART

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The sign outside reads "Nothing over \$3.99." They've got cool sunglasses, hats, jewelry and other accessories.

JET RAG

825 N. La Brea Ave.
Los Angeles, CA 90038
(323) 939-0528
Search through bins of clothes that sell for \$1 at their dollar sale every Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. in the parking lot.

By Jasper Nahid

14, New Roads School (Santa Monica)

I'm not a very brave shopper. I stick to department stores and buy nothing too "out there." Most of the time my uniform is jeans and a T-shirt. So when I decided I wanted to do something to help the environment, I was hesitant when my mom suggested shopping for clothes at thrift stores. I'd never been to a thrift store so I had an image in my mind of a cramped building that smells like the inside of an old closet, filled with threadbare clothes and weird people wearing stranger clothes than the ones that were for sale. While several of the thrift stores we visited made me want to leave quickly, we found several that changed the way I thought. They showed me that buying vintage and used clothing is a cool, green way to shop that saves money as well.

As a designer, my mother has a natural sense of style, so she always prides herself on picking out the nicest

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Photos by
Anisa Berry, 17,
View Park Prep HS and
Cathleen McCaffery, 17,
Marlborough School

THRIFT STORES AS NEW

clothes in a store. In fact, she's a great person to go shopping with. Most teenagers wouldn't say that about their moms, but honestly she has really good taste—even in clothes that I would wear.

Together we visited five or six thrift and vintage clothing stores around La Brea and Melrose. Two stores, Crossroads Trading Co. and Wasteland, seemed to have already done the searching for you. The stores look and feel like retail stores—everything is hung up neatly on racks and they're selective when they buy used clothes from people so you're more likely to find nice clothes. All the clothes are clean and to my amazement, didn't smell like used clothes. But the merchandise is used, the prices are low and they sold clothes that I wouldn't be afraid to wear in public.

At Crossroads I didn't have to do that much searching. Within a few minutes I found a cool pair of Diesel-skinny jeans that I bought for \$50 that would be about \$300 new. I also bought a new Vans wallet for a few bucks. My mom couldn't resist the opportuni-

ty to get some new clothes, so she bought herself a dress and a belt.

Wasteland was a really trendy store, filled with hipsters and dimly lit. Their prices are higher than Crossroads but you're guaranteed to find something in style. I got a pair of red low-top Converse for \$18 that appeared to be new. Someone had apparently lost their mind or became allergic to the color red because I couldn't think of a single reason to get rid of them. That person had also put black laces in one shoe and white laces in the other. You can't get that at a department store.

I've always been aware of the importance of helping the environment but I never really did anything about it. Buying used clothing is one of the easiest ways to help the earth. There is almost no waste because the clothes have already been bought and shipped when they were new. This eliminates the need for a huge freighter coming from China just to bring your clothes. It's even greener than buying new "eco" clothes because even if

they're made from environmentally friendly materials like organic cotton or hemp, they still have the other downsides of retail clothing: expensive, wasteful shipping and, potentially, sweatshop labor.

By shopping at thrift stores, you'll find clothes that were cool enough for people to buy, not what people don't buy. Plus the prices and the feeling that you are doing something good for our planet make it worthwhile.



Jasper says that if the quality of clothes at a thrift store is just as good as at a regular store, why pay more?

From designer jeans to funky shoes, you can find cool clothes at a good price at thrift stores

Leaving my anger behind

My behavior was out of control until an intense therapeutic center helped me become someone I like

By Sally C., 15

When I look back at my life I see this very angry person. When I was mad at someone I'd try to hurt them by scratching, kicking, biting—anything I could do. I think I just wanted to hurt people. If they made me mad, I wanted to make them mad. Back then I didn't think it was wrong.

My life has been messed up for as long as I can remember. My parents were always fighting. My dad was an alcoholic. He'd get mad for small reasons and hit us. I was scared to take showers because my dad would yell if I took too long. My mom didn't know how to deal with us when we were crying so she'd lock us in the bathroom until we stopped. She'd barricade the door with a vacuum or the sewing machine so we couldn't get out.

My brothers and I didn't know how to express ourselves when we were frustrated because our parents didn't teach us. So we would always fight too. Once my big brother made fun of me so I went upstairs and kicked the closet mirror and it broke.

Sometimes I'd think, am I the only one going through this? My friends looked happy all the time so I thought they had it easy.

I was 8 and in third grade when my mom filed for divorce. We had to choose our parent. We decided to live with my dad since he was staying in our house in Pomona. The thought of living somewhere else sounded weird.

When my mom left we had to take care of ourselves. I'd get myself dressed and nothing I wore matched. I wouldn't shower. Whenever my father did our laundry it smelled like mildew. We only had soda to drink. When I was sad I'd stuff my face. I'd always eat fast food and Cup Noodles. I was so fat.

At school there was a group of boys that would make fun of me and call me names like "Godzilla" and "tsunami." I'd usually call them names back. But one day in fifth grade one of the boys was really pissing me off so I kicked him in the groin and hit him. The school knew I was having problems so they took me to a mental hospital. I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. It's a mental disorder that has to

do with depression. It made me have different moods all at once. I'd be sad then angry then I'd be laughing. I was there for two weeks but it didn't change me.

When I was about to go to sixth grade I was told I had to go to a special school called Cortez, which was for people who had mental disorders or problems at home or in school. I never got up for school so they decided to send me to a lockdown therapeutic center 50 miles away in Murrieta called Oak Grove. I felt like my dad wanted to get rid of me.

SENT AWAY TO A STRICT FACILITY

When I arrived at Oak Grove I missed being home but I didn't miss fighting with my parents and my brothers. There were so many stupid rules about when to eat, when you could shower, when you could sleep. It wasn't fun. They even had a level system. To move to a higher level, which gave you more privileges, we had to show we were capable of things such as good hygiene, getting along with the other kids and helping others. I was trying to be good to show them I was better so I could leave.

I was more motivated when I became friends with one of the girls at Oak Grove, Kristina. We both liked drawing and anime. We were always together. We had a notebook that we'd pass notes in. We'd draw and put poems in there.

Sometimes my dad would promise me that he would come see me on the weekends, but he'd never show up. I felt like he wanted me to just go to treatment and get better. I felt like he didn't love me. That made me really depressed and not want to follow the rules.

Once they were making me move rooms because my roommate didn't like me. I said, "She's the one who wants the new roommate, why can't she move?" Then I punched one of the staff, Carol, in the stomach. The moment I did it I couldn't believe that I hit her because she was my favorite staff. I regretted it.

Another time, they dropped me from one of the highest levels to the lowest level for something stupid. I was so mad. The next day I went AWOL, which means being absent without leave. You're not supposed to go anywhere without a staff person. I left Oak Grove after showering at 8 p.m. I was wearing pink pajama

pants and had a big pink rabbit. People were staring at me. I found a pay phone and called my dad to tell him to take me home, which was stupid because he just called Oak Grove. They came to get me and took me back.

Running away became a way to not deal with my problems. When they didn't let me say goodbye to Kristina when she left, I got mad and ran away.

Another time I ran away and they brought me back and put me in the white room, which is where they put you when you get in trouble. I was like an octopus, scratching and hitting the staff. They were trying to keep me down. Every time they loosened their grip I would kick and scratch. I wanted to hurt them because they had made me upset. I didn't want them to win. I broke free and escaped the room. There was another staff at the counter. I started choking her (maybe she made me mad, I don't remember) but then they pulled me off of her. After that the staff were scared of me. They'd call for the big, strong male staff when I got in trouble.

My therapist told me if you run away one more time we're going to send you to a stricter therapeutic center. I did. They sent me to Heritage, which is in Utah. I wasn't upset when I was moving to Heritage. I guess it's because I hated Oak Grove.

I arrived at Heritage in 2006, when I was 12 years old. It was at Heritage that I finally realized I needed treatment, that I needed to be more mature and that arguing or getting upset for stupid reasons was wrong.

A FINAL OUTBURST

I wasn't ready to change right away. One day I was upset and walked out of the dorm building, which wasn't allowed. I didn't care. It had snowed. I threw snowballs at one of the staff, then started running. They caught me and took me to the ISU (Intense Support Unit), the place where you go when you're not doing so great. A new therapist named Krista came to see me. She talked to me. She said, "If you behave, we'll work on getting you back to the dorm."

I started following directions. I answered a whole bunch of questions they gave me, like what did you do wrong, what could you do bet-

ter next time? The next day they moved me to a new dorm. Krista had reduced the days I had to stay in the ISU from eight days to two. I was happy and relieved.

Things got better when I moved to the new dorm where there were fewer kids and I could get more attention. There were more staff available when I needed to talk to them about a problem, like if I didn't like a new girl or if I had problems with my parents. They'd see me frustrated or being mean to someone and they'd tell me to sit somewhere separated from other people. Then they'd check on me and ask, "Are you ready to talk about the problem and try to solve it?"

I had therapy sessions with Krista. We'd play the card game King's Corner. Sometimes she'd put on music and light candles. When I was sad she asked how I felt. When she got something out of me, I'd cry. I'd tell her about arguing with my mom on the phone and how my parents kept talking crap about each other and I was always in the middle of it. It helped me to express my feelings and not keep everything inside and get angry. She'd try to comfort me by saying "It's not going to last."

Krista gave me advice, like that I can't change my parents but I can change myself. She said a lot of good things about me, like "you're smart" and "you're a good girl." She told me she waits until she gets to know a kid before she looks at their file about their past behavior. She said that when she read my file she was surprised. She said, "Wow, that's a different person." It made me proud.

After I had been at Heritage for a year I had improved a lot. I wasn't running away or hitting people. One day I asked Krista, "When am I going home?" She said, "I'll look into that." I was happy because she usually said "not yet."

But I felt like I didn't have a home to go to. My mom and I argued too much. My dad wasn't there for me. My options were living at home or a group home in L.A., where I'd live with five other girls and adult staff. Girls are sent to the group home to get help with problems like drugs use, anger or family problems. I chose to go to the group home. It would help me with my family problems because I'd be closer to home and I could have visits with my parents.

*I'm proud of who I've become. I don't yell or get into fights anymore.
I'm strong enough to help myself when I'm upset.
I go to my room and calm myself down.*

I arrived in July 2007, when I was 13. At first I hated it and I always talked about Heritage. The group home was too strict. If I forgot to empty the dishwasher or if my room was messy, I wasn't allowed to talk to the other girls for an hour and I could only have fruit or veggies for a snack instead of candy, crackers or chips.

I'd get mad at the staff all the time. If they told me to do something, I'd say no. If I talked back they'd say "Sally, that's a time out." If I said "why?" they'd add on minutes.

After a while I got more used to it. I learned the hard way that it's better not to get in trouble. I learned not to get upset over small things, to agree and not talk back. If I get room restriction, which is when you can't talk to the other girls or leave your room, I say OK and I just go in my room.

I'M NOW A GOOD STUDENT AND A CARING FRIEND

I've become someone I like. I go to school and do my work. I care about my grades and want to be school president. When my friend had a problem I helped her with it. I talked to her. I'm glad I can help my friends. Everybody says, "Sally, she's sweet." I feel appreciated.

Looking back, I was going through a lot but I wasn't handling it right. Whenever my dad was frustrated he'd yell, break things or hit us. We thought that was how to act when you're upset. These therapeutic centers gave me guidance and role models like Kristina, Carol and Krista. I've changed into a whole different person. Plus I'm older. I've learned how to handle things differently. I've learned that you'll always face problems but you don't need to get mad. It's not the person who's making you mad, but you reacting to it. You can be the better, more mature person by not giving them a reaction.

My therapist said I'm ready to leave the group home but I still don't feel like I can live with my parents. Even though I can't go home, I don't get upset. I'm proud of who I've become. I don't yell or get into fights anymore. I'm strong enough to help myself when I'm upset. I go to my room and calm myself down. I want to be a person who people respect and want to hang out with. I want to be a person who is there for them. After all the changes I've made, I am that person.



Illustration by Brian Lopez-Santos, 17, Marshall HS

Calling all foster youth in Los Angeles County

Do you want to let other teens know what foster care is like? Here's your chance.

L.A. Youth is looking for foster youth ages 14 to 18 who want to write an article to be published in L.A. Youth.

By joining L.A. Youth, you can:

- EARN \$100** for each story published
- IMPROVE** your writing skills by working with an editor
- HELP** other foster youth by sharing your experiences
- INFORM** others about "the system"



Foster Youth Editor Amanda Riddle (right) works with a writer on his story.



Contact Editor Amanda Riddle at

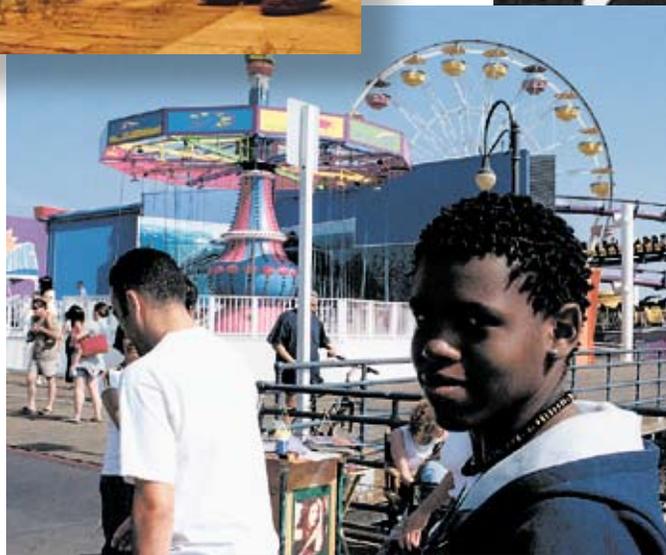
★ **(323) 938-9194**
or ariddle@layouth.com

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

★ **Got questions?**

Go to layouth.com and click on the Foster Youth link to learn more and read stories written by foster youth.

L.A. youth ART CONTEST: My Los Angeles



PHOTOS AND ILLUSTRATION FROM L.A. YOUTH ARCHIVES

DEADLINE: MARCH 31, 2009

Show us what Los Angeles means to you. Maybe it's your neighborhood, your favorite hangout or the place you go to get away from it all. Maybe L.A. means your family or your friends. You could show us how the city inspires you. Perhaps you define L.A. by the problems you wish you didn't have to deal with, like gangs. Enter our art contest and show us what L.A. is to you.



RULES

- 1) Contest entries must be original artwork of Los Angeles County youth ages 13 to 19.
- 2) The work may be done in any medium, including acrylics, oils, charcoal, pencil, pen, watercolor, collage, multimedia, photography or sculpture. The dimensions should be 8 1/2" by 11". Three-dimensional artwork should include a photograph of the artwork.
- 3) Each artist may submit only one entry.
- 4) The artist's name, age, address and phone number should be included on the back of the artwork. If the artist is in school, the school's name should be included. If the artwork was created as an assigned project in a classroom, the teacher's name should be listed. Artwork will be returned if a return address is provided.

The teen staff of L.A. Youth will select a first-, second- and third-place winner as well as some honorable mentions. The first-place winner and his or her teacher will each receive \$75. Second- and third-place winning students and teachers will each receive \$50. Winners and honorable mentions will be published in the May-June 2009 issue of L.A. Youth newspaper.

Questions?

Contact (323) 938-9194 or editor@layouth.com.

Send submissions to:

L.A. Youth
**(We're moving. Call or e-mail
for address.)**

COLLEGE

How I chose the right school

I had my mind set on the East Coast until I realized I could get a great education and be happy close to home

By Jennifer Carcamo

18, High Tech L.A. (2008 graduate)

I never thought I would end up staying in L.A. and going to UCLA. My dream was to go to Columbia University in New York— as far away from home as possible. I only applied to UCLA because it was a good school, I wondered if I could get in and I had an extra application fee waiver. But by the time my acceptance letters came in, my idea of a dream college had completely changed.

I first heard of Columbia from my ninth grade English teacher. I did research online and found out that it's one of eight Ivy League schools, which means it is one of the most prestigious and academically challenging colleges in the nation. The colleges get their name from their ivy-covered brick buildings. Taking the online tour of the campus, I was hooked on the architecture, which dated to before the American Revolution. Reading about grads like Alexander Hamilton and Barack Obama, I wanted to make myself one of those famous names. I fell in love with the idea of going there.

However, the main reason I wanted to go to Columbia was because it was the only way I saw to get away from home. I never had a good relationship with my mom. We never talked or hung out. The only time she spoke to me was when she wanted me to do the dishes or vacuum or yell at me because I had done a chore wrong. I had to get away.

By the end of ninth grade, I had my entire future planned—I would graduate with high honors, be valedictorian of my class, attend Columbia, graduate and become a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist.

I THREW MYSELF INTO SCHOOL TO ESCAPE PROBLEMS AT HOME

School became my second home because of the troubles at home. I started a journalism club and helped put together the yearbook in 10th grade when I was editor-in-chief. I was active in Junior Statesmen of America and even joined the robotics team (I'm not a science person). Since my school revolved around technology and had

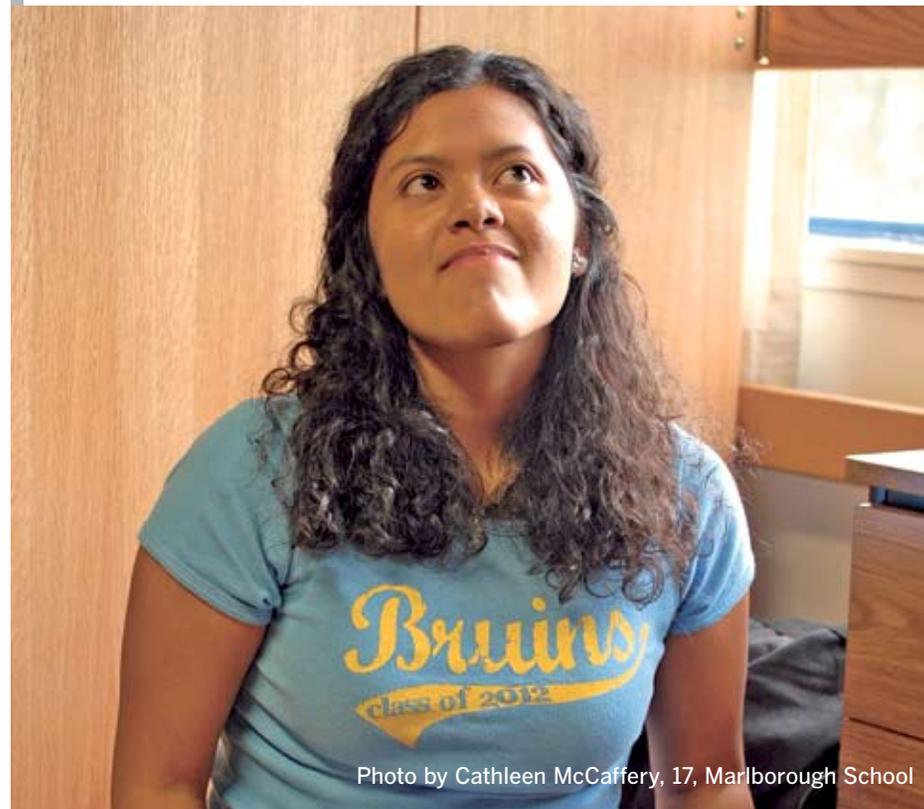


Photo by Cathleen McCaffery, 17, Marlborough School

no sports, being a part of the robotics team was like being a jock in a regular school.

Come the end of my sophomore year, I ran away because of the fighting and yelling at home. I moved in with my aunt and uncle, who took me in as if I was their daughter. I slept on the couch, stuffed my clothes under the bathroom sink and shared a bathroom with my 4- and 7-year-old cousins, David and Diego, but I didn't care. Moving out pushed me to work harder in school to maintain my grades so I wouldn't have to depend on anyone except myself.

Junior year almost pushed me to my limit. I took all the honors classes my school offered. I skipped nutrition and/or lunch because I always had some meeting to attend, teacher to talk to, test to study for, or project or assignment to work on. Outside of school I was even busier. I became a writer for the San Fernando Valley

News, a local newspaper, and L.A. Youth.

I was never with nothing to do and I loved it. Being busy didn't give me time to think about my family problems. It also gave me a reason to be away from home. I didn't have my own space at my aunt and uncle's and I felt like I was taking up theirs. I usually studied in the small kitchen and sometimes fell asleep on the dining room table on top of my uncle's laptop.

At the end of my junior year my college counselor, Ms. Koven, filled my e-mail with college information. So many other possibilities opened up beyond Columbia. My friends college-gossiped about the University of California schools and they talked about UCLA and UC Berkeley and how ridiculously difficult it was to get into them. I realized I was the only one of my friends who was planning on going to college out of state. I was still focused on Columbia, but listening to

them made me think twice about ignoring California schools.

I attended a one-on-one session with Ms. Koven where we talked about what colleges I wanted to apply to and which schools were my safety schools, reach schools and super-reach schools.

My list consisted of 12 schools, six on the East Coast, including Columbia. I didn't realize there were so many other schools out there that had so many things to offer. New York University has a good journalism program and Hawaii Pacific University has a strong communications department. UC Santa Barbara has lots of clubs and activities while Boston University has internship opportunities in the big city. All the schools offered a good education. Columbia was beginning to seem like just another school in a sea of many.

WOULD MY SAT SCORES BE GOOD ENOUGH?

Instead of focusing on which school was perfect for me, I decided that I would focus on getting good grades and studying for my SATs. I took two SAT prep classes, one offered after school that was free and another at Cal State Northridge over the summer that I got a scholarship for. I studied prep books for hours after I finished my homework. I stressed myself out until my aunt found white hairs on my head. Still, most of my friends did better than I did and I looked at my scores as the black sheep of my college application. My highest score was a 1750 out of 2400, and I was distraught. The average score at Columbia is 2100. Even though I had a 4.0 GPA, I was positive that no top-notch school would accept scores as "low" as mine.

Going into my senior year, my college list expanded to 13—eight in-state and five out-of-state: Cal State Northridge, Cal State Fresno, Cal State Los Angeles, UC San Diego, UC Santa Barbara, UCLA, Berkeley, Loyola Marymount, Boston University, Emerson College, Hawaii Pacific University, New York University and Columbia.

I got acceptance letters for all three Cal States right away. By February, I received my first ac-

ceptance letter to a private college—Hawaii Pacific University. Fearing that my SAT scores might not be high enough to impress any other schools, I quickly decided to go to HPU. I attended the college introduction session when an admissions officer came to Sherman Oaks. I was so excited that I began registering for my HPU e-mail and applying for a few of the scholarships the school offered. My boyfriend and I, who also got accepted, fantasized about how great it would be to go there together. Although I tried to pretend like my search was over, I knew there were nine more letters still out there.

After years of dreaming of Columbia, I suddenly didn't know what I wanted anymore. If I got in to UCLA or Berkeley, did I want to go there? They are great schools, but they're too close to home. Was it such a horrible idea to stay in California?

When I told my uncle that I had decided to attend HPU, he didn't say anything, but I could tell he didn't entirely like the idea. A few days later, my aunt told me that he thought I could do better than HPU and not to settle so quickly. I told them that I was scared that I might not get in anywhere else, and my uncle said he had no doubt I would. That made me smile.

A few days later, my aunt told me that they were going to buy a new house. She told me they were looking for a four-bedroom house. Four bedrooms? Before I could ask what they needed the fourth bedroom for, my aunt said, "So now you can have your own room too!" I was more shocked than excited. It was the happiest I had felt in a long time.

March came and more letters started rolling in. It quickly became evident that my SATs were not a barrier. I got accepted into three more pri-

ate schools and waitlisted at another. Slowly, the UC acceptance letters started coming. First it was UC San Diego with its humongous blue envelope that said "Congratulations!" on the front in white text and then UC Santa Barbara with its huge purple envelope. I felt confident, but I was still afraid of possible rejection.

After years of dreaming of Columbia, I suddenly didn't know what I wanted anymore. If I got in to UCLA or Berkeley, did I want to go there? They are great schools, but they're too close to home. Was it such a horrible idea to stay in California?

Then one day I received an e-mail from UCLA that said decisions were available online. My heart sank. The link staring at me meant I had to click it, log in and take myself to my own doom. I couldn't study the envelope to determine whether it was a rejection or acceptance letter based on its size. It was just that: a link. I took a deep breath and logged in. I was accepted. I couldn't believe it. A few days later, I got a letter from Berkeley. I was in. It didn't sink in until other people started congratulating me. Everyone at school kept saying things like "Your parents must be proud." My uncle was quick to say, "I told you" with a big smile that made me realize I did it!

I had been accepted to almost every college I had applied and that made me feel more accomplished than I had felt in a long time. I was still waiting for Columbia, but I thought that I probably wouldn't get in.

I contemplated each college carefully. I didn't know what to do. I could go far away and attend Boston U or Emerson College, also in Boston. I could still go to Hawaii or San Diego. Or I could stay home and attend UCLA. That idea of staying home had been the furthest thing from my mind four years ago. But now ... maybe.

My aunt and uncle had made home safe and happy again. For the first time in a long time I finally felt like I had a place to call home. They accepted me for who I was and made me a part of their family. David and Diego even refer to me as their "sister." And recently I've been getting closer to my mom, who was encouraging and supportive of my dreams.

BEING NEAR MY FAMILY BECAME IMPORTANT

Realizing this, I wasn't ready to let go of my family happiness, because it wasn't something I had when I was younger. I stopped focusing on getting away and started focusing on what I really wanted.

A few days later, I received a tiny little beige envelope with the Columbia insignia in the top left-hand corner. I decided not to open it because I knew it was a rejection letter. The weird part is I wasn't sad. In fact, I wasn't disappointed at all.

After discussing it with my uncle, college

WHAT ARE YOU THINKING ABOUT AS YOU SEARCH FOR COLLEGES?

It's a really hard decision to choose between big and small campuses. The big ones will be good for meeting a lot of people, but the bad thing is that I would rarely get to see the people that I meet. The school has to be in Southern California because I love the weather here and the Asian population is great!

Billy Lin, 17, Wilson HS (Hacienda Heights)

I want to study nursing. I want to go where my mom went. She's an RN and she went to Mount St. Mary's. I'm looking forward to going there.

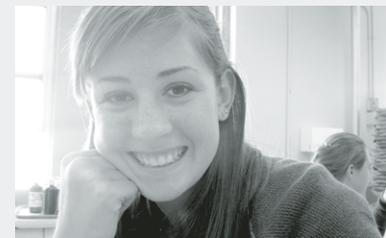
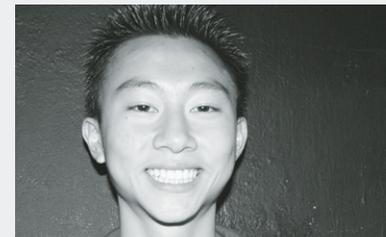
Christine Grant, 17, Washington Prep HS

I'm looking for scholarships, grants, loans, anything that will help me pay for college. I play football and hopefully I get a scholarship. Going out of state feels good but at the same time it's scary. I don't know many people outside of California.

James Jones, 17, Washington Prep HS

A campus that is not so big that I feel like I'll get lost, but not so small that it feels like four more years of high school [and] a good business program that I can major in to be in hotel or restaurant management.

Alison Quistberg, 18, Wilson HS (Long Beach)



counselor, teachers, friends, family and my mentors, and listening to their advice and encouragement, it became clear to me where I was going to go. I went on the UCLA website and spent hours looking up housing, possible study-abroad opportunities, majors, and, my favorite part, the Daily Bruin, the campus newspaper. I sent in my Student Intent to Register (SIR) for UCLA.

I started focusing on applying for scholarships. Although UCLA gave me a generous financial aid offer, the grants were not enough to cover everything. I wanted to do everything possible to avoid loans.

After I turned in my SIR, I finally decided to open the envelope Columbia sent me. I hadn't been rejected—I had been waitlisted. However, I realized I don't need to attend an Ivy League college to go to a great school. And I don't need

to go far away from home to be happy and pursue a better future. In fact, I realized the opposite. Having a stable family, being happy in a place I can call home and still being able to pursue my education at one of the top colleges is really what I wanted all along. I am happy with my decision. I am now a UCLA Bruin and proud of it!



Jennifer says that after being at UCLA for more than a month, she knows she made the right choice.

COLLEGE

Q&A: Getting ready for college

A counselor answers questions on how to prepare for the application process

By Jennifer Carcamo

18, High Tech L.A. (2008 graduate)

DURING HIGH SCHOOL, I was lucky enough to have a college counselor, Ms. Koven, who devoted herself to making sure that everyone could go to college. I wanted to interview her because her advice helped me and many of my classmates get into college. I think it will help others too.

What should students be thinking about when applying to college? They should look for what kind of college fits them best. Some things to consider are the size of the school, the location and the majors that are offered. You want to try to match your grade point average and SAT or ACT scores as best as you can with colleges that you're applying to. You also want to look at financial aid. How much does the school cost? All schools have money available for students but you just have to find the right fit and then pursue what scholarship money they have.

What can students do to be prepared? Take all the courses required for graduation and then the requirements of the universities that they are applying to. Most students have to start in ninth grade deciding what classes to take with the most challenging curriculum that is offered. In addition to that, colleges look at extracurriculars. What do you do outside of the classroom? What kind of a person are you? What do you do beyond that sort of minimum expectation that makes you interesting and uses your skills and different talents?

What would you recommend that freshmen do as they start high school? Focus on doing well in their studies and their grades because ninth grade grades do count. Aside from that, getting involved in their high school so that they get involved in high school life, make new friends

and get involved extracurricularly from the beginning so that they understand what it's like to go to school and do something outside of school and learn to balance their time.

What would be some recommendations you have for seniors? Start early. Don't wait to do your personal statement, update your resume, or make sure that you've gone through graduation check with a counselor until your senior year. Coming into your senior year, you should

have a pretty good idea of the type of schools you want to apply to. Seniors should also continue to stay involved and show dedication to whatever it is that they're interested in—journalism, sports, photography, etc. Also, regarding financial aid and scholarships, you can't wait until the last minute and expect the best results. It's one evening that you sit down and fill out the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) with your parents and [that] could mean a lot of money.

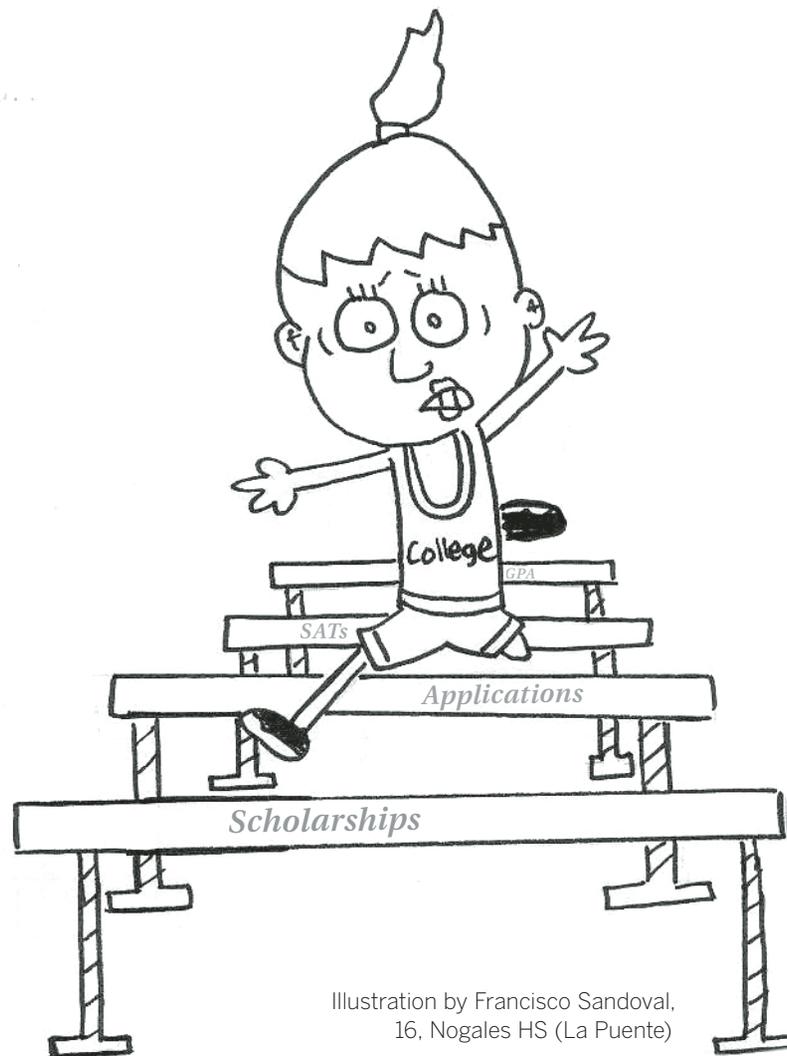


Illustration by Francisco Sandoval,
16, Nogales HS (La Puente)

How important do you think personal statements are? For colleges that require a personal statement, most look at that as another piece of the application that can give them some insight into the student's personality, struggles or triumphs, and get a little better picture so they're not just a number or a resume. It's your opportunity to really show who you are ... if you're the first generation college bound in your family, any struggles you've had—let's say if you've had a learning disability or something very dramatic happened to you during your high school years—you can explain why there was a dip in your grades. To make it unique, it should reflect a personal experience and really reflect who you are.

What are your favorite resources for looking into colleges? You can go to the school's website. You can look at the [book] Fiske Guide to Colleges. I'd say give colleges a visit and talk to students on that campus.

What's the most common mistake students make when looking into schools? Missing financial aid deadlines is number one. If you miss the financial aid deadline there is nothing anyone can do about it. Second is waiting until the last minute to ask their teachers for letters of recommendation. Teachers have limited time and often they have families and they do stuff on their own. If you wait until the last minute they might agree to do it, or they might not, but if you ask them last minute, chances are their letter won't be as good as if you had asked in advance.

Is there any final advice you have? Ask your counselors and teachers lots of questions. All your teachers have been to college. If the counselor isn't available you can find a teacher who you like who can help you. And you don't have to be a straight-A student to go to college. You can have a grade point average between 2.0 and 3.0 and still go to a Cal State, which is a four-year school. There are a lot of different options for students.

COLLEGE

Applying for financial aid

Starting early made it easier for me and my parents

By Sasha Jones

19, Crossroads School (2008 graduate)

As relieved as I felt when I sent in the last of my college applications, I knew that I had one more application process ahead of me—financial aid. Applying for financial aid was difficult, but with my dad's assistance, it turned out to be completely manageable. I wanted to write this article to show other teens that the financial aid process is doable and worth it.

Once I started the process in January, I found out that it is usually slightly different for each school, so it's important to look closely at each school's website. They should each have a "Financial Aid" link in the admissions section of the site, which leads you to directions for how to apply.

My dad filled in most of the forms, since he had the family tax returns, his and my mom's annual incomes, etc. My job was to scour the schools' sites, finding the instructions and printing all the information we needed. We ended up with dozens of pages that we filed in a folder my dad kept in his desk. I also had to keep track of the dates. Each school had a different deadline. I kept a list of the due dates for each school on my computer that I could check off when I sent them in.

For some schools (including all the ones I applied to), the first step involved filling out a College Scholarship Services (CSS) Financial Aid PROFILE, due in mid-February (but earlier for a couple of my schools). The profile can be filled out online, through the College Board website, at profileonline.collegeboard.com. Filling it out was tedious—it included a pre-application and it cost \$5, plus \$18 for each college you have them send the profile to. (Some people are eligible for a fee waiver.) Luckily, the same profile gets sent to every school so you only have to fill it out once. This application requires details about your family's finances, which I got from my dad, as well as basic contact information. The profile is used in conjunction with the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid). Completing a profile is

especially important if you apply early decision, since those applications are due months before a FAFSA is typically filed.

Every school requires that you submit the FAFSA for the financial aid application. You have to fill out the FAFSA to be eligible for the three types of financial aid from the federal government: Stafford Loans, Perkins Loans and Pell Grants.

The Stafford Loan can be subsidized (which means the government pays the interest while you're in school) or unsubsidized (which means you pay the interest while you're in school). Anyone is eligible for the unsubsidized loan, but you have to prove financial need to receive the subsidized loan. Perkins Loans are also need-based. Both types of loans must be paid back, whereas Pell Grants do not.

I filled this out online, at fafsa.ed.gov. My dad and I each had to create personal identification numbers (PIN) first, which we used to "sign" our forms. For most of my schools, the FAFSA was due at the beginning of March. De-

pending on when your form is due, you might have to fill out the FAFSA using estimated income information since your parents might not have filed their taxes yet.

OVERLOADED WITH FORMS

Each school also requested a number of other forms, and keeping track of all the different ones and how to submit them gave me a headache at times. Some schools required forms about sharing information with my guardians, which seemed silly considering that my dad was by my side while I filled out all the applications. While this didn't apply to me, if your parents are divorced, you might have to fill out a Non-Custodial Parent Statement. Most of these forms weren't too difficult though, and mostly involved a lot of signatures.

Each school asked for a copy of my parents' signed 2007 federal tax returns; some even asked for the returns from the year before. Some of the schools wanted me to mail the forms directly to them, while others wanted me to send them through a documentation service called IDOC. Carleton College wanted the returns sent to IDOC by early February, while Oberlin College wanted them sent directly to the college by mid-April. With all these different instructions, I recommend making a list with the requirements for each school, so you can check them off and make sure you're not forgetting anything. I kept one copy of the list on my computer and my dad had another copy.

While the process was often frustrating, what with all the busywork and number crunching, which left my dad and I needing the occasional break, it was all worth it when I got my financial aid packages in the mail. I received scholarships and aid at all of the schools I was accepted to. It may be disappointing to have to fill out yet another application once you've finally finished those college apps. But submitting these forms on time is essential to affording college, and it will be a huge relief when you're done. All in all, I was working on the applications from January to April, but it's not a constant process—it just involves

SASHA'S TIPS FOR SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATING THE FINANCIAL AID APPLICATION PROCESS

1. Keep track of the dates. Make a list for each school outlining what needs to be sent in when.
2. Communicate with your parents. They have the information you need. And let them know in advance what you need help with.
3. Start early. Figure out what you need to do in the fall, instead of waiting until you're done with college applications. Otherwise you might run out of steam.
4. Research outside scholarships (try fastweb.com) and apply for them. I didn't do this, but some of my friends did and received money to put toward college. These are also helpful for people whose parents make too much money to qualify for financial aid but who still need help paying for college.

paying attention to the details. Don't forget, you'll still have to fill out the FAFSA every year you're in college, but just for one school—so it does get easier.



Sasha recommends staying organized and working with your parents.

While the process was often frustrating, what with all the busywork and number crunching, it was all worth it when I got my financial aid packages in the mail along with my acceptance letters.

Making a difference close to home

I realized I didn't need to go to Africa to fight poverty



Melissa raised awareness for World AIDS Day by decorating her school with red ribbons. Bottom two photos: Melissa and her friends helped fix up the home of a low-income family through Habitat for Humanity.

Photos by Marisa Iannaccone and Yodit Yazdinian, both 17, Santa Monica HS

to the grocery store or saw people throw away food, I felt guilty.

When I look at this world I see so much beauty and potential. I feel everyone should have the opportunity to achieve their dreams. It disturbs me knowing that people around the world don't have the necessities to live. The more I kept researching and learning about this epidemic the more I felt I needed to act. At first I thought that it would be easy to find ways to fight global poverty. However, I realized it would take more than just wanting to do something.

I thought of creating my own organization. I knew there were people in parts of the world who weren't getting enough food and clean water and there were diseases. I saw myself going to Africa and feeding people, giving them water filters and educating them on how to protect themselves from diseases. But, I didn't know where to turn to find out how to do those things.

That's why I got excited when I heard about an event in my community December of my freshman year. It revolved around bringing together community leaders and Santa Monica residents to join the cause of fighting HIV/AIDS and orphans in Africa. I thought this event was a great way to become involved because I would be able to make a difference.

The day of the event I went to the beach and helped set up tents. The highlight was when more than 100 people formed a peace sign with our bodies on the beach and a photographer in a helicopter took an aerial picture. This act represented how people halfway across the world can show unity toward fighting a single cause. Even though I didn't go to Africa, I still felt like I did my part by making people in my community aware of this issue.

I was inspired to do more, but I wondered how. Each time I heard something on TV about poverty in third world countries or read about it in an article, or I was at the grocery store or riding the bus, my thoughts drifted back to how I desperately wanted to work on solving these issues. I had an empty feeling in my stomach and

By Melissa Etehad
17, Santa Monica HS

One day as I was flipping through the TV I came across a channel that showed a half-naked child standing alone in the middle of a desolate dirt road. The child was holding a broken toy covered with mud. A narrator explained that this was Sub-Saharan Africa. It was a village with no food, running water or access to education.

I could not forget the images of the child. I thought it was unfair for that child to live that way. I started researching global poverty on the Internet and what I found shocked me. According to Bread for the World, an organization that fights world hunger, 923 million people across the world are hungry. Every day 16,000 children die from hunger—that's one child every five seconds. And some 1.1 billion people in developing countries have inadequate access to water. After I learned this, each time I ate a meal, went

it wouldn't go away. Knowing that I wanted to do something but was not doing anything felt painful. There were so many things but I didn't know where to put my attention. I wanted to do everything and that's not possible.

I HAD BIG GOALS FOR MY CLUB

Motivated not to waste another year, in 10th grade I started a club at school and named it On the Move for the Globe. It would be dedicated to helping people in poverty in third world countries—specifically with hunger, malnutrition and access to clean water. I wanted to adopt a village and help raise money to provide whatever they needed. If that area had problems with HIV/AIDS, we would find a way to educate them. If the kids needed uniforms to go to school, we would provide them. But I still didn't know how to do that.

That same year I joined student council where I met Kelly Snyder. She was two years older than me and her passion was also working to find ways to fight global poverty. Through the nonprofit Invisible Children she raised \$25,000 to build a school in Uganda. Why couldn't I do the same thing? I thought, "How is it possible to raise that much money?" Seeing all that Kelly accomplished inspired me.

Kelly took me under her wing. She used to always say, "It doesn't matter how the event turns out, what matters is that you did it." After that I realized that it is more important to take action than to just sit around and wait for that perfect idea. She showed me how to put on school events, how to lead a meeting, and how to deal with money and the school administration. I was able to learn so much from her ability to lead and inspire people. She always smiled and talked with enthusiasm and confidence and her compassion showed through the work that she did. Having Kelly guide me not only helped me find myself but also helped me realize that fighting global poverty as a teen is possible.

Kelly told me about some of the organizations that she was involved with and I joined a few, such as Amnesty International, which deals with human rights around the world; Habitat for Humanity, which provides affordable housing to families in need; Global Citizen Corps, an organization for teens whose goal is to help people and communities around the world who are in poverty; and the ONE Campaign, whose goal is to end global poverty. All of these organizations have resources for teens such as suggestions for putting on events at school and letter writing campaigns to Congress to call for changes in policy. Through these organizations I began to understand that raising awareness is one of the most important ways that I could make a difference. Before, I was thinking too broadly.

At the beginning of junior year, my club held

its first event for World Food Day. I asked people from student council and the club to help make blue bracelets, which signify world hunger. Six friends helped me make around 4,000 bracelets and we went from classroom to classroom talking to people about the facts of hunger in Africa. The best part was that I knew that I had a whole team behind me. It meant other people cared too. Before the event I was worried it would be pointless and that people would think of it as random. But after we gave out the bracelets, a lot of students and teachers asked questions and were interested in what we were doing.

A few months later, I decided I wanted to do something for World AIDS Day. I thought of all the ways I could make people at my school more aware. I finally came up with a plan: to have a speaker and to decorate my campus with red ribbons. Luckily some people in my student

I organized a group of four students from my class to spend a day working with Habitat for Humanity, doing construction on a home for a family. Fixing up a house for someone is a way of fighting poverty because the foundation for leading a sustainable life is having a house.

government class were able to get the e-mail for Bobby Shriver, the Santa Monica city council member who co-founded the (PRODUCT) RED line, because their parents knew him. We e-mailed him and invited him to talk.

That day I put red ribbons on all the trees, and distributed red ribbons for teachers to wear. At the assembly Shriver talked about how students can help with the fight against AIDS. He said that the money spent on (PRODUCT) RED T-shirts from the Gap would go directly to the people in Africa with AIDS. During the assembly, standing before 350 students, I felt that I was helping educate my peers. At the end, everyone applauded and some people approached Shriver and asked him more questions.

At the end of junior year I applied to the Global Citizen Corps Leadership Summit in New York. The summit's purpose was to bring together 40 students of all ethnic backgrounds from across the country to educate us on ways to end global poverty. I'd been searching for so long for help and at this summit I'd be learning from people who work in this field every day. When I got accepted I was excited because

I would be able to meet a group of teenagers who felt the same way I did. Throughout the week I met people who spent their lives trying to end global poverty. We listened to speakers who worked on the problem of HIV/AIDS in Africa. There was a man whose sister died of AIDS in Uganda and a man who started an organization to end world hunger. We also visited the United Nations. It was really exciting for me to go to the United Nations because they work with the same issues that I cared about—ending world hunger, preventing HIV/AIDS, human rights and keeping peace.

I WASN'T THE ONLY ONE WHO FELT THEY WEREN'T DOING ENOUGH

On the last day of the summit we were asked to stand up if we had ever felt stuck, hopeless or anxious in our journey of fighting poverty. One

by one person started to stand up and before I knew it everyone in the room was standing, acknowledging the same fear I had. One girl talked about how she had a hard time having events at her school because her administration was too strict. Another girl said she felt frustrated because she didn't know how to motivate people at her school to care about global poverty. I was relieved to hear that I wasn't the only person who struggled and felt this way. Listening to everyone showed me that what's more important is how we act when we come across difficulties rather than what the difficulties may be. Being with a group of people who shared my beliefs made me realize this was something I wanted to do with the rest of my life.

After I came back from the summit I felt that I had a clear vision of my priorities. I really wanted to encourage people at my school to be involved with helping people in poverty.

In August I organized a group of four students from my class to spend a day working with Habitat for Humanity, doing construction on a home for a family. Fixing up a house for someone is a way of fighting poverty because the foun-

ation for leading a sustainable life is having a house, and being able to help provide that is fighting poverty.

I WAS PROUD TO SEE OUR HARD WORK HELPING SOMEONE

On a Saturday, we arrived and met 15 adult volunteers and the woman who owned the house. The man coordinating the project asked us if we knew how to paint. We said yes. Then he told us he wanted us to go on top of the house and paint. I climbed a ladder and stood on the scaffolding. It was shaking and it felt like I was going to fall. My friends and I began painting primer on the top edge of the house. (Primer is the step before you paint.) My other two friends worked right below us, putting primer on the edges of window frames. While we were working other volunteers were sawing wood to place on the top of the garage to add to the frame of the house.

We painted for eight hours and by the end of the day everyone was exhausted. The woman who owned the house came up to us, smiled and gave us all hugs. She told us that she was happy we were there to help her out and that she really appreciated what we were doing for her. It made me feel happy. I felt like this was the right place to be. I organized two more Saturday trips. All the hard work we did really made a difference; the house looked beautiful after we painted it green and the construction on the garage was finished.

I am relieved and motivated now that I have found a path to fight global poverty. This year I am planning a hunger campaign at my school. I want to invite organizations that fight world hunger and have them speak at my school during an assembly. I also hope to create a short documentary about global poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa to show during the presentation and to talk to students at my school about world hunger.

I know that someday my dream of going abroad to Africa and working directly with people who are in poverty and spreading awareness will come true. Until then I plan on continuing to educate my community about global poverty and trying to involve other teens to help families in need.



Melissa says to check out Global Citizen Corps, one of her favorite groups, to learn about global poverty.

What was I thinking?

Hormones were to blame for my crush on a jerk

By Lia Dun

16, Marshall HS

During freshman year, I had my first crush. I looked forward to school, something I previously loathed, just so I could see him. While I was studying, I would think about seeing him. People would be talking to me, but in my head I would be planning my wedding to him.

I saw him every day during English and P.E., and I always assumed he liked me back because he would ignore the teacher and talk to me ... about how badly he needed a "girl." He also talked to me about some weird stuff. Once, he asked me if my eraser was a sex toy. Another time, he told me about how he enjoyed "reading" *Playboy*. I sat there staring at him like, "Wow, tell me more." Frighteningly, at the time I considered every word he said either clever or profound.

Toward the end of ninth grade my interest in him started to wane. I also started to notice his annoying traits, like how he was convinced all atheists go to hell. I'm an atheist, and it seemed like he took every opportunity available to remind me of my eternal damnation.

"So why don't you believe in God?" he asked me once.

"I just don't," I said.

He frowned. "What if someone took a shot at you, but you tripped right before they pulled the trigger so the bullet didn't hit you? Are you saying that would be all chance?"

"Yeah ..."

He shook his head. "You're going to hell."

I had thought he was just very passionate about his religion. But later I realized that even passionate people don't have the right to push their beliefs onto others.

After my infatuation wore off I began to wonder why I'd liked him in the first place.

I FOUND A SCIENTIFIC EXPLANATION FOR MY BEHAVIOR

My dad always hounds me to read *National Geographic* because he thinks it'll make me smarter, so one day he left an issue on my desk open to an article called "The Science of Love." I didn't feel like reading the article at the time, so I immediately gave it back to him and told him to stop leaving things in my room. He tried to convince me to read it, but I

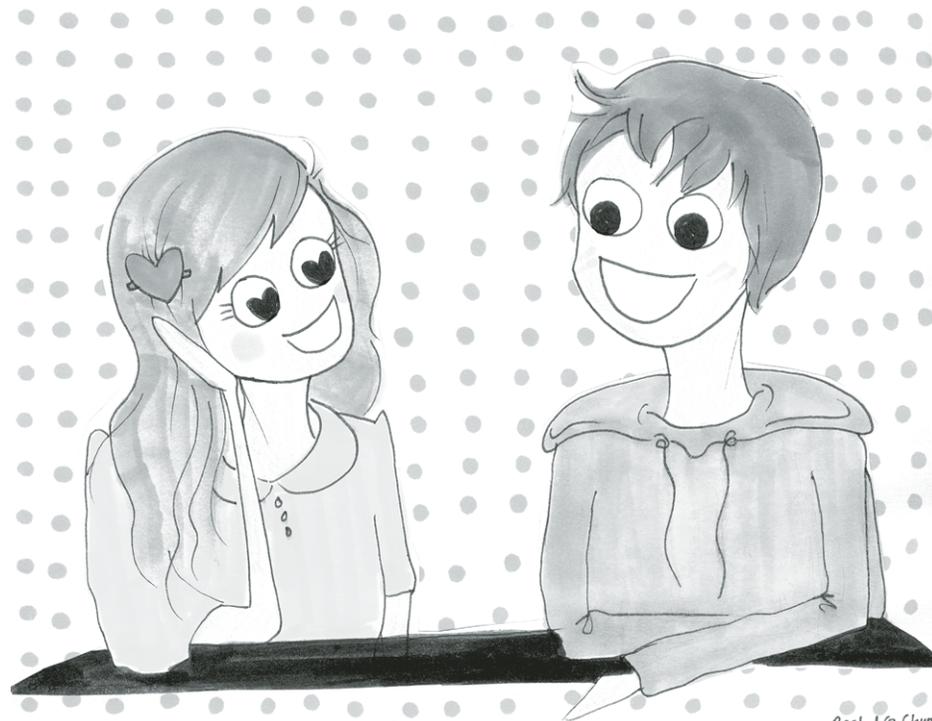


Illustration by Rachel Chung, 18, University HS (2008 graduate)

wasn't interested.

Then one Sunday I had nothing to do. I found the issue of *National Geographic* on our coffee table and started to read it. About halfway through the love article, I was fascinated. I learned that in the initial phases of love, we have reduced levels of the hormone serotonin. People with obsessive-compulsive disorder, a type of mental illness that makes people anxious and obsessive about certain things, also display low levels of this hormone. I think this describes how I was acting: I was constantly thinking about seeing him.

I was going to read the rest of the article, but then my friend called me and asked if I wanted to play with her new Wii. As interesting as the article was, I'd never played Wii before, so I went to her house.

When I got home, my dad had thrown away the magazine. "I thought you didn't want to read it," he said.

"But I did want to read it," I said.

My dad laughed. "See, you should have listened to me."

I really wanted to know more about attraction and its biological causes because I wanted to know if there was a reason for my acting like a moron. So I Googled "love hormones" and found a lot of information on the BBC website.

Love can be divided into three stages. The first stage, "lust," is caused by the hormones testosterone and estrogen, which are released by both sexes. They cause sexual arousal and physical attraction. I remember being attracted to the fact that he had really clear skin.

The second stage, according to what I found on the BBC website, is "attraction." In this stage, you can't think of anything else besides the object of attraction. Three hormones cause attraction: adrenaline, dopamine and serotonin. Adrenaline makes you excited and causes your heart to race when you see the person you like. Dopamine activates the pleasure centers of your brain when you think about or are with the object of desire. Finally, serotonin levels decrease, which can make you sad and obsessive.

I had a hard time thinking about school while I had a crush on that guy. Once during a history test, I forgot to do the matching section because I was thinking about seeing him next period. I was just lucky there was an extremely low curve in that history class.

The last stage, according to what I read, is called "attachment." It allows people to form long-term relationships and is related to two different hormones: oxytocin and vasopressin, which cause couples to become more emotionally intimate.

I was probably stuck either in the lust or attraction phase. Most teenagers don't make it past those two stages simply because they don't spend years with the object of their attraction.

Next, I learned about the reason people are attracted to each other. According to research at the University of Colorado, the main criteria for potential mates are scent and chemical signals called pheromones.

A scientist at the University of Chicago also discovered that women liked the scent of the T-shirts of men who smelled like their fathers. While I was doing laundry the day after I read that article, I sniffed one of my dad's T-shirts to see if there was a scent. I was disconcerted to know that my future relationships would all be linked to my father's pheromones.

Crushes aren't bad things, but with school, extracurricular activities and trying to find time for family and friends, I can't afford to be distracted by my hormones. People don't have complete control over the chemical reactions in their brains, but there are some ways to curb them: When I meet a cute boy, I think of that first guy I had a crush on and promptly gag. On those rare occasions when that method doesn't work, I remind myself that the reason I'm attracted to this boy is that he smells like my dad.

I've not had a crush on anyone since.



Lia says love is for suckers.



Cute Is What We Aim For

CD: Rotation

Reviewed by Jacky Garcia

15, Lynwood HS

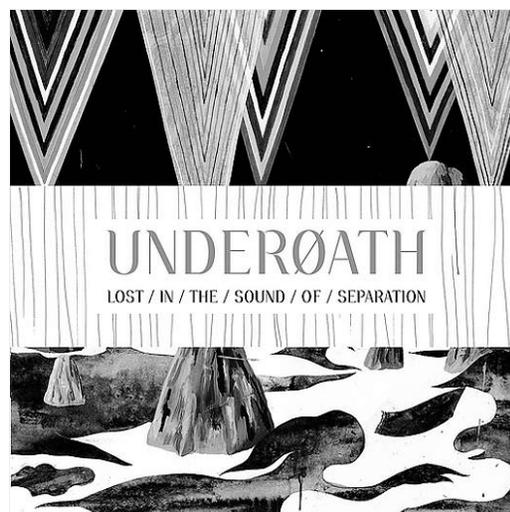
Cute Is What We Aim For's sound has really changed with the indie band's second album Rotation. With this album, they paid more attention to making whole songs great, instead of just having catchy hooks. And I like how their songs are not all about breakups or depressing things. They sing about trying to be a better person, crime, the nice side of love and the obsession with fame.

One of my favorite songs is "Hollywood." While everyone is so obsessed with being famous, lead singer Shaant Hacikyan wishes things could go back to how they used to be. "The way we're living makes no sense/ Take me back to the age of innocence." The variety of sounds—Latin-style trumpets and horns and a rap-like verse—makes the song more interesting, instead of the usual guitar and drums.

Another great song is "The Lock Down Denial." This song is about how Hacikyan imagines life behind bars and being on trial. At the beginning of the song, there are sounds from a courtroom, which give the song more meaning. "So I served time for my addiction/ I pay the price for my affliction/ A judge took my life with this conviction/ For the last time." This song has awesome guitar and drums. I can rock out to it all day!

Overall, the band has matured. Their lyrics are about more important things, and the band's sound has gone from boy-bandish to more sophisticated. I really love this album.

I like how their songs are not all about breakups or depressing things.



Underoath

CD: Lost in the Sound of Separation

Reviewed by Carla Love

15, College-Ready Academy HS #6

Underoath's Lost in the Sound of Separation is the Christian metal group's highly anticipated fourth studio release. It features 11 amazing tracks and critics say it is one of the band's more experimental albums.

The bass and keyboard are more distinguishable than on their previous records, but I would not say it is experimental. It's true to the music the band has been making but the lyrics are better because of the experiences that the band has gone through.

The album starts off with "Breathing In A New Mentality." It's a song with clashing drums and screaming vocals. It has a very in-your-face, messy intro but the album only gets better with each track.

"Desperate Times Desperate Measures" is the album's ear-splitting pleasure. With screams and belting of awesome lyrics: "God, where have I been?/ I'm terrible company/ With zero apologies," it is one of their best singles.

The next song, "Too Bright To See, Too Loud To Hear," has wonderful, ambiguous lyrics, "Good God, if Your song leaves our lips/ If Your work leaves our hands/ Then we will be wonders and vagabonds." I love the melody because it takes me to a serene place.

Every time I listen to this album I become so hypnotized by the vocals and the harmonious sounds. For a band that pulled out of the 2006 Warped Tour due to differences and dealing with a member with substance abuse problems, Underoath came out with one of the most brilliant albums ever.

With screams and belting of awesome lyrics, it is one of their best.



Oasis

CD: Dig Out Your Soul

Reviewed by Jasper Nahid

14, New Roads School (Santa Monica)

Oasis' Dig Out Your Soul is what you would expect from a veteran rock band's seventh album: mostly solid and well produced. The whole album flows together, from upbeat songs to slower, more typical Oasis songs, and back again. There were some great songs with a lot of emotion but there were also several songs that fell flat.

The first time I listened to the album all the songs reminded me of classic rock groups like The Beatles, Queen and AC/DC. I liked the retro sound. In "I'm Outta Time" the melody has a Beatles sound like Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band.

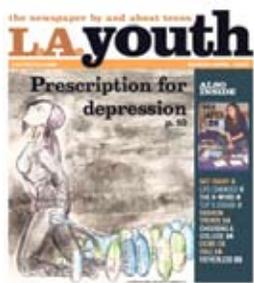
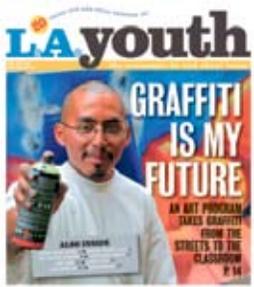
The album starts out with raw, energetic singles like "Bag it Up" and "The Shock of the Lightning," which sound like Oasis, but with a bigger, rougher, guitar-heavy sound. I really liked the strong beat and Southern sound in "(Get Off Your) High Horse Lady."

Mixed in are more melodic songs like "Falling Down," which is classic Oasis—light on the guitar and heavy on the vocals, which makes it intense. It's the music I listen to in my headphones when I want to hear all the sounds that are going on in the song.

One song that annoyed me was "The Turning." The "wooh" that is repeated throughout most of the song made me want to bang my head against a wall.

If you like Oasis, you should definitely buy this album. It doesn't have a huge hit single like "Wonderwall" but Oasis certainly doesn't seem burned out yet.

It doesn't have a huge hit single like 'Wonderwall' but Oasis certainly doesn't seem burned out yet.



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