

THE KNOW

Winter 09-10

Youth Voice of the Central Valley

"Things We Hide"

INSIDE
STEPDADS
SELF-INJURY
MOVING OUT
SAMOA
ADDICTION
MY OWN ROOM

ISSUE 6

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STORIES // POETRY // VIDEOS

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Thank you to the Fresno County Public Library, Teen Services Department, for helping distribute our magazine throughout the county.



the kNOW crew

Reader's Note:

"Things We Hide"

I couldn't believe all those months, he had been homeless, bouncing from place to place, sleeping in abandoned buildings and some nights waking up on the streets of southeast Fresno. Yet all the while, he continued to come to our youth meetings each week, appearing clean and kempt, same as usual. He did not give the slightest indication that he might be without a proper place to live.

And then one evening, after the meeting, I dropped him off at a friend's apartment where he said there was no electricity or food. I finally realized what was going on, what he had successfully hidden for so long.

It's painful to hide something about who we are, something we may be going through, something we wish we could tell another person but are afraid to because we don't want to be judged. But at the same time, we become helpless when we don't reach out for the help we know we need. In his case, he finally reached out because he knew he couldn't continue to live his life that way. He could no longer hide the reality of his situation.

And that's exactly the point—those things we keep to ourselves lose their hidden quality when they become told. Maybe in some cases, that is a good thing.

In this sixth issue of The kNOW magazine, several youth writers take a courageous leap to "unhide" their deepest secrets. You can read more about Marcus' experience with homelessness on page 15. Then also check out other revealing stories, such as Jaleesa's piece on self-injury (page 14), "Aurora's" article about the pain of losing a mother's bond (page 16), or Demar and "Ms. Chance's" pieces about hidden love relationships (pages 10 & 11, respectively). It's hard to divulge the things we hide. But, in most cases, only when we tell or acknowledge them can we begin a process of healing and recovery.

—Mai Der Vang

The kNOW is published by Pacific News Service/New America Media, and is made possible by grants from the S.H. Cowell Foundation, The California Endowment, S.C. Johnson Fund, Inc., The Stuart Foundation, Pacific Gas & Electric and The Cultural Arts Rotary Club of Fresno.

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the kNOw Magazine #6

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GROWING UP TOO FAST: THE STORY OF A LOST CHILDHOOD

By Chanda Clark

Have you ever thought about your childhood? Did you have one or did you miss out? Those of you who were robbed of a childhood, I feel for you. I, too, know how it feels.

Growing up, I missed out on so much because of my stepdad. Now that I'm older, I realize I am finally coming to terms with my inner child.

For example, I notice that a lot of little girls growing up played with dolls while I was told that I shouldn't play with them or collect them. Every Christmas or birthday, if I ever got a doll, my stepdad would put them in the closet in his room then lock the door so I couldn't get them.

I never played with girly toys, like Barbies, and never played dress up because my stepdad said it was wrong. When I got hurt and tried to go to my mom for boo-boo kisses, my stepdad would stop me and tell me to shake it off and be tough. Over the years, I have had to learn to hide my tears because it was weakness in his eyes.

I remember the day I cut my finger. There was blood everywhere. I tried to go to my mom for help and a kiss, but my stepdad stopped me and told me to suck it up and take it like a man. He told me to wipe it up myself and get back to cleaning.

I grew to envy other kids because I could see that many of them had happy lives. They got the boo-boo kisses, played with toys, and got to watch cartoons. I hardly ever got to watch cartoons because I had to make sure I took a bath, did my homework (all of it with no help), and did my chores. By the time I was done, it was time for dinner, and then off to bed.

The only time I got to watch cartoons was when my mom would let me, and that was when my stepdad would be asleep or gone for a couple of hours. The way my stepdad raised me turned me into a tomboy. I never wore skirts or any girly clothes. To me, I didn't act like a normal little girl.

My stepdad used to be a sweet, caring, responsible parent. Then he got hooked on drugs and turned into an evil person, some-

one we didn't recognize or know anymore. He has done a lot of bad and violent things to us, and he has become more controlling.

Now that I'm older, I'm making up for it by trying to find my inner child. I watch cartoons every morning with my brothers and sisters. One of my favorites is Sponge Bob. I play cars with my brothers and when my sisters were a little younger, I played Barbies and house with them. I'm making up for what I was denied.

Sometimes I think about the child celebrities who have also been robbed of having a proper childhood. Whether it's a famous singer, like Michael Jackson, or TV stars, like the Olson Twins, I know many people have been in my shoes.

Some of them are like me, and trying to make up for their lost childhood. In Michael Jackson's case, he built Never Land, a place he probably dreamt of as a child.

Having a childhood means something different to everyone. To me, it means that a person has the chance to live, grow up, make mistakes, and find who they are. To have a proper childhood means to have

the chance to have fun, play with toys, have friends, watch cartoons, and it means to have loving parents and other family members to support you instead of bring you down.

In my case, missing out on so much as a child made me feel out of place, especially when other people talked about their childhood and asked me about mine. I usually had nothing to say.

I think one of the consequences of not having a proper childhood is that when you get older, you want to make up for what you missed and that can lead some adults to act like kids.

Sometimes I regret that my mom married my stepdad, but then I remember that if she hadn't married him, I wouldn't have the wonderful siblings I have now. So even though my stepdad gave me a hard childhood, he also gave me the other half of my family. I realize that because I had to grow up fast, I am the loving and responsible person I am today. *

“I grew to envy other kids because I could see that many of them had happy lives”



WHEN CHILDHOOD FRIENDS TAKE THE WRONG ROAD

By Miguel Martinez

I used to have friends who were just like me and liked to have fun. We enjoyed doing all the kid stuff, like riding our bikes or kicking a ball around after school. Nothing seemed out of place until we hit our teenage years.

That's when I became aware of why my friends were missing so many school days or why they wouldn't talk to me for some time. Growing into our teenage years, we were all introduced to different faces and personalities. Years passed, and I hadn't talked to any of them face to face. I would see them around from time to time but only from a distance.

One day I came across an old friend at a bus stop after school. He was on his skateboard, and now that I was up close to him, I could see that he had some tattoos that looked unprofessionally done and he smelled like he'd been using drugs.

The person standing before me wasn't the calm, friendly kid I knew long ago. He used to be more cautious. He didn't like to get into any trouble because he was one of the few kids who would feel bad after he did something wrong. He used to wear clothes that actually fit him, and now he was dressed like a street kid, with an oversized shirt and pants that seemed like they were too big.

We talked for about two hours, and that was more than enough time for me to see the uncomfortable lifestyle he was living. He was 16, had dropped out of school, said he was "engaged" to a girl, and spoke proudly about weed and alcohol.

An uneasiness rose between us. He saw that I was still in school, and for a moment, I felt he resented me because I was doing well.

I told him that I was still in school and worked on the weekends. I also mentioned to him that I was still in sports and his response was, "What? You still play? Why?"

He then tried to downplay that I was doing well by making his life seem better than mine. He told me he was glad he wasn't going to school anymore because he gets to drink and smoke at home all day. In my mind, this didn't add up. I had met his parents and they were wonderful people, a nice apartment, very clean and simple as a matter of fact. Yet I couldn't figure out why he was so down on his luck.

I realized why. It was because he had hardly spoken to his parents about his life. His friends were just as quiet as he, they didn't say or do much. I met them later that day at his house. They were

just hanging out outside. Apparently they all skated together because they had skateboards. It wouldn't have surprised me if they all smoked and drank together as well.

It seems like one after another, my childhood friends have changed drastically. Running into my old friend has made me question many things, such as why do some kids, who had good childhoods and supportive families, end up taking the wrong road in life?

People have many opinions on this issue. Some say it is because the kid lacks parental guidance, both a mother and a father. Others say it is the kid who does this to himself. And still many more say it has to do with racial background, where a person lives, how much money their family makes, and even education can determine the outcome of a kid's life.

My opinion is that there are many kids out there who have shattered hopes and no one to turn to for help so they become afraid to share their feelings. It feels like there is a strong lack of communication between kids, youth, and adults.

But in my case, my family has helped me succeed in life. I have a strict dad, and although I may not always agree with his decisions, I later realize his lessons are worth keeping because they have helped me see things in different ways.

My mom is more passionate and approaches things with caution. She doesn't argue with me when I do something wrong. This combination of tough love and understanding has helped me find a balance between taking risks and knowing the consequences.

But the challenge I still face today is not taking enough risks. I, too, keep things to myself. But I am a little stronger-willed than most of my former and current friends. I have always been the shy type around most people unless I feel like talking is something I have to do.

There were many fun things out there that I could have done but I chose not to because I didn't want to embarrass myself or have people judge me. In reality I was just cheating myself from a good experience. I haven't completely overcome my shyness but I have gotten better, especially after I met a special person who opened my eyes to trying new things. This person was someone I could share my beliefs with and not worry about being judged.

But a lot of my childhood friends had no one to turn to for emotional guidance, so many of them changed for the worse.

Many of us young people have ambitions in life, like becoming an artist or musician. But nothing comes easy if we don't tell someone what we want. If I wanted to do something, I would tell my parents so I could get their support. If I didn't do that, then they wouldn't know I had such hopes.

I feel like my friend had something that he was interested in doing. But he never shared anything like that when I knew him, and he sure didn't seem interested in anything when I met up with him at the bus stop.

As I think to the conversations I shared with him and other childhood friends, I can't even recall hearing them talk about what they wanted for their future, or that their parents wanted them to do good and not drop out of school.

I think my friend took the wrong path in life because he didn't share anything with his parents or anyone else. Why? Probably because he didn't have anyone there who would listen, and if he did, they must not have had anything to say.

He didn't speak his mind, and he kept things to himself. His beliefs slowly faded just like his dreams. It seems like no one took the time to ask him what he wanted.

In the end, many of us young people need to contribute to one another more as a whole. We need to show one another that we care. We need to take the risk of being the one who gets laughed at and then learn to laugh at ourselves. We need to make friends, get to know others and share life stories. I believe that is the best way for us to find out who our friends are, and who we are as well. *



Home Money

WHAT THE LACK OF CAN DRIVE A PERSON TO DO!

By Kevis McGee

Put yourself in this situation. You are a senior in high school. You live with both your mom and dad. They both have full-time jobs that pay hourly wages. But your mom loses her purse one day and before she can even get her credit cards turned off, she is already a victim of major identity theft. Now she owes over \$5,000! Your parents make about a fourth of that per month. They ask if you can help them out, but you're saving money to go to prom and grad night. What would you do in this situation? Look for a second job? Donate blood? Recycle? Become an entrepreneur?

Selling drugs, robbing, begging from family, or panhandling are just some of the things that a person might do during a major financial crisis. A lack of money can push many people to these types of breaking points.

I'm not quite in that situation, but I am experiencing the feeling of empty pockets. It is not enjoyable. I got scammed on the Internet and it put me \$250 dollars in the hole with a deadline and no source of income to climb my way out.

I eventually earned money by mowing lawns, cleaning cars, doing chores, stipends from my work at The kNOw, and I even resorted to borrowing from people. I never thought a measly \$250 would have made my hair fall out so easily, but it did! If I didn't pay the amount on time, I would have lost my banking privileges for five years.

It sucks that we need money to survive, whether it's for day-to-day bills, or to buy things for ourselves. Especially when it comes to buying things, money can make some people very materialistic.

For some, anything that might bring temporary joy is somehow considered a "necessity." I know people who claim that they

need their Xbox's and PS3's. Or others who say they can't live without their cell phones. Some people even claim they can't live without buying a new pair of shoes every month or every few weeks.

Most people, when they're waiting for something, especially money, usually can't relax until they receive it. Some people prefer not to wait, so they resort to methods that will keep their pockets full, such as robbing,

"I never thought a measly \$250 would have made my hair fall out so easily, but it did!"

selling their bodies, selling drugs, pyramid schemes, and other scams.

I have a friend who gets money-hungry. He tells me if his current lack of money continues, he will start "ski masking," in other words robbing. I don't think that I would ever resort to that level of desperation. He didn't even try to look for a job.

I wonder if those people have ever stopped to think that for every minute they spent being mad, waiting for their money, is a minute of happiness they can never get back. Imagine how much time people waste just waiting for their next buck when they could be going out with friends, or spending time with family. Not everything costs money. Since I realize this, I know not to wait for the next buck.

Just recently my friends and I had a bonfire. We set up a pit with wood and charcoal. We got juice, hot dogs, bread, chips, salsa, marshmallows, chocolates, and graham crackers. We sat around an open flame

and laughed and talked all night long. It didn't cost us anything because all the materials were already in the house. That's just one of the many things to do with little to no money.

I surveyed 20 of my friends to learn more about what they would do in desperate financial times. In my study, 55% said they are always waiting for their next dollar.

Some people get so impatient to the point that they are doing some crazy things during the two-week period between paychecks. But it doesn't necessarily mean that they are all money hungry. They could be saving up, or have bills to pay.

About 30% of the people said they only sometimes look for money. I think these are the people who are satisfied with the amount of money they have, and only look forward to money when they want to buy something.

Only 15% said they never wait for their next buck. These are the people who realize that money is not a necessity, and they don't need it to be happy. Or maybe they have a cool amount of money and don't need more.

I hope people realize from reading my article that you don't need to resort to robbing, soliciting, and begging for money. I hope they also learn not to live life waiting for the next buck to come around.

It hasn't been easy for me, but at least I have learned to take it upon myself to handle my financial responsibilities, and also to find creative ways to enjoy my time with friends even if I don't have a lot of money.

Money has taught me a lot about how to address my financial problems when they arise, and especially that in order to address the problem successfully depends on my initiative to try. *



Gaining Space: To Move Away From Home

By Anna Gil

There is only so much a person can take. In frustrating moments, one thing that helps is having space. I like to share, but I also need space where I can be my own true self. I hit a point this year, when I realized that wasn't possible at home anymore. So I moved out.

It was a Sunday when I took a step forward instead of back. I got my things together and left. I was tired of all the things going on in the house. I moved out of my parents' house and into my girlfriend's house.

At my parents' house, I didn't have that much space. I had my own room but at the same time, I didn't because both my mom and dad had a copy of my bedroom key. They would go in and out of my room like if it were a bathroom. They used my personal fridge that was given to me for my fifteenth birthday so I can buy food and keep it for myself. They would use the fridge to hide food from my brothers, and stuff they didn't want them to eat.

I felt like I was on lockdown at my parents' place. I had no freedom and I always had to ask before I did something. I know they're my parents and it's their job to make sure I am safe. They worried about me, and still do, but sometimes they overdid it.

Each time I didn't ask for permission or each time I crossed the line, I would get grounded for a week, at most would be a month. If I didn't do good in school, I would get grounded for more than a month and my cell phone would be taken away even though I pay my own bill.

I understand it is their job as parents, but most of the time, I felt like I couldn't breathe without worrying if I would get in trouble for doing something. I've never been to jail but from what I've heard, it feels like I've been there for most of my seventeen years.

I felt like I wasn't able to grow up at my parents' place. At times I enjoyed it because they spoiled me, but it would also get me mad because I wasn't able to have fun. When I went out with friends, I wasn't able to enjoy the time I spent with them because of my curfew, which was to be home before dark.

Since they kept me locked up all the time, I felt like I couldn't learn anything about life. I never learned that the grass isn't always

greener on the other side, and that we can't always get things handed to us. I'm not trying to make my parents seem bad. They did what they could to make sure I was safe.

To be honest, my space was the bathroom. I never felt rushed when taking a shower or using the restroom. I was able to listen to music and relax until I was ready to get out.

“When she told my dad I was leaving, he gave me a look that I can't explain”

The day I moved out, I felt free, like I could finally spread my wings. I'm not going to lie, I moved into a house that didn't have much space either, but to me, I felt like I had gained so much by being in the new place. I felt more like myself and I learned how to be more responsible. Most of the responsibilities were things I already knew from what my mom taught me like cooking, cleaning, and making sure I pick up after myself.

At my parents' place, I already knew all that I know now, but if I were still at their place, I probably wouldn't step up and do anything for myself. I felt lazy there since I knew if I didn't do it, my mom would do it or she would have one of my brothers do it.

Since moving out, I step up and do things for myself now. Like if I am sick, I make my own doctors appointment and find my own way to get money and pay for my medicine. I don't go to my dad for money anymore, or to my mom for things I need.

The night before I moved out, I had a long talk with my mom. She wasn't happy when I told her I was leaving. We both cried. She asked me not to leave, that she would change her ways and give me more freedom, but at the time, I couldn't forgive her. I was in a lot of pain.

When she told my dad I was leaving, he gave me a look that I can't explain. He wouldn't talk to me. My parents took it really bad. Even my brother was upset but he knew it was for the best.

The day I packed, my parents weren't home. They left for church and when they came back I was already halfway done. My dad walked in the room and looked at me with sad eyes. He spoke softly, “Are you really going to go through with this?” I looked up and shook my head “yes.” He closed the door and walked away. As I continued to pack I heard them leave. My heart was in pain but it felt relief at the same time.

I moved out about a month after I turned eighteen. A month later, it seemed like my mom and I had a better relationship. We still bump heads sometimes, but now, we can actually have a conversation without arguing. It felt like the trust became stronger between my parents and I. Now it is easier for me to communicate with both of my parents and even my oldest brother.

There is less drama between all of us now, and I don't have to worry about arguing with my mom because of dirty dishes or the garbage being too full. We are able to see each other and spend time talking about what is new in life. Then I can leave when I feel like it.

By being on my own, I grew up and I took care of what I had to. I finished high school, got my diploma, got into college and fell in love. The bad thing right now is I haven't found a job, but I'm trying not to stress over it.

Everyday I wake up and start my day on my own. I buy and make my own food. I don't depend on anyone to wake me up and have food ready for me. Each step I take is my choice. If I take the wrong path, it is my burden to carry. Or if I achieve, that too is my choice. No more asking what is okay to do. No more getting grounded. Learning from my mistakes and rewarding myself when I do something good can only help me grow into a responsible young adult. *

Losing The Family Bond:

When My Siblings Moved Out

By Meme Garrido

It seems like there will always come a time when teens will want to break away from their home. They can't wait to turn eighteen so they can leave, but do they ever stop to think about how their younger siblings feel or what their parents think?

I'm a teen, and yes, I do think about these things all the time. But when I really think about it, I wonder what my little sister and little brother would do or say. I wonder if they would miss me or one day walk into my room and find me not there anymore.

Ever since I was three years old, I've watched four of my older siblings vanish slowly from the house. My oldest sister was the first to go. I didn't really care much because I was too little to understand. But when I was around eight years old, my brother left the house. I remember helping him take his things to the van. But when I asked him if I was going to see him later, he said "maybe."

I asked my mom what he meant by "maybe," and she told me what happened. I was devastated. I stayed strong the whole time until I finally realized he was gone. I cried so much.

My mom told me he wasn't going away forever, just that he wasn't going to live with us anymore. But I knew that I wasn't going to see him as much as I used to, and that did come true.

Now that I'm sixteen years old, I understand that kids can't live

with their parents forever. But I do realize that what I believed was true because I don't hear from my brother anymore. I used to see him possibly twice every six months before he got incarcerated, but now, it's for sure I won't see him for a while.

It hurts me everyday that I don't see my brother because we did a lot together. We used to melt all of our Halloween chocolate in a bowl, and then freeze it so that we could chip off the little pieces we wanted. Or how I used to take his naked baby pictures and show them to his girlfriends. Those were the good old days.

Another time I remember was with my nineteen-year-old sister, who had just turned eighteen at the time. I grew up with her too. I remember going to school with her and playing basketball. I remember how she would say, "I can't wait to leave" or "Watch when I turn eighteen."

I watched slowly as the years went by and how more and more, she wanted to leave. But the day she turned eighteen, nothing happened. It was just another day. I just knew my sister was bluffing. I knew she wasn't going to leave, but I was wrong.

My sister and my mom got into a huge argument and the next day, when my mom left for work, my sister was gone. But it didn't really matter to me because I knew I would still see my sister at school.

"I remember helping him take his things to the van. But when I asked him if I was going to see him later, he said "maybe."

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The Beat Within



A Weekly Publication of Writing and Art from the Inside

Voices From the Fresno County Juvenile Justice Campus

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, Aaron Benson, Nigel Medhurst, Lily Romero, and Mai Der Vang.

Drug House

It wasn't always easy growing up in a house with drug addicts. Your mom coming out of her room every five minutes yelling at you for no reason. Random people sitting in your living room waiting for a sack. Always insecure not knowing what's gonna happen next. Hanging out with the wrong people and doing things you know aren't right. That's why I'm locked up right now.

-Dillan

My Decision

Don't know what to say and didn't know how to decide. But all I know is that I have kept all the emotions deep inside. A really hard decision I had to make on my own, now with no one to talk to I feel like I'm alone. Emotionally unstable from the abortion I just had, all I seem to do is cry and be sad. I wish I had my love, my heart, my boyfriend by my side, because when he holds me, I don't feel one ache inside. He holds me and keeps my spirit up. The abortion has caused me so many tearful nights. I just didn't know what to do or how to decide. It's over now and I'm trying to be strong but just because my life is emotionally unstable, it must go on.

-D

Holding Hands With Misery

Since I was born I've always been a problem
I had a few issues from the start
When I think about it, it truly breaks my heart
As a little kid, I had anger issues and bad skin
The problems I inherited from my kin
As I grew older, things seemed to get better
I should have known, she's beside me
My one and only, friend of Misery
I kept growing, got my life straightened out
But no matter what, I still had my doubts
The pain and anger faded away
But some days I only feel the pain
I seem to walk in a life of rain
A junior in high school I was doing well
I should have known time would tell
She was right beside me through all the hell
Now the only thing that's on my mind
Is my friend of Misery deep inside
The wanting to die seemed to fade away
It was just more of not wanting to exist
But when I dream I still feel close to death
I'll get through this every time
Instead of holding hands with misery
I won't let my life fall apart
Instead I will put my hands on my heart.

-Cody

Please Help Us Out

The moment I began to think California was a failed state was when I found out my PO recommended me three years. It's my first time ever being locked up and they're not even willing to give me some

programs. They shut down boot camp because of no money so now they're not even considering giving anyone a second chance. I feel that isn't fair. I feel the state should offer more programs to prevent crime and help us at the same time.

I was highly intoxicated when I committed my crime and I feel I need help, not years taken away from my family. This is why crime never stops, they never take their time to put themselves in our shoes. We are also human beings. We're not animals who should be put away in cages for one mistake. So I think the state would have some improvement if they would just help us out and not put us away to suffer.

-Daniel P.

The Day She Was Born

I remember the screams like it was yesterday. The doctor saying I see her head, then I looked and there she was, my beautiful Daisy coming into this world. It was the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen. I'll never forget that magical day. She weighed 7 pounds and 11 ounces. It was the perfect day.

I held her and didn't want to let go. Now I'm in here regretting being here. I miss her more than I have ever missed anything or anyone. I think of her and cry. But I always remember that I am one more day closer to seeing her and it gets me through. I know God will take me home so I can be the best father.

-David

When My Homie Died

One time when I barely got out of the hall, my homeboys came through and I was playing football with my little brother. They told me that my neighbor was going to throw a party later on that same day so I decided to go. So later on that day, I saw lots of people coming in so I was chilling with my two brothers and some homeboys. Then I saw someone arguing so I went to see what was going on. I saw my brother taking off his shirt.

Everyone went to the middle of the street and one of the persons who was arguing with my brother pulled out a gun so I backed up. Then he shot the gun in the air and everyone ran. So I ran and I was behind my little homie and I got in front of him and he fell on top of me. We both fell down and I looked back and got up and my little homie didn't get up. Then I realized that he had gotten shot in his heart. I grabbed him tight but he couldn't breath so my brother ran toward me and picked him up and put him in the truck and took him to the hospital. My homie didn't make it. Rest in peace.

-Krow

This Is The Dark

When I woke up this morning, the first thing I thought about was how bad I want to get out of here. I would do anything to get out of this place. They won't let me go. Now I can't see my friends, family, coaches, teachers or anyone. I'm missing the holidays, basketball, and finals for the marching band.

Every night I dream I'm out and I'm happy. But then I wake up to this nightmare and my soul breaks too. I need to get out of this horrid place before I go crazy! I can't take this anymore. I need out!

It makes things worse when all I think about is the outside. I can't do this anymore. I pray to God everyday to get me out of here, but so far, I'm stuck. No one has visited me. No one has written. I'm alone here. It's scary. I'm like a child and this is the dark. I'm calling for help but there's no one listening...

-Michael

When My Parents Argued

I learned a lot as a child but I never listened to it or used it. I failed in life because I took advantage of all I've learned to do. My mom and dad (stepdad, I consider him as my birth dad because I hardly knew my real dad) were constantly going through divorces. I loved when they would fight (verbally) because I'd be able to leave and do drugs. I wish I had learned that being an opportunist has its downfalls and the ones I've gotten are bad, such as drug dependency. For that reason, I never blame anyone for my faults but myself. I wish I had tried to help my parents instead of take advantage. To all those out there locked up, stay up. To all those parents locked up, get out for your children's sake.

-Bandit

Won't Happen Again

My biggest issue after freedom will be to make sure my daughter is going to school and she is taken care of. I will make sure she is has a roof over her head and she has clothes and food on the table. Another thing I will make sure is that she has no gang membership. I know I can't control everything that happens in the world, but I will make sure that if she ever needs to talk to someone, I will be there when I get out. I plan to never get locked up again so I can watch my children grow old.

I know how it feels not to have a father. My father was killed when I was only thirteen years old. I don't want my daughter to go through the pain I went through. I love her to death and I know me being locked up is affecting her, not just me. When I get out, I plan on getting a job to support my family. While I'm incarcerated, I plan to finish school so I won't have to worry about it later in life. I have learned from my mistake and I can say it won't happen again, for my children's sake.

-Lynn

Evil Side

Surrounded by demons not knowing which way to go,
Wishing I could smoke another bowl.
But at the same time I have no control,
Every time I turn suicide is on my mind.
Hoping I die as soon as I get high,
Because where I come from it's nothing but
Pain to see another day.
People say, "God's there for you, he loves you!"
I wish I could feel that way.
As days, weeks and months drag by the pain
Within my soul grows.
Roaming the streets of Fresno hoping to
Find another cold soul.
Every day my heart cries out for help
But no one seems to notice.
Ashamed of all the things I've done!
As tears fall from my cheeks, I wish
I was an (angel) instead of a (demon)!

-Jr.

My Grandma's Trust

When I was born, my grandma said that I went through a lot of stuff and commotion with my parents. My mom was fifteen when she had me and my dad was seventeen. So there must have been frustration because I ruined their lives. They couldn't go out anymore.

When I started getting older I started getting beat brutal by

my parents and my grandma would come and save me. When my grandma started telling me things, I felt like I could trust her. So only my grandma knows what I've really done in the street, robbed, jumped, or even took stuff from. My grandma used to ask me why I did these things and I would say no, I just get the urge to do it.

-Jose

Why?

Why couldn't haters just be skaters?
Why couldn't lovers remain huggers?
Why couldn't friends stay the same?
Why couldn't you feel my pain?
Why couldn't people just be glad?
Why does everyone have to be mad?
That's because...
Some haters aren't skaters.
All lovers don't remain huggers.
And friends don't stay the same.
As they grow up they change,
And you couldn't feel my pain,
even if we were the same.
And everyone isn't always glad.
Now in this world people are usually sad
so they take their problems
out by being mad.

-Veronica

Recognizing The Good

I always wondered why good kids like me ended up in Juvie, why families like mine have such suckie lives, or why people's issues don't subside even when they know they are hurting those they "love." I know I'm not perfect, but I'm definitely not a criminal and don't deserve to be in here. My "scene" friends get upset when they find out I'm in here because they know I don't belong here.

My family is fighting this ongoing war between sides and it makes me sick and tired. Then they wonder why I don't wanna come over. When I bring up these issues to them, they still don't stop their war no matter how bad it hurts me. So all this being said, why does a good kid with a screwed up family who is constantly fighting still manage to see the good in everything? It's because I recognize that not everything goes the way I want it. I won't always have good days or a good attitude but I still love my family and myself. I believe life is the way we make it.

-Monstrosity



Yes! We Are Together

The Challenge Of Being In A Same Sex Relationship

By "Violet"

The day I told my mother that I was a lesbian and no longer wished to hide it by dating guys, she freaked. Although time has passed since then, my parents are still uneasy about the whole idea of me liking girls, but they try their best to accept it. I recall my father trying to convince me that it was just something I was going through and that I would snap out of it sooner or later, that it wasn't the "norm" for girls to date girls.

What is the "norm" for dating? If you ask almost any American, most would say straight couples are the "norm," or in other words, acceptable in society. Public views of same sex couples vary from person to person. Society is constantly changing and people are opening up to different views. But still there is a majority of people who view couples of the same sex as morally wrong.

I wonder why a person should be judged because they like someone of the same gender.

Take for example, Prop 8, which restricts same sex marriages. It was passed in the November 2008 General Election. There were so many people who supported and opposed the proposition. The issue also revealed the discrimination that a lot of same sex couples experience.

During last year, and now still, many groups such as the Gay/ Straight Alliance, Equality California, Courage Campaign and other supporters took steps that Martin Luther King Jr. took when he and others fought for racial equality during the Civil Rights Movement in the 60s.

I think the issue of gay rights has always existed, but it seems like today, it's become more visible to most everyone. The gay community faces a new fight because of Prop 8. It is a fight that might level the playing field for straight and same sex couples.

I wonder why some people in society cannot see that they are depriving human beings the right to marry the person they love, even if it is someone of the same gender. Maybe it's because it's too different, or some of them don't like change, or some simply believe it is immoral. But perhaps if their right to marry the person they loved were taken away, then they'd be furious too.

I think because of Prop 8, the public view of same sex couples has changed, some for the better, but some for the worse. I know, because I am a teen who is in a same sex relationship.

I recall many times being ridiculed when my girlfriend and I are out in public. People are constantly staring at us with insulting looks, sometimes it is other youth our own age, but mostly it is adults. Some people snicker or whisper to one another, or sometimes people say out loud, "Look at those fags."

Many people confuse my girlfriend as a guy because she wears clothes that are meant for guys. It is pretty obvious though that she is a girl because she does have breasts.

She doesn't mind if a person confuses her gender by accident. But if the person knows she is a girl, and still calls her a guy, she feels disrespected.

There have been many times when my girlfriend has confronted someone because of something they said. I remember this one time at Borders bookstore, my girlfriend was sitting and leaning against a bookshelf, and I was sitting between her legs leaning against her.

We were reading a couple of magazines when we began to notice two girls and two boys around the age of thirteen hiding behind the bookcase. They were peaking their heads out and laughing. This happened a few more times until my girlfriend asked what they wanted. The two girls came up to us and started to laugh. My girlfriend asked them once more what they wanted and all they said was, "We have a question."

My girlfriend suspected what their question was. She simply said, "Yes, I am a girl and yes, she is my girlfriend. If you wanted to know that then you could have asked and not laughed around the corner for the longest time!" After she said that, the two girls left as fast as they could.

I know for a fact that many same sex couples do not go around to places where they know they will be discriminated against. Many of them stay near familiar and safe places. For instance, in Fresno, I know many same sex couples that stay in the Tower District because they know almost everyone there and feel more comfortable.

But I believe we should feel comfortable anywhere since we do live in a free country. We as citizens should have the freedom to walk where we please without being discriminated.

Some people have taken discrimination to a whole other level, to the extent where it becomes a hate crime and a life is taken. I remember the story of Matthew Shepard, a 21-year-old gay college student in Laramie, WY who, in 1998, was beaten to death. When I heard about this, I was appalled. I never would have thought that people would take their hatred that far. It cautions a lot of same sex couples to be careful when they are out in public.

Although my girlfriend and I have only been together for eight months, I hope those months can prosper into years. I am not thinking about marriage any time soon, but when the times comes, and if it is with my girlfriend, I hope the law, and society too, will have changed its views on same sex marriage. *

"I recall many times being ridiculed when my girlfriend and I are out in public"



LOVE HAPPENS

The Story Of An Interracial Couple

By Angelina Thao

Once overheard one of my aunts say, “You see him,” as she pointed her finger at my uncle, “He has a beautiful daughter who is a doctor, but she is married to a Black guy. What a great loss.”

To me, something was wrong with her comment. Why should it matter who the daughter married? That was the first time I ever experienced the clash of interracial relationships. Traditionally, in my Hmong culture, it’s not proper for a girl to marry or date someone of another race. I’m sure it’s the same in many other cultures too.

But living in a culturally diverse environment makes it hard to play by the traditional rule of only marrying people from your same race. This is difficult because America is filled with many ethnicities from all over the world. We are culturally diverse, especially in Fresno where there are a lot of Southeast Asians and Mexicans. We grow up in culturally diverse neighborhoods and we go through school learning that everyone is equal. So why should race matter when it comes to love?

Luckily for me, I have a family that is open-minded about whoever I choose to date. I have been dating the same Hmong guy for the last three years, so I’m not dating out of my race, but if I were, I know my family would accept him.

But I have a friend who went through some drama in order to be with the person she liked. My friend, Kiang, who is Hmong, fell in love with a Caucasian boy named James.

It started during senior year at school. James started to notice how cute Kiang looked every time she squinted. One day, James turned to me and asked me about Kiang. He asked me questions about her hobbies, her favorite color, what she looks for in a guy, and other questions.

I advised him to get to know her slowly and to just be himself. So James started by hanging out with her more and he often ate lunch with her. I watched as Kiang and James’ relationship transformed from just friends to madly-in-love. I even had to give up my seat in class, next to Kiang, for James so he would stop bugging me.

But Kiang already knew that her affection for James would be difficult for her brothers to accept. They warned her about dating any guy, period, let alone a guy out of her race. Her brothers were good guys, but they were always protective of their youngest sister. Kiang was also concerned she would disappoint her mom. Kiang didn’t even tell her mom about James. Instead, she was ready to give up on her newfound love.

Personally, I don’t get it. What is wrong with a White guy or a Black guy or a Mexican or an Australian or a German? I believe love

isn’t based on ethnicity so it shouldn’t matter, but I know not everyone is as open-minded as I try to be.

Kiang was in love, so she couldn’t leave James. She decided to give their relationship a try.

Before she made it official with James, she wanted her brother’s approval, so she built up the courage to talk to her brother. Fortunately, it wasn’t that bad. All he said was for her to stay focused and to put her education before James.

With his approval, she had a little more courage to tell her mom about James. When her mom heard, the first thing she said was, “How am I going to communicate with him?” Kiang was speechless. She didn’t know what to say except, don’t worry about that.

Kiang began to tutor James in his Hmong-speaking abilities, and now he is actually able to say a couple of words. When James met Kiang’s mom, he greeted her in Hmong. He would call her “Kiang’s

mom” in Hmong, but then after awhile, she told him to just call her “mom.” Kiang was so happy to get the final approval from her mom!

But it wasn’t just Kiang fighting for the relationship. Kiang’s family practices the traditional Hmong religion, and James’ parents told him that he couldn’t date anyone who wasn’t Christian. But there was a part of Kiang that believed in God, because she would pray every night for the safety of her sister who is away fighting in the war.

James struggled because he wanted to introduce his new girlfriend to his Christian family. So he finally did! Kiang met James’ family and they were willing to accept her. She even went to church with his family and

met his grandparents.

James came to school one day and asked Kiang to be his girlfriend, and that was that.

Slowly, with encouragement, this interracial couple eventually overcame their challenges and helped their families see beyond skin color and religion.

They are both happily in love and I can see them staying together for a long time.

If you weren’t open to the idea of interracial relationships before reading this, I hope James and Kiang’s story has helped changed your mind a bit. The next time you see an interracial couple, instead of thinking, “I wonder how that happened,” I hope you think, “Love is awesome, and it happens.” *

“living in a culturally diverse environment makes it hard to play by the traditional rule”



Fighting The Forbidden Crush

By Demar Duncan

When you meet someone in life, it's hard to tell if that person will stick around or if it is a one-time thing. For me, I like to put everyone in a "maybe" category. I don't like the person too fast or too slow.

I created this "maybe" category to protect myself. About two years ago, I fell hard for this one girl, so hard I couldn't go a day without talking to her. She never told me she didn't like me so I kept wanting to hang out with her. One day, I saw her with a guy, and then she finally told me she never liked me, that she just wanted someone to text: "That's all you were, a texting friend nothing more, sorry." After that I told myself I would never fall for another girl like that.

With relationships these days, it seems to me that only time will tell. Recently though, I starting talking to this girl and everything was going great. It felt like nothing could go wrong.

But, ha, if only that were true! Like I said, only time will tell, but it seems like time picked a bad moment for me. I like this girl a little more than I should have when I found out what she told me. I know you want to know what happened, but first, let me tell

you how we met, yep, on Myspace!

I know you're probably thinking Myspace, are you for real? Yes, I am. I know people think meeting others on Myspace is a mistake, or they think some do it to get a one-night stand, but I'm not like that. I like to meet people and get to know them.

I became interested in this girl. We chatted a lot, and it was good. We laughed and got to know one another. Then one night, we were talking on the phone pretty late, and she acted a little weird. I thought it might be because her mom would get mad if she knew her daughter was on the phone with a boy. So I didn't trip off it.

We finally picked a day to meet and when our eyes met, it was not like love but something was there. We couldn't say what it was. She was a nice, kind, funny, and outgoing girl. She was my height and had long beautiful hair with lovely green eyes, and lips so pink you'd think she had lipstick on. She wasn't too skinny, but almost there. She had such a fun personality; I think anyone could be a friend with her.

So we hung out, and the whole time, we were laughing and talking just like we were on the phone. We goofed around and gave

each other gentle love taps.

But as the day went on, she wanted to tell me something, but was unsure because she didn't know how I would react. I told her, don't say it until you are ready.

She was ready, and then she said it, "...I have a...I have a boyfriend."

I swear. I thought I heard my jaw hit the floor. Then she said, "But I'm going to break up with him 'cause I can't take much more of how he treats me like crap. He hits me but not all the time, only when I make him mad."

I was shocked. I told her no one has to go through any of that. But she said if she left him, she'd be homeless and have nothing.

"Everything I have, he got it for me," she said, "I don't work but I go to school cause he wants me too. But I know it's for the best so I want to get through school so I can get a job. Without him, I can't finish school. I could move in with some family but I won't have a cell phone to talk to you or anything so it would be hard." It was like all her stress suddenly came out.

And then she said, "I think about you so much. I like talking to you and you're nothing like him."

Again, I was shocked, but there was something in me that understood. I told her she should do what she has to do, even if it is to stay with him until she can become independent.

For some weird reason, we were still cool to hang out for the day. Then she had to get home so she could make dinner for him. I was cool with that, so I told I would see her whenever she could. She was cool. It's been about three months since then.

She told me she was trying to reach her family so she could leave her boyfriend, and maybe in time, we would have a chance together.

But recently she told me her family was not calling her back. I told her to stay with her boyfriend and that we should just be friends, nothing more. Maybe we can talk now and then, but not as much. There's nothing else I can do, so for now, I'm okay just being her friend.

For others out there who have been in my situation as the "other" guy, just let it go. It's not worth it, especially if the other person finds out and then wants to fight you. I would never fight over anyone. If that person wants to be with me, then she will. Or else we're just friends. It's too much to risk a broken heart.

I didn't think this girl was a "maybe" because I thought she would be cool and understanding, which is the type of girl I like. I still care a lot about her, but I realize now I probably should have put her in that category right from the start. *

No Matter What:

The Story Of A Surviving Love

By "Ms. Chance"

About a year ago, my eight-year-old niece asked me a simple question. She looked at me with her big greenish eyes and said, "Why are so many people mean to other people who are different?" As I tried to find the words to respond to her question, I was left sort of speechless. All I did was smile with a confused look.

As I think about her question, it seems to me there is more hatred these days. I can tell, just by walking down a street and hearing people yell, or seeing people pick fights in an alley, behind the donut shop, or in school. Breaking news on TV of gang drive-bys and murders making it look like the world has gone bad, like we all hate one another. But maybe I am affected by all that hatred more than I used to be because of what happened to someone I cared about.

Many people believe it is wrong to love someone of the same gender. My question is why does it matter to them, especially if it has nothing to do with them? This issue hits deep for me because I am bisexual.

I know someone who committed suicide because her stepfather hated her for who she was. He caused her family to act like they hated her as well.

She was about eighteen-years-old, a senior in high school, good grades and a hard worker. She had long light brown hair that glowed next to her beautiful skin. A body

like a Coke bottle yet thick from her waist down. She was an athletic girl with goals. Smart, respectful, and funny. She didn't care what people said about her and she always went with the flow.

To me, she seemed like an angel without wings, and each moment I spent with her was like heaven. This person is my ex, Sol. We met at school. She was a teacher's aide in one of my classes.

Sol lived with her mom and stepdad. Her family loved her since she was the youngest. But when she came out of the closet and told her family she was in love with a girl, her stepfather took it badly.

Her mom still loved her because she was the same person. Her older brother had already figured it out, but her stepdad was so mad he threw her out of the house. Sol went to stay with her older brother. After about a month of getting kicked out, her stepdad made her go back home.

He put Sol on lockdown. He even took her out of school so she couldn't have contact with any girl. The only friends she could have were boys and she was forced to act "straight" and have boyfriends.

It got to the point where Sol was sexually abused. Her stepdad raped her a few times. Her mother couldn't do any-



"I know someone who committed suicide because her stepfather hated her for who she was."

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Hmong Marriage:

Is My Future Mine To Hold?

By Yee Leng Vang

It was a cool night. The moon shone brightly. The leaves were changing into bright red and yellow. The stars were out, but on that night, I wish there had been more. I was on the phone, talking to my girlfriend Sheng. She was sharing her dreams and wishes with me, which shone brightly through her voice, but in my mind, I could only see dark clouds.

Sheng was talking about us having kids and how cute they will be. I teased her, "They won't, for I won't be with you later on." She sighed and said I was being mean. I laughed and our conversation continued. We talked more about our future, about marriage. Still, I could see the dark clouds hovering overhead.

I know Sheng and I are young, but I've been thinking lately about marriage. I'm only sixteen years old, but it's my future and I want to familiarize myself with it. Some people might say, well marriage is just marriage and it won't be that hard to do, but I'm Hmong, and that creates many challenges for me.

Being Hmong means that getting married requires a lot more preparation and a lot of money. It can be hard for a Hmong guy.

As a Hmong person, in the community and in your extended family, a lot of elders know each other. Even if you are not related to each other, people still know each other.

If your family has a good reputation, then your family has to live up to that name and the sons in the family have to find wives who also have good family reputations. To uphold a good reputation, the children have to be educated and know the traditional cultural practices, such as how to do ceremonies, how to speak Hmong, and not be lazy.

But if you or your family has a blackened name, it can be difficult for you to date a girl from a good family.

I know other cultures may have these same rules too, but it seems like they are so much more emphasized in Hmong culture.

If your parents do something wrong, you will have to prove to others that you won't turn out the same way. I don't know why, but many Hmong elders judge you by how your parents are.

If you do something wrong, like commit crimes or do drugs, your parents will be at fault and they will be viewed as bad people because they didn't raise you right. That means you can ruin your family name easily. Sometimes, it can be hard to be accepted by other Hmong people because some of them judge so much.

When it comes to dating, a lot of Hmong parents have the same answer, "Do you really think he/she is pretty?" or "Look at the way he/she is dressed," or "Who are his/her parents, oh, that's the parents!" or "Look at his/her hair, it likes he/she is a gangster."

There are plenty of things they will say and many of them are ridiculous. These comments are usually followed by, "No, you cannot date that person!"

Since a lot of parents and elders know one another, they can ask around and find out more about the person's family, which is usually the evidence they need to support that final answer.

One of the funniest reasons I've ever heard for not dating someone was a story I heard from a friend. It goes: A boy asks his dad if he can date this one girl. The dad asks for her parents' names. Then, the dad says, "No! Long ago, their great-grandfather snuck into your great-grandfather's farm and stole many of his chickens and his prized cow. They are very bad people, no!"

I realize one of the reasons why such strict dating rules exist is because a lot of elders may have grudges against other families. Many parents also want their daughters to marry into a wealthy family or at least, a family that can take care of her financially.

As I think about all these things, I wonder if I will be able to marry the one I want.

"Being Hmong means that getting married requires a lot more preparation and a lot of money."

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Embracing Courage: When The Tsunami Struck The Samoan Islands

By Fa'amavaegaoaiga "Ena" Kurene

A river of water and people lay in the streets of Samoa. The clouds and sun battle one another in the sky for dominance. But before all of this, an earthquake shook the people on the islands like lifeless rag dolls and soon after the waves crashed. The waves swept men, women, and children out to sea. These people's position in society, their good deeds, or age didn't matter to these waves. It took lives.

The disaster in American Samoa and parts of Western Samoa has affected every Samoan in the world. For me, it has changed my entire life. I am a Samoan-American teenager, and though I wasn't born in Samoa, I cried and lost sleep over what happened.

On September 29, 2009, a tsunami hit the islands of Samoa, which is located east of Australia. News reports estimate that by October, the death toll stood at about 112.

These weren't just ordinary tsunami victims. They are my people. I felt as if this natural disaster was an attempt of genocide on my people. The whole atrocity pierced my heart beyond the power of any hurt a person could feel. My people have been so peaceful, and Samoa was never on the news until the earthquake and tsunami hit the islands.

My people were at the mercy of the weather and it made me ask why bad things happen to such good people. The death toll is still rising and people are still missing. All the while, a hole has formed in my heart.

I remember how the news of the catastrophe came through every outlet of information. Gruesome photos of bodies lying in the streets, and footage of children looking for their parents played over and over in my head.

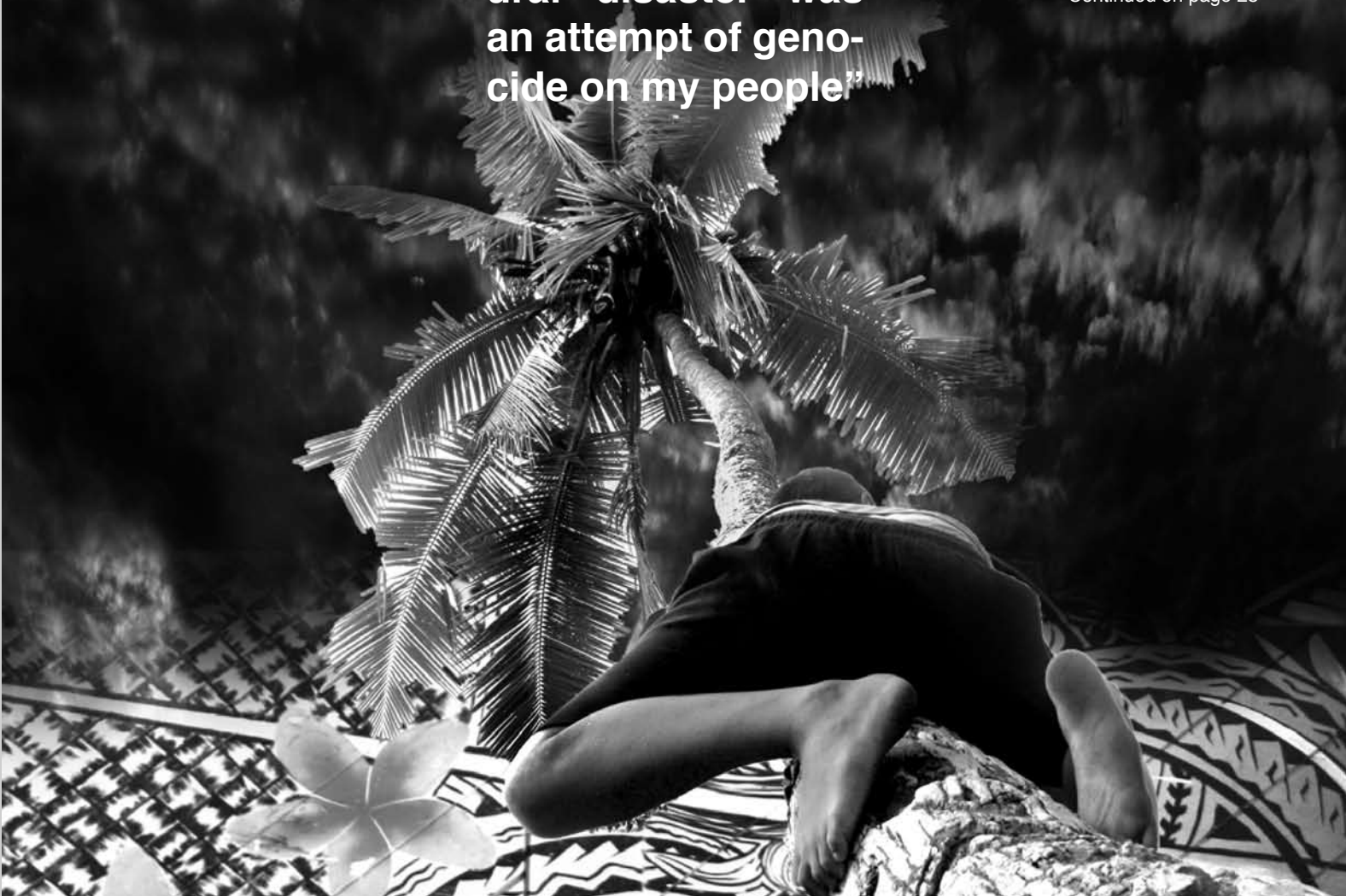
"I felt as if this natural disaster was an attempt of genocide on my people!"

That day, at the end of school, I kicked a stone all the way from the gates of McLane High School to the clothing store, where my mother waited to pick me up. I was accustomed to seeing a smile on her face when she saw me, but on this particular day, she had a frown.

I opened the car door and felt the somber mood let loose in the early fall air, and this was when I first learned about the disaster. I sat in silence, whispering a prayer as I let the news sink in. My silence was then disrupted by the sound of the engine starting and we made our way home. I asked my mother if our family was okay, and she said yes. My mother's family, who live in the mountain village of Aoloau in American Samoa, were safe.

I was also grateful to hear that my grandmother and uncle, who live near a beach in a village, were not hit hard. Instead

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TAKING THE PAIN AWAY

BY JALEESA VICKERS

MY STORY OF SELF-INJURY

Ask anyone, if you hurt yourself, it's probably an accident. We all bump into things, get a knick when we shave, or scrape an elbow or knee while playing outside. But what if you did things like that over and over again, every single day, but it wasn't an accident? You would do it out of frustration, sadness, anger, or even just boredom.

What do you think it would be like if you burned yourself just to leave a scar, or cut yourself just to see the blood? It's a difficult thing to picture, isn't it? In reality though, it's just some of the things that hundreds of youth do to themselves everyday.

Self-injury and self-mutilation is nothing new, but many people just aren't aware of it. When the subject comes up, some might cringe and cower at the thought, but it is in fact something that needs to be discussed. In our society, there is much to stress about, but there aren't a lot of places to tuck away that stress. We bottle things up inside, take a deep breath, then just go along with our day. Eventually that bottle gets full, and something has to come out. That something is almost never good.

I had my first experience with self-injury when I was a sophomore. I had already had a hard freshman year, so I was starting the school year with a lot of extra baggage. I didn't have a very good social life, so at school, I didn't have much to fall back on. My grades were bad because I was too into trying to make friends.

At home, I sort of started alienating myself from my family, not telling anyone how I was so messed up inside. All of that seclusion soon turned toxic for me.

I was sad, angry, and just plain fed up with my life. Where I was, I believed I couldn't scream, shout, or break anything. I thought if I took it out on myself, no one would have to know. If I hurt myself, I wouldn't have to burden anyone with my problems. To this day, I don't know why I decided to cut myself. Little did I know it would end up being something I would struggle with for the rest of my life.

For those who don't know, there are many different ways to self-injure/mutilate. (Note that I am not condoning this.) Some people cut or carve themselves using box cutters, push pins, broken glass, deconstructed shaving razors, or just about anything else sharp. Burning is also common, done by cigarette lighters, stove ranges, matches, or even curling/straightening irons. Some less common ways can be hitting one's head against a wall or with a hard object, like a fist or a hairbrush, not letting the physical wounds heal (for example, picking scabs), or one of the most extreme things, bone-breaking.

I can't speak for all people who self-injure, but for me, it was

like a drug. I wasn't addicted to the pain, per se, because for me, there was none. I was addicted to the way I felt afterward: relieved. I was relieved that I didn't have to feel anything else. I was in my own world, and no one could do anything about it. Cutting was something I could control, which was important to me, because I felt as if I couldn't control anything else in my life.

At school, I soon found a few other kids who cut and carved themselves, and they accepted me for who I was and what I did. It made me feel great for a while, but all they did was feed the fire. It made me cut more just hanging out with them. In a way, I felt like cutting was the only way of staying in the group. It made me feel that was all I had to offer. I began to pull my hair out—it wasn't an everyday thing, just a few strands a day. It helped me keep my mind off cutting but it was equally self-destructive.

A few months after I first started self-injuring, my scars became very apparent. The thin, but dark lines on my flesh were growing in number. My own mother made comments of concern. Her concern was comforting to me, but it also broke my heart. No one wants to disappoint his or her own mother—I knew I had to find a way to stop.

My mother, the disgusted looks of classmates, and my own self-consciousness encouraged me to take the path to recovery. It takes a lot of willpower to stop doing something that you believe helps you, something you believe is so vital to your existence. I promised myself not to cut. Even with stopping, self-injuring occupied my thoughts. I seriously needed help, but I refused to seek it.

I stopped because of sheer willpower. I had to keep myself occupied. I would draw and write, or try to make new friends. It was difficult at first but it got easier as time went on. I didn't seek any help because I was afraid that the adults around me would judge me and try to get me in trouble for hurting myself. I felt that because it was my problem, I had to fix it.

If I count the days, weeks, or years, no matter what, I'm still recovering. Some people aren't as lucky as I am, some people don't feel they have the reason or willpower to stop. Sometimes you just need a little push.

That's why I believe that if you know someone who is self-injuring, you should take the time to really understand that person. Don't think of that person as someone who only self-injures, think of that person as someone who has a problem and really needs to be listened to. It's often a cry for help. Don't be afraid to be that help. *

“To this day, I don't know why I decided to cut myself.”

The Road Alone:

My Story Of Homelessness

By Marcus Vega

One evening, after coming home from school, I noticed my grandmother's car was gone. My brother was in his room. I sat down and began watching TV. As time passed, I began to wonder where everyone was. Nightfall came, and I began to worry about what could have happened. My mind began to wander.

Then at exactly 9:45pm, I received a dreadful call from my aunt. She told me my grandmother had passed away from a brain aneurysm. I knew my grandmother was dealing with high blood pressure and knee surgery, but I was not prepared for this. My body felt crushed like I was an aluminum can under the shoe of a pedestrian. I held myself and cried.

Right at that moment, I had lost everything. My mother stopped taking care of me when I was a child because she wanted to do her own thing. My father left me when I was a baby. My grandmother was the person who raised and cared for me growing up, and at that time, we were living with my aunt.

I just sat there. I was told not to tell my brother because no one knew how he would take it. Moments passed. My aunt pulled up to the house in her car, accompanied by my mom and her boyfriend. My aunt drove us all to the hospital. Along the way, we stopped at Wayne's Liquor Store. My mom was hysterical, screaming, "You m***** killed my momma." No one paid attention to her. This hurt me a lot because I didn't want to hear this. She got out of the car to get an alcoholic beverage, and we left her there.

My aunt turned to me and said, "I'm glad she's gone. Now I can get red of yo' a**." This dealt a fatal blow to my heart. I sat in silence. When we arrived at the hospital, my other brothers were already there and another aunt showed up, along with a cousin. We consoled one another. Everyone cried except my brother and me. My aunt had this fake sorrow going on.

Later that day, I was dropped off at my brother's house with all my things. I stayed with him for about three months. I left there and went back to my aunt's. I wasn't even with her for two weeks when suddenly one night, at 3am in the morning, all my things were thrown outside and she threatened to call the police. I had just gotten home to discover that some of my money was missing, and I asked her about it, and she answered, "You need to get your a** out of here!"

I carried all my things that early morning and walked up and down the streets, a big bag, my clothes, a TV, everything I had at that point in time. I got help along the way, stopping at a friend's house, and then from there, I went to another friend's house. Over time, I lost a lot of my possessions and just basically had what I was wearing at that time, which was very uncomfortable.

I bounced around from place to place. I even found myself sleeping at bus stop 28 off Kings Canyon Avenue, on people's floors, couches, and my personal favorite were empty buildings (sigh).

I finally went to CPS (Child Protective Services) since I was still seventeen years old, and got myself registered into foster

"I carried all my things that early morning and walked up and down the streets, a big bag, my clothes, a TV, everything I had"

care. I stayed with a foster family, and my foster mother didn't speak much English, which was hard so I had to brush up on my Spanish. I lived there until I turned eighteen.

On my court date, one of my aunts was supposed to attend, and also, I had a plan that I was going to present to the judge, but my aunt didn't show up.

After foster care, I ended up on my own once again and without a stable living situation. I remember sleeping in an empty apartment with running water, which meant flesh tingling cold showers. There was a mattress on the floor. I never got used to these conditions. In order to get food, I relied on the kindness of others until I signed up for homeless food stamps. At the time, I was attending a charter school in West Fresno, but then I transferred to another charter school, the School of Unlimited Learning, which was located in the EOC Sanctuary where I used to pick up toiletries after coming from the EOC Health Clinic.

I forced myself to stay busy, always in motion. I could never stand still. My biggest fear was going back to the apartment and

having no one to converse with. A way to alleviate my troubles was to get high. It was a way for me to maintain my lucidness.

I prayed a lot. Read and studied by candlelight, sometimes stealing electricity via multiple extension cords stretched to a neighbor's outside outlet. This ended quickly. Time passed, and I wanted out of this dark prison, out of my hardships, which only seemed to increase. Quietly, my grip loosened, like an insect climbing on a wet metallic surface, slipping though it keeps holding on. I felt like there were no arms to catch me.

After a while, I got word about a Transitional Living Center (TLC) for teens through the EOC Sanctuary. After attending an orientation, completing a criminal background check along with a TB test, I was told I met the requirements and had been accepted. I stayed there for eight months, and during that time, I earned my diploma, graduated from a drug program, and learned many valuable life lessons. I ended up choosing to leave the TLC so I wouldn't get kicked out over breaking a rule.

At this current time, I have slipped back into my familiar realm of not having a stable place. Few people know of this. It is well hidden. My current living situation is far from graceful. I don't even want to describe it. I am at least attending Adult School to better myself.

I give much love to the friends and people who supported me with open arms when doors were slammed in my face or when others attempted to misuse me. Those who grasped my hand on rainy days at a time when I lacked purpose in my life, lifted me back onto my two feet, like a human being that should stand.

In time, I will remain as the ocean's surface, untouched beneath while ripples move across. For those still suffering and those who have fallen, I hope God's blessings fall upon you like spring rain and blanket you like a warm breeze. *



To Be The Oldest, And To Lose A Mother's Bond

By "Aurora"

I was raised to set standards and meet expectations. I am the oldest child in my family. Growing up, I have had to take on a role that many of my friends and siblings did not have. I didn't come from a traditional American family with a white picket fence. Both my mother and father are Hmong and were born in Laos. They fought to survive through a war, and spent several years to get where they are now.

My parents were unable to afford the best, but they always tried their hardest. They were able to buy an apartment complex and were successful for a period of time. To me, life seemed great.

But within a few years, my life, their life, and our family fell apart.

It felt like every night, I woke up crying, frightened by the screams of my parents. I remember holding my younger brother tightly, comforting him until their fight was over.

Eventually my parents finalized their divorce. I understood why my mother chose to get the divorce. She wanted a healthier environment for her, my two younger siblings and for me. She didn't want to put us in an environment where we could become victims of my father when he was under the influence of his substances.

My mom, siblings and I had to live with my grandparents, aunts, and uncle. I did not think it was bad. I was actually overjoyed because my grandparent's house was like my second home.

It was even better when I knew I would get to see all my cousins everyday when I came home from school. I always got happy when I heard my grandfather working with his tools, or hearing my little cousins running around in the backyard. I loved it when I could hear the joy and laughter everywhere.

My lifestyle changed completely. There were no more family arguments, and no more opium bowls in the cabinets.

I was completely happy. I was living with people who made me smile. I loved waking up late on weekends and catching up on gossip with my grandmother, aunts, and mother. The time I lived at my grandparent's house was when I felt happiest.

But my mom did not feel the same way completely. I didn't know what she wanted. I didn't know what I could have done to help her. I assumed she never got the attention and affection she wanted from my father.

Within a few months after my parent's divorce, she was introduced to another man and they quickly connected.

It felt like time went by so fast and yet so slow. I began to lose the relationship with my mother. Our bond faded. My aunts and I got frustrated and worried when we couldn't contact my mother because she would leave for a whole day with this other man.

I began to develop bad feelings for this man who my mother was suddenly in love with. I felt like he stole my mother away from everyone, especially from the people who needed her most, her children.

Eventually, my mom found us an apartment. We moved out of my grandparents' home. The apartment was not the best, but it was a place where I could have a bed.

For the first few nights, I slept in the living room because we didn't have beds yet. The apartment was disgusting. It was infested with cockroaches. I remember watching television one time and I felt a cockroach crawl on my leg. I still get disgusted just thinking about how many there were in that apartment. There were so many of them everywhere, crawling fast, trying to escape for the sake of their lives. I hated it.

The situation with my mom and her boyfriend worsened. He knew that she had a family to take care of, and children that she needed be with. My siblings and I were incapable of taking care of ourselves.

I felt ashamed of myself because I couldn't do anything to help my siblings, especially since I was the oldest. I felt inferior because I was supposed to make everything better when my mother wasn't there to guide us, and I couldn't. I was only 13, and so naïve.

I began to strongly dislike my mother's boyfriend and she saw that as me being disrespectful.

But I felt like he was not only disrespecting me, but the whole family. He would take her out for several days, and I felt like he brainwashed her by building a wall to isolate her from everyone who loved her. I became stubborn because I knew I had to protect both of my siblings.

To this day, it is still hard for me to watch my mother drift away from everyone and shut us out, especially because now, I am seventeen years old and this is when I need her the most to guide me, as I become a young woman. I missed out on all the mother-daughter "talks" we should have had.

With so much going on in my life around school, activities, my social life, and most importantly, church, it's hard for me to set my priorities straight when family is my biggest stress. Even with all this stress I've kept inside, I've grown so much.

Although I am the oldest child, I am still young. I need a role model, and my mom would have been the best one for me. But because of everything that has happened within the family, it is hard for me to talk to her about my personal dilemmas. I am afraid she will judge me and say I am only making matters worse. But the only thing I can do now is let her know that I love and care for her, not because I am obligated as her daughter, but because it is what I choose. *

"it is still hard for me to watch my mother drift away from everyone and shut us out"



A Room Of My Own

Challenges Of Sharing Space

By "Sammy"

As an unborn child, I lay inside my mother. I had my own room, you could say. When I was born, I still had my own room until my mom got with this guy who had daughters. I know you're thinking I might be going for a Cinderella story but this is not a fairy tale. I was only about five or six years old at the time. I can't remember everything, but I do remember that the girls were little brats. Their names were Candy & Gigi.

My mom and I had to move 'cause he wanted to, so we all moved into a two-bedroom house. How could my mom do that? It was hard for all of us. My mom and him got a room and I had to share with the girls. You would think I'd get my own room 'cause I was a boy, but nope, that didn't happen.

I slept on the floor in that room with the girls. Other nights, I would sleep on the couch. But mostly, it was the floor, and there were a few times they stepped on me while I was asleep.

I didn't have any place to go to be alone. Wherever I went, the girls came too, and they would mess up the time I would have for myself. I was always going to the backyard to get out of the house, but the next thing I knew, here came the girls right behind me. They always wanted to get me in trouble like it was a game for them.

They would lie that I did things, but I never did any of it. Like one time, they told my stepdad that I kicked one of them, then he started me pushing around, saying, "You like hitting girls, you little b****." He pushed me down and kicked me so hard that I had big purple bruises on my upper leg.

I spent most of my time in my bedroom closet. I know it's weird, but that was a thing for me. I could get in there just fine, and it was small but enough to fit me, a radio, and a few other things I wanted in there. It was great to be alone.

I would go in the closet as much as I could, and sometimes I would even sleep in there. I stayed in there until my stepdad got so mad he would tell me to get out. It seems like every time I had something good for myself, he hated it and didn't want me to be happy. He and I never got along, and we couldn't be happy with one another.

My mom was always working so I never really saw her. The only time I did was when she was sleeping or getting ready for work. When I came home from school, my stepdad would make me do the things he was supposed to do. I was the only boy on my block that mowed the lawn because everyone else's dad was doing it instead.

I thought it was wrong 'cause I was only nine years old.

When the days ended, I would make a little bed on the floor and get ready for the next day even though I didn't want it to come. Sometimes I even dreamt of having my own room and what it would be like, but my dream ended when the sun would come up. I couldn't take staying there, but I also couldn't take school either. School was difficult. The work was painful and the teachers were mean to me. I was a good kid but I couldn't do a lot of my schoolwork. But still, school was better than being home.

This living situation went on until I hit my freshmen year of high school. I moved in with my grandma. For years, I bugged my mom to let me live with my grandma until out of nowhere, on the day of my grandma's birthday, she said I could! My grandma and I were so happy.

At my grandma's, the only problem was I still didn't have my own room. My room was the living room, so I still couldn't do what I wanted, like sing, dance, or act like the crazy fool I am. Yet I stayed in the living room and got used to it.

Living with my grandma was so much better. I don't have to do anything at all at her apartment. There was no yard work, and I was always good about putting my things away and keeping my space clean. Living with my grandma was like living with a friend. We talked like friends, and it was different then living with my mom.

Now, I'm eighteen years old and I still don't have my own room. I still live with my grandma.

I'd like to be on my own someday. To have my own place would feel just as good as getting a first car or going on a shopping spree. In order to get my own place, I would have to save up money and possibly get a roommate who could help pay for expenses, like rent, electricity bill, internet, and all that good stuff. And of course, I'd have to get a good paying job.

It's important for me to be on my own at some point...to have that space I need and want would help me be free. One day, I hope to finally have a room of my own. *

Stress Like Never Before



TO SURVIVE MY SENIOR YEAR

It's only the start of my bittersweet senior year, and it's already full of headaches, stress and confusion. Homework headaches and only getting six hours of sleep have become the norm. Stress about passing my Advanced Placement classes and meeting all the college requirements. More stress about whether or not I'll be accepted into the college I want to attend. Confusion about the new path I've begun to walk, and confusion about whether it's right for me.

Just the other night, I got so frustrated with my homework that I began to get a headache. Lately it feels like my headaches have grown worse. Sometimes they get so bad that I stop doing my homework.

I have no idea where all this stress about college came from. Maybe it started with fulfilling the A-G requirements, or maybe it was all the testing I had to do. I've taken, and retaken the SAT reasoning test, the SAT subject tests, and the ACT. I've looked up scholarship and financial aid information. I've done almost everything I can, and yet I still wonder if I will be accepted into any college.

Have I really met the A-G requirements? Is there a chance I missed one by accident? Have I passed all my classes? Did I do good enough on all my tests? How am I going to pay for college?! What else am I forgetting? What else do I have left to do? Will I be accepted, and be amongst the chosen few who receive a congratulatory letter?

With budget cuts hitting many educational institutions so hard, it has been a challenge to get into any college. Many of them have begun to cut back on college enrollment. Some have changed their policies.

These changes make me wonder if there will be a spot for me in college. These budget cuts have definitely been hard on the present, but it adds more stress to my future. These days, because of the declining economy, it feels like it's a bad time to leave high school and enter college, or even just the work force!

My parents worked hard to come to America as Laotian refugees so their kids could have a better future. Sometimes it gets hard because they don't understand what I'm going through since they did not have college as an option in Laos.

Before, my parents didn't really talk to me about college, but now, I am constantly bugging them about college and whether or not they'll let me leave Fresno so I can attend a college outside of Fresno. They used to say "no" when I asked them that question, but now, they might allow me to leave Fresno because they see all the challenges that Fresno State University is facing.

Now, my parents know the importance of college and more importantly, they know what careers they want me to pursue. Like many other parents, my parents want me to be a lawyer or a doctor.

If I don't get into a four-year university, then I will have to attend a community college, which isn't a bad thing, but it will be my last resort. Community colleges offer a great alternative for students who are still figuring things out, but I would rather attend a four-year university.

All my older brothers want me to attend a four-year university. One of my brothers even felt that when he attended a community college, it felt too much like high school, which he did not like. Many of his friends have also dropped out. I guess my biggest problem with community college is that I'm afraid I'll drop out too. Whatever the case, I'd rather not take the path my brother took, and he doesn't want me to either.

Now that I've filled out a couple of college applications, taken the exams, and applied for EOP (Educational Opportunity Program), I feel as if everything from now on, in my life, is no longer going to be easy. Before, I had the luxury of my brothers and parents guiding me, but from now on, it's as if I'm on my own.

For many people, this is life changing. This is when people decide what they want to be in life, what they want for the

rest of their lives. This is when people decide to enter the workforce or go to college. This is the stress of an end and the start of a new beginning.

I know I'm not the only one stressed. I know there are lots of advisors and counselors available to help me. But even with everyone, I still feel so alone and unsure. There's this uncertainty about whether or not I'll be accepted. There's doubt about whether I've done everything and if I've done it correctly.

For me, I'm still unsure of whether this will be life changing. I'm still not even sure about what I want to do with the rest of my life. I guess only time will tell.

Even with all the stress, I'm going to keep taking steps forward to my new beginning. I'm hopeful that there will be a spot for me in college. In the end, it'll all be worth it and the stress will be another thing in the past, and next fall, I'll be sitting in a college class. *

"I've done almost everything I can, and yet I still wonder if I will be accepted into any college."

My First Semester:

Lessons Learned In College

By Dasen Thao

It was a beautiful morning. I woke up around 6am on my first day of college. I got ready and gathered my supplies as I headed out the door and gave my mother a hug. She knew it was going to be serious work for me because I was now attending a university. For me, it was just another day of going to a new school, but a special one that holds the key to my career.

I knew I had to get there early because of parking issues. From what I heard, parking can be difficult to find, especially during the first couple weeks.

I reached Fresno State around 6:45am, and I began to wander around the campus to look for my classes. After I found all the rooms, I reported to my first class that morning at 8:00am. My professor was nice and easy going. She cracked a joke and told the freshman students in our class how fun and exciting college can be.

Then she went over the syllabus with the class and answered all our questions. From looking at the syllabus, I realized how relaxing college was going to be because there would be plenty of time for me to complete my assignments. Calculating my time, the work did not seem so heavy, and I figured I could handle it just fine.

The rest of my classes that day went similarly as this first one did. Everything we will do in the course was all on the syllabus and if there were any be changes, the instructor would let us know ahead of time.

At that moment, I began to realize I'd have much more time on my hands than I thought. So it happened. A strange feeling began to develop inside me. I was unable to suppress it.

Since there was so much free time, I kept telling myself I would do my assignments by the end of the day. But then it never happened because I would drag it on to the next day, especially since I knew the class wouldn't meet again until a few days.

I had my financial aid money to cover my tuition and books, so I spent most of my time eating out and hanging out in the Student Union, where I played pool, bowling, and other fun activities. I remember how I would stop by the Student Union everyday during my breaks and after school to meet up with friends and socialize. I took for granted my time to study. There was a sense of independence that enabled me to dwell around and only do my work whenever I felt like it.

College is fun, perhaps too much fun that it tricks me into doing unnecessary things that might not benefit my career. Everyday on campus, clubs, organizations, sororities, fraternities, and other programs are having events, which distracts me.

It gets hectic when I get behind on my studies. But it shouldn't, because everything I need to know about the course and the assignments are on the syllabus. In college, I always know what's coming up next if I keep up with the syllabus, but some of my professors aren't very good at reminding students about deadlines.

It was different in high school. All of my teachers would usu-

ally let the whole class know about assignment deadlines and test dates. So I was dependent on the professors to tell me when they wanted something turned in on time and to remind the class about test dates. Unfortunately, I was only hurting myself because I finally figured out that my professors were not there to pamper me. It's either I do the work and turn everything in on time, or I can kiss my "A" goodbye.

It was hard for me to do most of my assignments because some of my classes required me to print out worksheets. Some assignments were five to ten pages long. And the worse part is that my printer broke! So printing my assignments at school cost me a good fortune.

The professors were not allowed to make copies of worksheets for students because the university couldn't provide enough white paper and ink for everyone. So they make students pay for it themselves to test if students are serious about taking the course and serious about their education. This impacts me because it means I have to work extra hard on printing while staying on top of my assignments.

As the semester went by, I began to see how my procrastination was seeping deeper and taking me into a direction that wasn't healthy for me. There was no one to baby-sit me or tell me when to finish my work. It's not that I don't have any motivation but the transition from high school to college has been a difficult one.

I knew I needed to refocus my mind on my assignments and on the syllabus. My grades were not good so I pushed harder in my studies. I stopped going to the Student Union during my breaks and started attending tutorial in the library. I set a goal. I could only go to the Student Union whenever I was hungry or needed a break from classes. Now, I only take about ten to fifteen minutes in there.

I've learned that college can't just be about fun. It requires hard work. My mother has high hopes for me and I cannot fail her by wasting all my time doing fun things. There are times when I see her so upset and stressed that she wants to leave this world behind to be with my father, who passed away a few years ago. I feel like my siblings and I have disappointed her because none of her sons can make her satisfied up to the point where she can tell the world that she has a son who is done with college and has obtained a degree.

Although being a college student can be harsh, it has already taught me several lessons. I learned that time is valuable and we must make time or we will never find time to do anything. I also learned that I should never try to rush the work for each class.

Now, even if I get the work done, I try to study for the next lesson or review my previous lessons. And I try not to get too distracted so I can complete my priorities before I have my fun. *

"I kept telling myself I would do my assignments by the end of the day. But then it never happened."

The Respect Women Deserve From A Guy's Point Of View

By Luis Pacheco // Photo by Jef Bettens

One day I was leaving the mall with my family. We were walking toward my uncle's car. Then suddenly in the distance, I saw a pregnant woman at the entrance doors. There was a whole group of men standing next to the door, and the woman had to struggle with opening the door by herself. I felt like the guys were being disrespectful because they didn't even think to open the door for her.

As a guy, I am beginning to realize more and more, as I get older, how a lot of men don't give women any respect. Not all men are that way, a lot of them do give women respect, but there are still a lot of men out there who don't.

When I was two years old, my mother left my father because he was seeing another woman. As I got older, I began to understand what that meant. I realized how he did not give my mother the respect she deserved. My mother didn't want to stay with someone like him.

My mother survived that incident and raised my siblings and me on her own. Today, she is the head of the house. I have a step-father, and he supports the family as well. But my mother's experience teaches me that some men, like my own father, can be really disrespectful to women.

I don't know, maybe that's why I feel so strongly about this issue. It hurts me to see women treated badly, but it also hurts because it gives guys a bad name.

I see how this issue plays out with teenagers and media. Every time I go onto YouTube, I check for new music videos, and then I also see the related videos. I look there to see if there are any funny videos, and then I find all sorts of videos that have to do with bad relationships where men abuse women. I can tell that many people enjoy watching these videos because the videos have been viewed so many times.

From my perspective, I think guys hurt women because they want something from

them. Sometimes if they don't get what they want, they might do awful things to women. Usually what some guys want from women is sex! That also explains why some men rape women.

For example, in October 2009, a rape took place outside Richmond High School in the San Francisco Bay Area where teenage boys raped a girl while others stared and took pictures. When I heard about it, I felt angry, sad as well. To me, rape is like killing a life. When there's a rape, and no one's there to see it, it's still wrong, but when there's people watching, that's just plain horrible.

If I had been there, I would have done something to stop it. I would have taken a risk to save that girl. Those teenage boys showed no respect.

In ninth grade, I had guy friends who had sisters. I would go to their house to hang out and I would see them hitting their own sisters when their mom wasn't around, for stupid reasons, like if their sisters went in their room when they weren't supposed to. It made me realize they were different at home than at school, and that they didn't respect their own sisters.

I admit that I myself have disrespected girls in the past. When I was in seventh grade, I used to mess with some girls who were my friends and put them down. I used to call them the "B" word, and it would hurt them badly because I would seem them cry.

I've changed though. I'm not that guy anymore. I've learned to respect every female. I want women to get the respect they need because they are human beings too, just like men.

I changed because there were people telling me I was a bad person. I want people to like me instead of having everyone hate on me. I changed so people could stop calling me a bad person, and start calling me a good person.

My mother worked very hard and suffered so that my siblings and I could have a better life. I respect her for that. She has always been there for me. She taught me the difference between good and bad, and from her, I learned how important it is to respect every woman. *

"I would go to their house to hang out and I would see them hitting their own sisters."



Poetry

Reboot By Dasen Thao

I can learn quick,
by just looking at
the directions given.
Trust me, I'm a pro.
I hardly make mistakes.
I can do what you want me
to, process, store info.
Yet with just a click here,
and there,
I'm back to the babbling stages,
getting ready to learn my ABCs.

The Candle By Miguel Martinez

So bright
yet so dull,
that I can't find
my way through the life
I live.

Its absence leaves me
blind on the road to
success.

A flickering countdown.

So slow, yet it
reminds me how fast
my life is slipping
through my
own two hands.

Turning Liquid By Yee Leng Vang

Darkness falls upon my eyes.
Something bright shines ahead.
It's small but there, igniting my way,
turning liquid as time goes by.

It paves the way for my escape.
No, it's not a torch, a lamp, or lantern.
It's small but there, igniting my way,
turning liquid as time goes by.

It sways, back and forth,
and diminishes if I blow air on it,

but strangely, air is its life.

It sways back and forth,
catches my eye. It doesn't do anything
but keep me company for if it were
not there, I would be blind.
It's small but igniting my way,
turning liquid as time goes by.

Untitled By Jaleesa Vickers

A dancing petal,
encased in a white, glazed mouth—
A smoldering post.

Untitled By Jaleesa Vickers

The glowing kiss, born from a single stroke,
sipping air, passing by—
the embers die ever so slowly.

Bountiful Harvest By Jaleesa Vickers

This is the time when the sun
descends below the horizon—the ground
is cool, dry, hearty and beautiful with
thick golden hairs—of all distant things
is the time of ripeness—the ground I
know crumbles away, I am swept off my
feet from the side, scythed, robbed of time
to grow and flourish—the sun is tucked
below my eyes.

Untitled By Kevis McGee

The luminous glow flickers
and dances in the shadows.
As I put my hand over it, I feel the
warm, almost cozy feeling caress
the palm of my hand.
I retract my hand to smell
the faint scent of smoke
from the scorching stem.

Untitled By Chanda Clark

Like an orchid,
you blossom beautifully.
Like a rose,
you are strong, radiant.
Like a violet,
you are true to yourself.

CONSTANT RECOVERY:

Fighting My Drug Addiction

By Marcus Vega



It was a choice at first, and then it became a part of my life. Not a need, just an earthly pleasure, an escape from reality. It was there for consumption, and it made me enjoy the chemical reaction that occurred in my body and mind when I used it.

I have been smoking marijuana for about six years. I have also tried other drugs, but my taste for them was limited.

My mother started using drugs early in her life. It consumed her. Nothing else mattered and she acted as though that was her purpose in life. My grandmother used to drink. She quit early in my childhood. As for my brother, he too shared this alcohol and drug abuse disease.

My drug abuse started before I even had knowledge of what drugs were. At the age of 12, my older brother offered me my first hit off a joint. When I took that first drag, my chest felt like it was on fire and my head felt like it was in the clouds. Everything else after that fell into place.

I liked marijuana best, but I also tried other drugs too, such as cocaine, meth, poison, and other substances. I even mixed some of the drugs together to prolong the intense high. Nothing mattered. I was in my own world.

When I'm under the influence, physically, I feel like I'm floating in a room without a ceiling and my chest feels like it's on fire. Mentally, I feel like I'm on a mountain, staring down like an eagle.

But then, as I continued to abuse drugs, I began to feel its negative effects. I remember I was in my friend's front yard, just chilling. It was a few days after getting high and putting in what I felt was the grocery list of substances. Standing there, I began to feel dry and weak. I looked around as a blanket of confusion covered me. I began to collapse in his front yard. It felt like the worse moment of my life. I couldn't move my body. I felt like cement.

I shook it off as my friend gave me some water. He offered me a place to sit down. That was the only time anything like that had ever happened to me.

Then in 2007, my drug abuse got the worst of me. This was during the time I was in foster care. My guardian and I went to visit one of her relatives. I wasn't using anything except marijuana. I felt sick. She thought I had the flu or something. I was sitting down. I drank a

glass of water, the only thing that would stay down for a moment.

Suddenly, I felt dizzy, and then I ran to the bathroom. I hit the wall, and it felt like my internal organs had fallen out. After arriving at the hospital, I continued to vomit into a small trashcan that I carried with me over there. The doctor did an x-ray and determined that it was an inflammation of my large intestine.

From my hospital experience, I learned never to consume any unnatural substances and to take better care of myself.

Then a year later, I moved into a living center for teens. I didn't smoke much, but I did now and then. They found out about my drug usage, and soon, I was told I would have to enter a rehab program.

The rehab program was a month long. I learned a lot of stuff from the people, from myself and from the counselors. I got to talk with people from different backgrounds ranging from those who distribute drugs to those who were full-blown addicts. Overall, I met some good people.

At rehab, I learned that I had a problem and my perception of the world was clouded. I learned to focus on my problems before another one arises, and just talk to someone, open up, and see my faults. I learned more about who I was.

I also learned that if a person is weak-minded, s/he will fall victim to the addiction of drugs. It's a progressive disease that if left untreated, will prove to be fatal. Also, people who begin to abuse drugs are obsessed with the thought of getting high.

I can say that because of what I've been through, I have become a better person. Now, if I don't have it, then I don't need it. I know more now, and wouldn't do anything stupid for the substance.

Sometimes, I miss being high though. Everyday is a challenge because I never know whom I may run into, and if that person may offer me something to smoke. It's an ongoing fight that I haven't completely won. Everyday I'm faced with temptation, and time and again, I fall victim to the addiction. It's a constant struggle, a test of will and only I can decide the outcome. *

“It’s an ongoing fight that I haven’t completely won”



To Put Down That Drink: STORIES OF THOSE FIGHTING ALCOHOLISM

By Angelina Thao

What does it take to be an alcoholic? How many drinks, sips, cans, bottles, hangovers or DUIs does it take to be put in that category?

I was never sure myself, but I used to think that as soon as you become drunk, you are an alcoholic. As a young person, I didn't know much. But to tell you the truth, I have taken sips of that nasty bitter liquid. Thankfully I don't drink today and it was just that one time.

My brother drinks and when I asked him why he likes to drink, he simply said, "It's the feeling you get when you're buzzed."

I find it useless that my brothers and teen cousins sit around, drink, and debate about silly things when they're buzzed or drunk. I don't like it when my brothers drink even when it's only sometimes. I know a lot of young people who drink and I'm sure that by now, many high school students have tasted beer.

Recently, I had the opportunity to hear some inspiring stories from two young women who were alcoholics but are overcoming their addiction by going to Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). It was really fascinating to get the inside scoop from people who had been through it themselves.

"Tina" is in her mid 20's and was once a victim of alcohol's deadly addiction. Growing up, she was a normal kid like everyone else. She was a good student, a cheerleader and a dancer who belonged to a picture-perfect family.

But in high school, whenever she ran into problems, she would drink, and even when she didn't have problems, she would still drink. It was up to the point where she would get drunk every night. Because of her alcoholism, her relationship with her family began to fade and they began to lose trust in her.

Finally, she moved to Los Angeles for college but she eventually got kicked out due to drinking. She even totaled her car in an accident!

Afterward, she lived with her boyfriend for a while, and he was in a gang. Tina finally left him, but then she became homeless and lived on the streets of Hollywood with just her laptop, dog and cowgirl boots. She finally made the call back home and got the help she needed.

Tina went to many rehab programs and never enjoyed the experience. At one point, she was in rehab for a while and then got transferred to another rehab place just for girls. She remembers sneaking in alcohol, and drinking in the closet!

When I heard this I was shocked. I thought to myself that the purpose of rehab is to get help, but it's hard to get help if you continue drinking while you are there. Tina was upset with the whole rehab experience and just didn't seem to care anymore.

But after being there for a while she eventually got out. She found out about AA and started attending meetings. She didn't know she was an alcoholic. She thought AA was just a bunch of older people talking about how miserable life is but as she kept on going to the meetings, she soon grew attached.

Tina has been sober for a long time now and she says that being sober is weird for her but she's getting used to it. When Tina started to tell her story, I was like, oh my god, she is still alive and well and standing here in front of me. It was hard for her to get back on track from what she went through, but people can be helped if they accept the help that is out there trying to reach them.

Today, Tina is back home in Fresno, working to rebuild the relationship with her family.

"Nicole", with her fashionable short hawk hair, is in her late 20's. She came from a

loving and supportive family, and she had an awesome older sister. She hung out with her sister a lot and kind of did what her sister did. Her sister would go to bars, and Nicole would go to.

Nicole drank with the college crew and couldn't wait to go to college. As soon as she got out of high school she went to college and did all the partying and drinking she could do. She hung out at bars most of the time. Her grades weren't the best so she dropped out and came back home and moved to a small town near Fresno. A friend introduced her to AA. She tagged along and liked it a lot, and eventually became responsible for making coffee at the meetings. AA worked for her as well! Now she now teaches at a charter school in a small town near Fresno.

Hearing what Tina and Nicole went through amazes and inspires me. I've learned from their stories that I should never give up on myself. Tina, Nicole, and many members of AA are living proof that anything is possible if you are determined to see it through.

Their stories remind me that my brother can overcome his alcoholism. I hope one day he comes to that realization, before he drinks his life away. *

"Because of her alcoholism, her relationship with her family began to fade."



NEWS FLASH!

Update on The California Youth Graduation Empowerment Project

By The Center for Multicultural Cooperation (CMC)

We were just notified that we got a \$5,000 grant to support this project! The California Youth Graduation Empowerment Project (YGEP) is led by students with CMC and a grant from State Farm Insurance. We were able to give mini-grants to six regions in California to create their own YGEP summits. In April, in a partnership with WestED, we conducted a statewide Web Dialogue that included over 350 students who voiced their opinions and recommendations. In September, we were able to bring the leaders from across California together for a YGEP summit in Fresno.

The Fresno Youth Service Council, co-sponsored by the CMC and the Fresno County Office of Education, had the privilege of taking 35 students to the Fresno County Graduation Summit in October. Student leaders were given half an hour to present their recommendations to reduce the dropout rate of one-third in our county.

On December 2, a group of YGEP group leaders presented their recommendations to the California Superintendent of Schools, Jack O'Connell. He supported the recommendation that students should have a voice in solving problems that affect them.

He agreed that service learning was a good way for students to learn and he said he has worked hard to provide students with more opportunities for career education. His staff agreed to work with YGEP leaders to set up a presentation by student leaders to education policymakers in the fall of 2010.

Students interested in participating in this campaign for change are invited to come to the next Fresno Youth Service Council meeting on Monday, January 11, 5:30-7:30, at the CMC office, 2425 Fresno Street, room 201. At this meeting, students will plan activities, including a leadership retreat at Wonder Valley Ranch. For more information contact Jenn Gaxiola at jengaxiola13@gmail.com.*



Blog Writings

Visit www.theknowfresno.org for more writings!

When Adults Do Funny Things By The kNOw Youth Media, Various Authors

Money-Stasher

A funny moment I remember about my grandmother is how she would stash money every time we had guests over. She had guests almost every day so she had a habit of stashing money. The funny part is when my cousins and I would watch her as she ran around the house trying to find the money she stashed after her guests were gone. It's still funny today but I know it was frustrating for her so of course I helped her. Or there were times I would come across the money while cleaning my room or while putting my things where they really belonged. Those were funny moments.

-Jesse

My Dad's Hip-Hop Tunes

I love listening to music when I'm in the car. I always listen to music in the car whether I'm driving or in my dad's car. Some of my best memories of my dad and I are in the car listening to music.

When I'm in the car, I usually listen to hip-hop stations and since my dad barely speaks or understands English, it can be a problem for him. Sometimes the songs on the radio stations I listen to irritate him; however, on my dad's good days, you can catch him singing along to the songs.

One day, when I was about ten, my dad and I were driving home from the hospital. A song by Nelly, "E.I." came on. My dad began to sing "E-I" along with the song, and it was funny. That song is a fairly old song, so it is hardly played on the radio anymore.

One day when my dad was driving, and a song came on the radio; my dad turned to me and said, "Why don't they play E.I. anymore?" I looked at him, stunned because I could not believe he just asked why they stopped playing E.I. I guess E.I. is really my dad's favorite song.

-Arena

My Mother's Fascination With J-Lo

As I recall one day sitting on my couch, watching TRL Live on MTV, listening to a J-Lo music video, my mother sat on the couch to watch it with me. She started to make fun of the way J-Lo was dancing because she was just moving her hips around and waving her figure in the air. My mom then had the brilliant idea to mock what J-Lo was doing and then called herself "J-Lo." My mom said she should get paid just as much as J-Lo, or more, because my mom has bigger hips and a bigger butt.

From that day on, my mom was known as "J-Lo" and whenever my friends come over, she does her little imitation of J-Lo for them, which in my case, is really embarrassing because that's just too much of my mother to be moving around.

-Gracie

Sex Education

I recall when I was around eleven years old, my mother attempted to teach me about sex. The funny thing was she grabbed a pie server and a Ziploc bag and told me that the male part is the pie server and the condom is the Ziploc bag. I looked at her astonished.

-Marcus

Silly Senior Moments

My dad is a strong and tough man. He's the type you won't see crying often or laughing either. But when it comes to directly saying the names of my siblings and I, he stutters. It's funny how he names all of my siblings and my name a couple of times really fast and finally, after a while, settles on the one he wants to call. You can say he was getting old but it's funny how he did that. He goes through everyone's name to get to my name, just to ask me to do the dishes. I find it really silly of my tough, almost perfect dad. LOL! My aunt also does this as well. I guess it's in their blood.

This one time, my dad came into my sister's room while all of us girls were in there and called out all of our names before settling upon my sister's name. My dad would always laugh after finding the correct name. I actually started on this same "can't-find-the-correct-name" habit and I even say my own name in it too. Whenever I do this, it reminds me of my silly and tough-guy dad.

-Angelina

My Dad's Random Acts Of Thunder

Sitting in the living room, watching television with my family. Then all of a sudden, my father farts out of nowhere and says he hears thunder. He tries to hide the fact that he was the one who farted, and he even asks who farted. But obviously, all of us know it was him because he is always chuckling.

-Gracie

The Mask

My grandma is a very tiny person. Yet there is so much energy and anger in her tiny body. I guess that's where I get my short temper. My brother made a Hanuman monkey mask for a dance performance at Fresno State. Somehow the mask got to my grandma's house. My little cousin Janice was staying at her house and happened to find the mask quite creepy. One day I was visiting and Janice was misbehaving as usual. My grandma went into her room. She came out chasing Janice around wearing the Hanuman mask. I thought that was the funniest thing.

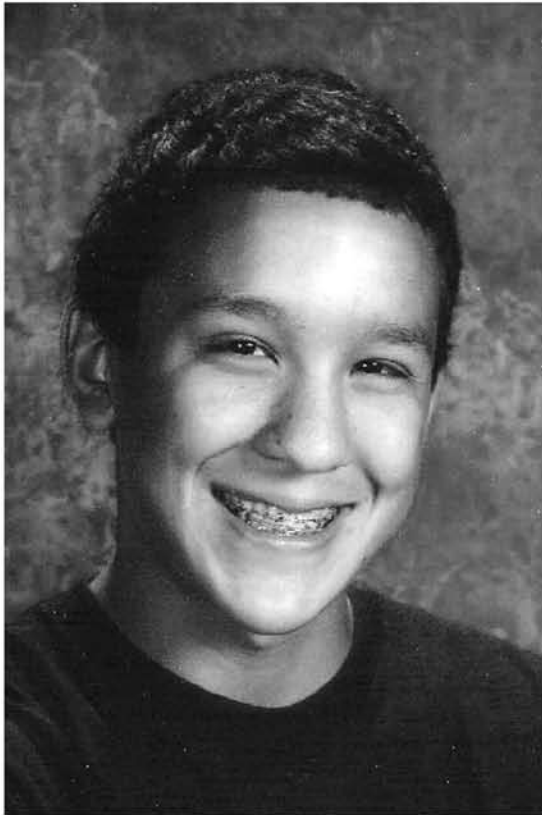
-Victoria

Party Mama

I was at a party and my friend's mom heard a Michael Jackson song and she was screaming, "Owwwhh!" over and over. She was saying that that's what Michael does in his songs. I couldn't stop laughing. My friend was embarrassed.

I guess older people don't mean to act that way in front of youth, but that's just how they are. They can't help it. They are just trying to have fun, just like us, and they can't help what they do. But if that were my mom, it wouldn't be funny. Young people like us think that our parents are uncool, which makes it hard to have friends over, but when you think about it, parents want to have fun too!

-Demar



The kNOw congratulates Juan Cardona, the 2009 Youth Award recipient of the Fresno West Coalition for Economic Development's 5th Annual Risk Taker, Dream Makers Awards Luncheon.

Juan has had many challenges in his life that he has had to overcome, from learning to speak English when he was 6 years old to smaller ones, such as making the cut as a player on his 5th grade basketball team. The biggest challenge of all took place recently when he spoke in front of hundreds of people, including the City of Fresno's Chief of Police, Council Members, and United States Congressmen. He wanted to share with them the challenges he has faced in his life, his dreams for the future and his goals as an advocate for the Dream Act so that other youth are able to achieve their dreams.

Every year, 65,000 undocumented seniors graduate high school. Because they have no citizenship in the United States, it is difficult for them to go on to college and follow their dreams. Juan is a youth leader with Faith In Community and he is working hard to pass the Dream Act so that those undocumented students can continue on to follow their dreams. Juan is involved in many sports and extracurricular activities. He has helped at his church as an altar server, and has been in the GATE Program since fourth grade.

Juan has maintained a 4.0 GPA for five years. He would like to attend Stanford University and his career goal is to be a Doctor. He has lived in Fresno for eight years, and his biggest role models are his parents. Juan hopes to finish college so that he can support them since they have sacrificed so much for him.



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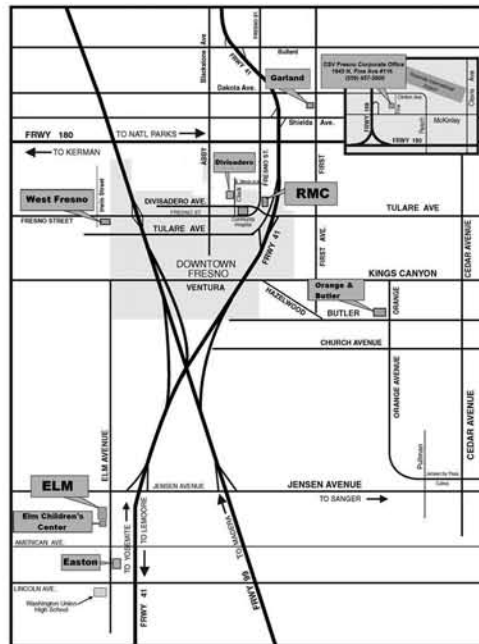
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Continued from page 5 “Losing The Family Bond”

Her relationship with my mom wasn't great, but they still communicated and they both knew that no matter how much distance they tried to put between them, they were still mother and daughter. I know she is still my sister. Everything went back to normal until my sister's graduation day. I was so happy for her and I couldn't wait until she went off to college so I could talk to her on the phone.

Well, that graduation day, my mom started taking pictures and it was my turn to take a picture with my sister. I didn't want to, not because I didn't care about her. For some reason, I just didn't want to. Then I blurted out, “No, because once I take this last picture with her, I'm not going to have the same relationship with her like I do now.” Still, my mom told me to take a picture with my sister.

After that night, I hardly saw my sister. But I would see her sometimes with this guy or that guy. They were just friends, she would tell me. Well, I'm a junior in high school now, and she's still gone from the house. She rarely comes over. She calls only when she wants something or when she's hungry.

I was right about she and I not having the same relationship. She seems mad all the time now. I try to go over to see her and go out with her, but she makes excuses. I'm beginning to learn that maybe this is just life.

My other sister, the last sister who left, didn't leave when she was eighteen. She left when she was sixteen years old. Therefore, she was considered a “runaway.” She ran away plenty of other times but this time, she was gone for good. I missed her more because we did so much together and she always made me laugh.

I remember also going to school with her. I remember how she would push me around, but I liked it because she would never hurt me. It was just fun. Now I don't see her as often. Everything for her revolves around her boyfriend. They have been together for a long

time but I don't know why she doesn't just come over for a day without him.

We used to go to the mall and to the movies. Now if we go, he goes too. I'm slowly starting to go back to hanging out with her because she is trying to bring our relationship back. It's cool because she calls me and talks to me, and we make plans to do things. Maybe I still have a chance with her.

For me, my sibling's stories are ones about the loss of family, laughter, fun and relationship, all that was once there. Today, it's just my little sister, my little brother and me.

My little sister and I are five years apart. We used to go to the same elementary school and we were close, but now, it's gotten bad. We fight, yell, and argue over the littlest things. We used to go to the pizza parlor up the street, or to the movies, just her and me. We don't do that anymore. I don't know why. Maybe it's the age difference. It hurts me though, inside. I don't show it, but it's there.

This is my story of losing my family. As much as I try to bring back the relationships, they aren't coming back. That doesn't mean I'm going to stop trying. It just means I'm going to try harder.

It's starting to happen between my mom and I, but I'm not going to lose her. I love her a lot and she's the only one I have. I sometimes believe that I'm just imagining these things but I think again, and it is my reality.

I guess it is part of life. As we get older, our head becomes full with memories. If you feel that you are separating from a family member, don't let it happen. It's hard to get back.

From time to time, I catch myself in a daze while I'm in the car or while I'm doing dishes, just thinking about what used to be and how I can get it all back. *

Continued from page 11 “No Matter What”

thing. Each time she tried to help Sol, he would beat her too. All the mother could do was act like nothing was wrong. When she was alone with her daughter, they would comfort one another.

Then the day came when Sol found out she was pregnant. Her brother found out what was going on when she went to visit him. He was furious, and when he took her home, he beat up the stepdad to the point where the stepdad ended up in the hospital.

Sol went to live with her brother, but after a while, she wanted to go back to her mom. She wouldn't say why, but when I asked her, she told me her stepdad threatened her, that if she didn't go back, he would hurt her mom.

After a while, things returned to normal, somewhat. I wasn't able to see her though because they moved. The only time I was able to talk to her was when she would sneak around and call me. They were like five-minute calls, and at the most, ten minutes. That's how I came to know her life.

In a way, we liked similar things and acted the same, but we were so different at the same time. When I was around her, I felt whole and each second she wasn't near, I felt like I wasn't myself.

Sol had her baby around June. She called him Prince. He was the most beautiful baby I'd ever seen.

Then, on July 21, 2006, everything went bad. It was the day I found out what happened. It felt like déjà vu.

Just the day before on July 20, I saw Sol and we spent the whole day at the mall. Later that night, I had a nightmare. I dreamt that she was jumping off some apartments. There was yelling and Sol's voice was loud. She was trying to run away and lock herself in her room. The baby was crying in another room and the door was pounding. I heard a man's voice yell, “Open up the door!”

In the dream, the man opened the door and he was holding a beer-shaped bottle. With one hand he threw Sol to the ground. She was screaming to be left alone. A lady, probably her mother, was yelling at him to get off her. The baby was crying his lungs out. Then there was a loud crash. The door came down and another man ran

in and grabbed the man who was beating Sol. He threw Sol's attacker against the wall and began to kick and sock him.

Sol managed to get out through the window. She climbed up instead of down the stairs. Before I woke up, her face became clear. I felt like I was next to her and without even knowing, I heard the words, “I love you” as she began to fall off an apartment building. That's when I woke up.

Weeks passed and I waited for Sol to call. Since she was on lockdown, she couldn't really call anyone. When she finally called, I cried with joy just to hear her voice. We told each other that we loved each other and hung up.

Days went by and I received another call. It was August 21, and this time, it wasn't Sol, it was her brother's voice on the other end. My heart dropped like if I was drowning in my tears, which began to run down my face as he told me what happened.

To this day, I feel like it was my fault because I could have stopped it by telling her about my dream. I could have encouraged her to get help, and to talk to someone about her problems, but I didn't react because she asked me to stay out of it. But I had that dream, and I believe that dream meant something was wrong.

I couldn't believe she was gone until I saw her tombstone. I still have those dreams, and when it happens I get that déjà vu feeling.

After her death, I started to feel depressed and confused, which led me to cut myself. It was a way of hiding my pain. It got to the point where I felt like dying, but each time I came close, her words would pop in my head. Those words have stayed with me, “It's not worth it to give up, so don't and whenever you want to, just remember I love you and no matter what I will always remain with you.”

Now, as I look at my niece today and after thinking about Sol, I realize that maybe I do know the answer to my niece's question. I will tell my niece that most people choose to be mean because they think it's cool to pick on people who are different, when really, it is better for us all to be different because it shows how we are beautiful in our own unique way. *

Continued from page 13 “Embracing Courage”

they fled to the mountains because the swells in the ocean were getting bigger.

We arrived home and found my dad on the phone with my uncle in Hawaii. He confirmed that our family was okay. But he also said that the death toll was rising fast.

A stream of tears flowed down my face like rain at a window. Deep inside, I felt like I was dying from all of this. The pain was unbearable. My people were suffering and I felt like I couldn't do anything but watch.

Though I felt alone inside, other fellow Samoans from my church congregation cried those tears too and felt the pain I felt. I prayed to God for comfort and assurance that the islands would emerge stronger than before.

Later, as I slouched over the edge of my bed and talked to God, I began to sing. I bowed my head and silently sang the words to Amazing Grace. I found myself thinking of the victims and once I again I began to cry.

I soon gathered enough faith to put myself to work so I could help my fellow Samoans. I waited impatiently for the weekend to finally come. At my church, we usually have weekly car washes, where all the proceeds go toward the church. But on this particular weekend, the donations would be for our people in Samoa.

On Saturday, at nine in the morning, I started by holding up

signs near streets and yelling for donations. The community responded well to our cause, and thousands of people came to get their car washed, or donate money or clothes. They came and gave what they could.

As the day went by, my donations bucket got heavier. The community donated about \$5,000!

Today, things are slowly getting better as I, and many of my fellow Samoans, are looking to God for strength and comfort to move forward and be stronger than before.

From this painful tragedy, I realized how culture affects who I am. I was not born in Samoa, yet I and other Samoan-American youth mourned as if we had been.

I am not just an ordinary American teenager. I am a Samoan who has successfully been the change I wanted to see, and will continue to be proud to call myself Samoan.

I have been reminded of what it means to be who I am. Instead of sitting around and mourning, my people have started to rebuild. For me, the meaning of being Samoan has changed forever. It now means to share, with the world, the passion and respect we share with one another as fellow Samoans, and more importantly, to embrace courage in tough times. *

Continued from page 12 “Hmong Marriage”

I think my family has a decent reputation. We don't have a lot of family issues with others and we keep to ourselves. We don't put ourselves out there to get a bad name. I remember we only had one major problem with another family but we resolved that problem with a marriage between my sister and one of their sons.

It wasn't a forced marriage because they fell in love. It did create controversy at first because my dad hated their family, but my sister and the guy were in love. My parents did not want to interfere and so they allowed the marriage. They are loving parents, but they are strict. It will be hard for me to obtain what I want in life.

I've been with Sheng for about two years. We have our good times and our bad, but no matter what, we're always there for each other. It hurts me to think that things might not work out for us in the future, even though right now, we have a pretty serious relationship. Sheng wants to get married, but not yet of course.

I feel very uncertain. I'm afraid I won't be able to marry her because of strict family rules and because of tradition. I don't know what my father will think, if he will allow it.

I feel like my father's opinion always has rule over my happiness. He will decide if I can get married or not. I am the youngest son in the family, which means I also bear the cultural responsibility of taking care of my parents, as they get older. I want to be happy, but I want them to be happy as well.

My mom always says to me, “If you keep being mean to us, we won't help you when you decide to get married.” I feel horrible when I hear that. Sometimes I feel like I should just run away but I don't want my parents to feel like I've run out on them.

Hmong traditions are complicated and I still don't understand everything, especially the bride price. It's what the groom pays the wife's family, more of a gift to thank them for raising the wife. Identifying an amount requires negotiations from both sides of the families, and can range between five and ten thousand dollars. The price can also depend on the wife's educational level and whether or not she was an obedient daughter, which can bring the price up. The good thing is that when paying a bride price, the groom's family can ask extended family to help pitch in. Or most Hmong guys just save up their own money.

If I plan to get married right now, it would be difficult to get the money for the bride price because I simply don't have it. I have too much pride to borrow from family so I will probably just work hard and save my money.

I believe these marriage traditions and values exist because back then, in the old country, this was how they did it. I hope these values don't disappear, no matter how disapproving I feel, because it's still a part of who I am. But I don't think the younger generation will continue the traditions because they are so complicated. Many of them can hardly speak the language. It will be hard to uphold these traditions, and that goes for me as well.

I want my Hmong culture to be sustained. I won't give it up, even if there are some things that frustrate me. But in the end, I know I will have to make some hard decisions and some tough sacrifices in order to be with her.” *

THE K NOW



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Photography, *Through The Eyes Of Youth*



The kNOw introduces the photography of **Ezequiel "Zeke" Esquivel**, a seventeen-year-old student of Roosevelt High School who has been taking pictures of downtown Fresno landscapes and using photography to cope with depression and other problems in life. Zeke has been photographing for two years now and he enjoys going out on "expeditions" around town in search of good spots and angles to capture. He is also a member of the Youth Leadership Institute (YLI) chapter at Roosevelt High School where he works on community projects to promote healthy food options and alcohol prevention.



the know

Photovoice Photography

A project in partnership with The California's Endowment, Building Healthy Communities Initiative



Cigarette By Curb / Photo by Angelina Thao

In this photo, I see a cigarette lying on the side of a curb. It seems like people are carelessly throwing things away thinking it is okay, but what they don't know is that when some teens see these things, it influences them and might make them think they should smoke. Some people don't notice that little things like this could have a big impact. We can do something by helping people better understand they should not litter, especially with stuff that can influence young people.



Pumpkin Smashed / Photo by Anna Gil

I see through a closed fence, an alley surrounded by weeds. There is a smashed pumpkin on the ground. The fence is chained together so only a hand can fit through. Alleys are where fights happen, and where people abuse drugs. The pumpkin means something. It's as if we are the pumpkin, smashed. For example, when we walk down an alley we may get jumped or witness something else bad. A fence can make a young person feel trapped. We can keep the alleys clean to help stop the drug abuse and violence that happens there. We shouldn't be afraid to seek help or call the authorities if we are in or if we see danger.



Tagged-Up Stop Sign / Photo by Kevis McGee

In this picture, I see a tagged up stop sign. We go outside everyday and look at graffiti like it is a normal part of the world. In other words, we look right over it! It is a problem because it marks the areas that are bad for us to go in. We should be able to go anywhere we want. We should set cameras up and have more patrol units around these heavily tagged areas.



Walking To School / Photo by Arena Phaphilom

This is a picture of the backside of a crosswalk sign near a school. This particular sign has tagging all over it. Youth, like those pictured in the background, see tagging and graffiti everyday, on just about everything. These days, it's very hard to walk to school and not see graffiti. Many youth join tagging crews to mark up street signs and other things in order to claim their turf. These tagging crews have brought so much violence between youth. Youth in tagging crews often quarrel with other youth in other tagging crews about their tagging names, turfs, and much more. If youth that joined tagging crews had better things to do with their time, they probably would not join tagging crews.

