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# L.A. youth

MAY-JUNE 2010  
WWW.LAYOUTH.COM

the newspaper by and about teens



## DIVERSITY IS MORE THAN RACE

It's also about people who have different experiences and views P.10

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## About L.A. Youth

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

Former teacher Donna Myrow founded the nonprofit teen newspaper in 1988 after the Supreme Court Hazelwood decision, which struck down student press rights. Myrow saw a need for an independent, uncensored forum for youth expression. L.A. Youth is now celebrating its 22nd 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. It can also be picked up for free at many public libraries and is available online at [www.layouth.com](http://www.layouth.com).

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

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

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

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

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# L.A. youth

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## M A I L

These are letters we received about stories in the March-April 2010 issue of L.A. Youth:

**EATING HEALTHY IS HARD**

I REALLY ENJOYED reading the article "Why is eating healthy so hard?" because I can relate to it. I have tried to eat healthy many times but my mom works a lot so a lot of times we eat fast food. I am an athlete so I want to eat healthy to be able to improve in my sport, but seeing the fast food on the table is very tempting and I start eating. Ernesto is setting a great example to those who want to start eating healthy and hopefully he can be an example for his siblings too. Hopefully he can accomplish his goal.

**Victor Lopez**

International Studies Learning Center (South Gate)

MANY PEOPLE CAN'T afford to eat healthy or go to a gym and because of this, there are a lot of obese people in poor communities. I'm glad there was an article published to bring up the topic. Something needs to be done.

**Rebecca Carreon**

International Studies Learning Center

**THERE'S MORE TO SOUTH CENTRAL THAN STEREOTYPES**

I THOUGHT THE stories in "We defy the stereotypes" were something everyone should consider. It's true that a lot of people are prejudiced when they meet someone who's another race. I was shocked when I read each writer's story about race in South Central L.A. People can be so judgmental; haven't they heard "don't judge a book by its cover?" Just because they live in South Central doesn't mean that they don't care about their futures. These students are

victims of racial discrimination but it didn't bring them down. They're strong and determined to fulfill their dreams and that's what is important. We need more people like them!

**Linda Sau**

San Gabriel HS

**MISSING MY FAMILY**

THE ARTICLE "MOM I missed you" stood out to me the most. The writer explained the difficulties that she had to go through. She saw her family only on the weekends. If I was in her situation I would go crazy. I'm really happy she's living with her family again. She taught me to appreciate the little things in life that my family gives me.

**Mari Mkrtyan**

Wilson MS (Glendale)

**I ADOPTED MY DOG FROM A SHELTER**

I REALLY LIKED the article about rescuing pets from the animal shelter because I'm a big animal lover. It makes me sad to know that thousands of pets are being euthanized because their owners either can't or don't want to take care of them. People should spay or neuter their pets because shelters are overcrowded with abandoned animals, and those who don't find homes are killed. It's great that the author rescued his dog from the shelter and saved her life. I'm considering getting a dog soon and I am planning to adopt as well.

**Jessica Jorge**

International Studies Learning Center

THE ARTICLE, "I rescued my dog from a shelter" really touched my heart. I can relate to this story because for the past four Saturdays I have been working at a shelter and I see many animals that

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## C O N T E N T S

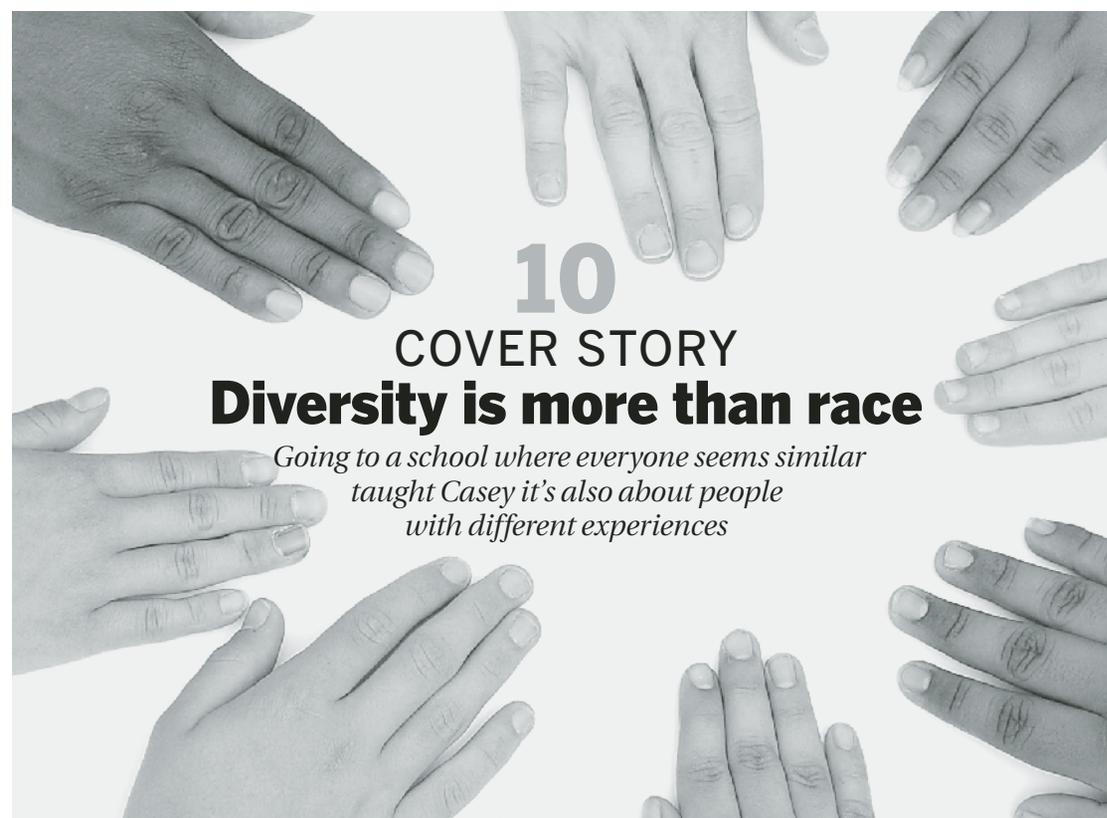
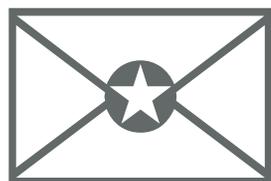


Photo by Jean Park, 17, Harvard-Westlake School (North Hollywood)

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need a home. Every time I go I wish I could adopt all of them and give them a home, but that's impossible. I just wish there were more people like Stanton to adopt and care for a helpless animal.

**Jessica Robles**

*International Studies Learning Center*

### TEENS SHOULD TAKE SEX SERIOUSLY

I RELATED VERY much to "Thinking about the consequences of sex" because I have friends who got pregnant at an early age and kept their babies. I also had a friend who had an abortion when she was 18. She didn't want to have an abortion but she thought it was best because she was in an unstable relationship and she didn't want the child to go through the pain and discomfort of not having a complete family. I can understand her point of view but I know that there are couples who can't have children and would like to adopt. I don't judge people who get abortions because they have their reasons. Instead of judging

them we have to stand by them because a decision like that is painful and not easy to make. If you can't handle the consequences, then stop doing what you are doing.

**Nallely Avellaneda**

*International Studies Learning Center*

THIS ARTICLE MADE me think about and feel grateful that my sister had her children and gave me a niece and nephew. It made me imagine my life without them. I think it's ridiculous how sex can be so casual and meaningless. I've always been against abortion because I think everything is a gift from God. Teens think that sexually transmitted diseases or pregnancies are things that won't ever happen to them if they have sex. Most don't realize how serious sex can be.

**Samhy de Guia**

*Wilson MS*

### I HAD THE COURAGE TO BE MYSELF

I CAN RELATE to "I can just be me" so much because I see how

music influences the styles and personalities of my peers. Brett reminded me of myself. I also began to venture out and listen to other types of music because I was stuck on one type of music. Hopefully this article helps people understand that there is more music to be heard than the type you normally listen to.

**Desiree Jimenez**

*International Studies Learning Center*

WHEN I READ the article "I can just be me" I realized I wasn't the only one who felt that way. I am constantly teased by classmates to cut my hair but I don't care. I have curly hair down to my lip but I straighten it sometimes because I prefer my hair straight. I am also into hardcore music. I also wear skinny jeans although they are kind of uncomfortable. At times I feel my teachers look at me differently because of the way I look. I have long black hair, tight shirts and two lip piercings called snake bites. A lot of people would judge me just by looking at me and

assume that I only like rock but I enjoy every type of music. I am completely comfortable with the way I look and would not change my style just to get new friends or to be accepted.

**Michael Hernandez**

*International Studies Learning Center*

### BEING AN UNDERSTANDING FRIEND

I REALLY LIKED the article "You can tell me." It is nice to know that even though each person is unique, your closest friends are still there for you. It's sad that some schools, religions and people in general are so judgmental toward homosexuality. Misusing the word "gay" is also wrong because it can hurt people without us even realizing. I support all sexualities. There is no reason to hide it. It's what makes you, you.

**Bina Kapoor**

*International Studies Learning Center*

I CAN RELATE to this article because I know what it's like to have

a best friend who is gay. Like the writer, gay people used to freak me out and I was uncomfortable around them. But now I see it a whole different way. When my best friend told me she was bisexual, I was a bit shocked, but I got used to it and accepted her the way she was.

**Name withheld**

THE ARTICLE "YOU can tell me" really hit close to me because I have a friend who's gay and I never realized it until he finally told me. We've been friends for years and for him to get the courage to tell me was one of the bravest things I've seen. At first, I was uncomfortable with the idea of him being gay but then, like the author of the article, my opinions changed and I saw nothing was wrong with him. I learned to not be prejudiced and to support my friend. He was like anyone else who needed someone to talk to. I'm now more open-minded and believe in gay rights. This article reminded me how brave my friend was.

**Name withheld**

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## JOIN OUR STAFF AT THE NEXT NEWCOMER'S DAY

No experience necessary! Writers, artists and photographers welcome. You will be invited to stay for the regular staff meeting, which starts at 1 p.m.

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# L.A.youth

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NEXT  
ORIENTATION:  
SATURDAY,  
JUNE 12  
11 A.M. - NOON

I LOVE TO WRITE and with L.A. Youth, I get to write about whatever I want. I get to share my passion for food and music with other teens in L.A. I have written a lot of restaurant reviews and about my experiences with music and traveling. It's also a great experience to work with an editor. It has really developed my writing.

I think that because of the editing process, which you can only really get by writing for a publication, I am a better writer.

—Sam Landsberg, 16, Hamilton HS



# Turn it off

When we use technology too much we forget how to interact with others

By **Ivan Alcantara**

15, Sherman Oaks Center  
for Enriched Studies

Last August, my sister and I were invited to our friend Elizabeth's quinceañera. It was my first time going to a quinceañera, so I was excited. I hadn't seen my friends much over the summer and I wanted to catch up with them. At the party, my friend Adam was sitting at my table.

"Hey Adam," I said. "Hey, hold up I'm busy," he said. I asked him what he was doing and he told me he was texting a girl. He just sat there texting for most of the party. He didn't even eat. I was frustrated because I hadn't seen him in weeks. My friends and I tried to get him to stop texting and start socializing with other people. We asked him to dance, but he just sat there texting. When I hang out with my friends and they're texting it bothers me because I feel like I'm not that important to them.

Technology makes it easier for us to interact and connect. I get my grades through e-mail from my teachers and I like to instant message my friends to talk about how the day went. My mom can call me on my cell phone to say that she'll pick me up 10 minutes late. But sometimes we lose control of how to use technology and sometimes I feel like a lot of my friends would rather interact with small machines instead of real people.

There are times when it's OK to text, such as to remind or ask a friend about something, or if I'm really bored and there's nothing to do and no one to talk to. I used to text a lot. Whenever it was hard for me to fall asleep, I would pick up my phone and start texting my friends until it was well after midnight. But I think that constant texting is inappropriate when I'm with my friends, in class, at a family dinner, at church or at the movies.

## DON'T TALK LIKE YOU TEXT

I have friends who forget the proper ways to communicate with other people because they overuse technology. Recently, my friend Jane's hand was numb for some reason, and she couldn't write very well. "What's wrong with my left hand?" she said. And then someone joked, "It's not right!" Apparently, Jane thought it was funny because she said, "LOL!"

LOL? Is that what we say now when we think



Illustration by Keanu Lueong, 14, Toll MS (Glendale)

something is funny? When someone's going to leave, some of my friends say "TTYL." It feels like all this texting and instant messaging is ruining the English language. If someone thinks that something is funny, I think a good response would be a laugh—a real laugh—not "LOL."

When a friend asked me to review her essay, I saw that it had some errors. She had written the lowercase "l" and wrote "u"

instead of "you." I wasn't shocked that she'd let that into her writing for school because I used to do that too, so I understood. I told her to be extra careful because I heard that teachers get upset when they see mistakes like these. Another friend, Adrian, e-mailed our science teacher, Mr. Okazaki, and asked him for a recommendation letter to volunteer at a hospital. Mr. Okazaki got a little mad when he read the e-mail. "I know you want me to

be your buddy, but if you're going to e-mail me, especially about something like this, you should be more formal," Mr. Okazaki told him. I used to do what Adrian did, but now, I'm more careful when I'm e-mailing my teachers. Sometimes I write "u" instead of "you" in my homework, but I review it before I turn it in to see if I made errors.

I also really hate it when I'm talking to people and they're wearing headphones. I'm not saying that listening to music is bad, but when I'm talking or listening to someone, I pay attention to them.

## HE COULDN'T HEAR ME THROUGH HIS HEADPHONES

At school earlier this year when I was helping my friend with his math homework, he was listening to his iPod at the same time. "Why are you listening to your iPod if you're already having problems with math?" I asked him. "I can concentrate more when I'm listening to music," he answered.

Apparently, listening to music didn't help him concentrate because he started humming and stopped working a few times. At one point he asked, "What am I doing again?" Sometimes I had to repeat myself because he didn't hear what I had said. I could have been hanging out with friends or doing my homework, but I chose to help him. I was frustrated and confused because he asked me for help but it didn't seem like he really wanted it.

I think the problem is that we're using technology too much. I think we should use our phones, iPods and instant message less. It's more fun to talk to people in person. You see the reactions to what you say and it strengthens friendships. People are missing out on life when they use technology instead of talking to the people around them, especially if those people are important to them.



*Ivan says that when people break up over instant message it's a sign that technology is out of control.*

# Desperate to get out

My family wanted to leave our violent neighborhood

## Author's name withheld\*

Growing up in Compton was frightening, with the sounds of police sirens, helicopters and gang-bangers' gunshots ringing in my ears every day.

I really became aware of the dangers in parts of Compton during middle school. Occasionally I'd see a few gang members beating each other up in the streets during the day. I wasn't allowed outside at night so I didn't know what went on. But if it was that bad during the day, I was sure it was worse at night. And then there was the gas station where people bought drugs all the time. Whenever we drove by the gas station, I would constantly see people going up to this one guy and giving him money in exchange for small black bags. I always wondered where the cops were.

I noticed that almost every night when I was going to sleep I would hear police helicopters flying around in circles above our neighborhood. It was really loud and the bright searchlight would blind me as it shined through my window. The light and the sound made it impossible to sleep. I would close the window and put a pillow over my ears but it would be no use.

For the first year that this happened I was afraid when I'd hear the helicopters. I'd tell my younger sister not to look outside the windows, because if there was someone out there, I didn't want them to see her. The lights were really close so whoever the police were looking for must have been pretty close as well. I was afraid that someone with a weapon could come into the house and kill us. I was afraid that the helicopter would run out of gas because of all the flying it did and it would crash down into my room. I was afraid to even be at home.

Eventually, I got used to it, and it didn't scare me anymore. It was mostly frustrating because it was so loud.

The way I saw things, the police couldn't re-

\*We are not publishing the writer's name to protect her privacy.

ally help anyway. There would always be streets to avoid because of drug dealers and gangs. If the police arrest 100 gang members in Compton, there would still probably be hundreds more out there. Violence can't be erased.

By the time I got to eighth grade my family and I wanted to move far away. I had a dream of my family moving to the small town of Walla Walla, Washington, where my mom's sister lives. She would always tell us that it's quiet

*I had a dream of my family moving to the small town of Walla Walla, Washington, where my mom's sister lives. She would always tell us that it's quiet and everybody knows each other. And she never told stories involving gunshots. I was jealous that she lived in such a peaceful place.*

and everybody knows each other. And she never told stories involving gunshots. I was jealous that she lived in such a peaceful place.

One night while my family was watching TV in the living room we heard shots. Suddenly, something burst through our living room window. We threw ourselves on the floor and heard the tires squealing as the shooters sped away. While we were on the floor we noticed that it was just a BB and not a bullet. It might have only been a BB but it still put a hole in the window. We stayed on the floor for about 10 minutes.

## WE COULDN'T AFFORD TO MOVE

My mom was furious and said that moving was our only option. I was relieved; we were no longer going to live in fear in our own house.

But as my mom and dad talked more that night they realized that we couldn't move because we had a loan on the house and if we sold it we wouldn't get enough money back to buy a new house somewhere else. I was so angry. I wished we weren't trapped in the house.

Also in eighth grade, my parents told me that I wasn't allowed to go out with my friends at night, even on weekends. They thought it was too dangerous. I was angry, but didn't really

If they were visibly guarding the streets then maybe I would be able to go out with my friends because it would be safer. I felt like they were ignoring Compton, which made me like them even less. Most people I knew, including me, felt like the cops harassed us. If they had time to pull people over for no reason then they should at least have time to help the community. The cops saw that Compton was tagged and filled with gangs and drug dealers. Why weren't they on every corner trying to capture people behind the violence?

I hated the gangs—who were to blame for the shootings, tagging and drug dealing—because they were the reason my family lived in fear. And in school there would be constant fights between rival gangs, often black gangs versus Mexican gangs. My brother, who is now 20, was a freshman when the biggest racial fight broke out. He told me that most of the students in the school fought. It was even on the TV news. My brother came home early because he didn't want to be part of the fight.

## GUNSHOTS WOKE US UP

One night in November 2007, around three in the morning we were all asleep when gunshots just outside my brother's window woke us up. One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six. Seven. A three-second pause. And then an eighth, which seemed to have come from a shotgun because the sound from that shot was louder. Right after the shots were fired we heard a man crying out for help. Most of my neighbors woke up to the sounds. We saw someone lying on the ground in a pool of his blood with his bicycle a couple of inches away. It was terrifying.

The police came in less than 10 minutes. There were about five patrol cars and an ambulance. Curious neighbors were coming out of their houses to observe. We watched as the paramedics put the guy in the ambulance. Later, as I tried to fall asleep I couldn't help but think about the guy. "Would he be all right? Does his family know? Does he have a family?" So many questions ran through my head that night.

The next morning my family talked about

protest because I knew Compton wasn't safe. I wasn't the only one either. There were a few of my friends whose parents also wouldn't allow them to go out at night.

When my school friends would tell me about all the fun they had going to movies or hanging out at each other's houses, I would ask my mom to let me out for just one night. But she never did. Usually I ended up watching television and playing with my 5-year-old sister. It felt unfair, but in our neighborhood we expected the worst things to happen. My friends who could go out said that I should try to sneak out. They also offered to call my mom to try to convince her to let me out for one night. I told them no, because she would have said no anyway.

I started wondering where the cops were.



Illustration by Brian Lopez-Santos, 19

the shooting. My mom said she was still scared. My brother said that he remembered the victim crying for help and how that haunted him all night. My mom said that she really wanted to move but that moving would have to wait until we could afford it. It was frustrating to be talking about this again when we knew we couldn't move.

At school that day I learned that a sophomore boy had been killed near the intersection of Compton Boulevard and Wilmington Avenue. It turns out that he was the one who got shot in front of our house. I was shocked and sad. I was ashamed to live in a place where a teen could get killed in the streets.

But about a year ago things changed. One afternoon on the way home from school I saw cops near the intersection of Compton and

Wilmington and I thought, "What are they doing here? Something awful must have happened for them to be here." As I noticed that they were just driving around on patrol I was shocked. I felt like I'd only seen cops responding to crimes, so seeing them patrolling was weird. I thought this was good, though, because this area was dangerous. This was the place where even walking home from school every day, I'd get nervous whenever a car slowed down as it drove by. When that happened I knew to look straight ahead and walk faster. People who stare could get shot, too, because the shooters think they could become witnesses.

Within a few weeks the gas station where the drug dealers were became an ordinary gas station. The guys wearing baggy pants sagging

below their waists, who smoked and yelled out street names that represent the gangs they're in, were gone. And I saw more people out at night. I felt great that the cops were finally doing something. But I still wondered what took them so long. They should have been there years ago.

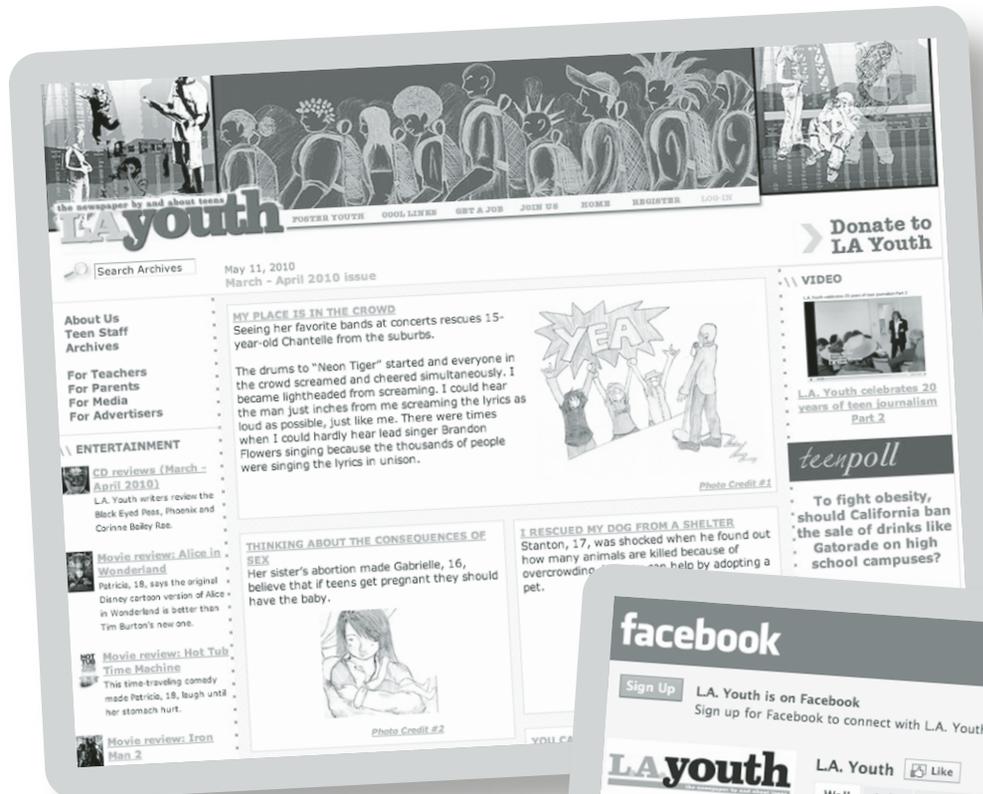
#### MY NEW NEIGHBORHOOD FEELS SO MUCH SAFER

Even with the increased police presence, my family still wanted to move. Last November, when we finally could afford it we moved to Carson. Although our new house is just 15 minutes away from our old one, it feels like a whole different place. The gangbangers and helicopters are nowhere to be seen or heard. I can walk at night without any trouble. Instead

of the smell of weed as I walk down the street, I feel the fresh air blowing through my hair. It's a lot quieter, even compared to the new and improved Compton. At times I feel as if the birds are too loud. In our old neighborhood I would pump up the volume on my radio to 48 but now I turn the volume down to 12.

I used to think that my younger sister would have a bad childhood because she would be stuck in Compton like I was, unable to go out, unable to hang out with friends, unable to have fun at night. But now it's different. I feel like she will have more freedom in Carson, the freedom I wish I had. Growing up in a violent community changed me. I've learned to appreciate things, like time with my family and friends, but I shouldn't have had to learn that by watching someone get shot.

# Hang out with us this summer!



**When school is out, L.A. Youth's teen staff doesn't stop working. Go to [layouth.com](http://layouth.com) this summer for new stories, reviews of the latest movies and news that is important to you.**

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# L.A. youth

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# Unexpected pets

We bought our chickens for the eggs, but they became part of our family

By **Leslie Ho**  
17, Walnut HS

Every morning when I woke up, I would rush to the garage, where my two chickens were fussing and whining because I always got up later than they did. I would open their cage and grab one, kiss her head and repeat with the other one. With one chicken under each arm, I would set them free in the backyard. About 20 minutes later, while my brother and I ate breakfast and my mom chopped lettuce for the chickens, they would squat against the kitchen door. They purred to let us know that they were eager for their breakfast.

I loved my chickens as much as I loved my old dog, who we had to give away because of his unsolvable flea problem. They needed love and attention the same as any other pet.

In the middle of eighth grade, my brother's pet fish died. My aunt, who had grown up in rural Taiwan, suggested chickens as an easy pet that needed only some feed and would give us eggs. The idea of having chickens sounded cool because no one else we knew had them. Also, farm animals aren't too unusual in Walnut since 30 years ago it used to be all ranches.

We drove to the farm supply store. As soon as I saw the days-old balls of fuzz with twiggy legs, I wanted to take the whole box of baby chicks home with me. My mom did not feel the same way. We picked two. They cheeped softly in their brown paper bag on the car ride home.

We filled a cardboard box with shredded paper and put it in the living room. We changed the filling every day because they pooped in it all



**Leslie bought Gracie when she was just a few days old. In the three years Leslie had her, Gracie survived hawk and raccoon attacks but she recently was taken by a coyote.**

Photo by Charlene Lee, 17, Walnut HS

night. When they got bigger, we let them outside. However, we couldn't resist bringing them in every couple of hours to play with them.

## EACH ONE GOT ITS OWN NAME

The more they sat on our hands or heads, or next to us as we watched TV and did homework, the more we started thinking of them as pets instead of little egg factories. When we grew close to them, we named one Little Black and the other Gracie, for her habit of sitting on top of the piano.

When they were only a few weeks old, Little Black was taken by a hawk. We bought two more chicks, Zebra and Ou Niao (Taiwanese slang for "pretty girl in black"). A few weeks later, we knew that Zebra had also been taken by a hawk when we found Gracie and Ou Niao hiding in a corner of the yard.

We still had not learned our lesson about how vulnerable our pets were. During summer we placed their box outside. One night, my mom woke up to their screaming. She grabbed a broom and whacked the raccoon that had grabbed Ou Niao. After chasing the raccoon away, my mom woke me up. I could barely see as I looked around for Ou Niao, and finally found her when I heard her cries. I helped set up their box in our living room. As my mom applied antiseptic on the bloody wound on Ou Niao's butt, I stroked her and hugged Gracie. They were shaking, their pupils were wide, and their little hearts were racing. Right after, we got a rabbit hutch for them to sleep in. It was safer

because it was raised from the ground. In the winter we wheeled it into the garage.

The first time one of our chickens laid an egg, my mom, brother and I argued over who could taste it first. My mom cracked it onto the frying pan and cooked it sunny-side up. She decided to split it among the three of us. The gooey orange yolk had more flavor than supermarket eggs. They laid eggs once a day almost every day so we always had plenty of fresh and delicious eggs for breakfast.

I had always expected them to be around. I was not prepared when Ou Niao suddenly died a few months ago. When I saw her, with her two feet in the air the way a dead cartoon chicken looks, I sobbed.

## IT'S HARD TO KEEP THEM SAFE

Then a few weeks ago, Gracie didn't come up to the kitchen door in the morning like she usually did. After we found chicken feathers strewn over a corner of the yard, we realized that one of the coyotes in our neighborhood had eaten her. Although we had made sure that our gates were closed and our fences were too high for coyotes to jump over, we didn't know that our neighbor, whose yard is connected to ours, hadn't done the same. With all the predators in our area, we knew that this could happen, but we didn't want to think about it because, like Ou Niao, she had become more than just a chicken to us.

Several years ago, when I had to give away my dog, I thought I would not be able to love another pet as much as I loved him. He was like a second younger brother. However, when I fed and held my chickens, it was not so different. I realized that they are just as great of pets as my dog was. It does not matter what kind of animal a pet is. What counts is the love and care that you give and your pet returns to you.



*Leslie won't forget the fun and happiness her chickens, Gracie and Ou Niao, brought her.*

# Diversity is more than race

Going to a school where everyone seems similar taught me it's also about people with different experiences

**By Casey Peeks**

*18, Marlborough School*

Coming back from summer vacation is when I notice it the most. For the first couple weeks of school most conversations go like this: "Oh, I didn't do much this summer. I just went to Italy again."

I always respond, "That must have been nice. I've never been to Europe."

A classmate then asks, "Who hasn't been to Europe?"

A lot of people at my school, an all-girls private school, have been to Europe several times, so they don't get excited or seem to appreciate it.

Private schools are often thought of as all-white, but my school, Marlborough, isn't. The administrators at Marlborough work hard to create a racially diverse school because they want a variety of experiences so students can learn from each other. But other than race, it doesn't feel that diverse. Many of us, no matter what our race, have parents who are doctors, lawyers and entertainment industry executives. Most of my classmates came from the same private elementary schools before coming to Marlborough. They live in the same areas, do the same things over summer vacation and have similar lives at home. Being at Marlborough has taught me the true meaning of diversity. It isn't just race. It's also different backgrounds and experiences.

## WE LOOKED DIVERSE, BUT WEREN'T THAT DIFFERENT FROM EACH OTHER

When I first came to Marlborough in eighth grade, I thought it was diverse. In my grade about half of the students were white, 20 percent were black, about another 20 percent were Asian and about 5 percent were Hispanic. I was impressed that there were so many black stu-

dents. I felt that I would fit in more because I wouldn't be the only black person in my class. I was one of two new girls, and we were both black. The other black students accepted us into their group, so I became friends with them immediately. Even though we were all black, I expected everyone to be different.

But when I started hanging out at their houses on weekends, I noticed that most of them lived within blocks of each other in Ladera Heights, an area where upper middle class black families live. It would've been more interesting if some of them had been from the Valley or Hollywood or another part of the city. Los Angeles is so large and diverse, it would have been nice to learn about the different parts of it.

People think race is what makes people different from each other, but I have learned that it's not race. It's their experiences that make them different. At an expensive private school it is understandable that most people will come from wealthier families, but I wish more could be done to create a student body with families of different income levels, who live in different parts of the city.

When schools have many types of diversity, you learn how to interact with people who are different from you. My middle school wasn't as racially diverse as Marlborough, but it was diverse in other ways, even though it was a private school too. I got to experience new things. I went to a lot of bat mitzvahs. In fifth grade I went to a Chinese New Year at my friend's house. My favorite part was the little red envelopes they give you with money inside. They say that the longer you wait to open it, the more money it will have. It's supposed to teach children patience and saving. I kept mine in my desk drawer for a few months because I liked the lesson and I wanted to see if I had the willpower to save it.

I've always been a curious person who likes to learn from other people. My best friend from

my old school is a tomboy and she likes to play video games. I always thought video games were for boys and I didn't think I'd like to play them. But whenever I visit her, we play video games and it's a lot of fun. We play a snowboarding game and race against each other. Even though she's a lot better than me I always try to beat her. I know it's just a video game but playing it with her taught me to try new things and that I shouldn't judge people. I had assumed that people who play video games were nerdy and quiet and obsessed with playing video games. But I realized that all kinds of people like to play video games and they can't be stereotyped.

There is value in all kinds of diversity. Each race or ethnic group has its own culture, and it's good for people to learn about different cultures. But I don't think having a lot of minorities at a school is enough to create diversity. If there are different races but everyone acts the same and has the same experiences, there's a limit to how much you can learn from each other.

## MY SCHOOL MAKES AN EFFORT TO TALK ABOUT DIVERSITY

Every year my school holds a weekend-long diversity retreat called Face-It. We talk about how we've been stereotyped and how we stereotype others. The black students talk about how everyone thinks that they listen to rap music or that they're all on financial aid. The retreat makes Marlborough a more open environment where people aren't afraid to share what makes them different. Some people even come out of the closet during the weekend. People are really supportive.

The students promote diversity too. One of the most popular clubs at my school is Alliance, which focuses on gay and lesbian rights. At their assembly this year they talked about how it's wrong to assume that everyone is straight. There are also African-American, Asian and

Photo by Jean Park, 17, Harvard-Westlake School (North Hollywood)

Hispanic clubs. The African-American club holds an assembly every year during Black History Month, in which they talk about the civil rights movement and famous African Americans. Race and sexual orientation aren't the only types of diversity, but at my school they are the types that get talked about the most, instead of income and religious diversity.

In one of my classes during junior year, people wanted to order sweatshirts with funny things that had been said during class throughout the year. When it was time to order the sweatshirts, the girl who designed them said, "I ordered enough for everyone in the class. They weren't that expensive, everyone just owes me \$30."

For most people in the class \$30 wasn't a big deal, but for my friend on financial aid, it was expensive. She felt too uncomfortable to say something, especially because the sweatshirts were already ordered. She had to use money that she had been saving because she knew her parents wouldn't want to give her \$30 for a sweatshirt. If there was more economic diversity at my school, I think people would be aware and more considerate in situations like this.

My school does provide financial aid to create more socio-economic diversity. Some students get financial support, but not everyone is on a full scholarship. And not everyone on financial aid is poor. If a family has more than one child at the school, sometimes the school will provide financial aid. My father is a doctor, yet most people in my class are wealthier than my family. My parents struggle to pay Marlborough's high tuition, which is \$28,950 a year. Then there are fieldtrips, uniforms and extracurriculars like sports that cost money too.

It would be nice to be around more people who have different views and experiences than me, although I don't know what Marlborough could do to get more true diversity. This is why I like coming to L.A. Youth. It's nice to get outside of my private school bubble. Students at L.A. Youth come from schools all over the county.

At L.A. Youth meetings I learn about the measures public schools are taking to save money, like laying off teachers—especially younger teachers who students like more—and cutting arts and athletics. After these discussions, whenever I see an article or hear about it on the news I pay more attention. I learned that California spends almost as much money on prisons as it does on higher education, which I thought was ridiculous.

I like meeting people who are different from me or who don't agree with me. At a summer program at Northwestern last year, I met a girl in the dining hall while eating lunch one day. We couldn't believe that we both liked this British TV show called *Skins* because most peo-

ple have never heard of it (we both watched it online). We'd hang out a lot between classes. One day I overheard her talk about how she's from a small town in Kentucky where people hated President Obama and were homophobic. I was surprised because that's very different from my views. For a second I didn't like her. I had thought all conservatives were mean and stupid but she was really nice. I realized that I was jumping to conclusions about conservatives.

I would have continued hating conservatives if I hadn't met her. I still don't agree with them but I'm willing to hear their side. They have reasons for what they believe and they're not all horrible people who hate liberals and gays.

#### WE SHOULD TRY TO GET TO KNOW OTHERS

Knowing people who are different from you allows you to understand people and the world better. If you have a wide variety of experiences you can talk to anyone in a room and have something in common with them. You're less likely to jump to conclusions about people based on stereotypes. You learn that some things shouldn't matter, like how much money someone has or their race. You realize that we're not so different.

I know that it's not just my school that isn't diverse. A lot of public schools struggle with it too because most people are from the same neighborhood, so students are usually the same race. But you can still try to talk to people you don't always talk to. I think that if you can get involved in extracurriculars and clubs that interest you, but maybe not all of your friends are involved in, you will be surprised at all the different people you meet and end up liking. I've done newspaper, soccer and I'm part of a community service club, and I have a diverse group of friends. I think it's OK to hang out with people who have the same background as you because sometimes that's what is most comfortable, but I also think it's important to step outside of your comfort zone. I would have never gotten to know the girl at Northwestern if I knew she was conservative. You miss out on a lot of experiences when you only hang out with people who are like you.



*Casey says don't be afraid to talk to someone who seems different from you.*

## IS YOUR SCHOOL DIVERSE?



"I don't think so because I think diversity means coming from different places and not knowing what someone else is going through. People at Locke are all going through the same struggles, being a minority living in a gang-infested place, not having the greatest materials."

—FRANK REED, 16, LOCKE HS #3



"My elementary school was all Latin people. Compared to my elementary school, my high school is diverse: Hispanics, Asians, Armenians, Bengali. It's fine if there's diversity but if you're not going to interact I don't see the point. I try to mix with everybody. I have Armenian and Filipino friends. In my English class, when we have discussions I enjoy hearing different viewpoints. Diversity matters but only when you make an effort to talk to people from other cultures and find out the way they live."

—ROXANA ONTIVEROS, 16, BRAVO MEDICAL MAGNET HS



"My school is not very diverse. Racially, the majority of students are Hispanic. Economically, we mostly come from working-class families. Our parents usually leave for work in the morning and don't come home until after we're done with school. I've been to L.A. Youth and leadership programs with students from other cities. Those are really diverse because it's like a melting pot of students. We come from different races, families, schools, social classes and experiences—unlike my school."

—ADRIAN RIOS, 17, SOUTH EL MONTE HS



"In February we had the Western Association of Schools & Colleges come to our school [for accreditation]. One of the things they really liked was the diversity. Everyone is really mixed. My group of friends is diverse not just in culture but in religions too. One of my best friends is Buddhist. Other friends are Jewish, Catholic and atheist. Our cultures are different and I really like that because I get to experience their culture when I go to their houses."

—JESSICA MARIN, 16, CULVER CITY HS



"I go to a performing arts charter school. Kids come from all over. I think we're diverse ethnically but also in what we believe in. There are a lot of gay and lesbian students. Others are straight but everyone's accepting. I think that's really cool. Some of my closest friends are bisexual. I think we have that common link of performing arts but from that stems everything else. We thrive off the differences we all have."

—KIERA PELTZ, 16, CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL OF THE ARTS—MULTIMEDIA AND PERFORMING (VAN NUYS)

# My turn on the mic

As a suburban Korean kid, I never thought I'd have anything to rap about



By **Kevin Ko**

15, *Wilson HS (Hacienda Heights)*

Rap has always been my favorite kind of music. I listen to it all the time—in my room and at school. I even rap along to my favorite songs every morning in the shower. At first I was so impressed by how Eminem flowed his words to his beats. Then later I grew to appreciate how rappers like Tupac wrote songs that were autobiographical. In the song “Changes,” Tupac rapped about racial issues, gangs, drugs and violence. Lines like, “Give the crack to the kids, who the hell cares/ One less hungry mouth on the welfare,” opened my eyes and made me respect the artists who had gone through hard times.

But I live in Hacienda Heights, a suburb about 20 miles east of downtown Los Angeles that doesn't have these problems. Since I hadn't experienced the same things as my favorite artists, I always felt like I was a poser for being a rap fan. Sometimes I even turned down the volume when listening to my favorite hip-hop songs in front of African Americans. I don't know why, I just did it.

Last November, my doubts about being a le-

git rap fan started to change. A group called 4C The Power, which tries to help kids reach their potential through creativity and the arts, offered to put on a concert to raise money for the school. The concert would feature the Gamblerz Crew (b-boy dancers) from South Korea, Kaba Modern from America's Best Dance Crew and many other artists including rapper IZ. I thought that they weren't genuine because they're mostly Asian. When IZ introduced himself by saying: “Ya know, like I been through a lot of stuff and y'all just gotta know,” he came across like an actor trying to sound hard.

The day before the concert, these artists led free performing arts workshops after school for the students. I took the hip-hop class, which was led by IZ and Jedi, a producer. They told us that there was going to be a showcase after the workshop and that every class had to perform. We had people from the school's dance team in the class, so we decided to do a hip-hop dance routine and I would rap afterward. I was really scared, but IZ and Jedi gave me advice and motivation. They told me that a true rapper never gives up and steps up to every challenge.

As people filled the auditorium, I knew

**The crowd went wild when Kevin performed at a concert put on by the 4C The Power program.** Photos courtesy of Erich Chen Photography

that this performance was going to be different than my shower raps. The crowd clapped and screamed a lot of “woos” during the spoken word, DJ and acoustic performances, which made me feel a lot more pressure.

## I WANTED TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY

Even though I had rapped along to my favorite song, “Changes,” so many times, I still kept thinking that I would forget the words. But what worried me the most was that the crowd wouldn't respect me.

The hip-hop dance routine was good. After they finished, the DJ played his own instrumental hip-hop beats that I'd rap on top of. I stood there and looked at the crowd and let the beat flow through my ears.

Bass. Snare. Bass, bass, snare. Bass. Snare. Bass, bass, snare.

“I see no changes. Wake up in the mornin' and I ask myself/ Is life worth living should I blast myself?” I rapped with confidence. When I was performing I wanted to look like a rapper, so I walked all over the stage and moved my

hands with the beat. I was so into the moment that I forgot I was a Korean Catholic altar boy and just thought of myself as a rapper.

After I finished, the crowd went nuts. In front of the audience, Diann from 4C told me that she was going to give me a month to write my own verse and then I would perform in one of their upcoming shows. Everyone cheered and chanted “Ke-vin, Ke-vin” as I walked off stage with a huge smile on my face.

Before I got to my seat, Jedi pulled me aside, took the composition notebook that I had been given by 4C, and wrote “Kevin's rhymes” on the cover. He told me that any time I had a thought, an inspiration or just needed to vent, I should write that in this book and make it into a rhyme. But I kept thinking to myself, “Suburban Korean teenagers can't write raps.”

I would perform two verses to a song by the hip-hop group Far East Movement. Since Far East Movement would be at the concert, which was at 4C's new office in Hacienda Heights, Diann and I thought it would be cool to rap one of their songs. The first verse would be from

After I finished, the crowd went nuts. In front of the audience, Diann from the 4C The Power program told me that she was going to give me a month to write my own verse and then I would perform in one of the upcoming shows. Everyone cheered and chanted “Ke-vin, Ke-vin” as I walked off stage with a huge smile on my face.



the song “Blue Collar Blues” and I would write my own new second verse.

A couple days later, I finished my homework one night and turned on the instrumental to “Blue Collar Blues.” I was scared to write what I was thinking. How would people take it that I’m rapping about having late nights finishing my AP homework?

What made gangsta rap so powerful was that they were rapping about what they actually went through. For me, I just had to be as passionate about what I’ve gone through, even if my experiences weren’t as serious.

“I got church, sports and ASB/ My grades aren’t anywhere near where they should be.”

I didn’t like the flow at all. My words didn’t seem fast enough for the beat. But I still stuck with it because I got my message across. I spent about three hours during the next two days writing lines. When I started writing, I used a pen (like Eminem in 8 Mile) because I thought it was more “rapper-like.” But after I scratched out half a page of lines, I switched to pencil.

#### I PRACTICED FOR HOURS

The night before the show, I stayed up until 2 a.m. rapping in my room. At first, I sat down at

my desk and memorized the lyrics. After I had the lyrics down, I pretended my stapler was a microphone and tried out different motions with my hands that would make me look more “rapper-like” on stage. I forgot lines, stuttered and even dropped the stapler twice. I would always mess up when I began thinking too much. So I realized that I would have to let the lyrics flow without thinking.

When I arrived at the show, I saw the concert poster with my name right below Far East Movement’s name. For a brief moment, I forgot my nervousness. My name was on a concert poster? I wanted to squeal louder than a teenage girl at a Jonas Brothers concert.

But soon the doubt was back. Suddenly, IZ came in because he would be performing, too.

“Just remember, it’s only you up there,” he told me to settle my nerves. “Nobody else controls you. As long as you think you’re the best one out there, you’re going to be the best one out there.”

I took the stage. I received a huge ovation, mostly because a lot of my friends had come. I was happy to see my friends, but they also made me more nervous. Soon the DJ played the “Blue Collar Blues” instrumental. The mel-

ody kicked in first, then the snare, then the bass. Then I started rapping:

*Trying to live my life as clean as I can  
In the end, the drug free person  
is the bigger man  
Instead of getting high,  
I’d rather write rhymes,  
Put temptation aside man, I’ll be just fine.*

Far East Movement came out as soon as they heard their instrumental. I pointed right to them and smiled and they cheered right back. Did Far East Movement just cheer for me? HECK YEAH THEY DID!

I saw my friends and heard them cheer me on. Artists like AJ Rafael and Voodoo Soul popped their heads out from backstage to watch me perform. And it made me really happy when I looked to my right and saw IZ smiling and clapping along with the beat.

After my performance, the crowd went nuts, mostly because they were my friends (I think). I didn’t see my family while I performed, but they told me after that they were in the back. This meant a lot to me because my dad always said rappers were losers who didn’t study. And my mom told me to stop listening to rap and

didn’t want me to perform because she thought I would end up joining a gang and doing drugs. But my parents told me I was great and that they were really proud of me.

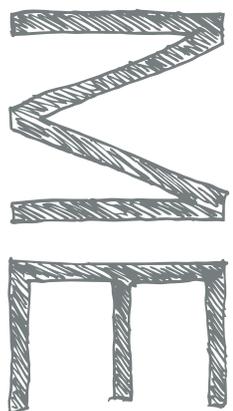
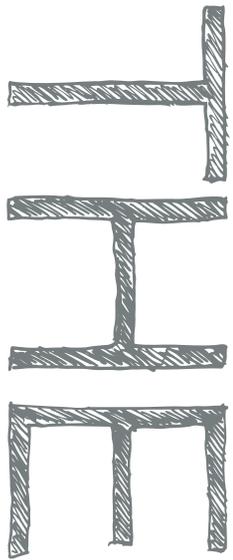
One of the members of Far East Movement told me that I was going to go places, which inspired me.

I’ve performed twice since then. And although I forgot some words one of the times, I feel lucky that I’ve had these opportunities. I get chills when I perform in front of a crowd that I can’t get anywhere else.

Now I know the true beauty of hip-hop is that it’s open to anyone. Hip-hop artists are judged by how good their flow is, not by what they look like or what race they are.



*Kevin’s favorite rapper is the Korean artist Dumbfoundead.*



## Congratulations

to the winners of our annual art contest, which asked teens to show us how they see themselves. The L.A. Youth teen staff chose these images as the winners. The theme “The real me” could mean what they are passionate about, the side of them that others don’t always see, or who they are on the inside. The first-place winner received \$75 and the second- and third-place winners received \$50. Please go to [layout.com](http://layout.com) to see additional artwork that won honorable mention.



FIRST PLACE

## Michelle Cao

15, Temple City HS • Teacher: Diane Chang-Ho

“Swimming makes me feel like I can be myself. It’s when I’m the most free and when I enjoy myself. This was based on a photo that my friend took on a day when morning swim practice was canceled because of the weather. We were happy because we found out that we won the meet from the day before, plus practice was canceled. We have lots of practices—mornings, afternoons, Saturdays. It’s really intense. Even though swimming is my passion, it was nice to hear that practice was canceled because we’d been working really hard.”



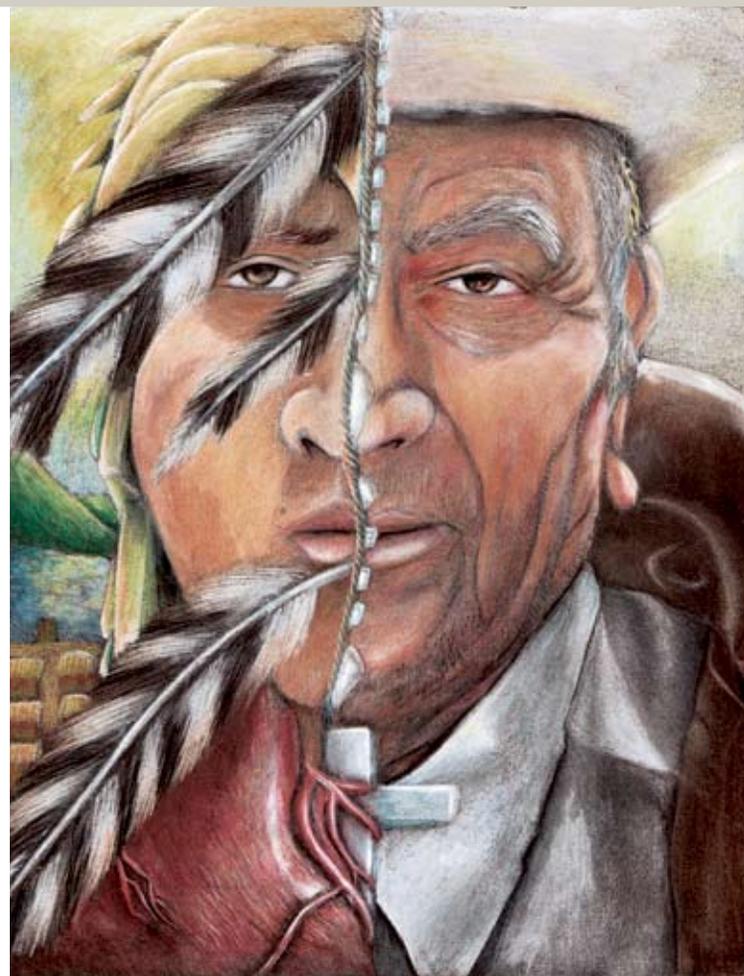


SECOND PLACE

# Tomas Castro

17, Mayfair HS (Lakewood) • Teacher: Robert Nelson

"My grandfather and the Aztec depicted in the piece represent my culture and heritage, being of Mexican descent. In the foreground the rosary and feathers represent the beliefs of my ancestors and my beliefs as a Catholic. Finally, the heart represents the bloodline that my ancestors and I share. To me it's my family, heritage and beliefs that define 'the real me.'"



THIRD PLACE

# Nathaly Martinez

18, Franklin HS

"It's supposed to show what goes on in my head every day. The eyes are planets, seeing beyond and accepting everything. The guitars in my ears are because I like listening to guitars. The wheels are my thoughts working in my brain. And it has film because I want to be a film director."

## HONORABLE MENTIONS

### 1 Guillermo Campos

16, Workman HS (City of Industry) •  
Teacher: John Snapp

### 2 Esua Villalobos

18, Arleta HS • Teacher: Steve Martinez

### 3 Maria Katherine L. Salvador

Age 19

### 4 Rachel Bell

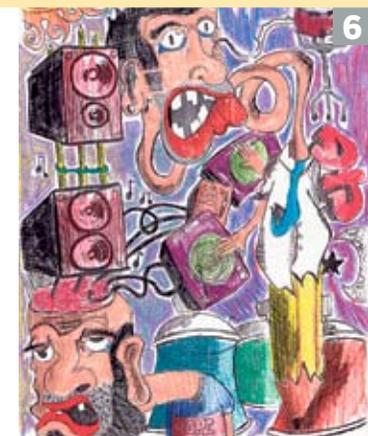
Central L.A. HS for the Visual & Performing Arts •  
Teacher: Julie McManus

### 5 Sally Choi

16, The Linden Center

### 6 Daniel Garcia

17, North Hollywood HS • Teacher: Carol Orzack



# You can lean on me

I wasn't sure how to help my friend after she was sexually molested

Author's name withheld\*

One day while walking home during freshman year, I was talking to my friend Natalie about how boring my health teacher was. But instead of giving me advice she was looking at the ground.

"Are you OK?" I asked.

She took a deep breath and then started telling me about what happened when she visited her 15-year-old cousin a few days before. Clenching her hands into fists, she told me that he sexually molested her. They were playfully wrestling in his room and then he started touching her crotch. After a few seconds she shoved him off and left the room terrified. He had never done anything like that before but she knew that it wasn't right. When she finished her story, I was shocked.

We stayed quiet for the rest of the walk to our homes. I went straight to my room. I couldn't concentrate on my homework. I wondered what would happen to her. What's going to happen to her cousin? I didn't tell anyone because I thought that Natalie needed her privacy.

At school the next day we tried to act normally but I could feel a tension. I couldn't ask her how her day was without it feeling awkward. I kept trying to think about what I should say and what I should not say. That evening my mind raced with questions. What would a caring friend do in this situation? Can someone help me? That was one of many restless nights.

## WE NEEDED TO TELL SOMEONE

A week later Natalie told our group of friends about what happened to her. Everyone was saying things like "Oh my god. Everything's gonna be OK."

"Everything's not gonna be OK," I said. "We can't just let this slip past. It's something really serious." After I said that everyone stayed quiet as we thought about what we should do. We remembered that Natalie was really close with one of her middle school teachers, so why not talk to her? Natalie hesitated.

"Are you sure she's even gonna listen to me?"

*\* We are not publishing the writer's name to protect her friend's privacy. Her friend's name has been changed.*



she asked.

We told her that since they still talk, why not try. After the bell rang, she and I kept talking and she said she was scared to tell her parents because if she did, it would create bigger problems. She also said she didn't think they would believe her. Her cousin was the family angel, and she had no evidence to prove that he did anything. It saddened me that when she needed her parents most, she felt like they wouldn't be there for her.

Three days later I went with Natalie to talk to her former teacher after school. I was nervous but I felt like I needed to be strong for Nat-

alie. On the walk there, she kept saying, "Let's turn around." But I wouldn't let her. I knew she wouldn't have gone through with it if I hadn't come along.

We showed up and I told the teacher that Natalie needed to tell her something. Then I went out to the hall and talked on my phone as they talked privately for two hours. I felt glad that I had helped Natalie and confident that her former teacher would help.

When she stepped out of the classroom her eyes were red. During our walk home she told me that her former teacher had set up an appointment with the school psychologist. I felt

Illustration by Tiffany Chen, 18, Walnut HS

a sense of relief because I knew she was going to get help from someone qualified. That night I was finally able to sleep. The next day she thanked me for convincing her to talk to her teacher. It cheered me up to see that at least I was able to do something.

The night after her appointment with the psychologist she called and told me what happened. When she had arrived for her appointment her parents were there. She didn't expect that. The psychologist told her to tell them what happened. She said that her parents didn't say

anything during the meeting, but when they got home her mother didn't believe her. And her father was furious. She told me that it was like he was about to go hunting for her cousin.

The police were also notified. They told her to avoid her cousin's family and that she should press charges against him. But she didn't want to because that would be too hard to deal with. She wanted everything to just be over.

During the next month Natalie always kept her head down and was very quiet. And it seemed as if she was always angry. At times she would randomly punch one of our friends in the shoulder.

#### I TRIED TO GET HER TO TALK TO ME

One afternoon, I reached over and put my arm on her shoulder as we walked out of school.

"What's the matter?" I asked. "Looks like something's eating you alive."

Natalie looked down at me, giving me the death stare. I had never felt so uncomfortable. I gently lifted my arm off her shoulder and waited for Natalie to respond. As the seconds passed more tension built up. She looked at me and then she looked down and said, "All we do is argue at home."

We kept walking and I looked down at her watch and had an idea. "All you have to do is put your anger on this watch and throw it as hard as you can against the wall," I said. "Trust me, you'll feel better."

She looked at me as if I were crazy but then grabbed her plastic watch. She threw it with all her strength and it made a hole in the apartment wall outside. She threw it a couple more times while cursing at the watch. Then we walked back home, Natalie smiling all the way, holding her dented plastic watch.

Her happiness didn't last long though. A few days later she was sad again and that continued for the rest of the school year. I tried not to let it bother me. I didn't resent her even though I had sacrificed a lot of my personal time for her, but there were a few times when I felt annoyed. I tried so hard for her but she wouldn't be happy for more than a minute. I felt unappreciated.

Once summer break started I didn't hear anything from Natalie. I lost track of how many times I asked in e-mails and voicemails, "Are you there? Are you alive? Why are you ignor-

**Three days later I went with Natalie to talk to her former teacher after school. I was nervous but I felt like I needed to be strong for Natalie. On the walk there, she kept saying, "Let's turn around." But I wouldn't let her. I knew she wouldn't have gone through with it if I hadn't come along.**

ing me?"

One evening in August Natalie finally called me. I was so relieved.

"Hey what's up?" I said.

"I wanted to commit suicide," she responded in a sarcastic tone. "That's what's up."

I got goosebumps.

"What?!" I yelled.

"I didn't know what to do, no one can fix my problems!" she said. "I'm better off dead! It seems like no one even cares about me! I can't take it anymore!"

I snapped at her and said, "You just scared the crap out of me! Does it seem like I don't care? How dare you even say such nonsense! I know that you are going through a tough time but you have to realize that you're not the only

one involved. You will never fix anything by trying to run away from it and it's nothing but being selfish. You think that no one cares or loves you. You don't even think about your little brother or your parents! I know it may not seem like it but they all do care!"

She needed a wake-up call. It was so frustrating that she had kept it all bottled up after I had tried so hard to help her out.

I asked her why she hadn't talked to me about this. She said that she felt unloved and unwanted. She started to cry. I realized that I had never really put myself in her shoes. I thought that the problem would eventually go away. I didn't know what she was going through. I felt guilty; I should have hung out with her more often.

"Killing yourself will never solve anything. Your family does love you and your friends do too. Never make such a tragic decision ever again because the next time I see you, it better not be at a grave." The words just came out of my mouth like I had memorized them. To me they sounded like words that only wise people would say, not me. I hoped that she listened.

After talking on the phone with her for three hours I knew that she needed to go to back to her psychologist. I spent most of the evening in my room thinking about what I should do. Before going to bed I told my big sister everything. I didn't want to tell my mom, because I thought that she wouldn't want me to be around Natalie because it might affect me in a bad way. My sister told me to just be there for Natalie. After that I fell fast asleep, exhausted from thinking too much.

Natalie called the next day, her voice cheery. She told me that she had seen her psychologist and told her everything about what had happened during the summer. Her mother's side of the family was still in denial. They couldn't believe that her cousin was capable of something so horrendous. They said that Natalie was craving attention and making up stories. Natalie was furious when she told me this part. That didn't matter though, because her mother finally believed her.

She also said that she was looking forward to starting school and hanging out with her friends. I felt so relieved.

"I think I can do this," she said. "You were right. I can't run away from my problems, I

have to face them." I was happy and proud of her when she said that.

I wish I could say that this was the end of Natalie's problems. But in 10th grade she had other problems. Eventually she became depressed again and she almost killed herself by overdosing on pills.

#### I REALIZED THAT LISTENING WAS THE BEST THING I COULD DO

But this time we knew better how to help. Her family became more understanding; they listen to her, spend time with her. My friends and I always ask her how she's feeling. Natalie's happy and in a better position than she was back then.

I never thought I would be in a friendship that went through so much. It was exhausting physically and mentally. But it helped me to be more patient and understanding. My friendship with Natalie grew stronger and closer. Sometimes I'm the only one who she tells things.

I learned that friendship isn't about just having fun. It's also about trying to help a friend when something horrible happens, even when I didn't always know how to help her. I'm glad I could be there for her.

### WHERE TO TURN

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

#### L.A. COUNTY RAPE & BATTERING HOTLINE (24/7)

(310) 392-8381  
peaceoverviolence.org

#### NATIONAL SEXUAL ASSAULT HOTLINE (24/7)

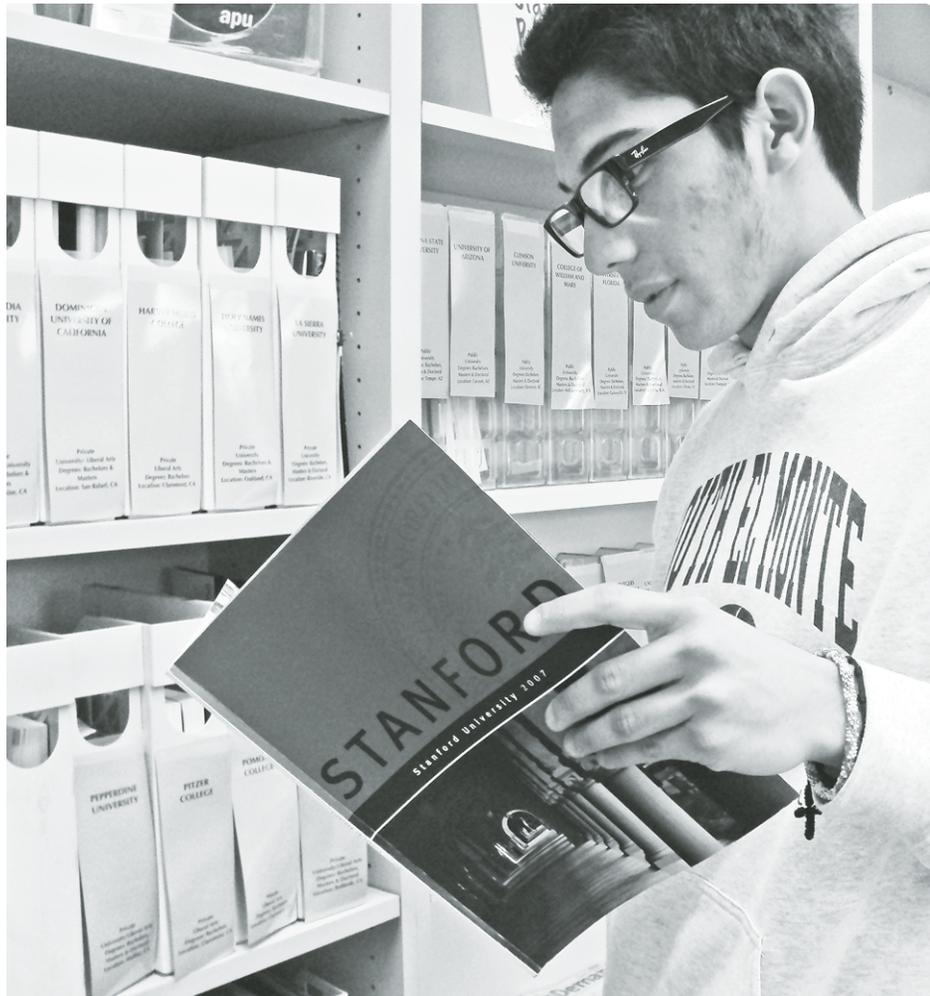
(800) 656-HOPE (4673)

#### TEEN LINE (6 TO 10 P.M.)

(800) TLC-TEEN  
teenlineonline.org

# Budget cuts are hurting our future

My school can no longer afford to give us extra career and college guidance



**The Career Path Center is still open, but Adrian says it's less helpful without the teachers who used to work there.** Photo by Elizabeth Sanchez, 18, South El Monte HS

**By Adrian Rios**  
17, South El Monte HS

Like all schools in California, my school is suffering because of the economy. To make sure that the school's budget got balanced and to try to save teachers' jobs, the administration cut the Career Path Center's funding before this school year started.

The Career Path Center (CPC) provided

information on all the post-high school options students could consider, from college to the military to getting a job. Five teachers used to devote part of their days to working in the center, but now they're all back teaching full-time.

My dad didn't go to college so he doesn't have many answers about the college search. My mom works long hours so she isn't always available and I don't have older siblings. So

when I had questions about college or career possibilities, I knew the Career Path Center would have the answers. I had assumed that I needed to take both the ACT and SAT to get into college, but last year when I asked, I learned that I only needed one. I ended up taking both to see which test I'd prefer, but the CPC gave me fee waivers and saved me \$193 on test fees. The staff also kept me informed about upcoming test dates and registration deadlines.

When I wanted information on Stanford University, I went to the wall of brochures and read about the programs and opportunities at Stanford and 20 other private schools. Reading the brochures, which were from schools across the country, was different than going to a website. Since the colleges sent them to my school, it showed the students that those colleges thought we belonged there.

Now many of those college brochures are gathering dust. And we no longer have presentations from college admissions counselors. The sign-up sheets for those presentations have been replaced with impersonal "How to fill out the FAFSA" pamphlets.

## THE STAFF ANSWERED QUESTIONS OUR PARENTS COULDN'T

The CPC was also important to many of my classmates because their parents speak little-to-no English or have not attended college, so they cannot help them with their college questions. My best friend Antonio's parents don't speak English. Antonio, who is also a junior, told me that he's worried about his personal statements because there is no CPC staff to edit them like in previous years. He plans on asking teachers and other students to edit them in their free time.

Last year, another one of my friends procrastinated on all of her college applications and had to finish them in 10 days. The teachers who worked in the Career Path Center stayed with her until 6 p.m. every day for a week, and she ended up attending Cal State L.A. She was happy and grateful because without them pushing her she might not have applied and wouldn't have gotten in.

The CPC also gave me some career advice. Based on the results of a career placement test I took through a CPC program, I was placed in a theater arts class with an instructor who worked in the stage design business for more than 15 years. She told the class that we could work as sound technicians for concerts, lighting designers on Broadway or floor managers for TV shows and movies.

We also used to have special projects. Seniors could job-shadow a person in a career they were interested in. One year, a student shadowed a mortician for the day, and that

Go to [layout.com](http://layout.com) to read about how budget cuts are affecting other schools. Ashley is upset that LAUSD shortened the school year. Sunitha's favorite teacher is leaving, while Jessica says the sports budget at her school was cut and players have to pay to play. Natasha wonders what's the point of keeping her small school open when seven teachers are leaving.

day she decided that's what she wanted to do. I was hoping to follow a news reporter for a day, but now I have to wait until college to see if that's what I want to do. It hurts that we lost such a great opportunity.

Without the well-staffed CPC, our counselors have tried to help us with college stuff even more. Every week they post scholarship opportunities on our school's website. My counselor welcomes me in her office whenever she's available. Also, the five teachers who worked in the Career Path Center still try to help us. One of them generously spared a few minutes from her busy day to tell me what to include (and not to include) in a scholarship essay.

But it's not the same. It's difficult to have one-on-one talks with our counselors about college plans because the five of them are far too busy helping the other 1,400 students at our school.

I understand that it isn't my school's fault. The administration had to make cuts, but this cut is seriously affecting our community. Without the CPC, I think fewer students will go to college in the next couple of years. Many won't be encouraged to attend a four-year university, so they will either attend a local community college or won't go to college at all.



*Adrian says that when schools cuts resources, it's even more important for students to stay motivated.*

**By Ashley Hansack**

17, King Drew Medical Magnet HS

When I became a vegetarian, eating lunch at school was the hardest part. I'd eat pancakes or cereal at nutrition, but by fourth period I would be starving. I'd look at the clock waiting for lunch even though I didn't know if there would be something for me to eat that day.

I would get in line and when I saw hot wings, chicken tenders, hamburgers and salads with ham I would search for more options. Sometimes there would be something without meat, like mac and cheese or a bean and cheese burrito. But most of the time, I didn't have anything to eat. I didn't take my own lunch because I come home late and I didn't want to wake up earlier just to make food. And my mom tells us to eat at school so she can save money.

I didn't want to bother the lunch workers because they seemed busy. I had a lunch ticket so I'd get a hamburger and sometimes a banana or carrots and give the hamburger away to my friends. It was tempting watching my friends eat. But remembering why I became a vegetarian stopped me.

When I read the book *Fast Food Nation* a couple years ago I was shocked and grossed out. I read about huge factory farms where cows are confined to areas where they stand in their own feces. Cows and pigs are given hormones to fatten them up so companies can get the most meat out of them. I worried that those hormones are harmful and were going into my body.

I also read how the workers are treated badly. They are exposed to chemicals and work long hours. The meat companies seem to care more about their profits than consumers. I didn't want to support these companies anymore so I decided to become a vegetarian.

A year earlier I had tried becoming a vegetarian. But two days later my mom made chicken and I ate it so I failed. This time I was determined to stick to it.

#### JUNK FOOD WAS OUR ONLY OPTION

My vegetarian friends and I would complain that there was no food for us. We'd go to the student store and buy 25-cent cookies or buy something from kids selling donuts, chips, candy and chocolate from their backpacks. By the end of school I'd be hungry again but I couldn't go home to eat because I had extracurriculars.

After a few months, I was tired of being hungry. At lunch I'd ask, "Do you have something without meat?" Most of the time the cafeteria workers would say, "No, sorry" because there were more kids coming into the cafeteria and they didn't want to stop the line to help me. I

Photos by Jasper Nahid,  
16, New Roads School  
(Santa Monica)



## Now serving vegetarians

There wasn't much for me to eat at lunch until the cafeteria changed



just let it go. But once in a while someone would go to the back to look. They'd come out with a bean and cheese burrito or a peanut butter and jelly sandwich in a wrapper. I like the PB&Js so I'd be happy.

At the beginning of the school year, the food improved. My school got money from the school district to renovate the cafeteria. It was called CAFÉ L.A. There were more options and more entrees without meat. I was relieved when I saw veggie burgers, vegetarian chili, vegetable frittatas and more fruit. The frittata looked strange because I had never eaten one before but it tastes delicious. It has tomatoes, bell peppers, egg, spinach and onions. I feel like I eat a lot healthier now. I don't get hungry until right before lunch so I can concentrate in class. Now I'm excited to go to lunch. It's fun. I talk and laugh with my friends, instead of walking around campus thinking, "oh I'm hungry."

I still had some complications. Once I got to lunch late and there was nothing vegetarian. I told them I was a vegetarian and they told me I needed a doctor's note. What? Why? I didn't know if I did or not so I left. When I told my older sister she said it was wrong for them to deny me a lunch.

#### MY SCHOOL IS REQUIRED TO HAVE VEGETARIAN MEALS

I spoke to the cafeteria manager, Ms. Ticey, because I wanted to know what my rights were as a vegetarian. She said menus are created by our school district (Los Angeles Unified) but the cafeteria manager at each school determines how much they need. Sometimes students who are not vegetarians grab the meatless item, which leaves the vegetarians without an option. But the school is required to have a supplemental meal so the vegetarian students can eat. She said they always have a backup, like the PB&Js. If you have a special diet, you need to get a doctor's note so they can accommodate you. Since being a vegetarian is a choice, there isn't a need for a doctor's note.

Vegetarian teens need to be more persistent about getting something to eat. If you don't speak up they won't put out more vegetarian options since there isn't a demand for it. I wish I had been more vocal from the beginning.



*Ashley's favorite thing to eat at lunch is the vegetable frittata because it's the healthiest.*

# Mom, I'm praying for you

I had just gotten close to my mom and then I worried I was going to lose her to cancer



Illustration by Lily Clark, 16, Immaculate Heart HS

**By Ben Bang**

*17, Palos Verdes Peninsula HS*

Four years ago, when I lived with my family in Korea, my mom found out that she had stomach cancer. Since she was diagnosed early, I thought she'd be fine after she got treatment. She had surgery to remove a third of her stomach and for two months she went back and forth to the hospital. But I never visited her because I was busy with school and didn't fully know what was going on. After her treatment, she stopped working and ate a special healthy diet but she seemed better, so I forgot that there was a possibility of cancer returning.

A few months after her treatment was finished, my family and I moved to California for a year because of my dad's job.

That year was like a break for us. We went on trips to Mexico, Yosemite, Las Vegas and the Grand Canyon. Our family would eat dinner together, which we rarely did in Korea.

In Korea, my mom worked and I would spend all day at school or tutoring. When I had free time, I would go out with my friends. Now my mom was home all the time and I got to spend more time with her. Sometimes when I was eating after school, she would tell me stories about her past, like

how she won an academic prize and got to visit the United States when she was in high school. I was surprised to find out she was smarter than I thought.

I also realized how similar we were. We can make friends easily and we're both forgetful. Whenever I lost my homework or wallet, I would jokingly say, "I got this from you, Mom."

After my dad's work was done, he and my sister returned to Korea. I liked how in the United States I could choose my own classes and do more extracurricular activities, so I decided to stay and live with my aunt. My mom said she would pack our stuff and move me to my aunt's house before leaving.

## IT WAS JUST ME AND MY MOM

For the next two months, my mom and I spent so much time together. We would go to the laundromat and I would read for school while she took a nap. Even when we read and didn't talk, it was still

comforting to know that she was there.

I loved this place at the top of a hill where I used to run for cross-country. It was one of my favorite spots in Palos Verdes because I could see the entire field covered with yellow flowers and the ocean in the background. A few days before she left, I showed it to her and she loved it. She thanked me for sharing the view with her. She said she would've regretted it if she hadn't seen that view before she left.

When she dropped my stuff at my aunt's house, I pretended I was OK but after she left I couldn't stop crying. I missed her already.

School started the next day. After my mom returned to Korea, she called me every day. But in early November my dad called instead. He sounded worn out.

He asked how I was but I interrupted, "What's wrong? How come Mom's not calling me today?" After a few seconds, he said my mom's cancer had returned and spread throughout her body. Her survival rate was less than 30 percent. He said the doctors were doing everything they could to cure her but there might not be much time left for her. He bought a plane ticket for me to fly to Korea for winter break. I couldn't say anything and he said, "I guess it's pretty late there, so go to sleep," and hung up.

After I put down the phone, I broke down. Tears kept coming out. I didn't want to believe it. That my mom, who was always there for me, whom I said goodbye to just a few months ago, didn't have much time left didn't make any sense. Why didn't I spend more time with her? I just got close to her, why do you need to take her away from me now, God? I started pounding the wall with my fist. What's the purpose of staying in the United States if I can't see her? Why do I need to wait for winter break?

After a while, I stopped pounding and crying, but my mind was scrambled. I lay on my bed not knowing what to think when I saw that it was already past 1 a.m. I thought I should stop acting like a child and pull myself together.

All I could think of was praying for her and doing my best at school to send her good news. I started praying every day for her recovery. At church I asked my pastor to pray for my mom too.

A few weeks after my dad's phone call, my mom called. I didn't bring up her cancer because I didn't want to talk about it. So we talked for only a few minutes. She encouraged me

to keep doing my best and I told her "don't worry about me." After I hung up I broke down again. I wanted to hold her hands and see her smile. I was sick of feeling like I couldn't do anything.

#### **I TRIED TO SOUND POSITIVE WHEN SHE CALLED**

At school, I worked hard to get straight As. Whenever she called, I told her "I will be there soon," and "I'm praying for you every day, you'll be all right." After I hung up, I'd think that her voice sounded OK so I wanted to believe that she was OK. But then I'd think, what if my mom was just trying to sound strong? What if she dies? I imagined our family without her, rare-

**“What’s wrong? How come Mom’s not calling me today?” After a few seconds, my dad said my mom’s cancer had returned and spread throughout her body. He bought a plane ticket for me to fly to Korea for winter break.**

ly seeing and talking to each other—my dad going to work, my sister going to college and coming home late, and no one at home to greet anyone. Without my mom, our home would be just another place to stay for the night.

When winter break started, I flew to Korea. I hugged her and held her hands like I had wanted to. She was weaker and wore a beanie to hide her short hair. She joked, "It's the new style. Do you like it?" She doesn't usually cook but that night she cooked mackerels and a Korean soup, which are my favorites.

During the two weeks I was there, my mom went to the hospital again for chemotherapy. My dad asked me if I wanted to stay with her overnight. I said yes, thinking now was my chance to help her.

I had heard about her treatment over the phone but seeing it for myself made her cancer more real to me. Her wrist was hooked up to wires that held liquid medicines and pain-

killer. After a few hours, she told me she wanted to take a walk. She had to move around with a rolling pole that held medicines. When she got back, she lay in her bed all day. I turned on the TV, opened the window and did little things she wanted me to do, but she didn't seem comfortable. Normally when she started talking, she would keep going, but she rarely spoke.

The nurse brought dinner but Mom said she didn't have any appetite and gave it to me. She fell asleep after watching me eat. It was only 9, but I fell asleep in the bed next to my mom's within a few minutes.

I woke up when I heard vomiting. I jumped out of my bed and flung the bathroom door open. She was throwing up even though she

Months passed and I kept praying daily. I was anxiously waiting for better news. Then, on July 14, my mom called.

#### **SHE BEAT CANCER AGAIN**

"Ben, I want you to calm down before I say this," she said. I didn't want to imagine the worst, so I didn't think at all and said, "I'm ready." She laughed and told me that after half a year of treatment, her cancer was cured. I was speechless so she repeated it two or three times, and I finally realized that she was safe. I got up and shouted, "GOD, THANKYOU SO MUCH!!" I even posted it on Facebook and got around a hundred responses from my friends saying they were so glad for me. Everywhere I went, I couldn't stop laughing and smiling. I went to church that Friday. I told them about my mom and I couldn't stop grinning the whole time.

I thought this was the way God revealed himself to my family and me. Even if God did not heal her directly, she found meaning and her will to live in his words. I was so glad that my prayers had been heard.

I couldn't wait until August when I went to visit her. She slept significantly longer than before and couldn't lift anything that was heavier than two or three pounds. She took medicine to reduce numbness in her hands and had her own healthy diet; but it was all good because she was safe now. There still is the possibility that the cancer will return, but with her healthy diet and positive thinking, I know that she will live until she sees my children and more.

Looking back to when she first got cancer, I realize how stupid I was for not appreciating her. I feel bad that I didn't visit her in the hospital. I should have cared, she's my mom. Now she's more to me than just an adult who provides everything for me. She's my supporter and friend. I am truly glad that she is still in my life.



*Ben can't wait to see his mom this summer.*

# You call that dancing?

I don't think you have to bump and grind to have fun on the dance floor

By **Jacky Garcia**

17, Lynwood HS

A couple years ago at my cousin's Sweet 16, my partner in the court of honor didn't want to dance. So I grabbed him and dragged him onto the dance floor. The reggaeton was already blaring. We were dancing face to face about a foot apart, but as the song progressed we danced closer and closer until our bodies were pressed against each other. Then he grabbed my hips and held me tight against him.

I wanted to stop. It didn't feel right. But I danced that way for three more songs because I wanted to keep dancing with him. I avoided making eye contact with him because I didn't want him to notice my discomfort. I worried that people might think I was slutty, which I usually thought when I saw girls dance like that. That thought made feel even worse.

Then they played some merengue and after that he didn't want to dance with me. I felt used, because I wanted to dance with him to all types of music but he only wanted to freak-dance to reggaeton. I wished he saw dancing as a way to have fun, the way I did. When I'm dancing with my friends I don't worry about anything (even how I look while I'm dancing) and all the stress in my life just melts away. I like dancing so much that I take dance classes. But when I was dancing with him, I wondered every second what people thought about me. I totally went against what I believe in—that the purpose of dancing should be to have fun, not to release sexual tension—just to please a guy. I hoped my mom didn't see me.

## IT LOOKED SO SEXUAL

Unfortunately, I see too many teens who seem into freak dancing. The worst was a few months ago. While dancing to some reggaeton at my cousin's quinceañera, I noticed a group of three girls and five guys grinding on each other. One girl kept bending down until she got on her hands and knees, while one of the guys grabbed her by the waist and moved his hips against her butt. The grossest thing was that I saw one girl's underwear. It was like pornography on the dance floor.

This inappropriate dancing went on for like an hour. I kept wondering, "When are they gonna stop?" My group of friends and I kept dancing



Illustration by Amy Fan, 16, Temple City HS

*There is no need to dance like that. I know that so many videos show this kind of dancing, but I don't care if it's popular, I think it's nasty. I mean smoking weed could be popular but you don't have to do it.*

but we tried to separate our group from theirs. I didn't want my parents to think I thought their grinding was cool or that I wanted to do it.

What made it worse was that there were 5- and 7-year-olds watching and even parents. I thought a parent or some adult would tell them to stop. Even though my mom gave a disapproving look, she didn't stop them and a few seconds later she actually giggled with my aunts. It's

not that I wanted my mom to stop them (these weren't her kids), but I was disappointed none of the adults did anything. That group kept dancing like that for the rest of the party. I just tried to ignore them.

I have seen freak dancing at school dances, too. A Halloween dance sophomore year was my first school dance. I went with two of my friends and the three of us were having a great

time dancing to cumbia and merengue music. Then one of my friends disappeared for like 20 minutes and when she came back she was telling us how she had freak danced with a guy. She sounded happy, like she just won something. I asked her why she did it and her only response was, "The guy was cute." I thought to myself, "What are you doing?"

Of the 30 or so students there, almost all of them were grinding whenever the DJ played reggaeton. Grinding isn't against the rules, according to what I've seen in my school's discipline handbook. There was only one teacher supervising and she wasn't even there most of the time. When there weren't enough guys, girls would grind on each other. There was one boy-girl couple that grinded on each other to every type of music. There was no need to grind to cumbia or merengue! I thought they looked ridiculous.

## I WANTED TO DANCE, BUT NOT LIKE THAT

There was a guy I was interested in dancing with but another girl beat me to him. When they started dancing freaky I thought, "Well, he probably only wants to dance like that so he wouldn't want to dance with me." I didn't care about dancing with him after seeing that; I wasn't going to degrade myself.

There is no need to dance like that. I know that so many videos show it, but I don't care if it's popular, I think it's nasty. I mean smoking weed could be popular but you don't have to do it. I feel that when girls do this, they are disrespecting themselves.

I'm also disappointed in the guys, who are taking advantage of girls and exploiting them by touching them inappropriately. I'm proud that I don't dance like that, because I'm setting an example for other girls and most importantly, my little sister. I want her to respect herself while still having a great time dancing at parties.



*Jacky has been busy rehearsing a Michael Jackson tribute with her dance class.*



# When are you an adult?

ESSAY CONTEST WINNERS

1ST PLACE \$50

## I had to take my mom's place

Author's name withheld

I remember all the nights when my mom would tuck me in and tell me she loved me. I also remember always wanting to turn 18 and move out of the house and get a place of my own. To me that was what being an adult was all about. But that didn't happen because my mom passed away when I was 13. That was the day that I was forced to become an adult.

When my mom passed away I didn't know what to do. I was confused, sad and lost. My mom—my best friend, the per-

son who looked over me—had gone away with no return. I didn't really know whom to turn to for help, especially since I had 1-

dedicated to my brothers. Over time my brothers looked up to me. To them I was like their mom because I am the one who takes care of them. It was really hard to be emotionally strong for them because I would always want to break down and cry. I wanted my mom. Most of the time I was questioning myself about what to do. It was hard because I would console them and tell them everything was going to be OK.

I never imagined I was going to become

*I never imagined I was going to become an adult at such a young age. I would always consider myself a mommy's girl. Now I feel like I'm the mom because I am the one who does everything without the help of anyone.*

son who looked over me—had gone away with no return. I didn't really know whom to turn to for help, especially since I had 1- and 7-year-old brothers. The only person we have now is my dad, but he is always working so he isn't there most of the time.

I never imagined all the responsibilities my mom had. She had to cook dinner, do laundry and keep a clean house. Now those are all the things I am doing. On top of that I have to keep up with my schoolwork. What sucked was that I had to give up all of my personal time. I no longer go out on weekends. Now all of my time is

an adult at such a young age. I would always consider myself a mommy's girl. Now I feel like I'm the mom because I am the one who does everything without the help of anyone. Being an adult to me means doing everything my mom would do. The things I took for granted now seem very hard. My whole perspective toward becoming an adult changed. I thought I would become an adult when I turned 18. Now I'm 14 with the responsibilities of a 27-year-old. Age is just a number. A number isn't something that is going to change you. The only person who can make a change is you.

Illustration from L.A. Youth archives



2ND PLACE \$30

## The court decides when I'm an adult

By M.C.

Central Juvenile Hall

California is one of many states that has high rates of sending juvenile offenders to adult court to be tried as adults. I know this because I am, unfortunately, one of them. I am a "fitness fighter," or high-risk offender. This has forced me to enter the crossroads between childhood and adulthood. Being a fitness fighter means I am being evaluated to see if I should be tried in adult court. Being unfit for juvenile court means doing adult time. I am only 16, but the judge will decide if I'm an adult.

This is a long and stressful process. First, I have been housed in a special unit in juvenile hall. Next, I have to go to court. When I first appeared in court, the judge told me that a psychiatrist was going to interview and observe me. Then, she scheduled my next court date for more than two months later. Af-

ter the psychiatrist has observed me over time, I will go back to court, and they will set a date for my fitness hearing. Finally, my fitness hearing will decide if I am going to adult court or if I will remain in the juvenile court system. The whole fitness process can take many months. I have now been locked up in juvenile hall for seven months.

At home, I would be considered an adult when I turn 18 and leave home. Being locked up in juvenile hall has made me mature much faster than I had planned. Kids my age in the outs (not locked up) often can't wait to grow up and become an adult. If I am tried as an adult, no matter what my age, it means a harsher sentence and time in a youth prison until I am shipped off to an adult penitentiary.

My life is hanging by a thread in the hands of my judge and nothing could be more frightening. I have seen many "kids," or according to the judge "adults," sent to spend the rest of their lives, or a good majority of it, behind bars. I fear that each court date could be my last and that I won't be able to see my family again as a free person. I think that everybody deserves a second chance. Now I am more mature. I regret and feel remorse for what I did.

Most young people have a different perspective about what makes a person an adult—mine is drastic. If the judge's gavel drops and finalizes my loss of fitness, at that instant, I will officially be an adult.

3RD PLACE \$20

## No rush to grow up

By **Abraelle Shirley**

Lawndale HS

Like most people, I had the urge to grow up quickly. Despite the constant “they grow up so fast” from relatives, it was not fast enough for me. I used to say, “I can’t wait until I grow up,” usually when I was frustrated with my mom’s strict rules. I fantasized about living a posh life, walking under the warm sun wearing designer shades with my athletic boyfriend before stopping at a restaurant and drinking expensive wines without my mom nagging me. My fantasy would abruptly end when my mom shattered my thoughts by reminding me that it was getting late and I had not yet started my homework. Sigh.

Through my own experiences—wearing excessive makeup to make myself appear older and dating older guys—and enlightenment, my views of being an adult have changed. Adulthood is something that will occur whether we are ready or not. College is a big leap that forces people into that transition from childhood to the beginning of adult life, especially if you are going to be living on campus. In college, I will have to cook and clean and care for myself. I will no longer have my mom telling me to avoid certain people, not to procrastinate and to make the right decisions. However, I will be able to keep the advice my mom has instilled in me so far, even when we are apart, although it may be hard to do so with the partying and alcohol and stress of college.

Legally, being an adult could mean being 18, yet there is no way that minute that distinguishes someone from being 17 on one day and 18 the next can determine their adulthood. Being an adult comes gradually as people take responsibilities for their actions, take care of priorities and look out for themselves with limited support of others. Adulthood is not determined by age or ability to bear children or being physically developed. I know people older than 18 who have not yet obtained these traits and I’ve seen many teen moms dependent on their parents to support the baby.

I will be an adult when I am able to make the right decisions determined by my morals that I have acquired over my years, when I understand the repercussions of my actions, when I am self-sufficient or accept limited help from parents or friends, and when I care not only for myself but others. The closer I get the more frightened I become. Now I’m in no rush to become an adult. I will take advantage of my mom’s guidance and housing and rules for as long as I can. I will enjoy the moment I am in and embrace my life when I am an adult.

NEW ESSAY CONTEST:

## What do you take for granted?

There are those things in our lives that are always there, but we never think about. You might live 10 minutes from the beach. It could be the blanket that keeps you warm at night. Maybe it’s how all of your dirty clothes somehow appear in your closet, clean and neatly folded, or that you are able to walk around your neighborhood and feel safe. It’s part of your life, but you don’t often take the time to appreciate it. What’s something in your life that you take for granted? Tell us why it’s important to you and what your life would be like without it.



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

Essays should be a page or more. Include your name, school, age and phone number with your essay. The staff of L.A. Youth will read the entries and pick three winners. Your name will be withheld if you request it. The first-place winner will receive \$50. The second-place winner will get \$30 and the third-place winner will receive \$20. Winning essays will be printed in our September issue and put on our website at [www.layouth.com](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, June 18, 2010**

## All-American Girl

By Meg Cabot

Reviewed by Julia Waldow

15, Beverly Hills HS

**A**ll-American Girl by Meg Cabot is one of my favorite books. The characters seem real and the plot is full of exciting twists. Cabot has a way of getting into a teenager's mind and putting her characters in situations that a lot of readers can relate to.

Samantha Madison lives in Washington, D.C. and is having a hard time at home and at school. Her two sisters are nothing like her (one's popular and the other's an annoying genius), and she's in love with her older sister's boyfriend, Jack. When Sam's parents find out that she's selling celebrity caricatures in school, they want her to take art classes as a creative outlet, but Sam feels that she is too experienced for the class.

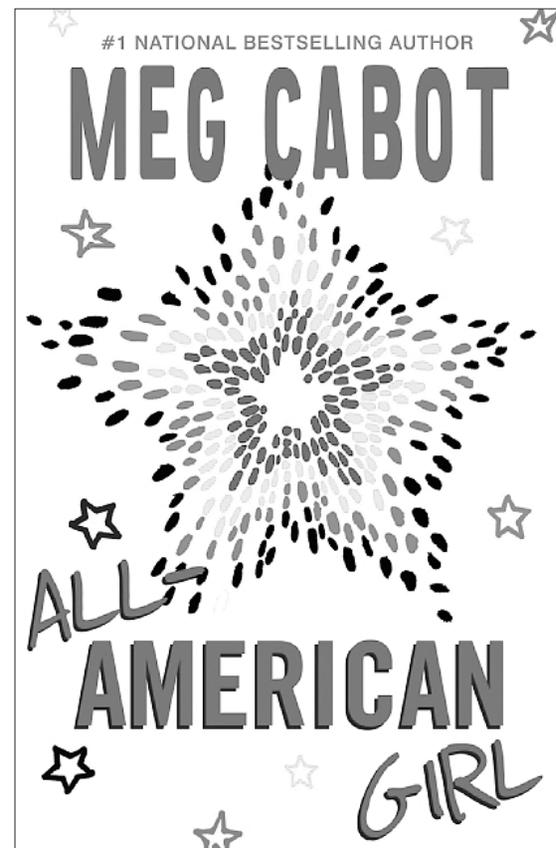
One day Sam ditches art class and is standing on the sidewalk, waiting for the light to change, when she sees a man trying to shoot the President, who is across the street. Sam tackles the man, saving the President's life and becoming a national hero and even teen ambassador to the United Nations! Sam becomes popular overnight and goes to a bunch of cool parties, but despite all of this, she still longs for a boyfriend. And who it turns out to be is quite surprising.

So much happens in this book. The story doesn't end with Sam becoming famous—she has to make some difficult decisions that affect her relationships with others, and she has to learn how to be true to herself.

Sam is a great character because she is easy to relate to. She has problems with her siblings and her parents, she struggles with who she is and who she wants to be, and she has a huge crush on a boy who doesn't like her back. Reading about her life was an escape from my own. Sam's story allowed me to get inside of her head and experience everything alongside her.

This book is great for reading on a summer day when you have plenty of time because you won't want to put it down! Plus, the book has "Top 10" lists separating most of the chapters, so you are constantly in the know about why Sam would make a better girlfriend for Jack, what you should not do at a press conference, and why Sam wishes that she were Gwen Stefani.

I would definitely recommend this book to anyone who is looking for a fun, adventurous novel with a surprising twist.



## Pretty Dead

By Francesca Lia Block

Reviewed by Destiny Jackson

17, Mayfair HS (Lakewood)

**B**efore you draw out your fangs and try to bite me for suggesting a vampire book, hear me out. I love Edward Cullen as much as the next Twi-hard, but it's time to move on. The Twilight saga books are over, and *Pretty Dead* by Francesca Lia Block is just the right book to move onto.

Normally in vampire books the girl wants to become a vampire to join her undead lover, but in this book it's the opposite, which drew me in. I couldn't believe a vampire could possibly "un-vampire" herself.

Charlotte Emerson is pretty perfect and is envied by the undead and mortals alike ... despite being dead for more than a hundred years. But after the suicide of Charlotte's only friend, Emily, Charlotte starts to question if living forever was the right choice. She feels that Emily at least had a way out, while she can't die.

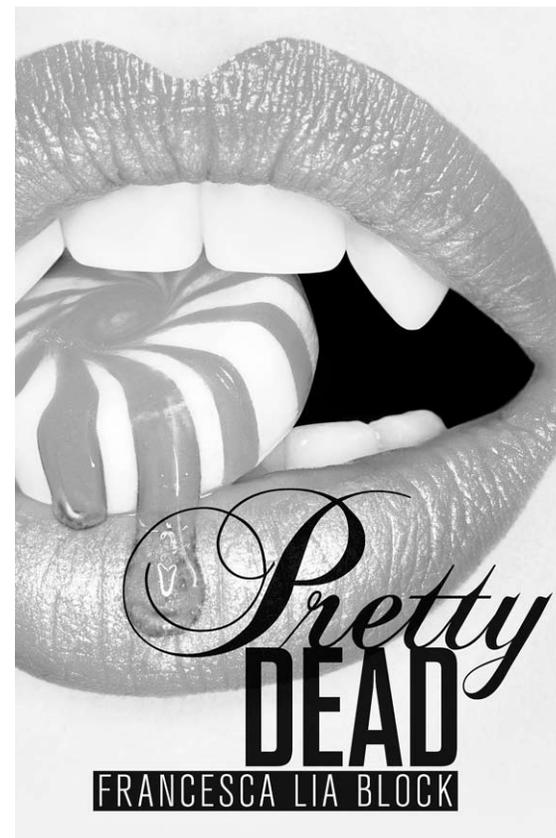
This is where the book gets a bit confusing. Charlotte talks to the reader as if it was her diary. In doing so she takes the reader back through her life starting in the early 1900s, going through World War I, Woodstock and to the present day. One minute she's in the present, then she's remembering her life as a human some hundred years back and then she has visions of the

future. It gave me whiplash.

Some time after Emily's death, Charlotte finds out that the man who turned her into a vampire, William, has come back to find her (because she had broken up with him two decades earlier). Charlotte wants to leave so she won't be found, but she falls in love with a human boy. That boy just happens to be Emily's former boyfriend, Jared. Can somebody say scandal!?

Since Charlotte is now attached to Jared, she decides not to leave and to confront William. During this weird love between Charlotte and Jared, she begins experiencing sudden changes in her body. Vampire bodies never change. Her fingernail tears and her cheeks get rosy, all human features. Is her old, powerful vampire lover William causing all of this? Or is it from loving a human? During her changes Charlotte wonders if becoming human would be good for her and Jared, since she wants to grow old with him.

I like Block because her writing style is vivid and descriptive. Like when Charlotte describes her eyes: "The Pacific is not unlike my eyes—sometimes sprawling blue and sometimes gray and sometimes dark." I also like that the undead get a second shot at life. I enjoyed that the book was through the eyes of a perpetual teenager. But I didn't like that it was only 208 pages. I finished it too quickly. But I'd definitely recommend it as a summer read to escape from those boring assigned books. It's not as good as *Twilight* but it's enough to hold you over as you wait for the next wave from the vampire craze.





## Lady Gaga

CD: The Fame Monster

**Reviewed by Patricia Chavarria**

18, Cesar Chavez Continuation HS (Compton)

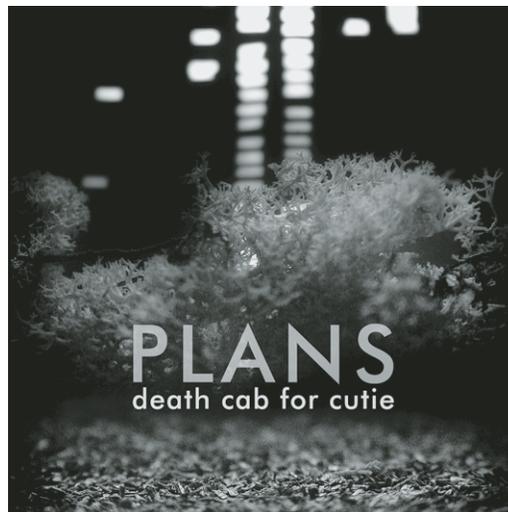
**P**assionate, charismatic and incredibly insane are some of the many words to describe Lady Gaga and her second album, *The Fame Monster*. With eight thrilling songs, *The Fame Monster* will keep you singing and dancing all through the night.

"Bad Romance" is the first song on the album. "I want your ugly/ I want your disease/ I want your everything/ As long as it's free" are just some of the lyrics that left me speechless. I saw a Lady Gaga interview on TV and she said the song is about her strong feelings toward a guy. She wants all of him, even the ugliest parts that he thinks no one wants. Unlike most artists, Lady Gaga dares to sing about love in a dark and gruesome way, which I love.

My second favorite song on the album is "Monster." With Lady Gaga's beautiful voice and laughter in the beginning, you can quickly fall in love with this song. She sings, "He ate my heart then he ate my brain/... That boy is a monster/ M-m-m-monster." I love how the song sounds retro. It has a funky beat that a model could strut to at a fashion show.

Eight songs seems too few for an album. But I can assure you *The Fame Monster* is worth buying. There are other great songs like "Alejandro," "Speechless" and "Telephone" with Beyoncé. I love Lady Gaga's soft and soothing voice—especially when she sings in French and Spanish. Lady Gaga is known for her outrageous wardrobe, but she should really be known for her outstanding music.

**Lady Gaga dares to sing about love in a dark and gruesome way.**



## Death Cab for Cutie

CD: Plans

**Reviewed by Samantha Lam**

18, International Polytechnic HS (Pomona)

**I** have never been a Death Cab for Cutie fan, especially because of lead singer Ben Gibbard and his whiny, girly voice. A friend of mine thought I was insane for not liking his favorite band and bugged me until I finally listened to *Plans*.

The album's biggest hit, "I Will Follow You Into The Dark," is the song I have the biggest problem with. When I heard the first line, "Love of mine, someday you will die," my immediate thought was, "Thanks man, that's something I wanna hear." As I kept listening, I thought some lyrics seemed overly fantasized, like "I will follow you into the dark." To me it would be a lot more affectionate if someone rescued me from the dark, not joined me.

"Summer Skin" is almost as bad. It's about a summer love that drifts off as the seasons change and each person grows. The pain of the lost relationship was beautifully described: "I knew your heart I couldn't win/ 'Cause the season's change was a conduit/ And we'd left our love in our summer skin." Yet the lyrics fell short when they were combined with the monotonous beat and Gibbard's high-pitched singing.

*Plans* can be accurately described by the name of one of its tracks: "Different Names for the Same Thing." Nearly every song is about heartache or searching for something but never finding it.

While my friend thought *Plans* was Death Cab's best, I learned that my first impression was right: I do not like Death Cab for Cutie.

**Nearly every song is about heartache or searching for something but never finding it.**



## Passion Pit

CD: Manners

**Reviewed by Natasha Doctor**

17, International Polytechnic HS

**P**assion Pit's debut album *Manners* has been on repeat on my iPod for months now. I absolutely love it. There's something about frontman Michael Angelakos's falsetto and the synth pop beats that is so refreshing, especially in this current music scene where all we hear is Jamie Foxx blaming it on the alcohol or Lady Gaga wanting to take a ride on a disco stick.

Passion Pit plays the type of music that makes you want to get up and dance, even for people like me who can't dance at all. "Little Secrets," my favorite song on the album, is the perfect song to drive to with the windows rolled down, the wind blowing through my hair and me singing at the top of my lungs. "But I feel alive and I feel it in me/ up and up, I keep on climbing/ higher and higher and higher!" How could you not feel pumped?

On the slower song "Swimming In the Flood," Angelakos's shrill voice sends chills down my spine as high-pitched bells ding in the background. Despite the slower pace and the creepiness, "Swimming In the Flood" still reflects that same unique indie pop vibe as popular songs such as "Sleepyhead," which was featured in a Palm Pixi commercial.

What are you waiting for? Turn off the radio, stop watching MTV, get this album and be ready to dance to your new favorite band.

**Passion Pit plays the type of music that makes you want to get up and dance, even for people who can't dance at all.**



# L.A. youth SUMMER WORKSHOP

Sign up for the L.A. Youth summer writing workshop, an intensive six-week program during which you will write an article that will be published in L.A. Youth, as well as conduct interviews. You will complete your story while working one-on-one with a professional adult L.A. Youth editor.

To apply, you must be a Los Angeles County teen ages 15-18 attending high school in the area. No journalism experience is required, but you must have an interest in writing for L.A. Youth to participate. The workshop is unpaid. Public high school students will be given preference. Apply early, because a limited number of spaces are available. If you have questions, call (323) 938-9194.

## Expectations:

- In this workshop, you are expected to meet weekly writing deadlines and attend field trips. Students who do not meet the deadlines will be asked to leave the writing workshop and encouraged to remain involved with L.A. Youth in some other way.
- You are expected to generate material for the September 2010 issue of L.A. Youth.
- You must attend group meetings at the L.A. Youth office every Wednesday from 2 to 5 p.m. from July 7 to August 11. You also must arrange weekly two-hour individual meetings with your editor. The first group meeting will be held at 2 p.m. on Wednesday, July 7, 2010.

## How to apply:

Submit this application form with a **one-page writing sample** as well as a **\$75 application fee**. Financial assistance available. Tips for the writing sample: write an original one-page statement that tells us something about you and gives us a sense of your writing style. It can be about one of your interests, hobbies or activities. After you submit your application, we'll call you for a short **interview** before you are accepted into the workshop. To prepare for the workshop, we strongly encourage you to read past issues of L.A. Youth on our website. Go to [www.layouth.com](http://www.layouth.com) and click on "Archives."

The application deadline is **Friday, June 4, 2010.**

## Application for the L.A. Youth summer writing workshop

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_

ZIP CODE \_\_\_\_\_

HOME PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

SCHOOL \_\_\_\_\_

GRADE YOU WILL ENTER IN SEPTEMBER \_\_\_\_\_

DATE OF BIRTH \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

Send application with \$75 fee and writing sample to:

**L.A. Youth**  
5967 W. 3rd St. Suite 301  
Los Angeles CA 90036