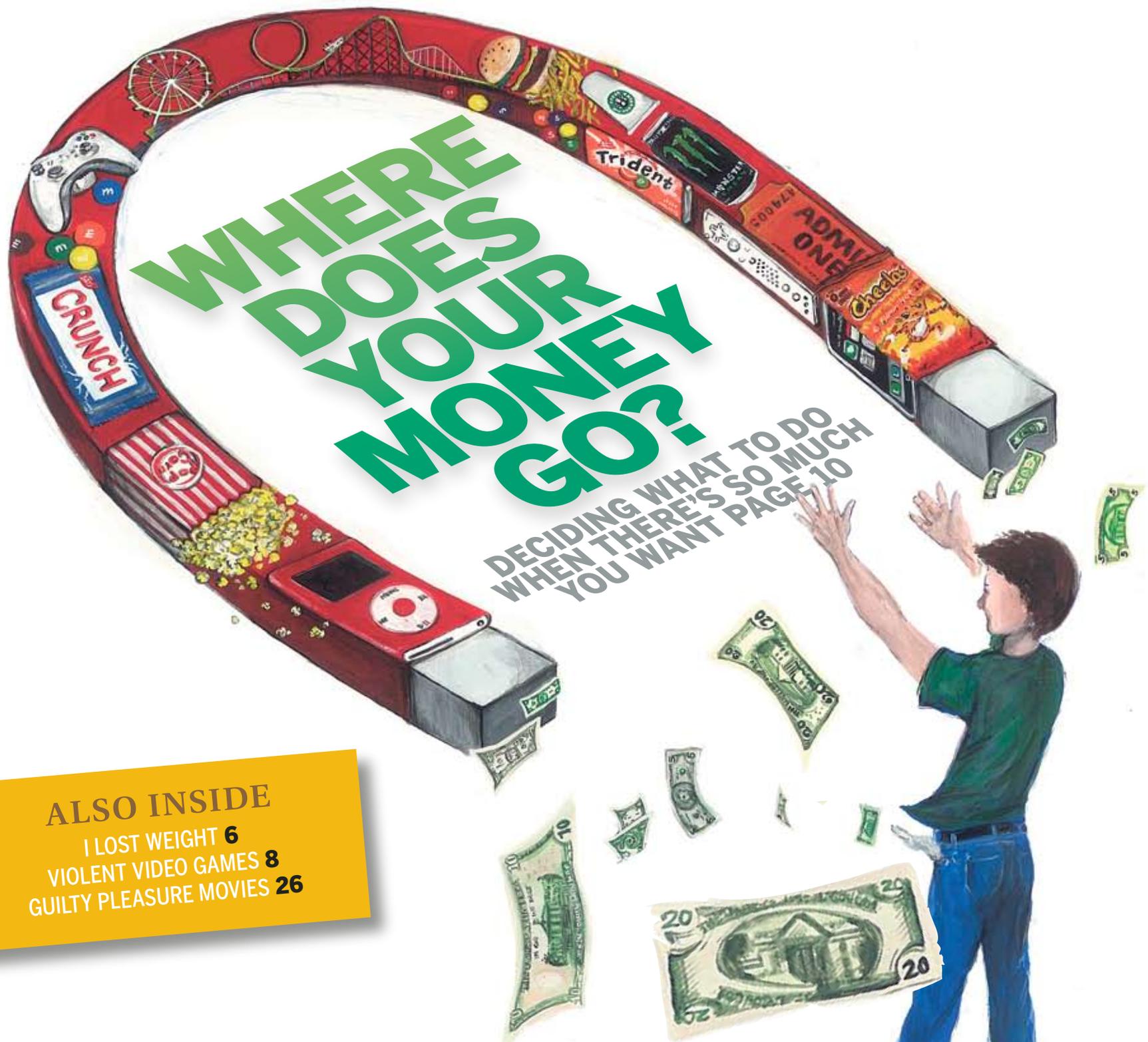


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# L.A. youth

SEPTEMBER 2009  
WWW.LAYOUTH.COM

the newspaper by and about teens



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## About L.A. Youth

### How did L.A. Youth start?

Former teacher Donna Myrow founded the nonprofit teen newspaper in 1988 after the Supreme Court Hazelwood decision, which struck down student press rights. Myrow saw a need for an independent, uncensored forum for youth expression. L.A. Youth is now celebrating its 21st year of publishing.

### How is L.A. Youth doing today?

L.A. Youth now has a readership of 350,000 in Los Angeles County. Hundreds of students have benefited from L.A. Youth's journalism training. Many have graduated from college and have built on their experiences at L.A. Youth to pursue careers in journalism, teaching, research and other fields. Our Foster Youth Writing Project has brought the stories of teens in foster care to the newspaper. For more info, see [www.layouth.com](http://www.layouth.com).

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

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

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

### Where is L.A. Youth distributed?

L.A. Youth is distributed free to teachers at public and private schools throughout Los Angeles County. L.A. Youth is also available online at [www.layouth.com](http://www.layouth.com), so check us out.

### How is L.A. Youth funded?

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

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

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

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

L.A. Youth is distributed free six times a year to high school and middle school teachers in most of Los Angeles County. Teachers also can download a free Teacher's Guide for each issue at [www.layouth.com](http://www.layouth.com). We do not share your info with other organizations or businesses.

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# L.A. youth

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MAIL

These are letters we received about stories in the May-June 2009 issue of L.A. Youth:

**FINDING TIME FOR WORK AND FRIENDS**

I REALLY ENJOYED this article because it shows that jobs can be fun. When most of us think of working, we imagine a place that has no fun. That isn't always the case though, as Camila explains. I think her plan of prioritizing her time worked for her. She had time to hang with friends, work and do schoolwork.

**Tina A.**  
Wilson MS (Glendale)

**A GIRL'S FAMILY CAN BARELY AFFORD THEIR HOME**

THIS STORY WAS very emotional for me. It makes me sad because they can't do anything as a family anymore. I know it is hard for people to go through the same experience. I hope you are not still going through this situation because everybody needs family time even if they are struggling. I am happy that you can face this conflict without adding pressure on top of it.

**Wallace Smith**  
Camino Nuevo Charter Academy

**A GIRL WAS ABUSED BY HER GUARDIAN**

THIS STORY REALLY grabbed my attention. One thing I can't tolerate is child abuse, so when I read this story, it really hurt to see that someone actually lived like this. After I read it, I knew that I wanted to become a social worker, and not just any social worker, but the best social worker, one who really cares about helping children.

**Honora Harrison**  
Warren HS (Downey)

WHEN I READ this article I was shocked. I couldn't believe that Victoria hit the writer after the writer was left by her mother for Victoria to take care of. I can't believe the writer spent years being abused and never said anything to the police. There were a lot of better places she could've lived that wouldn't have treated her the way Victoria had. But at least she had a friend to help her. I learned a lot from this article, like if you are abused, you should tell someone.

**Ana Luisa Vivaldo**  
Wilson MS

THIS WAS A great article with a strong message. It was very sad that Victoria made the writer do all those chores when she was just 8 years old. It was a good thing that she finally told a friend about what was going on, but she should've told someone about it even earlier so Victoria wouldn't have done those things to her. I was amazed that she had the courage to tell the police though, because without Victoria, she wouldn't have a real home. Reading this article made me think about all the other kids being abused and made me want to do something about it, like donating some money or clothes. She showed bravery and stood up for herself, even when it meant losing a place to live.

**Joshua Collado**  
Wilson MS

WHEN I STARTED reading "Left in the wrong hands," I couldn't put the paper down. I was shocked that the girl being abused didn't do anything to get away sooner! I knew that child abuse was horrible, but it seemed imaginary to me, like it didn't really happen. This

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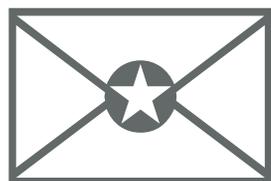
*Essay contest winners wrote about being ignored as a girl, girls deserving respect from boys and already being one of the guys.*

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

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

made me realize that child abuse does happen and is happening right now. I now understand how serious it is.

**Lauren Hansen**  
Wilson MS

THIS ARTICLE WAS shocking. I couldn't believe what happened to this young girl. It broke my heart. I never thought that her mom's best friend would abuse her. I will always look out for people who I think are suspicious.

**Deivi Cifuentes**  
Camino Nuevo Charter Academy

**I LIKE CLASSICAL MUSIC**

I FOUND THIS article very interesting and I can relate to the topic. I like country, classical and pop, but when I mention country my friends laugh because they are all into rap. Does that mean I have to listen to it too? No. I can listen to whatever because I'm my own person. So when someone puts you down for what you like just ignore them.

**Jasmyne Durgin**

**DRIVING LESSONS WERE SCARY**

I HAVE NEVER stopped to think about the accidents I might get into while driving. In "Not so fast," Lia writes about how many times she had near-accidents and how many people she was about to hit. When I learn how to drive, I will remember this story and I'll remember that I won't get it right the first time.

**Tara Baghoomian**  
Wilson MS

**PREPARING FOR QUAKES**

I FOUND THIS article to be very helpful. Ever since that 4.7 earthquake in May I have been very uneasy. It was the first real earthquake I experienced and it was a real eye opener. Knowing how close the epicenter was to my home in San Pedro really frightened me. The night of the earthquake I wanted to go out and buy some earthquake supplies in case an aftershock came soon. However, with all of the people



**After a May earthquake, L.A. Youth was glad readers could turn to Stephany's recently published story to learn how to be prepared for the next quake.** Photo by Kaitlyn Tsai, 15, Walnut HS

in my family working or going to school no one ever got around to buying what was needed. I think this is because we didn't know

what to buy. I took it upon myself to go to a nearby grocery store and I bought all the necessary supplies. Thanks to this article I

knew what I needed to buy and now I know that I don't need my mom to do everything for me. Because when it comes to dangerous situations like this, everyone has to be prepared. Thank you for the info.

**Melanie Mahabir**  
California Academy of Math and Science (Carson)

"GETTING READY FOR earthquakes" has taught me the importance of preparing for an earthquake. Earthquakes can be destructive and you never know when one will strike. It's best to prepare for an earthquake, especially if you live in Southern California. I wouldn't want anyone in my family to get hurt, but at least now I know what is needed during an earthquake. Every household should have an emergency kit and a plan in case of any disaster. Thank you for the safety tips.

**Jorge Martinez**  
Camino Nuevo Charter Academy

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# I survived the road test

Despite my nerves and an intimidating test proctor, I got my license

By **John Lisowski**  
17, Laurel Springs School

The day that I test for my driver's license has finally arrived. I leave my home nervous, but hopeful that six months of practice with my parents will pay off. I have been dying to get my license so that my parents won't have to drive me everywhere.

I arrive a few minutes early at the DMV and get in the line of cars to take the road test. As I sit in the car waiting behind about 10 cars that are moving impossibly slowly, I feel a sudden rush of anxiety and my palms start to sweat. I am unsure of my left turns. I am also fearful of the DMV employee who will administer the test. I bet that he or she will be stern and intimidating.

My mother reassures me that I will do fine. As a woman approaches the car, I grab my permit and other documents and try to force a smile as I hand her the papers. She informs me that I am missing the certificate that proves I completed driving school, even though I brought other forms, which I wouldn't have been able to get unless I had finished. This means I have to reschedule.

I go inside and get in a line so I can get a ticket, which will allow me to speak to a DMV employee and reschedule my test. My mom and I sit down in uncomfortable chairs along with about 30 other people. After what is at least half an hour, I go to a window where I'm told that I will have to wait until a spot opens up—in approximately one month. At least I can practice more.

## WITH A MONTH TO GO, I NEED LOTS OF PRACTICE

I drive almost every day during my extra month. I ask my parents to point out any mistakes, because I make a lot of careless mistakes and I had even run a few red lights. I know that I need to slow down drastically because my parents always point out that they are scared to be in the car while I am driving. My left turns need work as well; I tend to swerve.

When I return to the DMV a month later I make sure not to forget the document that proved I completed driving school. After I endure the rush of anxiety a second time, I am ready to take the test.

My mother leaves the car and is replaced

by a DMV employee, who has a no-nonsense look on her face. I politely say hello but get no response except for a simple, "just go." I try to control my breathing and not grip the wheel too tightly to keep the tester from seeing how nervous I am.

Her lack of emotion intimidates me. First, I

and I make the turn perfectly. Oddly, she begins writing on her pad.

"Right turns are not allowed on red lights back there," she says.

"What?" I ask in disbelief.

"You cannot disobey a turn sign because you feel confident enough to get away with it,"



The second test followed the same route so I knew every turn and sign. I felt relieved when I flawlessly executed the right turn, which I had messed up the first time.

Photo by Jasper Nahid, 15, New Roads School (Santa Monica)

show her the hand signals for turning left, right and for slowing down, which are used in case your tail lights go out, and then the emergency lights and brake. I do this without difficulty. She has me pull out of the DMV parking lot and turn left. By now I feel a little more comfortable with left turns. So far, the test has been manageable and I begin to relax. I execute the next few maneuvers without any difficulty.

I stop at a red light. The instructor tells me to make a right turn. I double check for traffic and everything looks clear. I turn the wheel

she says. I had no intention of disobeying any sign. I just didn't notice it.

As we make our way back to the DMV, the woman informs me that I failed the test during the first five minutes because of the illegal right turn on red. I am in shock. I have to face the sad fact that I will have to return to the lion's den once more. My mother tells me that most people fail their first try.

Undaunted, I make a new appointment for a week later. I don't have to wait a month like last time because of a cancellation. The weather

forecast predicts rain though.

I come to the DMV with my father for my second attempt. Anxiety rushes through me, as it did last time. I feel confident I will not make the same mistake on the right turn again. Perhaps I feel a bit too confident, because I make several mistakes on the non-driving portion of the test. I forget where the emergency brake is when asked and I forget how to activate the emergency lights. These were not problems the first time.

## I'M NOT PERFECT THE SECOND TIME EITHER

Thankfully, the woman issuing the exam is nicer than the first one, but she still has a serious expression throughout the entire exam. Luckily, the second test followed the same route so I knew every turn and sign. I felt relieved when I flawlessly executed the right turn, which I had messed up on the first time.

The remainder of the test is not as smooth. I forget to double check traffic when I switch lanes, which the tester points out, and later I go into a turn too fast and drive over the curb. I want to kick myself. The only thing I can do though is carry on with the test.

As we drive back to the DMV, the woman gives some sarcastic commands: "make a turn, without hitting the curb again" and "without trying to kill the other drivers." She cryptically makes notes in her chart without offering any feedback. I have a feeling in the pit of my stomach that I have failed once again.

Much to my surprise I passed. I did not make any errors which were considered to be "critical." The woman did, however, recommend that I practice much more before taking full advantage of my license. I agreed with her. I politely accepted the advice and left. When I got home I called a few friends. We were excited that I got my license because now I can go wherever I want without my mom.



*John says not to worry if learning to drive seems hard, because everybody struggles at first.*

# From fast food to fitness

After being overweight as a kid, I learned to eat right and exercise

By Justin Koh  
17, Cleveland HS (Reseda)

When I was 13, I stood at 5 feet 7 inches tall and weighed 180 pounds. I thought I'd always be the fat kid in my group of friends. When people asked me how much I weighed, I would subtract 25 pounds. I wanted to lose weight but I thought it would be too hard.

I was skinny until my love of fast food started in second grade. Every day after school my dad and I would stop at Carl's Jr. or Wendy's. I usually ordered a half-pound burger overflowing with guacamole with a side of large fries and a milkshake. It was the best stuff ever. By third grade, I weighed 120 pounds. My mom had to buy adult pants and cut the legs so they would fit me. My dad called me *doongboh*, which is Korean for "fatty," but I knew he was just teasing. But when my classmates would poke my stomach and call me "marshmallow" I'd get insecure and try to convince myself, "I'm not that fat."

Things didn't change much in middle school. I would grab a bite to eat with my friends, whether it was a Mucho Macho Burrito from the Burrito Factory or three slices of pizza from Ameci. At home I ate Korean food, which wasn't as unhealthy, but because I was used to eating until I was stuffed, I would eat two or three times more than my dad. My mom loved feeding me and said I was a "growing boy" so she always made extra food.

I didn't like to exercise. The worst thing about middle school was PE. I hated Tuesdays the most because I had to run the mile. I would walk more than half of it because I couldn't bear the pain on my knees or my heart pounding against my chest. The fastest mile I ran was 11 minutes, and those 11 minutes were long and painful. After every mile, drenched in sweat, I would sit down on the handball court. When I got up everyone would make fun of the giant wet butt prints on the ground. One time I overheard someone whispering, "Why is he running so slow and panting?" "It's because he's fat." I brushed off the comments, but inside it really hurt.

The summer after eighth grade, my friend

was having a pool party (with girls) and the boys were playing a game where we would jump up and down to see whose belly waved the most. I happened to be the winner. Even the girl I liked laughed at me. I knew she wouldn't like me, but it felt like a slap in the face. I usually laughed the jokes off, but this time the jokes hurt more than usual.

A few weeks later, I was at my friend's house and I forgot to take the sticker off the new pair of jeans I was wearing that read "38x32." As I was leaving, my friend pointed it out and he and his mom started laughing. It was embarrassing. That night, I looked at myself in the mirror and I saw what I didn't want to see. "That's it," I thought, "I'm going to do something about it. I'm going to lose weight."

## I STRUGGLED DOING PUSHUPS

I didn't know where to start so I took small steps. One night while I was watching TV with my dad, I decided to do some pushups. I could not even do one complete pushup. My dad said, "It's OK. If you practice every day you'll be able to do it." I had to go on my knees and it took all my strength to do 15 and I was breaking a sweat. I'd do them while watching TV. There were times I wanted to give up. A few weeks later when I did 10 full pushups, I felt great. That small accomplishment made me realize that I could do it.

During the spring of that year, I practiced with the football team during the off-season as a lineman. My sophomore year, I took swim class for PE credit. I realized it was good exercise. I felt better about myself, but I didn't see much difference when I looked at the mirror because my eating habits were still bad. At school I'd eat nachos. They're really unhealthy, but I didn't have anything else to eat. I'd say, "A bite is OK" but I'd end up eating the whole thing because I was so hungry.

After school my friends and I would stop to eat on the way home. If I suggested something healthier like Subway, my friends would laugh at me. When we would eat at McDonald's, I would choose healthier options, like a grilled chicken sandwich with no mayo and a Diet Coke. My friends would call me "pansy." I'd say "I'm trying to lose weight" and they re-

spected that. But they'd still tempt me, "Don't you want a fry, Justin?"

After a semester of swimming, people started to ask me, "Justin, did you lose weight?" and that motivated me to keep it up. I can't stop now, I thought.

Sophomore year I got my first membership to a gym. Every day after school, I would go straight to the gym. For the first month, I had no idea what to do. I ended up just bench pressing and arm curling.

During the summer I went to my sister's house in Riverside for a week. She goes to the gym every day. I met her friend, a huge guy who was a personal trainer. I asked him, "How'd you get so big?" He said, "You have to work specific muscles every day." We made a schedule. I would do chest and triceps one day, back and biceps another day, legs and shoulders another, have a day of rest and then repeat. He showed me the proper techniques. He said I should eat chicken, lots of protein, and less fat and carbs. I wrote everything down and when I went back home I worked out six days a week with my buddy, Josh. At first it was tiring but after a month, my body got used to it. It was fun. It was way better than being bored at home.

I also looked up articles online and took advice from people on workout forums on what to eat and how to lift weights. I read that eating healthy, getting a good amount of sleep and working out correctly were key factors in getting a great body. I felt great. I didn't have to suck in my belly to put on my favorite pair of jeans anymore! And I was getting stronger too. I kept on swimming, and by the end of summer I could swim 100 laps in a row.

When my junior year started I got more serious about working out. My friends and I would look at videos of Mr. Olympia on YouTube. They were my motivation.

## I MADE NUTRITIOUS, LOW-FAT MEALS

I started to pack my own lunches. I took brown rice, boiled eggs, chicken breast and broccoli to school every day. My friends would be eating school food or sandwiches with ranch and bacon. They told me they wished they could have the discipline that I had.

I also joined the wrestling team at my school

*After a semester of swimming, people started to ask me, "Justin, did you lose weight?" and that motivated me to keep it up. I can't stop now, I thought.*

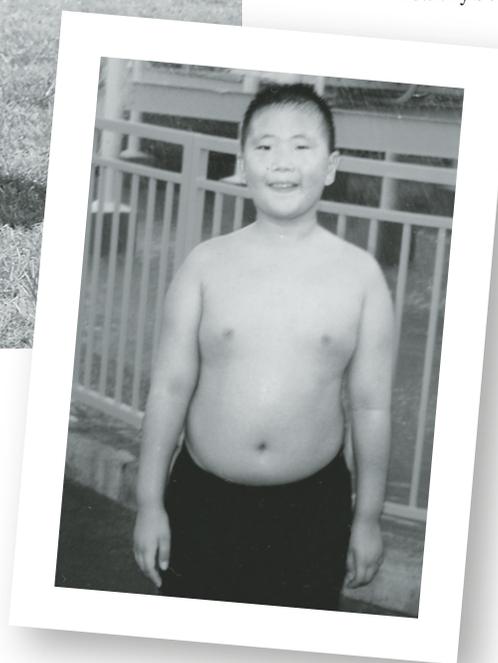




**Running is one of Justin's favorite ways to stay fit and healthy. At right, a photo of Justin at age 10.**

and the Students Run L.A. program. It was on the wrestling team where I started to lose a lot of weight. I had to have my body composition measured, and I weighed 175 pounds with 18 percent body fat. After two months of hard training I lost 11 pounds and I could slightly see a six-pack! The great thing about wrestling practice was that it was at 6 a.m. every morning, which made it easy to fit into my schedule. I also learned that doing cardio (exercise that keeps your heart rate up like running and swimming), in the morning before eating was a great way to burn fat because this is when your blood sugar levels are the lowest.

Races with Students Run L.A. took place once a month on the weekends. In December I ran a half-marathon. Halfway through I thought, "Oh my gosh, I'm only halfway done and I'm going to die." Then I got a burst of energy and I was able to keep running. Sure my legs hurt after, but I was too proud of myself to notice. The next day, I wore the shirt I got to school to show that I ran it. My friends said stuff like, "Wow! I can't believe you ran that!"



I felt that I was too skinny and I wanted to look like Arnold Schwarzenegger. When wrestling season ended in February, I picked up Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, a martial art based on ground fighting. The studio is in the same plaza as my parents' dry cleaning business, which makes it easy to get there. I love jiu-jitsu because it is a good way to burn fat. I have lots of fun because I learn the moves I see in UFC (Ultimate Fighting Championship) matches.

Now I am 6 feet tall and weigh 185 pounds with a lot more muscle. My diet consists of two weight-gainer shakes a day, a lot of chicken and brown rice, and salmon and egg whites. However, I am not a robot and junk food never lost its appeal. I usually have a cheat meal once or twice a week to keep myself from going crazy. During summer it was a lot harder to stay healthy because of all the pool parties and barbecues.

One weekend I had five hotdogs, three hamburgers and a bunch of pizza, mainly because I was hanging out at my friends' houses and I didn't want to seem rude or there was nothing else to eat. But I burned a lot of it off the next day lifting weights and going to jiu-jitsu.

#### **WORKING OUT IS PART OF MY LIFE**

When I first started working out, I just wanted to lose weight. Now I do something every day. If I'm not at the gym, I'm doing jiu-jitsu. If

I'm not at jiu-jitsu, I'm swimming or running. I want to get as big as I can without steroids. Having goals gives me a purpose and drives me to keep working out.

I don't just look better, I feel better too. As a kid, I never thought that I could be in the military even if I wanted to. Now I hope to become

#### **JUSTIN'S TIPS FOR WAYS TO BE HEALTHIER NOW**

1. Choose the healthier options. For example, choose wheat bread over white, and drink water instead of soda or juice.
2. Go for a jog or exercise at home in the morning. Your body will feel a lot better all day!
3. It can't hurt to do 5-10 pushups and sit-ups while watching TV. Work your way up to three sets.
4. Drink water! It burns calories and is good for your body.
5. Remember to not give up. You can't get to where you want without starting somewhere.

an officer in the Navy because I want to remain physically active for the rest of my life. When I went to a summer program at the Naval Academy to check out the campus, one day we didn't stop for eight hours. We did up-downs (going from standing to laying on your stomach) in the surf, rafting, swimming, running and an obstacle course. It was pretty fun. I could do it because I'd trained my body for it.

Seeing results made me realize that if I put my mind and effort into something, I can do it. And it's not just my body, it can work with my academics, too. If you keep at it you can do it.



*Justin says that if you stay committed, you'll eventually get to where you want.*

# In defense of video games

Playing games with blood and guns hasn't turned me violent

By **Nicholas Robinson**

14, Central L.A. HS for the Visual and Performing Arts

I play video games just about every day. I like them because I can do things not possible in real life like shoot fireballs out of my arm, stop terrorists from selling weapons to North Korea or slice a creature in half with a chainsaw!

Some people, thankfully not my parents, say that playing violent video games can make a person violent. I disagree. I've played games like Halo, Fallout 3 and Call of Duty, where I get to mow down lines of enemies with powerful guns and spill lots of blood. When I finish playing those games I don't feel violent urges or go out and kick puppies. I feel good after playing well, just as I would after playing family-friendly games like Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess and Super Mario Galaxy.

The first video game I played was Turtles in Time on the Super Nintendo when I was around 4, and I was hooked. About two years later, I finally got my own GameCube.

I got my Xbox three years later, when I was 9, and after that my whole gaming world changed. Xbox games looked much more realistic—trees swayed in the wind, people's bodies fell limp when they died and there was blood. These new details created a darker, grittier world that I could immerse myself in.

The first M-rated ("mature") game I played on my Xbox was Halo 2. Halo 2 is a first-person shooter (meaning I see all the action from my character's point of view as I shoot people) that takes place on a gigantic ring-shaped weapon filled with parasites that will turn you into a mindless zombie. My objective was to destroy the ring, killing as many bad guys as I could along the way.

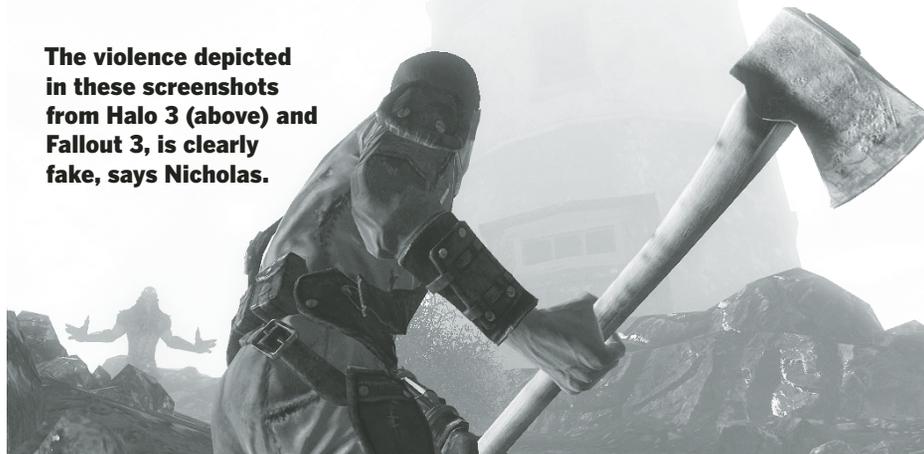
## THE GRAPHICS WERE SO COOL AND REAL

Hours later I finally noticed the blood spots on the ground and sheer number of aliens that you kill when I was watching my friend play. But what stood out were the graphics and how realistic it looked when parts flew off of a damaged vehicle. After nearly 10 hours the game hadn't warped my mind to ignore the violence, it's just that the point of playing was to have fun. That's what I like about these games, the fun.

My parents seemed OK with all this. They



**The violence depicted in these screenshots from Halo 3 (above) and Fallout 3, is clearly fake, says Nicholas.**



were more concerned with me getting headaches from staring at the TV all day than how the games might affect my behavior. One of my friends isn't so lucky. His mom won't let him buy any violent games. He can play them, though, which he does at my house.

Sadly, I've learned that some people aren't as cool with these types of games as my parents. When reading about video games online a little more than a year ago on screwattack.com (a gaming website), I read about Jack Thompson, who has become famous in the video-gaming world for trying to prevent teens from buying mature-rated games.

After the shooting at Virginia Tech in 2007 that left 32 dead, Thompson blamed the video game Counter-Strike without police having confirmed that the shooter had played the game. He said, "These are real lives. These are real people

that are in the ground now because of [Counter-Strike]. I have no doubt about it," according to an article on MSNBC.com. He has even called video games "murder simulators."

My first thought was "what a jerk." The people who have committed violent acts have serious mental illness. What was wrong with them was way more than a video game or television show or movie could cause. Just because they killed people in video games doesn't mean that the game caused a person to kill in real life.

The games aren't "murder simulators" at all. Even though the M-rated game Call of Duty 4 looks very realistic, none of the killing is real. For any game you just press a button and you fire a gun. It's not like shooting a real gun. As realistic as the Call of Duty series tries to be, it's still not that realistic.

As I read more about Thompson, I learned

that he is on a crusade against video games that he considers too violent or sexual. He threatened to sue the creators of Grand Theft Auto IV, which contains killing, nudity, drinking and sex with prostitutes, to block the release of the game. I've played hundreds of hours of M-rated games and I don't feel like it's affected me. I'm not violent and I don't have violent thoughts.

## THE RATING SYSTEM WORKS

I think games are well regulated with the game rating system. Games that are appropriate for any age (sports games) are rated "E," games with a little violence and adult language (most fighting games) would be rated "T" for teen, and more graphic games are rated "M."

Places like GameStop and Best Buy don't sell M-rated games to teens unless they show ID that proves they're 17 or older. I tried to buy Halo 2 without my parents but the person at the store told me, "unless you are 17 or older and have an ID to prove it, you can't buy this game."

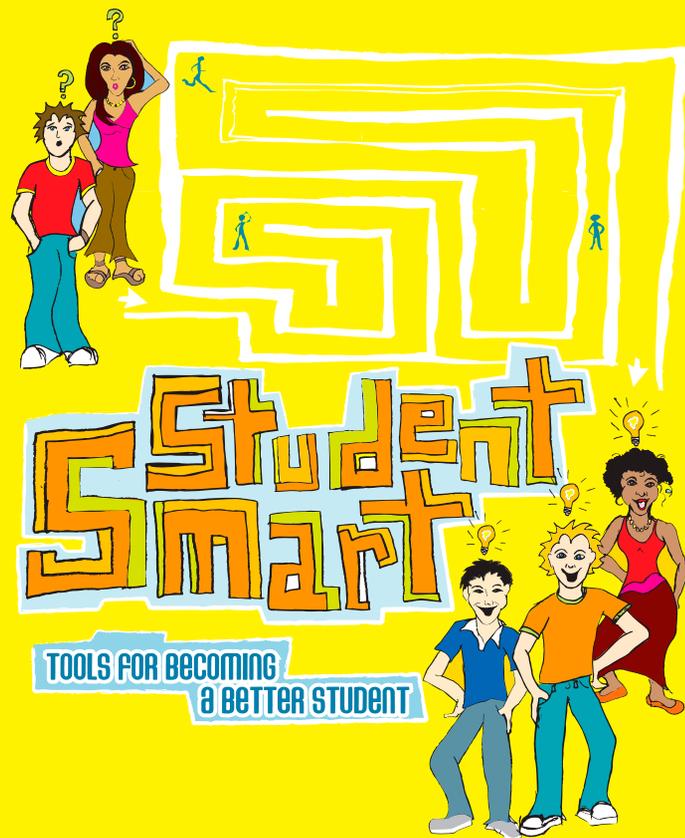
I think parents, who watch what their kids buy and what they buy for their kids, are better than censorship. I was 10 when I told my parents I wanted Call of Duty 2. They asked me "what is the rating?" and "what's in the game?" I told them that it was rated "T" and it was a World War II first-person shooter. They were OK with it, because I was getting older.

Now that I make my own money walking dogs, I am allowed to buy any game that isn't rated M. If it is, I have to talk to my parents first. I know my parents wouldn't let me buy Grand Theft Auto.

But honestly, I wouldn't let a kid under the age of 16 play Grand Theft Auto. There is way too much inappropriate content in the game. But Thompson wanted to stop the game from being sold period. That's ridiculous. I think people are smart enough to tell the difference between reality and a video game.



*One of Nicholas's favorite games right now is Super Smash Bros. Brawl for the Wii.*



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# SHOULD I BUY THAT?



**Money is hard to come by these days and you need to know the best way to spend it.**

*The experiences on the next page show how tempting it is to spend, but if you're smart with your money, you can save and still have fun. Also, turn to page 12 to find out how one teen decided what to do with the money she earned from her job.*

Illustration by Lily Clark, 15, Immaculate Heart HS

# IT ALL ADDS UP

*Our teen staff kept track of what they bought for a week*

## I FELT GUILTY BUYING A TEA



*One of the most important topics in today's economy is how to save money and spend less. It's even more difficult when you're a teenager and your only*

*source of income comes from your parents. I usually don't spend a lot of money because my mom is a single mother whose entire income supports our family. I can't just blow money on daily Starbucks trips or weekly trips to the mall like my friends.*

**Day 1** My one-week challenge started on a Sunday. It was summer and I wasn't going anywhere, just staying home to try to finish homework. I spent the day annotating Jane Eyre and suffocating under Frankenstein.

**Days 2-6** The rest of the week passed by quickly. I didn't spend any money, which is a lesson learned—if you stay at home, you're not tempted to waste your money buying things you want at the moment but don't need.

**Day 7** On the last day, July 4, my friends invited me to watch fireworks at the local park. My friend Ricky drove me and my other friend Daniel around to different stores so he could buy fireworks. He ended up buying a few smoke bombs. As the sun began to set, our stomachs began to complain and we were thirsty. Out of weakness, I bought a Hong Kong milk tea at a Quickly for \$2. I regretted it when we ran into my friend Christine at the park. She had Styrofoam takeout boxes and one too many sodas, which she handed to me as we watched the fireworks.

Sometimes, when I do splurge a little, I feel guilty afterwards. I mentally lecture myself, as I did with the \$2 milk tea, on why instead of enduring my thirst a bit longer, I gave in and spent money I knew I couldn't afford. However, this doesn't happen often because I take

measures to ensure that I don't buy a \$15 shirt I suddenly fall in love with at Hollister and desperately want to buy. I hardly ever carry money with me. When I do, I carry \$5 at most so I can't afford most of the things I want to buy. Also, my mom taught me that there are always bargains or substitutes; Safeway cola tastes just as good as regular Coke but costs less. It's tough learning ways to save money, but it's an art that anyone who puts time and effort in can become a master at.

*By Michelle Ruan, 17, Alhambra HS*

## NOT EATING OUT SAVES MONEY



*I don't spend that much so keeping track of my spending was easy. I get an allowance of \$30 a month and I usually save it for big events or presents.*

**Day 1** I worked for two hours at the library sorting and shelving books. Usually I go home and drink juice but I was so thirsty that I bought a can of soda for 75 cents after I was done.

**Day 2** I bought gardening gloves for \$20 as a present for my dad when I visit him in Korea (I live with my aunt and uncle).

**Day 3** During SAT prep class I bought a bag of chips for \$1 because I forgot my breakfast and was hungry.

**Day 6** On the Fourth of July, I bought a collared shirt for \$20.

I spent about \$42, which is a lot, but I had to buy a gift for my dad and I wanted to buy a shirt since I hadn't bought clothes in six months.

I didn't go anywhere special during the week. I hung out with my friends but we played basketball and hung out at someone's house playing video games and cooking instant ramen. I rarely eat out, which also made this assignment easy. Since my uncle and aunt rarely go out to eat, they told me that I should

eat out only on special occasions. I eat out with my friends only once a month, like when finals are over or when it's someone's birthday or when a good movie comes out. Sometimes it seems silly when everyone is eating and I'm not, but it helps me not to spend too much money.

In the summer I can go a week not spending anything. During the school year, I spend money on cookies or ice cream and forget about it. The next day, I ask myself, "Where's my \$2?" I don't realize how much I've spent until there's no money in my wallet. Maybe this school year I'll try not to buy snacks and instead bring food from home.

*By Ben Bang, 17,  
Palos Verdes Peninsula HS*

## HAVING FUN ISN'T CHEAP



*Knowing that I was going to have to keep track of my spending, I wanted to spend less money. My parents give me money and I set a budget of \$100, considerably*

*more than I usually spend in a week.*

*But I figured that it was summer and I'm entitled to a bit of fun.*

**Day 1** I needed summer clothes so I went to Old Navy. I could have bought only the one pair of shorts that I needed, but I ended up walking out with three pairs, a new bathing suit and two tops, spending roughly \$50.

**Days 2-4** For the rest of the week I tried to be more conscientious about my spending. When I hung out with my friends I chose to do inexpensive things like going to the park or walking through the mall. I spent about \$30 on food.

**Day 5** Friday cut severely into my budget. My friends and I went to Knott's Berry Farm. I spent \$60 for 10 hours of fun, a hamburger from Johnny Rockets, a funnel cake and Dippin' Dots.

I would like to say that I resisted the temptation of impulse spending, but I didn't. I tried to be reasonable, especially because I knew that I was going to have to record all that I bought. I didn't want to buy things that were unnecessary, but I went about \$40 over my budget. At first I felt guilty, but then I felt that the clothes, memories and fun were worth it.

*By Breanna Lujan, 17, West Covina HS*

## I HAD TO BORROW FROM MY PARENTS



*I barely had any money when I started this week, so it was interesting to see how much I borrowed or was given. It really made me conscious*

*of the fact that it is much better to make my own money instead of borrowing, especially because I am now in debt to my parents and would be in big trouble if they were in the mafia. Thankfully, they are not.*

**Day 1** I spent 50 cents for the bus each way to school (my parents pay my bus fare for school), and \$1.25 for the bus from my house to downtown for Art Walk with two friends. My mother gave me \$4. I spent \$3 on a vegan hot dog. When I pulled out my money to pay for it, a homeless man saw that I had an extra dollar and asked if he could have it. I gave it to him.

**Day 2** I went to school on the bus, but the driver didn't punch my card, so the ride was free. After school, I rode my bike to my friend's house and we went to a birthday party on the beach, so the evening was free. My dad picked me up.

**Day 3** I spent \$2 for an iced coffee on break from my art class.

**Day 5** Again the driver didn't punch my card on the bus to school. My dad picked me up. Came home, spent no money. Went to my job at a bakery, but they didn't need me, so I didn't earn any money, either.

**Day 6** 50 cents bus fare each way to school.

**Day 7** I went to see the new Harry Potter movie at 1 a.m. I paid for the ticket with a movie pass and paid \$20 for a taxi to get home, since neither my parents nor any of my friends' parents would pick us up at 4 a.m. when the movie got out. I got an advance on my allowance, plus some extra, from my dad for the taxi.

I don't like spending money, but I do like the results of spending it. I felt bad spending \$2 on an iced coffee because it's free at home, but it tasted good and I liked drinking it. I need to find a balance from now on.

*By Sam Landsberg, 16, Hamilton HS*

# SAVING FOR SOMETHING BETTER

*I decided a sweet 16 birthday party wasn't the best way to spend my hard-earned money*



**By Jean Park**

16, Harvard-Westlake School  
(North Hollywood)

When I got a job the summer before my sophomore year, my plan was to spend the money I earned on my 16th birthday party. I've always heard that your sweet 16 is supposed to be the most special, so I was so excited about it.

I wasn't the kind of person who had birthday parties. My parents usually baked me a cake and we celebrated at home. After sixth grade, my only birthday party was a dinner with a few friends in eighth grade, so I wanted my 16th birthday to be the one I'd always remember. I wanted a colorful party—the walls would be painted bright colors and there would be a disco ball reflecting circles of light around the room; the cake would have tons of rainbow sprinkles with all kinds of frosting. I wanted a DJ and lots of candy. I knew that my parents wouldn't want to spend lots of money because they think I'm too old for a big birthday party, so I really wanted a job so I could save up money for my party.

When I told my parents I wanted a job, they told me I should be more focused on studying rather than working, but they didn't say no. I wanted to show them that I wasn't going to ask for money, but was going to earn it.

One of my friends told me that I needed a work permit since I was only 15. I asked my school dean for one during the last month of school and got it signed by him and my parents. In July, I looked up information on web-

**I feel good knowing that I have money saved in the bank and it's increasing. I'm glad I'm learning to be responsible with my money.**

sites that help teenagers find jobs, like the best places to ask for a first job. The websites recommended small cafés, a fast-food joint or working as a busboy. I wasn't expecting a glamorous first job, so I wasn't discouraged when I found out that my best chances of getting a job were food-related. I read all the interview questions just in case I'd be asked on the spot and picked a weekend that I was free to walk around Glendale and ask about job openings.

I walked down Colorado Boulevard and walked into City Café, a small family-owned coffee shop. I asked if they were hiring, but the woman at the register said that they didn't hire minors. Then I walked into the Coffee Bean next door and they said they weren't hiring. I looked for signs that said "Help Wanted" and when I walked down further, there was a "Now Hiring" sign at a KFC. I wanted to make KFC my back-up choice because I really wanted to work at a café, which felt more relaxing and cozy because of the comfy chairs and cushioned stools. But it was already late in the afternoon so I walked into KFC and asked for an application and the manager came out to greet me.

He handed me an application and said that

they "didn't usually do this," but since it was only a summer job, he would let me apply even though I wasn't 16. I didn't want to sound too excited in front of him, but I had a huge smile on my face.

I went back home and I showed my parents the application, but they weren't as excited as I was because they didn't want me to have a job. The application asked for my personal information, like my address, social security number and contact information, and work/volunteer experience. I wrote in pencil just in case I made a mistake and went over it in pen.

## I HOPED THEY'D HIRE ME

I came back the next day and when I handed

ly had to do the women's restroom, but I had to mop the floors and make sure there were no paper towels or toilet paper on the floor. The manager had Oust, which is spray that kills bad odor. I used about half a bottle in one day because the bathrooms were so smelly.

Most of my work was cleaning up after people, but I loved it when people said "thank you." When I go to a restaurant, I either don't see the busboy because we leave before he gets to our table or we only thank the waiter. I felt really good when people thanked me because it meant that I was doing my job well.

After a couple weeks, I found quicker and smarter ways to do things. For washing the windows, I put towels at the bottom of the windowsill so that the water wouldn't spill on the tables or floors, but would soak into the towel. When I finished early, I learned more about the kitchen, like how they cook the chicken and make their potato wedges.

I got around \$90 for every paycheck, but my parents explained to me that taxes took away about 10 to 20 percent, so each week I got around \$75. I saved almost all of it, except when I went to a couple movies.

## LOOKING FOR THE PERFECT DRESS

When I had free time, I'd walk to the mall and look at the dresses in each store to see if there was one like the dress I had in mind. I wanted a strapless dress with the bottom like a tutu.

I saved up around \$490 by the end of the summer. I felt really good about the money I had earned and I thought about saving the money instead of blowing it all at once for my birthday. I thought a birthday party wasn't worth all the hours I worked and the number of times I had to clean the bathrooms.

My sophomore year was like a rollercoaster because there was unnecessary drama from friends, more work from school, and stress from my parents and teachers. When I had a tough day, I usually convinced myself that I would spend all my money on my birthday. Just thinking about all my friends there and the music made me feel better. My friends had lots of parties that year, since it was their 16th birthdays. There were dressy dance parties with DJs, chocolate fountains, bowls of candy, cupcakes, and even napkins with the birthday girl's name on them. My friends and I would dance and

pig out. I know I'll never forget what everything looked like and how much fun I had. It sometimes felt like I was celebrating my own birthday.

Because of that, I decided not to spend my money for my 16th birthday in March. Instead, I had a small dinner, which my grandparents paid for, at Castaway with my family and a few close friends. I don't regret it at all. My best friend Rachel was there and everyone laughed the whole dinner. There was an outdoor patio and Rachel and I went outside after dinner and talked for two hours, partially because we wanted our food to digest before dessert. We talked about guys, of course, and our summer plans after our senior year. Then we went back inside, where everyone else was talking, and ordered the best molten chocolate cake that everyone shared. My mom said that she'd only cheat on her diet on my birthday because she knows how much I love sweets.

I was still deciding what to do with my money, so later I talked to my friends and they helped me decide to save what I'd earned and maybe dip into it only for college or emergencies. They told me that if they had money that they worked for, they would definitely save it.

This summer I wanted another job because I liked the feeling of earning money. It made me feel grown up because the other workers trusted me and rarely treated me like a kid. I walked down to the Ralphs three blocks from my house, and asked the manager what my chances were of getting a job. He said that he might have an opening, but I'd have to apply online first.

They pay around \$8.55 an hour. I'm so glad that I was able to get a job because of the economy. I started off as a "cleaning technician," which I later found out was a janitor. I am also going to start bagging groceries when some of the college students go back to school. I want to work during 11th grade just on the weekends. My parents still don't want me to work, especially during school since I'll be extra busy, but they say, "We'll see," and I hope I can handle having a job during the school year.

#### I PLAN TO SPEND SOME BUT SAVE A LOT

I want to save money from this job maybe to help pay for college, but I also want to spend a little shopping for clothes I need or eating at a restaurant with my friends, but not splurging on things I don't really need. It's easier for me than my friends to save because I don't go shopping a lot. When I do go shopping, I have a hard time because I think that

everything is overpriced. I love the clothes at Urban Outfitters, but there are tank tops for up to \$50 so I look for clothes on sale. But to keep from even spending a dollar, I tell myself I want to save a certain amount before I spend some of it. Right now, my goal is \$650 and I have around \$570.

My parents have always told me that they give up a lot for my brother and me and now I realize that they can't keep most of what they earn at work because it goes to pay for school tuition, house payments, taxes, gas and house bills. From working and talking to my parents, I've learned that money is valuable, not just because you can buy things with it, but because money keeps me in school and puts food on our table.

I feel good knowing that I have money saved in the bank and it's increasing. I know I won't spend it because I don't keep the money in my wallet. It's like when you're on a diet; you won't be tempted to eat sweets if they aren't in your refrigerator or cabinets. I'm glad that I'm learning to be responsible with my money. Although money isn't the most important thing in the world, it is valuable and saving it has benefits.

#### WEBSITES TO HELP YOU SAVE

##### BANK OF AMERICA'S THE MORRIS CODE

Info on budgeting, what credit is and how to save for college.

##### MONEY TALKS

Take quizzes about your spending habits, get saving tips and learn how to open a savings account.

Go to [layout.com](http://layout.com) to find links to these websites, plus read about more teens who tracked their spending for a week.



*Jean says learning the value of money will help her not waste it in the future.*

# MONEY Q&A

## Expert advice on how to spend wisely and save for the future

**By Sylvana Insua-Rieger**

18, Beverly Hills HS (2009 graduate)

*I interviewed Maria Beckman at Bank of America to find out what to save money for and how to do it.*

**Sylvana: What is a budget and how do I set one up?** Bank of America: A budget is a plan that you have that takes into account the money you have coming in or your income (allowance, part-time job), and subtracting your fixed expenses (non-negotiable things that you have to pay for, like paying your own cell phone bill). From your budget, you can figure out what you need to spend, and what you can save. That's the essence of a budget.

**What are some easy ways to not spend so much money?** That's a tough one, since we live in an age of instant gratification! The easiest way is to learn how to distinguish what you want from what you need. Ask yourself the question: What'll happen if I don't buy it? If your life doesn't fall apart, then it's something that you want, not something you really need. Or you can try waiting a couple of days. If you don't need it, then don't buy it.

**How do I open a savings account? Do I need my parents with me? What's the difference between a savings account and a checking account?** You don't need your parents to open most student savings accounts. If you want a checking account, then you do, because you need to be 18 or older to open one on your own. A savings account always pays you interest, and there are usually a limited number of withdrawals you can make. A checking account can be accessed with checks, ATM or debit card. It may or may not pay interest. Opening up savings accounts takes about 15 minutes [at the bank]. The interest will vary. Right now, interest is not that high because of the current economy.

**What are the benefits of saving my money instead of spending it all?** If you save your money, you're putting it to work and it can grow for you. If you save money consistently, you could be able to buy a car. But if you

can't save for a car because every day you have that Starbucks or treat your friends to McDonald's every afternoon, then you have nothing substantial to show for your money.

**How do you resist spending money on useless things?** If you have a list of what you're saving for, then when you think of buying that useless thing, you can think, "If this is \$15, how long until I have enough for what I want?" Avoid that impulse buying, and remember to distinguish between want and need.

**What should we be saving money for? I have \$1,000 in the bank but it won't make a dent in my college costs so should I save for something else like a car?** We want to make sure we're saving for both. One thousand dollars won't make a dent in your college tuition, but if you start saving early, then you could make a substantial contribution. I recommend that students shop for a used car so it's easier for you to save for it, and you get it sooner.

**How do I talk to my parents about saving for college?** That's a great question. I guarantee that your parents will really appreciate your help because it's getting tougher for parents to save for college on their own, so if the student wants to contribute, that's fantastic. You could try saying, "I really want to go to college, and I know you want me to go too. What can we do so that we can save and I can go to the college of my choice?" The website The Morris Code (<http://promotions.bankofamerica.com/oncampus/themorriscode/>) is designed specifically for teens. It answers questions about how to save for college and your financial options. It was set up by Bank of America.

**How much should you have saved to pay for college?** It depends on where you want to go to college. UCs can be less expensive than a lot of the private schools because they are subsidized by the government (because they are state universities). That's why it's so important to have this conversation with your parents, so that you can talk about whether you need a full scholarship or not, and what you can do to save.

**By Taylor Moore**  
15, Westchester HS

**W**hen I'm in a good mood, you can always catch me dancing. When my friends Rwanda, Victoria and I hit a good fore-hand or backhand when our coach is feeding us balls at tennis practice, we do the hip-hop dance jerking. It's like my victory dance.

Music makes me want to move. When I listen to the beats, they get me pumped to move my feet. I love trying new dances and testing myself to make sure I can do them. I change it up to put the "Taylor" signature on it. Dancing has changed so much. The Harlem shake came from the East, Soulja Boy is Southern and now we're West Coast with all the good dances, krumping and jerking.

The first hip-hop dance that was so cool to me was the Harlem shake, when you shake your shoulders with your arms straight and down. I did it when I was in elementary school whenever I listened to Bow Wow's song, "Bounce With Me," because he always did it in his music videos. My cousin, Morgan, and I made up a dance to the theme song of the Disney show *Kim Possible* by mixing dances together that were popular for a minute and died down.

When I was in middle school, one of my favorite dances was the chicken head. It was funny. You would pump your arms and jerk your head and feet back. People say it looks like you're about to break your neck. I also liked chicken noodle soup, which was named after a song by one-hit wonder Young B, when you jump side to side while crossing your arms in front and behind you. You've gotta do it fast. When I heard the name of that dance, I thought whoever made it up was eating cup of noodles and dancing at the same time "with a soda on the side."

When E-40's "Tell Me When To Go" came out in middle school, everyone was krumping. Krumping music is filled with hard beats. Krumping is when you jump all over the place and move your arms really hard as if you are going to punch someone. It is a violent-looking dance, but no one gets hurt. I used to mix it up with belly dancing so I wouldn't look so rough; I added girl flavor to it. When we had our school dances, we had a battle zone, where everybody would compete to see who could krump better. I would scream with everyone else to determine who had the hottest moves (whoever got the loudest screams won). It was fun to watch because I liked to see people mix it up with their own moves.

My freshman year, I lived in Texas, and I realized how all the Southern dances come out there before coming to L.A. The Soulja Boy was huge all year. It's a dance to Soulja Boy's song

"Crank That" with jumping around, crossing your legs and doing the Superman. My friends and I did it everywhere—at home, outside when we were playing and every time my cousins came over. We did it at the Welcome Back dance and Winter Formal. Everyone would get out there and do it.

Now that I'm back in L.A., I jerk all the time. When I first heard the word "jerking" I was like, "whaaaaat?" I thought it was another word for "let's get this party started" because people would say "let's get it jerkin'." When I heard that jerking was a type of dance, I thought I could definitely come up with a new dance, all I need is a unique name. If the people who created chicken noodle soup or the chicken head could do that, I can make a dance move called chicken and ranch. When I eat chicken, I like to have ranch with it, so I should make up another chicken dance. Simple as that.

#### JERKING WAS EASY TO LEARN

Jerking is the most fun because anybody can do it. Your feet should be apart, one foot in front of the other, and your knees bent. Move your legs in and out so your knees almost touch as you cross your arms back and forth at the wrist with your hands in a fist. To look good, move your torso forward and backward. I make it my own style by making weird faces or changing up what I do with my hands.

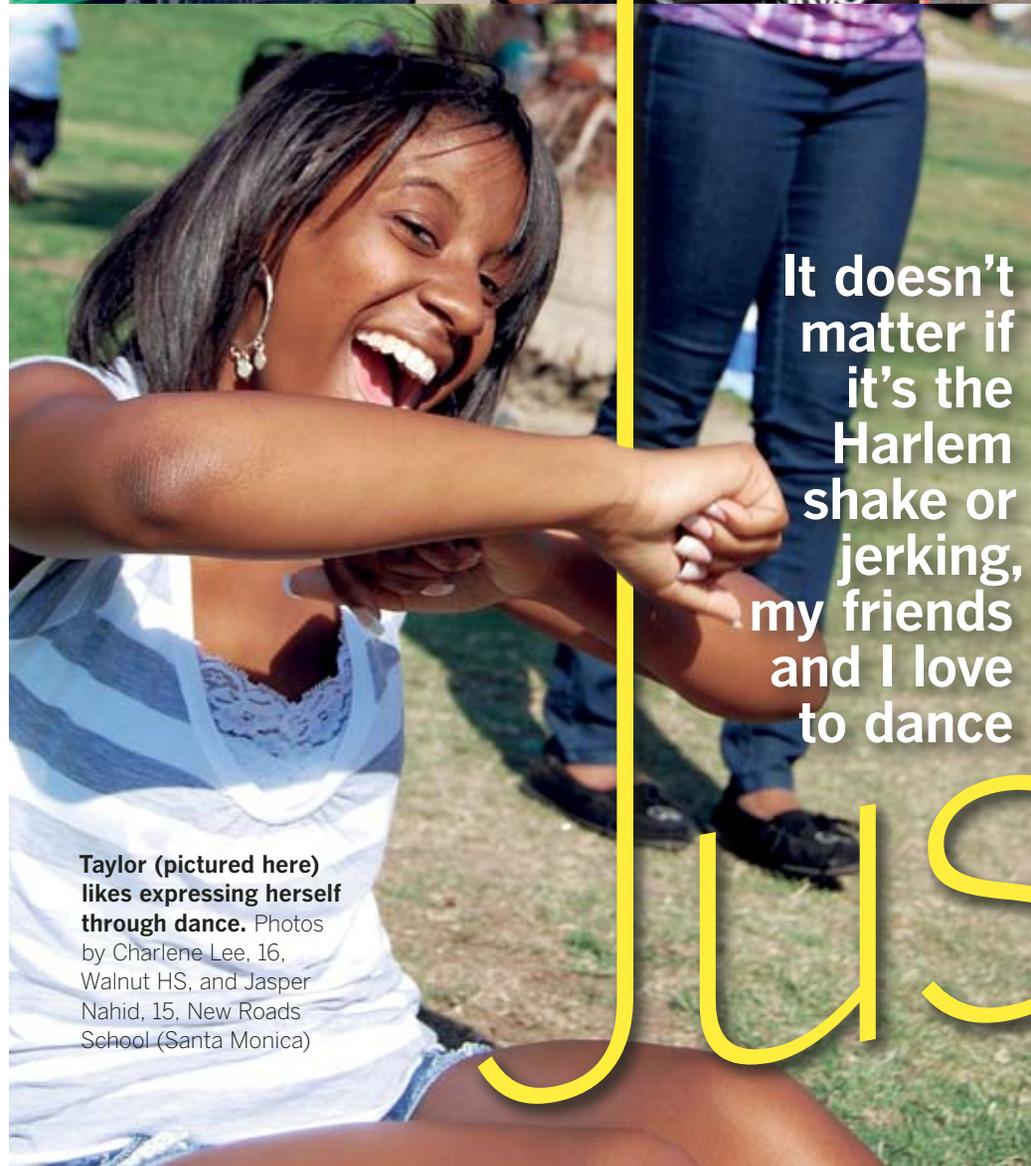
The reject, SpongeBob, pin drop and tippy toes are all part of the jerking family. The reject was the most difficult for me until I got the hang of it. Everyone says it is the backwards running man (a dance popular in the late 80s), but it's not that easy. The first time I tried it, I was coming out of Chili's and my cousin was trying to teach me. I fell flat on my butt. I was so embarrassed because people were looking at me. Now that I am finally able to do it, I'm rejecting all over the place—at home, parties and people's houses.

My friend, Ashonde, and I made a YouTube video of us jerking because we were bored and had a camera, and decided to have fun. I jerk with my brother, Omari, who is 10, and my 4-year-old sister, Nia. When Omari and I are doing our chores, we blast music and start jerking. Even Nia dances.

Jerking won't last forever. My friends say it's going to die soon. What's next for hip-hop dancing? Is it the chicken and ranch? Or ...



*Taylor says the next time you're at a dance, don't be a wallflower and have fun with it.*



It doesn't matter if it's the Harlem shake or jerking, my friends and I love to dance

**Taylor (pictured here) likes expressing herself through dance.** Photos by Charlene Lee, 16, Walnut HS, and Jasper Nahid, 15, New Roads School (Santa Monica)



Go to [layouth.com](http://layouth.com) to watch Taylor's dance demonstration

# Should I be afraid?

I didn't know what to do when harassing phone calls turned into threats

## Author's name withheld

After some problems with my classmates and grades at my old school, I needed to start over in the middle of sophomore year. So I transferred to a new high school and everything seemed perfect until a boy wouldn't leave me alone.

It started innocently when I gave a boy in one of my classes, Jake\*, my phone number. When he asked for it he said that it was just for "school purposes," which I assumed meant homework. He called me that day and asked about my day, my plans and if there was any homework I needed help on. I thought he was being friendly.

But after two weeks of almost daily calls it became irritating, especially when he asked about my personal life. "How many boyfriends have you had? Do you still talk to them? Why'd you guys break up?" It was ridiculous that this guy I barely knew was prying into my life. I changed the subject every time. By the third week, I had told him dozens of times to stop calling, but he called anyway. I started screening my calls, but sometimes he called from a number that came up as "private" or "unknown" on my phone. When I answered those calls I made things up to get off the phone.

In class, I did my best to avoid him. My friend and I developed a system for her to come pull me away when she saw him around me. Our system worked, but part of me pitied him because nobody at school seemed to like him. Sometimes I felt so bad for Jake that I talked to him. Looking back I see that my actions weren't clear. I had told him to stop calling yet I sometimes picked up when he called and I talked to him, too.

In March, Jake asked me to the Sadie Hawkins Dance even though it was supposed to be the girls who ask the guys. I made up an excuse and declined. The week after, he asked me to go to the movies with him. I told him I didn't feel comfortable going with him alone. He invited one of his friends and one of mine, so it would be a "group hang out." I had my friend lie to him and tell him that she couldn't go. And if she couldn't go, neither could I.

Soon after, I stopped answering my phone, except sometimes to tell him to stop calling. Those times, when he would beg me not to hang up, I made up excuses like "My dad just

came home, I have to go" or "My brother needs to borrow my phone."

### I FELT BAD ABOUT REJECTING HIM

Sometimes though I didn't hang up on him because my pity for him won out. Those times he liked to tell me how bad his day went, how he has girl problems. "I like this girl and she doesn't like me back. I asked her to the movies and her friend tells me no for her. What should I do?"

Having Jake refer to me as that girl who rejected him made me feel like a jerk. I wondered if other girls had to deal with guys like this. I had no idea whether his behavior was normal.

I didn't tell my parents about it because I didn't think they would understand. I told a couple of my friends from my old school and they told me to transfer. I wanted to, but that wasn't an option. My parents had told me when I transferred schools that they didn't want to go through that again because it was a lot of work for them.

Things got scary around the end of April of my sophomore year. Jake called and I decided to pick up because I didn't want to be mean, but after 15 minutes I told him I had to go.

"Talk to me, or I'll cut myself," he replied. I was too stunned to say anything. Then he said: "Sometimes, I want to die." He sounded

sad and serious. His voice was quiet.

Cutting wasn't a joke to me. I used to cut myself when I got upset. I didn't hang up because I didn't know whether he was serious. I thought that if I listened to him, he wouldn't start cutting like I did. Even though he scared me, I wanted to be someone I wished had been there for me.

I felt as if I would be responsible if anything happened. I had rejected him when he asked me to go to the movies and to the dance, and now he said that he would hurt himself if I continued to reject him.

*\*Names have been changed.*



Illustration  
by Michelle Paik,  
17, Palos Verdes  
Peninsula HS

After a minute of silence, I asked him, "Why would you do that?"

Jake just changed the subject. "Have you started your homework yet? Oh, my friend is here, I have to go, bye."

Part of me thought that he was playing some kind of really sick joke on me, that it was all an act to get my attention. The other part of me thought that I didn't know him well enough to judge and I also didn't know what he was capable of.

The next day, I told my school guidance counselor everything. She told me she was going to talk to Jake's guidance counselor and get everything straightened out. She asked me if I was ever more than just friends with him. I said, "No." She also asked me if it was a bad joke because she knew I used to cut. I told her I didn't know. She was the only adult I told. After talking to my guidance counselor for an hour, I felt better.

After a few days of not seeing him in class, I asked my guidance counselor if she had talked to his guidance counselor and she said no. I was frustrated and disappointed. She then brought in an assistant principal, who had me write a statement of everything that happened. It ended up being about five pages; my mind was racing as I wrote.

The assistant principal later had my friend Sarah, who had witnessed things that happened

was going to rape me "over and over again."

My heart stopped. I was speechless. I was angry with Sarah for not saying anything to an administrator.

"It's a joke, don't overreact," she said.

I was scared all over again. I kept asking my friend Leslie, who was sitting next to me, if I had heard Sarah right. Leslie said that I had heard correctly. After fifth period, I left my counselor a note saying I needed to talk to her.

That whole week I was terrified. At school, I spent all my time in a classroom or with a group of friends. I couldn't get a hold of my guidance counselor because she was unavailable. I didn't tell my parents because we've always had a distant relationship. I didn't tell anyone besides my best friend, Jenny, and my boyfriend. They both suggested I call the police. I had thought that too, but I didn't have proof. It was "he said, she said." I also thought of telling the assistant principal but I remembered him telling me last semester, "Unless he does something to you, ignore it." I believed the school wouldn't do anything because he physically didn't do anything to me.

By the time my guidance counselor got back to my "I need to talk to you note," a week had passed. I told her what happened. She suggested I talk to a different assistant principal and give her the name of the girl who had told me about it. I felt uncomfortable involving my

est thing ever. Some kid basically stalked me and was obsessed with me and had said he'd rape me and we were going to have a peer mediation?!

I felt the room closing in on me when I saw both Sarah and Jake come in. We all had a chance to say what we thought about what happened. What was scary was neither Sarah nor Jake saw this as something serious. I felt anxious when they seemed so dismissive of what Jake had said, because rape is a felony and a horrible and violent crime. Sarah rolled her eyes and said, "I don't see it as a problem and I wouldn't care if someone said that to me." Jake claimed it was a joke. The assistant principal was convinced that Jake meant no harm.

#### ALL I GOT WAS AN APOLOGY

After that, the assistant principal decided that it was not a threat and it was more of an "educational experience." He let Jake go with a warning to stay away from me. The assistant principal highly recommended Jake apologize to Sarah and me.

"Sorry," he whispered. The assistant principal recommended I accept his apology. I didn't want to but I knew that if I didn't, I would cause drama. So I accepted it. I felt the administrators just wanted to make this go away.

The principal wanted to call my parents to let them know what was going on, but he changed his mind. He felt that nobody was hurt, and it wasn't a big issue. I didn't tell my parents about it because my parents wouldn't understand.

I feel that this whole thing could have been prevented if only I had ignored him from the beginning or if I had told someone who cared sooner. When he complained about me indirectly, I should've stood up for myself and told him I was going to tell someone he was harassing me.

But I think schools should not be passive about threats and harassment because both should be taken seriously. My senior year, I suggested to the new assistant principal that the school do more to prevent threats and unwanted attention. All he did was add a slide about threats and harassment to his PowerPoint presentation about school rules that they show once a semester.

My advice to teens is to talk to an adult when you feel like you're in over your head. Trying to cope with everything on your own is not as effective as getting help. Write down everything that happens and file a police report if the school does not work with you to come to a resolution. Don't make the same mistakes I did.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT CELL PHONE ABUSE

If you feel like someone is abusing or controlling you with a cell phone, or you want to prevent it from ever happening, here are some tips from Break the Cycle, an organization dedicated to preventing dating violence.

- Remember, it is always OK to turn off your phone. (Just be sure your parent or guardian knows how to contact you in an emergency.)
- Do not answer calls from unknown numbers. Someone can easily call you from another line if he/she suspects you are avoiding him/her.
- Do not respond to hostile, harassing, abusive or inappropriate texts or messages. You won't get the person to stop. Responding can encourage the person who sent the message and your messages might make it harder to get a restraining order or file a criminal report.
- Many phone companies can block up to 10 numbers from texting or calling you. Contact your phone company or check their website to see if you can do this on your phone.
- Remember that pictures on cell phones can be easily shared and distributed. Be careful what images you allow to be taken of you from a camera phone.
- If the abuse and harassment will not stop, changing your phone number may be your best option.

—SOURCE: [THEsafespace.org](http://THEsafespace.org)

## WHERE TO TURN

If you are being abused or harassed over the phone, online or in person, these organizations can help you:

**breakthecycle.org** (provides legal services and counseling)

**thesafespace.org** (learn how to protect yourself from dating violence)

If you need immediate help, call the **National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline** at 1-866-331-9474

*That whole week I was terrified. I remembered the assistant principal telling me last semester, "Unless he does something to you, ignore it." I believed the school wouldn't do anything because he physically didn't do anything to me.*

between Jake and me, write a statement. She was angry at me because I involved her.

The assistant principal told me, "Unless he does something to you, ignore it." I didn't have any contact with Jake for the rest of the school year. I'm not sure whether any administrators talked to him, but he stopped trying to talk to me.

#### HE TOLD SOMEONE HE'D HURT ME

As my junior year started, I didn't see him around and I hoped I wouldn't because I wanted to put everything behind me. But in late September, I was having lunch in the courtyard when Sarah told me that Jake told her that he

friend again, because she wasn't very happy the last time. So I talked to Sarah before talking to the administrators again.

But now she changed her story and said that Jake threatened to rape her and not me. Luckily Leslie was a witness and confirmed what I said. I was angry at Sarah for changing her story. We immediately stopped talking and we no longer shared lockers or had lunch together. Leslie and I continued to have lunch together and she was supportive and told me that I was doing what any normal person would do.

Eventually the school had Jake, Sarah and I meet in the assistant principal's office and come up with a solution. I thought it was the stupid-

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Turn to page 27  
to read Francisco's  
review of Asher  
Roth's debut CD.



**L.A.** Youth has given me an opportunity to showcase my art to hundreds of thousands of people. I have had four comics, four illustrations and five CD reviews published in the newspaper. Without L.A. Youth, my art would have remained in my sketchbook. Even better, the kids at my school would see my artwork in the paper and compliment me.

L.A. Youth has also given me the opportunity to discuss current events with other teens, like the war in Iraq and the 2008 presidential election. At school we're busy studying history and other subjects, and we never have the chance to discuss issues like these. I also like that at the weekly staff meetings I've met teens from other parts of L.A. County who are different from the kids I go to school with.

L.A. Youth has taught me to become a better writer, too. I am more confident expressing my ideas on paper than I was before I joined.

—Francisco Sandoval,  
17, Nogales HS (La Puente)

# L.A. youth

[www.layouth.com](http://www.layouth.com)

# Making food for the hungry

I felt good knowing the peaches we dried would help feed people around the world



Photo by Dorothy Yamaguchi, 13, homeschooled

**By Audrey Hahn**  
15, Cleveland HS (Reseda)

Last April, my church friend, Amanda, invited me to join her on a trip to rural central California to work on a food assembly line. The destination was Gleanings, a nonprofit organization that creates and packages food for poor communities all over the world. You might think that's the last way I'd want to spend a week of summer vacation, but I was ecstatic!

Ever since I was a little kid, I would be nearly in tears whenever there was a "help the hungry" commercial on TV. My family was already sending money to support a teenage boy in the Dominican Republic and a little girl in Guatemala. I was concerned about the other kids in the world and last spring I even gave a speech in school about world hunger. I shared that 9 million people die each year from malnutrition and hunger. Of that 9 million, 5 million of them are children. I declared, "We must take action!" I wanted to help those poor families but I never knew how. Now I had the chance.

At Gleanings, volunteers spend a week drying peaches and packing soup mixes to send to hungry families in 40 countries like South Africa, Guatemala and North Korea. Amanda had

volunteered at Gleanings for the past four years, and since we attended the same church, she would always talk about her trips there.

My mom decided to volunteer too and I was excited and nervous about the week-long trip. In the car on the way to Gleanings, I wondered, would Amanda's friends like me? Would the people there make me work until I can't move another muscle? Was the food we packaged really going to reach people around the world?

I looked through the car window and saw countless rows of corn, peach trees and apple trees. Finally, after a nearly four-hour trip, we arrived in a town called Dinuba. Gleanings had an outdoor food assembly line with a roof, a building where soup mix is made, cabin-like dorms, a dining hall and mobile homes where the permanent staff lived.

## WE WORKED ALL DAY LONG

More than 150 people volunteered during the week we were there. The daily schedule was organized: 6:30 a.m. wake up, 7:30 breakfast, and by around 8:30, we started the work. There was one 15-minute break between lunch and dinner, and work ended around 5:30.

I spent most of my time working at the peach assembly line. The loud screeching of the assembly line machine sounded like metal rub-

bing together. The commands from Fritz, the man in charge at the assembly line, were even louder. We patiently waited for him to call out "Break time!" I was thankful there was a roof over the line. Outside, the heat reached 100 degrees, but under the roof it was cooler.

At the assembly line there were six stations. The first station was called inspection. We would look over the peaches on the conveyor belt, taking out the bruised peaches and dropping them in the trash. It was one of the best jobs because the line moved slower than at other stations and sometimes it would stop so the peaches wouldn't get backed up. Once, our friend picked up a bad peach and tossed it to Amanda and then she threw it to me. At first we were playing catch nicely, but then he started throwing several peaches and aiming at our faces and arms. We were angry, but then we thought it was funny. I ended up hitting him in the face. Jackpot!

Then there were stations where the peaches were cut and the cores were removed. After the coring station, the peaches would roll down onto square wooden boards. We would spread out the peaches and flip them so that the insides of the peaches were facing up so they wouldn't stick to the wood while drying. The peaches were mushy and sticky and hard

to hold on to, like a wet bar of soap.

We were working so fast I was sweating even though I was right next to a huge fan. I worried that my sweat would drip onto the peaches. Yuck. On top of that, I got splinters every 10 minutes. I used about 25 Band-Aids and I visited the first-aid room so often that the nurse knew my name. Even though I'd get tired, I'd remember what the purpose of being there was. I was doing something that would feed hungry people.

I also helped package dry soup mix. The soup mix building was much more laid back because there were no machines and it was air-conditioned. The smell of garlic was so strong that whenever I went on break from the soup mix station, everyone near me would know without asking where I'd worked. Here, we scooped the soup mix that had already been made by the staff members into large Ziploc bags. The bags had to be air-tight. I'd lean on the bags and pat them to get the air out. One time, my friend sat on a bag, assuming that this would help squeeze the air out. Instead, the bag busted open and the soup mix shot everywhere.

## THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE WOULD EAT THE FOOD WE MADE

After drying for a week or so, the peaches would be ready. By the end of the week our group had prepared 38,000 pounds of peaches. I helped make 1 million servings of food for the hungry. I didn't think our small group could do so much in a week. It felt good to be part of that.

On the last day, I wished it wasn't over. On my trip back home, I think I told my mom about 10 times that I wanted to return. She yelled back, "OK! I heard you Audrey. Haha! It's clear that someone in this car enjoyed this trip."

I don't watch those world hunger commercials with a sense of helplessness anymore. And I don't complain about what we're having for dinner. Whether it's my least favorite vegetable soup or a tasteless salad, I learned to appreciate what I have. I live in a comfortable home with running water and a refrigerator that is always packed. What more could I ask for when miles from me, a girl my age would do anything to eat a small bowl of that vegetable soup or salad?



*Audrey likes that she can also help close to home by volunteering with her church to feed the homeless.*

# I no longer feel worthless

After years of being teased, the support I got at a new school helped me become confident and happy

**By Tanya Lopez**

*14, Logsdon School (Rosemead)*

I was born with a physical disability. Three of my fingers on my left hand are very small. It's hard to hold things, like my tray at lunch, and I need people to help me to do stuff like make my bed and carry my laundry basket.

In elementary school, the kids would tease me about my hand almost every day. I used to go home and tell my mom the kids were making fun of me and cry. My mom would meet with my teachers to try to solve it, but it didn't help. The kids just thought I was a snitch. I wanted friends but the only kid who played with me was this boy who took me by the hand one day and we started jumping rope.

What made me feel worse was that my dad left when I was a kid. I thought he left because of my hand. I thought nobody loved me. Sometimes I prayed, "Please God, make me a new life." But it didn't work.

I wished that the people who were bullying me would understand that it hurts to be bullied. When I was in fifth grade the kids were saying a boy wouldn't like me because of my hand unless I kissed him. I didn't want to do it. "Ha ha, he doesn't like you because of your hand." I was so red.

I couldn't handle it anymore. I went up the stairs and walked to the railing. I was hanging onto the rails and was about to jump. The school therapist ran over and said, "Calm down, everything's going to be all right." It made me angry. I didn't believe him. Then the cops came and grabbed my wrists and helped me down.

I went to a mental hospital for two weeks. When I left, the hospital recommended that I go to a new school. It was smaller. I didn't get teased and it was fun. I was there for one month. At my fifth grade graduation we sang R. Kelly's "I Believe I Can Fly" and Vitamin C's "Graduation (Friends Forever)."

For middle school, I went to a special ed school. I liked it at first. There were fewer kids, 15-20 in a classroom instead of 30. When I got there the kids asked, "What's your name?" "Do



*Continued on page 22*

Illustration by Lily Clark, 15, Immaculate Heart HS

# Calling all foster youth in Los Angeles County

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Foster Youth Editor Amanda Riddle (left) works with Sally on her story.



Contact Editor Amanda Riddle at

★ **(323) 938-9194**  
or [ariddle@layouth.com](mailto: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](http://layouth.com) and click on the Foster Youth link to learn more and read stories written by foster youth.

Continued from page 20

you want to eat lunch with us?" Then after a month the kids started being mean. I think it was because new kids came and the school started getting crowded. The boys would say, "Look at her hand. She's weird."

One girl was a bully. She would trip and de-pants people. I stayed away from her when I'd see her. But she'd still come over and call me Frankenstein and Freddy Krueger. Sometimes I'd tell her to stop but she wouldn't. It went on and on. She would whisper it in class. And then the other kids would call me that. The worst was when I was talking to a boy I liked and all of a sudden the girl pulled down my shorts. The boy saw my underwear and started laughing. I went to the locker room and covered my face.

#### I KEPT MY HURT FEELINGS INSIDE

I didn't talk to anyone about being bullied. I never told the teachers because I didn't want to be called a snitch again. When my mom saw I was sad she asked me "What's wrong?" I would say "nothing" because I didn't want her to talk to the principal. But I wanted to talk to someone. I felt like I was trapped.

Then one day I was sent to the principal's office and I didn't know why. He said, "Let me see your cell phone." I asked, "What's going on?" "Someone said you sent an inappropriate message to him." There was a nasty message sent to me from a classmate about having phone sex. They were trying to get me in trouble. The kids who sent me the message and I got suspended for a week. I was mad. It wasn't fair. The kids and the principal blamed it on me but I didn't do anything. It was messed up.

Later that day at my mom's work, we were leaving and my stepdad told me to get in the car. I started banging on the car window saying, "Let me out." I wanted to run away from my problems. I was upset because there was too much on my mind—the teasing, people accusing me. I blamed my mom for putting me in that school. I yelled at her, "I hate you mom." I got out of the car and ran into the street. One car stopped and its brakes screeched—it almost hit me. That scared me but I kept running. My mom was chasing me in the car. They had to call the cops and an ambulance to take me to the mental hospital again.

I stayed there for a month but I didn't go back home. They were worried that if I went home I might run into the street again. So I went to a locked treatment center where I couldn't leave the grounds by myself. The long hallways and rooms reminded me of the mental hospital, but there was a school and instead of nurses there were staff who were strict.

I was scared about being in a new place. I thought the other kids might bully me. I would pull the sleeves of my sweater down to hide my

*When I was younger I just wanted people to be kind to me and I wanted friends. I wanted to be happy. I have that now. In group meetings, we stand up and hold each other's hands. The kids squeeze my hand. It makes me feel like they support me. When I'm having a bad day they say, "Keep your head up, don't give up."*

hand or put my hand in my pocket. A few weeks later I told the kids, "I've been teased a lot" and I showed them my hand. I felt scared, what would they think? They asked me what happened. I told them, "I was born this way." They didn't make fun of me. They said not to worry.

Even though the kids were nice, I really wanted to go home. I missed my mom. I could see her for only three hours a week. I couldn't feel the love from a good-night kiss, her putting a blanket over me when I was asleep and her home-cooked food like tamales and enchiladas. Instead there were staff members saying, "She doesn't act good," watching me 24 hours a day! It felt like jail.

I was sad and acting up because I wanted to go home. I hit the staff. One day I drank shampoo. I started vomiting. They gave me a liquid to flush my stomach. I wasn't thinking, I just did it. Looking back, it feels like a different person. At the time I was having problems.

Another time I ran out the front door. I got across the street and the staff caught me. I was crying. They asked me why I did that. I said, "Because I want to leave."

I went to court so the judge could see how I was doing. I told the judge and my lawyer, "I miss my mom and I want to go home." The judge said, "You're not going to go home if you keep doing this." They made a contract with me that if I did good, the group home would let me visit my family on the weekends. I decided to start doing good because I wanted to see my family.

It was hard but I tried to do good. The staff was there for me. I'd be crying or tell them I want to go off because I missed my family. They'd say, "Remember your contract." When I was upset they'd ask, "What's wrong? Can I talk to you?" That helped because I used to keep my feelings inside. If you keep it inside it builds up and you explode. They helped me express myself in words instead of going off and yelling, hitting people and running away.

#### THE KIDS LISTENED AND DIDN'T JUDGE ME

Having support from the kids helped me too. We have group meetings where we talk about our problems. My therapist Leah told me it would help me if I talked about my feelings. I'd say, "I'm having a hard day." The staff would say, "Does anybody support Tanya?" and the kids would raise their hands. They really cared about me.

A few weeks after I'd gone to court, my therapist recommended that I be allowed to go on visits with my family. She said I had improved. She could see that I was trying. The court said OK.

I couldn't wait until Saturdays to see my family. My mom always cheered me up. We'd go to downtown L.A. and buy stuff for her work, like balloons. We'd go to Salvadorian restaurants and eat. We'd visit my aunts. Sometimes we'd stay at home. My mom showed me how to cook pupusas and tamales. I needed help from my mom to roll the dough because of my hand. I'm a mamma's girl. I feel happy when I'm with my family. When I came back to the treatment center I wouldn't miss my family as much because I got to spend time with them. It made being there easier.

When I was younger I just wanted people to be kind to me and I wanted friends. I wanted to be happy. I have that now. In group meetings, we stand up and hold each other's hands. The kids hold my hand and squeeze it. It makes me feel like they're not scared of me and they support me. They've been through a lot, like family problems and school problems. The kids understand me here because all of us have problems. When I'm having a bad day they say, "Keep your head up, don't give up."

My closest friends are Victoria and my roommate Gabby. When we go on outings, Victoria,

Gabby, another girl Rosalie and me get in the back seat of the van and wave at the people in their cars. It's fun. Gabby, who is three years older than me and has a son, lets me call her "mom." She said, "You can be my daughter." When I'm having a hard day she's there for me. Like when everybody wanted me to charge their iPod (because I had a charger and they didn't). They kept coming to the door of my room every morning and waking me up. They were using me but I was too shy to say anything. At a group meeting, Gabby said, "Can you please stop asking Tanya to charge your iPod?" I never had someone stand up for me. I felt like I had someone on my side. Before I used to think I wasn't going to have any friends. Now I have friends.

After I had been here a year and a half, the staff said I was ready to leave. They said I'd matured a lot. They found me a group home with fewer restrictions. If I do good eventually I'll get to go home. In group, the staff told everyone, "Tanya's leaving for sure." Rosalie said, "Don't leave Tanya." It made me feel so good.

#### NOW I CAN BE THERE FOR OTHERS

I think it was good that I came here. I feel like I'm a new person. I'm happy, caring, I make people laugh when they're sad and listen to them when they're having a bad day. One day Gabby was having problems and was crying. I came up to her and asked, "What's wrong?" I held her and she cried on me. The next day she told me, "Thank you for comforting me." I felt happy and proud that I could help other people.

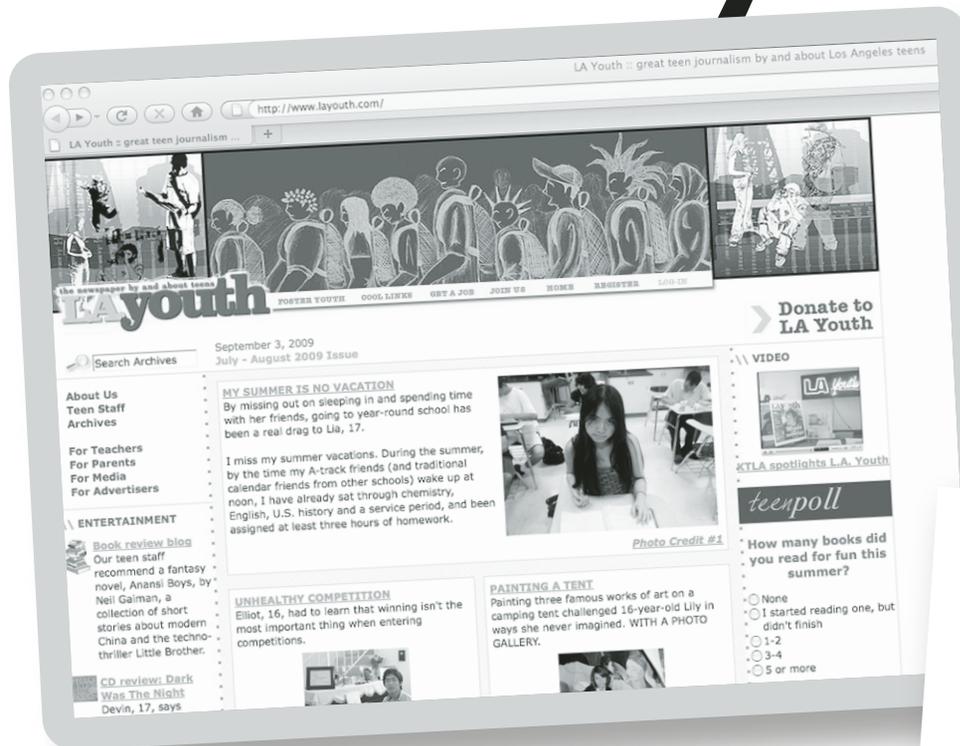
I appreciate all the staff for being there for me. I want to say to the kids, thank you for accepting me. They showed me that everyone has problems and you can get through it. Now if people ask about my hand I say that God sent me like that. I don't hide it. When someone teases me I ignore it or I stand up for myself. Before I couldn't do that because I was scared of what they would say. I'm not embarrassed anymore. I accept myself now. I'm proud of what I've achieved.

My past was sad but I recovered. It doesn't matter how you're born or what people think of you, what matters is what's inside.



*Tanya says to treat others how you want to be treated.*

# Check out these stories ...only online



**The summer was busy at L.A. Youth. Even though we don't print the paper, our teen staff kept writing. Every week we updated our website. We had new stories, movie and book reviews, and reactions to Michael Jackson's death. Go to [layouth.com](http://layouth.com) to read these stories, and more, that you might have missed.**

## **I miss you Father Ryan**

Kevin, 14, wrote about feeling guilty because he didn't say goodbye before his priest died.

*"When I learned that Father Ryan had died, I felt sad and angry. But what I felt most was guilt. I felt guilty for all the things that I didn't do—like stop my excessive cussing, which he always pointed out to me. It's a hard thing to realize that there are no more second chances after someone has died."*

## **The great debator**

Janie, 16, says debate has given her more confidence.

*"Last year in my European history class we were having a discussion on children's rights during the Industrial Revolution and I found myself in the middle of a heated debate with other students. I loved how I could express my feelings without being afraid of what other people thought."*

## **Restaurant blog**

Sam, 16, had fun searching for good eats this summer.

*From his review of Scoops, an ice-cream shop that makes unique flavors: "The crowning jewel was the goat cheese fig, and I don't even like figs. There was the perfect amount of creaminess from the cheese. The fig brought on an irresistible sweetness and completed the flavor."*



# L.A. youth

[www.layouth.com](http://www.layouth.com)

# A different gender for a day

ESSAY CONTEST WINNERS

1ST PLACE \$50

## People would pay attention to me if I were a boy

Author's name withheld

It's hard being the oldest daughter at age 14 when my dad is never home. And whenever he is, all my mom does is fight with him.

I try asking others for help, including my family, but it's like my delicate appearance just won't let anyone hear or understand me. Life would be much easier if I were a boy.

If I were a boy, I'd be able to guide my dad closer to my mother's heart. I would tell him what mom hates the most about him, but most importantly, I'd show him how to fix his mistakes. I would explain to my dad how bad he hurts Mom, and he would listen to me, his son. My dad would probably want to spend more time with me. We would talk about guy stuff, and he would no longer ask me what I made for lunch that day.

Things would be much easier as a boy because I wouldn't feel like I'm competing about every little thing with all the other girls. If I were a boy, maybe then my parents would come to see me in at least one of my music concerts. Maybe then, as a boy, the other guys who play guitar would teach me something new instead of saying, "You can't play that!" Maybe my dad would want to proudly watch me perform at my concerts.

I often feel helpless at home. Maybe because there's no way I can run away or stop the world from turning. If I were a boy, I'd be the young man of the house and be able to set up some rules, like no fighting in front of my little brother and sister. Does no one pay attention to me because they think that just because I'm a girl, all I do is complain about everything that goes wrong in my life?

Life would be easier if I were a boy. The benefits would be spending more time with my dad, and getting more respect. As for now, I shall live like a ceramic doll whose lips are glued shut, hollow inside, but so ready to burst out in screams.



Illustration by  
Brian Lopez-Santos,  
18, Marshall HS (2009 graduate)

2ND PLACE \$30

## As a girl I'd want respect

By M.D.

Juvenile Hall

To be honest I think that if I were to switch genders for a day, I would be lost. I like to play rough, get dirty and do things that women don't typically do. I'm not saying that it would be hard, but I know it wouldn't be easy.

I think that being a female for a day would be interesting. I mean I could cry when I want to, get my hair done, and get a pedicure without people thinking I'm gay or feminine. (Not that it matters to me what others think.) Really, it would be nice to just go somewhere and relax while talking about fashion and the latest gossip. You see, as a man I don't do too much of that either. I'm training for football, playing basketball

or working. Though there are those times when I look at my fiancée and say to myself, "Man, she's got it easy," I'd rather remain a man.

The thing I wouldn't do if I were a woman for a day is date. I can't stand the way most men treat their girlfriends. It's just not right. A woman is supposed to be loved and cared for in a way that makes her happy. I've noticed that men fail to listen to their girlfriends. Men always want but never give. I've watched men dump their problems on their girlfriends but when she has something that she needs to talk about, her boyfriend has no time or doesn't want to hear it. (Then they wonder why their relationships never work out.) I always listen to my fiancée when she talks to me. Even when she doesn't want to talk about something that's on her mind, I encourage her to. That's how a partner is supposed to be, compassionate and understanding. Many men think it's a feminine trait and it's hard to find a man like that. For that reason, dating is not an option.

I think it would be much harder to be a woman than a man. I don't think I'd like it too much. Don't get me wrong, it has its positives, but I think I'd still prefer to stay the way I am.

would we still be so close? I think if I were a boy, I'd actually have more girl friends, and be a lot closer to my mom, like my oldest brother is. I don't think I'd be so tough, I think I'd be more girly than I actually am as a girl. Sometimes I laugh to myself because my oldest brother is heavily into sports, but will cry like a baby if anything goes wrong. He cries over his girlfriend, his cell phone, football games, EVERYTHING. And me, on the other hand, I don't, at least not in a room full of people like my brother. I feel that if I were a boy, I would have to prove myself to them so they wouldn't bother me.

If I were a boy, I think that I would be less popular. I think part of the reason I have so many friends is because I'm a jokester and I can take a lot of jokes, unlike a lot of girls, who might get their feelings hurt. But being that I'm a girl, it stands out more that I can take it. If I were a boy, it wouldn't be such a big deal.

Since some of my closest friends are guys, when we go out, it seems like half the time they don't even realize that I'm a girl. They'll talk about their girlfriends and what girls they think are cute. I fit in just like one of the boys, so it's hard for me to imagine what it would be like if I were a boy. I think I'd be more feminine, the opposite of what I am as a girl. I like being a girl, and still feeling like one of the guys, because I get the best of both worlds.

NEW ESSAY CONTEST:

## What's your biggest regret?

We make decisions every day. Some of those decisions affect us more than others and many times we second-guess ourselves.



Do you ever regret something

you did or maybe didn't

do? What's your biggest

regret? Should you have

asked her out? Do you

wish you could've taken

back what you said to your

father? Do you wish you had

spent more time studying or less? Describe

what happened and why you regret it now.

Looking back, what would you do differently?

### 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 November-December issue and put on our website at [www.layouth.com](http://www.layouth.com).

### Mail your essay to:



L.A. Youth

5967 W. 3rd St. Suite 301

Los Angeles CA 90036

or [editor@layouth.com](mailto:editor@layouth.com)

**DEADLINE: Friday, Oct. 16, 2009**

3RD PLACE \$20

## Already one of the guys

By Miriha Austin

Monrovia HS (2009 graduate)

If I were a boy, I think I'd be just like my brother. He's a lot like me and I don't think I'd change much if I were a different gender. I grew up around a lot of boys and still get along better with them now. Sometimes I even think my life would be a lot easier if I were a boy because I'm just like one of the guys. Being the youngest and only girl in my family and growing up with three god-brothers, I was born into the world with tons of guys around. I grew up tough like one of the boys because my brothers and I would constantly fight and roughhouse. I'm not a sports fanatic like the rest of my family, which is odd, but I think that's one of the things that lets people know I really am a girl.

I wonder if I would still have the same relationship with my oldest brother and my dad. I'm very close with my dad and older brother, but they say that girls are usually that way—daddy's girls. But if I were a boy,

WE ALL HAVE MOVIES we're embarrassed to admit we like. L.A. Youth writers shared the movies they love to watch, even if their friends make fun of them.

## The Lizzie McGuire Movie

Reviewed by **Kevin Ko**

14, Wilson HS (Hacienda Heights)

"Hey now, Hey now! This is what dreams are made of!" That's my favorite part of one of the catchiest songs ever ("What Dreams Are Made Of"), the theme song of my guilty pleasure movie, *The Lizzie McGuire Movie*.

Lizzie (Hilary Duff) and her class, which includes her best guy friend, Gordo, just graduated from middle school and take a class trip to Rome. At the hotel, Lizzie and Gordo talk about how they're going to have the adventure of their lives.

Soon Lizzie gets mistaken for a famous Italian singer, Isabella (also played by Duff), by Isabella's duet partner, Paolo. She finds out that Paolo is a phony, who lip syncs during his performances. Isabella and Lizzie later meet and in the end, the girls turn on Paolo's microphone during a performance, showing the world the phony he really is.

A lot of people hate this movie and I'm not surprised why. The acting is horrible and the plot is cheesy and predictable. But there's something about this movie that makes me love it. I'm pretty sure it is because of my little-kid crush on Duff. I didn't actually "like-like" her, but I thought she was really cute! If this movie popped up while I was just flipping through channels, I'd stop everything I was doing and watch it. Even now, I find myself singing those lyrics: "Hey now, hey now! This is what dreams are made of!"

## Sleepover

Reviewed by **Emily Navarro**

18, Environmental Charter HS (Lawndale)

*Sleepover* is a typical girly movie. The complaining girls might annoy you to death, but it's fun and a great movie to watch whenever I need a break from reality.

Four girls make a bet with older high school girls. The older girls compile a scavenger hunt list and both groups of girls have to participate in the hunt. Whoever wins gets the special fountain area where all the "cool kids" sit.

Alexa Vega from *Spy Kids* is the star, Julie. Throughout the movie, the girls endure ridiculous dares. My favorite is when Julie goes on a blind date with a guy who turns out to be her teacher. She borrows her mom's clothes and has them altered by a friend. It is hilarious because even though she looks the same even with sunglasses, her teacher only recognizes her after they have ordered drinks.

In another dare, she has to sneak into her crush's house while he's in the shower, to steal his boxers. Then comes the predictable happy ending, but I won't spoil too much.

My 16-year-old sister introduced me to the movie last year, and to be honest, I hated it the first time. As we watched it a few more times (as a result of her temporary obsession), I started to laugh at all the silly things. Now, I can watch *Sleepover* over and over again. It reminds me of middle school when I used to be outgoing. My sister is the only person who knows about my guilty pleasure ... until now. It feels liberating to let out this secret.

## Camp Rock

Reviewed by **Jasper Nahid**

15, New Roads School (Santa Monica)

Disney's TV movie, *Camp Rock*, is unoriginal but once I let that go, I enjoyed it—probably more than I should have. Starring the Jonas Brothers and my favorite Disney star, Demi Lovato, the movie's plot is just a formulaic excuse for Shane (Joe Jonas) and Mitchie's (Lovato) romance as well as the catchy (albeit annoying) songs.

The story is about Mitchie trying to fit in with the rich kids at an elite music camp called Camp Rock. Mitchie sucks up to the Mean Girls-esque crew and pretends to come from a rich and famous family. This works for a while and she even catches the eye of Camp Rock star, Shane. But when people discover she is the cook's daughter, Disney's clichéd (but admirable) morals demand that she proves herself to all the people she lied to. So she steps up and sings an awesome duet of "This is Me" with Shane, which redeems all the other sappy, ultra high-energy songs in the movie.

While the worn-out Disney moral—believe in yourself and you will succeed—shines through, I still found myself hooked by its charm and Lovato's impressive voice. In fact, my fondness for Lovato is a lot of why I like *Camp Rock*. While some 15-year-old guys would be afraid to admit how much they like a teenage Disney star, Lovato's classiness, actual talent and hotness would make any self-respecting guy like her.

## Grease 2

Reviewed by **Caitlin Bryan**

16, Valley Alternative Magnet School

Many people don't like *Grease 2* because of the bad acting and it's a rip-off of *Grease*. In *Grease* a good girl fell for a bad boy, but in *Grease 2* it's a nice boy falling for a bad girl. Still, I like it.

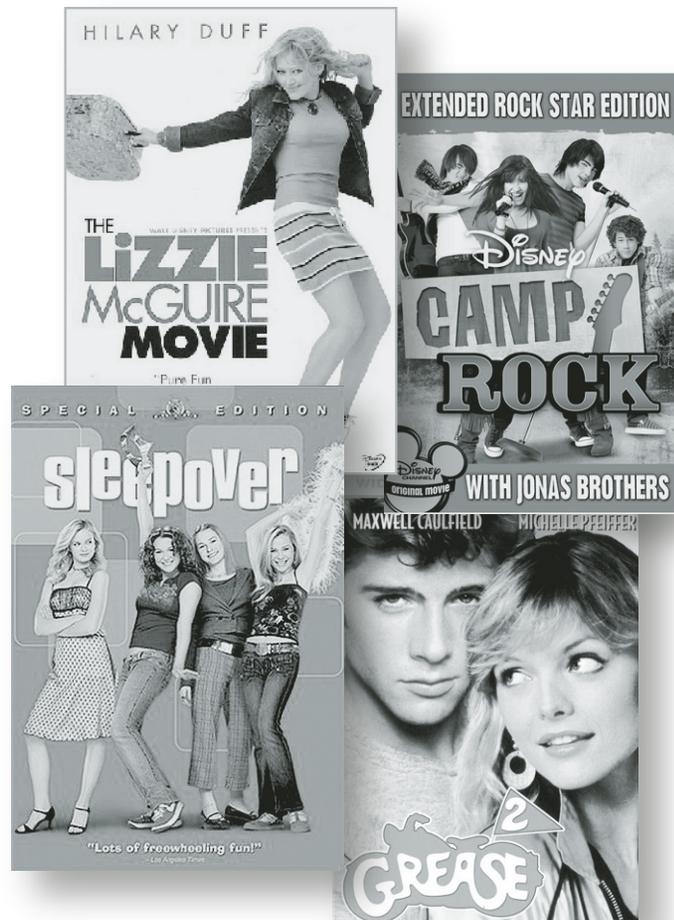
The T-Birds and the Pink Ladies are back with different members, and there's Michael Carrington (Maxwell Caulfield), the new cute brainy kid from England. Stephanie (Michelle Pfeiffer), the new leader of the Pink Ladies, catches Michael's eye. But Stephanie wants a bad boy and describes what he would be like when she sings "Cool Rider." He would ride a motorcycle just like the T-Birds.

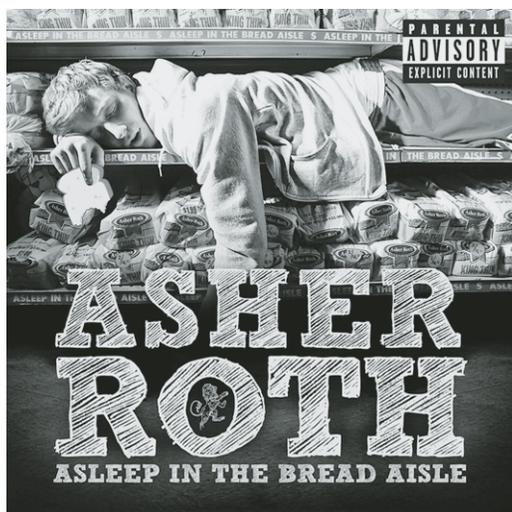
Michael decides to "shape up" and become this "Cool Rider." Stephanie likes him, not knowing it's Michael. No one

knows he is the Cool Rider except for Frenchy, who's back from the first movie.

One of my favorite scenes is during a school talent show, when the Pink Ladies sing "Calendar Girls." I like the song. The Pink Ladies sing, "I'll be your girl for a season," and they represent the seasons by wearing funny outfits, like a costume that is a glass of egg-nog with legs hanging from the side.

My parents say that this movie should never have been made because it's really bad. But whenever *Grease 2* is on TV I always watch it. I am a bit embarrassed to say it's a good movie.





## Asher Roth

CD: Asleep In The Bread Aisle

**Reviewed by Francisco Sandoval**

17, Nogales HS (La Puente)

**A**sher Roth is a new rapper who hip-hop magazine XXL calls a carbon copy of Eminem, because they have a similar sound and both are white. However, I strongly disagree. Roth's debut album, *Asleep in the Bread Aisle*, clearly sets him apart from Eminem.

Roth raps about growing up in suburbia and going to college. Eminem was a lot more explicit; for instance he jokingly rapped about murdering his ex-wife, and he grew up in the ghettos of Detroit.

Roth's first single, "I Love College," is a fun, slow-paced song about Roth's time in college. "That party last night was awfully crazy/ I wish we taped it." You will not find any violent lyrics like in an Eminem song. Two other fun songs are, "She Don't Wanna Man" and "Lark On My Go-Kart."

"His Dream" is the deepest song on the album. It's about Roth following in the footsteps of his father by becoming a writer. His father did not accomplish his dream but Roth did, "His dream is my dream/ my dream is his dream." There are singers singing beautifully in the background and a light drum beat, adding to the emotional depth of the song.

Roth clearly defines himself with his debut album. He has a lot more fun with topics from partying to driving go-karts and comes from a different background.

**Roth's first single, "I Love College," is a fun, slow-paced song about Roth's time in college. "That party last night was awfully crazy/ I wish we taped it."**



## Demi Lovato

CD: Don't Forget

**Reviewed by Chianne Jolly**

13, Luther Burbank MS

**A**s a huge Demi Lovato fan I listen to her debut album, *Don't Forget*, all the time. I have been a fan since her first Disney Channel movie, *Camp Rock*. Now she has her own Disney show, *Sunny with a Chance*.

With this album Lovato, 17, sings her heart out. I like her because she is an incredible singer. She can take any song and make it so you sing it over and over again.

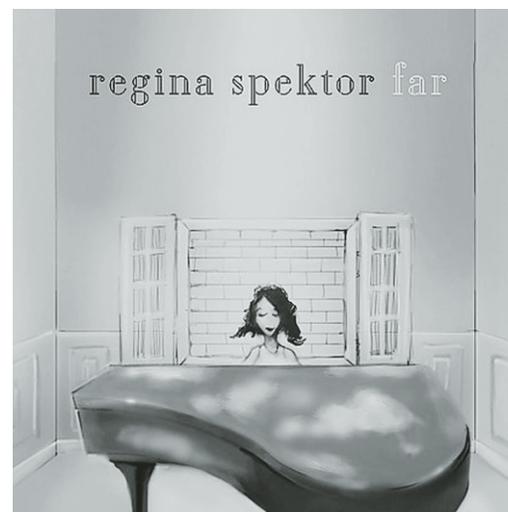
The songs on *Don't Forget* are upbeat and fun. Almost every song makes me want to dance. She has just one slow ballad, "Don't Forget," which is good but not great. I think she should stick to the upbeat songs.

I love what her songs are about. They say things every girl should know. The song "Gonna Get Caught" means if the guy cheats he's not worth it. The song "Don't Forget" talks about how you don't forget your first love. In "Trainwreck" she sings about how life isn't perfect but when you find that special guy, it's the closest you'll ever get.

The best song is "Party." I pick up my hairbrush and sing to it while dancing. "Hold on tight/ it's a crazy night/ get your party on/ so we'll scream it out loud." I like songs that say just have fun. They make me want to get my friends and have a good time.

Other good songs are "Get Back," which is a song you can rock to, and "La La Land," about how people say that she should be afraid of losing everything. I can't wait to buy her new album, *Here We Go Again*, which is in stores now.

**The best song is "Party." I pick up my hairbrush and sing to it while dancing.**



## Regina Spektor

CD: Far

**Reviewed by Emily Clarke**

16, Palisades Charter HS

**R**egina Spektor's bird-like voice makes her songs instantly recognizable. On her new album, *Far*, Spektor explores layers of sound beyond her voice, piano and guitar, adding to the complexity of some songs. *Far* is quickly becoming my favorite album of hers, with songs I've already listened to as many times as I've re-read the *Harry Potter* books. They don't get old.

Each song adapts Spektor's freewheeling singing and lyrical imagery in different ways. "Eet" has the vocal leaps heard in "Fidelity," the biggest hit from her previous album ("It breaks my hea-ah-ah-art..."). "Blue Lips" is another one of my favorites, a lyrical assault of feeling that starts soft before beating into a shudder as Spektor sings, "And all the gods and all the worlds / Began colliding on a backdrop of blue/ Blue lips, blue veins."

One of the awesome things about Spektor songs is how open to interpretation they are. In "Laughing With," she sings, "No one's laughing at God when they're saying their goodbyes/ But God can be funny/ At a cocktail party when listening to a good God-themed joke," and ends, "No one's laughing at God/ We're all laughing with God." To me, she's singing about how spirituality is human.

The album's few weak spots come when she relies too much on clapping or electric guitar. Thanks to YouTube, I first heard "Folding Chair" with just the piano and her singing. In the album version, the extra instrumentation makes a beautiful song sound overdone. That said, I've still played the song over and over again. *Far* is an interesting, gorgeous album, definitely worth a listen ... or 400.

**Each song adapts Spektor's freewheeling singing in different ways.**

# Fame

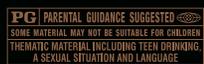
THEY WILL  
DREAM IT.  
EARN IT.  
LIVE IT.



METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER PICTURES LAKESHORE ENTERTAINMENT AND UNITED ARTISTS PRESENT A LAKESHORE ENTERTAINMENT PRODUCTION "FAME"  
IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER DEBBIE ALLEN CHARLES S. DUTTON KELSEY GRAMMER MEGAN MULLALLY BEBE NEUWIRTH WITH ASHER BOOK KRISTY FLORES  
PAUL IACONO PAUL MCGILL NATURI NAUGHTON KAY PANABAKER KHERINGTON PAYNE COLLINS PENNIE WALTER PEREZ ANNA MARIA PEREZ DE TAGLE  
CASTING BY DEBORAH AQUILA, CSA TRICIA WOOD, CSA MUSIC BY MARK ISHAM CHOREOGRAPHER MARGUERITE DERRICKS COSTUME DESIGNER DAYNA PINK EDITOR MYRON KERSTEIN  
PRODUCTION DESIGNER PAUL EADS DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY SCOTT KEVAN EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS ERIC REID DAVID KERN BETH DEPATIE HARLEY TANNEBAUM PRODUCERS RICHARD WRIGHT MARK CANTON  
PRODUCED BY TOM ROSENBERG GARY LUCCHESI BASED ON THE MOTION PICTURE "FAME" WRITTEN BY CHRISTOPHER GORE SCREENPLAY BY ALLISON BURNETT DIRECTED BY KEVIN TANCHARDEN



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