

ASKNOW

Spring 2008

Youth Voice of the Central Valley



**THROUGH THE EYES
OF YOUTH:**

Images of Our City

Inside:

A teacher's impact
Loss of native tongues
Surviving homelessness



#issue
03

the kNOW table of CONTENTS

Spring 08
READERS NOTE:

2008

is the year of The Know! We're growing in many exciting ways. Earlier this year in January, we were honored as the Youth Advocate Award recipient by the City of Fresno's MLK Jr. Unity Committee—a positive start to our year.

In this issue, we use the visual power of photography to tell a story. Those stories reveal what young people see in their communities when they step out of it and take an observer's role. The photo-essay (p.08-11) in this issue captures evocative images of West and Central Fresno.

Also in this issue, some youth writers take time to focus on their family, such as Anna's piece (p.20) highlighting the bond between a father and a daughter, or Angelina's piece (p.04) chronicling the history of her parents' struggle for freedom during the war. Gracie taps into the new trend of friends becoming like family in her article (p.12), and another youth (p.21) writes a letter to her incarcerated mother. Clearly, the sense of family, a place where you belong, is important to many young people.

Aside from our mag publication, we have ventured into video production in partnership with news station KSEE 24. Soon, you'll see youth videos aired regularly during its 4PM newscast.

We also learned basic photography through monthly workshops led by Bay Area photographer, Joseph Smooke. A new way of expressing and looking at the world, from in front of a lens and behind.

Our website/blog is up at least, check it out: <http://the-knowfresno.blogspot.com>. We'll be updating regularly so bookmark the site.

And finally, in response to youth demand as to how to get more involved with The Know, we've started what we call "Open Workshops" held the first Monday of every month from 4-6PM at the New Millennium Charter School in West Fresno. These workshops are facilitated by The Know members and are welcome to all youth who want to check us out.

Enjoy this issue, visit our blog, and write to us!

- Mai Der Vang

Thank you to our community partners:

- KSEE 24/NBC
- Joseph Smooke, freelance photographer
- Fresno West Coalition for Economic Development
- New Millennium Institute of Education Charter School
- Dr. Virginia Crisco, CSU Fresno
- CSU Fresno interns: Lorena Hayes, Janie Corona, Crissy Myrold

The kNOW is published by Pacific News Service/New America Media, and is made possible by the financial support of the S.H. Cowell and Walter S. Johnson Foundations.

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this publication are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the views of any of the partners.

© 2008 The kNOW, Pacific News Service/New America Media



- Faces of the know*
- 01....A Letter to Young People
 - 02....*A Teacher's Impact**
 - 03....Sex is the New Fashion
 - 04....A Hmong Story of Survival
 - 06....*Loss of Native Tongues**
 - 07....Abandoned Buildings
 - 08....Our City: A Photo Essay { **COVER** }
 - 09....*Our City*
 - 10....*Our City*
 - 11....*Our City*
 - 12....Friends Are My Family
 - 13....Reality of Gang Life
 - 14....Japanese Fashion
 - 15....Hip Hop Artist, Random Abiladeze
 - 16....*Experiencing Homelessness**
 - 17....Youth Advocate, Laneesha Senegal
 - 18....Blog Writings: School Violence
 - 20....My Dad, My Hero
 - 21....Letter to a Mom in Jail

Director: Patricia Johnson

Layout/Design: Silicon Valley De-Bug www.siliconvalleydebug.com

Contact: Mai Der Vang mvang@newamericamedia.org

Find us at:

<http://theknowfresno.blogspot.com>

<http://www.myspace.com/theknowyouth>

"TO RISE BEYOND OUR ENVIRONMENT!"

A Letter to Young People Everywhere" By Jesse Andrews

Dear Young People,

Sometimes the older generation may forget to give words of encouragement to young people, to keep us going from day to day.

So many problems, circumstances, issues and questions plague my generation today, such as, drugs, gangs, sex and other problems we face on a daily basis. I think it is because we do not have encouragement in our life, and we feel like no one cares.

My parents were not always there to give me the encouragement I needed to become who I am today. It took a lot of thinking and self-determination, and telling myself, I wanted something better for my future.

My life is plagued with many problems, the alcoholics, the drug addicts, the financial troubles all around me. However, by knowing God, I get all the help I need. Many times, we walk around with the wrong intentions of making a difference in our lives. We walk as if we have no direction or hope. I have been to that point.

Yet through having met some influential people in the Central Valley, I have chosen to rise above the problems that plague my life. One influential person I have met is Gloria Rodriguez, who comes from a similar background like me. She had little family support to go to college, but through help, was able to get it paid, and is now an education ambassador encouraging young people to go to college.

I want to emphasize that education is a vital part of life because it will help accomplish dreams and success in life.

When the Save-Me-A-Spot-In-College (a project through the Campaign for College Opportunity) told me that a college-going student makes approximately \$1.1 million more than a student who just graduates from high school, I became determined to tell young people everywhere that college is essential. When we get an education, we have the chance to become more independent, and not need others to tell us where to live, how to live, what to eat, and how to eat.

With a college education, I know I will have more freedom to be who I am, to continue to follow and pursue my dreams. I have a dream of attending Morehouse College to become a doctor, and I am constantly making sure that my credits and my grades are on track. I am a junior right now, but I am excited about my senior year in high school because I plan on getting plenty of scholarships and financial assistance to make my dream possible.

I have learned not to let my family's mistakes become my own mistakes. We can make decisions everyday for our own selves. If I were to have dropped out of school in tenth grade because my uncle, cousin, aunt, dropped out in tenth grade, then I would not be accomplishing anything. If I have the opportunity to continue, then I must continue. I cannot let that situation become a generational curse. We must begin to rise beyond our environment, which is our challenge.

My best friend helped me understand that. When she told me that her nephews and sisters never made it to eleventh grade because they dropped out, she wanted to make a difference in her family so she kept going to school and is on her way to finishing. We

can do the same thing too!

My pastor teaches me constantly that your attitude determines your altitude. If you say you will succeed, then you will succeed! Whatever you tell yourself is likely to happen. We as young people must begin to speak positive changes into our lives. Tell yourself, "my C grade will become an A in chemistry," "my brothers and sisters will not be drug addicts," "Fresno will have jobs and fun activities for me to take part in." Then act on what you said and watch change begin to happen in your lives.

If we make pleasant remarks to the people we meet, we will have a pleasant day. Many times people will say things or act a certain way toward you. You have to learn to continue to go forward in spite of that. As a child growing up in an alcoholic environment, those who are alcoholically influenced can say some harsh things toward you such as "you are going to be like you broke daddy" and other things that can be mind altering. We must begin to rise beyond our environment, which is our challenge!

As young people, we need role models to look up to, to imitate, or even dream to be like. I look up to those who give wisdom and insight on life because they know more than I do.

A few years ago, I met Cleon Sykes, an older woman who attended my church, whom I call her Mother Sykes. A retired police officer, she was born in Chicago and moved to California. At that time, I just started going to church, and there were some things I did not understand about religion and life. However, when I talked to her, she knew the answer to my problems because of her own experiences. She was always encouraging to me because she taught me that being a Christian can be fun.

I believe one thing that made our friendship so strong was the fact that we were doing all we could to help share Christ's love with everyone else. She would create booklets for her evangelist conferences around the nation, and I would help put them together.

Many times our closest friends are not the best people to look up to. I have a friend who looks up to his friends more than he would look up to people who have helped change his life. He believes that because they can relate to him they are alright to kick it with. Rich people do not hang around poor people they hang around rich people. If we are going to become great in anything we do, we have to hang around some great people!

Before I became involved in church, I would curse because my friends did it. I would lie because my aunts and uncles lied (grown ups should examine themselves because we watch their every move). I am glad to know Jesus saves and cleaned up every area of my life.

Because of lack encouragement from our elders, I challenge all of us to help one another through support towards education, and let us be better role models, we have got to become people who are doing something positive in our lives and going places, then I believe our young people would be better young men and women. Stay encouraged! No matter what situations may look like, no matter the circumstances, we must rise beyond our environment, which is our challenge.

**May God Richly Bless You and Keep You,
Jesse D. Andrews**



More Than Just A Teacher: How A Teacher Can Impact a Student's Life

By Kevis McGee

It's not often that student/teacher relationships are talked about, but I think it can drastically impact a student's academic process, self esteem, and attitude towards education.

It was about five years ago, I was in the seventh grade. I remember the weather was rainy and cold, maybe some time around mid-January. I don't remember the exact date or time, but I remember my emotions and the pain I felt.

I was in Math class doing my work. I leaned over to ask someone for an eraser because the writing implement I was using didn't have an eraser. So it seemed like the teacher thought I was cheating on my worksheet. She told me to go outside.

"For what?" I asked.

"What did I say?" she snickered.

"Go outside," I replied.

"Well, what do we need to do?" she said with sarcasm.

"But I didn't do anything!" I explained. Then suddenly, she took my umbrella (which at the time was my mother's) and threw it outside in the rain. I was shocked! I stood there with my mouth wide open. The other students sat in silence, as if they were being quiet in a library.

Being that I was in the seventh grade, I was still scared of adults. This teacher was a senior citizen, and I respect senior citizens so I felt like I had to obey. I just walked outside.

This story is an example of a negative student teacher relationship. I think she acted that way because she didn't like me.

But aside from the negative experiences, there are also positive student teacher relationships too! In fact, about 90% of my dealings with teachers after ninth grade were positive because I became more mature. I guess I grew out of it. I'm not as talkative as I used to be, and not as playful.

Yet throughout my whole ninth grade year and before, I was very immature so I know my teachers may have disliked me. I used to be a pest, but what happened to me in that story was not my fault,

I wasn't even doing anything bad.

I believe teachers can alter a student's self-esteem. In that story, the teacher's actions didn't affect my self-esteem but it did leave me confused and mad. The impact that the role of a teacher can play in a student's life is vital and can leave a drastic effect.

Just last December, one of my teacher's, Mr. Devore (at Edison high, a splendid teacher might I say), impacted my self esteem in a positive way. He complimented my last article that was published in The Know magazine, and elsewhere. In fact, I was praised by the majority of the teachers who read that article. As much as I might disagree, because I don't think I do, I recall hearing someone say I have a "knack for writing". The positive compliments made me want to write more.

Student/Teacher relationships are not just about communication with each other, but also about flexibility. A positive relationship can even be determined by how much work the teacher gives. I'm not suggesting that teachers refrain from giving work, but what I'm saying is to just show some heart. If there is a school wide writing sample or test that day, the teacher should cut us some slack. Don't give us more work after we complete our essay or test—we're exhausted!

I currently have a teacher like this at my school (you know who you are because I'm always complaining about it). Maybe teachers who give a lot of work don't stop to think that sometimes we get wrist cramps from writing so much. I understand all of that hard work and thinking is supposed to prep us for the outside world. But after a test, we should be able to talk amongst ourselves and just relax a bit.

It's also about teaching so that we can learn something, thus letting us benefit as students. We will be better students if teachers have good teaching skills.

I know teachers aren't perfect, and I know teachers have to use a curriculum. And I know sometimes students don't make the job for teachers any easier because of their bad behavior.

But one things for sure, if a teacher has a positive teaching relationship with a student, then that teacher will help the student feel more proud and earn grades and test scores to reflect that.

"BUT I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING!" I EXPLAINED. THEN SUDDENLY, SHE TOOK MY UMBRELLA (WHICH AT THE TIME WAS MY MOTHER'S) AND THREW IT OUTSIDE IN THE RAIN.

Sex is the New Fashion

By Patrice Word

Just as we had the Vans era, punk rock, and prep, we have a new fashion that's sweeping the high schools. It's the new "IT". But just like some fashions, it should become history, like bell bottoms and platform shoes.

For many teens nowadays, it doesn't matter if you are in a relationship, working towards a relationship, friends, or just classmates. Sometimes you don't even have to know the person, but you are still willing to give your body to that person. You could meet someone at a party while hanging with yo' girls/boys, chat and then hit the sheets. On Monday at school, you will pass that person in the hallway without saying a word.

I am a high school student so I see all this first hand, the sex and openness about it. Who's having sex with whom, oral sex on campus, and sex at parties. It's reality! We need to make a change and fast because, I don't know about other teens but I want to be able to lead by example for my children. So let's get down to the source of this and talk about why many teenagers are having sex so freely.

You may think that a person should at least be in a relationship, but in my high school, I hear about friends, peers, sometimes people I don't even know having sex with one another. About 80% of the time, they are not in a relationship.

There was one day I was walking with a friend at school, and my friend stopped me and said, "You know, so-and-so had sex right here, just out in the open." I thought, "But they're not even together." Then I replied like always, "well that sucks for them but who cares."

I have noticed that sex isn't something that is hidden anymore by many of my peers. In the new generation, kids as young as 12 are losing their virginity. There have been many times when I have walked pass little boys and they would say to me, "Ay baby, let me hit that." It has gotten to the point where I don't feel sorry for them anymore. I just keep walking. Keep in mind these boys are around age ten, but they brag about having sex with their "girlfriends." I don't think they know the first thing about a girlfriend.

So I ask, is my generation growing up too fast? No, of course not, not with the teen nightclub, growing rates of teenage pregnancy, and young kids who leave home. YES WE ARE! Sorry for being honest, but some of us need to hear the truth.

In my opinion, there are many outside influences that might help explain why so many teens are headed down this path. It does not help when all we hear, for example, on BET, are commercials that tell us to "rap it up", which means use a condom, rather than hearing "close your legs up". We have all kinds of sources, such as condom commercials, or sex education ads, telling and showing us that sex is fine as long as you use protection.

I disagree with that. It feels like no one is telling us not to do it. I don't think it is okay to have sex with anyone you can get your hands on. From my perspective as a girl, I think girls need to respect their bodies, and not just give themselves to every guy they think is cute. It's not okay with me. I have respect for myself.

I don't recall a specific point in time where I made the choice not to have sex. It came to me over time as I grew up and saw what I thought were "negative" things. When I was around the age of 10, I found out that someone close to me was selling her body for money. For any young girl at that age who actually saw the way the men badly treated this person who was dear to me, it really had an impact and taught me about respecting one's body.

But I know it can be challenging for some girls. As young women, most of us don't have people telling us we're beautiful. But many young girls will find a boy to tell them, which is sad, but true. A lot of young women have very low self-esteem, which could be an open door for a boy to take advantage of her.

A recent report came out that said approximately one in four girls in the country is infected with an STD. This may shock many people, but it doesn't surprise me at all. Maybe it is because I already hear about these things every day, which makes me numb to these statistics. Many of us already know the issue exists.

Many young people are selling themselves short because they are not getting told and shown that they are special. Instead of telling them about all the STDs and things that can happen after sex, tell them they don't need to have sex to feel beautiful or to belong.

Many girls look to boys for support, and a lot of boys continue to use girls for sex.

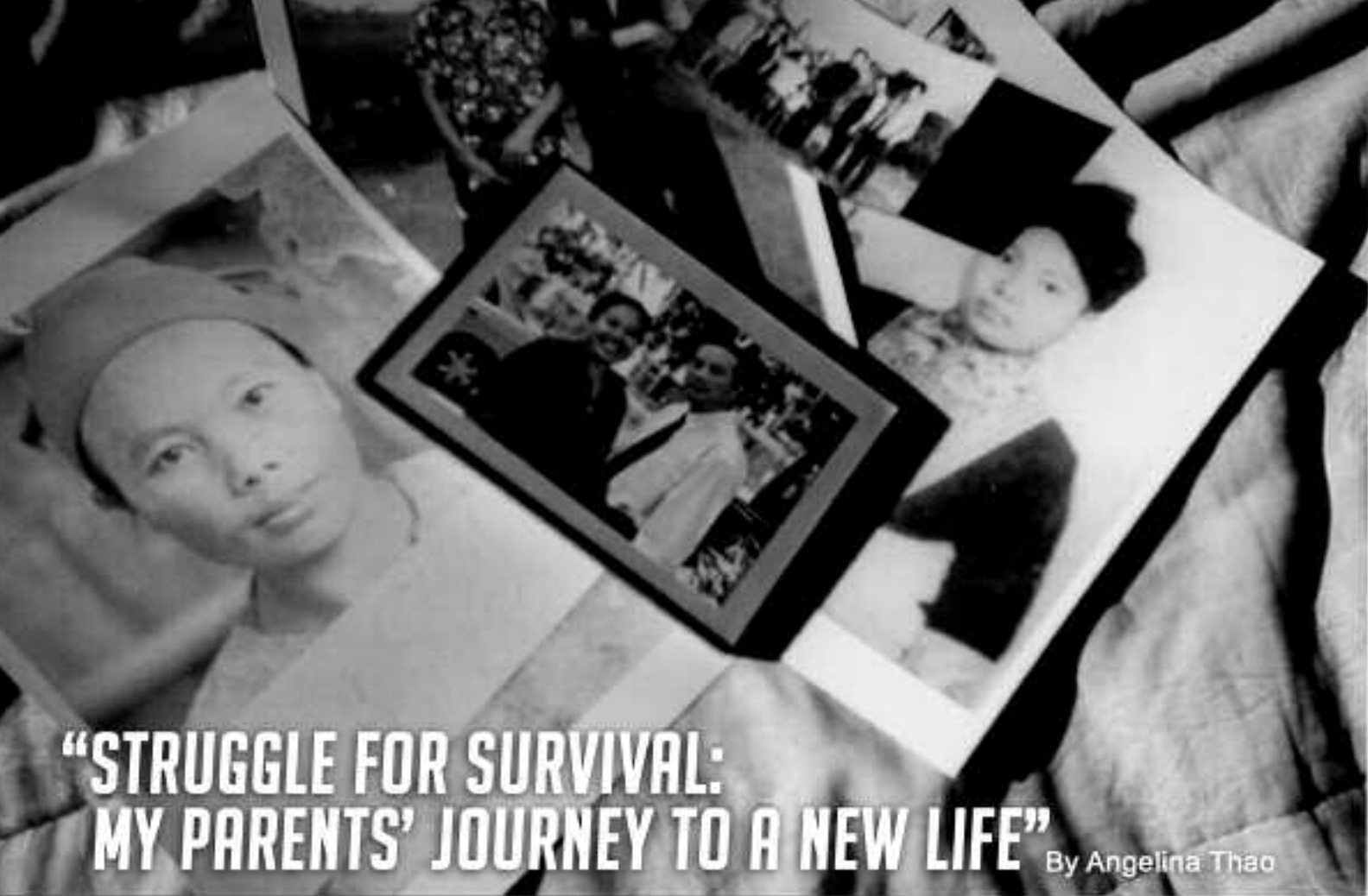
Many girls look to boys for support, and a lot of boys continue to use girls for sex. And in some cases, even if the girl doesn't choose to do it, the guy still finds a way.

I have a friend who went to a party and met a guy. She exchanged phone numbers with him, but didn't really talk to him. Then she saw him again another week at another party, where everyone was drinking and smoking. He offered her beer and she accepted because everyone else was drinking. They talked, and she said he seemed really cool. Then she had too many beers, and felt dizzy. She went to the bathroom to wipe her face. When she came back, he asked her out, and she said okay. Then they started hugging and kissing. She was really drunk and faded. She wanted to be left alone, so she went to a bedroom to lie down. He came in the room and asked if she was okay. She needed to rest. He took it the wrong way and got mad. Then she felt bad and they started kissing. She was out of it, she says. She passed in and out at that time, and he took advantage of her, along with her virginity.

It's not too late to make a change. We need to educate our youth on the importance of abstinence, and help them understand the meaning of virginity. It's not too late if you've already had sex. You can stop if you want to. It doesn't make you less of a person.

Parents should talk to their children about the importance of waiting. At school, students should be educated on the real meaning of sex, and what it can do to your body. Young people should talk to their friends about sex and let them know it is okay to wait, or at least give words of encouragement.

Stay strong in the fight to respect your body, know that you are worth far more than you think you are!



“STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL: MY PARENTS’ JOURNEY TO A NEW LIFE”

By Angelina Thao

As a child, I enjoyed story time at night with my parents. Throughout my life, I’ve heard all kinds of stories, ones about Hmong history, about my culture, scary stories, funny stories, and historical ones.

But the story I admire and love most is the amazing story about my parents trying to escape from Laos to Thailand so they could reach freedom. During that journey, they made so many sacrifices and hard decisions. This was a story that was kept hidden and when it was shared with me, it brought tears to my eyes (and still does).

This is the story of my parents’ journey to freedom.

My parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins all lived under one roof in a village in Laos near a big road, close to a military base. One night in 1975, when the Vietnamese communists had won and taken over much of Southeast Asia, the family was up late trying to decide what they were going to do.

Some were saying to run for it, but others didn’t just want to run blindly and not know where they were going. So the whole family concluded that everyone stays and whoever wants to leave can leave in the morning.

I don’t really know much about the Vietnam War. All I know is that the war started because of the spread of communism. The Americans were trying to stop communism and they asked the Hmong men to help them fight. After a couple of years, the

Americans realized they weren’t going to win this war. They retreated and so did all the soldiers that fought with them. After that happened, many people had to choose whether to stay in Laos and live their life in fear, or escape with everyone else to Thailand.

The next morning came, and there were Vietnamese communist soldiers everywhere, patrolling and unwilling to let people leave the village. There were guns pointing in all directions and big green tanks rolling through the village.

My mom was scared and had no idea what was going to happen. She thought in a split second, guns would be fired and bodies would be lying all over the village. My parents and other relatives hid inside the house. My mom remembers the shouting and chanting from the soldiers.

They said, “Don’t leave my brothers. We love you. Don’t follow the enemy, the Americans. Stay with us and we will love you. If you go to America, you will meet poverty because they won’t love you like we will. Stay, don’t follow them. This war has ended and the land is at peace. Stay, don’t leave.”

My dad did not want to stay at all. He wanted to leave because the Hmong army leader, General Vang Pao, had already left. But my dad knew it would be hard to leave and also, my parents were poor and couldn’t make the trip. They had to stay and save up money because they would need the money to bribe the Lao fisherman and guides to help them escape.

My parents were always trying to escape, or were thinking about it, but they weren’t financially set yet. Not just that but when the communist soldiers took over, they assigned two soldiers to each family or house in the village. Those soldiers were responsible for keeping track of the families so they wouldn’t escape.

Those soldiers did everything with the families in the village. The two soldiers shared chores with my parents, ate, slept, and practically lived with my parents and everyone else in the house. No one had any privacy, which made hard it to escape.

My parents stayed in the village from 1975 until 1983, for eight years. During those years, the communist soldiers began to take and steal from the villagers. They took big portions of the crops that were grown by villagers. Not just that, but they made the land hard to farm because they killed plants with chemicals overnight, which I think is evil. My parents' crops were good and fresh one day, and then suddenly, the next morning, they turned yellow and dead. One night, my dad stayed at the farm house to see what was causing the crop failures, and he saw what the communist soldiers were doing. My dad got caught in some of the chemicals and he got sick, so sick that he almost died. Those chemicals killed many crops but the soldiers were still expecting their portions from each of the families in the village. Many families began to have less and less crops for themselves.

When my dad recovered from the chemicals, he started to buy cows at a cheap price and then brought them to the larger cities, and sold them at higher prices. He started to save up along with my mother. It had been a couple of years already since the soldiers took over the village, so they didn't keep a tight watch anymore.

My dad was able to travel and he found a trustworthy guide who showed him a safe way to Thailand. The deal and promise was made.

My dad paid the guide and the guide promised to take my parents and two sisters safely to the Mekong River.

When my dad was told to prepare for the journey, he was excited but sad. He told my grandpa that he had found a way to freedom and for my grandpa to get ready to leave. But my grandpa was old, and he still had his own dad there as well, who is my great-grandfather. My dad is the youngest son, without a mother because my grandma died when he was only five years old, so all this made it harder for him to leave my grandpa.

One night, while the soldiers were asleep, the guide came and gave the signal to get ready to go. My dad did not get to see or say good bye to my grandpa. It was a sad, quiet escape in the middle of the night. My mom says she can still remember the heartbroken look on his face, as he turned to look at the house one last time.

Two of my uncles and their own families also went on the journey with my parents as well. My dad carried a bag of rice and a child inside a bamboo carrier. My mom carried a pot filled with cooked rice and a bottle of water, along with a child on her back and a child in the womb. My aunts and uncles packed the same things as well.

On the first night, they had traveled far and deep into the Lao jungles. The guide led them around the villages that were under communist control. On the second night, my mom had to cook rice and fill up the water bottle again. When they came near the villages with communist soldiers, they sat down and rested until the guide found the way.

It was hard to keep walking because of the heavy loads they were carrying. My mom told me the baby she carried and plus the rice pot was so heavy she could hardly keep up with the rest. She could feel the weight on her shoulders even when she took the load off. My parents had huge red lines that sunk into their shoulders and skin.

On the sixth night, the guide gathered them into a little village alongside of the Mekong River. The guide helped my parents find a Lao fisherman who was willing to take them to Thailand. Each person had to pay one silver bar, which here, equates to a lot of money. My parents had to pay four silver bars to get on the boat. The boat ride was risky because some of my dad's relatives paid a Lao fisherman, and when he took them to the middle of the river, the fisherman dumped them in the water after stealing their belongings. There were lots of stories like this. A lot of people who tried to cross the river died because of boats tipping over, drowning, or being shot by

patrolling soldiers. Many people were killed and tossed in the river like nothing.

Luckily, my parents and the rest of the group didn't get tipped over. They made it safely to the other side. My mom and everyone else waited on the banks of the river while my dad tried to talk to the mayor or leader of the area to sign my parents' papers. These papers stated that you were refugees from the war. They help you travel easier and prevent you from being sent back to Laos. The mayor was furious and screamed at my dad to

g o

My parents were always trying to escape, or were thinking about it, but they weren't financially set yet.

back and not come into Thailand. My dad stormed out and told my mom and the rest to go.

As they were walking along the road, a big army truck came by and stopped in front of them. A short, stubby man came out of the passenger side and grabbed my dad by the arm. He asked my dad if my dad was Hmong and then the man told my dad that just yesterday, some Thai officers caught some Hmong people and sent them back to Laos after taking all their money and goods.

My dad and everyone else were lucky to have met these guys. They loaded everyone into the back of the truck and went straight to the base. There were Thai officers searching everywhere for my parents like crazy! The Hmong-Thai officer hid my parents and the group in the bathroom for the whole day. My mom told me they were so thirsty they drank the water that was used to wash urine and feces.

Outside the safety of the bathroom, the Thai officers were circling and going back and forth in the area of the Hmong-Thai base. When night came, the Hmong-Thai soldiers loaded my parents and everyone else back into the truck and took them to a refugee camp called Ban Vinai.

When they arrived, the mayor or leader told my parents this place was nicer and simply asked if my parents had any relatives that were already living in Ban Vinai. My dad's uncle was living there, so he took in my dad and everyone else.

My parents stayed with my dad's uncles from June 1983 until March 1985. They stayed for about two years, but Ban Vinai was no longer registering people to come to America, so my parents moved to another camp. My dad registered the family to come to America. The two requirements were: not wanting to stay in Laos or Thailand and you had to know where you wanted to go in America. My parents got on the plane to San Diego, CA. My parents were happy to be heading towards freedom, but sad too because they left their friends, their family, their homes. My parents cried, knowing they may never see them again. But they knew at least they were going to a place where they were loved, wanted and appreciated. After all their struggles, they were finally going to a land of freedom, of opportunities, and privileges.

The story of my parents' journey to the U.S. inspires me to do my best in life and everyday things. They worked hard, sacrificed so much, just for a better life for me and my siblings. Their story reminds me of how important my success in the future will be, and that inspires me to work hard to achieve it.

우리는 지는 언어 밤새껏 이다
SIND WIR. DIE SPRACHE BER NACHT VERLIEREN
Estamos lengua perdidosa durante la noche

"ARE WE LOSING LANGUAGE OVERNIGHT? YOUTH FORGETTING THEIR NATIVE TONGUES"

By Arena Phaphilom

There I was, sitting in the cold, quiet doctor's office. My doctor was speaking to his assistant, and I heard him questioning her about the languages she was able to speak. He asked her, "So you can understand Lao, but you can't speak it?" Then it hit me. These types of situations are happening everywhere today.

More and more people today are forgetting their native tongues, or languages. Either that or they were never taught it. How can we expect to keep our languages alive if more and more generations are losing it?

America is filled with many people of many different ethnic backgrounds, nationalities, heritages, and cultures. Because of that, Americans should have the ability to speak more than one language. But here, the primary language is English.

It seems that many of our ethnic youth are losing their native tongues. A native tongue is also known as your first language, a language that is spoken at home, or maybe a language other than English. For example my native tongue is Lao, but I can also speak English.

In my family, my parents made sure we grew up speaking Lao. I guess they thought it would be of great use to us in the future. They always thought we could learn English in school and speak it there. When my brothers and I were younger, the only language we heard around the house was Lao. But now, we speak more and more English and less Lao. My nieces and nephews can barely speak Lao, however, they can understand it. They grew up speaking English, so it is hard to communicate with them in Lao.

It can be challenging to keep our native tongues because we speak English at school and with our friends. We spend more time outside of our homes, meaning we spend more time speaking English. My parents constantly scold us for speaking English at home, especially because our nieces and nephews can barely speak Lao. They always talk about how people of other ethnicities, for example, Hmong, teach their kids to speak their native tongues and how other youth can speak their native tongues, but my nieces and nephews can't.

If you have a native tongue, then what has happened to it? Can you speak it or not? If you are unable to speak it then why is that? I'm pretty sure it didn't disappear overnight. You may have thought your native tongue would not be of great use to you because you are in America and everyone can speak or understand English. The only language you need is English, right?

You do need to know English, but you should also know your native tongue. It is a part of who you are and your identity. It provides a sense of family, because you communicate through it with your siblings and parents. It is a part of your heritage, and I believe that if you don't know your heritage, then often times you won't know yourself. As the old saying goes, "If you don't know where you come from, you won't know where you are going."

Imagine applying for a job, and on the application it asks, "Can you speak another language other than English?" You skip the question and move on to the next. You discover that you did not get the job because someone else who could speak more than one language got the job. Maybe now you wish you could speak another language. Just one of the reasons why speaking your native tongue, or another language, is useful.

It may also come in handy when you talk or help your elders, like your parents, grandparents, or aunts and uncles. If you didn't know your native tongue, you would not be able to translate for your elders, because you would have no clue what they or you are saying. It would be challenging to communicate because they would have a hard time understanding you and you understanding them.

I always manage to have a hard time trying to make my parents understand why teens go out on the weekends, like to the movies, or school events. They always expect us to stay home, especially when we say we're going to see a movie. They say, you can watch movies on T.V. or rent them.

It's also good to know your native tongue when you meet or run into people of the same ethnic background, you'll have a special way to communicate with one another. Your native tongue can give you comfort and confidence to know what the other person is saying. It feels compelling to communicate and connect

with people of the same ethnic backgrounds as you. They can probably relate to you more than most other people because they are of the same ethnic background as you. They may even have the same difficulty of keeping their native tongue alive.

How can we keep our native tongue alive, or how can we re-learn it? Here are a few of my ideas:

- *By speaking it more and more, at home, and with people of the same ethnicity*
- *Speak it to kids of the same ethnic background, teach them new words*
- *Watch movies or listen to music in your own language*
- *Attend cultural events in your community*
- *Take a language class*

Losing your native tongue, or even your heritage, is almost like losing your identity. Without knowing your native tongue, can you truly say that you know yourself?

As the old saying goes, "If you don't know where you come from, you won't know where you are going." We can keep our native tongues strong and alive for more generations to come if we make the effort today.

Empty Buildings Gone To Waste:

How to Make Better Use of Old Buildings

By Chanda Clark

It was a beautiful Sunday morning about two years ago. I was on the bus on my way to church with family and friends. We got off at our stop at Olive Ave and Golden State Blvd. I noticed an empty building that was not being used, next to the bus stop.

I asked my mom if she knew why this building was closed. My mom told me that it used to be an old K-Mart store back in the 1990s. She doesn't know why it closed.

Then I remembered when I was younger, K-Mart used to be one of my favorite stores. My mom used to work at a K-Mart store, so we used her discount card every time we went there. We bought almost all of our clothes and shoes there, and when it got closer to Christmas time, we would always put things we wanted to get as gifts on layaway.

But on that day, it was sad to see an old building where I had many good and happy memories.

To see it closed down, with graffiti all over the walls. The outside of the building looked all worn out, the paint was faded, and there was garbage all over the parking lot.

I started to think of many ideas for what the old K-Mart store could be used as. It is better to do something with the empty building rather than leave it there while everything else around it is changing with the times.

A lot of people want kids to stay off the streets, and out of gangs. I think it would be great to turn this old building into a safe teen hang-out spot. It is so big we could put different activities in there. We could put in a room for skateboarding, a big food court, a video arcade, and other things. There could also be educational workshops for teens, about how to handle peer pressure, sex, gang and drug prevention, safety, and others. And maybe even include some small stores inside selling shoes, clothes and jewelry.

We need this here because there are so many kids around town with no place to hang out. Even though we have the Boys and Girls Club, not every kid wants to go there. A lot of young people go to Riverpark to hang out; actually, too many go to Riverpark and adults have complained about the high numbers of teens in the area. If adults continue to complain about young people hanging out too much in that area, then some young people might even start to do bad things, for example, join gangs for support and for a place to hang out. If teens are going to hang out at Riverpark, at least the area is safe and they are staying out of trouble.

If money is a problem, we could have fundraisers so we can fix it up, such as bake sales, car washes, yard sales, and we could sell candy to raise money to fix the

building. I believe that young people would band together and work hard to make this happen. We could also hold meetings to give people more insight about why fixing up the building would be useful, then we could work together to ask the City for help, and ask people to help sponsor.

Another idea is to use this old K-Mart building as a homeless shelter, because many shelters are already full, which forces more homeless to live on the streets. Fresno needs another homeless shelter. The shelter could include a free food court, a place for kids to hang out, as well as a daycare for parents who are trying to look for a job, or maybe they already have a job and just need childcare assistance. It could also have rooms for sleeping, a place to get clothes, and a place to take care of one's personal hygiene.

Around Fresno, there are many other abandoned buildings and houses we could make more useful. For example, at the corner of Belmont and Van Ness, there is a big empty house that you can see from the freeway. It looks like a two or three story house, and it's all boarded up. The outside of the house is white and some of the walls have graffiti on it. The rooms look like they could house at least six to seven people.

My mom told me that when a house/building is boarded up, then that means it is condemned, or is not appropriate for public use. But how can you condemn this huge house? It looks big enough to house at least a hundred or more homeless.

We could also make it into another special needs and homeless school for those that need it. Not many homeless parents can pay for transportation for their kids to go to school and there are some homeless families that have special needs. Not many homeless parents have money for public transportation, or they don't know anyone with a car so they can get their kids to school. Some school buses only go to certain bus stops, and so some kids have to walk long ways.

The money they are using to create new buildings could be used for renovating empty buildings that aren't being used.

If the empty buildings were fixed up and used as shelters, then my family and I, and other homeless people, would have had a place to stay even if it's for a little while. When I was around 16 years old, my family and I became homeless. All seven of us had to sleep in our small car because we didn't have anywhere to stay. If some of the empty buildings were fixed up and turned into shelters, then we would have had a warm, un-crowded place to sleep, since all the shelters were full.

There are so many more positive things we can do to improve our community. If there are any more caring and understand people out there, let's take a stand together and fix the homeless/teen hang-out issue by starting with these abandoned buildings.



Our City

Photographs of West and Central Fresno

*Coordinated by Joseph Smooke
Photography by The Know*

Photos by

Below: Patrice Word

Bottom: Laqusha Locke

Top of right side page: Anna Gil

Left bottom corner: Laqusha Locke

Right center: Laqusha Locke

Right bottom corner: Marcus Vega

**Strange City guy rides in
On train
To a world under exploration
The kNOw?
But there's so much in question**

**Adversity is growing up
Adversity breeds creativity**

**Working first with words
Then from the City come photos
Black and white and distant
Until discussion and practice
Reveal truths**

Common experiences

**A new language develops
Images DO speak!
And in your hands
Disposable cameras
Create indispensable images
-- Joseph Smooke**



Photo: Kevis McGee





Our City

Photos by
Below: **Marcus Vega**
Bottom: **Anna Gil**
Top of right side page: **Arena Phaphilom**
Left bottom corner: **Laqusha Locke**
Right center: **Jesse Andrews**
Right bottom corner: **Arena Phaphilom**



Photo: **Chanda Clark**







My New Family: The Role of Friendship for Many Youth”

When families drift apart, many young people create their own families, usually consisting of their friends.

I remember a time when my family and I were in a massive argument. All I can remember are words, cursing, and more harsh words. I couldn't stay in that house any longer. If I did, I probably would have killed myself.

I called my friend Zee to pick me up so I could get away from all the chaos. Within ten to fifteen minutes, he picked me up and told me he would have been there sooner but he got caught in traffic. As I was rushing out of the house, my parents started yelling at me, telling me I better not come back. I yelled back in frustration, "Don't worry, I won't!" I knew eventually I had to.

I sat in the car, thinking and crying, passing so many freeway exits. It was so frustrating trying to tell Zee the whole story, hoping he would understand my jumbled words. But then he quickly made me forget about everything that happened that day. He told me the funny thing that happened to his mom earlier that day, when she had a wardrobe malfunction with her outfit. It made me feel better.

We finally arrived at his house and his mom greeted me like she hadn't seen me for years. Zee then took me to the guest bedroom where I usually stayed when I was over. I was lucky because I had another pair of clothes there.

During the two weeks I stayed at Zee's

house, I still went to school. But I noticed something I hadn't noticed before, that my friends were more like my family than my actual family. They helped me out of a jam, giving me a place to crash when I had nowhere else to go, feeding me when I was hungry, giving me advice. They know more about me than my family. I think that is sad, but it's true.

After that incident, I look at my friends in a different way. I see them as my family. I am glad I have such great people in my life.

For me, it's hard to tell my parents the things going on in my life. Seriously, who would tell their parents they have friends who are potheads, or that they might drink when they go to a weekend party? I would not have the courage to do that.

This is where my friends come in for me. I tell them everything I do, even though they might be disappointed in me. I am always honest with them. I feel comfortable telling my friends all the crazy crap I do, instead of facing the wrath of my parents and the possibility of getting kicked out.

If I try to be honest with my parents, or talk to them, I feel like they see through me as if I am a ghost. Sometimes I feel like they forget I exist. To be honest, sometimes they even forget my name and call me Maria so I'm like, "WTF, my name's not Maria. Are you sure you are my parents?" Since I am the middle child, I feel like I get lost in my older sister's shadow.

My friends are the people I can depend

on. They listen to me when I need help and give me advice when I need it. My friends have been through so much, especially my best friend Zee.

If my family were there for me more often, it would probably make me feel special and appreciated; especially if they took time out of their busy lives to try to talk to me, or try to get to know me better.

It feels like my parents do not know much about me. I sure wish they did. It would be so cool if I could tell them about my friends. If only they knew the problems I'm facing in school with grades, SAT's, and finals. Or at least try to be interested in my love life. Either way they still are my family and there's still time to change.

To Melissa, my sister from another mother

I'm glad you are in my life
Despite all those times I've cried
After all those lies
Talking me out of taking my life

Giving me a place to stay
And wiping my tears away
By trying to put a smile on my face

Hugging me when I looked down
And hearing my problems out
Gawd I love you
My friend Melissa

Lost Souls

The Sad Reality of Gang Life

By Marcus Vega

I know what it's like to be stuck in gang life. I've seen the consequences.

At the age of twelve, I walked out of my grandmother's house after hearing a distinct, familiar sound. It caught my attention. As I stepped outside, I saw one of the big homie's get struck with a few bullets. I remember that as the bullets entered his head, a few chunks of what was later identified as brain fragments fell to the ground. He was lying on the ground and began to hyperventilate. I could see he was fighting for his life. People began to gather around before police and ambulance arrived. Both the victim and the perpetrator were African American.

It seems to me that no matter how many programs there are to engage young people, the gang mentality remains.

Many youth do not accept that all could end just like counting to three. The last thing you hear sounds like thunder. It is sad to die at an early age, as I have seen with many gang members. Maybe those who die wanted to be made famous for dying first in their gang, maybe get mentioned in a freestyle verse from his homies cause his last breath was used to represent the block. Or maybe his comrades will pour out alcohol or throw out a doobie blunt in his remembrance.

I have been in the presence of gangs for as long as I can remember, and have seen people get shot, abuse drugs, destroy human life and deteriorate themselves. Most of the gang bangers around me were mostly my brothers, my friends, and other acquaintances.

Gangs are foolish in my perception. Everyone wants to be the hardest and they lose focus on what the main reason is for banging, which is to find a sense of belonging in my opinion. In other cases, it also to find unity, yet all these beliefs are thrown out when it is time to engage the "enemy". I use the term "enemy" lightly in the sense that most gang members don't know anything about structure or guidelines when it comes down to carrying out a "hit". For many gangs, there are many rules and regulations when it comes to eliminating another person's life. For example, no senseless killing or random shooting, and if you see the enemy, its funk on site, in other words, engage the enemy

After you've seen what the lifestyle has to offer, as I have seen, you will realize many gang members don't see the meaning of life. Many gang members fail to realize that by killing one another, it is like committing genocide upon our own communities.

I recall a moment when I felt the cowardice and rage of the fools who choose the gang lifestyle. Not too long ago, I was kicking it at a friend's house, just relaxing.

A car rolled up with three guys and a Caucasian girl. The three men hopped out. One of them had a pistol he drew down and asked

"Which one of ya'll n**** said f***...." something that was not really audible to me at the time.

Me and my homie just looked at each other while the man cocked the pistol and put on a red Nike baseball glove with a white underbelly. One of the guys was trying to provoke the guy with the pistol to pop both of us saying, "Yeah, if I was these n**** age, I would have smoked them after knocking them out."

They got back in the car. As they pulled off, someone in the backseat said to the guy with the pistol "Are you goin to let that n**** talk about yo' momma like that cuzz?" After that, the man with the pistol hopped back out and said "You better take back everything you said about my momma, n****, or I'mma knock you out." Then the man jumped back into the car and rode away.

I am trying to turn away from the negative elements around gangs. I realize now that when you're affiliated with gangs, you're on your own even though it is supposed to seem like you are in a family. Basically you're alone when you think about it. Sometimes they don't always have your back, and even your own homie can turn on you.

many gang members fail to realize that by killing one another, it is like committing genocide upon our own communities.

What young people need are legit, legal and healthy ways to live and bring in a source of income that won't result in incarceration or death. For all youth, African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, Caucasians. We should have more job programs. Some gang bangers actually apply and most have never worked before. Most get turned down from these jobs, and that makes them discouraged, so they return to the gang lifestyle where the cycle repeats itself.

Ultimately gang life is a choice, but people succumb to it because it becomes a tool or coping mechanism for life's hardships. The end result is usually lost souls where shots keep ringing.



Visual Kei

The New Japanese Fashion

By Jaleesa Vickers

Ask someone about Japanese fashion, and if any thoughts come into that person's head at all, it might include Hello Kitty or something with a kimono. Even though many Japanese youth sport those things from time to time, most have something else in mind. It's called "Visual Kei" (V-Kei for short), and many youth all over the world today are jumping onto its bandwagon. One might ask, if it's so popular, than why don't I know about it? Don't worry, Visual Kei is here, but you just have to know what to look for and where.

So what is Visual Kei? It is a type of fashion used by Japanese rock bands and youth. The style of music is related to Punk, 1980s Glam Rock, and Metal. The bands emphasize a unique style of dress. Both males and females are candidates for this type of dress, however, males who dress the part take full advantage. Many (males and/or females) wear the following: dresses, wigs, hairpieces, distinct make up, dyed hair, and contact lenses. There is no absolute concrete look for V-Kei because its followers often (and are encouraged) to incorporate their own style. With V-Kei, individuality and creativity are key.

Even though some people in the U.S. know what Visual Kei is, they still may not be clear of its origins. It began in Japan, in the late 1980s, influenced by Glam Rock. Bands such as X Japan, D'erlanger, and Color can be credited as being the forefathers of Visual Kei's music style and fashion. Dynamite Tommy (vocalist from Color) created a record company named Free Will, founded in 1986. He and that record company were a major contributor for spreading V-Kei outside Japan. It existed in overseas markets as early as 1992, but it wasn't until around 2000 that its popularity rose in the United States. I think that happened because no Japanese artist brought their music into the U.S markets until that time.

If you asked someone on the street in Fresno what Visual Kei is, you probably wouldn't get a credible answer. But many young concert goers may have heard of the band "Dir en Grey". They have been included in the Family Values Tour—their style of dress has changed since they entered the U.S. markets. If you've heard of them, you've probably heard of a few more bands who are slowly nudging their way into the minds and iPods of American youth. Some include the newer bands like Antic Café, Phantasmagoria, The Gazette, Nightmare, and Alice Nine. Anyone a little more seasoned in the V-Kei world will likely know of Luna Sea, Color, X Japan, and Malice Mizer.

If you would like to listen to some of these V-Kei bands, feel free to do a little research on how they distinguish themselves from one

another. It is important to remember that they don't copy each other, and that they value their individual music just as much as their creativity. If you're in it for the music, I suggest listening up on some Luna Sea and Nightmare. If you're just a little more curious about the look, Phantasmagoria all the way!

Visual Kei may be news to most, but the phenomenon of Gothic Lolita has been in Japanese youth culture for quite a while. In accordance to Visual Kei, Gothic Lolita has a number of sub-cultures woven into its fundamental fabric. The most popular are only slight in variation, but include: EGL (elegant gothic lolita), EGA (elegant gothic aristocrat), and Loli-Punk (lolita punk). Gothic Lolita and EGL fashion are based on Victorian/Edwardian fashions. The girls tend to be teenagers who want to make themselves look like cute, Victorian porcelain dolls. They wear baby doll dresses, headdresses, ribbons and bonnets, miniature top hats, and doll "companions" dressed to match. The Gothic Lolita fashion can be spotted in countries like the UK, Netherlands, New Zealand, Australia, France, and the U.S. (none in Fresno, yet...).

Another popular subculture, EGA, usually involves older teens **Many (males and/or females) wear the following: dresses, wigs, hairpieces, distinct make up, dyed hair, and contact lenses.**

and young women. The wearer is supposed to be seen as more mature than her Lolita counterpart. Even with different dress, these subsets often listen to Visual Kei bands. The girls of Loli-Punk incorporate a little more "attitude" into their style, mainly trading most of their cuteness in for a more sassy look. I believe that style is going to end up finding its way to girls here because the style is seen in much of the clothing sold in local retail stores.

There is another type of fashion in Japan that is noteworthy. It's called Ganguro (literally means "black face"). Its popularity, which reached its heights in the 1990s, has declined in recent years, but it still has a strong group of devout followers. The style takes the schoolgirl look and does a complete 180 degree turn. Ganguro girls actually tan themselves, most slather a bronzer and fake tanning products. White concealer as eye shadow/lipstick, and black ink as eyeliner are a must. For a Ganguro girl, lightened hair is practically a religious element. The shades of hair ranges from orange to blonde, to a silver-gray color called "high bleached". Many Japanese actually see the Ganguro as an embarrassment, and most foreigners are freaked out by them, due to their shocking style of dress and rumored history.

Not only girls are subject to Ganguro, their male counterpart are called Yanki (translation, Yankee). Everything is the same as the girls, except for the makeup. Much like the Ganguro, they are rumored to be party goers and have bad hygiene (because they stay out partying and hanging out).

Keep in mind that youth who engage themselves in Ganguro, Visual Kei, and Gothic Lolita fashions are using these means to express themselves. However, some of these youth use the fashion for attention and shock value. Something so visually extraordinary usually doesn't go unnoticed.

Japanese people are traditionally perceived as hard-working, wealthy, and conservative. Some may blame these fashions on lack of discipline and too large of an influence from Western cultures. In a sense, some Japanese may feel as if they're losing their youth to these fashions.

I could go on and on about subsets of Japanese fashion, but it would be difficult because they're practically endless. Just like anywhere else in the world, fashion is constantly changing. Gothic Lolita and Visual Kei can even open up people to create new fashions here in the U.S. Fresno may not be its first stop, but I'm sure it will find its way here.

RAPPING WITH A MESSAGE

An Interview with Spoken Word Artist Random Abiladeze

By Patrice Word

As I sat there next to my friends, one wearing big gold earrings and the other staring off into space, awaiting the next musical presenter, from behind, I heard a voice.

From the moment he walked in, he demanded attention. I turned around to see a man walking down the aisle, making his way to the stage in front of me while spittin' his sick lyrics. His words grabbed my attention. My eyes watched in amazement at this incredible talent standing before me.

It wasn't his cashed out clothes that drew me into him...he was dressed average. It wasn't his ice...he had none at all. It wasn't the beat in the background...there was nothing but the sound of his voice. It was just Random, speaking the words to his song entitled "Read".

As we all jumped out of our seats to get a closer view, my eyes fixed on him. I watched with admiring eyes and listened to the words he spoke. I nodded my head and swayed back and forth, but my eyes never left him. That was the day I truly fell in love with hip hop. The man that made it possible was Random Abiladeze.

I had the opportunity to interview Random, and it all started with a phone call. Looking for the number in my phone that I had saved under Random, I began to sweat from nervousness. I knew the faster I called the better. A cool calm voice answered the line, and I lost all words in my vocabulary at that very moment. There I was, a 17 year old girl calling to confirm an interview! I was relieved when I found out he was expecting my call. To my surprise, he was just as down to earth as I was.

Random, whose real name is Randy Murray, grew up in Sacramento and Roseville. He lived as the only child, but he had older siblings. Most of his years growing up were spent with his mother.

At the young age of 13, Random became very serious about being a rapper, even though it started as a joke at the age of 12.

Now at 22, Random is setting out to pursue his dream of becoming a music artist. Some of his musical inspirations include Tupac, Nas, Gangstarr, Sam Cooke, Marvin Gaye, Ray Charles, Rage Against The Machine, System of A Down, Slick Rick, Luther Vandross, James Brown, Tech N9ne, and Immortal Technique, among others.

Random's lyrics encompass a wide range of topics, such as love, pain, joy, chaos, peace, and life in general. But he usually stays close to political, personal or social issues. Those are some pretty "touchy" subjects, but Random states, "my current passion is to let folks know that it is always a good time to make the most of your life and to appreciate it...expand your knowledge, take constructive action, and be confident."

On the first verse of his song, "Take A Look," from his new album, "Brutally Honest", he says: "I do this for the people believin' there's no hope / I'm here for you / best believe I keep it real for you..."

It wasn't always easy for Random to get his career off the ground. People put him down for focusing on hip-hop even if they had never heard or seen him perform. He believes it is because the genre has such a bad reputation for only being about negative things. "There's nothing wrong with knowing you have a gift and

using it properly," he says.

In the end, he overcame many obstacles by staying true to who he was. He also stayed close to people who had an open mind like him. "No use in wasting my time on people who don't care for what I love." Through it all his biggest strength has been an undying will to succeed.

I feel sometimes in the music business, some artists put little effort into their lyrics, so I asked Random why he choose the long road. He said, "I think we all lie to ourselves in life in different areas, but I was always the one who would tell on myself." He believes staying truthful is important, which is something his mother taught him.

Many types of people listen to hip-hop. There is no one in particular that Random wants to reach, but he said "I want people to pick up where so many others have left off and be great leaders." He also wants to inspire people who may not yet know how great they can really be, and just need a little reminder.

When asked what people can expect to get from his lyrics, Random's response was simple but sweet. "I want to be understood." That doesn't mean you have to agree with his thoughts, but just comprehend them. I feel he wants to inspire others to speak from their hearts.

I asked him what a common day is like for a music artist. For Random, it usually involves hours of emailing, Myspacing, and phone calls. After that's all done, he's either speaking at events, attending meetings, or performing somewhere. It all happens on the same day. "I work almost all day and try to get the most out of every trip I take." During his

free time, you might find him on a basketball court, or reminiscing on children's shows from the late 80s. "Name just about any TGIF (kid's) show theme song from the early-mid 90s, and I probably know it."

For the future, Random has set his sights on speaking to groups and organizations. He would like to focus on high school and college students, and talk about life. He would also like to continue writing poetry and creating music, and advance to other levels that include books, seminars, and theater.

"Brutally Honest", Random's newly released first album is a powerful mix, from the first seconds of the first song, to the catchy sounds and beats. I listen to it every morning at home while getting ready for school. It inspires and motivates me to start my day with knowledge.

Random's tips for newcomers looking to get into the music business:

1. Educate yourself about the business
2. Don't expect anything from other people
3. Hit up open mics (make yourself known)
4. Stay self-motivated
5. Keep a small circle around you

Random also sends props to all his fans, for their support in his movement. For more information, to obtain information about his new album "Brutally Honest", find out about performances, events, and contests, please visit Random's Myspace: www.myspace.com/randomabiladeze.



HOMELESS FOR THE FIRST TIME

My Story, My Solutions

By Chanda Clark

Three years ago, on a bright sunny Friday afternoon, my grandma called my mom and told her that the property we were living on was sold. The man who owned the property gave us a 60 day notice, right before Mother's Day, to move out.

My mom started calling around to find a lawyer to fight this. The man found out, and got angry. He then told us we have just one week to get out. My mom found out that he could do that, and that we had no rights. So my mom and dad told us kids to get our backpacks and pack what we could. We all got ready to leave.

Our car trunk was packed full, and we all crammed into the car. As we drove away, we all had tears in our eyes. My mom and dad said that everything will be okay as long as we have each other.

Now we were truly homeless for the first time in our lives.

We had to live in our car for about four months. My mom continually visited shelters to get information about housing services, and she applied for help through the Fresno Housing Authority. After those horrible crowded nights, we finally found an apartment.

I hear about the issue of homelessness in everyday conversations, but it seems like everyone is just talking about it, not acting on it. Everywhere I go, no matter if it is on the West, East, South or North sides of Fresno, I see homeless people.

After having experienced homelessness, I now look at the situation from a homeless persons' perspective. It's very difficult, looking for a place to stay, surviving cold nights using clothes as blankets, and having people turn their noses up at you.

Shelters aren't always an option. I was told by Leticia, a woman who works at the Village of Hope, that they do not accept children, which makes it harder for families. This is an issue because a lot of homeless families need to stay together. When we were homeless, my mom tried to apply for our family to get into the Village of Hope, but they turned us down because we had five

kids at the time.

Sometimes when homeless children get separated from their families, they end up turning to prostitution, gangs, and drugs for safety, shelter and a sense of belonging. My sister who was separated from us later on told me she turned to gangs, drugs and prostitution because she needed to feel safe, to feel she belonged, and to feel a

It's very difficult, looking for a place to stay, surviving cold nights using clothes as blankets, and having people turn their noses up at you.

sense of family.

My younger sister also told me not all homeless youth who turn to prostitution do it for money, but many times, they are forced into it by someone they trust. I remember when my sister told me how she got into prostitution. She said her boyfriend was talking to her about ways she could make some easy money. He told her that because she was staying with some of her so-called "homies" or friends that she would have to find a way to help out around the house. He reassured her that he loved her before going on about his idea. He then told her that if she loved him that she would do what he said no matter what it was.

My sister told me that he then took her to Belmont Avenue and told her to stand there and wait for a car to pull up. She did what he said and after that first customer stopped, she told me he made her do that every night.

When I think about the homeless

women, children, and even the men that are out there, I start to think about all the child molesters, rapists, murderers, and what they could do and what they have already done to many homeless people. Being homeless makes a person an easy target for assault because they have no shelter and are out in the open.

When the news reports about dead bodies or rape victims, I start to think whether the victim was homeless. Then the police may just add the case to all the other unsolved crimes because it seems like people don't care, or they don't know anything about the victim.

Whenever I see a homeless person, and I have extra money, I buy them hot food and something to drink. I even know some people who have bought blankets, food, and paid for hotel rooms for homeless people.

There are some resources to help homeless, such as the Fresno Rescue Mission, Poverello House, Marjoree Mason Center, and the Evangel Home, to name a few. But even though these places help, it still feels like there is not enough, because the problem is still there.

When my family was homeless, we needed shelter, food, blankets, beds, and a chance to better ourselves. If my family had had more time to look for another place before we were told to leave, then we wouldn't have been homeless in the first place. We also needed people to help us stand up for our rights from being kicked out, so that we could have known our rights. Since we thought we didn't have any rights, we just packed up and left.

I've read in the newspaper that the Fresno government is choosing between prevention services or services for people who are already homeless. My opinion is that we need to focus on and address both of these situations because you cannot deal with one and ignore the other.

Prevention is important because it will prevent more people from becoming homeless, services such as giving people time to find housing, knowing their rights in the first place, and time to find jobs. But then services for the people that are already homeless are also important because they need the same type of help as well.

I realize in most places all over town, there are homeless people (adults and children), but I strongly believe we can do something about this situation. If we choose to make a difference and act, then Fresno would look better and have less homeless on the streets. But if we choose to sit back and watch...well, you get the picture.



THIS WOMAN'S WORK: *Profile of Youth Advocate Laneesha Senegal* By Laqusha Locke

Passionate, driven, and inspiring are three characteristics that describe Laneesha Senegal.

Laneesha is a local Youth Advocate. At thirty years old, she pushes youth to do positive things in the community. She works at the Central California Adolescent Development Corporation, where she is the Executive Director. There she has mentored many youth through leadership activities and provided job readiness skills. She also teaches youth to use their talents through producing music and by using software and editing programs.

Laneesha works at two after school programs, as a Youth Leadership Coordinator. At Scandinavian Middle School she teaches the students effective leadership skills and how to make videos, and at Washington Union High School she teaches them how to make music.

A motto Laneesha lives by is "Building better kids." She believes that we need to instill values of working together. She teaches kids how to become leaders of integrity.

She recognizes talent and leadership in youth, and then works to create opportunities for them to be successful in it. When she sees the gifts and talents that young people have, Laneesha motivates them to use it in a positive way, to help the community.

Laneesha worked with a young man named Robert Washington, who has a talent for rapping. His music talks about how drug and alcohol abuse, and gang violence negatively affects our community. She helped steer him in a positive way to reach young people through his music.

"I equipped him with a computer and the software to help him in his music, he now has four albums," she says.

Laneesha notices that the Central Valley is in need of change, and this is her way of taking a stand. "When kids don't have anything to do, they get themselves into trouble," she said.

So she is giving kids and young people things to do. I have seen her in community parks and at schools, refereeing kid's basketball tournaments. I see her at almost all the community block parties where the focus is about making our neighborhoods a safer and better place for kids.

"One day I was riding through some neighborhoods, and I heard some kids screaming my name, Laneesha! Laneesha! I stopped, turn and looked around, and to my surprise," says Laneesha, "I saw a small group of kids that I've worked with before selling Icees, then they shouted, 'Look we are doing something positive!' Hearing them say those words gave me joy."

Laneesha says her inspiration comes from her lack of opportunities. She didn't really have anyone to look up to, or any mentors, encouraging her to succeed and go in the right direction. When she lost a family member because of gang violence, she decided to commit her life to young people. "I chose to give up my life to save another," she says.

Laneesha struggled a lot through her childhood years. Imagine yourself walking alone, your eyes blind folded, and things are being thrown in your path left and right. I can imagine it, and if a person isn't strong enough, these road blocks could stop that person from continuing the rest of life.

Her mother was a drug addict and her father was nowhere to be found. At the age of 12, her mother was reported to Child Protective Services by the staff at her school, because of the way she and her siblings were poorly dressed.

After that, they were all placed in foster care. Later, her mom was arrested and was sent to prison. Without parents and a sense of direction, Laneesha became a runaway, but in spite of everything she was going through, she kept good grades in school. Laneesha didn't stop, she didn't give up, and she didn't wallow in self pity. "I was always career minded," she says.

When she was 14, she landed an internship at her school doing job development/training. Then at the age of 16 her mom was released from prison, and she moved back with her mom. "When my mom got out of prison, I was already responsible," Laneesha says.

Working in the community, she has seen a lot of change, but she has also faced some challenges. "There were times when I wanted to throw in the towel because of doors being shut in my face," she says, "sometimes when we present our ideas to our leaders, they don't grant us enough resources."

When she lost a family member because of gang violence, she decided to commit her life to young people.

Not only has she had setbacks with leaders, but also with youth in the community. "One moment you think you're helping them; getting through to them, and the next moment they're back to their old ways."

Despite stumbling blocks, Laneesha is determined to make a difference in young people's lives. Today, she has five children of her own and she wants them to have access to all available resources.

There are many people who have supported Laneesha, but she says someone she admires most is Randall Cooper, who helps run the City's Parks and Recreation department. "He taught me a lot about business," she says "and how to present and represent myself to the big

guys."

Laneesha is an inspiration to me. I don't just hear what she does for our community, but I witness it. When I observe her with kids, I see the compassion in her eyes. Everything she is, does and stands for motivates me to be a better person.



Blog Writings

posted april 17, 2008

"Roosevelt High School Shooting"

We're all hearing the tragic news about the student who attacked an on-campus police officer at Roosevelt High School with a baseball bat. The officer fell to the ground and then shot the student, who died at the site. It is sad on both sides, the family who lost a son, and the police officer who tried to protect himself. The kNOW youth team also had many thoughts as they tried to process and understand the incident for themselves, fully aware that such occurrences could happen anywhere, even in their own schools.

Gracie, 16

Many stories, even more rumors, was it one or two bullets? Don't have a concrete answer yet but all I'm left with is a 17 year old sophomore dead, and an officer in the hospital. Everyone is talking about "OMG, did you hear what happened at Roosevelt?" Me just looking at them and saying "yes" even though I had other things on my mind. Just trying to get the story straight in my head, thinking was killing him the only way from such a big family that maybe he felt neglected, like no one cared about him or something? I still have no answers and the media hasn't given me any concrete information. Their stories are always changing. But now all I can think about is if my safety on campus is assured since anyone can go off at any time, which is scary if you think about it.

Jesse, 16

It makes me curious that something of this caliber would take place on the same day that we remember the Virginia Tech school massacre. One thing I concluded out of the many stories I heard was that the officer did what he could do to protect himself. Maybe the family was some way, somehow involved with gang violence. Maybe there was a lack of love in his life, which may have involved home, school, and the streets. It seems like the student had this planned out well.

Parents, having enough security guards and police on a school campus doesn't make it safe. House training and love will keep America safe. Probably there was a lack of love in his life. Him being in a family of eleven children, maybe he felt neglected. Before we go trying to save children in other countries, let's save our children. We've gone so far overseas that we've began to neglect the needs of our children. Let's show love to one another. That's the only solution besides church! If you can't find love, the doors of the church are always open.

The only reason I feel safe at school is because when I step foot on my school campus, I am praying "Lord, cover my campus with your blood. Let no evil come on this campus, in Jesus's name." I am rooted in the word. "No weapon formed against me shall prosper." Isaiah 54:17

Angelina, 15

I don't know much about the Roosevelt shooting incident, but it's

scary. It made me think about all my peers and other students that go to my high school. I wondered what if this incident happened at Edison, what would I do? I wouldn't have a clue. I would probably run into the office or a classroom...It's scary because it's possible for anyone to flip out and go crazy like that. I've been thinking about this ever since the Virginia Tech incident. I try to prevent stuff like this from happening at Edison by saying "hi" or talking to my peers that seem lonely, depressed, or just a bit down. I'm scared of people that surround me at school because I don't know what they are capable of doing and their feelings, or what they are going through. I wouldn't know what to do if a scary situation like that happened.

Now back on the Roosevelt issue, the first time I heard about it, the first thing that came to mind was "Why didn't the officer taze him instead of shooting him down." I don't really know all the facts behind the incident, but it's a sad loss for both. I feel sad for the officer and for the youth that died.

Marcus, 18

My feeling about the Roosevelt shooting incident is that the school structure is faulty all the way around. The students don't have an outlet for all they may be overwhelmed with in life. Also, it will be hard to justify the attack on the police officer by saying that the student used anti-depressants and has a mental disability, which causes him difficulty in learning and to worry excessively. A bat meant the student was ready to engage in the act of taking the officer's life. That may have taken place if the officer didn't choose to act in the manner that he did.

Arena, 16

I remember going home and going to my laptop to turn it on. When my laptop finally turned on and loaded, I signed onto my Myspace account. I had New Comments. I clicked the link and read what my friends said and replied. Then I scrolled the page and read another comment, but this one caught my attention. The comment read "Did you hear about what happened at Roosevelt?" I replied, "no" and my friend replied, "a cop was attacked and he shot back at the attacker." I then clicked on the home link and noticed a bulletin announcement that a friend of mine, who attends Roosevelt High School, posted. She said very little about the shooting, but she talked about how the kids who were locked down in the school acted very disrespectfully during the whole situation.

At the bottom of her bulletin posting, there was a link to KSEE 24's website. I clicked the link so I could read more about what happened. An on-campus officer was attacked by a student who was depressed. The student used a bat to attack the officer, not just any bat, but a modified bat. I remember thinking, wow! That's crazy.

Today my friends and I spent most of first period hovering over the Fresno Bee. The Roosevelt shooting made the front page. All my friends had something to say about the whole issue. Some were like "How did he get a bat?" "Why did the officer have to shoot?" "Why didn't the cop use a taser gun? Did he have taser gun?" "Did anyone even know the boy had a bat at school? Did anyone even notice?" "Do on-campus police have guns, weapons?" "How did the student know how to modify the bat?" "Why did some students react the way they did?" "Where are campus assistants, security, the Vice Principal, or Principal? Why didn't they help sooner?" "What has happened to youth today?"

Some questions I found the answers to myself; however, the question that still troubles me is "what was the motive behind all this?"

Kevis, 17

I remember when I was at school this boy fell and hit his head against the curb and was knocked unconscious. And the officer didn't know what to do. He kept the boy in his original position which was on his stomach. I had to scream out "get him off his stomach" for him to do it. But dealing with an unconscious person is very scary if you don't know what you're doing.

A mad student, 16

When I first heard about the situation at Roosevelt, I was kind of numb to it. But as I started to hear more details about it, it made me think deeper. My thought is that if I were a police officer and I was hit point blank in the back of my head, I think my first reaction would be "someone is trying to kill me." Then I would use the first thing that I know would defend me. I believe that's what the police officer did, so I don't blame him at all. The boy's family had to know that their son was on medication, and needed attention because of it. So they should have told the school about his situation, maybe they did, but still. Because he was a danger to other students, and himself, and now look what happened.

Laqusha, 20

In my opinion, the cop was using self defense. According to media reports, the student was waiting to hit him. Before we judge the situation, be real with yourself and put yourself in the cop's situation. What would you have done? Seriously!

On another note, someone should have been informed about the kid's situation. Has something like this happened before, or is this the first time the kid has flipped out on someone?

Lastly, my thoughts on the roots of the problem is that there are a lot of kids who are depressed and are going through a hard time. What I want to know is who is taking the time to sit down and really talk to our youth? We need adults, parents, teachers, counselors to ask themselves, am I doing my job? Am I really being there for these young people in education and emotionally? These school systems are too structured, which have pushed teachers into being just about the paycheck and not about our youth and their futures!!!

Oh yeah, we also need to be aware of our surroundings, friends, peers, everything! Because let's just face it, this world isn't safe and it's getting worse and worse, but I am not afraid because I believe my faith is my shield.

Jaleesa, 18

I believe that the boy who got shot at Roosevelt had a lot of mental issues. If he was feeling depressed (which he was), something in his life obviously triggered it. I, personally, don't think there were enough caring and responsible people in his life to actually sit down with him, ask what was wrong, and help him resolve what was making him depressed. I think teenagers need more people who help solve a problem, not just listen to it.



Want to make movies in the California Voices Summer of Service program? Its FREE! For more information check out www.cmcweb.org, or call 445-0015.

check it out! → ☺



"I got to understand what inspired my storyteller to dedicate his life in working with others..."
- Roberto Corralejo

"My hands-on learning experience gave me a boost of confidence!"
Liliana Yang

We make websites too!
fresyesblog.com



Made possible by
the Center for
Multicultural
Cooperation





My Hero, My Dad The Story of a Man Who Inspires Me

By Anna Gil

Lately I have been having dreams about a little girl waking up to find out that her dad has been in an accident at his workplace, and that he has died. It is a man around his 50s, working the graveyard shift at a construction site.

I relate to this dream because of my own dad. It scares me. Every time I wake up, I think of my dad, and of how different my life would be without him.

My dad is 51 years old and is turning 52 on July 7. He usually works dayshifts at a construction site. But lately, he's been working graveyard shifts from 8PM to 5AM.

My mom worries as well but she believes he is strong, and that he will come home every morning. I live with both my parents and three older brothers.

I almost lost my dad a year ago. He got alcohol poisoning and the doctor said if he were to drink again, he would die because his body wouldn't hold up. Ever since he had the operation, has not drunk any alcohol. My dad stopped drinking and that makes me happy because I know how hard it is to stop something you are used to doing. The alcohol poisoning was bad for his body, but it helped him stop drinking, and realized he should stay alive to be with his family.

My dad loved to drink. Every time he got his paycheck, he would go out with his friends from work and drink. This would happen every Friday. My dad said it was his way of rewarding himself from all the hard work he'd done during the week. Every time we went to Mexico, you'd find him drinking at the local cantina.

I never liked the idea of my dad drinking, but I couldn't make him do something he didn't want to do. I remember telling him "Why drink, Dad? It's not healthy." He would say "sorry" to me and try to stop but he couldn't. My mom told him to stop also, but he wouldn't. He was addicted.

My dad used to be a healthy person overall. In his 50 years, he has rarely gotten sick from the flu, and rarely ever had a fever or headaches. But when he got alcohol poisoning, things changed. He gets sick easily now, but he tries to hide it so he can continue to work.

My dad is a hard worker. When he isn't working, he will find something to do around the house. He can fix just about anything, from cars to refrigerators, to bathrooms and showers. He can also take old tables and make them brand new again. He even made me a pink bookshelf.

People say I am like my dad. I work hard and never quit. For example, during the end of my sophomore year, my grades were low, and I had so much going on at school. Tests and homework assignments were flying at me from every corner. But I tried my hardest and didn't quit. I passed with Bs and Cs, some As too.

I do agree I might be like my dad, but even if I try I could never actually be like my dad. He is one of a kind.

My dad has one thing I don't have: He always has a positive attitude. It doesn't matter the situation he's in, he'll always think positive. Just the other day, he found out that his youngest sister passed away. He was sad, but he accepted it and said, "That's how life is. Only God knows why people die."

I do have a positive attitude, but along with many doubts. I have moments when I give up for a while, but I eventually keep trying to achieve my goals. My dad's positive attitude helps me achieve my goals.

I'm scared of losing my dad, even though I know it will happen sooner or later. I try and enjoy the time I spend with him. I act as though we will always be together. I imagine a world where we have eternal life. Knowing that isn't real, I show my father a side of me that not many people get to see everyday. I work hard in school to make him proud, and if something were to happen to him, I would know he would die feeling proud of me, how I always try my hardest to achieve something important in life.

My dad has helped me in many ways. He showed me the meaning of life. He would say, just like my mom would, that "God put you on this earth to become someone in life, to go to school and graduate. Get into college and become someone important in life. And when your mom and I get old, you can take care of us."

Some of the best memories I have with my dad is when I worked with him every Saturday morning.

We would go to the flea market to sell things. Even though I acted like I hated waking up at 5AM in the morning on a day where I should be sleeping in, I appreciated every second I got to help him. Going with him to the liquor store those early mornings, getting a 24 ounce of French Vanilla Cappuccino, and enjoying it with some home made chocolate chip cookies my mom baked. Yum! Makes me want some right now.

I'm close to him. He and I don't sit around and talk about my problems. We communicate in a different way, in a way that only a father and daughter could understand. For example, when we talk, we talk about other people's problems. Usually, we'll talk about my brothers' problems, and discuss them as if they were my own problems.

Some father and daughter relationships don't always work. The dads don't always show love. Maybe they would think if they show love, then they are cowards.

But not for my dad and me, because our father/daughter bond is special.

"Letter to a Mom in Jail"

Dear Mom,

I'm writing to you not because you wrote me, but because I want to let you know how much you have hurt me.

I used to be so worried about you. When you would run off, I'd think... "Where did she go? Is she okay? Will she come back?" All these thoughts running through a little girl's mind.

A couple of times, you had me so worried to the point I would bite my nails to the core. Then everyone wonders why I bit them. Sometimes I'm embarrassed to say it's because of you. I've been biting them ever since that day when the police came to Granny's house looking for you. As I watched them drag you out, and you screaming, "Cover your eyes! Cover your eyes," I felt scared and confused. My little seven year old mind was telling me you weren't coming back.

That's why I used to always tell you, when I was younger, "Promise not to leave me again." Because I was afraid that if you left, there was no coming back.

I'm seventeen years old now. You know, one lower than 18. This means I'll be grown and on my own. I'll be graduating soon and then I'll be going to college, something that neither you nor my sister accomplished because of getting pregnant early. I am not ready for that kind of stuff. Being raised by Granny and Auntie helped me make that decision by keeping me safe and telling me right from wrong, like any mother should do.

Seeing the big belly teens struggle at school opened my eyes to see I don't want to be a teen parent catching the bus and having the responsibility of caring for a baby. I can barely take care of myself!

I have many great goals, and I am working hard to accomplish them. One is staying strong and learning to do what's right. Another is staying happy and cheerful no matter what's going on around me. Then there is graduating from high school and going to college, getting a degree, and living a fun, safe, and worry free life.

I'm also trying to follow the Lord more too. Yes, I know I have been going to church since I was little, but I really wasn't into His word before. Now I have a better understanding that everything I have been through, and will go through, is happening for a reason. I go to church every Sunday that I can. I also attend Bible study every Wednesday and I even joined the youth choir recently. My life is great so far. All my flaws I put behind me and all my worries too.

You're a beautiful person. Personality and all. I used to love it when it was just me and you talking and laughing. You could always put a smile on my face. When I think back, like right now, you still have that same effect on me. From your big jubilant smile that goes with your overly loud stern and happy voice to your thick and somewhat chubby body that I used to love to take a nap on. I was always your daughter and you will always be my mother. But some things just have to change.

Mom, we have had this conversation before about you leaving and going back to jail. The family has tried to talk to you about being a mother to me and my sister. I shouldn't be worried about you like this. You should already know right from wrong. I do.

My main priority is school. I am somewhat struggling with that. I don't need all of your troubles on top of my own.

I believe I have come out alright because of the positive way I was raised by Auntie and Granny, and because of what I've seen. It's sad to say, but it's true.

As time has went on, I've learned to let things go. So yes, I forgive you for all the heartache you've caused me. Yes, I forgive you for running off on me, and yes, I forgive you for not being a mother. I forgive you.

I love you, and always will. I just had to break it down and let you know what's up. Keep your head up in there. Hopefully you'll do right this time....

Love,

Me, Your youngest daughter

the kNOW

