

INSIDE: The kNOw Expands to Merced

the kNOw

WINTER 11-12 | ISSUE 8

YOUTH VOICE OF THE CENTRAL VALLEY

A TOWN FULL OF HEROES

- + WEST FRESNO HISTORY
BECOMING A MOTHER
SUPER HEROES IN
REAL LIFE
- BATTLE WITH SUICIDE
SURVIVING ASSAULT

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Fresno

the kNOw

youth media

Youth Voice of the Central Valley

Mission: To promote the voices of young people and equip them with media skills to tell their stories and the stories of their community.



Merced

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Compiling stories for Issue 8 of The kNOw Magazine was more of a wake-up call than any of us expected it to be. As our writers asked questions of themselves and community members, a common theme emerged: There is change taking place in Fresno's neighborhoods. It can be easy to focus on our community's struggles. Lack of access to healthy foods and reliable transportation, increasing violence, and barriers in education are a reality.

But when we listen to youth tell not only their own stories but also the stories of the people and community around them, we realize that in what often seems to be a bleak picture, everyday heroes emerge. And often, these heroes wear young faces.

The too-often harsh picture of our neighborhoods are a reminder of the job we do here in the "NO" -- providing opportunities where, perhaps, none existed. Through media, through fellowship, and through example, we aim to sow the seeds of positive long-term change in these lives.

This summer, The kNOw added another cohort of youth. In Issue 8, we're proud to feature the voices of these heroes from our Merced expansion.

Through these stories we see that in our community, progress is happening, even in the face of violence, loneliness, language barriers, poverty, depression and much more.

-Anna Jacobsen

The kNOw

Youth Voice Of The Central Valley
Winter 11-12 | Issue 8

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When Family Gets Locked Up

By Te'Lona Love

MY UNCLE is in prison. Talking about the prison system and about him being locked up is pretty hard. He might not even know I am writing about him. With my uncle being locked up, it has opened my eyes to the prison system and how incarceration affects families, friends, and younger kids.

The judge said twenty-five years to life. That is a pretty long time for someone who barely remembers the night his whole life changed in the blink of an eye. His car, whose gun? So many questions, not enough answers. I do not know everything that happened which led him to get locked up, but from what he has told me, it was not fair.

Growing up, he sent a lot of birthday letters to me, but I never really understood them too well. Now, every time I get a letter from him, my face lights up with a big smile. I write him back every chance I get. We talk about a lot of things, mainly about our lives and the future. He listens to what I say, and writes back with good advice.

In my last letter, I wrote about how scared I was to start high school this year because of having to make new

friends and having new classes. My uncle wrote me back saying I should not be scared because I can make friends easily and I should ask my teachers for help. I really feel like I can trust him.

I realize I am not the only young person who has a family member locked up. My friend Shayna's dad has been locked up for over nine years. When I asked her about it, she said she didn't

"MY DAD FREAKIN' GOT LOCKED UP A WEEK BEFORE MY BIRTHDAY," SAID BRITTANY, "AND WE WERE SUPPOSED TO CHILL TOGETHER."

really care because she didn't really know him. Maybe deep down, she is hurt he was not there for her.

Another friend, Brittany, has three relatives locked up, her dad, uncle, and cousin. I talked to her about it, and she was mad when she heard they got locked up. "My dad freakin' got locked up a week before my birthday," said Brittany, "and we were supposed to chill together." Even though she is close to her dad, she doesn't get to visit him.

My uncle has been in prison lon-

ger than I have been alive. Going to visit him in prison when I was younger made me wonder if we were going to have to do that for the rest of our lives. It was always my grandma, my mom, and I who went.

I remember the first time I went to visit him around the time when I was five years old. It was a sunny day and I couldn't wait to see him. I was standing there waiting and waiting for him to walk through the door. All of a sudden, someone picked me up from behind and I realized it was my uncle. I was happy and surprised. I did not want him to put me down. When we left, I felt sad, knowing I probably wouldn't see him for a long time.

I would ask my mom why he couldn't come back home with us, but I know it was hard for her to explain it to me at such a young age. Family means a lot to my mom and now at fifteen years old, I understand why it was so hard for her.

Going to visit him was weird for a couple of years because of the dress code and the policies. Visitors can't wear certain colors, dark blue jeans, jewelry, and other things.

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DON'T JUDGE A COMMUNITY BY ITS COVER

THE STORY OF
WEST FRESNO'S PAST

by Sarah Thao



SINCE Fresno's expansion to the north, much of West Fresno's rich history is now overshadowed by the River Park shopping center, Fashion Fair Mall, and other popular destinations in town.

In the earliest years of Fresno, West Fresno was considered the heart of the city. People from all over grew their crops here since it was known as the "best soil

in town," according to Anne Gaston, who does outreach for the West Fresno Health Care Coalition. Everyday life for West Fresno consisted of farmers and family-owned businesses that worked side-by-side. Here, everyone knew

each other. Whether or not you were of a different race, when you were here, you were family. "At one time, Fresno was a booming community," Gaston states, "We had our own businesses and restaurants. There was the Garibaldi Hall and an amusement park too." This amusement park was known as Zapp's Park and it served as a place where people of all ages enjoyed the summer sun under the blue skies of Fresno.

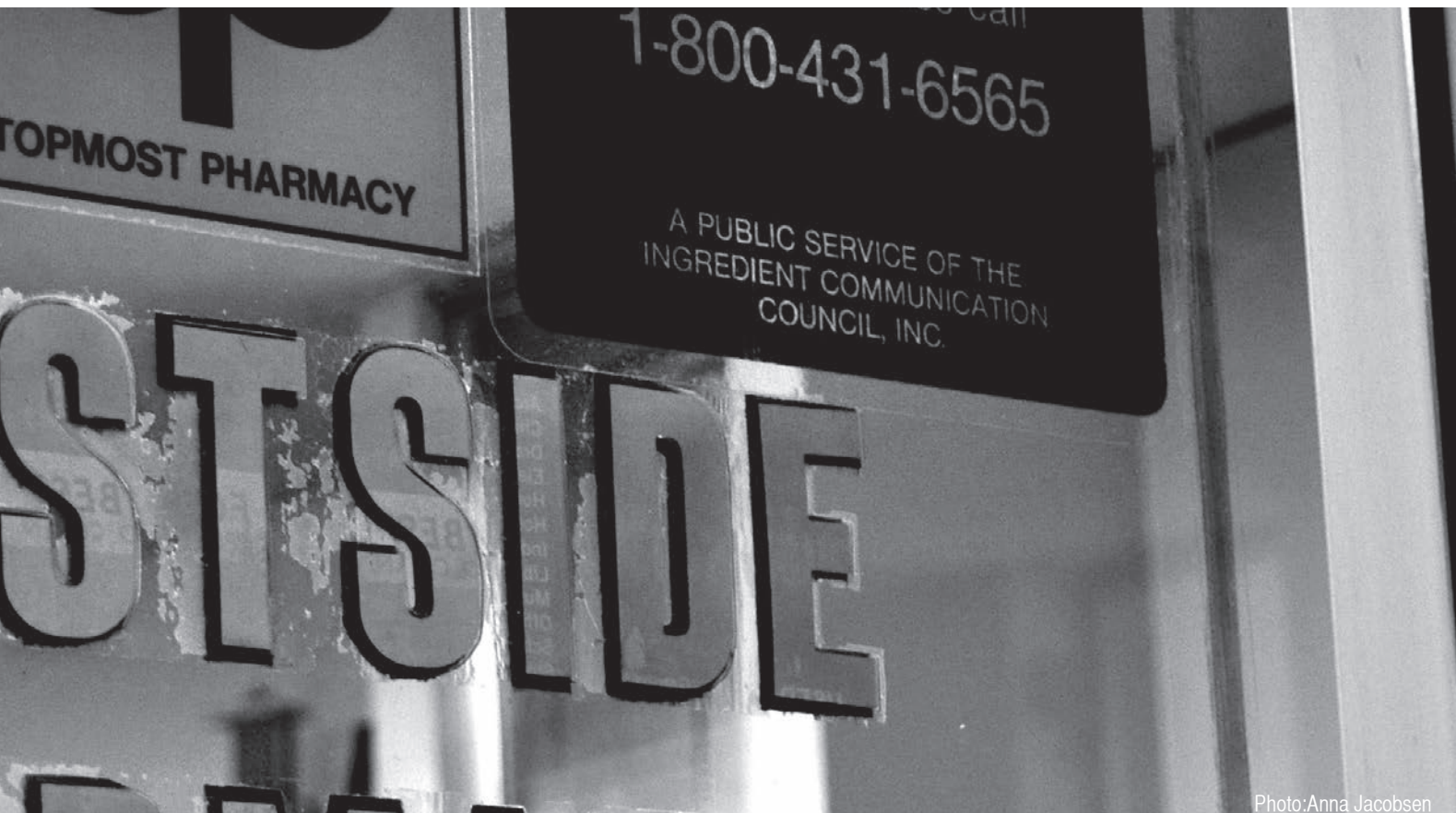
Today, however, some people view West Fresno in a bad way. But who's to judge which class is higher?

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BEEN LIVING IN POVERTY FOR MORE
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TINUE TO LIVE THAT WAY.**

Is it the lack of resources or the insufficient homes of West Fresno residents that define inferiority? Mark Villa, a correctional officer at Fresno County's Juvenile Justice Campus, says that whether or not the government invested money in the West Fresno community, he'd rather spend his leisure time elsewhere because of neighborhood problems. "There are gangs everywhere," Villa said. "It's not safe."

What happened to the community that used to exist?

In 1957, Highway 99 was built, causing West Fresno to be completely shut out from the rest of the rapidly growing city. Gaston said the small businesses didn't stand a chance because of the larger and more popular shopping choices. Banks became unwilling to provide support for the businesses to stay alive. Since then, grocery and retail stores went out of business. The lack of bank services caused a decrease in wealth and high crime rates increased the struggle in attracting new businesses and housing development. Residents with low income began to expand in this area since they found the homes more affordable. This factor contributed to



the economic segregation because more and more immigrants and poor families took refuge in this side of town.

So what did the government do?

“Local government is allowing certain communities to deteriorate because of their focus on building north,” says Margarita Rocha, a resident of West Fresno, “West Fresno still doesn’t have many stores, there are still safety issues—so much is needed.” There are also future plans for the area that do not benefit the community. According to Anoush Ekparian, a teacher at W.E.B. Dubois Public Charter School, there are potential plans that will put the neighborhood in jeopardy. “They’re planning to put a power plant in this area,” said Ekparian. “Just because this is a poor area doesn’t mean the people here don’t deserve to live in a healthy environment.”

Although there have been efforts to bring more support to West Fresno, many who live there still feel neglected. And although the people here have been living in poverty for more than fifty years, it doesn’t make it acceptable for them to continue to live that

way. “If you’re going to develop a city,” Gaston said, “You should develop everywhere...why not make it convenient for all of the residents?” The people here deserve to live in adequate homes and have the correct resources to obtain a sustained lifestyle. Ekparian states that children need to know and understand that there’s a world of possibilities outside of the boundar-

ies that bind them. Villa, however, argues that “it’s the people that need reformation, not the environment,” but if that were the case, then the world as a whole shouldn’t deserve to live sufficiently either. So why not

allow West Fresno residents to see that? Why not allow them to live without the fear of not making it home?

A community cannot prosper without the hands of many. “The potential’s here—when you work diligently in your community,” Gaston pleads, “we as a group can do a lot more.” When we work together to make the world a better place, we’re also making ourselves better citizens. There’s no use in ignoring the issues that you deem irrelevant, because the outcome of these issues shapes your world. **tk**

“JUST BECAUSE THIS IS A POOR AREA DOESN'T MEAN THE PEOPLE HERE DON'T DESERVE TO LIVE IN A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT.”



POLICE VIOLENCE

THE USE OF EXCESSIVE FORCE

By Vang Yang

**As the flashes of my life pass my thoughts,
I'm forced to bear the pain.
I lay on the pavement with sirens around,
but family memories help me to sustain.
Each breath I take, I hear screams
and paramedics telling me to hold on...
I see my mom and dad crying and a
small voice saying "daddy be strong."**

*(Excerpt from Angelo Fernandez's poem "My Place")
Source: Community Alliance Website*

ANGELO Fernandez was on the verge of turning his life around for the better, but this changed when he decided to go to a Fresno discount store with his brother. As soon as Fernandez stepped into his brother's car, four undercover police cars suddenly boxed them in, leaving nowhere to go. Frantically, Fernandez dashed out of the car and ran across the parking lot in an effort to escape. He heard no orders to stop.

Unarmed with any sort of weapon, he stumbled to the ground as a bullet pierced through his back. As soon as he fell to the ground, a pack of officers surrounded him and started yelling and kicking him. Meanwhile, police officers pressed his brother to the ground with a gun to his head. The officer's reason for shooting Fernandez was that he was possibly armed and might commit a crime in the future. The officer said that Fernandez was going to R-N Market and would hold shoppers hostage in the store. However, witnesses saw that Fernandez was running in the opposite direction of the store.

So what was the real reason to shoot? Soon after the incident, Fresno Police Chief Jerry Dyer spoke to the public about Fernandez being a vio-

lent Bulldog gang member and that he was wanted for carjacking and firing a weapon at someone.

Mike Rhodes, editor of the Community Alliance Newspaper, covered the Fernandez case. Rhodes states he has long been aware of police violence, but has only recently started to cover it in his own reporting.

"It was significant because he did not die," Rhodes stated, referring to the Fernandez case. "Usually when police shoot someone, they say that

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THROUGH HIS BACK.**

they feared for their lives and the suspect had a weapon."

Rhodes says people are hurt by Fresno police every day. He also mentions an incident when police officers shot and killed a mentally ill woman when she was violently hitting cars with a bat. This incident, says Rhodes, shows that police officers should have had other weapons in their tool box to destabilize her.

Rhodes thinks that police do what they do because they can easily get away with it, and there is no one in the department who evaluates what they do. To make matters worse, the Internal Affairs Unit, which investigates complaints with the department, "never finds anything wrong."

Lt. Donald Gross, administrative Lieutenant for the Fresno Police Department, has had twenty years of experience and says that police violence in our community is not a problem.

He interprets police violence as the use of excessive force, and states that in the second quarter of 2010, the department received over 100,000 calls and only used force 146 times - less than 0.2% of the time. In that quarter of 2010, 90 officers were assaulted; in the same time period in 2011, 125 officers were assaulted. When an officer is accused of using excessive force, the plaintiff or the victim takes a receipt of complaint and submits it to the Internal Affairs Unit. Most of the accusations are considered not valid by the unit.

Local resident David Vang, 17, has lived in Fresno all his life and does not think Fresno has a problem with police violence since he has never witnessed it. However, based on his own personal

experience, he has noticed that police officers are rude and ignorant. Vang and his dad were trying to pick up a mattress that they already bought. An officer was nearby, and Vang stepped out to talk to him, who was doing nothing at all at the time. The officer rudely interrupted Vang and told him to go back into the car. It was as if there was something going on with the officer, but he was just standing there. It wasn't a violent interaction, but it shaped Vang's opinion of the police force.

The term "police violence" is usually used to describe officers' assaulting citizens. However, police in Fresno have recently been victims of violence as well, showing how the situation has gotten retaliatory.

In one case, on September 4, 2011, a police officer's house was firebombed by someone that was obviously upset at the officer. But it didn't stop there. The very next day they struck again, firebombing the officer's house once more. The officer was responsible for shooting and killing a Fresno resident that rushed the officer with a knife.

In 2009, 32-year-old Steven Vargas was shot and killed by a Fresno police sergeant. Before the shooting occurred, Vargas was driving recklessly and rammed into a parked van. When officers arrived and told him to step out of the vehicle, he refused, and police claim he reached down in a motion that looked like he was getting a weapon. That was when he was shot seven times by the police. An investigation showed Vargas was unarmed and that he had a drug, PCP, in his system. According to a CBS news report on the Vargas' wrongful death trial, Arturo Gonzales, the attorney for the Vargas family said, "There's a pattern of practice in Fresno of using excessive force, including shooting people without cause and we've identified at least 15 other shootings, just in the last 5 years, that we think were improper."

According to Gonzales, there has been a lot of police violence in Fresno, but on the other hand, there has been a lot of violence toward police officers too.

Everyone has a different perspective on police violence. But which perspective is more valid? On one side, Mike Rhodes, the editor of the Community Alliance Newspaper, takes a different perspective from the police department. Lt. Gross states that police violence in Fresno is not a problem, but the cases of Angelo Fernandez and Steven Vargas tell otherwise.

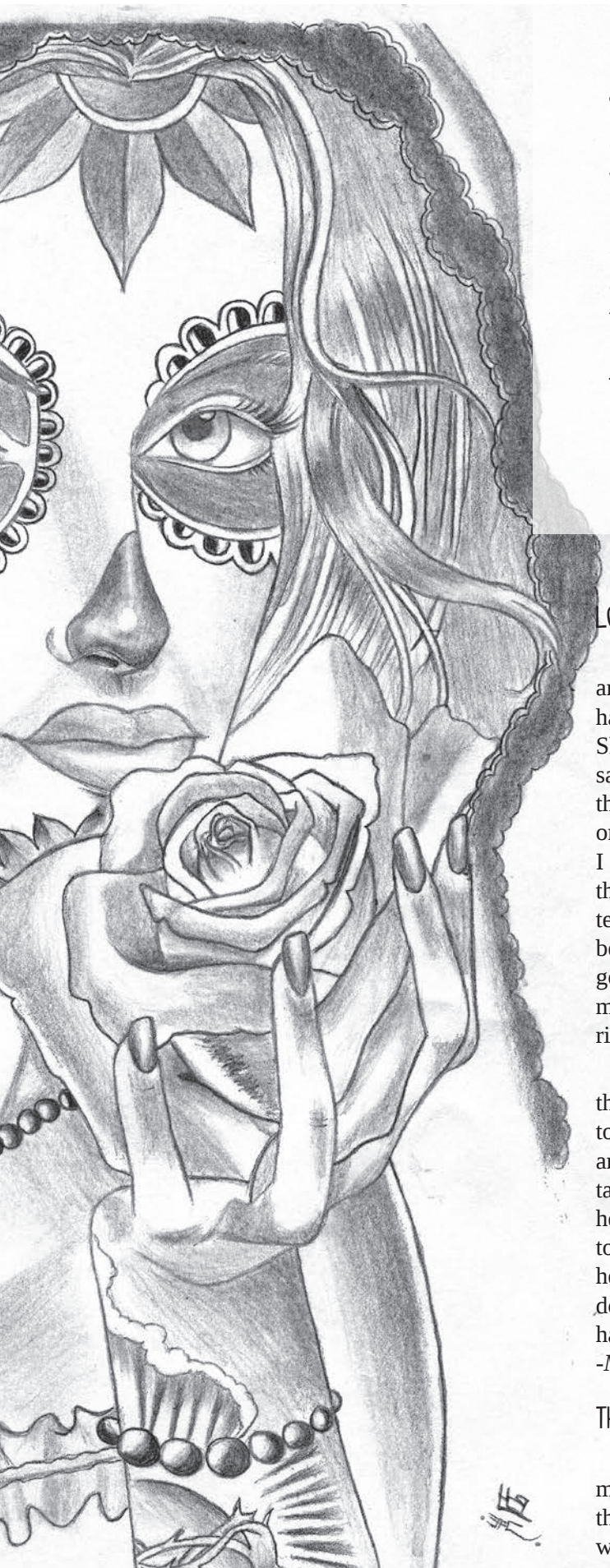
On his professional blog, Daniel K. Martin, a criminal defense lawyer in Fresno, reacted to the firebombing of an officer's home. "We also should support the majority of officers who are honest and serve to protect our communities. Without the honest police officers, crooked ones would rule and we would have no protection." The bottom line, Martin says, is that "We should never resort to violence against our community because that makes us no better than a dirty cop." **tk**

On Jan. 5, 2012, a federal judge and Fresno City Council members awarded Stephen Vargas' family \$1.3 million, bringing justice for his death. The money will be put into trust funds for Vargas' children.

The Beat Within

A Weekly Publication of Writing and Art from the Inside





The Beat Within, a program of Pacific News Service/New America Media, provides writing workshops and a weekly publication for incarcerated youth nationwide. Through the support of Focus Forward, The kNOw staff and volunteers conduct weekly workshops at the Fresno County JJC.

The Beat Within, Fresno Team, is: Brian Costa, John Esquivel, Lily Romero, and Mai Der Vang.

LOVING MOTHER

The person who inspires me and always has is my mom. I don't have a dad in my life, just a mom. She's like a dad and a mom at the same time. She's there with me through thick and thin. She's the one who gives me the speeches I need. When I think I'm alone in this world, she's always there to tell me I can be anything I wanna be if I really want. She tells me to go down the right way and lead my brothers and show them the right path.

She inspires me because she's the strongest person to me. She took my little brothers and me and raised us, put food on the table, clothes on our backs, all on her own. There's no need for me to be locked up when I should be helping her for everything she's done for me. I'm sorry for the hard times.

-Manuel

THE STORY OF MY GREAT GRAMMA

I'm happy and lucky to say my great grandma is still living to this day. She is 80 years old. She was born on Feb. 5th, 1931 in the

south somewhere in Texas. From the pictures I saw of her back in those days she was beautiful.

She had almond shaped eyes, a light brown color, and caramel colored skin with long wavy dark red hair. She had a coke bottle shape with long skinny legs. When I saw this picture I was in shock because she doesn't look anything like that now.

When I was younger she used to tell me about her childhood. She was living during a time when whites were separated from blacks. In the south especially, colored people lived not only in segregation, but also in fear.

Once my grandma was walking to school (blacks didn't ride on buses, whites only) some white boys passing on a bus threw rocks at her and her friends called them mean names. Another time my grandma (by this time she was grown and with Pop Pop) got stopped by a white cop. He was being unprofessional and trying to bully her and make her do things but she wasn't havin it. So he slammed her against the car and clubbed her in the back really hard.

She said even though she was angry and in pain she couldn't do anything because that was just how things was. He may have knocked her down physically, but he didn't knock down her pride and dignity. Over the years she lived through the assassination of MLK, the riots, the hippy years (in my nan's time), etc. She lived to see a lot and I'm grateful to have her around to share such stories.

That's how I learned a lot about black history. Many kids my age aren't as blessed and I'm thankful for my great gramma (and Pop Pop, 85 years old). I love her so much and I resent that I don't spend time with her like I used to. She's my greatest black history book.

-Jeanetta

CHANGING FROM MY PARENTS

My parents are very bad at parenting. I do not want to be anything like them. They are both crystal meth addicts, and are unemployed most of the time.

I was taken away from them when I was a baby, and put in a foster home. I would not want my kid to go through that, because look where I am now.

I would be a strict parent, just not too strict. I would be the kind of parent that I always wanted. I would show my kids the good in life if you succeed, and what you'll turn into if you don't.

That way, maybe they will achieve their dreams, and be known as a good person. That's how I would parent my kids.

-Jordan

WORTH LIVING

My life is worth living because I got people who care for me and need me. I also got a lot of responsibilities right now. My aunt and my grandma are getting too old to be taking care of me, so I need to step up and take care of them. They thought I was worth living for, so in my heart I know they're worth living. I also got a girl who is two weeks away from giving birth to my son, so I know my son and my girl is worth living for, just as well as my little brothers.

I felt it was okay to cry when I was locked up and my grandpa passed away. I'll cry in front of anyone, no matter what they think of me. I also cried when my homie got killed when I was locked up. He was dying and he didn't even know it. And also, when I got locked up this time I cried for two days because I'm gonna have a kid in two weeks.

-Sergio

ELLEN, MY SISTER

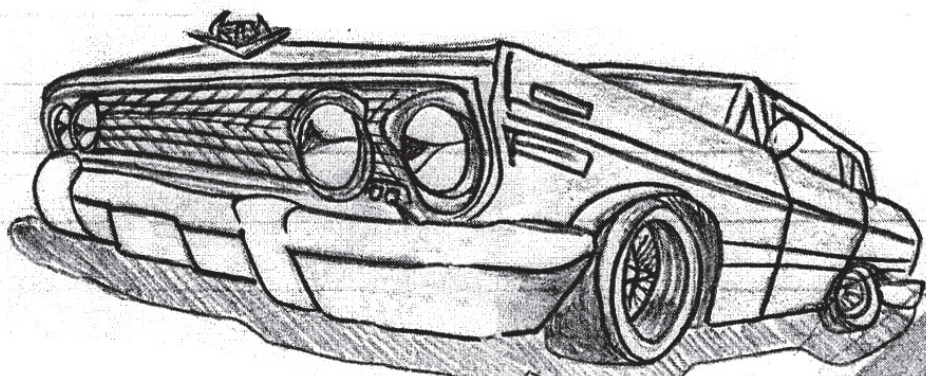
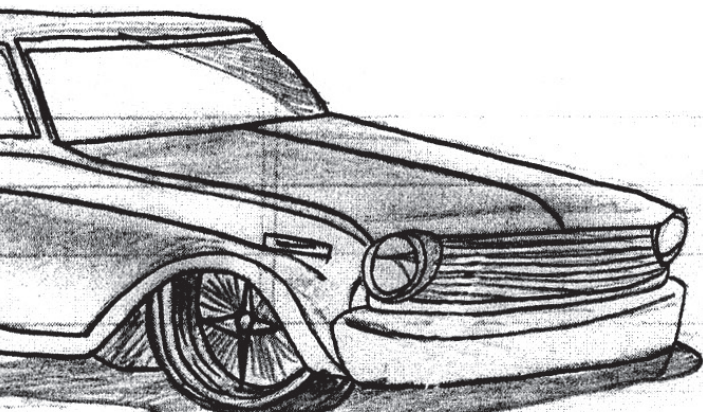
Remember all the times we spent together?
Remember when we were little
Playing Barbies outside?
Everything was perfect at that very
Moment. It felt like we had all the
Time in the world.

Remember when we used to watch TV at
Night together,
Laughing so hard we fell on the sofa?
But then everything changed
You started sixth grade, I barely started third.

Everything changed from then on
There was no more watching TV
Together only fighting on who
Got to watch it.
You put away the toys, everything
Childish. You grew up
And stopped hanging out with me.

You seem to ignore me but I remember
Those years after you finished 6th grade.
I saw you become who you are today.
I remember always wanting to be
Like you, so beautiful, so smart...
You became Ellen, my sister.

-Jane





ENGLISH LEARNING PROGRAMS

By Bao Xiong

FOR AS long as I can remember, my family and I lived in neighborhoods with either my relatives or other Hmong families as my neighbors. As a child, I grew up learning my native language and not knowing how to speak English well. I remember being in a group of students who were English learners and we all had these little packets with a book, writing utensils and tiny gifts. I learned how to read and write in English. It was then that I knew the importance of literacy.

Many people are unaware of the importance of the English Learning (EL) programs and the way in which the special programs are made to guide students.

The EL programs provide students with the extra help they need in any class course they do not comprehend. They are guided by specific English Learning Development (ELD) teachers and counselors throughout their years in school. The students are given extra classes in any subject that is available to meet the school requirements.

Mai Zoua Vang, a senior at Edison High School, has been in a program similar to the English Learning program since her elementary years. She says the goal of the program is to provide students the assistance they

need in furthering their education and future. "In elementary school, we went to summer school where they (taught) us the basic subject and to better our English speaking," she says, "Then in middle school and up, they helped supply us with a binder, pencil, calculator, et cetera. They called us in and updated us with college stuff so we knew what to do for the future."

Not only are these programs geared towards students, but there are also many programs like these for parents as well.

Pedro Vasquez, a counselor who

"THEY HELPED SUPPLY US WITH A BINDER, PENCIL, CALCULATOR, ETC. THEY CALLED US IN AND UPDATED US WITH COLLEGE STUFF SO WE KNEW WHAT TO DO FOR THE FUTURE."

has worked at Edison High School for almost four years, is one of the counselors who lead their parent English Learning program called the English Language Bilingual Advisory Committee (ELBAC).

The meetings are held on the first Wednesday of every other month in the evening. In this program, parents are not only taught specifically English, but how to help their child in school

and how they can contribute to helping their children do well in their studies at home.

In addition, ELBAC provides resources for parents to help their students in furthering their education. "What we're trying to do is establish a connection with the parents so they can feel that they are part of the school," says Vasquez, "but also, they can increase their own knowledge and then hopefully better assist their own children and just the community in general."

Parents are also given the opportunity to improve the education system by attending the Fresno Unified School District Board meetings and voicing their opinions or concerns of any kind during the ELBAC meeting.

Connie Cha, also a counselor at Edison High School, works with Hmong and Spanish-speaking students who are in the EL program. She has worked with EL students at Edison for about seven years.

"The EL students are a special targeted group here that we always try to make sure there are available support services," says Cha. "We make sure the students know who their counselors are. We help explain why they have certain classes, and we also talk to them about their level of English profi-

Photo: Some rights reserved by MyTudut

ciency, and how those classes will still help them towards meeting graduation requirements.”

Cha says that based on the California English Language Development Test, which is given to EL students at the end of every year to check their learning progress, counselors must give the students the appropriate classes to support their learning.

She says many of the students question why they have two of the same classes all the time and a big struggle for these students is the process of learning English and trying to comprehend it to the best of their ability. Cha recognizes the challenges and pushes the students to do their best in their studies.

“A common thing I see is every single one of them has the passion, dedication, motivation to try to learn English. They all want to do well so they

can understand every bit of information that comes their way,” said Cha.

Both Vasquez and Cha say they believe there is always something that needs improvement in programs like these, especially in the area of parent involvement.

“It’s always difficult to get parents to come to the campus in the evenings around five o’clock,” says Vasquez, “When it starts to get darker outside, we get less parents. Sometimes we get a great turnout; sometimes we don’t get so good of a turnout. So parent involvement is the key here to awareness, but then again it depends on availability of the parents as well.”

In all programs, parents play a vital role in contributing to their child’s education. “I always feel that is an area that is always open to more improvement,” says Cha, “I don’t know what the magic formula is, but I would love

to hope and strive for that one day, to get all the parents of our EL students to be active in their child’s education.”

She says that more parents need to voice their opinions and concerns, and be active in order to be heard. If they don’t, then changes cannot be made to implement programs to better serve their children.

English Learning programs are essential for students who are behind in their English speaking, reading, and writing skills. Furthermore, programs like these can really help students succeed and continue their education after high school.

Literacy is essential to become successful in one’s education and career. For new immigrants and their families, having more of these types of programs will help them better adapt to a new community and to be successful overall. ~tk



Illustration: Bao Xiong



IS COLLEGE WORTH THE MONEY?

By Denise Yang

AS SENIORS get used to their last year of high school, counselors begin inviting guest speakers from different colleges to motivate students, but even this seems inadequate in guaranteeing a higher high school to college transition rate. Plenty of times, adults tell students, “More education equals more money.” This concept doesn’t seem so hard to grasp so why are there still those who’d rather choose to get a job straight after high school?

Due to the increase in tuition fees for college, those who are financially challenged feel like they don’t have the choice of getting a higher education. College Board, a website that helps high school students apply for college, shows that tuition and room and board fees have gone up 2.6% each of the last ten years.

Sky Ly, a second-year student at Fresno City College, says she sees a trend among those who drop out of school. “If you have a job, you’re just going to keep working, working, and working, and then you’ll come to

the point where you stop and wonder, ‘when am I gonna go back to school?’”, commented Ly.

Counselor Ben Reynoso from Upward Bound says that about 97% of his students have gone on to college and the other 3% don’t go to college right after high school. Upward Bound, a program at Fresno State, helps first-generation and low-income, college-bound high school students get into college. The

“I THINK A LOT OF STUDENTS SEE COLLEGE AS THIS THING THAT YOU KNOW IS GOING TO TAKE FOREVER, THEY EITHER FIND A JOB OR THEIR PRIORITIES ARE DIFFERENT.”

program has several counselors that push their students to continue on their education after high school. Reynoso states that students don’t go to college because they have other plans. “I think a lot of students see college as this thing that you know is going to take forever, they either find a job or their priorities

are different,” Reynoso said.

Along with the financial aspect, some individuals opt out of college because they think they’d be able to get a head start saving money. Truth is, they will be less likely considered in the selection process for jobs.

Panyia Thao, a former college student and current employee at the IRS shared that one of her friends who was hired was laid off several days later because her “education wasn’t enough.” She compared a high school graduate’s status with a four-year college student’s status when competing for a job and it was clear that employers would rather hire the person with a higher educational degree.

Thao said she believes in the importance of education and what it entails for the future of individuals. According to Thao, college provides students the opportunity to acquire the skills needed to obtain a career or a job in the future, but the decision to actually attend mainly derives from the amount of motivation and drive within them. “Two or three years out of col-

lege, you're going to lose all the information you learned in high school...you won't remember a lot of the knowledge you learned," says Thao, "and when you decide to go back to college, you'll start out really fresh and it'll be hard."

Inflation and increased tuition is a major problem, but students sometimes forget about the essential aides available. "That's what the counselors and financial advisors are for," says Ly, "that's why you go talk and get more information." Though she didn't visit her counselor as often as she could have, the times when she did, Ly said that her counselors did give her helpful information that made her think of her college route.

In addition to the academic advisors available, Reynoso says that his students who did not qualify for financial aid applied to many scholarships or took out loans if attending the more expensive schools. This is an option that people can take advantage of if they feel like they are unable to afford college.

For those who are afraid to take out loans because they don't want to be in debt, Thao offers that regardless of where someone goes to college, that person will eventually need to take out a loan at one point or another to afford it unless they are wealthy. The point is, no matter how long it takes

in college, once finished the hard work and dedication will pay off. The borrowed money will be slowly paid off once a person uses his/her degree to get a job.

Because some students, as Reynoso mentioned earlier, don't have their priorities straight, they might be thinking about buying a car or something that will benefit them presently. He says that what they need to think hard about is "when I'm 25 or 30, how is having a college education going

to help me? And if they really think about that they're going to know it, the older they get, the more a college education really makes sense."

In the long run, individuals who recognize the importance of a college education and get a head start

on it will prevail over others who don't realize which path brings a more satisfying lifestyle until later. Thao sums it up by stating, "It's going to be hard for you to force yourself back into school unless you have the determination...education should come first and you can always get a part time job or go to school part time and work full time as long as you're still in college and filling your mind with skills and knowledge." tk

**"WHEN I'M 25 OR 30, HOW IS
HAVING A COLLEGE EDUCATION
GOING TO HELP ME?"**



**In 2011, nearly 200
reports came through
the BusTracker System.**

**Each report tells a story,
giving a first-hand
picture of transportation
in Fresno.**

**See it for yourself at
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Photo: William Thao

BusTracker

3 ways to make a report:
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fresnobustracker@gmail.com
theknowfresno.org

Include what happened, cross
streets, bus line, date, and time.



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REAL SUPER HEROES

By Miguel Bibanco

THE NIGHT is bleak and the neighborhood is dark. A lone figure walks the rough and ill lit streets of a neighborhood known for its infestation of crime, but instead of being a victim or criminal, this person serves an entirely different role. He walks the streets not to reach a particular destination or to be on the lookout for a victim to target with his malicious intent, but to serve as a beacon to warn criminals that they are not welcome and that if they wish to break the law, they will be punished.

In the pursuit of this goal, the in-

dividual often employs the use of superhuman abilities, ingenious gadgetry, and noteworthy costumes. Now, this description serves as a great example as to a superhero's goal and actions, but how far does it go to describe an individual who deeply cares about making their community a better place?

We often encounter depictions of hero-like figures who use their extraordinary abilities to fight crime and aide in the pursuit of justice, and we have learned to admire these fictional characters, and what they represent, but how would we react to someone

doing this in real life? Would we be supportive and encourage them in the pursuit of their goals? Would they really serve their respective communities in a meaningful way?

In recent years, the amount of people who have dubbed themselves as superheroes and proceeded to to adopt unique alter egos has risen noticeably. Ways this has been done include increased media coverage, documentaries pertaining to the subject and increased community acceptance of the work of these individuals as seen in the HBO documentary "Superheroes."

The amount of publicity that this social phenomena has attracted has also risen. One such example of this rising trend of masked crusaders is Mr. Extreme, a “super hero” based in San Diego. Mr. Extreme often assists his community in numerous ways that include, but are not limited to: aiding the homeless, patrolling the neighborhood and raising awareness of issues pertaining to the public interest. He states that the reason he does this is because he wants to aide his community and he feels this is the best way in which he can express who he is. He states that people definitely pay more attention to a cause if the advocate is a “colorful” individual. “I wanted to make a difference and I was fed up with all the apathy and indifference” was what Mr. Extreme categorized as

MANY HEROES BELIEVE THAT RAISING AWARENESS IS ONE OF THE BEST WAYS TO COMBAT COMMUNITY APATHY.

one of the reasons he chose to become Mr. Extreme, a view shared by many individuals.

Recently, he has seen a good amount of attention from the public and media and is recognized on a regular basis. “Sometimes, I can’t even walk down the street in my regular attire without someone saying ‘Hey! You’re Mr. Extreme,’” said Mr. Extreme.

An example of this popularity can be seen in a recently released documentary on the subject of super heroes in real life. Superheroes, an HBO documentary, is a look inside the lives of these individuals that gives insight into why they are super heroes.

Many heroes believe raising awareness is one of the best ways to combat community apathy, an issue that many people deserves more attention. An example of an event that demonstrates the severity of this issue can be seen by the case of Kitty Genovese. In this tragic event, a women was fatally assaulted and raped while nearby inhabitants of the Kew Gardens section of Queens, NY heard her cries and did little to help her. This was a story shared to me by Mr. Extreme as an example of how community apathy affects us.

Many superheroes state that hearing similar stories is one of the main reasons they decide to aide their community in such an interesting fashion.

Of course, not all people see these so called superheroes in a positive light. Some people have made references to the possible dangers that may arise from individuals trying to deter crime without formal training or putting themselves in similar precarious situations.

Lt. Andra Brown of the San Diego Police police department has acknowledged that although such individuals might benefit their communities in small ways they might also cause danger to themselves or others by attempting to diffuse precarious situations with little or no formal training.

At the center of this argument is the possibility that many people might not consider the repercussions such a lifestyle might have and the problems they may encounter. One example is a recent case that involved Seattle superhero Phoenix Jones. Jones was charged with assault for allegedly pepper spraying a group of individuals who Seattle police claim were dancing, but Jones claims they were engaging in a fight. This event has caused some to believe that these superheroes really aren’t prepared to handle the situations they could possibly face.

Of course, this incident is not to subtract from the good work that is done by people like Mr. Extreme or other superheroes like Master Legend, who is the leader of a superhero organization, Team Justice, which obtained nonprofit status.

The facts are that although there might be some possible drawbacks to people becoming caped crusaders, they assist their communities in numerous ways. If these activities can be undertaken responsibly with the communities best interest at heart why shouldn’t this behavior be encouraged? Perhaps we all should begin to encourage others or ourselves to don the superhero garb. Maybe not as a superhero, but as someone inspired to take part in improving their community and raising awareness.” tk

DOUBLE XP Z O JUNK FOOD

By Luis Pacheco

CALL OF Duty Modern Warfare 3, which was released Nov. 8, 2011 and is one of the most popular releases of 2011, is encouraging gamers to buy junk food with “Double XP” codes on chips and soda packaging.

Pepsi products like Doritos & Mountain Dew have the code, and gamers buy these products to use in the game so they can “level up” quickly. But putting these promo codes on junk food isn’t a good choice. Promoters of the game are hurting gamers by promoting not just a game, but an unhealthy lifestyle.

I myself am a huge Call of Duty (CoD) gamer, so I bought myself some bottles of 12-ounce Mountain Dew, which gave me 15 minutes of Double XP time for each bottle.

Double

XP codes are on a variety of products, and the codes range from 15-90 minutes of Double XP time.

Double XP time helps your player in the game “level up” faster than without. For example, in CoD Modern Warfare 3, if you kill someone, you receive 50 points. If you kill someone while

I HAVE A HISTORY WITH JUNK FOOD ADDICTION, BUT I STOPPED EATING JUNK FOOD A YEAR AGO. IN 2010, I DRANK OVER 112 MONSTER ENERGY DRINKS.

using Double XP time from Mountain Dew or Doritos, you will receive 100 points for one kill.

As a gamer, I have sacrificed my health over junk food just to get Double XP. I have a history with junk food addiction, but I stopped eating junk food a year ago. In 2010, I drank over 112 Monster energy drinks. I also ate a bunch of junk food. This year, I cut junk food out of my diet and I have felt much better. But in the month of November, I made some sacrifices to get Double XP although I didn’t want to buy any junk food.

Naturally, gamers will take any opportunity to help their player level up faster. Double XP is a huge deal to most gamers, because getting their hands on these codes gives them an advantage over other players. Entic-

ing gamers with both a fast track to leveling up and with junk food, which can be addicting on its own, is hard to resist.

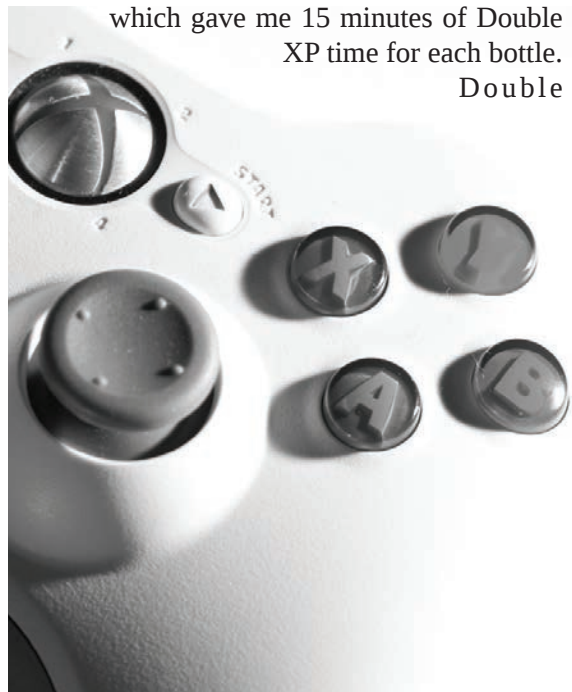
Now, let’s take a look at how many minutes you receive for buying Mountain Dew and Doritos:

15 minutes for any 20-ounce Mountain Dew bottle, 45 minutes for a 12-pack of Mountain Dew, 90 minutes for a 20-Pack of Mountain Dew, 15 minutes for any 2 or 3-ounce Doritos bag, 45 minutes for an 11-ounce Doritos bag and 90 minutes for a 17-ounce Doritos bag.

Not all of these products are available at a liquor store, but you can find the 20-ounce Mountain Dew bottles and 2 or 3-ounce Doritos bags at liquor or convenience stores, which are common in areas that lack supermarkets (these areas are also known as “food deserts”). Eleven-ounce Doritos bags are only available at Target and 17-ounce Doritos bags are only available at Walmart. These stores benefit from the junk food promotion and the exploitation of gamers, just like the video game and Pepsi does. As for the soda packs, the 20-pack Mountain Dew is only available at Walmart.

To throw the soda down the drain would be better than consuming it, but if you do that, you’re just putting

continued on page 32



VOICES OF YOUTH IN **MERCED**

FOR the past five years, The kNOw Youth Media has empowered young people in Fresno to share their stories and explore issues most relevant to them. This work has grown and it is with great pride that we offer you a first glimpse into the work of The kNOw's new program in Merced.

Coming late this spring, Merced will produce the first issue of its very own youth magazine, made possible through the support of the California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities campaign. Some of the things you read here may be explored further while new ideas, issues and stories will also be brought to light. We aim to directly empower the young people in our program by giving them a platform to voice their stories, which in time can empower their friends, families and other young people-- their community-- to realize they are the most powerful agents of change. Our young people are us. They are who we once were and they will ultimately guide us into the future.

- ANDRES REYES, MERCED YOUTH COORDINATOR

Tell me
So tell me what the hell is wrong
What am I supposed to do
When I see your face I want to scream

So tell me why I think about what it is you tell me
What do you want from me
I gave you everything I had

So come on! What are you waiting for!
You have me right where you want me
You just won't stop
Not even to take a breath instead you send me death
- Mark Skinner

"ALL I NEED"

I AWAKE every cold winter morning to the delicious smell of breakfast sausages permeating the atmosphere of my warm room, as the weak sunlight seeps through my window blinds creating black and white stripes across my blanket. I rise and prepare for the day ahead.

"Remember to wear warm clothing, darling. I checked the weather forecast today and they said it's going to rain this afternoon," mother says.

After my preparations, she drives me to school to my morning class, Music. We slowly drive on Childs Avenue with the windows rolled up and the heater on trying to keep out the cold winter fog stubbornly colliding with our windows. Then suddenly a figure slowly makes its appearance at the intersection of Childs Avenue and Tyler Road.

This figure is a young teenager walking on an uneven dirt sidewalk with mist evaporating from the nearby canal. He shakes violently with his arms tucked in his thin white t-shirt as we slowly drive pass him. Even with the fog slowly enveloping him making him vanish, I can feel his soul silently reaching out to knock on the doorway to my heart.

The dismissal bell rings and the halls begin to fill with footsteps, voices, and people. I rush through the halls toward the east out onto the bus pick-up zone while everyone else rushes to the west to watch a fight.

Dark gloomy clouds start to settle above my head as I step onto the bus and grab a seat by the window. As we drive over the Childs Avenue Bridge, the clouds release its weight upon the world and I see a lonely homeless man seated and cross-legged on the ground. His long damp hair covers his eyes as he arches his back over to hide his face with his arm raised above his head and his hands holding a cardboard sign saying, "I'll accept any change," as shelter against the pouring rain. Sadness, lone-

THIS FIGURE IS A YOUNG TEENAGER WALKING ON AN UNEVEN DIRT SIDEWALK WITH MIST EVAPORATING FROM THE NEARBY CANAL. HE SHAKES VIOLENTLY WITH HIS ARMS TUCKED IN HIS THIN WHITE T-SHIRT AS WE SLOWLY DRIVE PASS HIM.

liness, hopelessness, desperation, and shame were the words written all over his image.

With the roof as shelter to my body, nothing can shelter my heart from shattering like rain.

At my bus stop on M Street and Cartmell Drive, my parents pick me up with their white Toyota truck along with many other parents. A blonde wavy haired girl digs for her iPhone in her tan Gucci purse and above all turmoil she hollars, "Mom! You better take me to the AT&T store and get me the new iPhone 4!" She tosses her phone back in her bag and mutters angrily between her teeth.

Enviously, I gallop over the puddles

of rain to my parents and excitedly ask, "Ma, can I get a cell phone too? Everybody my age has a phone and I...I..." Disturbed and disrupted by the trotting of the young teenager, my mind changes instantly. Down the sidewalk, through the mud, and rain he trots with a yellow t-shirt, brown khakis, and worn shoes where his toe sticks out.

Down the road, through the mud, and rain, untouched I went. "You want a cell phone?" My father questions. "No. Never mind. I don't need it anyways."

"Why not? How come all of a sudden you don't want one? You've always wanted one." His brow rises up suspiciously. "Because there's a child out there without a sweater walking in the fog, in the rain, and all he or she is asking for is a sweater to keep him warm. There's a homeless man under his shelter, a cardboard sign giving up his pride wanting just a penny. They need what I have. I have what they don't have yet I'm wanting more than I already have, not need."
- Naly Thao

I LOVE my family. I've never been hurt or threatened or scared by a family member. They've always been supportive of me. I know there is a lot worse out there and I am very fortunate to have a decent home-life. However, I am worried.

Throughout my entire life my Dad has been an excessive drinker. I used to think it was common for fathers to come home from work and toss back a

Photo: Alyssa Castro

few beers and fall asleep on the couch. I assumed that was what all of my friend's dads did.

It wasn't until I got older when I realized that was not the norm. I looked at other dad's and recognized that they didn't have "beer guts" that made them look like they were pregnant. Other dads don't constantly have a can of chew in their back pocket.

Neither of my parents went to college, but they both have decent paying jobs. My Mom is always stressed out about money and is constantly trying to strategize new ways to help our budget. My Dad spends so much money on beer and tobacco, approximately a six pack every two days, sometimes more.

I can't even imagine the amount of money and gas we'd save if we didn't have to get these items. Some nights he'll open a fresh bottle of beer and fall asleep after having only one sip; with the price of beer these days, that's practically a dollar going down the drain.

Once when we were almost home af-

ter going on a road trip my Dad realized that he needed beer, and I commented: "No one NEEDS beer." My statement was simply ignored. Not only am I concerned about my Dad's unstoppable addiction with alcohol, I am even more troubled by all the health risks of binge drinking such as liver and kidney failure and cancer

NOT ONLY AM I CONCERNED ABOUT MY DAD'S UNSTOPPABLE ADDICTION WITH ALCOHOL, I AM EVEN MORE TROUBLED BY ALL THE HEALTH RISKS OF BINGE DRINKING SUCH AS LIVER AND KIDNEY FAILURE AND CANCER FROM THE TOBACCO.

from the tobacco. I'm also afraid to even drink, because I've been told that "it runs in the family."

It's tough feeling like you can't even talk to your own father about how you feel and what your opinion is on his actions, because it's his choice, he's an adult and it is his own body and his own money.

My mom and my sister feel the same way, but we try to ignore it and not talk about it. So my entire point in writing this is because I know my Dad will read it. He is a good and supportive Dad and I am hoping that this will be his motivation to try to make a change, for our family. - Jessica Munday

I NEVER meant to be so cold.

I'm always trying to get high off anything for my own selfish desire. I always blame others for my pain when it's really all my fault for becoming who I am. When I'm high off whatever, I always wake up next to a guy well over 20 and my family members yelling and crying.

Then I go and try to kill myself and hurt others for my own selfish desire. To get rid of my pain that I created in myself.

Then I go and find a new boyfriend and let him treat me and my family and friends like s***.

Then when he leaves or cheats on me I expect my friends and family to be there for me.

Then when the guy asks for me back and to accept his apology, I run to him and ditch my friends and family. What I really meant to say is I'm sorry for the way I am, but it's over now. - Jacoba Starr

I take away beauty
I take away lives
I tear apart families
You'll live in my lies

You'll cover me up, with sleeves
I'll isolate you-or at least that's
what it seems
you'll feel so deserted
you'll feel so alone

I'll drive you insane
I'll make you feel numb yet
my pain you just can't get enough
of
the pleasure the pain
the release that you feel

maybe you'll need stitches just so

"it" will heal
the more you use me, the deeper
you slide in
the more blood you see
the deeper your drawing begins

I'll help you draw the lines
I'll help you paint stars
and the more you abuse me,
the more I'll leave scars,
but if I cause you death you
blame me
you took me in your hand, this I
know you can see

I'm caused by depression
Mr. Razor's my name
you can try to cover me up
but I'll still leave an emotional

stain,
so don't dare forget me
remember my name
you'll be thinking it later as you
cry out in pain

- Ricki Reed

SUCCESS Project Report

A Conference for School SUCCESS

By Kate Henry & SUCCESS Partners



At the SUCCESS Conference, young people and adults discussed school discipline policies.

Visit youthengagementteam.org for more info.

STUDENTS United to Create a Climate of Engagement, Support and Safety (S.U.C.C.E.S.S.) hosted the SUCCESS Conference on School Discipline on Saturday, October 29th at the Zimmerman Boys and Girls Club in Fresno, California. The conference was truly a success, with over 100 people attending (more than 80 participants being youth) and included a busy day filled with workshops, a panel discussion and a great dinner/dance.

Young people from some of the most impoverished neighborhoods in the city (and the nation) came together with school officials, community leaders and other adult allies to discuss the importance of keeping students in school and explored in depth the issues of school discipline, suspension and expulsion. Everyone agreed that involvement and input of students and young people is vital in the effort to craft solutions that address some of the toughest challenges facing our school district. This youth-led conference shared informa-

tion that the SUCCESS team gathered over the last year through district data analysis, student, staff and parent focus groups in an effort to raise awareness and deepen community learning around the complexity of the issues facing students and families in our school district.

Adult participants heard the authentic and thoughtful voice of youth and their commitment to creating a safe and inclusive school environment that supports student learning. The youth learned in workshops what their responsibilities on the Fresno Unified School District campuses are as well as what rights and opportunities for resources they have as students of the district. It became clear that both the community and these young people want to improve the conditions at school

and make changes that will support all students in improving attendance and graduation rates.

The next steps for the SUCCESS team will be to present their work to the community and district officials to find workable solutions and test those solutions in the coming school year, making sure that all young people have the opportunity to be successful at school.

~tk



Life As A Type One

By Kristine Balliet



Photo: Anna Jacobsen

Kristine adjusts her insulin pump, which helps her live a more normal life as a diabetic.

ON AUGUST 30th, 2010, my life changed forever.

I had been sick the entire night before and I thought I was sick with something normal, like the flu. I didn't think it was anything worse than that. In the morning, I went to the emergency room. I had to wait for a few hours in the waiting room. I don't remember much, but as I waited, I remember I was very thirsty. My mom asked the people at the front desk if I could have water, but because they didn't know what tests they needed to do, they only let me have a little bit of water. It didn't help. I was still very thirsty.

I was scared. I didn't know what was wrong with me.

After waiting a few hours, they did some tests. When the results came back, I was told what was wrong with me: I had type one diabetes. This news changed my life. I remember crying and not knowing what would happen

next. I didn't know how to feel or what to think.

Like most people, I didn't know a thing about type one diabetes. I quickly learned it is an illness that causes my immune system to kill off the insulin-producing beta cells in my pancreas. Without insulin, my blood sugar skyrockets.

That day, I was very sick and out of

WE DID NOT GIVE THIS TO OURSELVES. WE COULD EAT GREAT EVERYDAY AND WORK OUT AND DO EVERYTHING SOMEONE "SHOULD" DO. IN THE END WE WILL STILL BE DIABETICS.

it. I had slipped into DKA (diabetic ketoacidosis). If I hadn't gone to the ER, I would have died.

My family was worried about me, and they didn't know much about type one diabetes, either. I was in the hospital for four or five days, and most

of that time I was in ICU. I had many warning signs of diabetes for some time before I went to the ER, but because I didn't know what those warning signs were, I didn't seek help. My mom stayed with me every day and night that I was in the hospital.

I trusted the people at the hospital to give me accurate information about my condition, but sadly, when I was in the hospital I was given a lot of wrong information. I was told that I could only eat 30-60 grams of carbohydrates for each meal, and that I should take the same amount of insulin at every meal unless my blood sugar was not in check. In that case, I would have to change it as needed to fix the blood sugar.

Later, I learned the truth.

Lisa Higgins, a nurse at Kaweah Delta Medical Center, trains diabetics about how to use their insulin pumps. I met her when I was trained how to use my pump. Because she is a diabetic herself, continued on page 32

TRYING TO GET OUT: BATTLE WITH SUICIDE

By Brian Phetthavong

A FEW years ago, I briefly spoke with a couple of people working at a psychological health clinic. I was there with some of my relatives. The people that worked there came to accompany my relatives. They were verbally making note of some of the problems that I might have had such as anxiety, social phobia, and low self-esteem. I asked my relatives that I was living with during that time if they would take me to get professional help. They said that I shouldn't receive therapy because supposedly being diagnosed with something would hinder me from getting a job in the future. Financially, my relatives probably couldn't afford to pay for the professional help that I might have needed.

I was pretty much a loner in middle school all the way through until the end of my sophomore year in high school. All I did for fun was play video games and go to the elementary school nearby where I lived to shoot some hoops by myself.

I didn't have any friends. Most of the other kids and teachers in school had negative things to say about me usually because of my appearance and how I'm quiet most of the time. It was also the same at home. I would always get criticized by my family because I didn't live up to their views and expectations. It was very hurtful. I felt a lot of loneliness and sadness.

According to the Social Phobia/Social Anxiety Association, the definition of a social anxiety disorder is, "the fear of social situations and the interaction with other people that can automatically bring on feelings of self-consciousness, judgment, evaluation,

I SAT DOWN ON THE FLOOR AGAINST THE WALL. I HAD A SCISSOR THAT I WAS PLANNING TO PLUNGE INTO MY HEART.

tion, and criticism." If a person usually becomes anxious in social situations, but seems fine when they are alone, then "social anxiety" may be the problem". I believed that a social anxiety disorder was what I really had based on this information.

I was moving to a different town and I had to adapt to the changes in my life that were happening back then. Some of the changes included fitting in at a new school and making new friends. As time went by, the hardships in my life just seemed to worsen and pile up. My grades were bad and I was having a hard time getting them back up. Also, I was still receiving a lot of verbal abuse from the other kids and teachers in school. All in all, the people around

me contributed to my distress and low self-esteem.

I just didn't want to feel the misery anymore. One day in my room, I sat down on the floor against the wall. I had a scissor that I was planning to plunge into my heart. I held the scissor next to my chest pointing directly to my heart. I was thinking to myself that this would be the end and I wouldn't have to suffer from all the anguish that I was feeling. It turns out that I didn't go through with it. I dropped the scissors and tears started streaming down my eyes. It was only a few minutes that I was weeping out all the pain that had bottled up. Afterwards, I called a suicide hotline.

I received counseling for a number of months throughout the school year. The counselor that I was meeting once a week helped me to resolve some of the issues I had such as anxiety and poor communication skills. She taught me some relaxation techniques and basic conversation skills. Also, I wrote in a journal every day which helped me to think more positively and boost my self-esteem. I've also grown to not care about other peoples' negative opinions of me. Also, I became more independent and self-reliant thanks to her guidance.

Suicide is a preventable issue that is often overlooked by many people. Peoples' attitudes towards suicide have changed over the years. Nowadays, people are beginning to understand suicide better because of the research that has been done. However, there are still some people who view suicide as a contemptible matter, a stig-

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Illustration: Jaleesa Vickers

Journal of a A Young Expectant Mom

By Amelia Garrido



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**JUNE
28**

FINDING OUT that I was pregnant was a major wake-up call. I didn't believe it at first, but after the second test came out positive, it was clear. I had just turned 18 and just graduated from high school.

Becoming pregnant right after all this is NOT a good look, especially with goals such as mine. I wanted to be a model and to start on my portfolio. Now I'm getting bigger, so I have to buy new clothes that will fit me.

It's even harder when you don't have a job and are constantly getting sick, as in my case. At first, I was told I was a high-risk pregnancy, because of how small I was and that I wasn't gaining any weight.

**AUG
28**

NOT ONLY was I not gaining any weight, but I had lost two pounds from when I first went to see the doctor. Then, two weeks later, I gained it back. But three weeks after that, I lost three pounds, which sucks. My nurse said it was normal, and that I had to try to eat more.

I don't try, I do eat more than ever.

But I'm not gaining anything. And it's making me worry.

**SEPT
28**

I'M 17 WEEKS and guess what?! It's a boy :) I came back from my ultrasound feeling great. He is actually bigger than expected. Exactly what I was hoping for!

Since I started school at UEI College, the days are going by a lot faster than before, so that's good. I'm training to be a medical assistant. In class we had to do blood draws, injections, vitals, and a lot to do with testing. I can take blood from people and give injections, but I can't give or get any because of my pregnancy. When I tell someone why I can't do it, their voices get quiet and they start talking like it's a secret.

Some yell it out, which I don't mind, but I don't think it's that serious for everyone to act the way they do.

When I have my scrubs on you can't tell that I'm pregnant, because I'm small. Guys still stare and try to "holla" at me, which I kind of figured would still happen. So when they notice or find out I'm pregnant, they get rude and say things like, "You hide that pretty well" or "Are you taking Baby Daddy applications?"

I ignore them, but it annoys me so much.

OCT
10

I HAD NO MONEY coming in for me at all, other than the \$30 stipend I get from the work I do at The kNow. At first I signed up for General Relief to get cash, food stamps and Medi-Cal, which only lasted for three months, and I was planning to wait until next year to sign up again.

But that's no good for me, because it takes 9 months to have a baby.

So I'm thinking in my head, "WTF am I going to do?"

I moved back in with my mom, so that she could help me with my pregnancy. That way I could get cash, food stamps, and Medi-Cal as long as I was staying with her.

Or so I thought.

I can't get cash because I am over 18 and won't be able to get it until I am 5 ½ months pregnant and won't get more until the baby is born. I don't have a job and I'm not going to school.

About 12 weeks into my pregnancy, I got into a deep lazy mode. I didn't want to do anything or see anybody, I just wanted to sleep until the baby came. Which is not okay.

NOV
14

I'M 24 WEEKS now, which is six months. I'm getting pretty big and have gained 14 pounds so far. I started off my pregnancy at 124 pounds. Now I'm 138 pounds. That makes me so happy because I'm mostly baby and that means the baby is getting bigger.

He moves a lot and makes me hungry all the time. I haven't been sick like I was in the beginning of my pregnancy, so that's a plus.

When I went to get the baby tested for deficiencies or Down syndrome, everything came out negative, so I was very grateful for that.

I have good and bad days, which I kinda expected, but since I turned five months I've been feeling pretty good.

Lately though I've been wanting my own space and my own room, especially now that my baby's daddy moved in. I want room for myself, him, and the baby's stuff. But this is only temporary until we get on our feet.

Hopefully that happens soon.

Me and my baby daddy finally came up with a name for the baby, and we decided it's going to be Amariae Darius Kadayne Bigby! Three more months and he will be here.

I'm looking forward to things now. I'm waiting for everything to fall into place now that I'm going to school. I'm still going to The kNow's meetings. I'm going to be getting welfare soon, I'm on WIC, the baby is healthy and I have a stable place to live.

The holidays are coming, and I'm expecting to get bigger and have better things. I won't be on welfare once I finish school in June or July of next year, and I can start on my portfolio for modeling as soon as possible.

I don't plan on being in Fresno two years from now, but I should have my own apartment in March, and a car. I plan on getting my son everything he needs. I don't want him to need or want for anything.

I want my son to have everything I didn't have and see more than I have. I plan on being the best mother I can be and giving him my all.

I expect great things in my future, even though I was set back by some things in life. I now have someone to live for and someone to come home to, to tell all my experiences to, and to love me just for me. Just because. ~tk

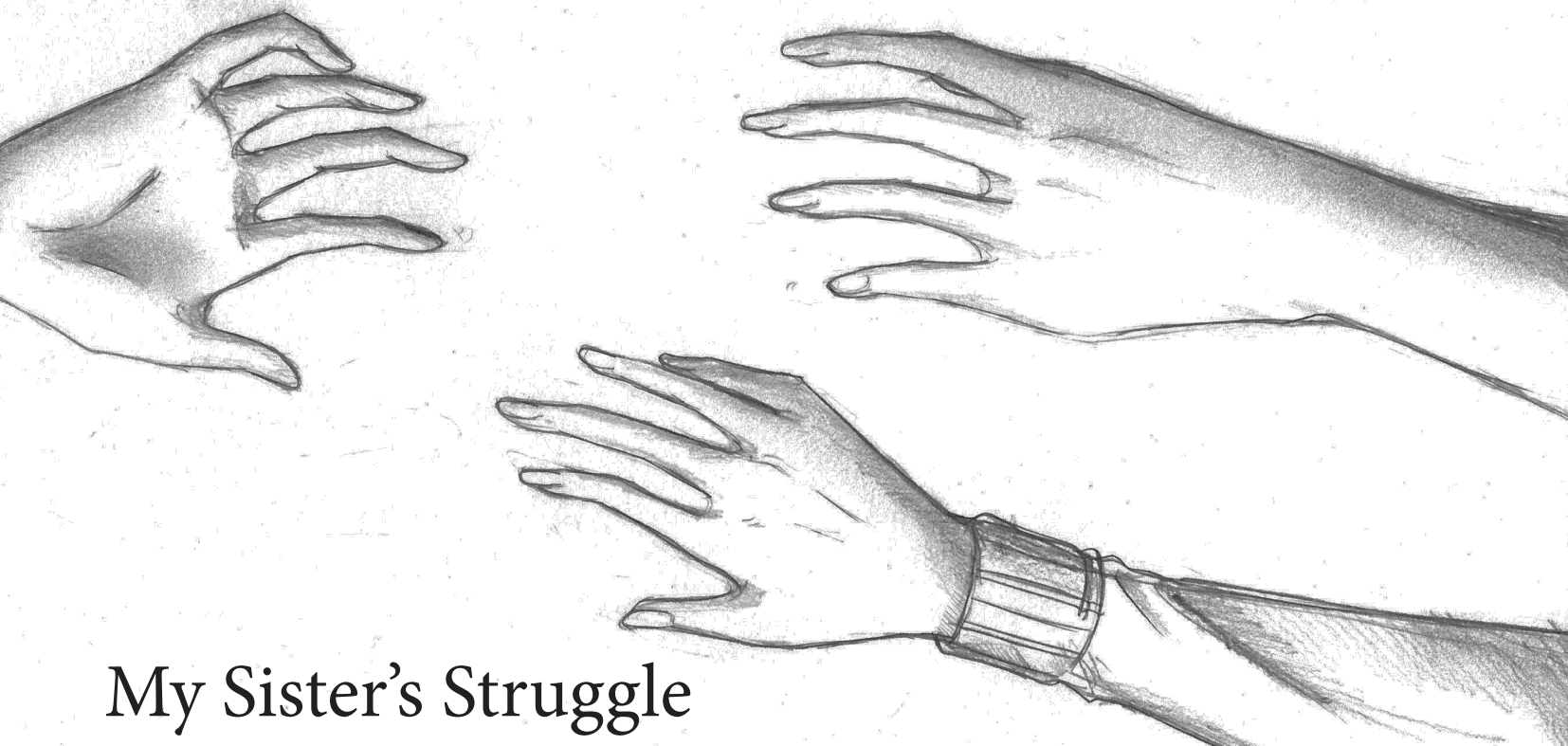


Illustration: Jaleesa Vickers

My Sister's Struggle

By Ellen Carretero

ALMOST five years ago I went through a difficult phase. It all started when I began middle school. I think that is about the time any young adolescent starts to go through changes even they don't understand. When it started happening to me it was very difficult because I didn't understand what I was doing, just like my thirteen-year old sister Jane is now.

During that time, my relationship with my mom became almost non-existent. When I look back now I think about all the time I wasted with her by just being mad over small things. I would get mad when she would question why I was staying after school. I think all she was trying to do was find out my interests and understand me better. I also got mad when I would ask her to buy me a shirt or a pair of jeans I really liked, even though I knew we didn't have a lot of money.

My younger sister Jane and I have this "phase" in common. Her situation was definitely different from mine but overall it was about the same thing, finding out who you are.

When Jane started the sixth grade she was already showing signs. She didn't want to listen to anything my mom told her. We could tell Jane was still grieving and missing our dad who passed away a couple of years back. When she promoted from elementary school she was already talking back and was so disrespectful to my mom that I decided to step in.

I became like a second parent to Jane. Now that I look back I think I

WE COULD TELL JANE WAS STILL GRIEVING AND MISSING OUR DAD WHO PASSED AWAY A COUPLE OF YEARS BACK.

understand that my place was never to be a parent but to be a sister and most importantly a friend. Like my school counselor said, she already had a parent, she didn't need another one.

It got to the point where our mom couldn't control her. Jane was disrespectful to everyone. When my mom would tell her to do her chores she said she didn't want to. I tried to help but it

was useless. My family started to fall apart after that. My mom and I started to argue over why my mom wasn't doing enough to control my sister better. My older sister would agree but really didn't want to get involved, which was a good idea and smart of her to do. Everyday was a constant war zone in our home and I couldn't stand to be around Jane.

Sometimes my mom and I would discuss options on what we could do to get Jane some help. We looked into programs and services offered by the county, it wasn't until we started to look that we noticed there weren't many programs out there. We would find some programs that could help but later we would find out that their fees were too much and we couldn't afford them. My mom started to get frustrated and would stress about not being able to find help for her daughter.

One day, my mom found drugs in Jane's backpack. It was that day that I think not only changed Jane's life but all of ours too. My mom decided to turn Jane in to the police.

The police continued on page 34

The Story of My Rape

How I Survived Assault

By "Roxy"

AT THAT time in my life, I was lonely and desperate – I had never really been lucky in love, and I was never the center of attention. I was craving for someone, anyone to sweep me up and give me what I thought I needed.

I was calling up a lot of chat lines and eventually someone floated my way and became interested in me. He was a lot older, in his thirties, but that didn't bother me because I thought it would be a good change of pace.

After about a week of talking, we decided to meet. He took me back to his place and nothing major really happened. He didn't want to do anything because I wasn't eighteen yet. About a week later when I did become an adult, we met up again, but this time the situation was different. Once more at his place, apparently he had something other than relaxing on his agenda. What was at first consensual sex turned to rape. At that moment the simple word "no" was everything, yet meant nothing.

I had no choice but to stay there the whole night because my home was so far away. I lied on the floor with no blankets, by myself, cold and sleepless. The next morning, I was dropped off near my home like nothing ever happened. I was lost and confused, and for days and weeks afterward that's all that was on my mind. That feeling went away when school started and I became pre-occupied with my work. Working was the only thing that I was doing that was keeping my mind off everything that

Illustration: Jaleesa Vickers

AT THAT MOMENT THE SIMPLE WORD "NO" WAS EVERYTHING, YET MEANT NOTHING.

up when love came into the picture. I was slowly becoming afraid of men, ultimately afraid of the intimacy that I had once yearned for so much. I couldn't get as emotionally close as I wanted to with the opposite sex. On top of that, I was afraid to have sex, and I would become overly attached to those who got close to me, in fear of them leaving me alone or getting angry with me. I was often clingy and seemingly childish, and I was stuck inside my self-made bubble of comfort. My fears and insecurities that were a consequence of the rape were poisoning my relationships.

I've had discussions with my partners about it, hoping that talking about it would set me free of any residual guilt. When I would open up, I would sometimes get reactions like "That's why you never want to do anything", "Wow, that person messed you up really bad" or even "Why didn't you just fight back?" Hearing those kinds of things started to make me feel like my only purpose in life was to be a man's tool...this object for their own selfish desires, and like the whole incident was my fault. It made me think of all the things that I could have done to possibly prevent the rape.

What my partners (and some other people) fail to under-

happened.

But suppressed emotions bubbled

stand is that something as serious and invasive as rape can make you feel powerless. There are many things that can be done, but how can you think clearly in a time like that? I know I didn't. If I had tried fighting back (if I could), what if he had killed me? The lines between safety and survival are blurred in those moments. When a person crosses boundaries in that nature, it's difficult to think. Speaking from my perspective, I felt everything. I felt like screaming. I felt like giving up. I felt like just laying there. I didn't feel like hearing, or seeing. I felt like dying.

It's almost impossible to forget something like rape. However, it's not something I can let control my life. I know that I don't always have to feel alone and helpless like I did immediately after the incident, because I know there are others out there like me. I chose not to seek help for privacy reasons. Many people may think that may have been a bit extreme or even foolish, but I hope people will understand my reasons. At the time, it was the best option for my situation.

It has been years since, but every now and then I think about it. I've moved forward with my life and worked hard to not let what happened interfere with my relationships. I admit that it creates some bumps in the road sometimes, but if I have someone with me that understands and is willing to accept me, and accept what happened in my past, I'll be able to get through it all. ~tk

Battle With Suicide
continued from page 25

ma and look at it as a shameful thing. Suicide is not about being weak; it is always about ending some level of pain that the person does not wish to feel anymore.

According to Leann Gouvía, the executive director of Fresno Survivor of Suicide Loss, for every two hundred suicide attempts, there is one completed suicide. Some high risk factors for someone that is in danger of suicide include having a gun in the household, previous suicide attempts, and having someone in the family that is diagnosed with a mental disorder such as depression.

Depression is actually one of the main causes for suicide and should be treated professionally. Those that have depression feel hopeless despair and sadness all the time. The person that is depressed usually has problems added on to the problems they already had and they usually bottle it all up. Some-

times, we can't see the warning signs of someone who is suicidal.

Gouvía says it is like a glass of water filled to the very top and it will spill if one more drop is added. Most of the time, we don't know what that "one more drop" is for a person. Individuals that are suicidal usually don't verbalize their intent to commit suicide so people cannot directly tell if they are suicidal or not. On the other hand, someone may give verbal clues or say things that can imply they are suicidal.

Some indications include being preoccupied with thoughts of suicide or suicidal ideation, feelings of loneliness, helplessness, powerlessness, and depression. Some warning signs can be identified such as when an individual goes through a sudden change in behavior. For example, someone that is usually upbeat and jubilant experiences something very traumatic, like a loss of a loved one or an end of a relationship, and then suddenly they are miserable

and sorrowful for a while.

Suicide is very hard to pinpoint compared to a disease or an event like a car accident. Nobody can exactly determine why someone would want to take their own life. Also, we can't directly ask the person why they committed suicide since they are no longer alive. We can only wonder and speculate why someone committed suicide.

Peter Vang, a Staff Analyst and Refugee Community Liaison for Fresno County Department of Social Services and is a member of the advisory board for the Fresno Survivors of Suicide Loss, had a son who committed suicide. He is living with the uncertainty of why his son chose to end his life. "I only guess and I will never know the answer," Vang said, "I will never know exactly what caused it and I wish I knew." ~tk

verbal abuse.

By Kevin Shelton

"My name is Morgan and I committed suicide two years ago by shooting myself at the pier where I usually go to get away. The last phone conversation I had with my mother was right before I died. I was born in Fresno but moved to Miami to live with my father. I was a sophomore in high school. My life dream was to do photography and become a model just like my older sister, but I never got the chance to fulfill my dream. I killed myself over the emotional stress I was feeling about my boyfriend, but really, there was so much more to my story."

MORGAN was my best friend's sister, and to me, she was the little sister I never had.

I remember jogging around the neighborhood with her and how fun it was because of her goofiness. I can still see myself holding her through tough times and giving her a smile of support. Even though she's gone, she continues to be present in my life. She committed suicide because of verbal abuse as it stated in her diary.

Morgan was one of the many millions in her age group of 15-25 who suffered from verbal abuse, which led her to suicide. According to the Centers for Disease Control website, suicide is one of the leading causes of teen death in this country.

Verbal abuse is the act of damaging a person's emotions, confidence, and self-esteem through negative statements. It can cause depression, low self-motivation, stress, emotional breakdown, and in Morgan's case, death.

To learn more about the topic, I spoke to Margaret Jackson, a social worker with the Cultural Brokers Program. "If not treated like a physical wound," she said, "abuse replaces itself as one's personality." Morgan's abuse led her to have low self-esteem and eventually she committed suicide.

Ms. Jackson also shared with me that "reaction to the abuse might not seem so cohesive, but in time will grow to affect one's mind."

I don't know all the details of Morgan's abuse because she moved so far away, but reading her diary sickened my stomach. She wrote a lot about having low self-esteem at school and the terrible names she was called made her feel ugly, such as a being a slut or hooker. She also wrote about suffer-

SHE WROTE A LOT ABOUT HAVING LOW SELF-ESTEEM AT SCHOOL AND THE TERRIBLE NAMES SHE WAS CALLED MADE HER FEEL UGLY, SUCH AS A BEING A SLUT OR HOOKER.

ing everyday from her appearance, her family, and even her lifestyle. She even wrote about how she turned to cutting as a way to help.

Her family noticed a change in her behavior, but they didn't know what to do. They had many conversations with her to find out if something was wrong, but she would always tell them the same thing, just stressed with school and tired. None of us know for sure who was abusing her, but we are guessing it was someone at school because that is where she was most of the time.

I had conversations with her too about friends and relationship problems, but looking back, I should have noticed something was eating her up inside. I had no clue she was suicidal. I could have helped prevent this. She was so far away, and I feel bad there was nothing I could do to be by her side physically in her time of need.

I will never forget the day I found out Morgan died. It felt unreal when I got the phone call from her mom, who lives in Fresno. There was nothing left in my body but shock as I tried to catch my breath. I fought to keep her happy and looking forward to life, and now she was pronounced dead. I cried a storm as the memory of her replayed in my head. Her mom struggled to tell me what happened. After we hung up, I rushed to her house to comfort her mom.

I came to know Morgan through her older sister, who is my best friend. Together, we were like the three musketeers, never separated. When I met their mom, she was so nice, I felt like she was my own mom. The first thing she told me was to call her mom. That's how close we all are.

Morgan was the type of person who motivated others. She was always

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Double XP On Junk Food
continued from page 19

Sadly, this promotion shows that the game promoter doesn't really care about gamers' health. Activision (the game's publisher) and Pepsi are trying to make money off of us, even though it hurts our health. They know we can't resist and we'll buy the junk food because we love the game.

Gaming is not a physical activity. It doesn't involve exercise, but encourages long hours of sitting. Adding junk food to playing CoD is a recipe for harming one's body.

These companies could have put the Double XP codes on healthy food. Putting the codes on water, 100% juices, fruit packs, carrot sticks or whole grain bread would have been great for gamers, because they would be eating healthy while playing. It might even help change the eating habits for some of these gamers.

Let's think about who is playing CoD and buying junk food for the Double XP codes. Even though the game is rated "M" for mature content and supposed to be played only by people over the age of 18, many CoD players are young, and these kids are most likely to buy junk food to get codes for the game. They are the ones that need healthy food the most. They are most attracted to junk food advertising, like the Mountain Dew bottle with the label claiming to be "game fuel."

Activision and Pepsi should consider the impact this promotion is having on all gamers, but especially its impact on youth. **tk**

CAMPAIGN



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MULTIPLAYER

ended and continue the single player experience.

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Life as a Type One
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she is sensitive to her patients' needs and I trust her to give me the right information. She told me that type one diabetics get the wrong information all the time. "It is very rare to see a type one admitted to the hospital and when they are, they are treated like a type two," Higgins said. "There is definitely an issue with confusing the two diseases."

After meeting Higgins and reading up on type one diabetes, I know that most of the information I was given was really for type two diabetes.

Most people think all diabetics are overweight, older, people who do not take good care of themselves and that is how they get the illness. I and other type ones are not like that. We did not give this to ourselves. We could eat great everyday and work out and do ev-

everything someone "should" do. In the end we will still be diabetics.

It has been a year since I found out I have type one diabetes. For the most part I know what to do, but that doesn't mean that I just test my blood and give insulin and that is all. I don't feel good a lot of the time. My blood sugar is still high or low a lot of times and that makes me feel sick.

Knowing that I will have to live with this the rest of my life can really take a toll on me at times. Sometimes I can't do things because I don't feel well. Sometimes I can't do things because I'm scared that something will happen to me and I won't be with anyone who will know what to do to help me. I used to be scared to sleep because I worried that I would have low blood sugar in my sleep and die.

I recently got put on an insulin pump and that has helped me a lot in many ways. I'm not as scared to sleep because I know it won't give me too much insulin. When I was taking insulin from shots I didn't know how much insulin was still in my body, and I could easily overdose.

It is really important for people to know what a type one diabetic has to deal with on a daily basis. I have gotten pretty used to the everyday life as a type one diabetic, now that I have had a year to learn about it and learn how to deal with it. But still, even now, some days I find it very hard to deal with the challenges of being diabetic. **tk**

WHAT HAPPENS ON AN EXPEDITION...

By Jaleesa Vickers

In June 2011, The kNOw youth took a trip to the backcountry with WildLink. It was an expedition that spanned several days, and we came back with lots of memories...



When Family Gets Locked Up
continued from page 5

When we get there, we go through the information station and write down our date of birth, the person we're visiting, how many pieces of jewelry we are wearing, and other information. Then we wait for the bus, which takes us to the metal detector station where we take off anything that is metal and we take off our shoes.

I recently talked to Jonquisha Damon, who has studied incarceration and

received her Masters degree in Criminology from Fresno State. She works at the Boys and Girls Club. Jonquisha shared with me how studying incarceration gave her insight on how to work with people who have behavior problems because of what happened to her brother. "My brother was in prison," she said, "My family tried to hide it but then I looked it at from their point of view, they were hurt...how is this going to affect my family." Instead of letting this get her down, Jonquisha used it to

push her harder to do better in school.

Hearing the stories of Jonquisha and my friends remind me of my own struggle with having my uncle locked up. Incarceration broke my family apart because it took my uncle away, and I know how it can negatively impact younger kids. I hope one day my uncle will be free so I can get to know him and he won't have to miss out on any more of my life. ~tk

My Sister's Struggle
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came about an hour later and asked what the problem was and we told them everything. The officer decided to arrest Jane.

For my mom, it was very hard as I am sure it is not easy for any parent to see their child cuffed and taken in a police car. I spoke to the officer who came, and he told me about a year ago the county had more programs to help young people like Jane but due to budget cuts, those programs were taken away. Now there is a limited amount of help out there for youth like my sister and myself. That day they took her to juvenile hall; she stayed there for thirty-five days.

I felt sad to see it get to this point but I also knew it was for the best. I missed her a lot but I knew her being at juvenile hall would help her understand that her actions have consequences. It made her realize the value of family over ma-

terial things. She also understood that if she kept going in a negative direction, she could be back in juvenile hall not just for a couple of weeks but for months or years.

Recently, I spoke to my high school psychologist about this whole situation. She said there are many teenagers and families struggling through this and that I am not alone in the way I feel. She also told me that a brother or sister should serve as a best friend, not a parent. Siblings need to show unconditional love and support, and parents should not expect their son/daughter to be the same kid when they were little.

Overall, some of the things a person can do to help, according to my school psychologist is to try not to argue about the small stuff but instead about things that matter. Something else a person can do is come up with a reward system that allows a young person to buy a special gift at the store or go some-

where nice if good grades are achieved. The most important one I believe is to not put them down. Don't try to make them feel bad about themselves. Like she says, "They already have low self-esteem so putting them down doesn't help at all."

In the end, Jane and I were lucky to have our family's support. But for others, not having someone to provide support can negatively affect the way a teenager develops. It may determine the types of decisions they make that could change their lives forever, not just physically but mentally and emotionally.

As young people, sometimes all we really need is patience and someone who is willing to stand by us through this phase so we can better understand what we're going through. ~tk

Verbal Abuse
continued from page 31

a joyful, fun and goofy person to be around. Her personality was truly her own. She had no shame to be herself.

I remember one night, Morgan and I were on our way to her mom's house for movie night, and at that time, I was beginning to learn to drive. Morgan and I were so busy having a conversation that I accidentally stopped at a green light. We sat there in a full con-

versation not noticing the light was green until we saw it turn yellow, and luckily the street was empty at the time. We both had a good laugh and swore up and down that we had no clue the light was green.

Recalling some of these memories are difficult because I know she is gone. It still hurts us all because we did not see it coming. It devastated her parents the most because she was a child taken away from her family.

To help someone who is experiencing verbal abuse, "it is important to embrace him/her no matter the response," says Ms. Jackson, "in doing so, that person will realize you are not the enemy but someone to trust."

For me, Morgan's death makes me realize how sad it is when people don't realize the bullets they shoot off in their words, and how words they speak can destroy a life. ~tk

CONTRIBUTORS



FRESNO YOUTH:

(L-R) Te'Lona Love, Kevin Shelton, Jaleesa Vickers, Vang Yang, Bao Xiong, Amelia Garrido, Luis Pacheco, Brian Phetthavong, Sarah Thao, Kristine Balliet, Ellen Carretero, Denise Yang, Miguel Bibanco.

ArtHop at The kNOw

On Nov. 3rd, we opened our office to the community to host an ArtHop event. On this night, we celebrated the talents of our youth through art, dancing and performances. We would like to thank those who came out for the festivities and we can't wait to host more events in the future.



Jaleesa Vickers



William Thao

Bao Xiong's pencil portrait of Korean singer BoA was one of many pieces by youth artists featured for ArtHop in The kNOw's office.