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L.A.youth

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2009
WWW.LAYOUTH.COM

the newspaper by and about teens

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lived in
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LEAVE US ALONE



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 21st 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.layout.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 is L.A. Youth's mission?

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

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

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



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MAIL

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

MY FRIEND BECAME A TEEN MOM

THIS ARTICLE WAS a real eye-opener for me because I never really thought about how a pregnant girl feels about her pregnancy. I would usually just think those girls didn't care about school, but this story about Michelle proved that was wrong. Michelle cared about school, she just never had sex education. People usually look down on pregnant teenagers and shun them, when what they need is a good friend to help them through that rough time. I think there should be more people like Solange in this world. Kudos to her for being such a good friend.

Bianca Tran
San Gabriel HS

I REALLY ENJOYED this article. My sister is a teen parent and I've seen how hard it is to have a child. Many teenage girls don't realize all the time and stress that goes into having a baby. Your article really explains and shows what teenage girls go through when having to care for a young child.

Neshan Vidal
San Gabriel HS

I ADMIRE MICHELLE'S strength and courage to continue with school even though she was pregnant. Even after she had her baby, she went to school. I thought it was awesome that her friend Solange stuck with Michelle through everything. She even threw her a baby shower. I think Michelle is a strong girl and that she can get through any ob-

stacle that comes her way.

Breanna Juarez
East Valley HS (North Hollywood)

I FOUND THIS article interesting to read because it made me think twice. I think it's sad how Michelle had to find out what responsibility really is the hard way. I don't think students have the right to judge her. Students shouldn't have treated her differently because she was pregnant. Nobody has the right to judge you. You learn from your mistakes. Also, it's amazing how she can take care of her daughter and go to school.

Joana Garcia
East Valley HS

I REALLY ENJOYED this story because it shocked me to know how so many teenagers are pregnant even if it wasn't their intention. I have a friend who also got pregnant at an early age. She was so shocked to find out she was pregnant. I was pretty shocked too, but I think she didn't really mind having a baby and is glad with her decision. I have to say that I think that Michelle made the right decision to not give up Kaithlyn. I think this article shows that you shouldn't give up no matter what obstacles are in your way, even if it means sacrificing certain things in your life.

Krisnel Miraflor
Wilson MS (Glendale)

I LOVED THIS article. It made me realize that if someone is a teenage mom it doesn't mean she is an irresponsible, sexually active weirdo. It just means that she made one bad decision. Before reading this article I would probably judge someone who was a pregnant teenager. Now if I were to meet a pregnant

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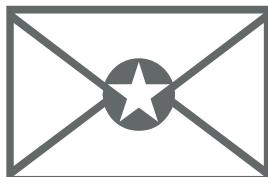
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**Send your letters to L.A. Youth**

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M A I L

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teen, I would get to know them before I judged them.

Arlene Ohnaian
Wilson MS

THIS ARTICLE SHOWS that you can go on with life after having a baby, you just have to have faith. I believe Solange is a fantastic friend because she stood by Michelle's side in the good times and the bad times. Although Michelle has made mistakes in her life, she and others may learn from them.

Rosallyn Soto
East Valley HS

I LOVE THE article "My friend is a mom." My mom had my brother at 17 and she is far from the stereotypical "pregnant teenager." She got her GED and is one of the hardest-working people I know. It's easy to think the worst of young teenage mothers but in reality they're just girls who made the wrong decision.

Brenda Sandoval
San Gabriel HS

THE ARTICLE "MY friend is a mom" is just awesome. I admire Michelle's strength to be able to juggle school life and taking care of a baby. Her friend Solange is great too. I don't think I would have been supportive or helpful. I definitely would have been one of those people who whisper and think negatively toward pregnant teens. Kudos to the two of you and I hope for the best!

Irene Diep
San Gabriel HS

I LEARNED TO CONTROL MY ANGER

"LEAVING MY ANGER behind" was a great article. I am glad that someone can share with others about their bipolar disorder. It's not embarrassing or shameful to say that you have a disorder. I can give you so many names of teens who are affected by their past, but it's also how they react to it today. The author here decided that she needed help so she reached out.

Lily Che
San Gabriel HS

I GIVE EXTREME props to Sally.

She has shown me anger is not the solution, it's the problem. Sally is an inspiration for me and I learned many things from her article. Sally has made me stronger.

Elaine Phan
San Gabriel HS

AFTER READING THE article "Leaving my anger behind" I began to think about the books I've read, where the main character had the same problem as Sally. I never imagined that the events in the books I've read could happen to real people. While reading the article, I felt very sad and admired Sally's strength. Although I do not know her, I'm very proud that she has overcome her problems.

Davie Sy
San Gabriel HS

I AM KOREAN AND AMERICAN

WHEN I SAW the article "Stuck between two worlds" I immediately connected to it. This was very inspiring to me. It takes a lot of guts to try to mix two very different cultures and remain fluent in both. Elliot had to mold his personality in such a way that he could relate to both Americans as well as Koreans. He expressed the emotions it feels to be an immigrant very accurately.

I am an Asian Indian who moved to America just before middle school. When Elliot writes that he felt alone and out of place, I thought about how it felt when I first moved to California. He is lucky to have found people who he finally feels comfortable with. Unfortunately there aren't a lot of Indians where I live. But this article has made me realize that as long as my friends accept me for who I am, I will always be at ease with them.

Sayonika Mohnata
Clark Magnet HS (Glendale)

I REALLY ENJOYED reading "Stuck between two worlds." I relate because I'm Asian and was raised in the United States, too. My Chinese isn't perfect, but at least I know it. I understood how Elliot felt when the taxi driver said rude things to him because of how he spoke

Korean. My friends say that I speak Chinese with an accent and sometimes I string Chinese and English together when I'm speaking to my parents. They understand English but they still say it sounds funny. It's awesome that Elliot found his Korean side again. He's inspired me to not lose my Asian side.

Heather Tran
San Gabriel HS

FINDING THRIFT STORE DEALS

I HAVE NEVER been one to shop at thrift stores but "As good as new" really made me think another way about the way I shop. I mostly shop at department stores at the mall and pay no attention to how making and shipping all the tons of clothing affects the environment.

This article made me realize that I can find good clothing at a thrift store. Jasper found a pair of Diesel skinny jeans at a much lower price than you would at any department store and a pair of red

Converse. This taught me to be more open about the way I shop and I thank him for that. By reading Jasper's article, I learned that by shopping at thrift stores I can find great clothing, save money and help the environment.

Jonathan Quiros
Clark Magnet HS

I THINK THIS article is great for everyone to read. Going green and saving money is what everyone should do these days. The article changed my point of view on new clothes and thrift store clothing. I used to think thrift stores were kind of dirty and it was weird to wear someone else's clothes. Thrift store clothing may be used, but it is the same quality as brand new clothing. This article taught me to save money, because why would you pay more when you can pay less?

Jamie Phan
San Gabriel HS

I THINK OF a thrift store as a

crowded place with weird hobos grabbing things off disorganized tables full of holey, smelly and stained clothes. Just think, those are someone else's clothes that you're buying. You don't know where they have been, what they've done in them. It just seems kind of disgusting to me. Honestly I'll try it but I still may shudder at the thought.

Kevin Tu
San Gabriel HS

MY FIGHT AGAINST WORLD POVERTY

THE ARTICLE "MAKING a difference close to home" is really inspirational. Poverty around the world is very real and everyone should be aware of it. The high school students in the article have contributed a lot to a great cause and surely many others will follow in the fight against global poverty. Everyone can make a difference close to home or around the world!

Ricky Wai
San Gabriel HS

Do you smoke cigarettes?

Are you 14 to 21 years old?

Interested in quitting?

UCLA is conducting a 24 week research study for teens and young adults (ages 14 to 21) who want to quit smoking. The study offers a 6 week program to develop individualized strategies & skills to stop smoking and 4 monthly follow-up visits after completing the 6 week program. Participants will be offered 4 weeks of nicotine replacement therapy in conjunction with the skill-building program. You also will be asked to provide a saliva-based genetic sample so that we may be able to identify common gene difference in youth smokers that may affect treatment outcomes. Participants can earn up to \$265 in gift cards.



(866)449-UCLA

UCLA IRB#07-04-100-02 | Exp Date: JULY 9, 2009
UCLA Dept of Family Medicine | Steven Shoptaw, PhD Principal Investigator

A mouthful of beats

Learning to beatbox has given me a talent to be proud of

By Ben Bang

16, Palos Verdes Peninsula HS

For years, I've had a dream of performing on stage. I've wanted to feel the excitement of getting attention from a huge crowd. However, I never had a chance. I am horrible at singing, playing instruments, acting, telling jokes and dancing. One time, when I was 11 years old, my violin tutor told my parents that I was not only "not good" at reading music, but also had no talent at all. As for dancing, I went to a party one time with my friends and danced. After the party, my best buddy called me and said, "Ben, I like you, you are cool and all that, but just don't dance please. You were even making me embarrassed when you tried to robot dance or whatever you were doing."

I felt like I would never reach my goal of performing until I started beatboxing.

Felix Zenger, a famous beatboxer, describes beatboxing as "making music out of your mouth." Beatboxing developed when it became a part of hip-hop culture in the 80s. With the help of microphones and amplifiers, it's now easier for a beatboxer to perform in front of a large crowd.

In seventh grade, I was on the verge of falling asleep watching a talent show when one of my friends went on stage without any instruments, introduced himself and started making insane sounds out of his mouth. The beats came out of nowhere and soon I started clapping with the crowd and rocking my head. The sound effects he used reminded me of a DJ scratching a turntable or computer sounds. It was unbelievable. I felt as if he was from another planet.

MY FIRST TRY WAS FULL OF SPIT

The next day I asked my friend how to beatbox. He tried to teach me the basic beatboxing skills. The first time I tried the "kick drum," which should sound like slapping a hardcover



Ben (center) beatboxes with friends Perry Nguyen, 14, playing the saxophone, and David Ha, 15, on the electric guitar. Photo by Jasper Nahid, 14, New Roads School

book, it sounded more like a fart or just some air coming out of my mouth. Each time I tried "high hat," which should sound like a sprinkler, too much spit came out of my mouth. The hardest, however, was the "snare drum," which sounds similar to the "kick drum" but has a more cymbal-like quality. I sounded really pathetic compared to my friend. But after months of practicing daily, I was able to beatbox more than a minute without messing up or going off beat.

After eighth grade, I moved to the United States. I had a very hard time with English and I was too busy adapting to a new environment to focus on beatboxing.

But this June I was searching videos on YouTube for the first time. Suddenly I thought, "If there are millions of videos, won't there be ones of beatboxers?" I typed "beatbox" into the search and hundreds of videos showed up. I was surprised when I saw videos by pro-

beatboxers because I had never seen a beatboxer other than my friend. While watching Zenger, Roxorloops and Joel Turner beatbox, I thought to myself, "How in the world can they make such sounds?" They made all sorts of mechanical sounds, DJ scratching sounds and imitations of trumpets and electric guitars. After that, I went on YouTube to check out the Beatbox Battle series and more beatboxing video clips. Because it was summer, I watched tutorials about beatboxing skills almost every day. One day, when I tried to learn "abra scratch," which sounds like a DJ scratching a turntable, I practiced for four hours to get the hang of it.

Once I found out about more skills, I practiced everywhere. I love practicing while taking a shower since the structure of the bathroom makes the sounds echo, and beatboxing sounds better when it echoes. I will turn on my iPod, put it in the corner and start beatboxing to add more texture to the music. While beatboxing, I feel relieved from homework, grades and all of my worries. I just follow my flow of beats as

the song plays. Then I start daydreaming about grabbing a mic and performing on stage. I realize that I've been taking a shower for half an hour when steam covers the whole bathroom.

I finally came closer to my goal of performing when I beatboxed along with my friends. A few months ago, my church friends gathered around after the service and started playing drums, bass and acoustic guitars. Before thinking about it, I jumped in with a mic, followed the beats of the drums and started beatboxing. My friends were amazed. However, they told me, "You need to learn how to play drums! You've got all the beats in your head!" I didn't like this comment since I knew that beatboxing can be an instrument, not just a step to learning the drums.

Since then, I've beatboxed a few times with my school friends while they played guitars and saxophone. They said, "Dang, you're good! It sounds good all together, too."

EVEN MY PARENTS ARE IMPRESSED

With beatboxing, I actually have something special about me that has caught other people's attention. I was proud when my parents heard me beatboxing and their response changed from "Let's stop making noises in the house since your sister is studying," to "Well, you've got some talent there, son. Try to do something with your talent. Start a club or something so that you will actually achieve something with that."

Now it's a habit to beatbox whenever I hear hip-hop, pop songs, rock songs and even classical music. But, I have to practice more so that I can create my own style of beatboxing. I have been working on making some scratch sounds, a noise that helicopter blades make as they spin and advanced snares to embellish the beats. I keep practicing so I will be ready to perform when the chance comes.



Ben hopes beatboxing will one day be recognized as its own instrument.

► Go to layout.com to watch a video of Ben beatboxing

Favorite sound

ESSAY CONTEST WINNERS

1ST PLACE \$50

No longer deaf, I love the sound of a rattle

By Ariana Mendoza

Marshall MS (Long Beach)

People don't understand that deaf people can hear also. Some of them have one deaf ear, hearing aids or a cochlear implant. The sad part is they can't hear as well as normal people. But they might have the sounds that are important to them, like I have.

I was born deaf. I can't hear at all. When I was 5, I had an operation for a cochlear implant so I can hear much better. Sometimes when noises are annoying me, I take my implant off. I went to many places so I can speak well. I started learning sign language when I was in the sixth grade. I stopped speaking at school, but I still speak at home. It's really hard to be hard of hearing.

When I was a baby, my mother always bought me rattle toys. The stuffed red puppy with the rattle in it was my favorite. At first I didn't know it rattled. After the operation, I was playing with it and I heard weird noises coming from the toy. I shook it over and over again and it rattled. I started to like my rattle toys. Sometimes my mom took my rattle toys away because they bothered her, but she let me keep my stuffed puppy. I love to hear the rattle because it was my first sound and now, every time I hear something rattle, it reminds me of my past.

My dad and step-mom are buying toys for their baby. My step-mom is four months pregnant. Sometimes I shake the new rattle toys. At that moment I feel like I'm 5 years old again. It's a very joyful sound in my life.



Ariana Mendoza holds a picture of herself as a baby with her stuffed puppy rattle. Photo by Anisa Berry, 17, View Park Prep HS

2ND PLACE \$30

The Pokémon theme song takes me back

By Lubina Kim

Wilson HS (Hacienda Heights)

When I was 6 years old a personal alarm rang in my head every Saturday telling me to get up, grab a bowl of cereal and go watch Pokémon.

The Pokémon theme song is my favorite sound because it brings back nostalgia for my childhood. When I first moved to the United States from Korea in kindergarten, I had a hard time making friends. The language barrier restricted me from hanging out with anyone besides my family, but Pokémon helped me step out of my boundaries.

The song sounds like cheesy battle music. It begins talking about the determination of the main character (Ash Ketchum) and how he's going to "catch 'em all." To anyone over the age of 10, the lyrics sound like total crap, but to me, it reminds me of my 6-year-old self. Pokémon was like an imaginary world I desperately wanted to live in. It was a dreamland full of unusually cute animals that can be captured and kept as pets. Instead of asking for ponies, I asked my parents for a Pikachu, an overgrown, obese look-a-like mouse with red cheeks.

During the summer my parents bought me my first pack of Pokémon cards. It consisted of 12 normal cards and one hologram. The cards evolved into an obsession for collecting.

I hit jackpot on my first set of cards. My hologram ended up being Raichu, the evolved form of Pikachu, and the card immediately attracted many of the neighborhood kids. I didn't have much street smarts dealing with trades so I easily allowed myself to be sweet talked by a ninth grader. In exchange for my hologram he offered me a stack of his "best" cards. I hastily accepted and I ended up getting 50 lousy, bent energy cards with a value of nothing in the Pokémon world. Although I felt really bitter toward him, he ended up teaching me how to haggle and trade.

Recently I was sent a Smosh YouTube parody of the show's theme song. As the opening notes of the song played I perked up and sang along. I haven't heard the song in years and yet I had every word down. It made me realize how much I miss being a kid.

3RD PLACE \$20

Applause is music to my ears

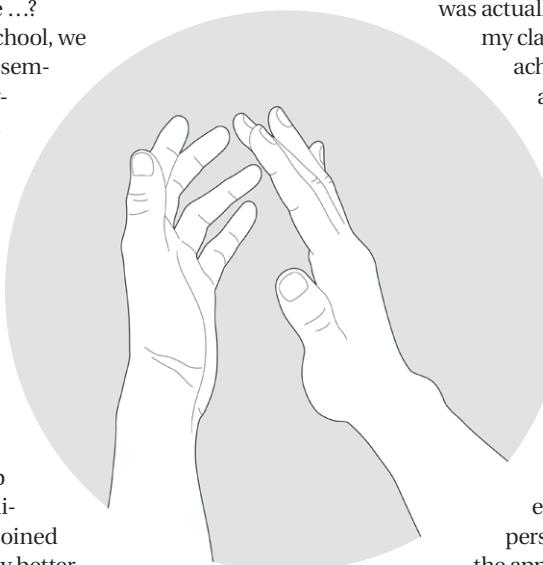
By Jonathan Trinh

San Gabriel HS

When I was younger, I never realized what clapping was for. I mean, don't seals clap? Seriously though, why are we smacking our hands against each other? It hurts. Surely, there must be more to clapping than just making a lot of noise. But what could it be...?

In elementary school, we would have little assemblies, as I'm sure everyone knows. And typically speakers would come to speak to the school about something important concerning the students. At the end of every speech, the whole student body would begin to clap and hearing that initial clap, everyone joined in. Not knowing any better, I had to go with the flow. However, I wondered, "Why are we making so much noise?"

A few years later the idea and purpose of clapping finally hit me when I experienced it firsthand—I was the person up there getting the applause. It was an awards ceremony and I happened to win an award. As shy



That day I figured out that clapping was actually a sign of approval; my classmates recognized achievement and were acknowledging me for it.

Clapping—applause to be exact—has become one of my favorite sounds. Even if the applause isn't for me, I still remember how I felt that very first time.

Nowadays, I clap even louder for the person who is receiving the applause. You've got to hand it to them, they deserve

the applause. And I feel I can understand the wonderful emotions he or she is feeling and how exhilarating it must be for all these people to applaud for you. I now associate applause with being successful, so I guess you can say that my favorite sound is the sound of success.

and timid as I am, I made my way up to the podium, unsure of what I was supposed to do. In a matter of seconds, my fellow classmates began to clap. Uh-oh, do I go with the flow this time? Do I clap even if I'm the one standing up there? I guess I go by the motto, "When in doubt, FREEZE." I froze and stared at the entire school. For some strange reason I suddenly felt an adrenaline rush. I realized at that moment that they weren't just clapping—they were clapping for me.

The sound of hundreds of hands striking against each other is amazing. It was like a stampede of jungle animals sprinting right by me. Just knowing that they are all clapping for you is an extraordinary feeling. I felt so good about myself at that moment, like I could overcome anything that got in my way.

NEW ESSAY CONTEST: **What era would you live in?**

If you could choose any time—past, present or future—to live in, what would it be? Maybe you've dreamed about what it would be like to live during a certain time period, like when dinosaurs roamed. Or maybe you

wish you could have witnessed a historical event, like marching with Martin Luther King Jr. Perhaps you could see yourself living in Elizabethan England, the Old West or the peace and love of the 60s. Some of you might imagine what living in a future world would be like or maybe you love your life and the potential of the world at this time, right now. Describe your life in your ideal era and explain to us why you'd want to live then.

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

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

Mail your essay to:



L.A. Youth
5967 W. 3rd St. Suite 301
Los Angeles CA 90036
or editor@layouth.com

DEADLINE: Friday, Feb. 20, 2009

► Go to layouth.com to read the honorable mention essays

AND A FEW MORE FAVORITE SOUNDS ...

We received hundreds of essays from readers about their favorite sounds. Some of the most popular responses were "school bell," "rain" and "my mother's voice." We also got many unusual responses. Here are some of them:

- crunching an apple
- turning the page of a book
- dog scratching at my door
- leaf blower
- my mom's empanadas frying
- zipper
- my priest's voice

Finally friendship

I used to be shy, but making friends helped me become more confident and outgoing

By Camilla Rambaldi

16, Taft HS (Woodland Hills)

I always thought having friends would be the ultimate happiness in the world. In middle school, I'd see this group of friends and they were always smiling and laughing. I wanted that so badly. I had always been shy and I was never able to look anyone directly in the eye.

My problems began in elementary school. I was shy because I was always put down for the most absurd reasons. They said I was too short, that I was annoying, that my feet were too small and I didn't know how to dress. (I never wore jeans because I hated denim and always wore skirts.) In middle school I was made fun of because I was too neat and I was labeled the school freak since I studied a lot. The insults piled up and I stopped speaking to people. I would try to tell a joke and no one would laugh. They would just stare at me and make me feel so stupid for even deciding to talk to them. I even had trouble reading an essay out loud in class unless I practiced it a million times. I would be wondering what people were thinking about me. I felt as if I was a girl who had nothing special to share with others. I was so insecure.

I desperately wanted a true best friend and a group of friends that I could talk to about fashion, politics or just joke around with.

Things changed after middle school when I started going to CHAMPS (Charter High School of the Arts—Multimedia and Performing). On my first day everyone was so nice to me. They all came up to me and asked me where I was from. I started to feel that I could relate to them and that we had a lot in common. I felt like I was in an environment where I could find my group of friends.

SHE DIDN'T JUDGE ME

I met Jasmin on my first day. We were talking about an assignment, then she asked me what I liked to do for fun, what my interests were and how I found out about CHAMPS. I asked her the same. Jasmin would use the f-word a lot, which bothered me a little bit since I didn't really cuss back then and wasn't used to hearing

it. I'd say, "Please don't say that." She didn't say, "This girl is crazy," as I thought she would. Instead, she laughed about it. She was so nice that I felt comfortable opening up to her. I even took out my planner in front of her. I told her that it was probably the most important thing I had. People at my old school made fun of me for being so organized, but Jasmin loved it and even

invite the three of them over to my house for dinners. We had some really fun nights. We were always laughing. Robert always had something funny to say, Ben was the perfect person to debate politics with and Jasmin loved watching my mom make pizza. I never felt happier. I was finally part of my own group! I would come home and talk about my friends every second.

like I had something to share with others. My shyness was not as bad. Most of all now I had friends to rely on. I was proud of how much I'd changed and no one could bring me back to the person I used to be.

When the year ended, I decided to switch schools because CHAMPS didn't have the academics that I needed. As I hugged my friend's goodbye, tears dripped down my cheeks. Even though I didn't want to leave, I felt strong enough to confront my future because of the new person I had become.

In 10th grade, I ended up at Taft High School. My mom wanted to send me there my freshman year, but she knew I wasn't ready to be at a school with more than 3,000 students. Even though I felt more confident about myself, I wondered if I'd find similar friendships as the ones from CHAMPS.

At first I felt scared walking down the halls with so many people. I had trouble finding the right rooms for class. I had so much more homework every night and I really needed more than just my parents to help me figure out what classes to take and how to prepare for college. I felt alone at times, and wished I had a friend to talk to.

In November, I met my true best friend, Arshitha. She was a sophomore like me, and we met in biology class. Arshitha saw I was having difficulties adjusting to the new school and that I missed my old friends. She helped when I wasn't sure if it was worth dropping one of my honors classes and even an AP class to be on the tennis team. I really didn't want to, but she thought it was a great idea and that a sport on a transcript would show how much effort I put into extracurricular activities. As time passed, we became really good friends.

Arshitha would come over to my house whenever she got the chance, and like Jasmin, she loved my mom's food. We'd meet up on the weekends at El Torito to talk and during the week we would sit at Starbucks, drinking the vanilla frappuccinos that we both loved. Senior year we've both had pretty busy schedules, but even though time is limited, we still try to find time to hang out even if it is just for 10 minutes. Right before winter break we spent a whole day shopping together for friends' gifts

I never felt happier. I was finally part of my own group! I would come home and talk about my friends every second. I told my mom about all the things we laughed about and all the good times we had in physics class.

asked me to help her get organized.

We started to hang out at school. We walked to class together, or just sat around the lunch area talking. Spending time with Jasmin made me feel good about myself. I would always make her laugh because of my neatness and all my jokes. Jasmin listened to everything I had to say and always wanted to know my opinion about certain things, like if her hair looked better up or down. I was happy that somebody wanted my opinion. CHAMPS made me feel like I was free to express myself without the fear of being made fun of. It was the opposite of middle school.

Soon Jasmin and I became friends with Robert and Ben. Every day during lunch, we would joke around, and usually the reason why we were laughing was because of me. Either I needed to get my hand sanitizer or I couldn't walk around in the heels I was wearing because of the bumpy concrete. It might sound like they were making fun of me, but not at all. For once in my life, I started to feel like part of something.

The four of us became best friends. We started calling each other "the four amigos." I would

told my mom about all the things we laughed about and all the good times we had in physics class. I told her how Jasmin was so smart and helped me with all the formulas.

NEW CLOTHES, NEW ME

I felt like it was time for me to stop dressing in my usual plain skirts and dresses. One of the biggest changes was when I started wearing jeans. After days of persuading me, Jasmin brought me to the mall. I went to Rampage by myself because Jasmin wanted me to surprise her. I remember being there for about an hour and a half deciding which ones to buy. I finally picked a pair with gold jewels on one side that were elegant and simple just like me.

I couldn't wait to wear the jeans at school the next day. I spent the night curling my hair and picking out the perfect top to match them. When I got to school Jasmin went crazy about how much she loved my jeans. Other people said they looked good as well. It made me happy. I felt accepted and confident, but I was still the same person. The person I wanted to be had been stuck inside—jeans helped let her out.

I felt a lot more secure about myself. I felt



and just hung out at the mall.

Being friends with her is different than being part of a group, because in my group I didn't have a relationship where we would share secrets or personal things. With Arshitha, I can tell her anything, like if I don't like someone who bothers me, if I have a crush on someone, or even if I am having problems with myself.

There were several times when I was having problems with my parents about college. I wanted to apply to several four-year colleges, but they wanted me to attend a community college and then transfer. Arshitha helped me find a two-year school, Marymount College, which is affiliated with the transfer system at the private college I want to go to, Chapman

University. When I talked to my parents about it, they seemed to be more open to my ideas about college. I feel less stressed now.

I WAS READY TO BE A LEADER

At the beginning of senior year, I decided to start my own club called Script Dialogue Club, where I would be able to meet people who had

the same interests as I did. I was already in another club with Arshitha, California Scholarship Federation, but I didn't feel like I had a large role in it. To get people to join I had to put myself out there during club rush, which is a day when all the clubs set up tables at lunch with signs to recruit members. I was intimidated, but I thought, "I can do this." I had to push myself to speak loud enough. As I was holding a huge sign, I yelled, "Please come join Script Dialogue Club! Any one interested in meeting people from the entertainment business?"

Twelve people ended up joining the club. It's been really interesting getting to know them and hearing their opinions. During our meetings we're always laughing and making jokes as we come up with ideas. We write short scripts, film them and meet people from the entertainment business. We meet every week, and I have to stand up and give short speeches about what's going on with the club and what we have to do. Before I was too shy to stand up and express my point of view. Now, I'm not afraid. The club also improved my social life because I made new friends through the club and I started hanging out with them.

I can finally say I'm proud of who I am. I've met people who love me for the way I am. I'm sad that I barely talk with my CHAMPS friends now, but they will always remain important to me. My friends at CHAMPS and Taft made me more confident. I'm no longer afraid to go up to people and share with them who I am. When I met my boyfriend for the first time at Fall Formal, I asked for his number and started up the conversation, after he asked me to dance. After becoming friends with such wonderful people, I realized that there was a vibrant personality inside me that just needed to come out.



Camilla (left) felt more comfortable at a large high school thanks to her best friend Arshitha Vaidyanathan, 17.



Camilla says her friends helped her realize the positive aspects of herself, like her sense of humor.

Author's Name Withheld

When my father went to jail for hitting my mom, I thought everything was going to be fine. But it wasn't. Things got worse after he was released from jail. He turned into some kind of monster who kept coming around harassing us and hitting my mom. I thought it would never end. I hated feeling that way and I'm grateful I finally feel safer.

When I was small my dad would get mad often but he didn't scream or hurt us; he would just leave and go drinking. But when I was around 10 he started getting more controlling. He'd tell my mom, "You can't go out." He'd also scream at her over every mistake she made, like if a meal she cooked didn't come out as good as he wanted it to. I couldn't stand it. I would go outside and kick the soccer ball or play with my little brother so he wouldn't have to hear their yelling. I was afraid that one day my father would get out of control over something more serious and hit my mom.

I will never forget July 4, 2004, when I was 12. I walked into my parents' room and saw my father hitting my mother. He was on top of her swinging at her. I was paralyzed. My father was twice the size of me and I knew I couldn't do anything. Then I heard my mom repeating "call the police, call the police." As soon as I came to my senses I called the police. My father saw me dialing and stopped hitting my mother. I thought I was next but he walked right past me. He hung around until the police arrived, I guess proving to us that he wasn't scared. The police took him and placed him in the back seat of the patrol car.

I felt bad that he'd been arrested—after all he was my father and he had done everything for our family. But him being away meant peace at home. My mother was happy, even though she had to work extra hours because my father was no longer supporting the family. I also felt free. I wasn't worried because I thought he'd be in jail for a few years.

But after about four months the police called to let us know that my father had been released. My mother went to court and got a restraining order, which meant that he couldn't come within 100 yards of us. But to me that restraining order meant nothing—it was just a piece of paper. I knew my father didn't like to follow rules. Would he come back to do something to me for calling the police?

WHAT DOES HE WANT?

After he got out of jail, he would call and the caller ID showed that he was staying with one his brothers not far from our house. My mother didn't want anything to do with him. He called the house or my mom's cell phone every day. I would hear my mom ask him, "What do you want?" After she hung up I'd ask her what he said and she'd say he didn't say anything. I didn't know why he was doing this. I wanted him to leave her alone.

I was afraid that he would hurt her. Every day after school I would wait on the corner or in front of our house until she got home. When she was late I would worry. When she arrived I would think, "She made it." I would ask, "What took you so long?" "The busses were running late," she'd say.

LEAVE US ALONE

I feared my father
would never stop
terrorizing my family

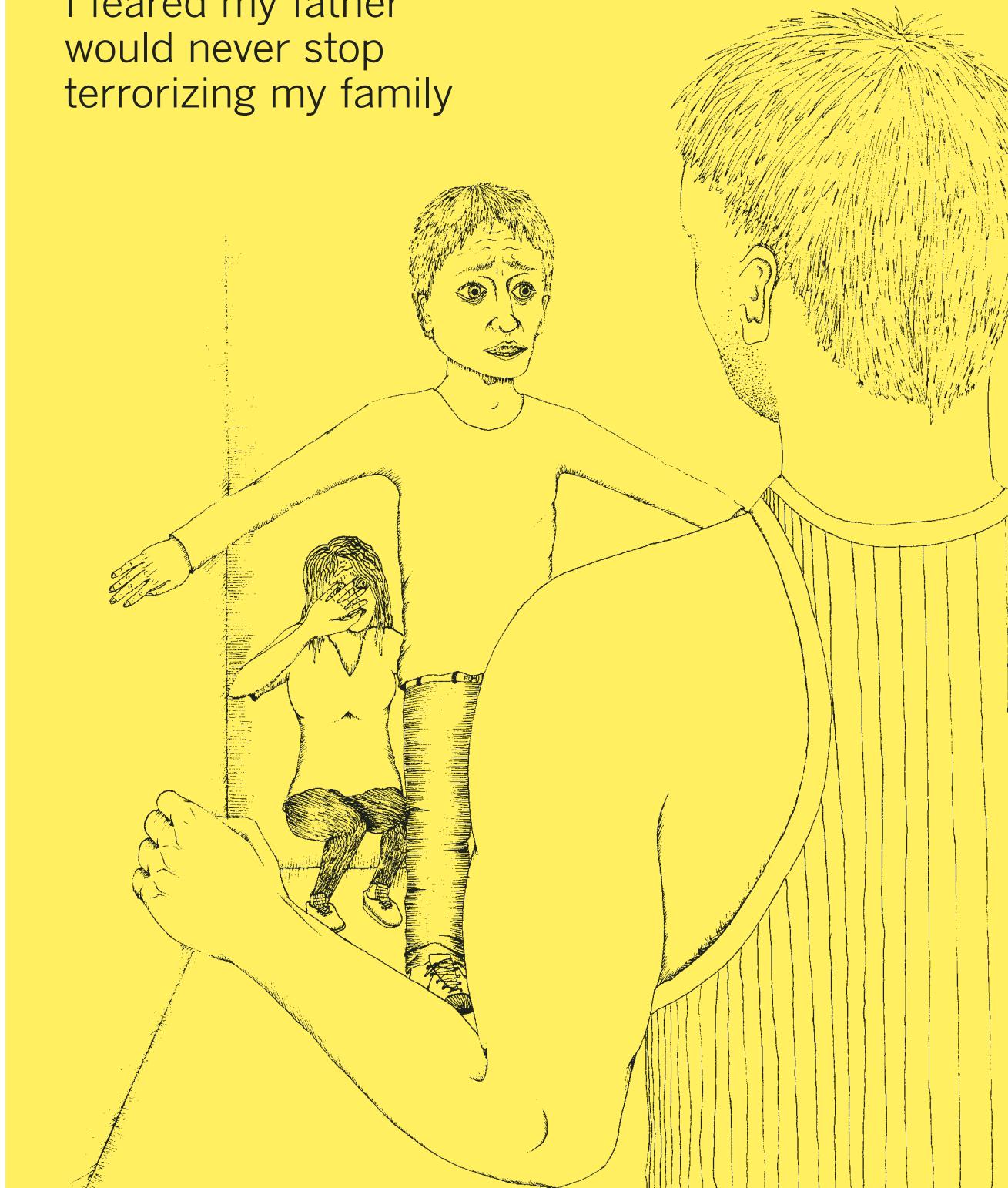


Illustration by Edison Mellor-Goldman, 17, Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies



Before the problems at home started I was a good student and never got in trouble, but then my attitude changed. At school I couldn't focus on my work and it was hard thinking about my mom all the time so I pushed everything aside. I wouldn't listen to my teachers. I would throw papers at my science teacher. When he called security I'd leave and go to the P.E. field. I would sit on a bench alone and think of how my home used to be before my father got all crazy. How our garden was all nice and neat because he took care of it, but now it was dead. How my mother didn't have to get up early to go to work but stayed at home, and wasn't tired all the time.

At home I'd just lie on my bed sleeping or thinking. Doing homework didn't even cross my mind. By the end of the semester I was failing English, science and math. I had to go to intersession to bring my grades back up. I didn't want to tell anyone about my problems. I felt like they wouldn't understand. My best friend

"If he comes back around, call us." Other times I wouldn't bother to call the police because I didn't think my father would get caught.

WE HAD NOWHERE TO GO

I felt like running away with my family—just packing our stuff and starting over somewhere else. But that wasn't possible because we didn't have enough money. Then I thought of leaving on my own, but I couldn't leave my mother and brother.

One night I saw him choking my mother. As soon as I turned on the lights he stopped. Another time on Valentine's Day my father threatened my mom. A few days later she asked me, "Do you want to move?" I was tired. I guess she was tired too. She said there was a program that would move her, me and my brother to a house in another state and pay for the first three months of rent. I told her I wanted to move but I thought if we did, he might hurt our other family members. "OK," she said, "then we'll stay and

ing. My hands were sweaty and my heart beat faster.

As he walked up to the house I was standing behind the metal screen door. He said, "Bring me your brother." "What for?" "Hand him over," he yelled. "Either you bring him to me or I break the door and take him." I figured if I didn't obey him he would break it down. My hands were shaking as I unlocked the door and opened it. I told my brother to go with him. I didn't know if I was going to see him again. But I knew he would never hurt my brother because he loves him too much.

I ran to our neighbors and asked them to call my mom at work to tell her that my father had taken my brother. Then I made my way to school. I couldn't stop thinking of my brother. I went to the restroom during lunch and sat in a stall just thinking of him. Is he OK? Is he scared?

On my way home from school I saw little kids playing and they reminded me of my brother. The more I thought about him the madder I got because I didn't do anything to prevent my father from taking him. When I got home I was surprised to see my mother. She said, "Your dad has been taken by the police." She explained that he pulled up when she was waiting for the bus. She found a sheriff's deputy and 30 minutes later they surrounded my father a block from the house. When she finished telling me I was happy. I felt that we could start living our lives again. But I couldn't enjoy it because I figured they would release him early again.

Things should have been better but I had too much anger inside. My mother would cook the same thing three days in a row. I didn't want to eat the same food. One time I snapped. I yelled at her, "I'm tired of eating this!" At school I started acting up again.

I WON'T BECOME LIKE HIM

Then one day I was alone in my room trying to think of all the good things my father did, to put what he did to my mom in the past, but the bad memories would take over. I remembered how he would yell at my mom at the dinner table. I did that too. I was becoming him. I didn't like hurting anybody, especially my mom. I didn't want my brother to live with another version of our father and go through what I went through. I said to myself, "I'm not going to be him. I'm not him."

I began improving my behavior. I stopped getting into trouble. Although I still had anger toward my dad, I tried not to think about him. When I'd get upset I would go to my room and stay there until I calmed down. At times I would cry to let the anger out.

I'm my brother's father figure now. I help

him with his homework, encourage him to read, tell him what's right and wrong. It's a good feeling to know that I'm doing the right thing for my brother. He told me he wants to be like me. I felt proud. That also encouraged me to believe in myself more and to convince myself that I wasn't like my father. I didn't turn out like my father and if my brother follows in my footsteps, he won't turn out like him either.

My mother told me recently that my father was out of jail. Not long ago I spoke with him on the phone. He seemed like a completely different man, more calm. He told me he wasn't drinking or doing drugs anymore. I won't take his word for it until I see it for myself but in a way I believe him because he has a new family with a newborn. I don't fear for my mother anymore; he has a new life and so do I.

Many times when I was lying in my bed I looked up at the sky at night through my window and asked, "Why me?" hoping to get an answer. But I received just silence. I've stopped caring about why because it doesn't change anything. School is my number one priority. I take harder classes and stay after school to ask my teachers how I can improve. I want to go to college and become someone in life and have a better future. If I have kids I'm going to be the best father I can be. It's hard to think about those bad times but it helps. My past is a reminder not to change who I am. I'm not him. By being a good role model for my brother, I can change his and my life for the better.

I will never forget July 4, 2004, when I was 12. I walked into my parents' room and saw my father hitting my mother. He was on top of her swinging at her. I was paralyzed. I heard my mom repeating "call the police, call the police." As soon as I came to my senses I called the police.

would call me to go out and I'd make up an excuse not to go. "I'm tired" or "My mom won't let me go out." He took it personally and we stopped talking.

After a few months my dad started coming to the house. For almost a year he came around and bothered us; sometimes he was drunk or high. As soon as I saw him coming I would send my brother, who was 5, to go play with his friends a house away. When my father was near my mother I wouldn't let her out of my sight. Although he intimidated me I would stand tall with an evil stare, as if saying, "Don't mess with me." After he left I would relax. I didn't have to pretend to be that tough guy I'm really not.

He kept coming around more and more. Once we called the cops but he ran out as soon as he saw me dialing. The police would arrive late every time I'd call. They didn't do anything. They just asked us questions like, what did I see? What did he look like? Then they'd leave saying,

go through this."

I thought it was never going to end. One time he kept insisting to see my mother's purse. He had his gun tucked in his pants. My mom said, "Put the gun away and I'll show you what I have." He gave me the gun and told me to hide it. Alone in my room I thought of using it and taking my own life. I thought if I did everything would go away. But my father would probably go crazier and kill my mom. So I wrapped the gun in a shirt and hid it behind my dresser. Looking back it's crazy that I thought of that. At the time I thought he was going to get away with everything he did and we were always going to live like this. But soon after, he got arrested again.

On Nov. 29, 2006, when I was 15, I was getting ready for school when I heard my father's truck pull up. I couldn't reach my mother because she didn't have a cell phone and she wasn't at work yet. I stopped what I was do-

WHERE TO TURN

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

LOS ANGELES COUNTY RAPE & BATTERING HOTLINE (24/7)
(310) 392-8381
www.peaceoverviolence.org

NATIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINE (24/7)
(800) 799-SAFE

BREAK THE CYCLE
(310) 286-3366
www.thesafespace.org
Provides legal services and counseling to teens if you've been in an abusive relationship.

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.

**1ST PLACE
\$75**
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\$50**

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:

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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.

My food paradise

I've grown up going to the Farmers Market, eating dishes from all

By Edison Mellor-Goldman

17, Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies

My memories of the Fairfax Farmers Market define who I am. I've become a big foodie because of the thousands of hours I've spent there. For my family, it was almost like our market, since there was only a smattering of regular customers, including us, who would show up to the open-air food court on weekend mornings. When I was younger, the market was going through financial problems. The creation of The Grove next door changed the market, but also kept it alive. Because of The Grove, an upscale outdoor mall, the Farmers Market is now a more "hip" place, but it has kept essentially the same vibe. Ever since The Grove became a teenage hotspot, I've been trying to spread the gospel about this little taste of history that's right next door.

When I was younger, my weekend mornings blended into a collection of smells, sights and cravings. We would park in the old parking lot and I would get that instant high that can only come from being barraged with the scents of hundreds of types of foods all at once. Often we would go to Charlie's and I'd get my silver dollar pancakes, and if I was lucky I'd see a couple of Mickey Mouse-shaped ones thrown in there. The older woman who owns the place has memories of me sitting on the counter to order when I was a little kid.

When I was a little older, I frequented The Gumbo Pot on the west patio. The oyster po' boy sandwiches were, and still are, my life. These warm, deep-fried oysters in sweet harmony with chilled tomatoes, lettuce and thin slices of lemon are one of

the many reasons why I'm not a vegetarian.

Some mornings, my family settled down between The French Crepe Company and a Mexican restaurant that is no longer there. My then 4-year-old brother had a habit of sitting at the counter so he could flirt with the cute waitress. Whenever I try to place the root of his playboy tendencies, this is what comes to mind. Now in its place there's a new Mexican joint called Loteria, which has some of the best south-of-the-border cuisine I've ever pigged out on. Though relatively expensive compared to the rest of the market, it's well worth it. It's a good idea to split those shredded beef nachos with a friend, though. Trust me, you can't eat it all on your own.

Since I've been a sushi fiend for as long as I can remember, I was thrilled when a sushi restaurant came to the market, though "sushi crevice" might be a more apt description. These days, Sushi A Go Go does a good amount of business considering it's just about the smallest purveyor in the Farmers Market. When I first started going there, I suspect I was one of their only customers. The owner knew what I would order every time, an eel handroll and a spicy tuna handroll, and he even gave me a free mug at some point. They had a "C" on their health code inspection, they gave the place a terribly cliché name and they continually hired cashiers who didn't speak a word of English. Since then, their prices have gone up by about a dollar on every item, their health code rating is an "A," they have a dedicated following and now they have a new cashier who speaks some spotty English. Somehow it still feels like the same funky place it's always been.

There are many other delicious eateries, such as the stunning pizza at Pat-sy D'Amore's, the hearty pedeh (pronounced pih-day), which are Middle Eastern pizzas, at The Village, and the comforting Chinese food at Peking Kitchen. There's something for everyone, waiting to be discovered by an adventurous eater.



Edison says don't be afraid to try something exotic.



e

over the world



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Photos by Allison Ko, 17,
Wilson HS (Hacienda Heights) &
Edison Mellor-Goldman, 17,
Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies

Last fall L.A. Youth decided to bring attention to the persistent problem of violence in the community. We asked our readers to share their thoughts and experiences through a survey and our essay contest. The more than 1,000 responses we received to our survey showed us that many teenagers are concerned about violence at school and in their neighborhoods. Nearly two-thirds of survey respondents said they see or experience violence at least once a month. Nearly a quarter of respondents said they do not feel safe at school. (Turn to page 18 for survey results.) Our essay contest asked readers how violence affects them. We published the winning essays in our November-December 2008 issue. Because of the large response to the survey and essay contest, we decided to bring together five L.A. Youth staff writers and a juvenile court judge to examine this issue in more depth. At the roundtable discussion, they talked about their experiences with violence and what can be done to make teens feel safer. Excerpts from the discussion are printed here. The full text can be found on our website at www.layouth.com, along with a six-minute video of the discussion.

I wish the violence would stop

Teens suggest solutions to racial fights at school and gang problems

Britawnya Craft, 17, Warren HS (Downey):

There's been several times where a lot of our fights at school happen racially, racial motivated. They may start out as one thing but everybody comes together and they just go at it. ... What they ended up having to do is get more police officers to come. It was featured on the news several times and it just went on for like a whole week.

Juvenile Court Judge Cynthia Loo: What did you do to protect yourself?

Britawnya: Most of the time I spent after school in a teacher's class while most of this was going on or I'd try to go the back way home so I wouldn't get caught up in anything.

Solange Rubio, 17, Leuzinger HS (Lawndale): When I was in 10th grade, I wasn't at lunch but it [a fight] started. I understand that it was racial and then later on that day it extended to outside the school. That same day at school there were helicopters and it really made it seem like more than what it was and it scared me more than it should have.

Judge Loo: Do you think the school dealt with it well?

Solange: They did suspend and expel those who were involved. They have tried to kick out more of the gang members or anyone who shows that they are gang related.

Juan Valdovinos, 17, Fremont HS: Around that area [South Los Angeles] there are the Crips and the Bloods and the Florence so there's always violence no matter what time of day. Just yesterday there was a fight about to break out in the morning as soon as I was walking to school. It gets tiring after a while. It has to stop. I mean I want to get out of here and move on with my life and this violence and gangs, it's not letting me do what I want. ... Once I was walking to school and they came up to me



Participating in L.A. Youth's roundtable discussion were (from left to right): Britawnya Craft, Esteban Garcia, Solange Rubio, Juvenile Court Judge Cynthia Loo, Raymond Carrillo and Juan Valdovinos.

and wanted to steal my mp3 [player] and my cell phone. My friend came running and he stopped them. Since then I started getting a ride. I stay at school all day until my mom picks me up from school.

Raymond Carrillo, 18, Polytechnic HS in Sun Valley (2008 graduate): My brother was, I won't mention any gangs, the names of them, but he was also in a gang. I was always around them because most of my friends were in gangs. I al-

ways wanted to, in a sense, fit in. ... I knew the consequences, which is why I never crossed the line [and joined a gang] but I was always in the middle. I knew the consequences of my brother went to jail, I've seen the stories of many people, of how their friends die, how their homies die, how their family members die. People want to be accepted and they're willing to risk all those things just for acceptance.

Judge Loo: Why don't we talk now about

some suggestions that you all have.

Esteban Garcia, 16, Warren HS: High school unfortunately many times is too late, you know, to prevent this. Character building starts at home but once we're in school we have to have that support from teachers, we have to have that support from our school.

Britawnya: The police aren't doing enough. I've had guns pulled on me walking outside and they're a hundred feet away from me. It's

like the police aren't doing enough to stop the violence and it's happening more in the poor neighborhoods and nobody's saying anything and the kids become a part of that.

Solange: I think more understanding from the teachers, because at my school a lot of students feel like some of the teachers don't get what they're going through and they just think that everything is OK so why aren't you getting the good grades. The teachers that do put more understanding and try to speak to students, they really end up helping a lot of people that I've known change and it was because of them, because the teachers took the time to understand and not just pick on them like you know, why aren't you doing this, why aren't you doing that, get out of my class, you're acting up.

Raymond: Any organization or any type of group or program that would bring forth love. Because the truth is that what changed my life was not people giving me an attitude, was not people disrespecting me or anything like that but the people that really changed my life were those people that loved me even though I disrespected them.

Juan: There's not programs outside of school. Usually they don't go home after school, they're just out in the streets and they need somewhere to go because sometimes they just don't like their home because there's violence at home too and they want to escape from that.

Britawnya: At my school there's over 4,000 kids and you're pretty much on your own. There's no one you could talk to.

Audience member: What gives you hope?

Britawnya: Having an understanding of the outside—what's outside of our city, what's outside of L.A., what's outside of the gang. It gives me hope that this isn't going to go on forever. You can go to another place and it's not going to be as bad as this.

Esteban: Education is personally what I love but for a lot of people unfortunately it isn't. But I think that through that and writing and art, bringing that out in them really can inspire them to understand that we're together.

Solange: I know that I want to break the stereotype of where I come from. I'm always put down by others who know where I come from, Leuzinger, and they're like you're not smart enough. Because you go to that school you're not going to go to college and you're not going to do anything. I have this motivation to just prove them wrong.

Juan: If we go out and be successful and come back and give back to the community, that would make a really big difference, to see that there is hope, that if we can do it they can do it. Why be surrounded by all these people that are just bringing you down when you could do so much better?

Readers respond to gang essays

WE DON'T OFTEN receive letters to the editor in response to our essay contest winners. However, many readers wrote to respond to the winning essays from the contest "How has violence affected you?" in the November-December 2008 issue. We decided to print them here to let others share their experiences with violence. The essay contest winners wrote about hanging out with a gang, being scared in their neighborhood and an uncle who was shot.

ONE OF THE most sad and scary essays I have ever read was "Sucked into the wrong crowd." Just a few days around gang members can change your life. Knowing that the author hung around a gang just because of a friend made me feel I should watch out for who my friends are. I had a friend who was gang-banging but sadly lost his life avenging the loss of his friend. Clearly it's not worth going into a gang just to feel stronger than other people.

Brayan Lopez
East Valley HS (North Hollywood)

THE ESSAY "SCARED for my life" was inspirational. I can relate to how life can be so dangerous sometimes. I know how it feels to live in poor communities where there is always gang-related activity going on. I really feel sad for those who have to live in such poorly managed neighborhoods just because their parents cannot afford to live in better communities. I always hear about gang-related shootings and other types of violence on the news. After hearing about these types of things on the news it really scares me, especially when I have to walk home from school. I like how this person described how her life was affected by violence and how she prayed every night that the violence would stop. This is why my heart goes out to those who are constantly affected by violence.

Byron To
San Gabriel HS

THE ESSAY THAT really caught my attention was "Sucked into the wrong crowd" because living

in North Hollywood there's a lot of gang violence. You can't even go outside without seeing graffiti on the walls and alleys. This essay shows that anyone can change but they have to really want to change. Kids nowadays have the mentality of "I'm so cool because I'm smoking" or "Look, I'm in a gang, I'm so cool now." If this person can change, anyone can.

Gabby Rodriguez
East Valley HS

I THINK THE people you hang out with are very important. That's why "Sucked into the wrong crowd" really caught my attention. If you hang out with gang members, that doesn't mean you're a gang member but to another gang you're just as good as a gang member. So you can get jumped or shot just because you hang out with gang members. I think it's important to choose your friends wisely.

Angel Siajes
East Valley HS

IT'S SAD TO know you almost lost your uncle to the violence that was going on around him when he was selling drugs. I've been in that situation where I didn't feel safe walking around an area, wondering if me and my family would make it through the day without something happening. I always wondered if my uncle would live until the next day. I've lost two uncles to gang violence.

Jose Pulido
Hutchinson MS (La Mirada)

"SUCKED INTO THE wrong crowd" really opened my eyes. Everybody knows there are gangs

and violence in our cities, but they don't put so much thought into it until it happens to them or to a person close to them. When we are teens, we are naive and believe that we know everything and that we are too young to die. We hang out with the wrong people—people we think care about us and for our safety—because they are going through what we are going through. They feel like our second family. I have been through something like this, but I finally realized that if they really did care about me, they wouldn't allow me to do crime and get chased by cops or do drugs.

Diana Tran
San Gabriel HS

I LIKED THIS essay because the things that happened in it related to real life out here. I feel bad when I walk down the street. If you were to walk down the streets you would see many words on the wall claiming rival gangs, sometimes with a line through the words, meaning "war." All the drug and alcohol use that happens now is ridiculous because people don't know that if this doesn't stop we're just going to keep passing this to our siblings and our younger generations.

Anthony Acosta
Hutchinson MS

AFTER READING THE essay "Sucked into the wrong crowd" I began to think about all the people in this world who are like that. It's sad how teenagers get killed, injured, even mentally damaged because they went into the wrong crowd. I'm glad that

the author found her way out, yet she still had to suffer the loss of her "best friend" Gabby. This shows that even if you go the wrong way, there's always a light at the end of the tunnel waiting for you. All you have to do is choose to find a better crowd.

Bernice Portugal
San Gabriel HS

IT'S AMAZING TO hear about the everyday events that threaten someone's life. I'm lucky that I can go outside without any fear of harm. It'd be wonderful if everyone else could say that too.

Robert To
San Gabriel HS

"SUCKED INTO THE wrong crowd" shows that making the right friends can shape your future. My friends and I were kicking a hacky sack back and forth when this gang came up and started trying to steal it. We knew if we did something there was going to be fighting. So we played it smart and just stood there. The gang saw we didn't try to get it back so they threw it back at us and left. Sometimes thinking smart pays off.

Jonathan Lam
San Gabriel HS

IT MUST HAVE been hard to see someone you know lose their life, especially a close friend. Growing up hanging around a gang must have been hard. It's sad that violence is an option some people take, even though there are other solutions. I wonder if gang violence will ever stop.

Calvin Hwang
San Gabriel HS

Violence survey results

THIS FALL WE asked our readers to share their experiences with violence in their neighborhoods and at school. Here are the answers from the more than 1,000 teens who responded (thank you very much for helping us out). We randomly chose three people to win \$100 for participating. Congratulations to: Ernesto Tapia of Van Nuys MS, Joshua Uyeda of Shery HS (Torrance) and Jose Quiros of Foshay Learning Center.

Note: Some percentages do not add up to 100 because respondents skipped a question or checked all the answers that applied.

RESPONDENTS WERE:

Gender: 46% Male 54% Female

Ethnicity: 8% White 12% Black
54% Latino 7% Asian
26% Other

COMMUNITY VIOLENCE

Have you ever seen or experienced violence in your community?

Yes 89% No 11%

If you answered yes, what types of violence have you seen or experienced in your community?

Gang tagging	68%
Someone being jumped	66%
Someone being threatened	59%
Theft	45%
Shootings	42%
Drive-by shootings	31%
Other	14%

WHERE TO FIND HELP

TEEN LINE

(800) TLC-TEEN OR
(310) 855-HOPE

www.teenlineonline.org
Confidential help line for teen callers. Call between 6 p.m.-10 p.m. to speak with a trained teen counselor.

211

DIAL 211 OR (800) 339-6993

(24/7)

Directory assistance for social services in Los Angeles County, including gang prevention and intervention programs.

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

Hardly ever	30%
A few times a week	24%
Once a month	21%
Once a week	11%
Every day	8%
Never	6%

How has violence in your community affected your actions?

When I go out I look around for people who might cause trouble	41%
I don't go out after dark	37%
I'm unable to go where I want	29%
I go directly home after school	25%
I haven't changed my behavior because I feel safe	25%
Other	14%
I've gotten involved in illegal activities	11%

How has violence in your community made you feel?

I worry about my friends and family members	56%
I worry about my future	35%
It doesn't affect me	28%
The littlest things get me angry	17%
I want to fight other people when they make me angry	17%
I have trouble concentrating at school	11%

How do you feel about violence in your community?

I wish there was less violence but it could be worse	47%
It's ruining my community	38%
There's nothing anyone can do to reduce it	22%
My community feels safe	18%
There are times when someone deserves it	15%
Other	7%

SCHOOL SAFETY

Do you feel safe going to and coming from school?

Yes 75% No 25%

Do you feel safe at school?

Yes 76% No 24%

If you answered no, why don't you feel safe?

Gangs on campus	49%
Racial fights	44%
Violence in the surrounding neighborhood spills into the school	39%
Bullies	39%
Students bringing weapons onto campus	39%
Gang tagging	34%
There are not enough security guards	23%
Other	20%
Students making Internet threats against other students or the school	19%

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

Hardly ever	30%
A few times a week	23%
Once a month	18%
Once a week	12%
Every day	11%
Never	7%

How does your school respond to situations involving violence?

Students don't feel safe reporting violence	42%
Security is effective	41%
There aren't enough security guards to control things	24%
Teachers and staff take too long to respond	22%
The security guards don't do anything	9%

What do you think would help teens be safe in their neighborhood?

More adults involved in teens' lives	45%
More after-school activities	45%
More places to hang out like parks and libraries	41%
More police	38%
Keep schools open later	22%
Other	12%

What do you think would help teens stay safe at school?

Weapons searches	46%
Keeping gang members off campus	44%
More encouragement to care about school from teachers and administrators	44%
More discipline when students do something wrong	37%
Stricter security	29%
Random locker searches	29%
Requiring students to wear uniforms	17%
Other	11%

WHERE TO TURN

The last time you felt unsafe, how did you handle it?

Talked to a family member	40%
Talked to a friend	38%
I kept it to myself	25%
I haven't felt unsafe	24%
Talked to a teacher or other trusted adult	19%
Other	6%
I reported it to the police	4%

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

I'm not sure if there are any programs where I live	65%
Yes but I'm not interested in joining a program	20%
Yes I'm currently involved in a program	8%
Yes but I don't have transportation to get there	5%
Yes but I'm afraid of retaliation if I were to join	3%

How do you feel about the police?

They don't respond quickly enough	35%
They don't arrest the people who are the cause of the problems	33%
They harass teens	26%
They're doing all they can	25%
I don't know	22%
They make me feel safe	22%
There aren't enough police officers in my community	17%
There are too many police officers in my community	10%

What do you think could reduce violence?

Active neighborhood watch programs	40%
There's nothing anyone can do because there will always be violence	39%
More police officers	34%
Harsher punishment for criminals	30%
A peer-to-peer mediation/conflict resolution program at school	29%
Other	8%

Gay couples should be allowed to marry

At first it wasn't important to me, but I came to see this as a civil rights issue

By Stephany Yong

14, Walnut HS

While I got ready for school on Nov. 5, the day after the elections, I kept the radio on waiting to hear the outcome of Proposition 8, the measure that would take away the right of same-sex couples to marry. My ears pricked up as the results were announced.

"I think the results are pretty much final," said KIIS DJ Ryan Seacrest. "Prop. 8 passed."

I couldn't believe it. How could this proposition pass? I always thought of California as liberal. You would think the citizens of California, which imprisoned Japanese-Americans at internment camps during World War II, would recognize the wrongs of discrimination and vote against propositions that would diminish a group's rights.

Around the country, gay and straight people poured into the streets in the days after the election carrying posters and chanting to protest the passage of Proposition 8. People joined hands and were fighting for something they were passionate about. My heart ached as I sympathized with the protestors. Same-sex couples should be able to celebrate their love and devotion through marriage.

I STOOD APART FROM MY FAMILY

My conservative dad disagreed. "Why are these people protesting?" he asked as we were watching the news. "The people have spoken through the ballots and don't want gay marriage. They should respect voters instead of pushing for something that people already voted against."

"Well, Dad," I said, "if it concerns taking away people's rightful freedoms, people should stick up for what's right. Just because the majority has more people, it isn't always right."

"You're becoming too liberal," he retorted.

Am I too liberal? Sure I am in the eyes of my dad. Raised with 10 siblings in the small town of Kudat in Malaysia (where homosexuality was never discussed), my dad still embraces and preaches traditional values such as loyalty to the family and living humbly. Those



Illustration by Jennie Nguyen, 14, Wilson MS (Glendale)

same values drove him to seek an education in America, start his own business and raise a family. I still keep those values dear to my heart. My parents are my role models. The values that drove Dad to succeed inspired me to work hard for what I wanted.

Another value I learned from my parents is to think independently. My parents are both Republicans, but they do not always vote Republican. My mother is pro-choice and my dad agrees with many of President Barack Obama's policies such as investing in alternative fuels and renewable energy. My parents are educated voters who read about the issues before they vote. That need to be informed has always fed my curiosity; because of it, I read newspapers and magazines and discuss what is going on in the world with my parents. They encourage me not to care about what others think of my opinions.

But it was Proposition 8 that really got me

thinking independently of my parents. In May, the state Supreme Court ruled that banning gay marriage violated the California Constitution's protections against discrimination. After the ruling, conservatives put Proposition 8 on the ballot to re-establish marriage as a union between only a man and woman. I first heard of the proposition while my mom and I were in the car listening to KFI (a conservative talk radio station). I shrugged it off. "I'm not planning to marry a girl," I thought. "Why should I care if gay couples can get married?"

As I listened to both sides debate Proposition 8 in world history class, I heard a classmate bring up the violations against civil rights that Proposition 8 posed since the government shouldn't be able to stop love between two people. This got me thinking, "Why shouldn't gay couples keep the right to be married? It does not hurt the marriages between straight couples."

A friend who was for Proposition 8 said that gay marriage was "wrong and gross," which was the most ignorant and crude sounding com-

ment of the debate.

"Well," I thought, "it is also wrong to stop two people who love each other from being joined by the strongest bond there is: marriage. It doesn't matter if homosexuality is against your religion. The government is secular." The more I thought about it, the more it made sense. By not letting same-sex couples have a right as basic as marriage, it is the equivalent of degrading them to second-class citizens.

People say if gay couples have families, their kids will be taught the "gay" lifestyle. If straight couples can raise gay kids, why can't gay couples raise straight kids? Gay couples could be loving parents who would teach their kids tolerance, equality and empathy. These are traits that many people who voted for Proposition 8 lacked.

IT'S IMPORTANT TO SPEAK OUT

Although my dad and I disagree on a lot of things, we've always agreed on saying what's on our minds. A supporter of civil rights, I found myself passionately against Proposition 8 while Dad was the opposite (he would honk when we passed by "Yes on 8" rallies on the street). When I told him I was writing an article on my opinions, I was surprised by how happy he was. Even though I was writing about something that went against his beliefs, he was proud that I was strong enough to voice my opinions.

In 2004, 62 percent of voters opposed gay marriage in California. In 2008, 52 percent were against it. Things are changing, and so am I. So as I sat in my room on Nov. 5, disappointed by the results, I thought, "How are we going to make progress? Where are we going if we continue to have prejudices?" Just like how I challenged my family's beliefs, I hope people keep challenging Proposition 8. I look forward to waking up soon to a radio announcement that same-sex couples can get married in California.



Stephany hopes the continued protests against Proposition 8 will help gay couples get the right to marry.

► Go to layouth.com to read more views on gay marriage

I'm glad she came here

My friendship with my housekeeper gave me a better understanding of illegal immigration



At top: Brett still gets together with his former housekeeper, Emilia, at his house on Sunday mornings. **Right:** One of Brett's favorites memories is playing at the park with Emilia. Photo (at top) by Cathleen McCaffery, 17, Marlborough School



By Brett Hicks
17, Loyola HS

Three years ago I watched news stories about students walking out of schools throughout Los Angeles to protest a proposed bill against illegal immigration. I didn't think much about it at the time, and I didn't have an opinion about immigration. Back then I wasn't informed about political issues. But seeing kids my age get involved made me wonder why they were protesting. I thought about my former housemaid's story of coming to the United States illegally and I realized I had a personal connection to this issue. I wanted to be more informed about immigration.

Emilia was my family's maid for 15 years. She took care of our family by preparing our meals at times, cleaning the house, and watching over my older brother and I when my parents were busy. She lived with us for several years. She was like a parent because my parents were constantly working.

During seventh grade my mother told me about Emilia's past. Civil war made life hard for her in El Salvador. Emilia, just like thousands of others, needed to escape in search of a better life. She left her 3-year-old daughter Marilyn with her mother and came to America alone. She arrived in the United States with the help of coyotes (people who help others cross the border for money).

When I heard about this, I was shocked. The fact that Emilia went through such a difficult experience surprised me. I could never picture her holding on to a moving train to reach the United States. I felt that I had someone to look up to because of her courage and bravery to do what she did. I also felt sorry for Emilia because she went through so many hardships back home and God knows she experienced even more hardships on her way here with the fear of border patrol catching her and sending her back. Leaving her daughter must have been difficult as well. That Emilia risked so much to come to the United States meant that she had a lot of courage and it was the right thing to do for her daughter.

My mother told me Emilia arrived on my family's doorsteps in Bel-Air in September 1991, a few weeks before I was born. She'd been rec-



ommended by another housekeeper who was her relative. The first couple months were very hard for Emilia. She would sob in her room, wondering if she would ever see her daughter again and realizing there was no way to go back home. If she returned to El Salvador to visit her family, it would be very difficult for her to cross the border again. My parents gave Emilia her own room and made her feel at home. Emilia saved all the money she earned working for us to send to her family in El Salvador. She wanted them to leave the warfare and move to L.A.

SHE'S ALWAYS LOVED ME

My mother told me that when I was born, a smile came on Emilia's face. She felt as if she had her own child to take care of and it made her happy. Later my mom told me that Emilia saw me as her son. I felt thankful because I never thought that somebody (other than my parents) would think of me that way.

I remember as a child, we would spend our afternoons at Beverly Glen Park. I would run around the nearby golf course touching each hole's flag pole while Emilia would chase after me, trying to catch up to me with her arms stretched out in front of her, panting for air. During my first years of school, we would spend our mornings having hot Cream of Wheat or oatmeal, and chocolate milk. Also, Emilia would accompany us on our family road trips to Yosemite National Park, Idaho and Big Sur. Having her with us on vacation made me feel like she was part of the family.

She moved out of our house when I was in second grade. She was still our housekeeper off and on, but she came only three times a week. Later on, Emilia married Arturo, who was our plumber, and started a family in Reseda. They had a daughter, Gabriella. Eventually, Emilia's daughter Marilyn moved to California to live with the family. Her dream finally came true when she was reunited with her daughter. Unfortunately, Emilia's mother did not want to relocate to Los Angeles because she did not want to leave El Salvador. Although her mother passed away recently, she was able to come to Los Angeles to visit her family before she died.

Even though Emilia moved, I still spent time with her. On the first Thursday of the month, I'd get out of school early. That's when

I couldn't picture her holding on to a moving train to reach the U.S. I felt I had someone to look up to because of her courage. Emilia also went through so many hardships back home.

I'd have a chance to see her. I'd come home around 12:30 and we'd go to lunch. I'd tell her how I was doing in school. We'd go to Baja Fresh or the Olive Garden. Sometimes I'd have dinner at her house and she'd serve rice and beans and chicken. Afterwards I'd play with her daughters. She was like a 1950s mom. She puts in a lot of effort to making her house perfect. She invited me to Gabriella's birthday parties and I'd play with Gabriella on the moon bounce. Spending time with her outside of my house, I got to know her as a person. She helped me with my Spanish. I'd try to order meals in Spanish and she'd help me say the right thing. Now I can speak to her in Spanish. I am fortunate to have her see me as part of her family.

She was also there for me. When I had problems at school, she'd help me out. Once there was a guy who was being a jerk. He put me down trying to be cool. We'd get into fights. My dad would tell me to fight back and Emilia would tell me to walk away. Her advice made more sense. If you fight, the problem is just going to escalate. The next time he was a jerk, I ignored him and we didn't get into fights anymore.

I have been trying to learn more about Emilia and her past to broaden my views on im-

migration in America. I recently watched the movie Innocent Voices about the civil war in El Salvador in the 80s. It was about an 11-year-old boy who was recruited to the army. He escapes to find his mother, but their village was burned. Before I saw the movie I knew there was oppression in some countries, but I didn't know exactly what it was. I was shocked to think about how people dealt with this. It gave me a better sense of what people in war-torn countries were going through and why they wanted to come to the United States.

Some media portray illegal immigrants as "aliens" who harm America's economy by taking jobs from citizens because they'll work for lower wages. What they don't show is that these "aliens" are arriving from harsh nations where they are surrounded by poverty and political strife. I have watched Lou Dobbs on CNN. He talks about illegal immigrants as "aliens" and says they should go home. Listening to him is hurtful and frustrating because he is always so negative. I have also researched policies on immigration such as the DREAM Act. I wish this would become a law because it would allow undocumented students who complete at least two years of college or two years in the military to apply for U.S. citizenship.

A BORDER FENCE ISN'T THE ANSWER

I hear news stories about how we are paying taxes to build a fence along the U.S./Mexico border to keep immigrants out. My friend agrees with building a fence because he thinks that people should wait in their home nations to obtain a visa or permission to come here legally. I don't agree with the fence. The fence would not reduce illegal immigration because people can figure out a way to get around it. Also, fences represent our country's negative view toward illegal immigrants.

Emilia got her green card, which means she has permanent residency and can live here legally. She has helped me put a personal face on illegal immigration. The hardships she faced back home and on her way here made me become accepting to more open immigration. I don't think immigrants should have to face such burdens to get to the United States. People shouldn't have to sneak into the country, but we still have to let people in for the right reasons. How can we keep criminals out of

the country? Another dilemma is the MS-13 gang from El Salvador. When Emilia lived in an apartment in West Hollywood, some MS-13 gang members would come to the apartment building and hang around its pool. She was afraid of them because they were dangerous. Allowing more people into the United States is not as simple a solution as I wish it could be.

I kind of regret I didn't ask Emilia about her life in El Salvador as much as I should've. Basic stuff like what were you like as a kid? I have always considered Emilia a true best friend. She is kind, loving and has a wonderful sense of humor. We never had any arguments. We always had a good time. I get birthday and Christmas cards from her every year. She always writes, "I love you, hope you're doing well. You're in God's hands." She didn't forget about me. She still had me in her heart. It reminds me of how she loves me.

She moved to Omaha, Nebraska in 2006 but Arturo couldn't find any work out there as a plumber, so they returned to L.A. We stayed in touch when she moved. It now feels good to have her in my life.

I think teens should be aware of immigration and they should form their own opinions. Emilia's story has given me a better sense of why people leave their countries and come to the United States. I'm glad Emilia has been able to have a better life here by having a home and raising a family and I think everyone should have the opportunity to do that. I believe that people who are in America illegally should be allowed to apply for citizenship. Just because they came here illegally should not be an excuse to kick them out. The world needs to understand their reasons for doing so, just like Emilia's story. We need to give them a second chance, even if they arrived here illegally.



Brett likes making pancakes for Emilia when she comes over for breakfast.

Acting against AIDS

Putting on a play made me realize teens are at risk and need to protect themselves

By Jessica Carreiro

17, Wilson HS (Long Beach)

I used to watch documentaries on the Independent Film Channel and HBO about AIDS victims in Africa and Thailand, and feel sad but not scared. It was happening there, in third world countries that had nothing to do with my life in L.A. Even when I heard statistics on the news about AIDS affecting teens in the United States, I still didn't feel it related to me. No one I knew had AIDS and not being sexually active meant I couldn't get AIDS. That's the way I thought until my drama class put on a play called *Carriers*. Now I know teens should take the threat of AIDS seriously.

Everyone moaned when Mr. Bowden, my drama teacher, told us that we would be performing the play. The drama class has put on the play every two years for a long time. I'm sure that in 1992 the dialogue was hip and happening, but today it's out of date. At one point, a guy with AIDS who is accused of spreading the HIV virus begins his monologue, "I'm Garren. And you've got to admit, I look good!" Who says stuff like that? I thought, "Mr. Bowden can't actually believe that this play is going to magically cure AIDS. It's time to move on."

My friend didn't want to act in it either. She said, "If kids are going to do it, they're going to do it. Watching some play isn't going to change that."

CHEESY SOUND EFFECTS MADE IT EVEN WORSE

I had the most embarrassing part for one reason: sound effects. I can't even roll my r's to pronounce my last name correctly and they expect me to do sound effects? The title of my character was "Miss Public Health" and her job is to kill off sexually transmitted diseases. My teacher's instructions were to come up with five shooting noises for when I zap away STDs like crabs and scabies. I came up with grenades,

Tommy Guns, lasers, an atomic bomb and a shotgun. My Tommy Gun sounded halfway between gargling water and choking. It got a laugh, but not the kind I was looking for. The only sound Mr. Bowden laughed at was the shotgun. "That's her impression of Dick Cheney," he said. I ended up replacing the others with comic book sounds like boom and zap. I thought, "Sure, I'll be embarrassing myself, but it's only in front of freshmen."

The play was a joke, and each day of prac-

One time, a few of my friends and I got on the topic of bad jokes. One after another we'd tell an absolutely terrible joke and laugh hysterically at it. More and more kids came over to join the conversation until the whole class had migrated into our group—even our lookout. It came my turn to tell a joke. "What's the difference between a pile of dead babies and a pile of rice?" I looked up at my friend. Her eyes were wide open. At first I thought the joke was too offensive. I turned around and there was

no other purpose, I thought, than to make us afraid to go outside. I found out that in 2006, California had the second-highest rate of AIDS in the country, with 140,000 cases. In Los Angeles, African Americans accounted for the highest number of AIDS cases at 17,960, followed closely by whites and Hispanics.

Soon, he gave us a deadline to return with our own articles. I researched online and found out that the number of people with AIDS has fluctuated and, in many cities, was on the rise.

But I couldn't connect with the statistics. Numbers don't feel real; they characterize people as a mass. They don't convey any sort of personal struggle.

One day Mr. Bowden sat us down and slipped a tape of *And the Band Played On* into the VCR. It was a 1993 docudrama on the discovery of AIDS before anyone knew what caused AIDS or even what to call it. I teared up at the end when the main character died. But even though it was a true story, it still felt like just a movie.

I put the same emphasis on the four letters of AIDS as I did on the three letters of VHS. AIDS was old and distant. No one talked about it. It couldn't touch me. I was more worried about SATs and getting into college.

IT FINALLY HIT ME THAT TEENS CAN DIE FROM AIDS

I changed the way I thought about AIDS when I heard about it from someone I knew. A few days before the show, Juan, a senior in our class who I never really talked to, said quietly, "I knew someone who died of AIDS." The room was silent and Juan was hesitant as Mr. Bowden asked question after question. Juan had to pause to keep from crying. It was clear this was hard for him. But he kept talking. I wanted to look away and plug my ears, but my curiosity wouldn't allow it.

Juan's friend, a senior at the time, was a heroin user. "He said he was going to stop, but that would only last until his next fix," Juan said. "Users never clean their needles and they share

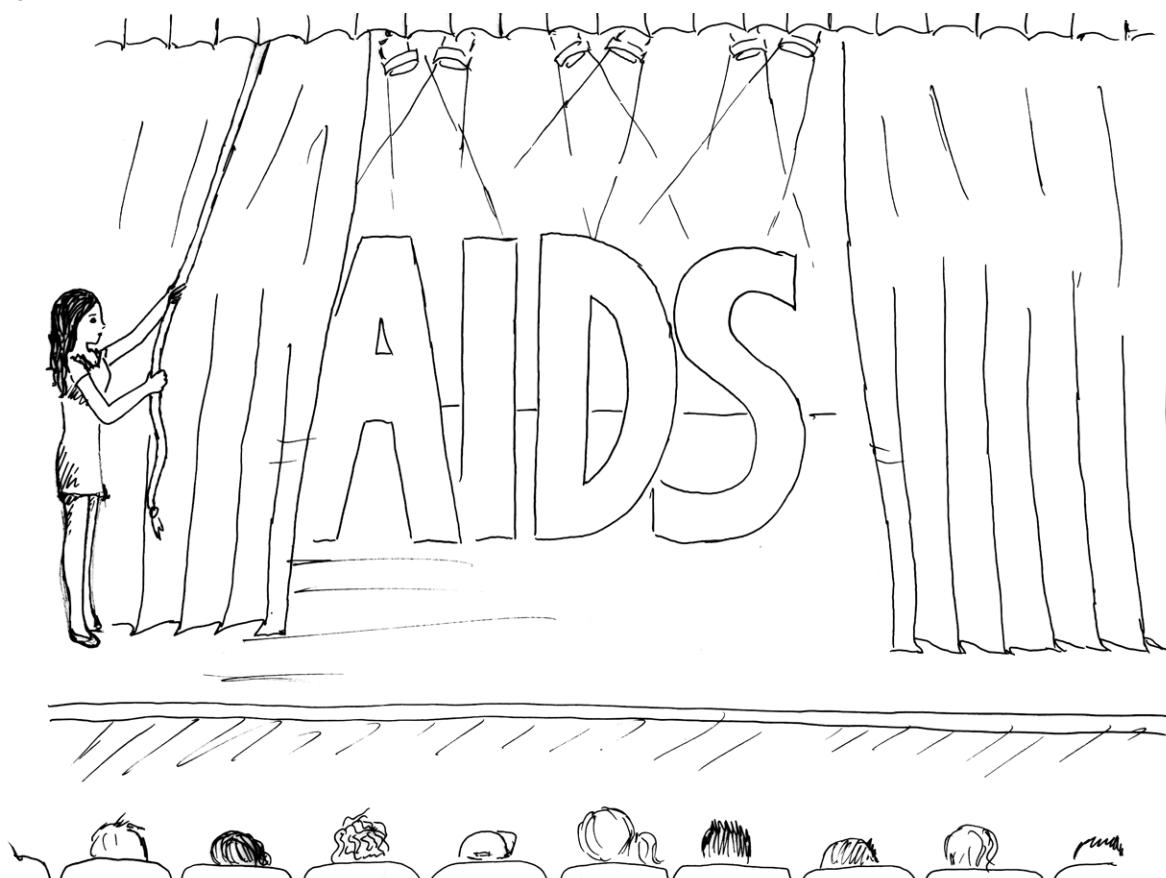


Illustration by Fiona Hansen, 16, Marlborough School

tice I found a new way to keep it funny. "Watch this!" I'd say to my classmates as I attempted an Australian accent with my lines. No one took practice seriously. For goofing off, it was all pretty strategic. It was a key part of the operation to always have a lookout—someone standing just out of sight pretending to run their lines while keeping their eyes open for the teacher.

Mr. Bowden standing behind my seat. "Go on" he said. I finished the punch line almost whispering, "You can't pick up a pile of rice with a pitchfork." He looked down at me expressionless, then slowly turned around and walked back to his office. Not two seconds went by before everyone was laughing.

Each day, Mr. Bowden would bring in an article with a depressing statistic designed for

with everyone." Juan choked up. "Then one day he told me he had AIDS. He seemed scared. I'd never seen him like that before. Things started happening so quick. We had been told that you could live years with AIDS, but within a few months his face was already changing. It became pale and pasty, like he was dead or something. I could hardly recognize him."

I couldn't take my eyes off Juan as he cried, looking down at the ground. "Barely a year after he had been diagnosed his immune system gave out, and he died." Juan took a deep breath. He seemed glad to get that off his chest. So many thoughts were racing through my head. "The kid was 18 when he died of AIDS?" "Could this happen to one of my friends?" I felt awful about how easy it had been for me to shrug off the pain that AIDS has caused so many people. I felt ashamed that I had acted

AIDS was old and distant. No one talked about it. It couldn't touch me. I was more worried about SATs and getting into college. I changed the way I thought about AIDS when I heard about it from someone I knew.

like as long as AIDS didn't affect me, it didn't matter. I pictured myself in Juan's position, thinking about how I would feel if I lost one of my best friends to AIDS. It was scary knowing there was nothing I could do. Juan's story showed me that any of my sexually active friends could get AIDS and I couldn't protect them. I finally realized that that was the point of the play—to get people to understand that AIDS can affect you, whether you're the one with the disease or not.

I finally felt like I was a part of the play and

of the fight against AIDS. We wanted the audience members to know about AIDS and how to protect themselves without living in constant fear of it. So much of how sexual education is taught is scaring teens. My sex ed class was a joke. The slides showed pictures of STDs and the teacher constantly pounded into our brains that "the first time can be the last time" and how "the safest sex is no sex at all." Telling teenagers not to have sex and assuming you're giving them all the education they need is not only naive, it's life threatening. Teens need to know that sex doesn't kill, diseases do, and there are easy ways to prevent them.

I HOPED OUR AUDIENCE WOULD LISTEN

The day of the show consisted of four consecutive performances. At 8:15 a.m., the first audience poured in. Never before had so many freshmen been so intimidating. I looked at the kids in the audience. Loud, popping their gum, texting, listening to their iPods—they weren't going to make this easy. But despite a few butterflies, I wasn't nervous. The lack of curtains, costumes and paid admittance made the play feel less professional and more like I was just talking to the audience. I felt comfortable.

The first performance went well. I got a couple laughs, though I'm not sure if they were laughing at me or with me. With each performance, I tried to make my sound effects funnier to lighten the somewhat serious mood. They seemed to be reacting just like we wanted them to. Our jokes were followed by laughs and at times they were so into the play they'd forget to close their mouths.

At the conclusion of each performance, the cast came together for a question and answer session with the audience. It was amazing to see how much I had learned when I saw how little the audience knew. How could they actually think there is a cure for AIDS? One freshman asked, completely serious, "Can you get crabs from the beach?" A question that someone in every audience asked was, "Is it better to use two condoms?" I laughed at Juan's response, "No double bagging!" Using two condoms is unsafe because the friction can cause the condoms to break. Once the audience started getting comfortable, the questions became more educational. Someone asked, "If you get an STD and you get pregnant, does your kid get it too?" Mr. Axelson, a health teacher for one of the classes in the audience, replied, "In the case of syphilis, yes." I had no idea.

Before the performance we had been told to memorize the number to the Long Beach Health Department, where teens can go to get free HIV testing without having to tell their parents. Throughout the question and answer sessions one of the cast members would shout "1,

FACTS ABOUT HIV/AIDS

HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) causes AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome). This illness weakens the immune system, making it less able to fight infections and diseases. Currently there is no cure for AIDS.

1. You cannot get HIV from ...
 - working with or being around someone who has HIV
 - sweat, spit, tears, clothes, toilet seats, or through everyday things like sharing a meal, insect bites or stings
 - donating blood
 - a closed-mouth kiss (but there is a very small chance of getting it from an open-mouth or "French" kiss with an infected person because of possible blood contact)
2. You can get HIV from ...
 - sexual intercourse or oral sex
 - birth, if your mother is infected
 - sharing needles with someone who is infected
 - a blood transfusion (risk is extremely low)
3. HIV can infect anyone, male, female, young, old, gay or straight. Don't think you're not at risk just because you're a teen. More than half of all new HIV infections in the United States occur among people under the age of 25. Almost 11.8 million youth around the world are living with HIV or AIDS. Throughout the world, almost 6,000 people ages 15 to 24 become infected with HIV each day.
4. You can live 10 or more years with HIV without showing any symptoms.
5. Birth control methods like the pill or the patch give you no protection from HIV. Condoms protect you, but only if they are used correctly.
6. You can get tested anonymously and without parental consent at a local health clinic. To find a clinic near you that offers free or low-cost HIV tests, call the STD/HIV hotline at (800) 758-0880 or go to aidshotline.org.

2,3" and we'd all join in "(562) 570-4000." After a while it seemed tedious and kind of cheesy. Then a girl who had been asking a lot of questions and joking around about not going outside anymore, shouted out from the back of the room, "What's that number again?" We repeated it as she typed it into her phone. I knew that even if we didn't get through to anyone else in that audience, we got through to her and she'll be safer.

Looking back, I know I wasn't the only student in my drama class who didn't understand the point of the play in the beginning. And I'm willing to guess that I'm not the only teen who has found it hard to connect to a disease that seems so distant. But the fact is, AIDS isn't distant and too many people find that out too late. About half of all new HIV infections in Los Angeles County last year occurred among people aged 15 to 24, according to the Long Beach Aids Foundation. A quarter of them were un-

aware they had HIV. I don't want to scare you into thinking that if you have sex you'll instantly get AIDS, but I also don't want you to think that there is nothing to worry about. If you are sexually active, wear a condom. It might not seem like such a hassle when you consider the alternative. And go get tested. Most cities provide free HIV testing at their public health centers. All you have to do is show up. Your life is worth it.



Jessica wants teens to take AIDS seriously.

Eating right while eating out

After learning I had high cholesterol, I made my diet healthier

By Brandie Hanson

17, North HS (Torrance)

Last year my friends and I were out for a late night dinner at Denny's after a long day at Disneyland. I saw a spork on a Denny's advertisement. I wondered out loud, "Why do they call a spork a spork and not a foon?" My friend Jessica said she wouldn't be able to say, "Pass me a foon please," with a straight face. These kinds of kooky conversations are typical when my friends and I go out to eat, which used to be almost every day. I love to eat, I love food, and in a small city like Torrance where I live, eating out is the only thing that's fun to do with friends. But for me eating out so much wasn't a good idea because of my high cholesterol.

The summer before my freshmen year I went to the doctor's office for my usual check-up. I got my blood taken because I had been sick. My doctor called a couple nights later and told my mom my cholesterol level was 186, too high for someone my age (a healthy level for adults is less than 200, but my doctor said that when you're younger you have had less time to build up cholesterol so it should be lower). Neither my mom nor my dad have high cholesterol so it was most likely not hereditary, meaning something that came from them.

It was a shock because I would always laugh when I saw those Vytorin commercials for pills that lower your cholesterol, in which the people look like the food they eat. But now those commercials weren't so funny.

We talked about it after my mom got off the phone. The reason seemed obvious to us. I had been eating McDonald's every day after school for the past six months. I would order six-piece Chicken McNuggets, large fries and every once in a while a Coke. I knew it was unhealthy but it didn't matter at the time.

I didn't know much more than the basics about cholesterol. I knew that it built up in the arteries. My mom told me that having high cholesterol could lead to a heart attack and heart disease when people get older. Heart problems ran on my dad's side of the family so I knew having high cholesterol put me at a greater risk. My mom did more research on cholesterol. From her and my doctor I learned that the causes of higher cholesterol are diets high in saturated fat, found mostly in food from an-



Avoiding the fried food and steak on the menu, Brandie (right) ordered a chicken salad when she ate out with Julie Park, 17, of North High and two other friends. Photo by Anisa Berry, 17, View Park Prep HS

imals such as steak and ham, but also cheese and some oils. Also trans fat, found in many fast-food products, raises your bad cholesterol, LDL (low-density lipoproteins).

I CUT BACK ON JUNK FOOD AND DAIRY

After learning all this, I decided that I wouldn't eat out so much and I would eat healthier at home. I still loved food but I wanted to stay healthy for my family and friends.

Whenever I would buy or eat something I would look at the nutrition facts on the label and check to see how much saturated fat there was, if there was trans fat, and of course the amount of cholesterol. I was disappointed to find that a lot of dairy products had a lot of cholesterol so I had to cut back on all the creamy,

rich goodies. I love cheese but I stopped eating it completely. It was fairly easy because cheese stays in the deli drawer in my fridge. Out of sight out of mind. It was harder to stop using butter because I spread it on many things like bread and crackers, but I did. It was easier to stop eating eggs because they had to be cooked, so no eggs meant less time and effort.

I started to bring a big fruit salad to school every day. I would eat it in third period and that would be enough to fill me up for the rest of the school day. I also cut down on snacks. Sometimes I wouldn't bring money to school to resist the temptation to buy the unhealthy stuff they sell like Chinese food, big chocolaty brownies and all kinds of chips and candy from the vending machines.

At home instead of munching on all kinds of things, I began to snack only when I was hungry on fruits and veggies. There were usually Tupperware containers of fruits and veggies that had already been cut in the fridge. I did have days when I would go to 7-Eleven and go crazy and buy a bunch of snack food—a Slurpee, chips, candy and Hostess cakes—because I would get the munchies. After stuffing my face on days like that I would feel sick but it didn't ruin my diet since it was once in a while.

My mom started buying healthier snacks like baked chips, 100-calorie snack packs, fruit and veggies, and cooking healthier dinners. My favorite meat had always been steak but my mom made fewer steaks and more salads. Once the food in the kitchen was healthier it was easy.



My doctor didn't mention exercise could help lower my cholesterol but my mom did and I stayed on my soccer team even though it wasn't as much fun as it used to be.

When I got my license my sophomore year I'd pass Burger King, McDonald's, KFC, A&W, Taco Bell, Wienerschnitzel, a Chinese restaurant and a Mexican restaurant on the

Eating healthy and exercising will help keep your cholesterol low. A good cholesterol level for teens is lower than 170. Your cholesterol is high if it is 200 or higher.

BRANDIE'S TIPS FOR BEING HEALTHIER

- Read labels. I used to read labels to find out if a food was fattening but now I read labels for cholesterol, too. I look for food that has less than 5 percent of your daily value of saturated fat and of cholesterol. Be aware that some foods, like avocados, have healthy fat but nutrition facts don't show the difference between good and bad fat.
- I eat smaller servings by ordering a side or a salad instead of an entree when I go out to eat with friends.
- I don't carry as much money as I used to so I can't buy snacks when I'm not at home.
- Exercise. You're supposed to keep your body in good shape. It makes your heart healthy.
- Find ways to resist temptation, such as driving a different route so you pass fewer fast food restaurants.
- If you're worried about your health, get your cholesterol checked at a doctor's office or health clinic. It's better to know. It's not that hard to change your lifestyle.

way home from my friend Christy's house. They're all within a mile. How could I resist the temptation when it was a minute's drive away? In an article in the Los Angeles Times, the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research found that the average Californian lives near four times as many fast food restaurants and convenience stores as grocery stores and produce vendors. I think that the number of fast food restaurants and convenience stores surrounding us is overkill but in the end it is still up to us to choose what we eat. I started driving a different way and carrying less money to avoid temptation.

BACK TO THE DOCTOR FOR A FOLLOW-UP

The summer before junior year, I went back to the doctor to get my blood taken to check on my cholesterol. Every time I looked at the bandage I worried, "How much did my cholesterol change? Was it better or worse?"

A couple days later my doctor called with the results. I remember my mom listening intently and asking how I could change my diet and what I should do. My mom got off the phone and told my dad and I that my cholesterol was higher. It was 200. I felt defeated. I couldn't think of anything I did wrong. My diet was way better.

I'd been able to keep my diet healthy but when my friends started to get their licenses we had more freedom to eat out, which made it harder to eat well. We started eating out almost every day after school because we hadn't eaten all day. We're hungry and bored so we go to Jack in the Box, Chipotle, Subway—almost anywhere we feel like.

One week it was Wahoo's on Monday, In-N-Out on Tuesday. On Wednesday morning before I went to school my mom said, "Try to come home after school and have dinner at home." She was beginning to worry about how much fast food I was eating. I thought, "OK Mom I'll try." After school that day I got boba and then I went home to eat dinner, which was macaroni and cheese, one of my favorites, but not too healthy. Then Baja Fresh on Thursday and El Torito on Friday. I realized I shouldn't be eating out so often but I thought it was a phase and after a month we'd get tired of going out to eat.

The problem with eating out is that you have to ask for the nutrition facts; they're not staring me in the face, so I'm left guessing at which

FAST FOOD COMPARISON

I would like teens to know what they're eating at these restaurants so they will try to live a healthier lifestyle. For a typical 2,000-calorie diet, you should consume no more than 65 grams of fat and 300 milligrams of cholesterol a day. Note: Nutritional information was taken from the restaurants' websites and www.chipotlefan.com.

McDonald's

BIG MAC: 540 calories, 29g fat, 75mg cholesterol
MEDIUM FRIES: 380 calories, 19g fat, 0mg cholesterol
MCFLURRY: 620 calories, 20g fat, 55mg cholesterol
TOTAL: 1,540 calories, 68g fat, 130mg cholesterol

40g fat, 95mg cholesterol
CHIPS: 570 calories, 27g fat, 0mg cholesterol
TOTAL: 1,623 calories, 67g fat, 95mg cholesterol

HEALTHIER OPTIONS

Souplantation

CHICKEN NOODLE SOUP: 170 calories, 3g fat, 30mg cholesterol
CAESAR SALAD ASIAGO: 270 calories, 22g fat, 30mg cholesterol
LOW-FAT BUTTERMILK CORNBREAD: 140 calories, 2g fat, 10mg cholesterol
TOTAL: 580 calories, 27g fat, 70mg cholesterol

Subway

SIX-INCH CLUB SANDWICH: 320 calories, 6g fat, 35mg cholesterol
CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIE: 210 calories, 10g fat, 15mg cholesterol
TOTAL: 530 calories, 16g fat, 50mg cholesterol

Chipotle

BURRITO with steak, rice, pinto beans, cheese, guacamole, salsa and lettuce: 1,053 calories,

options are healthier. I usually stay away from meats that are higher in saturated fat, like steak, and fried foods because oil is also high in saturated fat. Salads with dressing on the side are usually the best option. No dessert. Without a dessert menu on the table it's much easier. Sometimes at dinner I will eat less than my friends do. I order a side or a salad instead of a meal. When I get to choose, we go to Subway or Souplantation, which are healthier.

This summer I went for another check-up and found that my cholesterol was up to 224. The doctor came to the conclusion that the problem was just in my genes. My mom and I asked about medication but the doctor said I was too young for the benefits to outweigh the possible side effects.

I'LL ALWAYS EAT HEALTHY

I'm trying to lower my cholesterol so it doesn't get worse. Every morning I eat oatmeal, which is proven to lower cholesterol. I eat a lot of fruit, which has no cholesterol. My love for eggs and butter and other foods high



Brandie says eating healthier doesn't have to taste bad.

Beastly

By Alex Flinn

Reviewed by Destiny Jackson

15, Mayfair HS (Lakewood)

If you love fairy tales and romance as much as I do, then Beastly is most definitely the book for you. Alex Flinn invites us into a modern and edgier version of Beauty and the Beast. I really liked that the book took place in modern times because it was easy to relate to everything going on.

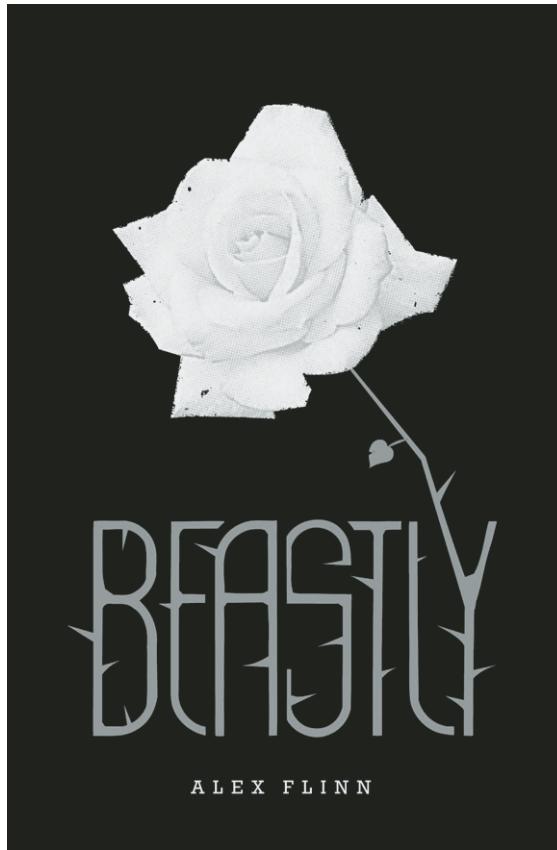
Sixteen-year-old Kyle Kingsbury attends a wealthy New York City private school. He is gorgeous and popular. Kyle invites an ugly goth girl to the Spring Dance, without (of course) planning on going with her. He blabs to the school that it's a prank. During the vote for Spring Dance court, Kyle wins but then the goth student calls him shallow and embarrasses him in front of the whole class. He's upset the girl who is actually ... a witch!

The witch curses him by turning him into a beast and giving him two years to find his true love, or the spell can never be broken. Kyle doesn't realize that all his money and popularity won't fix the unnatural amount of hair that covers his body, his long claws or his uncontrollable growls. Kyle is desperate to find a true love to break the spell after his girlfriend dumps him, since her kiss didn't work. Kyle even tries to

find love on MySpace. I really enjoyed this because it was the first book I've read to mention the website. I was really hoping for him to find love.

However, after meaningless searching on MySpace and in nightclubs he learns that his selfish and money-grubbing ways aren't attractive. Slowly he tries to become nicer, even planting a flower garden (drastic measures!). The beast's transformation from spoiled to humble really made me like this book. It came early, allowing the book to focus on the rest of his personality traits like his awkwardness talking to girls. But I think the best part is that this isn't some classic story where furniture talks or a happy-go-lucky fairy tale. It gets a little dark when dealing with the abuse of a major character and a minor character's drug habit.

I couldn't put the book down. I was interested in the characters, actual teens like me dealing with everyday school life like getting teased or being judged by their appearance. I could put myself in their shoes. Even though the message of "you shouldn't judge a book by its cover" is familiar, the story is fresh and exciting—very 21st century.



I Am Not Esther

By Fleur Beale

Reviewed by Sally Choi

15, The Linden Center

I Am Not Esther by Fleur Beale was a page-turner. The book is about a 14-year-old girl named Kirby, who is forced to live in a cult and struggles to find her mom. It was exciting to read about her acting against the cult. I wanted to know what would happen next.

The book begins with her finding out that her mom, who is a nurse, is being sent to Africa to help the needy. She leaves Kirby with family members she has never heard of. When her uncle and cousin arrive to take her, Kirby throws a tantrum by crying, cussing and throwing things. But despite the scene, her family doesn't say anything. They seem understanding so she goes with them.

When she gets to their community she realizes she's part of a strict religious cult called Children of the Faith. The cult leaders change Kirby's name to a biblical name, Esther. While she's showering they take away all her clothes and replace them with a long white skirt, plain white shoes and a modest blouse.

She doesn't follow the rules so the cult always finds a way of punishing her. One time she takes the kitchen scissors and chops off her hair because she was forced to have it neatly braided at all times. Her uncle

and aunt are shocked. They place her in a room and lock the door, forcing her to memorize verses from the Bible.

I was frustrated that they forced her to change her beliefs. They took away everything that was her, like her clothing, slang, manners and appearance.

After a while she adjusts to the rules and becomes attached to her 5-year-old cousin Magdalene and her teenage cousin, Daniel. She starts liking the cult. She has to decide who she is. Is she Esther or Kirby?

I could relate to her confusion because I live in a group home, which is a house where I live with five other girls and adult staff. At my group home you have to follow rules but there are things I don't agree with. It's the same with Kirby—she doesn't agree with the rules so she wants to resist.

Toward the end of the book it got really suspenseful. I wanted to find out if Kirby would escape the cult and find her mom. I also liked learning about the cult because it was different.

This book tells you to fight for what you believe in, even if things aren't going your way. I totally recommend this book.





Beyoncé

CD: I Am ... Sasha Fierce

Reviewed by Genesis Godoy

16, Environmental Charter HS (Lawndale)

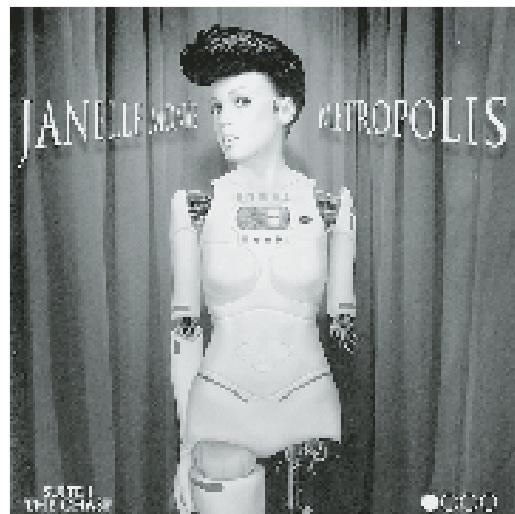
As a Beyoncé fan, I bought the album "I Am ... Sasha Fierce" the day it was released on iTunes, exactly at 12:07 a.m. But as I listened to the album, I was disappointed. "I Am ... Sasha Fierce," Beyoncé's third solo album, consists of two discs. The "I Am ..." disc contains ballads revealing Beyoncé's beautiful voice. Yet, the songs lacked creativity and soul. On the "Sasha Fierce" disc you will find a hip-hop vibe. But instead of making you dance, the songs on the "Sasha Fierce" disc make you want to turn back to her old Destiny's Child days.

Her first single "If I Were a Boy" had strong vocals and good lyrics, which made it appealing. "Single Ladies (Put a Ring on It)" was her second single and its fun beat made me anxious to see what the rest of the album was all about. To my surprise, the album was a disaster because of the meaningless lyrics and repetitive beats.

The worst song is "Diva." Just imagine "Na na na diva is a female version of a hustla/ Getting money, divas getting money" repeated throughout the song. "Video Phone" is another pointless song with a beat that gives me a headache. The songs were so terrible I couldn't listen to them again after the first time.

Before, Beyoncé actually created songs with good lyrics and extremely catchy beats. How can we forget her first solo hit "Crazy in Love" or every girl's heartbreak anthem "Me, Myself and I." I still think that Beyoncé is talented; she just didn't work hard enough on this album.

The album was a disaster because of the meaningless lyrics and repetitive beats.



Janelle Monáe

CD: Metropolis: The Chase Suite

Reviewed by Sharon Kim

18, Beverly Hills HS

Janelle Monáe's debut album, Metropolis: The Chase Suite, transports us to another world, a futuristic city called Metropolis that faces the same problems we face. On this concept album, Cindi Mayweather (a cyborg) flees her city after being found guilty of falling in love with a human, something strictly forbidden in Metropolis.

The music on Metropolis is influenced by different genres like classical, soul, opera and pop. Monáe blends these types of music so well that it's impossible to say this is just a pop or soul album. Being a huge fan of classical music and opera, this CD's instrumental compositions took my breath away. I was surprised by the balance of powerful vocals and harmonic instrumentals.

Each song reflects a different mood and tells a different story. "Many Moons," my favorite song, is energetic and upbeat. In "Cybertronic Purgatory," Cindi sorrowfully bids farewell to her lover. At the end of the song, her haunting voice loses strength and fades away.

Monáe fearlessly reveals her political views in "Sincerely, Jane" and "Mr. President." In "Sincerely, Jane" she addresses violence and teen pregnancy. "These kids round killing each other, they lost their minds, they gone/ They quittin' school, making babies and can barely read/ Some gone off to their fall." Monáe explains her dissatisfaction with George W. Bush in "Mr. President."

Metropolis is a complex album and I pick up new things every time I listen to it. Even though its influences are what most younger listeners would call "old," her sound is fresh and captivating.

This CD's instrumental compositions took my breath away.



AC/DC

CD: Black Ice

Reviewed by Rene Franco

16, Providence HS (Burbank)

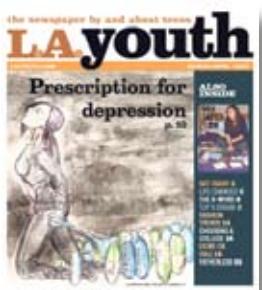
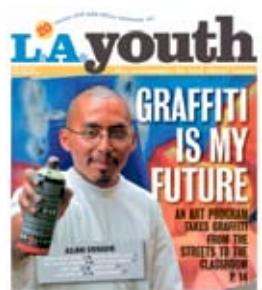
AC/DC's Black Ice takes me back to the glory days of rock n' roll when it stood as the reigning symbol of rebellion. I think that modern bands such as Fall Out Boy, Nickelback and Hinder have taken away much of the brute force of rock established by Led Zeppelin, The Who and AC/DC in the 70s. Black Ice is a 15-track kick in the chest that sticks to AC/DC's formula of simple, crowd-pleasing rock n' roll.

The lyrics on all the songs on Black Ice (as well as most AC/DC songs) can be broken down into three categories: 1) scoring gorgeous women 2) partying 3) rocking out, typically with the word "rock" somewhere in the title. But who listens to AC/DC for the lyrics anyway?

My favorite song is "Rock 'N Roll Train." Its power-house chorus and Angus Young's guitar riffs make you feel like the song is being played live. The song "Big Jack" is a funky jam with catchy riffs that sounds like something off of the band's legendary 1980 album, Back in Black. "War Machine" is an epic song that thunders with Young's breakneck solos.

If Black Ice has any message it's this: keep rocking. That message goes a long way for an adrenaline junkie like me. The energy emitted by these old geezers is more than enough to get me through a pile of homework. Having Angus Young along for the ride instantly makes me forget that I have problems that are beyond my control. And that is what rock n' roll is supposed to be about. AC/DC is proof that classic rock n' roll won't go away anytime soon.

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