

the **KNOW**

SPRING 09

YOUTH VOICE OF THE CENTRAL VALLEY

in REPAIR

INSIDE:
TRAFFIC SCHOOL
CYBER BULLYING
TATTOOS & PIERCINGS
MOMS
RESPECT
FORGIVENESS

ISSUE

#5

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STORIES · VIDEOS · POETRY

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New website, with stories, poetry and videos posted weekly!

www.theknowfresno.org

www.myspace.com/theknowyouth

news.newamericamedia.org

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Reader's Note:

Sometimes a writer will craft a piece that stirs his/her emotions to the point of tears. This doesn't happen often, but when it does, it reaffirms how writing can have the intrinsic power to document painful life experiences, the power to find emotional closure or "repair." Make sense?

It happened the other day during one of our meetings. Every time we get ready to publish an issue of this magazine, we read our own articles out loud to get feedback on final drafts.

One young lady found the courage to write on a topic that had been troubling her but she rarely spoke about. It seemed easy to write the article, because she did it in a breeze, but reading it out loud was different.

At first she simply refused. So then the others rallied behind me to encourage her, and finally, the words began to flow from her mouth. She read diligently, and we listened to every word. But as she neared the end of the article, she stopped. After a long pause she looked up and said, "I can't do this."

She threw her face into her palms, and the tears began to flow. It was the first time many of us had seen such vulnerable display of emotion from her.

As the group sat silently together, we also realized that for her, it was no longer about the article, no longer about the words, or the sentence structure or grammar. The article had stretched beyond the mere act of writing and pushed her to seek "repair" of that thing that had been troubling her.

Other writers in this issue also bring to light those things in our lives that are always in repair, such as "Nana" on page 1 about a fight she had with her mom, or Patrice on page 3 about the relationship she wish she had with her mom, and even "Marie" on page 25 about fixing the broken connections in her life.

Many readers have told us that articles in our previous issues have triggered those same vulnerable emotions. But when it's the author who conveys those emotions during the writing process, it adds truth to the saying that it does take sweat and tears to craft a memorable and compelling piece of writing.

We hope you enjoy the powerful stories in this issue. Don't be afraid to reach for the Kleenex. —Mai Der Vang

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A Mother's Hate, A Daughter's Cry

By "Nana"

It's weird how my parents don't trip out as much about my sexual orientation (I am bisexual). But when it comes down to getting a tongue piercing, they trip out!

I just turned 18 years earlier this year, and a few weeks after, I went and got my tongue pierced. I told my mom before I even did it and of course she disagreed, but I did it anyway. I didn't hide it from her when I talked and I wasn't afraid if she saw. I knew what she would do if she saw it, but at the moment I didn't care.

A week went by and my parents didn't notice at all...until my niece told on me, which she did by accident.

A few days later, I left to go see my "wife" and spend time with her. Then I went to the movies to watch Underworld 3 but one of my friends couldn't get in because it was rated R and she was underage. We left and drove around; then we decided to go to John's Incredible Pizza, which was packed! The line was all the way out the door. There was no place to sit but we stayed and found a spot to sit and eat. I had fun, hanging out with my friends and playing games. Then around 8pm, I went home. I knew my mom would yell at me and my dad would look at me differently.

I walked into their bedroom and smiled. My mom asked me to close the door so I did. Then she yelled at me: "Show me your tongue!"

I laughed trying to act like nothing was wrong. I walked up to my dad and gave him a kiss on the cheek. My mom got up and ran to the door. She locked it.

"Show me your tongue!"

I grabbed her hands because I knew if I didn't she would hit me when I showed her the piercing.

So I showed her my tongue and she told my dad to do something. Then as I tried to leave the room she swung at me. I covered my face as she punched me and pulled my hair. Then she told me to leave. As I tried to get up, she pushed me out of her room. I got up and ran to my room, grabbed my phone, charger and mp3 player. I ran out of the house.

I tried breathing and getting my head together but as I ran, I fell and lay on the ground for a minute. It felt like five minutes. Then I got up and ran toward the canal. A million things were running through my head as I grabbed my phone and text my best friend who lived like five blocks away.

"You home? I need you!!!"
She texts back: "Ya what happen?"
"Go outside, I'm coming ova."

When I got to her house, she came outside and gave me a hug. I began to cry.

"What happened?" she asked
"She found out, about my tongue."
"Who found out?" she asked.
"My mom, she hit me!" I said.

We took a walk, and I told her everything. My friend tried chang-

ing the subject so I would calm down. It helped. We walked around the block and then went to the canal where we usually go when something happens. This is the spot where we go to calm down and relax.

My parents are like dogs when it comes down to me. I am always getting grounded for doing something wrong and when I do something right, they still give me a negative attitude.

My dad is great, no lie. I love him with all my heart. He's nothing like my mom. My mom, she'll kill me if I step out of line and my dad will just look at me and hurt me with words. His words are like knives, stabbing into my heart.

I hate the fact that my parents think I can't handle the real world. I tell them I can take care of myself. That in order for me to get a taste of the real world, I have to be on my own and do things my way so if I make a mistake, I am the one who has to fix it, not them.

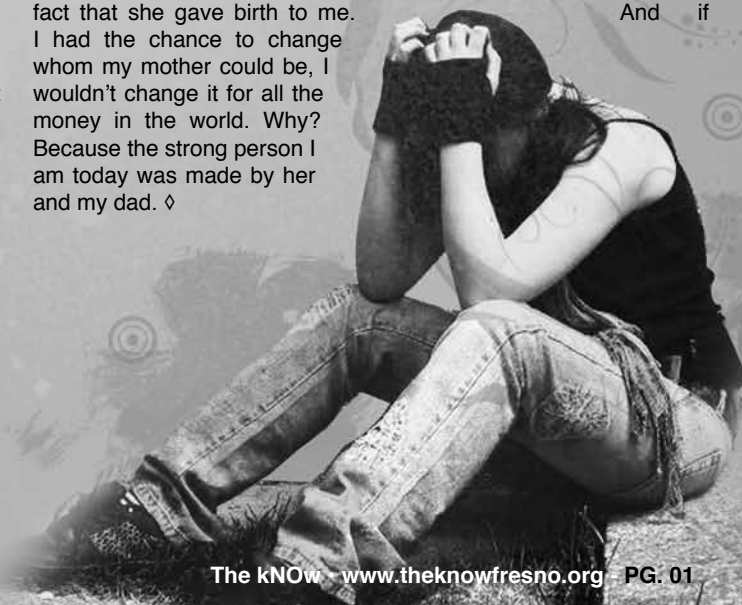
as the painful memories attack me one last time, I feel like a stronger person

I know what I'm doing. I know what I'm getting into. I know how to take care of myself. I'm grown up, 18 years old. They think I'm going to be around them forever. I don't know why they think I'm still a child. I have to start my own life one of these days.

They say horrible things to me, which cause me to fall down near their feet. They get me to crawl on the floor as if I am a slave to them. Their words overwhelm me, and they make me weak, forcing me to be in their control, like a dog when it is ordered to sit, speak, and stay.

I am strong! I am not going to take it any more. My mom can hit me all she wants and anyone can tell me I am not good enough, but no one will ever hurt me the way my mom did that night. I am recovering from the pain I felt, and my flashbacks are fading, but as the painful memories attack me one last time, I feel like a stronger person. I realize no matter how much I love someone I should NEVER let that person take advantage of me.

My mom will always have me as a daughter, but I will never see her as I did before. She used to be the mother who loved me no matter what I did or said. I can't change the fact that she gave birth to me. And if I had the chance to change whom my mother could be, I wouldn't change it for all the money in the world. Why? Because the strong person I am today was made by her and my dad. ♡





I DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT SEX...

Now I'm A Dad!

By Demar Duncan

My parents never told me about sex, what it is, how people do it, why people do it, and now, I will be a father.

My mom was always working and I never knew my real dad.

All I had was a stepdad, but he never told me much because he was always using drugs.

The schools tell you about sex, but who really pays attention there? I know I didn't. It goes to show that moms and dads play important roles in what their children know and don't know. I know if my mom had told me what to do and what not to do, I wouldn't be on my way to becoming a dad right now. I am eighteen years old, and I got a girl pregnant. We are expecting a baby in September this year.

When I was young my mom would always be at work, so my stepdad stayed home with me. He was a bad guy, my mom just didn't want to accept it. He did drugs and he used to beat me, but my mom didn't do anything about it.

I never learned anything from my stepdad, except how not to keep a job. He could never keep one so he stayed home and laid around all day, getting mad at me for little things so he could take his anger out on me. I guess that was his way of dealing with things. As for my real dad, I never knew him. My mom never did want to talk about him. She had me when she was a teenager.

My mom was and still is a hard-working woman. She's taught me how to be dedicated to my work. Even though she works just at a fast food restaurant, my mom works hard. She wants me to do better than her.

But I know in some way, it is sort of her fault for not teaching me about sex. She never sat down with me and talked to me about it. The only thing she has ever told me was not to do drugs or I will end up like my stepdad. I laughed it off but it really stayed with me. I don't do drugs because I don't want to end up like him.

When I started my freshmen year in high school, it was cool but scary. I didn't know a lot of people, but like everyone, I made friends. There were girls who I liked but I never thought about sex. I know it sounds unreal, a teen boy who doesn't think about sex, but I was one of the good boys.

Then I met a cool girl named Vicky. One night, I was over at her house and we started kissing. One thing led to another, and I was 15 years old when I lost my virginity that night. That's when things changed, not in a bad way, but they just changed.

During my junior year, I met another girl named Jill. She was

cool and outgoing, which caught my eye. We hung out and talked about everything. I thought, wow, this girl is so cool I want her to be mine. Years went by. Then, a few months ago, she was at my house, and again, one thing led to another and we ended up having sex.

I didn't think I could get anyone pregnant so we didn't use protection. After that night, Jill came to me and told me she missed her period. Of course I was shocked but at the same time, I was happy about it.

When I told my mom, she freaked out and she didn't want me to have the baby. She was really let down. She said so many things to me that made me want to cry. The only person who was happy was my grandmother. She even told me I was going to be a great dad, but I still couldn't stop thinking about the things my mom said.

If my mom didn't want something like this to happen, how come she didn't take the time to talk to me about it before? She could have told me how she felt about me having sex. She was a teen mother herself!

I wish my mom had talked to me about safe sex or anything about sex! Now that she knows I'm having a baby, she tells me it's too late for that talk. Now she tells me she didn't

have a life cause she had me to take care of, and now I'm just throwing away my life by having a baby.

But I don't see it that way. I see it as a great thing, and I'm going to do what I have to do to make this baby ready for the world. I will care for this baby as much as I care for myself.

I did learn something valuable from both my real dad and stepdad, how not to be the kind of fathers they were to me, and that I can be a better father. I will teach my children the importance of not having sex, but also let them know about safe sex, so they won't end up like my mom and I, as teen parents. ♦

**I'm going to do what
I have to do to make
this baby ready for
the world**

The Mom I Never Had

By Patrice Word
Photo by Anissa Thompson

Although I have known her my whole life, she has never been close to me. We have never had what you would call a “mother-daughter” relationship. She has never told me I was beautiful, never said she loved me, and as a matter of fact, I don’t believe we have ever had a conversation.

My mother grew up with seven other siblings. Times were very different when she was growing up. She endured a lot of hard things from her siblings and mother as well, which pushed her to make some bad decisions. She dropped out of high school in the ninth grade and had her first child at 18.

She and I have always had our own little lives, which is a sad situation. You would think that not having a father was bad enough, but to make matters worse, I also missed out on a mother.

As I stare at her, I see a number of things I inherited. We have the same nose and big, plump full lips. Her skin is light like mine. Standing at only 4’10”, she is just two inches shorter than me. I know for a fact I got my height from her.

Looking at us, you can clearly see that I am her daughter and she is my mother. But looks are about the only things she has ever given me.

Going back as far as I can remember, my grandmother was the one who took care of me. Not because my mom wasn’t capable, but because she wanted to do her own thing.

As a child, I remember having a picture of her in a frame on my dresser. She looked so pretty. At night, I would get out of bed and grab it and hold it to my chest. I would beg God to bring her to me.

Every chance I had, I went with her even if the conditions weren’t the safest. I just knew I wanted to be with her. I can remember my grandma and aunt being mad at my mom, and at the time, I was too young to understand what was going on. So I kind of blamed them for my mom not being with me all the time.

Now I know they were just trying to keep me safe and away from harm.

Around the age of seven, I finally got the chance I had been

longing for. I was going to live with my mom for good. Prior to that, I had been living with my grandma. I was excited, but I didn’t know what I was getting myself in to.

There were some good times, like once in a while, my mom and I would walk to the store and get candy and then go back home and play cards for candy. I loved that. It was a side of her I rarely saw.

Then there were other times, the bad ones. I remember lying down by the window and my eyes were open. My mom looked at me and said, “Your eyes are brown, I thought they were black.” I thought, wow, it took her eight years to notice that. My feelings were really hurt.

I have always had something deep down inside of me that has wanted that relationship, just to hear her say “good job” or maybe a gift for my birthday. Maybe just a little support from her would have made me smile.

Maybe just a little support from her would have made me smile

I know deep down that my mom loves me and there’s no doubt about that. She just doesn’t know how to express her love to me. To be honest, I don’t even think she knows how to love, which is sad.

Now that I’m 18 years old and going away to college, I want to leave on good terms. But at this very moment, I can’t say if that will be possible. I moved out of her home three days before my eighteenth birthday because we got

in a huge argument. I haven’t been back since; so as usual, we really don’t have a relationship.

We’ve had this weird relationship for so long that I don’t see or know any different. One thing is for sure. Before I leave for college, I will sit down and have a talk with her and make sure that no matter what, she knows I love her, I forgive her, and I will be there for her. I don’t know if it will help us, but as long as I let her know how I feel, I’ll leave feeling a little better.

Even without a mother role model in my life, I must admit I have done well for myself. I’ve kept it together and I am proud of the way I turned out. I can’t take all the credit. There were people, like my godparents, god sister, and my grandma, who have helped shape me.

It doesn’t stop there. Whenever the time comes for me to have children, my children will never have to deal with what I went through. I plan to break the generational curse that my mother suffered from. It’s not like I didn’t learn anything from her because I learned all the things I shouldn’t do. ♦





EVERY DOLLAR COUNTS!

HOW TEENS CAN SAVE MONEY AND SPEND WISELY

By Arena Phaphilom

When I walk into a store, I sometimes feel divided between choosing to buy a cute new shirt and shoes, or keeping the money in my pocket for simple everyday necessities, like lunch, library fines, and paying my phone bill. When I have money, it's as if it burns a hole in my pocket right away!

Everyone knows the current economic recession has been hard to deal with. And teens, along with adults, have been affected.

As a teenager, it feels like I always have a need to spend money. There is always something new I need to buy. Yet there is rarely enough money to save, or rarely a moment where I feel the need to save. Many teens today have become materialistic, and I admit that, I too, have fallen into that trap.

It's as if I have become blinded or consumed with spending. I feel the need to keep up with the latest fashion trends and technology, and I'm sure other teens can relate. It took me to write this article to realize my materialistic instincts.

I find myself buying new jeans, sandals, shoes, and lots of shirts. I even find myself buying shirts similar to shirts I already own and jeans similar to ones I already have. When I go through my closet, I always think I have nothing to wear, even though my closet is full of clothes.

It can be difficult to save money these days, whether you have money or you don't. People spend money when they have it, and they even spend money when they don't have it. This seems to be an unending cycle.

Many times, I know I want to go to the movies with my friends but I also know that I need to save that money for other things, such as lunch, gas money, or my phone bill.

The stipends I earn from my work at The kNOw and my weekly allowance need to be saved for things I need to pay for, instead of things I want to spend it on.

Looking back, I have always had trouble with money management, and I don't think I am the only person with this problem. Last week I realized I could spend \$200 in a couple of hours. Thinking back now, I wish I'd saved that money.

In this economy today, money management is what I need now more than ever. I need to learn that it is okay to spend and buy, but that I must do so wisely.

I am sure I am not the only teen that can spend that much money in little time. It was just the other day that my friend admitted to spending \$150 on a new pair of Jordans he saw after two minutes of being in the store. My other friend has even spent \$200 on a pair of jeans!

I have had to hide money from myself and tell myself I am broke in order to save money

I am not sure how I became so materialistic, but I do know that it has definitely taken a toll on me, and my finances. Maybe it was the media and TV or maybe it is my peers. Whatever it may have been, it has become a big problem.

I have found that keeping a piggy bank is no help because even piggy banks do not keep me from spending money. I have had to hide money from myself and tell myself I am broke in order to save money.

Doing that helps me save money. But everyone has a different technique, so I asked a few people, and here are some of their ideas:

1. **Shop in the clearance section at stores.**
2. **Put your money in the bank.**
3. **Look for bargains and sales.**
4. **Keep weekly receipts to see how much you're spending and give yourself a weekly budget based on your expenses.**
5. **Cook your own food rather than eat out all the time.**
6. **Spend time at home rather than going out so much.**
7. **Buy things you need, not want!**

I know I am not going to be a millionaire anytime soon, but taking steps to save money now can help me later. With money management skills, I, and many other teens, can save money as easy as we spend money.

So after giving my closet another look, I realize now I have enough clothing. I guess I don't need another pair of jeans after all.♦

WHY TRAFFIC SCHOOL

CHANGED MY LIFE

By Dasen Thao

Many teens are caught either speeding or drunk driving almost everyday. According to statistics, I learned that 1 out of every 3 teens will get a traffic violation ticket during their first year of driving.

I wonder why many teens violate the laws set upon them. It seems that after many lessons from driver's education and training, we should know better. Of course, I can be that one teen to tell you why I sped and what led me to become a safer driver.

It was in the evening last October when an officer caught me speeding on a street. I didn't see him behind me. I didn't notice him until he flashed his lights. I was scared of course, as any beginning driver would be.

My heart beat fast and my palms began to sweat as I clenched on to my steering wheel. I thought to myself, what did I do wrong? I pulled to the side of the road and lowered my window. The officer asked for my driver's license. I handed it to him and waited. He told me I was going 51 miles per hour in a 40 miles per hour zone.

I strongly disagreed with him, but I kept it to myself. I couldn't possibly be going that fast since I was going with the speed of traffic. He handed me my ticket and drove off. I thought it was a mistake but I wasn't even paying attention to my speedometer so I really had no idea.

I had to wait for my court date to be mailed to me in about two weeks. My family went easy on me. I thought they would lecture me but they were calm. They realize I am still learning how to get used to driving.

My court date was scheduled for late-January. When that day came, I went to court to either fight the case or go to traffic school. I wanted to fight it, but my mom told me to just pay the \$20 fee for traffic school to void the \$150 speeding ticket.

I learned a lot at traffic school. At first I thought it would be long, boring lectures but it was the opposite. There were teens there around my age. And there were people with all sorts of driving violations, from speeding to crossing a stop sign and even drunk driving.

The session began exactly at seven that night. It was the night that changed my life forever.

Our first speaker was a graveyard keeper. He told us how expensive it is to have a plot at the cemetery if we were to ever speed on the road and die. He mentioned the expenses that our family would have to pay for a proper funeral and burial. I found it to be very scary and my mom was there too. Although my mom doesn't enjoy watching things related to death, and she couldn't quite understand the speaker because she doesn't fully know English, she found the pictures in the slideshow to be intriguing. I translated for my mom.

Hearing these stories and having my mom by my side made me value my life more

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MAINSTREAM MEDIA: WHERE ARE ALL THE ETHNIC PEOPLE?

By Jaleesa Vickers

One day, much like all the others, I turned on my TV. I flipped through the channels, searching for something to watch. I saw ads for several products.

One in particular was a commercial for Almay Cosmetics. The women were promoting a certain type of blush and foundation. They showed all the shades and none of them fell below the lightened beige. The women presenting the products were thin and they had blonde hair, blue eyes.

This continued with many other products. I came to the disturbing, but not surprising, conclusion that most people I see on television are White.

In the times we live in, one wouldn't think this would occur. America is a giant melting pot with many different cultures, so it baffles me that when I turn on my TV, seven times out of ten, the person on the screen is White. There aren't nearly as many ethnic people as there should be. Most people in the world have dark hair and dark eyes, so why would networks and advertisers want to show the opposite?

Growing up in Fresno has made me witness many different types of cultures. It was always hard being a Black female, and growing up I didn't have many influences to build a good self-image on. As a little girl, I was bombarded with images of people who didn't look like me at all. They started to make me feel inferior.

I found myself asking my mom if I was too fat or why couldn't the stores we shopped at make clothes my size. I wanted my skin to be lighter, but I found out that was a battle I couldn't win. I've gotten over a lot of those feelings now that I'm older, but I have my insecurities now and then.

We all know that mainstream media provides some of those ads just for sponsorships, but I feel that there are other underlying reasons. Makeup advertisements almost always have tall, thin, White women. To me, it's sending the message, "be this way, look this way, or you're nothing."

It may or may not be intentional, but ads like these cause many people, especially young people, to have a war with their identity. Many youth have a habit of comparing themselves to who's in the media and who's around them. If that's the only example that young people have, many of them are going to try to change themselves into people they're not.

I'm not saying there are absolutely no ethnic people in the mainstream media. It's just that when they are (in sitcoms, for example), their identities are often altered to fit cultural stereotypes.

Blacks are often portrayed as ghetto or silly. Latinos, like on the George Lopez Show, sometimes parade around like they're so low-class, yet they live in a suburb and take a lot of things for granted. Or on the show One-On-One, after Breanna moved to college, her

Asian friend always acted ditzzy and stupid. Either way, in reality, most ethnic people don't live such simple and carefree lives like on TV.

The mainstream media's common alternative is to make ethnic people appear "whitewashed." In any case, the purpose may be to entertain, but these negative undertones are placed as if to exploit. Some call it harmless TV, I call it racism.

The news, however, does not remain unscathed. There are news anchors of all cultural backgrounds, but the news they report differs. When a child kidnapping is reported, it's almost always about a White child. The news media has recently been all over the Kaylie Anthony case, which involved a little girl gone missing and her mother accused as the killer.

It wasn't until recently that someone's case other than a White child was presented on the news. The victim was Sandra Cantu, an eight-year-old girl from Tracy, CA. It's sad what happened to her, but what's even sadder is that so many other cases like this pop up and don't get the media attention they deserve.

Is money the issue? Or is it that news producers feel that these missing little White children are more important than anyone else's children? The point is that many ethnic children are kidnapped,

Some call it harmless TV, I call it racism

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from my soul-consuming quest thrown abroad into a forest of questions yet to be answered. Like a plastic bag caught in the wind I began foolishly frolicking in the fields of ignorance and leaving me in time lethargic similar to a liquid in cupped hands. My dance with foolishness left my mind and body as cement.

I have adapted to my struggles in an effort to maintain my lucidness, slipping then diving off my platform of guilt, crushed. I felt responsible for the suicide of my friend Virgil Ivan Allen Jr. I acted as Iblis or the bringer of despair, luring another soul towards destruction. I reference myself as an enemy because I carelessly drifted astray and felt destined to destroy all good around me.

In time I have found my life to be a lamentable existence. My falling from grace is a reference to my being homeless, having a mother on drugs and myself also on drugs, among other things. I

Constantly I've fought pain and searched for peace, again finding myself acting without restraint

found this laughable in a manner that only life brings out. Almost in tune with my life, yet detached similar to the way a schizophrenic operates. My mind built a solid platform to run on. Over my nineteen years I've learned that my purpose on Earth is to love, and the desire to do so will accompany me when I depart from this earth.

As if I am a passing wind, many inquire on where I come from. My beginning is what I seek to return to. I have not found peace in my soul, yet to pursue another path will prove a risky venture and at times I feel my life and thoughts are now like month-old baking soda. They have become platitudinous. Am I but nothing?

Most of my life has been a harrowing experience. Now I realize the power of an enlightened heart. At all times I look into my heart to find love bound by a rope of emotions tempted by the fallen one. I have found my life to be righteous and this place unknown. My current standing at heart searching for a place to rest my soul where it all began.

My duality, to narrow it down, stems from my upbringing. No mother or father, only a strong willed, beautiful, loving individual, my grandmother Joann S. Hollins and my brothers close, yet separated. Constantly I've fought pain and searched for peace, again finding myself acting without restraint. My soul screams, "Take me away!" I'm dying for a change, literally. Non-fiction. My main struggle in life is coming up empty handed. My race, my faith and what I feel guides me through life. ♦

Family & Identity: My Internal Struggle

By Marcus Vega

The article I am writing is about my own personal battle. A conflict involving the duality of my being that is bitter in taste but beautiful in sight.

One of the many battles I fought with is my ethnicity. To further elaborate, my grandmother was of Indian descent, African-American, and Pacific Islander. She was born Feb. 15, 1931, and she passed Dec. 8, 2006. My mother is of the same with the exception of her father's Irish mix. My father is of Latin descent.

I am the product of a mixed race relationship. I feel it makes me richer in culture and richer in identity. I love being mixed though at times I feel bad because I can't relate to one ethnicity and many around me are confused about what I am. A chameleon. At times I dislike myself because of my distinct facial features, my eye color, and my skin color. These things distinguish me from those who are not as I am. I have found that to a certain extent, we are all mixed.

Coming to terms with my only enemy, ME, I emerged vivacious

TWO YEARS AND COUNTING: Being In A Stable Relationship

By Angelina Thao

I had no idea what world I was entering by simply saying, “I guess?!?” It was a mischievous afternoon when my friends and I decided to call up this random boy named Mongsai.

I didn’t really know him but I had seen him at school a couple of times walking with his little “group” of friends. He was a year older than us and was the quiet type. Out of boredom, we called him up that afternoon and I was chosen to talk to him.

I didn’t want to do it, but my friends kept urging me so I said, “I guess?!?”

He picked up the phone and said in a low-tone voice, “Hello? ...Who’s this?”

I chirped out, “Hello, is Mongsai there?” He then answered with a confused and shocked tone, “Yeah, this is me...who’s this?”

I quickly forced out the lie, “This is your baby girl, Mandy!” “Who?” Mongsai asked confused.

Laughing inside, I quickly answered, “Remember our favorite place under the big maple tree?”

There was an awkward silence before Mongsai asked, “Is this Angel?”

AHHH!! I hung up the phone and wondered how he could have known it was me calling. He didn’t really know me, how did he recognize my voice? I had never spoke to him before and I didn’t even think he knew my name. I looked at myself and wondered if I looked like the flirty type of girl.

Weeks passed and school started. I was a funky freshman with my friends. I was friendly, so almost every morning when I went to class, I would pass by Mongsai and I would say “good morning” to him as well.

A few weeks into school, I received a strange phone call. I answered the phone with a calm, “Hello?” and a low voice answered, “How have you been?”

Confused and a bit scared, I questioned, “Who’s this?” “Your boyfriend of course!” said the voice on the other end.

I figured out who it was by now, but I decided to play along and kept asking the same questions about who he was. My own phone trick was coming back to haunt me.

Mongsai eventually told me it was he calling. He then asked, “So can you come to the front of the school with me tomorrow morning then?”

I answered nervously, “I guess?!?”

The next morning, I didn’t bother to go up to the front of the

school, but my class was in the front so I saw him when I was going to class. He asked me, “Where were you?” I didn’t say anything but put on a silly smile and shrugged my shoulders.

I went to class and many thoughts went through my head. I asked myself if I was really going out with this boy Mongsai. I thought it was just a joke so I played along with him.

Not really knowing one another, I felt guilty like I was cheating something out of my life. The first two months were cool getting to know him. He was sweet, patient, and really into me but I wasn’t sure if I was up to that level yet, so I broke up with him.

Then for two more months, we spent more time getting to know one another. It was at that point that I became really comfortable with him. I began to trust him, and we decided to stick through this relationship and see where it would take us.

That was two years ago, and we’ve been together ever since then. When our friends ask how long we’ve been together, they look at us like we’re crazy to be with each other that long. We laugh it off because we know we have something real. Even my sister told us



When our friends ask how long we’ve been together, they look at us like we’re crazy



REBUILDING MY FAMILY

Learning To Forgive And Let Go

By Laqusha Locke

In 2006, a poll by New America Media asked young people what they considered to be the most pressing issues facing their generation. Family breakdown received the highest rating.

According to DivorceRate.org, 50% of all marriages end in divorce in the United States. Many families become divided because of the different issues that emerge as a result of divorce. One issue my family struggles with is letting go of things and forgiveness.

Around me, it seems common for many people to just give up; whether it's giving up on life, family or education. I see many people throwing in the towel at an increasing rate.

I rarely hear conversations about unconditional love, and some of us have even put aside the will to endure in hard times. It's like when things get tough I've seen people just give up.

It was common back then to just say, "I'm sorry." Then the other person says, "I'm sorry too." And a hug is given and the situation is tossed to the side.

These days, it's more like, "I'm sorry..." "...me too." But in their minds, they are thinking, "If that person messes up one more time, then we are done."

I remember keeping record of other people's wrongdoings. I would tell the person I forgive him/her, but instead of letting the problem go, I would file it into my mind. I would wait and watch for that person to make the same mistake, and when s/he does, then that's it.

When I was younger, my cousins and I would get into arguments. Sometimes we would fight, scream and yell at each other. But at the end of the day, she was still my cousin. So then we would set aside our differences and apologize. And even if we didn't apologize verbally, we knew "the look" that meant we were sorry and that we didn't want to be mad each other anymore.

I remember knowing how to let go, and I remember the mutual feeling of how we treated one another to not hurt each other's feelings.

I remember knowing that we are not perfect beings and we are bound to make mistakes so I learned how to keep forgiving. I knew how to build bridges and get over "it."

Remember when only "mean" people held grudges? I remember when I wasn't ashamed to tell someone I was sorry for the wrong I had done. To this day when my little brothers and I get into

disagreements and I say something I shouldn't have said, I stop and apologize. I have learned to set my anger aside, in the moment, so it won't linger and become a bigger problem later.

You might be thinking, well, some people have held grudges for centuries, and yes that is true. These are not new issues, but it feels like they are happening more today. My question is, why have so many people around me stopped pressing through? Why are they not as tolerant as they used to be and where did they learn to give up so fast when things got hard?

My family feels very divided. They argue and talk about one another too much. We can't let go of the past.

Recently we had a funeral for my great-great grandmother who was 98 years. A few days prior to the funeral, there was drama among the relatives. My older cousin (my Granny's favorite grand-daughter) came from Texas for the funeral, but she wasn't aware of how separated our family was. Her heart was broken to discover the family gossip that was in the air from family to family.

We have a huge family, and my Granny had over a hundred grandchildren, about 70 great-grand children, about 55 great-great grandchildren and like 25 great-great-great grandchildren. But only about 25 people showed up to the funeral.

I didn't even know what was going on, but when I heard bits of gossip, I would walk away. Many things need to be worked out in my family, and I was hoping that most of our family would show up at the funeral so we could talk things out and fix what is broken.

Because of the division in my family, I don't know all my cousins. My hope is that one day we can unite and be what a family is supposed to be.

Like others, I have issues too and sometimes I let those issues get the best of me. Sometimes I let pride get in my way and I don't apologize when I should. But as I'm growing, I'm realizing that it's okay to admit that I am wrong. I can't let my pride break up any more of my relationships.

We all need to learn how to humble ourselves and resolve conflicts because when we don't, the situation can resurface in other issues. We have to learn to let things go. We need to open up and let people know how we feel, say what we mean and mean what we say. We should learn how to be vulnerable again and develop a love that is unconditional to help us make it through anything. ♦



When Love Hurts: Abuse In Relationships

By "Marie"

Violence...is it to be expected in a relationship or not? To me, values such as love, trust, loyalty and communication should be expected in a healthy relationship, but not violence.

I have heard stories from girls and women who blamed themselves for their boyfriends or husbands hitting them, or maybe they say it's okay for their partner to put them down emotionally but not hit them. It makes me sad because abuse hurts in every way, mentally, emotionally and physically.

My mother has a story. It was during the afternoon, and my siblings were at school. My stepdad came into the house and started arguing with my mom. He was in the process of coming off crystal meth, and one of his friends made him mad about something. He decided to take it out on my mom.

She said something to defend herself and he shoved a pack of cigarettes into her face. She ended up with a fat cut on her lip. I remember after that, she told me she accidentally walked into a wall. A lot of women say things like that to protect their partner.

Every time my stepdad hurt my mom, he would apologize and beg her to forgive him. And she did because he apologized. He would buy her presents and promise never to do it again.

But the last time he did it, he hurt her so bad he nearly killed her. I got tired of seeing my mom get hurt so I got in the middle and pushed him away from her. He chased me, and I ran into my bedroom and into the closet. He looked all round the room and then found me in the corner of the closet. Then he punched me in the head for getting involved.

It took us kids getting taken by Child Protective Services (CPS) for my mom to have the courage to finally leave him. Today, she still sees him because they have kids together, but because of the mental, emotional and physical violence, she now has low self-esteem. I'm trying to help her build herself up again. She's trying to get back on her feet while taking care of the kids. I am the oldest and I am also helping her watch the kids.

Physical violence is painful because you see the bruises, but the scars are emotional and can mess up your mental health. It can

hurt your self-esteem badly and has led some people to commit suicide.

No woman or man should have to be in a relationship where they are being hurt. There are many signs of violence; you just have to pay attention.

If people change their appearance, it's important to notice. For example, I know this person who used to wear shorts, skirts, short sleeve shirts, tank tops, etc. Then suddenly I noticed she started to wear pants, long sleeve shirts, jackets and sunglasses. She even stopped talking to everyone and hardly went out unless she was with her other "half."

It is also important to notice when people get bruises and cuts, especially the ones you know could not have been caused by walking into walls.

Other signs to look out for are a change in their behavior, such as low self-esteem, self-blame for everything, or just keeping to themselves all the time.

I have never been in a love relationship where I was abused. But growing up, I was abused physically and emotionally by some family members, such as the same stepdad who abuses my mom. The abuse went on for years because I was too scared to speak up.

It can be hard to get out of an abusive relationship, but I believe if you have a good support system in your life, people you trust who can help you get away from your abuser, then that would help. It would also do you good to either have a place to stay or know people who will let you stay with them as long as your abuser does not know. In Fresno, there is a women's shelter called the Marjorie Mason Center who has helped many women break out of violent relationships.

I also wonder why there isn't a battered men's shelter. I know most of the time, it's the women who are getting abused, but I have also heard about men being abused as well. Men need a place to stay just as women do.

If you are in this kind of situation, I hope you get help. Find someone you trust. It's important to get out of this situation before it's too late, and you end up losing everything. ♦



YOUTH TRENDS ON THE RISE TATTOOS & PIERCINGS

By Jaleesa Vickers

Artwork by Jaleesa Vickers

Snakebites, industrials, monroes, lebreys...not a whole lot of adults and parents would be familiar with those terms. They may be, however, familiar that a growing number of youth are having that type of work done on their bodies. Others are more familiar with getting "inked" or getting "tatts." Love 'em or hate 'em, I'm talking about tattoos and piercings, a growing trend among many youth.

Back when I was in school, I didn't think much of it. In middle school, when I was about fourteen years old, a classmate of mine had a tongue piercing. I would say to myself, "wow, that must hurt," or "oh, that's cool."

Now that I'm older and have graduated from high school, I got myself a lip piercing. It didn't hurt as much as I thought it would, and for me, it was low maintenance. I did it as a little treat for myself for my nineteenth birthday, just because I thought it would look nice on me.

These days, my peers pierce and tattoo almost anything on their bodies. From eyebrows, tongues, lips, cheeks, septums, to tattoos on their arms, legs, chests, and necks. So why are so many youth taking such a strong interest in these types of body modification?

One reason could be that many shows on TV, like Miami Ink and LA Ink, helped propel tattooing, which was an underground culture, into the mainstream. A lot of people may be starting to realize how much of an art form body modification can be, and how powerful it can be to shaping who you are.

Many youth think it is a rite of passage. They may think that getting a tattoo or piercing enables you to be in control of your body, and that you are capable of making decisions. It's something to the effect, "If I'm old enough to get a piercing, I'm old enough to do other things I couldn't do before."

Not all young people think that way. For some, it's more simple. Some do it for shock value. Some do it to fit in, while some just think it's cool. Whatever the reason, it's a trend that isn't showing any signs of slowing down.

To gain a broader perspective, I interviewed Monica Pasillas, a tattoo artist for Tower Tattoos in Fresno. Being tattooed and pierced herself, it was awesome questioning someone with experience and a cool demeanor.

When I asked her what types of tattoos and piercings were popular, she said, "I see that lip and side lip piercings are in, and belly button piercings are still popular. For girls, tattoos on their inside wrist and for guys, the chest and arms."

As a person who has a piercing, I asked why she thought young people get tattoos. "To look cool and to fit in," she stated. "I think it's very mainstream now." So far, we shared the same views. "They think it's a rite of passage," she added.

I took it a step further by putting her in the shoes of a parent. She replied, "If they were 14-16 years old, I'd allow earlobe and nose piercings, but not the septum." In regards to a tattoo, she said, "No tattoos if they're under 21. They're not completely developed yet, and they might make a bad decision."

When she told me she doesn't tattoo hands, necks, or faces, she also added, "They can be associated with gangs and interfere with getting a job. It's not really acceptable in our society."

From that statement, I could see there were major and minor repercussions from getting tattoos or piercings. There's always a risk of infection if the equipment isn't sterilized. Your family or your employer may not be very accepting of the work you get done.

Tattoos can fade, and there's always a chance you can regret what you did. Piercings aren't forever but tattoos are, and the removal can be expensive and lead to scarring.

Not everything is bad about body modification though. It can be good if it's done right. Piercings can be around as long as you want, if you clean them thoroughly and use the right jewelry. Tattoos can be small or large and have vibrant coloring and detail. If taken care of, they can stay that way. Both can be used as ways to express yourself and what you stand for.

Just because you finally get a taste of freedom doesn't mean you should run out and get a tattoo or piercing. Like any other major life decision, you should put a lot of thought into it. Many young people make that mistake, wanting to get a tattoo removed or going to great lengths to hide it from their family.

Also, if you rush to get something done in an unprofessional environment, you may not get what you expected. Just remember the saying, "You get what you pay for."

As a final note, Monica told me, "What you like when you're younger may not be what you like when you're older. Also, parents, employers, etc. may be a little more accepting if it is done professionally."

I am not by any means saying that everyone should get a tattoo or piercing. I just suggest you do your research and make a mature, conscious decision. ♦

I could see there were major and minor repercussions from getting tattoos or piercings

The Beat Within



A Weekly Publication of Writing and Art from the Inside

The Beat Within, a program of Pacific News Service/New America Media, provides writing workshops and a weekly publication for incarcerated youth nationwide. Every week, The kNOW staff and volunteers conduct workshops at the Fresno County JJC. The Beat Within, Fresno Team, is: Patricia Johnson, Nigel Medhurst, Ashleigh Rocker, Lily Romero, and Mai Der Vang.

My Baby's Lost

I'm going to write about bad things that happened on the outs while I've been in JJC. About two weeks ago, I got a visit from my mom. She was crying. I asked her what happened, and she told me that my baby's mama fought for full custody of my baby, Anna, and she won. She moved and no one knows where she went.

I feel bad. I find myself crying to sleep at night. My baby's mama was talking about getting back with me, but she saw the chance to take the only reason why I try to live away. This is the first time I have told anyone about this, so thank you Beat Within for listening to me.

-Nano

The Winning Catch

All my life, I had many moments to overcome but there was only one time when I truly overcame my fears. It was the summer of 2001. I was about to play a championship football game. It was Edison versus Central. We went 12-0 in our league, and in the Central league, they were also undefeated.

So we were practicing all week, harder than we had ever practiced before. It was the night before the game and that's when my fears came with all the thoughts running through my mind. Are we going to win? Am I going to cost us the game? All of those thoughts ran through my mind all night.

Then it was game day. I was dressed up all black with a clear visor and a Deion facemask. We were doing drills and I couldn't seem to catch the ball because I had those thoughts in my mind. Then the game started and we were neck and neck with the score at 14-14. I did okay catching three passes for 52 yards. In the fourth quarter, it was 31-31 and thirty seconds left on the clock. I called a timeout. My coach came right up to me and said, "It's all up to you."

All my fears ran through my mind even more. We entered the field and I got into position. I was shaking with fear. The quarterback said, "Go" and I ran a streak, which is a long straight route. They threw me the ball. The cornerback tipped it but I managed to still catch it. I closed my eyes and fell to the ground. When I opened my eyes, all of my teammates were jumping around on the field. We had won the game!

-Kevin

Justice

Justice is something that happens not too much in this world. For me, I don't believe that there is justice, cuz if there was my brother wouldn't be doing time in prison. All this year of pain and hurt makes me believe that justice is only in God's eyes, not in us. If only that judge knew that he was sending an innocent man to jail, but no that man don't know shhh. They think that they do but they don't.

This system that the courts go by isn't justice. Once they see that bold cholo tatted down they straight out see him like another number to the statistics of Mexicans that ain't no one and won't be no one. But they are wrong my bro ain't that. And it's not fair that he's doing all this time for something that someone else did.

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But you know what one thing that I know for sure is that they can't keep him down forever. In my mind I know that one day there will be justice in this world but by the Lord, not by men. Sometimes I ask myself why is this happening to me. But you know what? As time passes by God has shown me he does things for a reason and I thank him.

Because this past year my cousin passed away and I know that if my brother was out it would have been him. Sometimes I feel safe cuz he's off of the streets. But being behind that other wall doesn't make him safer. No matter what some people believe that the only way for justice is in their hands. But it's not, I know it's hard just to let it be but that is the best way.

When my bro got sentenced I felt like going off on someone but I knew that it wasn't going to get him out.

-Mona

Ups And Downs

The oldest relationship I have is with my mom and we have had a lot of ups and down. She told me she was glad to have me when I was born because I was the only boy and she had to try four times. But there were also times when she told me she wish she never had me. After that I started having a relationship with the streets. Then I stopped having a relationship with school or anything that involved rules. But you know everything has rules so I started breaking the law.

My mom and I were never really talking for about five years when I was running the streets. I remember getting locked up one time and got my first visit from her or anyone for that matter. I looked around and everyone was having a good time talking but my mom and I



were arguing the whole time. After it was over, everyone in visits got a hug from their parents except for me.

But during the last three months, things started to change and now my mom and I are talking more. She also came to visit me and we had a good time talking. I also got a hug at the end. That just shows you, relationships go up and down, but they can be fixed no matter the situation.

-Sidni

How I Feel

I feel like life ain't worth it at all.
But life does go on; coming back
to me is a big mess in here.
I thought the last time was
really my last time though.
I never thought I would
end up here again.
I ain't trippin' though because
those people who hate,
let them go ahead and keep hatin'
because soon I will be gone,
or just wait 'til I am on probation.
I could do what I want and not have
anyone tellin' me what to do, and
people lyin' to me locked up...
I feel like I am never free,
but I do wish that one day I will
be free from everyone.
I want to thank this one special
person who understands me,
and has been there for me.

-MLP

Both Parents

I think I am a lucky kid because there are a lot of kids in the world that do not have both parents. But lucky for me I have both of my parents and I love them and they love me. On top of that, they are still together. I'm lucky because my parents want me to live in a good place and stay in school. I don't want to offend anyone who doesn't have both parents. To all the kids who don't have any parents, or maybe your parents are separated, just have hope that one day they'll be back together. If you don't have any parents, you have my sympathy and I am sorry.

-Binky

RIP Cisco

Hey Beat, do you want to know who I would bring back from the dead? I would bring back my dad. My dad was shot and killed, and he died in my arms. It has been about seven months now and I've been hating life. I feel alone. I still have my mom, brothers and sisters, but the day he died, I lost my best friend!

I would do everything with my dad. You name it, we did it! And now my life feels empty. I'm going crazy. It feels like just yesterday we were kicking back. People who I thought were my friends turned out not to be and they shot my dad. If I could bring him back, I would just talk to him one more time and I would tell him I love him and I'm sorry. I'm sorry for hanging out with the people he told me not to. He told me they did not care about me, but I did not listen. And look at me now?! I lost the person I love the most! I just want to say, "I'm sorry dad". And to everyone who reads this, choose your friends wisely.

-Samuel

I'm Sorry...

I'm sorry for hurting my mom.
I didn't mean no harm.
I am sorry for not being the dream
Daughter for you.
But I can't be perfect.
My Baby, I am sorry
For cheating on you.
I didn't mean to make you blue.
We have been going for two years strong
So don't let it break us apart now.
We was like Bonnie and Clyde.
Even though we both have lied.

Daddy I am sorry for not being that
Straight-A student you want me to be.
I am sorry for being a talker, not a listener
But I am sorry for all of the bad choices I done made
And I promise that I will try.

-Baby

Lucky Brother

One wish I have for my little brother is that I want him to live a better life than me. I want him to keep going to school so he can be smart and go to college. As he gets older, I'm gonna inspire him to do the right things. When he is 12 years old, I will be 24 years old, and I'm gonna help him stay away from the wrong people because there are a lot of fake friends out there who just wanna see you fall. In the end I know he's gonna do good because he has a good brother (me) who will be there to support him.

-Jesus

A Friend For Life

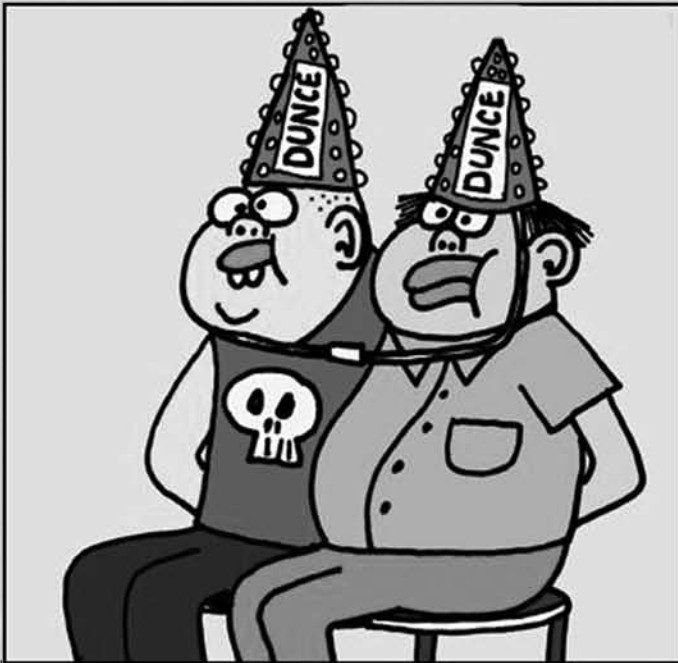
If I could go back in time, I would bring back my homie Don. Don was with me most of my life. He taught me how to function in a stable place and on the streets. When I was a year old, I was taken by CPS and placed in foster homes. He was too. So we were always with one another.

When I turned 6, he was 13. He was teaching me what he knew and I looked at him as a brother. There were a few times I saw him fight and I was scared but when he was done, he would tell me, "Don't trip, little homie, we cool." He started smoking and drinking and he was a gang member.

By the time I was 12 years old I was labeled a criminal. I had seen and done many things than a normal 12 year old or a grown man, like sell drugs, had shot guns, and a lot more I shouldn't say. I did it all with him. I remember we would sit in front of the Kearney Plaza and he would tell me about the streets and he would always buy me stuff no matter what it was. If he had money, he would buy me stuff, and if he didn't, he would steal it. The truth is I loved him, but I guess you could say I was scared of him too because he was "hard."

One time, there was a boy a little bit bigger than me who wanted to fight and I was scared. So then Don told me, "Don't be a punk, little homie, go fade him up". I did, and I lost, but he gave me so much props I felt like I had won. He was always there for me and I feel I owe him, but when I tried to repay him, he said, "It's cool, pimp, we family."

And then that day came. We were on the west side, posted at a store three deep. We were lined up leaning on a Tahoe smoking and shots started. And when I started running, I tripped, and Don ran into me and stumbled back down. When the shots stopped, I looked around and realized he not only stumbled into me but he had been shot in the chest. I feel like it's my fault because the people were aiming for me. I would bring him back from the dead and tell I love him and I'm always thinking about him. **RIP Don-Don. -Devron**



Don't Dumb Me Down! When Youth Change Who They Are

By Kevis McGee

Dumbed down! Making oneself condescendingly simple, a broken-down version of your true self. Many youth these days have problems with this psychological issue. "Dumbing down" can have different meanings, consisting of simplifying or "dumbing" oneself in his/her education, creativity, or culture just to create a perception of popularity, coolness, or "in".

People may sometimes hide their natural intellectual abilities to fit in. In school, they may not do as well as they know they can. They may intentionally answer questions incorrectly on quizzes, or fail to go to school. They may even go as far as to get in trouble on purpose.

Since when was not going to class cool? There are people out there who prefer to sell drugs rather than get a job and earn an honest living. In some cases, the amount of simplicity required to qualify as "dumbed down" differs depending on the intellect and values of the individual. In most cases, the specifications of a dumbed down person are quite obvious.

When I see or know an individual who has the potential to do good but is held back by his or her own ignorance, I can do nothing but shake my head in disapproval.

I knew a few girls who had the potential to do very well in school. They all just lacked the willpower! One of those girls jumped from school to school and ditched classes at each school. She got in fights, got suspended, cussed at her teachers, and has gotten arrested on several occasions.

When I saw her around, I would tell her to get her act together and turn over a new leaf while she had the chance. She would tell me that school is stupid and that all of her teachers are against her. No matter how much positive things I tell her, she just didn't care.

A friend once told me something I have been thinking about and am starting to believe. He said, "don't feed swine to the pig," which to me, means, "don't try to tell people about themselves be-

cause they're just going to consume it without any thought." It will come out sooner or later, and they'll just return to doing what they were previously doing.

The girl eventually got pregnant, disappeared, and the last I heard of her was that she was prostituting. I don't believe she did these things to fit in, I believe she did them because she hung with that type of crowd. She was already accepted into that crowd. This mentality of "dumbing down" had seeped into her brain, which made her not care about her priorities.

Another example of "dumbed down" involves a different friend. She doesn't really care about the responsibilities that are given to her as she enters adulthood. She has a friend who has offered to help her find a job and she acts like it's going to kill her to call and check on the status of her application. She has even told me that she doesn't want a job.

She also recently dropped out of school. I asked her why. She replied, "I'm not really feeling school right now." I asked her if she's looking for a job since she dropped out, and she said "No." So then I asked her what she was going to do with all her extra time, and she said "Nothing!" The only thing that came to my mind was, wow.

Then there is another friend who absolutely hates school. He has given into the whole "Forget school, I'm gonna be a gang-banger" propaganda. I ask him, "If you hate school so much, why don't you just drop out?" He says, "Because I will get kicked out of my house." He might be 18 years old and in high school, but he only has freshman credits.

So I asked him, "Why don't you just take advantage of the opportunity and do your work?!" But he responds saying he does not know.

People may sometimes hide their natural intellectual abilities to fit in

Nobody wants to be dumbed down. In fact, most people don't even notice when they are. Most people believe they are just being themselves and not being a "square!"

In actuality, I believe you can still be yourself and not dumb yourself down. Too bad I didn't realize that in my earlier years! I thought I was being myself. And I thought school was for nerds, and also for athletes who wanted to get by with a 2.0 GPA so they can remain doing what they love most.

When I look back at myself, I realize how much I messed up. I was doing all of the things that I previously mentioned above.

If parents reading this article notice their children entering this phase, I recommend a change of scenery in their lives. That's what helped me. I switched schools and that helped me get on the ball. I started getting good grades when I switched schools. It was my idea to switch and I'm proud of myself for doing that.

I don't know why people make it their obligation to be like others. We all have our own personalities and we need to use them. ♦



Falling to Pieces and Fixing the Puzzle

By Mitchell Davis

My world began to fall apart when I was in third grade. I would become angry or sad for no reason. I couldn't concentrate and I couldn't sit still for five minutes. In fact, I would sit, sobbing, for hours. My mom would stay with me during those times asking me what was wrong.

It seemed like decades, but nearly two years later, I got enough help so that I didn't always feel such extreme emotions. My family was told I had a mental illness, but we didn't know what type (or types) it was.

Looking back on that time, I realize how many people have come to help me out, and all the work they put into helping me become

a person who doesn't cry for no reason. It was hard on all of us, because the systems to help people with mental health problems can be confusing or hard to get through unless you know how they work.

Even if you know the system, it can still be difficult to get you or your loved ones the help they need. There are many hoops you have to jump through it seems nearly impossible unless you try with all your time and energy. This presents its own problem: if you or your family have to work, how can you have time to advocate for yourself, or another person?

Today, I am a person who doesn't just

hope to live, but now thrives. But I don't believe in just helping myself to a bit of scarce mental health funding. I try to make sure that while I get the help I need to keep me well, that my family, friends, and even strangers can access the same support that keeps me healthy.

Why would I want strangers to access mental health funding? Put it this way: you, the reader, are a stranger to me, and I am a stranger to you. Would you, if needing help, choose to feel the most extreme sadness of your life, again and again?

About two and a half years ago, I was first introduced to the idea of mental health advocacy. The idea stuck to my brain, and I eventually became an advocate for many of the things I believed in, but most of all mental health. I've went to bat for mental health so much I usually can't go two weeks without attending an anti-stigma event, a mental health walk, or the State Capitol.

Speaking of the State Capitol, I was just there in April. I went for Advocacy Day, with my mom, brother, and one of our family's good friends who works for a mental health education and advocacy organization called United Advocates for Children and Families (www.uacf4hope.org).

The day before, we drove to my Aunt's house. Then the next morning we cleaned up and headed out to a meeting in the heart of Sacramento, just a few blocks from the Capitol Building itself. At the meeting, which lasted a few hours, we learned about how bills become laws. I made a few witty remarks, got a laugh or two, and really enjoyed the whole thing.

Then we went around looking at the shops until the time we were supposed to meet at the office of State Senator Dave Cogdill. We knew he wouldn't be available, so we talked to one of his legislative assistants, Tiffany Zurilgen, instead.

She listened to us and seemed to understand the message we were trying to make: If you don't spend money on child and adolescent mental health now, or worse, take money away from child and adolescent mental health, you will need to spend ten times more money treating adult mental illness later.

On the way home I wondered what else I could have done to make the day go as well as it had. Nothing, I realized, could have made the day any better. Being an advocate didn't only make me feel like I was doing the right thing, it helped me feel that though I was just one person, my voice could be heard in the noise of life.

Mitchell Davis, turning 15 this June and completing the ninth grade in Fresno Unified School District, has lived with and battled Major Depression since third grade. That hasn't stopped him from working on his dream to become a herpetologist and/or a mental health advocate. First stop, Sacramento. Next stop, Washington, DC! ♦

Our City

Photographs of West and
Central Fresno
Photography by The kNOw

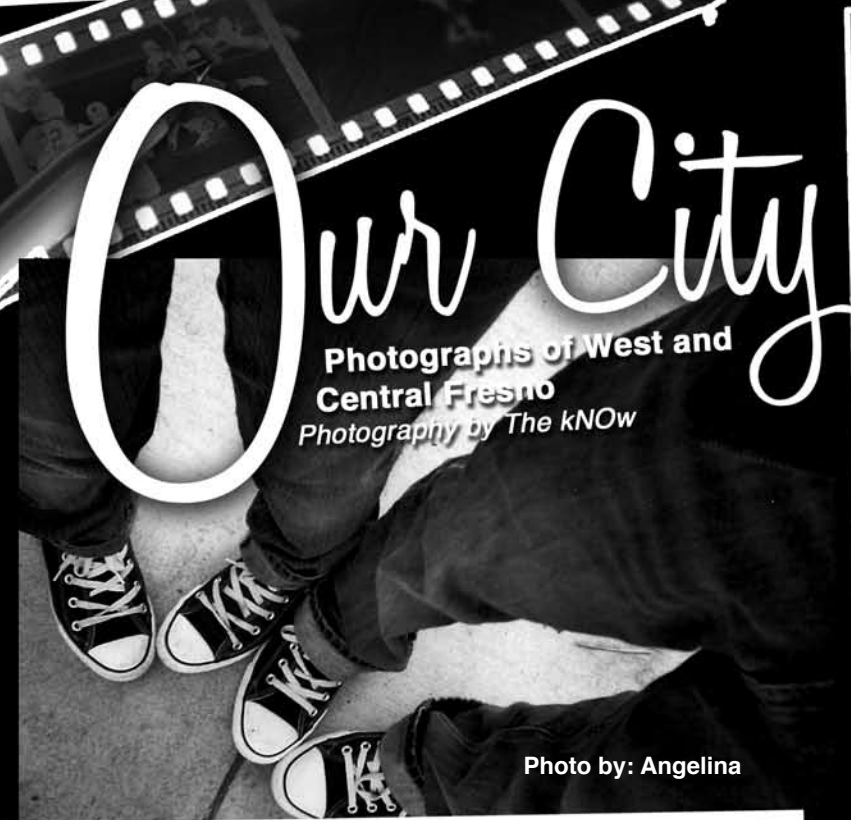


Photo by: Angelina



Photo by: Anna



Photo by: Kevis



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Photo by: Patrice

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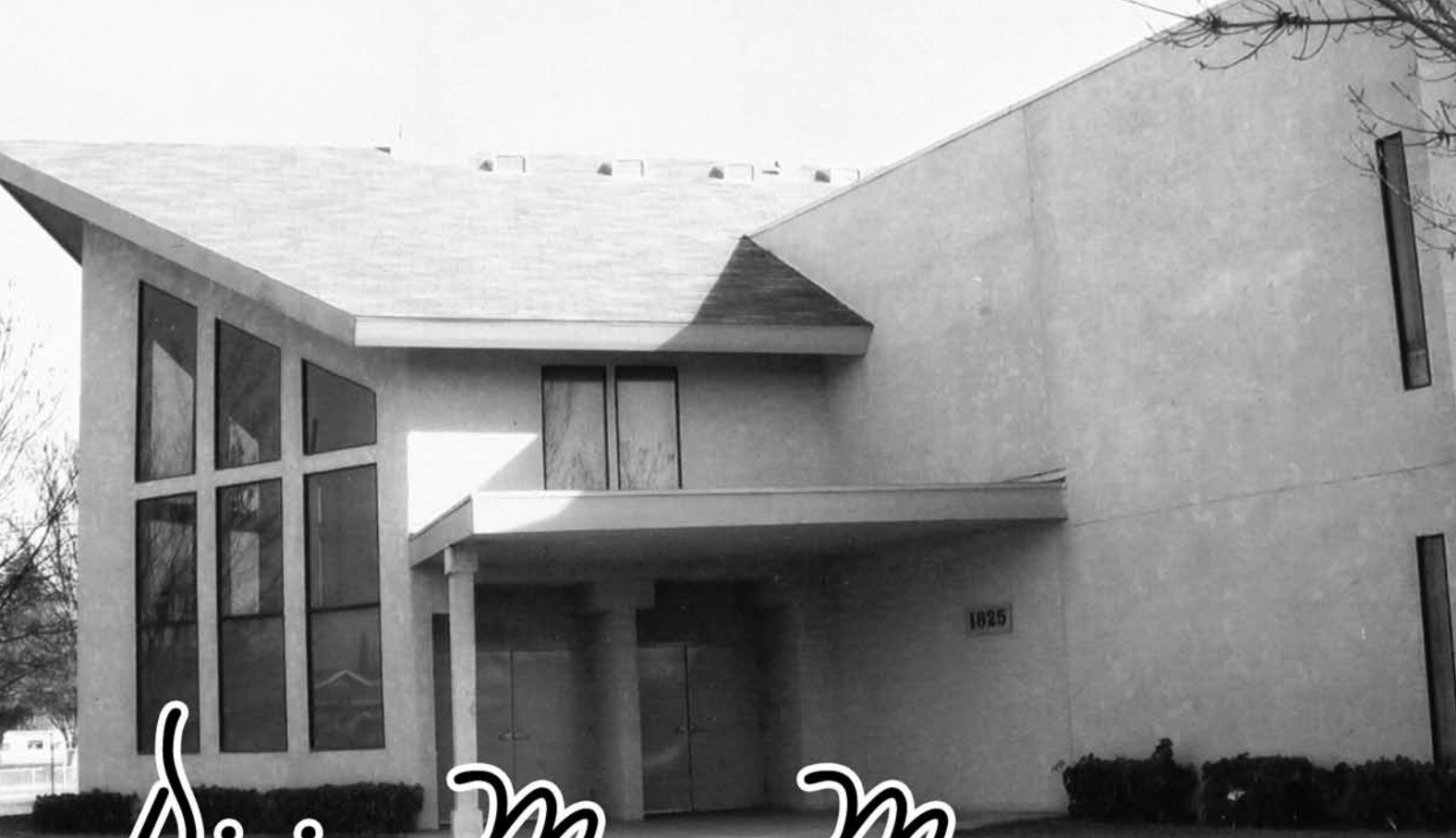
Photo by: Patrice



Photo by: Jaleesa



Photo by: Chanda



Divine Mega Merger!

How Two Churches Are Surviving This Economic Crisis

By Jesse Andrews

In this economic distress, banks have merged, car manufacturers and stores have closed down, and hundreds of thousands of Americans have been laid off. Every sector of society has been affected, from the retail market, to education, to city and county budgets, down to even churches in my community.

It hurts me to see people losing their jobs, their homes, and their livelihood. It gives me the drive to want to help others the best I can. I believe even though the world's problem isn't my problem, I still have an obligation to my neighbor or others around me. I feel that we are in this together, and we need one another because we all have something to bring to the table.

For me, the church has helped answer many of the problems I face on a daily basis. Like being confident that I am someone but yet to stay humble. I've learned how to deal with stress in a positive way. I've learned how to deal with people, nice or not nice. I've learned how to take the good, run with it and kick the bad to the curb.

Now the church has amazed me and shifted the tides of my expectations. With Barack Obama as our new President, change has become the new atmosphere in America and I have seen it happen locally.

Both located in West Fresno, The New Kingdom Church of God in Christ and Greater Macedonia Community Church of God in Christ, which is my home church, merged together in December of last year! To me, this is something bigger than Chase and Washington Mutual coming together.

Two Pastors with the same vision, and two congregations becoming one. The product: The New Macedonia Church of God in Christ.

These two churches merged to become a greater force in the community, giving hope through dynamic services offered weekly and also by providing community outreach. Programs such as Praise Dancing, Bible Study, and Music Ministry are all available to the congregation. There are even office hours to accommodate the fast growing population of the church.

The merge wasn't just all talk. People went straight to work. In the first week of December, the church served well over 1,000 people in the community, giving away food, clothes, and toys to families in need, along with resources to help families get back on track.

"When the church responds, there is hope" is the theme Bishop Samuel Doyle, the church leader, gave the congregation years ago.

Now, Executive Pastor and Superintendent of Victory Fellowship District, Pastor Alonzo Oliver has a vision that is second to none and is going to help empower community members to shake the foundation of West Fresno.

The vision of these two men is something I have wanted to see and be part of since I have been able to live in West Fresno. The vision is to become a church committed to transforming lives through the power of God spiritually, socially, and economically.

Before my church merged, it was like all the other churches

the merger has empowered me to be a better person in my home and in school



No Respect

When Teens "Hate" On One Another
By Patrice Word

Sitting back, relaxing with my close friend, just having a conversation about who or whatever. Drifting off I started to focus on the world around me. I was in the "teen zone" also known as high school. A small group of girls were having a weird conversation about hair gel. I smiled to myself and turned my attention to find a more interesting crowd. My friend kept talking on and on and I occasionally nodded.

"Ohhh, he did what?" I thought to myself as my ear caught some gossip about someone I knew. I pretended not to be nosy so I stared off into space. "Shhh," I told my friend as he stared back blankly, like I had lost my mind.

Another friend of mine sat close by and had her phone out. She was surrounded by other friends who were listening closely.

As I started to pay more attention, I could tell she was reading something on her cell phone. I realized she was using Myspace on her cell phone to visit "The Hater Page," a page that posts gossip, rumors and pictures about other teens. Sad, right?

The Hater Page is a Myspace page that someone created. The pictures and gossip are of other teens from all throughout Fresno. The person uses the page to tell other teens' business, like who is having sex with whom, and where, and how. Somehow they know all the details. They call out the "sluts" and "hoes" and talk about the way they look.

My friend and I started having a conversation about "The Hater Page." "Can't they find something better to do?" my friend asks. "Guess not," I reply.

Recently, at a school meeting, I was sitting with a few girls. We were having a contest to pick a student to sing the National Anthem. The girls I was sitting with were being ridiculous, calling the contestants b***** and other mean names.

I got really mad because there was no meaning to what they were saying. So I turned around and told one of the girls to "Shut up." She could tell I was serious, and she got upset. I didn't care at all. These student contestants did not deserve to be called those names.

Teens can be so cruel. Not only on Myspace, but just walking to class can prove it. If a girl is walking in a crowd full of people and accidentally bumps into another girl, the girl that got bumped into will look back with hate in her eyes, like she just wants to kill the other girl. I've seen it happen time and time again. It was an ACCIDENT! Get over it.

Sometimes it looks like we walk around with the world on our shoulders, and we just hate the world so we want everyone else to feel like us. It's not going to hurt if we smile, not one bit.

I believe the question to ask is if we stopped respecting one another. Or maybe we don't understand the value that the

word "respect" holds, like being considerate of other people's feelings.

Looking around at my peers, it seems to me like we don't have respect for one another.

Losing respect for something or someone is bad because we stop caring about what others think or how they feel. And it's all downhill from there.

Respect is learned, whether it's from family, friends, school, or whoever and wherever a person may have seen it.

So if we are not seeing respect in our homes or schools, how are we going to learn it? It's a domino effect. It starts with one and then gets passed down because every domino around it is falling.

Once a person learns respect and shows it to someone, that person will then pick up on it and show respect back, eventually passing it along. Since many of us are not taught about respect at home, it is up to us to learn on our own and spread it among our peers. You see where I'm going with this? ♦



Rumors In Cyber Space: Teen Stories Of Bullying Over The Web By "Violet"

One day I logged into Myspace to find a message from my friend Mia, in my Inbox. In her message, she informed me of a girl who was talking crap about her on Myspace. Mia asked me if I could block that specific girl and to tell my friends to do the same so that the girl's account could be deleted.

I didn't think anything of it so I agreed to do it. Then Mia sent me the link to the girl's page. I clicked on it and went to the page. All I could recall seeing was a picture of my friend in the "Heroes" section and underneath was a long essay about how my friend was a "fat b**** and a w****". It went on to say how Mia was an "inspiration" to the girl because now the girl would never become obese, "supposedly" like Mia.

In the back of my head I knew my friend Mia was a little chubby, but she wasn't obese. I couldn't continue reading the horrible stuff so I instantly blocked the girl and within an hour, her Myspace account was deleted due to a substantial number of people who were also blocking her.

I couldn't believe that someone would waste time talking trash about someone else on Myspace, or over the Internet, period! I find it ridiculous. People already have problems with other people in the real world, but then to start problems with them in cyber space?

It seems like some teens these days have shifted from bullying in the real world to bullying through the Internet. Most might think nothing of it, but sometimes this cyber bullying can lead to violence, and no, I am not talking about simply arguing.

For example, my friend Sara heard about a girl who was saying bad stuff about her over Myspace, so she wanted to confront this girl. The next day at school, she confronted the girl about the situation, but the girl acted as if she knew nothing.

As Sara continued to question the girl, matters got worse. They began to argue with one another, which then shifted into physical confrontation. My friend Sara ended up with a black eye, cuts and bruises all over her face, and she was suspended for a week.

It is pretty silly for a person to get suspended and physically hurt over something that was said on the Internet. But not only can a person get hurt physically, but also mentally.

This mental hurt through words can lead to severe consequences. It's one thing to hurt people mentally because they might not let go of the situation and the words stick with them for as long as they can remember. This can cause low self-esteem, or even worse, cause them to hurt themselves.

I am reminded of the story of Megan Meier, a 13-year-old girl who lived in O'Fallon, Missouri. She made a friend over Myspace named Josh. She and her friend were exchanging messages for over a month before he ended their relationship. He then began posting bulletins and saying things like, "Megan Meier is a s*** and is fat."

Many didn't know that Megan suffered from depression and attention deficit disorder, which she took medication for. After hearing all the things said about her, she hung herself in her bedroom on October 16, 2006.

Her family was devastated to find her the next day. A few months after the incident, her family found out that a mother of Megan's former friend created Josh's Myspace account to find out what Megan was saying about her own child. The mother never thought things would get so out of hand that Megan would end up killing herself. This example teaches us that bullying through the Internet shouldn't be taken lightly.

I believe, bullying, period, is just plain wrong, even if it is just words thrown over the Internet. It is a big issue that can have serious consequences. It's important for parents to monitor their children's access to the Internet and for teens to stop bullying one another, or if they are being targeted, they should ignore what others are saying.

For my friend Mia, although the problem with that girl wasn't completely resolved, she learned to ignore that person and accept that some people will always have their issues.

So for teens, if we want to stop bullying from continuing, we should work together and not encourage that kind of behavior. It's the only way to break the cycle. ♦

Continued from page: 05 **Traffic School**

Next, we had a policeman. He told all the teens to sit up in the front row of the seats. He made us close our eyes and use our imagination to visualize his story. His voice was astounding and it made me picture his every word.

The setting in the story was in the early morning, just before sunlight. The sky was clear, and the temperature was just right. Traffic was not busy yet, and he asked us to imagine that we are driving to work. Just as we stumble upon a stop sign, we make a left turn without stopping completely.

Right there, bam! We slam on our brakes just because we think we've hit something or someone. We get out and there lays an old lady covered with blood. We are too afraid at the time to call for help but the old lady is staring at us with eyes saying, "Why me?"

Through his words, the officer made me realize that if I am not safe when driving, I could be in that situation. I know I have made incomplete stops at stop signs before but got away with it. However, this story makes me more considerate when coming to a stop sign.

We had more guest speakers that night, but the ones who stood out to me were these parents. The father started by telling us how he loved his son dearly, and about all the wonderful moments they shared. However, the golden days went down the drain during one tragic night.

They got a call from the hospital asking if they were the parents of a teen who had been brought into the hospital. The parents didn't know that letting their son go to a party could be fatal. They rushed

to the hospital and when they got there, it was too late. The doctor told them their son passed away.

With grief, the wife came and told her side of the story. She said the death of her son was due to him speeding on the street and not being careful. She held a teddy bear in her arms that once belonged to her son. She cried and told us that we were fortunate to be here and not end up her like son. As much as she wanted to hold him again, she knew it was not possible, which is why she carries his teddy bear around as a memory of him.

At that moment, I knew my mom could have been in the same position of losing me. I turned to my mom and held her close.

I translated for my mom and explained to her why the mother was holding the teddy bear. My mom agreed, and that is why she always worries about me when I hit the road by myself.

As the night came to an end, the meeting was adjourned and I went to pick up my traffic school certificate.

It was like a miracle happened to me that night. Hearing these stories and having my mom by my side made me value my life more. It encouraged me not to speed on the road. All the excitement of driving on the road left my system.

It wasn't even about showing off to my friends anymore, that I could drive fast or violate the laws on the streets to have fun. I would not want to go through any of these horrible situations when I have my own family, so why speed your life away when you can drive it safe? ◇

Continued from page: 06 **Mainstream Media**

abused, raped and murdered everyday. Where is their media time?

When ethnic people commit crimes, it is often the top story in the news. Even if the crime isn't absolutely heinous, it is treated as such. If a White man or woman does the same thing, it's highlighted briefly then brushed off. It's little things like that that make a bad name for a lot of ethnic people.

It can, however, be turned into a positive thing. Situations like those push me to work hard to never be seen that way. It's sad that ethnic people have to work hard to prove themselves, but to me, it only showcases strength.

What concerns me most is what this is doing to my generation. There isn't much of a way to tell what this can do to the youth psyche. Are we going to end up as prejudice people who hate ourselves? Mainstream media, as it is now, only shows ethnic people as

stereotypical groups who aren't good enough for society.

This lingering negativity is probably one of the reasons why some youth act the way they do. If you treat someone like they are inferior, more than likely, they will gain that mindset and act that way. I don't want my peers to grow up to be people who complain constantly about their self-image and status. I want us to live happy, successful lives, no matter what's in the magazines or on TV.

My point is that if we claim that we are a country for equality, we need to act like it. We have so many great cultures here, and they all should be granted as much media time as the next person.

Ethnic people shouldn't have to strive to get their own TV channel or turn to less popular types of media to get their stories out. This world is big enough for all of us, so maybe the mainstream media should stop acting like it's only for the rich and famous. ◇

Continued from page: 08 **Stable Relationships**

in the beginning that it was just puppy love and that it would never work.

But it's not like Mongsai and I never fight, we do. Actually we argue about every little thing! The funny thing is that it's the arguments that keep our relationship interesting. Instead of breaking up after arguments, we give each other time to breathe.

Trust me, there are times when I want to push him out of my life, but then I'd be left with guilt. We learn from our disagreements and arguments. Every time I look at him, I say to myself that no one is perfect.

Many adults believe that teens are unable to keep or stay in a stable relationship. I can understand why many adults might view teens this way because it is true in some cases. I know many teens whose longest relationship is two months. And I also know people with relationships that only last two days or a night. But then I also

know teens who are in stable relationships like Mongsai and I.

Before getting with Mongsai, I didn't know anything about love. I never knew the meaning of it. I literally tried looking it up in the dictionary but I still didn't understand it. By watching TV, I used to think that love was kissing and hugging and going to the movies where the guy yawns and cuddles next to the girl.

Now that I am in a relationship, I think I understand enough to say that love is a form of expression that has to be felt.

It's not about the kissing and hugging in my relationship. Mongsai and I like to have fun, hang out, but most importantly, we support one another. He's not just my boyfriend but also my best friend. He helps me through the hard times, and I do my best for him too. ◇

Second Place Is Not Good Enough

By Victoria Phosykeo // Image by Svilen Mushkatov



In second grade, I had a best friend and she was...well, perfect. She was smart. She was pretty. She was first and I was second. There was a never-ending comparison between the two of us. I was a bit socially awkward, and she was always in control. She hardly panicked and everyone got along with her. And when I say she got along with everyone, I literally mean it.

Once, we both had a crush on the same guy. The day I told her I liked him she straight out told me he didn't like me. I acted like I appreciated the truth, but sometimes the truth hurts.

The next day, the truth stabbed me in the heart. They were together and I was stunned. Not particularly surprised because I knew she was much prettier than me, and she was a sweetheart. But the holding hands and being so close made me wonder if I was capable of being like her—to have a crush that wasn't one-sided.

Being her best friend, I thought I should be a little more like her. But struggling right behind her, I realized I wasn't myself. In sixth grade, she moved away. To be honest, it was an uplifting feeling, but after awhile I missed her. She wasn't exactly perfect as I thought but she was a great friend.

And that's when it hit me; I wasn't her best friend to compare myself to her, but because she was always there for me. Insecurity made me miss the last few years with my best friend. Instead of trying to be someone I am not, I should have been wiser.

"Stop wasting your time trying if you're not going to be the best," my mind repeated. I tried everything from sports to singing, hoping and fishing for compliments (which never truly satisfied me). My body wasn't beautifully shaped and my mind felt as if it were deprived from happiness. How can you be happy if you are always last and even when you try, you will only be second?

I suffered from a horrible parasite called insecurity. And to this day I still see myself last and put everyone else in front of me. I doubt my future will be pleasant, but there is still a little happy dream of certain goals that sneaks its way to me every night.

By surprise, I found myself growing out of my tomboy and kid-dish figure. I wore fitted clothes and a smile everyday. I was astounded when I first heard the words: cute, pretty, and even beautiful directed to me. I kept feeling like the people who gave me compliments were lying to me and it was only a terrible joke.

I struggled with compliments and wasn't able to say, "Thank you." I thought if I said thank you they would say, "Just kidding," laugh, and walk away. It was hard because I was trying to impress people around me when I couldn't even impress myself. Now I say thank you with a smile, but still question if people meant their compliments.

Sophomore year, I started being dedicated to track and field. I worked hard and had a lot of fun. I would end up getting second place and my friends would congratulate me, but I would reply, "There

were only four people running," or, "It's not first place." Second was just not good enough, even though I put forth so much effort.

This year I received my first medals for hurdles and high jump. I knew I should have been ecstatic, but it was a relay meet (which meant everyone on the team who participated in a specific event, their time or height is added up to place).

I knew I wouldn't have been able to get a medal if I ran on my own. I knew I should have been prideful, but I wasn't. I put on an act that I was very proud to my teammates, yet I still thought I didn't deserve the medals.

My friends are like my primary family. They are the people I go to when I am sad. And they are the people I want to cheer up everyday. Although sometimes, I feel they are better off without me. I act so weird and I am afraid I will embarrass them. Yet they are the people who have helped me cope with my insecurity. They compliment me so much that I have grown accustomed to it.

I aspire to be a happy pastry chief. Yet I am gaining knowledge to become a pharmacy tech. I want to be a pharmacy tech not only to make my dad happy, but also to use the money to hopefully open a bakery. It frightens me to think that if I make it as a pastry chef, no one will like my pastries, and my business will fail. But I shouldn't be scared because I don't know my future—no one knows his or her own future.

Although I may put myself last and care about everyone else first, I am still trying for myself. As long as I keep in mind to be myself and do things for me and not to impress others, my goals will be satisfied. I know now that insecurity isn't really a parasite, but an annoying bug I can just flick off.

I have learned over time that coming in second place is okay. Life isn't a race, and I should still hold my head up high and know that I am great regardless of what others think.♦

I know now that insecurity isn't really a parasite, but an annoying bug I can just flick off



Blog Writings

Our Thoughts Our Words

Let Me In! Opening School Grounds For Recreational Use On Weekends

By The kNOw Youth Media, Various Authors
May 5, 2008

It's common to hear about children and youth jumping over fences and sneaking onto school grounds during weekends just so they can play on the swings or shoot some hoops. However, a new law in California, Assembly Bill 346, if passed this year, would expand joint-use of school facilities and open up school playgrounds for recreational use on weekends. Here, The kNOw writers share their opinions and personal experiences with this issue.

A Good Alternative

For the past five years, I've lived in between two schools. Sometimes I've passed by witnessing little kids trying to get into the schools on the weekends. They come prepped with playground balls, volleyball nets, and Frisbees. A lot of them even come with their parents. They almost always have to help each other over the fence or squeeze themselves through it. I've had to do this a few times, circling around the school, looking for an opening. It's irritating that I don't live near any parks and all the places I could play at are locked.

I do think that schools should open their playgrounds on weekends. Many families and individuals don't have the means to travel all the way to a park. It would be a good alternative to kids staying inside all day.

The only possible problem I see is that some people may abuse that right and vandalize the schools. It happens already, but an open school would make it that much easier. There should be security guards, school staff or parent volunteers to watch the schools on the weekends while they're open.

-Jaleesa, 19

Dangerous Streets

Schools should open their courts and playgrounds on the weekends. It would take a lot of kids off the streets. It's sad to walk around parts of Fresno and see crosses or memorials with the names of kids on them because they got hit by a car, trying to get a ball or something. That could have been avoided if they would have been playing at a school and not by a street. So I hope we can open our school playgrounds on weekends and let kids have a playful childhood. I know I didn't have one, but I hope other kids can.

-Demar, 18

You Know It's A Problem When...

Not permitted to have fun? What's the point of prohibiting children from playing on the playgrounds at schools? You know it becomes a problem when kids have to break into

their own school just to play on the swing. I understand vandalism can happen, but what if there were responsible adults willing to supervise the activities? Maybe there could be adults on an organized weekend schedule. Opening up school playgrounds on weekends would create a better environment for kids to be in and a better relationship between adults and children.

-Victoria, 16

Sneaking In To Play Ball

I believe schools should be open on the weekend for public recreational use. It is lonely to see schools empty on the weekend when it could be full of happy neighbors doing activities and playing sports together. With schools open, teens can have access to sports equipment and have a place to hang out where they can stay away from trouble.

Growing up with limited resources and a lack of space to do activities, I relied on school grounds. I remember I did everything at my elementary school. Played sports, met up with friends, hung out, or even went there to read.

But when I started going to middle school, I wasn't able to do much anymore. The gates were always closed on the weekends. My friends and I had to hop over the fence. There we would set up our volleyball net on the poles and play. One time, one of the office workers threatened to call the police on us if we didn't leave. I stood my ground and refused to leave. My friends and I weren't causing any trouble. We were just playing volleyball. I told her the school is open to the public and shouldn't be off limits. She told us that the school is only open to the public when the gates are open. Now it's locked, and we need to leave.

I was upset, but I left anyways. It's disturbing when I get into trouble for dumb reasons. From that day on, I had to sneak into schools to play volleyball, and only when there were no workers there.

-Dasen, 18

Keep Kids Out Of Trouble

I have never had to sneak onto a school playground to play because growing up, I was a person who stayed home and did homework or read. But I do believe that schools should open their playgrounds on the weekend because I think it could help decrease youth violence. It might not make a huge difference right away but it's a start. Schools should open the playgrounds and courts cause that's always when youth get into most trouble. Most don't have anything to do on the weekends.

I know schools might worry about graffiti on the walls or vandalism on the playground, but that's why there should be responsible adults to supervise. If adults want youth to stop sneaking into playgrounds and courts, and if they want youth to be safe, healthy and out of trouble, then open the playgrounds!

Maybe this could start out for a few weekends to see how it goes. If it goes well, then schools should keep the playgrounds open for good.

-Chanda, 20

Continued on page: 24

Continued from page: 18 **Churches Merging**

in West Fresno, short on members but with big dreams. When the churches merged there was more work to do, but there was more help to get the job done because people were stepping up to help. Someone in the Sunday School program mentioned, "I actually came in and left a whole new person."

I have watched the transition up close and it has affected me personally. I have always wanted to see my youth ministry department thrive and I have the privilege now of working as the Public Relations Coordinator in that department. I have also been able to work with the church outreach services as Chief Editor of the church's newsletter, Celebration.

My new church creates a community hub that gives hope to people all over Fresno. For example, if I was low on food and needed assistance, I know I can get food at the community food bank my church offers. If I need help with schoolwork, the church has tutors there to help me after school. Even people who don't go to the church are empowered because the church is there to help them strive and survive. The church offers its food bank, jobs, and its earned income tax credit services to the wider community.

Although this merger has brought many positive things, one of the challenges I see in being part of such a big church is that it gets harder to know your fellow churchgoers on a personal level. Another challenge was to see some people leave the church because they weren't sure of the merger. It is always hard to see someone go but, "God has everything in control," I tell myself.

Regardless, the merger has empowered me to be a better person in my home and in school. There are times when I need a lifter. Yes, I read my word, but to hear it explained in a way that tells me that I can overcome my teachers giving me bad grades, or dealing with bills by trusting God with my finances helps get me through the day.

I am glad that these two pastors worked together for the common good of the people. People who need help to get through difficult times and to gain insight that no matter how bad our economy can get, we all know we can get back up, start over and make it this time. ♦

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Why Can't We Just Share?

I believe schools should open their gates to the community on weekends. Kids shouldn't have to hop over high fences to shoot some hoops. Kids shouldn't have to play in busy, dangerous streets when there is a nice field right across the street. Growing up near schools with playgrounds, I've always hopped fences. When I was little, my whole family would walk to my elementary school and go on the swings or play ball. Even today, I still go onto school grounds to play ball.

Not too long ago, I took my little nieces to a nearby elementary school. We played on the slides. After a while, a security guard pulled up and told us to leave. He said that we set off the alarm, but all we did was play on the slide. I didn't know how we could have

set off the alarm, but we just ended up leaving because he wanted us to leave.

It was easy to get into that playground because there was only a 3 feet brick wall. But when we went back the next time, the school extended the brick wall by adding a little fence on top. It's sad to see how much the school is fighting to keep us out. Why can't we just share?

-Angelina, 16

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The kNOw

Getting It Back

Fixing The Broken Relationships In My Life

By "Marie"



Have you ever felt like you were alone? Like there was no one you could turn to? Even though you knew there were people there for you yet you were too scared to turn to them because you don't want to get hurt by them or get looked down on?

I have people in my life who are there for me, but I still feel alone like there is something missing.

I believe that even though I have my mom, three brothers, two sisters, an adopted family, and another family (The kNOw), there is still something that is not there. It is the relationship with two of my siblings, my fifteen-year-old sister, "Ashley," and my thirteen-year-old brother, "David." We all once had a good relationship until we went into foster care. It feels like we argue more now than we did in the past.

I remember the good times. When I was thirteen, and they were both little kids, we lived in a small town in Iowa. Our mom worked at Wal-Mart and my step-dad was out quite a bit. I would watch the kids along with my other sister, "Candace," who was ten at the time. My mom worked the graveyard shift and our step-dad would be asleep in his room.

One night I cooked a whole meal of spaghetti, salad, and garlic bread for the kids. I told them they could pick a movie, so we all sat together eating dinner and watching TV. After that, I did the dishes and cleaned up, and then carried the kids to bed. I tucked them in, turned on the night light, and gave them hugs and kisses for my mom because she couldn't be there.

But it all changed after Child Protective services (CPS) came into our lives. Now, all that my brothers and sisters can see are the bad mistakes I have made.

About five years ago, we moved back to Fresno and found a place on the westside, a two-bedroom apartment. David and my other younger brother, "Matthew," shared one room and my two sisters and I shared another. Our parents slept in the living room. We lived there for about a year and half before my relationship with my David and Ashley fell apart.

It started out as a sunny day, when one of our neighbors called CPS on my family because of some things that Candace said to them. She is now seventeen years old and I have a good relationship with her. But that was when I saw the CPS van, and immediately, it felt like the sunny skies turned dark gray.

At first, they kept us together in Reedley, Atwater, and Merced. But when they brought us back to Fresno, they separated us, and we couldn't talk to each other for about four days. Every time we talked, we cried. When I talked to David, I tried my best to comfort him and tell him that everything would be okay. It was hard for him to sleep at night.

During my time in foster care, I developed a better relationship with my two other siblings, Candace and Matthew. But I lost the relationship with Ashley and David.

It was about a month after my eighteenth birthday, and my mom got all of us back together. That's when I noticed we argued and fought more than typical siblings. Every time we argued, they both made me feel like everything that has happened over the years was

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my fault, like they blamed me for everything.

I am mixed, half Black and half White, so I have a different dad from my siblings. My biological father raped my mom, which is how I came along. My siblings are all white. David started with racial comments to hurt my feelings and self-esteem, which made me cry almost everyday.

I feel like Ashley hates me because she blames me for letting her get molested because we all got separated. David hates me for causing us to all get separated. And I know they both hate me because of what my "father" did to our mom, which is what brought me into this world. I also don't get along with my step-dad, who is their dad.

I understand why they might hate me, but I wish they knew it's not my fault for the rape that happened to our mom. They also hate me for acting like a parent.

I wish we could all go back in time to when we were younger and got along. I wish I could get the relationship with them back.

When they were scared or confused, they used to come to me and I would do my best to comfort and cheer them up. I wish they didn't hate me so much.

Everyday, I try to work on our relationship. Sometimes I might act like a parent, but I'm not trying to, I only tell them because I love them. I look out for them and try to help my mom take care of them.

I will work on me some more because I want the relationship back. I feel like if we had more family meetings and talked more to each other, then maybe CPS would never have been called, and our relationship would be okay. But having CPS involved also helped my relationship between me and the other siblings. Maybe if CPS would have allowed us all to keep in contact with one another, we might still have a good relationship.

Maybe some family therapy, family hangout nights, family conversations, or programs that I can do with Ashley and David would help.

Over the years, I have seen things from a new perspective, and I know I will have to learn how to deal with relationships, good and bad. I only hope I can fix the ones today so I can look forward to the ones to come in the future. ♦

Poetry

by the kNOw

www.theknowfresno.org

Without Equal

By Marcus Vega

I have traveled where all souls
Will pass yet none will return
If you fail you will burn
For what he closes can't be
opened
Spare my soul for I am wise
Young and knowledgeable
I have time
Only one just to remind
The light again I have yet to
find.

Under The Stars

By Marcus Vega

As I stare at the sky I am lost
Though my thoughts are gifted
Hole in my heart
Empty void
Something is missing
Stuck expression on my face
Shows content
Smoking and poetry is a way to vent
Trying to take your life
Funny how
A man of flesh and blood
Intertwines with fate
No confusion with faith
Not a drug dealer
But will make a way
Through my life of misfortune
Words of wisdom
Torture my soul
My flesh my prison
Of course I'm nothing
Just a passing wind

Weak

By Anna Gil

I wake up,
You come to my thoughts.
I lay to rest,
Your scent blows my mind.
I try to focus,
Images come and go.
I go crazy,
I see your smile glow.
The way you laugh.
Your brown eyes shine in the sun,
Gives me feeling
That comes and never leaves.
I'm falling.
I'm scared to hit the ground.
When I hear your voice,
The organ in my chest
Skips with no beat.

To Have Fallen

By Victoria Phosykeo

the earth spinning quick
unbalanced
dizzy
swaying from left to right to forward to back
light-headed
unsteady
pushed only once
and fallen onto knees
knees without cushion
to feel welcomed, loved, appreciated
to have fallen
with dirt in hair
dust in eyes
blood on elbows
shame in a fist
love in the other
to only realize
in reality you must not focus on the terrible
look up in the sky
reach my darling
reach
until you have touched your goal
get up
shake the dirt off
clean up the blood
throw the shame away
and look at love
see where it brings you
and begin to walk