

SUMMER 2012

the KNOW

IN SOMEONE ELSE'S SHOES

INSIDE: Learning from Mistakes at School, Getting a DUI, Living with HIV, Time Warping, and more.



The kNOw

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The kNOw

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From the second story windows of The kNOw's office, I can look down to the parking lot to see the exact location where we held some of our early meetings and energizer activities nearly six years ago. Just down the hall from the front door of our office, I remember how the young people sat on the floor, perched up against the wall with a notepad and pen.

In other cases, it was normal for us to have our meetings at a local library, sometimes even at Burger King. Other days, we were lucky enough to have access to a classroom at a nearby charter school. I worked mostly from home and out of my car, picking up young people and taking them home, sometimes making two trips

We were homeless then, without a stable place for the young people, hopping from one place to another. But that didn't discourage us, nor did it deter us from the larger mission to create a refuge for youth voices to be heard in a place like Fresno. What an incredible feeling to know we are still here today, almost six years later, with another proud issue to share with you.

As I look back on my time at The kNOw in the midst of my imminent transition out as Director, sometimes I wonder what impact I have made on the young people who I have watched over so closely. Then I realize that the impact they have made in my life is far greater than I could have ever anticipated. Whether it was young people here at The kNOw, or those I worked with at the Juvenile Justice Campus through the Beat Within, or those from We'Ced in Merced—our newest addition of voices (so proud of them!), these young people have taught me about stoic resilience in the face of desperation, about friendship and love in a cynical world, and above all, about trust. I am proud of them for telling the stories that need to be told!

In this issue, we invite you to walk in the shoes of young people, to feel and experience each day as they do while at home, at school, in the neighborhood, or anywhere else. If you are a young person, then we hope you can put yourself in the shoes of a friend or someone you know. If you do, you will know what it feels like to take a two-hour bus ride just to get to where you need to go every day, or you will understand how it feels to be unfairly suspended for something that wasn't your fault, or you will feel the weight of living with depression, or you will know how much it hurts when no one listens to your side of the story. Put yourself in the shoes of our writers, such as in Vang's story dealing with domestic violence between his parents (p. 20), or in Te'Lona's case, the pain of lacking a real relationship with her father (p. 30), or in Jane's situation, struggling each day to get through the tough middle school years (p. 23). When it comes to hearing people out and putting yourself in their shoes, we are also proud to feature in this issue a story on restorative justice (p. 8) by Miguel, written in partnership with the Fresno Bee.

I am deeply humbled to have journeyed with The kNOw this far, from the long hallways and parking lots, to the walls and windows of our current meeting room. To all of our amazing community and youth-serving partners, to our generous funders and supporters, and to our dedicated staff, I encourage you all to never stop investing in young people. And to all of our young people, I hope you never stop investing in yourself and in your future. You are never alone in your struggle. There will always be someone out there who wears the same shoes too.

Mai Der Vang, Director 2006-2012

HIV & Me

By “Michael Erikson”

For pretty much all my life I wondered why I had so many different doctors. I'm not sure how many doctors I had, but I remember when I was younger I went to San Francisco for doctor visits twice a year. When I was 13 years old, it was at one of these visits that I found out I have HIV. They told me that when I was born, my mother, who also has the virus, passed it on to me.

When I first found out that I had the virus, I didn't know what it meant. I don't think I'd ever even heard of HIV or AIDS before that day, so because of this I wasn't really scared when I found out about it. I didn't know what to say when they told me I had it, but I could tell it wasn't a good thing to have because of the expressions on everyone's faces and their tone when they told me about it. When they asked me if I had any questions, there was only one question I could think of: Was I going to die?

When they told me about it everything made sense. It made clear why my mom and I had to take special medication. After they told me the news, they told me about a summer camp for kids like me called Camp Kindle. It made clear why they always had a red ribbon at this camp.

Camp Kindle is a camp for children who are infected with or affected with HIV or AIDS. The camp was started by Eva Payne in August 1998. She started the camp when she realized that there were no camps for children whose lives were affected by HIV or AIDS. She wanted to start a summer camp for these children so they could feel like they were not alone and that there are people out there who love and support them. The camp's first session was in July 1999 and it was held in Hordville, Nebraska and served 50 campers. Between then and now, Camp Kindle has served more than 1,500 campers.

Camp Kindle means a lot to the children who get to go. Cassidy, my friend and fellow camper,

says that the camp lets children with HIV express themselves. “Some of them don't get to do that often at school, or at home, or at church, because of influences and stigma,” she said. Cassidy went to camp with me and has gotten to know people who have been victims of the stereotypes that come along with the virus.

“Camp Kindle is about spreading education, because a lot of people are uneducated about the disease of HIV and AIDS,” says Rockpile, a counselor at the camp. To me, the camp is about many things, but this is one of the main things it's about.

“Usually when kids go there for the first time, they aren't too happy to be there,” said Rockpile, whose real name is Russell Boring. Rockpile was my counselor at the camp. I have to admit that I wasn't very excited to go there my first year. I was going to a place with a bunch of people I had never met before and before I went to camp, I had never really spent a

whole entire day without my parents, which scared me a little bit. On my first day, about three summers ago, I was surprised because the campsite wasn't really the way I'd pictured it in my mind. At the front of the campsite there was a huge cafeteria where we ate, held our camp activities, and had our big end-of-the-week showcase where we

showed everybody what we had been doing and the projects we were working on.

When my friend and I were talking about camp, I thought about all the good times I had there. I wish I could go this year too, but there's a camp rule that once you graduate from your cabin, you have to spend a year away from camp so you can mature and come back the following year as a CIT (counselor in training). I imagined everything I would do up there if I went this year and all the new people I would get to know.

Camp Kindle is important to me because the children who go there always leave with more than

There was only one question that I could think of: Was I going to die?





The author, who is HIV positive, deals with the effect of the virus every day, but he found support and a chance to feel normal at Camp Kindle.

they came with. I don't mean material items, although you do leave with some pretty cool things. Rockpile said that the camp helps HIV positive children understand the virus. "A lot of [the campers] say I know I have it, but I don't understand what it actually means to me," he said. He was right. Before camp, I knew I had it, but I didn't know what it meant. At camp I learned more about what I have and how to manage it.

There are a lot of myths out there about HIV. One is that any kind of physical contact with someone who has HIV or AIDS will cause you to be infected. Another one is that only gay people can get HIV. For anyone who believes this or any others like it, let me tell you now that a lot of them are not true. There are a few different ways to get it. A lot of people get it by having unprotected sex with someone who already has the virus. It can also be caught by using a needle that was used by someone who already has the virus. Children who are born to a mother who has it or are being breast-fed by someone who has it will also get the virus.

I haven't known for all that long about this and there aren't many people I really trust, so I haven't told anyone about my HIV. The only people who know are my family, my doctors, and people at Camp Kindle. That's why I'm writing this article under a pseudonym. Since only a few people know about it, I've never had to personally deal with discrimination, however, I've heard stories of people discriminating against other people with the virus. An example of this is when a school in Pennsylvania denied admission to a kid because he was HIV positive.

At this point, I bet you're wondering what the point of this article is. The point is that there are many myths out there about HIV and AIDS and there are a lot of people who believe them, so I'm hoping that by reading my story you realize that not everything that people say about them is the real and whole truth.

For me, being HIV positive hasn't been all that bad. I really haven't had it all that hard since it isn't public information and I've only had one major health issue that this virus has made worse than it should have been. I do know of people who have had a tough life because of HIV or AIDS, whether it's because of discrimination, or because of health complications that were made worse by the virus.

Studies have shown that the percentage of women in South Africa who pass on the virus to their children has gone down. This is because for the past couple years, South Africans have been investing in ways to fight HIV and AIDS. In fact, 95 percent of the women there are now getting the antiretroviral treatment they need to protect their children. Also, the number of new infections that occurred between 2001 and 2009 dropped by 22 percent. It seems like things in South Africa, as far as preventing HIV and AIDS go, are improving. Unfortunately, the same can't be said for women here in America.

According to a team of US AIDS experts, the yearly number of new HIV cases among black women in Baltimore and some other major US cities is five times higher than originally thought. As a matter of fact, a recent study has shown that the HIV rate among black women in some cities here in the US is as bad as some countries in Africa. It's unfortunate and sad that HIV is as bad as it is here in America, especially since we've always been the more developed country. I also feel sad for the children out there who will have the virus and will have to deal with the problems that come with it.

I am one of the 1.1 million people infected with HIV in the US, and one of Fresno County's 1,908 total reported cases of HIV. As of March 2011, adolescents between the ages of 15 and 24 years in Fresno County accounted for nearly 20 percent of all HIV cases in the county. I'm one of those adolescents. In 2010, Fresno's only AIDS clinic closed due to lack of funding. HIV among teens in Fresno can't be ignored, but according to a recent NPR poll, young people don't think having HIV is a big deal. HIV shouldn't be taken lightly, but people should also be careful about spreading harmful stereotypes about the virus. **tk**



Camp Kindle has served over 1,500 campers and has been around since 1998.

There aren't many people I really trust, so I haven't told anyone about my HIV.



Photos by Anna Jacobsen

Addicted *to* Shopping

By Ellen Carretero

W

hen I think of a shopping addiction or a shopaholic, I think of someone who is young, has money to spend and is very happy in life. What I didn't realize was that some of the people with shopping problems aren't necessarily happy about what they are doing, and every time they buy something, they have to think about what they did and feel bad. I went to a Debtors Anonymous meeting and what I learned there was very interesting to me.

What I learned at the meeting changed my perspective on what a shopping addiction really is. I learned that it is like a disease that you have to learn to control but you will never actually be cured from it. Many people don't like to talk about money because it's a touchy subject. No one wants to admit they are in debt

because they can't control what they buy.

Not many people know about shopping addiction. The first thing I think everyone should know is that it's not called a shopping addiction, it actually has a name and it's called oniomania. It's the psychiatric term for compulsive shopping or shopping addiction. It basically means that people shop on impulse as a way of coping and find it difficult to control their spending or shopping behaviors.

When someone goes to the mall every weekend and says they're just looking but leave with something, is it considered a shopping addiction? I feel like everyone thinks they have a shopping addiction even if it is just something small. **Continued on page 15**

No one wants to admit they are in debt because they can't control what they buy.



To Learn *from* Mistakes

How one method of school discipline could improve the odds of student success.

By Miguel Bibanco



John Alex Pena, a Washington Union High School dropout, believes Restorative Justice could have saved his education.

Photos by Anna Jacobsen

Restorative justice, simply put, lets young people learn from their mistakes.

A

s California's fourth largest school district, Fresno Unified has recently begun revamped efforts to address its high number of school dropouts. The district is using approaches that involve listening to different individuals in the community, including experts in education-related fields and students. Several ideas have been suggested as to the cause of the high dropout rate. One idea that surfaced through the increasing amount of dialogue is that current discipline policies in Fresno Unified need to be addressed. Critics believe that current Fresno Unified policies push out students and don't provide them with the opportunity to learn from their mistakes in a way that does not hinder their academic achievement.

In order to provide students with the opportunity to be held accountable for their actions and have them learn from their experiences, supporters of restorative justice have proposed a switch from current discipline practices into a system that focuses on healing relationships. This system asks why the incident happened and how can it be prevented. It is different than simply finding out who was involved and dispensing out punishment without considering how effective the punishment will actually be, or whether it is deserved.

This type of system is known as restorative justice. By using several methods, advocates for restorative justice state that it aims to "restore" those affected by the incident and meet the needs that might have been created by the event. These methods vary but usually follow a theme of cooperative resolution and voluntary participation. Conferences between the individuals involved are quite common.

Restorative justice has actually been implemented in schools and in the juvenile justice system. The Victim Offender Reconciliation Program (VORP) states that it works on the principles of restorative justice and focuses on working with people affected by juvenile crime.

The program brings victims and offenders together to discuss what happened and allows the offender to take responsibility for his or her actions. Each side is allowed to state the

actions and how they can reach a solution to the problem. Once both sides can agree upon a solution, they discuss how to carry it out and a time frame of when it can be completed.

VORP says they have seen success with their program and great response from participants in the program. Noelle Nightingale, Executive Director of VORP, attributes some of the success to financial concerns and the need for alternatives.

"I think a lot of it has to do with economic times," said Nightingale. "Budgets are pretty tight so people are a little bit more open to alternatives to what has currently been happening."

Nightingale believes this to be one of the many factors as to why people take advantage of VORP. Noelle also stated that using VORP makes sense fiscally.

"They can't just hire more probation officers," Nightingale said. "They can't just keep all the pods open in juvenile hall."

Noelle says this because she believes that these issues have to be resolved and not just put away. She also states that the process is popular with VORP participants. Noelle recalled a past case in which she heard positive feedback from a former participant in the program.

"The victim actually ended up coming into court and stating how much he appreciated the program," Nightingale said. She states she has heard similar feedback in many other cases.

VORP's caseload consists mostly of misdemeanors, but they are looking to expand and take on felonies as well. One of VORP's best claims of success has been the seemingly low rate of repeat offenses of participants of the program compared to non-participants. VORP's statistics show only 6.59 percent of its Community Justice Conference (CJC) participants have been found guilty or responsible of breaking the law again compared to 18.18 percent of non CJC participants for the year of 2012. Noelle has stated that when they begin taking on the felony cases she predicts that the difference in recidivism will be even more dramatic.

Districts across the state have adopted restorative justice practices. Three years after

Oakland Unified School District began making plans to overhaul its discipline policies, the district has restorative justice programs in 12 schools, some of which have seen up to 85 percent reduction in suspensions. San Francisco, Sacramento, Raisin City and Immanuel Schools in Reedley, along with rural districts in Merced County, have also joined the nationwide movement to reduce suspension and expulsion rates through restorative justice.

Immanuel Schools adopted restorative justice after participating in a training on the alternative discipline model at Fresno Pacific University in 2005. Ryan Woods, the superintendent of Immanuel Schools, said the transition was not a simple one.

"Overall it was not easy because there is no set answer," Woods said. "Each situation is unique and you have to treat them as such, and that is something that wasn't easy and still isn't easy today."

Despite these difficulties, Supt. Woods said that he is very glad that the schools actually made the transition. However, he does realize that his schools have several advantages that other school districts might not have. Besides the benefit of restorative justice fitting in with the school's Christian theme, the school is also small, serving only 402 students. However, there have been numerous schools that have implemented restorative justice throughout California. These include Fresno County's Raisin City School and several schools in the Oakland Unified School District. Recently, the implementation of restorative justice in FUSD has become a possibility, especially now that it is a recommendation of the Graduation Task Force.

Superintendent Woods says that if this option is taken in FUSD, it needs to be backed by school leaders.

"Administrators have to believe in it because they're the ones that have to support it and they have to understand the process," said Woods.

The need and effectiveness of restorative justice has been debated and continues to be a topic of discussion. Some of the things that people question about restorative justice

include its actual effectiveness and possible errors in recording its claims of success. Some state that perhaps the reason that there is a comparatively lower rate of repeat offenses in restorative justice practices is that those individuals who voluntarily go through restorative practices are probably not likely to reoffend in the first place.

Mike Reynolds, author of the three strikes law, has expressed some concerns about restorative justice. He was first introduced to the concept of restorative justice in the early '80s. He has voiced that that the restoration of an incident is unarguably a good thing and not many can deny that. Benefits like being recompensed for the damage done to property or being reunited with previously stolen possessions are difficult to oppose. He does however think that a system like this could only work for small crimes and that "restoring" certain wrongdoings just isn't possible. He also expressed some concern with the apparent lack of tangible data that really gets to the core of restorative justice's why and how. He lists as examples the fact that although most restorative processes are voluntary in nature, no one tracks the reasons why individuals choose to go with the restorative route.

Reynolds asks questions like, how does one know that the individuals who participate in the restorative process aren't the type of individuals who would have been less likely to reoffend in the first place? He also points out that these types of answers can be useful in proving the effectiveness of the program, and that this is something that needs to be investigated, especially when any program works for the public and is funded to do so.

Recently, the implementation of restorative justice in FUSD has become a possibility, especially now that it is a recommendation of the Graduation Task Force. In March, the district assembled a task force consisting of educators, administrators and community members whose goal was to research solutions to the dropout crisis. The adoption of recommendation eight, which relates to the implementation of a restorative model in schools, makes these questions very relevant.

So far the timeline for the implementation of restorative justice in schools is uncertain, but work is underway. Fresno Unified's superintendent Michael Hanson has stressed the importance of proper implementation.

"Just changing a policy and just expecting that to drive everybody's behavior is not very realistic," he said. He foresees several difficulties in implementation and knows that there is a lot of work to be done if FUSD is to succeed. "Communicating and developing a trusting environment in which to develop this will be the most difficult thing," Hanson said. He also points out that although Oakland is several years into similar work, restorative justice is just beginning to be used at Skyline High School, the fit is the first comprehensive high school in Oakland to do so.

"My initial hope was to go much bigger, much faster. But in conversations around it, on the central San Joaquin Valley floor, we don't appear to have a great deal of capacity that would overnight or in a dramatic way turn Fresno. So I think it's going to take us awhile to build the ability to do this," Hanson said. Among the factors to consider will be the fact that FUSD is still wrestling with budget cuts and that the process of restorative justice is a relatively new process to many.

Hopefully the decisions FUSD leaders have made and the ones that they continue to make will be ones that have the best interest of our students. We must remember to put our young people at the forefront of our minds when we make decisions that affect them and truly consider how best to sculpt them into the leaders of tomorrow that they will become. Perhaps restorative justice is a good avenue to help our youth overcome a troubling trend. Nevertheless, any decision that is made to help our students must do just that and help us invest in our future. **tk**

This piece was written in partnership with the Fresno Bee as part of a series of coverage around school discipline. More coverage on this topic can be found in the Fresno Bee and on The Know's website.

In their own words...



Jane

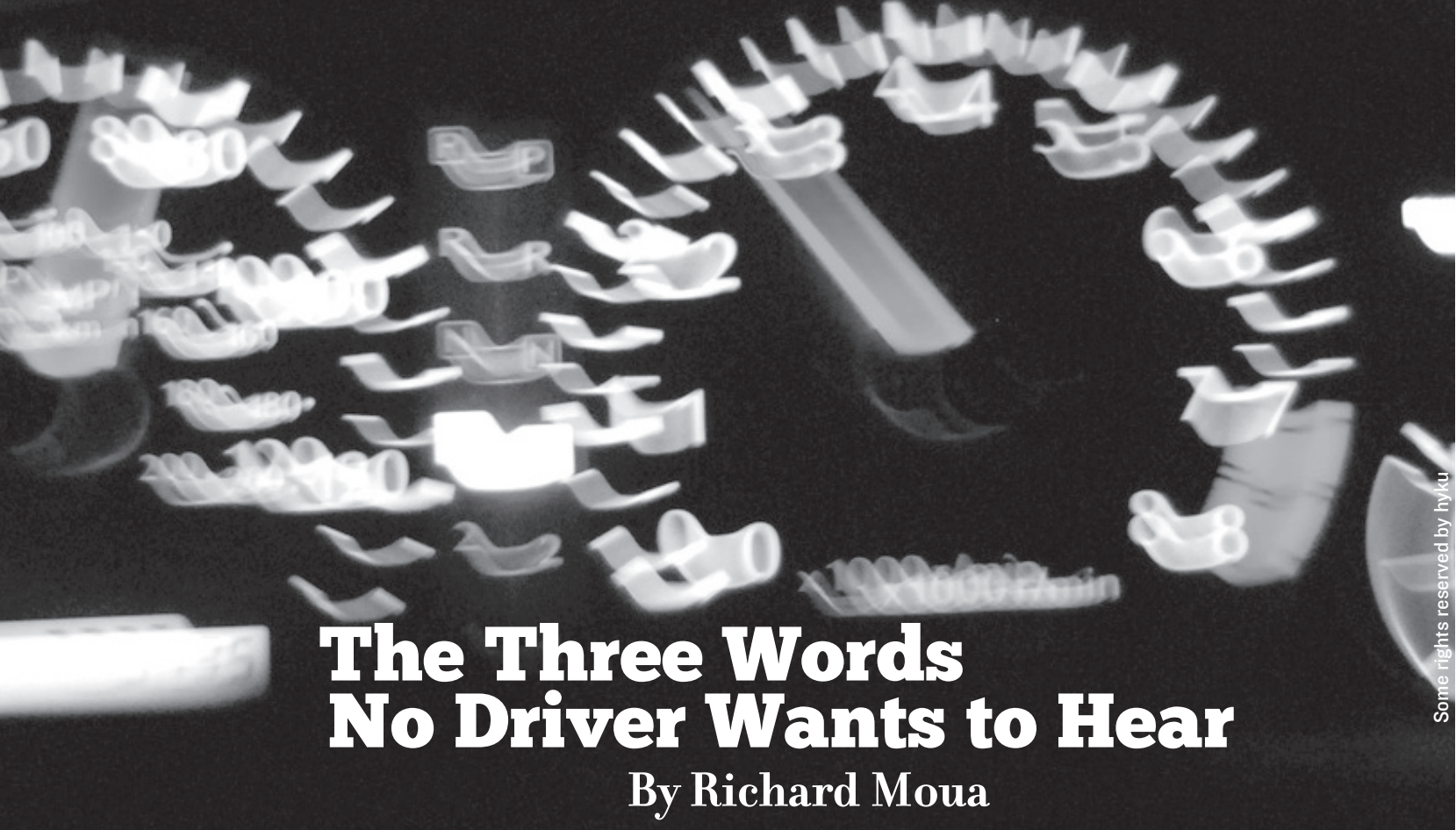
wishes she had experienced restorative justice, because she feels like teachers would have heard her side of the story.



John Alex

is in a program that uses restorative justice and says through it, he was able to take responsibility for his actions.

Hear Jane and John Alex in their own words at theknowfresno.org.



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The Three Words No Driver Wants to Hear

By Richard Moua

I

n the summer of 2011 I was pulled over at 11 p.m., but why? Did I run a stop sign and crash into another car? Or was it because I ran a red light? Apparently, the CHP that night wasn't able to see my license plate so he pulled me over.

For all he knew, his only concern was that I didn't have a license plate. But as I saw those flashing lights behind me I was already panicking. Tears rolled down my face as my friends told me to just calm down. Then the officer told me to roll down the window and asked for my driver's license and insurance. At that time, the alcohol was already hitting me and it was already a struggle for me to find these things.

"Step out of the car please," the officer asked. After going through multiple questions and tests, I admitted how much I had that night. I was arrested and placed behind the car as my friends were instructed to come out of the car. The police asked if they were able to call for a ride, states Sher Her, who was a passenger that night. While waiting in the car, he had many thoughts running through his head. "I thought to myself, 'Damn, am I going to juvenile hall with Richard as well?'" said Her.

After this incident I was given a temporary

As I saw those flashing lights behind me, I was already panicking.

license to drive around for a month, then decisions and court would come along. During this time period, all that went through my head was my license. I was so scared, I did plenty of research of what was going to happen to me and whether if I was going to get my license back or not. Going to juvenile hall wasn't a big concern at all, but if I wasn't picked up that night by a relative then I would have slept over at juvenile hall.

I asked probation officer Jesse Montemayor if he sees this more often in teens or in adults. Montemayor, who works with youth who have DUIs, said that age does not play a huge factor in who gets DUIs. "Alcohol does not discriminate," said Montemayor. It affects

all ages and nationalities. He also said that it mostly affects males, but it is increasing among women, as more women join the workforce.

Some people have a difficult time realizing that alcohol doesn't discriminate, no matter what sex or age. Pheng Vang's life was also affected by his DUI when he got it at the age of 20, just five months before his 21st birthday. He went through the same thing as I did. "I had to ask for rides from friends and parents to places such as school," said Vang. He said that getting a job involving driving was impossible, and to this day, it still affects his driving record. No matter what a DUI is a DUI. Vang's alcohol percentage that day was 0.8. "Insurance raised and nearly doubled," said Vang. Vang said it now affects him financially. He also had to take a written test to receive his license back. "I'll never drink and drive again and I've learned a lot from this experience," said Vang.

Getting a DUI as a teen is something I feel that society is not educated on. I would like to be that person to educate others to not make the same mistake as I made. I was wondering why my

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How do you live a healthful life?



Caroline

Growing up, I was always outside playing tag and being active kept me fit. But as soon as I entered third grade, I began to eat more and more. I don't know what made me eat so much. It wasn't just the eating, but I also began to watch TV more often. This went on until I was in sixth grade. During my fourth grade year, my family members bullied me because I would eat a lot. It made me upset but I didn't care about what they were saying because I loved eating.

In sixth grade, it finally hit me that I should lose weight. During sixth and seventh grade, I was at my best. I was skinny and finally fit in with other girls,

and I was happy. When eighth grade started, I began to eat more and more all over again. I don't know what triggered it. From that day to now, I've just been really big. People are surprised when they see my seventh grade photo because they can't believe I used to be skinny.

We are all judged in today's society, no matter how big or skinny we are. I've decided to change myself for the better, so that I can live longer to see the next generation and so I can finally fit in again.



Christina

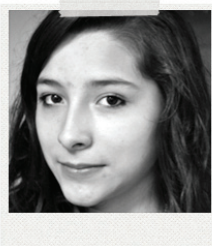
People tend to forget that being healthy isn't only about staying in shape and eating right, but also maintaining a positive attitude. This means being able to feel good about yourself inside and out and not being overwhelmed with negative emotions.

Volunteering keeps me in the right mind without bringing myself down, and I love to do it. I volunteer with a club at my school that helps raise money and awareness for cancer. I love volunteering for the American Cancer Society, because cancer has become a big part of my life. I had cancer as a child, and I was lucky to live through it. Unfortunately I was diagnosed with cancer again, and it's another reason that I continue to volunteer with the Relay for Life. I'm not going to let cancer keep me from

reaching out toward new opportunities, and it's merely another gesture for me to look at my life in a more healthy manner.

There's so much you can do to have a positive outlook and maintain a healthy perspective. If there's too much bothering you, maybe pick up the phone and send out a text, or make a call. Pick up a pencil and write down your thoughts on paper. Take a long lovely walk, and open your mind to the fresh air, and enjoy the view. Play a sport and find joy in playing with others.

Being healthy consists of more than just being in the best shape of your life and eating the healthiest meals, it also is about making the effort to stay positive.



Ashley

As we all know, obesity is an issue many people face today. There's another side to this health issue: Over 1.30 million Americans suffer from anorexia, not to mention that 50 percent of all people that have anorexia also have bulimia. Most people that suffer from bulimia and anorexia are females from ages 15-24. But it's not just females that face this problem: 10 percent of people that have bulimia and

or anorexia are in fact males. Now you want to know something scary? Anorexia is a fatal disorder, with 18-20 percent people who suffer from it dying after 20 years. According to eating disorders statistics only 1 in 10 people get help for their eating disorder. So not only is obesity a life-threatening problem, but bulimia and anorexia are, too.



Vince

Believing in yourself and saying you can do whatever you want to do is one of the biggest assets when you're trying to accomplish a task.

I used to be very unhealthy and unable to meet the level of physical fitness of my peers. This would be very discouraging because it was obvious whenever I played sports such as football, basketball, or soccer. I had very low stamina and would always be the first to become fatigued. But through sheer motivation and will, I was able to overcome that part of my life.

Today, I am a strong competitor in the boxing scene and an accomplished football player. If I stayed completely oblivious to the fact that I was falling behind others, and became lazy and overweight, I

would never have been able to succeed in the things I'm doing and have done.

This was all done with simple motivation like repeating to myself I can succeed, I will overcome, and I will be healthier. I also got rid of old eating habits, bad crowds, and entered a state of happiness where I remained focused on daily responsibilities. I started appreciating the little things in life and began understanding other people's feelings, and not just my own. Before I felt lazy, compulsive, egotistical and self-centered. This fed my unhealthy habits, but since I've gotten rid of those things, I really do believe I have become healthier, and an overall better person.

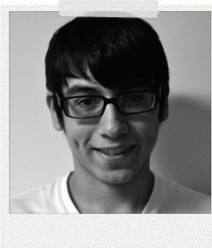


Elmo

Young people are easily influenced and tend to follow the people in their life who are stronger, smarter, or who take care of them. I experienced this when I joined the marching band and met a short but very intimidating man named Corey Reynolds, my marching band teacher. To this day I have a lot of respect for him for showing me that hard work and trying my best can really bring satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment.

Younger siblings, a peer, or even someone older than you could have learned examples from you and

you may have not even realized it. This is why it is always important to promote good habits and healthy ways of living your everyday life. If you make the right choices around your friends and family, you could be the one encouraging them to pursue a better life. Healthy people start with healthy relationships and having trust in one another.



Antonio

I was told I was overweight during a checkup when I was 10. I weighed in at 145 pounds, 30 pounds more than the amount I was supposed to weigh. I was really the one to blame for making unhealthy choices, but my mom also could have kept track of the unhealthy stuff she brought into the kitchen. It was all because I ate the wrong things and chose to never exercise. I never really knew any of the kids in the neighborhood, and that made me want to stay indoors and not go out and play.

Two years later during another checkup I weighed in at 160 pounds. My condition was not getting any better and this was the breaking point. I was put on a strict diet and forced to join sports. I lost some weight, but not much. Eventually, the energy around the changes I made died down and I lost commitment to my goal.

In 2008, the City of Fresno's "Healthy Lifestyle Fitness Camp" opened up in the Pinedale Recreational Park. It was free of charge, and I was sent to this camp by my parents whether I liked it or not. I went there for

two months and lost about 20 pounds. The camp used my progress as a success story. I kept on going back the following summers to volunteer as a mentor to help kids that went through the same problem and to also better my own health and fitness.

Being healthy is something that has become quite a problem here in America. It is mainly due to eating disorders such as being obese or anorexia. Eating too much is a problem, but eating too little is not the healthiest decision either. Many young males and females die from anorexia every year. Many young males and females are also diagnosed with diabetes every year as well. Teens are losing ground and becoming less healthy at a young age.

I guess the real big message is, being healthy doesn't have to be difficult. It just requires one to watch what they eat, how much they eat, and how much exercise to do every day which should be a minimum of 30 minutes or more to maintain a healthy, good weight.



Quamir

A healthy life means you are eating right and working out every day. Being healthy is one of the best things a person can do. I know because I used to be overweight and bigger than my family members. It wasn't cool because I was too big to participate in their activities. People made fun of me and made fat jokes about me.

If you are overweight, there are plenty of ways to lose weight. One is to go on a diet and eat healthy food like salad and Slimfast.

Exercise is the main key to losing weight. I love swimming because it's a good workout and it keeps me cool. I also like to ride bikes and jog. Exercise is fun. You can do it in a lot of ways. Eating fruits and veggies and diet foods is a great way to not gain weight. If you are really serious about losing weight, you should stay away from fast food restaurants.

It took a long time for me to lose weight, but I was committed and stayed inspired.

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Driving Under the Influence

consequences were so harsh. Montemayor explained that a couple years back, it wasn't like how it is now. A person was able to get 3 or even 4 DUIs and not have a punishment as hard as I have it now, but then it all made sense when he said that Mothers Against Drunk Driving were the ones who created these laws. That is why these laws are harder and more strict.

"Alcohol affects everyone differently," Montemayor said. Now I am on probation for a

I am on probation for a year and I had to go through a program for six weeks.

Addicted to Shopping

and a shopping addiction isn't an exception especially if you don't have the economic resources to support it. This causes many of those people to have debt that leads to many negative effects.

You might be wondering, well what exactly does a person with a shopping addiction do. When Jennifer Moncada, an Edison High School student, was asked how much was a reasonable amount of money to spend on clothes a week, she said \$100. Now if you think about it that is around \$400 a month just on clothing. To some people, this may seem reasonable if you have the economic resources to support it. For others, it could be too much, especially when many start to wonder, when do you wear all those clothes?

"When I look in my closet, I think I don't have anything to wear," said Jennifer. This may seem like a sign that you are spending money on clothes that you don't wear and need to start looking where you are spending your money and on what.

Something you learn when you are trying to control your compulsive shopping is that writing down what you spend your money on is very helpful in making sure you're not overspending. When Jennifer was asked how

year and I had to go through a program for six weeks. Also, I lost my license for a year as well - on my senior year!

While on probation, you are automatically arrested if you violate your probation, such as getting caught drinking. You can get checked at anytime and anywhere for a urine test and your curfew is 9 p.m. If you disobey these laws, you will get arrested and stay behind bars from a month to a year.

Teenagers nowadays don't know what they can get themselves into by drinking and driving. They may think it's cool and that they're able to drive, but it can lead to serious problems and a high chance of death. In some cases, these things have happened.

Montemayor told me that he always had a thing against drunken drivers and explained that his best friend was killed in an incident where the other driver was driving under the influence. About 40 percent of all fatal accidents involve teens who have been driving under the influence.

Drunken driving should be taken seriously and the consequences for both sides, victim or driver, should be known. Teens shouldn't be looked down upon because of what statistics say. More often, it's most likely that they just don't know what can happen to them because they may not be educated enough about drunken driving. **tk**

she managed her money, she replied saying, "I usually try to just separate my bill's money from the rest of it." This again can be a helpful way to also stay out of debt.

Many people have commented on the economy and how it has taken a bad hit although recently there is also talk that it is becoming much better. When Jennifer was asked how she felt about the economy she said, "I don't feel like the economy is not so great, but it doesn't really affect me because I have a job and work my maximum amount of hours that I can get with my school permit."

A new sense of respect for people dealing with shopping addiction grew. I went into this article with almost no knowledge and came out with a lot more information. I wish more people knew about the facts regarding oniomania and what it actually means to have it. I wasn't too sure what I wanted to write at the beginning and I was still too confused about the topic but now I couldn't have chosen a better subject. I want people to become aware and to understand those with a shopping addiction. I want everyone to know that shopping addiction is a hard issue to deal with but even if it's small you must deal with it before it's too late. **tk**



Photos by Anna Jacobsen

Living Time Warped

By Jonathan Castro

Have you ever wondered about living in the past? Do you imagine how it must have felt living in a certain time era? If so, you should learn about living time warped - a type of living that puts you into the past. The definition of living time warped is a person who chooses to live in a different era of time. For instance, if you loved the jazz age of the 1920s, then you would dress like people did then, listen to the music from that time and do hobbies they did back then. Of course these aren't rules you must follow; you can customize the way you time warp to your liking. It's your lifestyle so you can make it your own.

To live time warped, you just have to choose a generation you like or one you think would best fit you and start to live like they did. The objective of this lifestyle is to live as close to a different time period as possible. Some people go to the extreme and buy everything they can find pertaining to a certain generation. Others may participate in time warping in events such as a renaissance fair or Civil War reenactment. The choices vary. Some businesses even cater to time warpers.

Sawyer's Vintage Service in Clovis specializes in fixing

antique items such as cars, waffle irons, radios, appliances, soda machines, gas pumps and clocks. At Sawyer's, history is very strong in their family, shown by items passed down through generations. "The building has been in my family since 1949," said Bryan Davis, a proprietor at the shop. He collects classic American antiques which include appliances and he also houses family heirlooms.

Davis has slick hair and a bowling shirt resembling the 1940s and 1950s. But his chosen era doesn't limit his repair expertise - he can fix kitchen appliances, farm equipment, cars, radios and television sets from many different times.

Because there really is no exact location of where time warpers live, much of their community is located online. However, they often appear at events with historic value, like classic car shows, reenactments and local shops like Yoshi NOW!

The reasons for this choice of lifestyle vary. Most of the reasons are due to the interest, but where people got their interest and why it's so

important to them are the factors that stand out. People may be interested because they just like the era or because of their family history. Ray Luna, a college student at Fresno State, dresses as a Chicano youth from the 1960s. He said his interest was the style. "The main reason would be

Some people go to the extreme and buy everything they can find pertaining to a certain generation.

because they look better. For example, the cars and clothes,” Luna said.

Living time warped has some challenges. Finding items of a specific generation can take some time. Vintage items are either found in museums or tucked away in a basement. According to Luna, finding items from a particular time is easy. “I think you just got to know where to look,” he said. “You can always find vintage items at yard sales and thrift stores.” Money would be the next problem. You shouldn’t worry about it unless you are in dire need of financial help, and if that’s the case, then a suggestion may be to work on that instead. But other than that, you shouldn’t have a problem unless your family isn’t supportive. If that’s the case you can find a group of time warpers on the Internet for some tips.

The last challenge affects everyone but still is a pressing issue for this hobby: time. It’s an issue for every hobby but the difference here is that time warping hobbies could take longer than usual. Having time for the hobby is difficult depending on what era you live in. Clothing from the past can be a hassle to find. Practicing old hobbies from the era you chose to live in can also be difficult. For example, let’s say you are a pin-up girl from the 1940s. You must be able to fix your hair, put your make-up on, dress up, and proceed to your normal daily tasks.

There are many eras of time to choose from and a variety of reasons to do so. The different historical artifacts left behind in books, films and photographs are a reminder that with time, everything changes. There are a handful of people interested in eras that have a past, although the past is not forgotten. Each era brought its new style of music, fashion, trends and technology. What era will people time warp into when its 2045 or 2070? What will they collect? What will stand out to them from our generation? Only time will tell. **tk**

To live time warped, you choose a generation that best fits you and start to live like they did.

Shops like Sawyer’s Vintage Service (below) keep the spirit of the past alive - an important part of time warping.





Photos by Kristine Balliet

Race *and* Adoption

By Kristine Balliet

Adopted children often have a few differences from their adoptive family. My little sister is adopted, and her differences are more noticeable than most. She is pretty tall for an almost 6-year-old, probably the tallest in her class at school. She has beautiful dark skin, big dark brown eyes and black hair, which falls a little past her shoulders in small locks. Her differences are noticeable because my family, who is white, adopted a black baby.

My sister has a great personality. She is very funny, smart and loving. She draws pictures for me and my other family members just about every day. She loves wearing tutus, dresses,

and picking outfits that are colorful and very fashionable. She also loves it when I paint her nails. My sister is a total girly girl. She loves pretend cell phones, purses, jewelry and the Disney princesses. About half of what she owns is Hello Kitty. I love my sister so much and I am so blessed to have her in my life. She makes me laugh and smile every day. Whenever I'm having a bad day I know she will be there to give me a big hug and make me laugh. She always knows when to say or do something silly to lighten the mood.

Sometimes when I am talking to my little sister she will point out the differences in our

skin color. "You're peach," she'll say. When I ask her what color she is, she replies, "I'm brown." She knows we aren't the same color but she doesn't care. Why should she? When I talked with my mom about this, she had a great perspective. "Truth is, we're all the human race," she said. "There is no difference."

My family was always open to adopting a child of another race. At first my family was going to adopt a baby from Guatemala, but it is a lot harder and takes a lot longer to adopt from another country. So we ended up adopting in the US.

There are a lot of reasons why it isn't common for families like mine to adopt from a different race. I think that some people don't adopt darker skin babies or a baby of a different race because they think the child would have a harder time fitting in with the family, or they don't know how they would deal with racist people. I think some people don't adopt outside of their race because they are scared of dealing with comments from outsiders. There's also the fear of how their adopted child would be affected by negative attitudes.

I can understand these fears, but I think these fears are a better alternative than the child not having a family at all. Some people don't realize that even if they adopt from another race, the child could still look like their family, which could reduce discrimination.

My mom, who has talked with a lot of adoption professionals, told me that it's common for potential birth mothers to adopt children that look like them, even if they're from a different race. She said this is true for her and my adopted sister. "People have always said that my adoptive daughter looks very much like me, and she does. She looks very much like my pictures as a baby and a child, and, of course, we obviously have very different hair and skin colors," she said. My family adopted my sister when she was a baby, and my mom was even there when she was born and around the birth family for 10 days. During this time, my mom saw that there were a lot of similarities between our families, even down to mannerisms.

A lot of people think that now that it's 2012 race isn't a big issue, but it very much is. People let the color of a person's skin get in the way of dating and sometimes giving a child a home. As an older sister of an adopted child of a different race, I don't understand why you would not adopt a child because of their ethnic background. My sister is a smart, beautiful, funny little kid and I love her the same as my biological brothers. It makes me sick to think about people who won't adopt a dark skin baby when there are so many that need homes. Why do people let the color of someone's skin get in the way of giving a child a home? **Continued on page 21**

**People let
the color of a
person's skin
get in the way
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home.**





The Worst Brings out the Best

By Vang Yang

When my dad beat up my mom, my family's world fell apart. Here's how it was put back together again.

Illustration by Kevin Shelton

Waking up to the yells of your parents is never a good thing, especially if they're yelling at each other. This is how I woke up one morning last spring. It was even worse because it was only the start of the week. "Get up before all your chickens outside die!" my mom exclaimed to my dad as he lay on the bed, still sleeping. Apparently our dogs were killing the chickens in our backyard, and my mom was trying to warn him about it.

For a while, my parents hadn't been getting along because my mom found out that my dad was having an affair. Even before my mom knew, it was very clear to me that my dad was cheating. Whenever I was in the car with him, he would constantly be on the phone with someone. I noticed that whenever he talked to this person, he instantly turned into a soft-spoken man. My dad was either too ignorant to care that I knew, or he just thought that I wasn't smart enough to know that he was obviously having an affair.

Tensions grew, and my parents argued constantly. My brothers and I never really got into the arguments unless they were physically abusing each other, but that usually didn't happen. On a good day, my parents used to share a laugh when we were watching TV, but things just were never like that anymore. During the arguments, our financial issues were

an inevitable topic. We had been struggling financially with our house payments and piles of other bills. Over the years, the steam and stress accumulated. They were bound to come out one day.

Unfortunately, that day was May 23, 2011, and it is a day I will never forget.

It was around 11 a.m. and I was in my chemistry class when I got my brother's text message. "What is the number to dad's workplace?" it said. I had a feeling there was something terribly wrong so I tried to call my brother immediately, but there was no answer. "Today, when you left, mom and dad were in an argument and dad hit mom. The neighbors saw and they called the police." There was a pause as I waited for his next text.

"So now dad is in jail."

I was shocked and didn't know what to think. I didn't know my dad was capable of doing what he did. I kept wondering what was going to happen that day. Later on, I was called into my school's office by a man who dealt with domestic violence in the police department. As he informed me about what had happened, I was so close to just breaking down, but I kept myself together and pulled through the day.

I went home as soon as I could. I was dying to know, for myself, what really happened. When I got home, I looked for my mom. She is a strong-willed woman who never lets anything get in the way of her taking care of

her household. Not even the fact that my dad was in jail stopped her from going to farm. When she got home, I had no doubt that she was injured emotionally and physically.

There was a horrible bruise across the top left side of her face. My dad had hit her with a stick so hard that blood gushed out of her head. My brother stopped the fight by pushing my dad off and taking away the stick. I don't know how it would have ended if my brother hadn't been there.

In my mom's eyes, I saw she had no pity for my dad and thought he got what he deserved. At that point, I was extremely mad at my dad and I asked myself why he would ever do anything like that. But in every story, there are always two sides.

My dad instantly knew he had done something wrong. My dad heard a knock on the door and checked the door. It was the police and he shut the door abruptly. He turned to my mom who was lying on the couch. He knelt down and asked her, "Please don't let them take me to jail." My mom replied, "It wasn't even me who called, and I can't do anything about it because they are already here."

When she opened the door, the cops cuffed my dad and threw him on the ground in our front lawn. They didn't even question him because my mom was visibly wounded. That's when my older brother came home from dropping off my brother at school. The police didn't allow him to talk to my mom or dad, and

he couldn't even go in the house.

My uncles bailed my dad out for \$5,000. This was especially hard because now we were in even more debt, this time, to family. When he first got out, my dad lived with my uncle, and we visited him there.

Everyone in our family was affected by the incident, but my brother Cheng got the worst of it, since he was the one who stopped the fight. "I separated them and brought my mom inside," he said. "I told my dad to get away from her." Even after all that, he still had to go to school and hold himself up to get through the day. "Your brother had a rough time," the officer told me. "You should go easy on him today or give him a pat on the back."

Cheng was hit hard by the incident. "I cried a lot and I was dramatically shocked but at the same time, I was mad at my dad," he said. He had no idea what hit him and didn't know how to cope with it. Our family never really had a certain way of dealing with it. We just never talked about it and just let things happen as they came. Fortunately, good things came and there was a positive outcome in the incident. It was different going back to school without our dad. Usually, we would go shopping for back-to-school clothes and school supplies, but

not this year.

Although our dad was not there, my mom still was able to provide for us and we still had an okay life. But nothing was the same as it used to be. Our house was not complete without our dad living in it.

This experience completely changed my

My dad changed his ways as soon as he came back.

dad from how he was before. He told me that every night when he drove home from work, he would cry his eyes out. "I would always have to pass the street where I usually turned to our house," he said. "Now that this has happened, I had to just keep driving."

Domestic violence is common in Fresno. There is a major increase in domestic violence cases when the heat reaches 95 degrees, and this means that summertime in Fresno is especially violent. However, heat isn't the only factor in these cases, because domestic violence occurs year-round. In most cases,

families are not as lucky as my family. Thankfully, there is support and help from places like the Marjaree Mason Center which is a shelter for families struggling with domestic violence.

Eventually and fortunately for our family, my mom let my dad come back into our lives and start over. It was probably the happiest moment in my life. It was not easy going almost five months without our dad.

Believe it or not, since my dad has been back, life has been better than ever for our family. One of the many things we've learned is to really appreciate each other, because you never know what is going to happen. My dad changed his ways as soon as he came back. He is now a terrific, loving, and faithful dad. Don't get me wrong though, domestic violence is a horrific thing to have happen in a household, but our family dealt with it pretty well.

My parents get along fairly well now. As a family, we share more good times than ever. Also, we learned to appreciate each other a lot more than before. Since we know how it feels to lose an important piece of our family, our bond is stronger than ever. **tk**

Race and Adoption

Once when my mom was in a chat room for moms who wanted to adopt a child, she read that some of the women would rather adopt a white child that had been born to an addicted mother than a black baby. "I got really sick to my stomach - literally sick to my stomach," she said. "They [would] rather go that route and pay huge amounts of money than to get a healthy black child."

I was shocked when my mom told me that some families would rather have a light skin drug baby [a baby whose mother did drugs when she was pregnant] than a healthy black baby.

The way I see it, every child deserves a home, no matter which race they are. When I was doing some research for this article I found an adoption website. When I first saw the site, I thought it looked like a dog adoption or dating site. The site showed a picture of a kid and a little about them and what they like. "Meet this sibling set of three!" the site said. "Aaron is the middle child. He is very talkative and he enjoys drawing." When I saw this, I was really sad that any child would have to go through something like being put on a website to help find them a family to adopt them. Now thinking about it, I'm not sure how they could make it better, but I feel so bad for

these children.

People will look at someone with an multiracial family differently or like they've done something wrong, like maybe the adult with the child kidnapped the child or something. I have heard stories about a Mexican family having a biological child that was light-skinned, blonde, blue eyed, and people thinking it wasn't the family's kid. Stereotyping like this even happened to my family once.

Every child deserves a home, no matter which race they are.

One day my dad was sitting outside of my sister's school waiting for my little brother to arrive on the bus from his school. As he was waiting with my little sister, a lady in a van drove by. After she saw my dad and sister, she backed up and asked my dad if that was

his child, and he said yes. But the lady didn't believe my dad. Instead, she asked my sister the same question. When my sister told her that was her dad, she finally left them alone.

Sometimes children don't look like the rest of their family even though they are. A lot of people don't mind their own business when they should and end up saying nasty things to people. A lot of people, including my family, have been hurt by this kind of stereotyping.

I am so glad that my family did not let race get in the way of adopting my sister. I sometimes wonder what would have happened to her if she wasn't adopted by us. Would she still be with her birth mom? Would she be in foster care until she was 18? Would she be homeless? A lot of children who need an adoptive family, especially those with darker skin, end up in foster care or homeless with their birth mom. I am glad that I have my sister. She is a blessing to my family and she fits right in with us. Maybe she doesn't look just like us but that doesn't matter at the end of the day. What matters is we all love each other and are a family. I am very proud to call her my sister. **tk**



Truth Be Told

By Jane Carretero

M

iddle school - for many people, it was the worst time and for others it was the best. For me, it was a roller coaster.

It all started in the fall of 2010 when I started the seventh grade at Fort Miller Preparatory Middle School; a school where both of my older sisters had attended a few years before. They used to tell me how their days went sometimes and I was so excited in the way they described it - a big building with many classes, a lot of new students from different schools in Fresno and much more.

By the time it was my turn to go to middle school, I was nervous and excited. I thought it was going to be easy and that time would go by fast. I thought I would be in high school before I knew it. Boy, was I wrong about everything.

The first few weeks were fine. The only changes for me was the changing classes part. Unlike other people who were looking for friends and people to hang out with, I had made friends within the first week; one of whom I still know. Her name is Ruby. It wasn't until two months later that I finally understood everything.

Imagine those movies at a high school where they show the "groups." There are always the popular kids, the wannabes, the nerds and the outcasts. Well that was like my school. I didn't care where I stood in that line, unlike others, who tried to get with the people who seemed popular. I just always hung out with my friends.

The school year seemed to drag on every single day, and every day that went by felt

more and more like high school. Fights one day, kids smoking weed, people getting boyfriends and girlfriends and making out in the hallways. Ditching classes, drugs and beer became an everyday sight. There was so much drama intertwined in it all. By the time my seventh grade year ended, I had smoked weed,

Parents and adults don't see the new truth in middle school.

ditched some classes and drank beer.

Summer went by all too fast and eighth grade came quickly. I knew it wasn't going to get any easier, so I braced myself for the worst. I had easy classes: Algebra 1 (Since I only got basic in seventh), English and History. Within the first month of the new year, I had been sent out of class twice and I was failing all my classes. I had a B in P.E., which was my only passing grade.

My mom wasn't happy, to say the least. She didn't know what had happened during my seventh grade year. I started getting into more trouble with every day that passed. It got to a point where my mom went through my bag one night in October and found weed. She called the cops and I was put in juvenile hall.

I spent 34 days with food that I didn't eat and beds that I couldn't sleep in. After those days, I learned my lesson. I came out with a promise that I would change for the better. For me, middle school was nothing like how anyone had told me. Whenever I would get in trouble, the teachers would say, "I know what you've been through," and I would say to myself, "Do you? Do you really?"

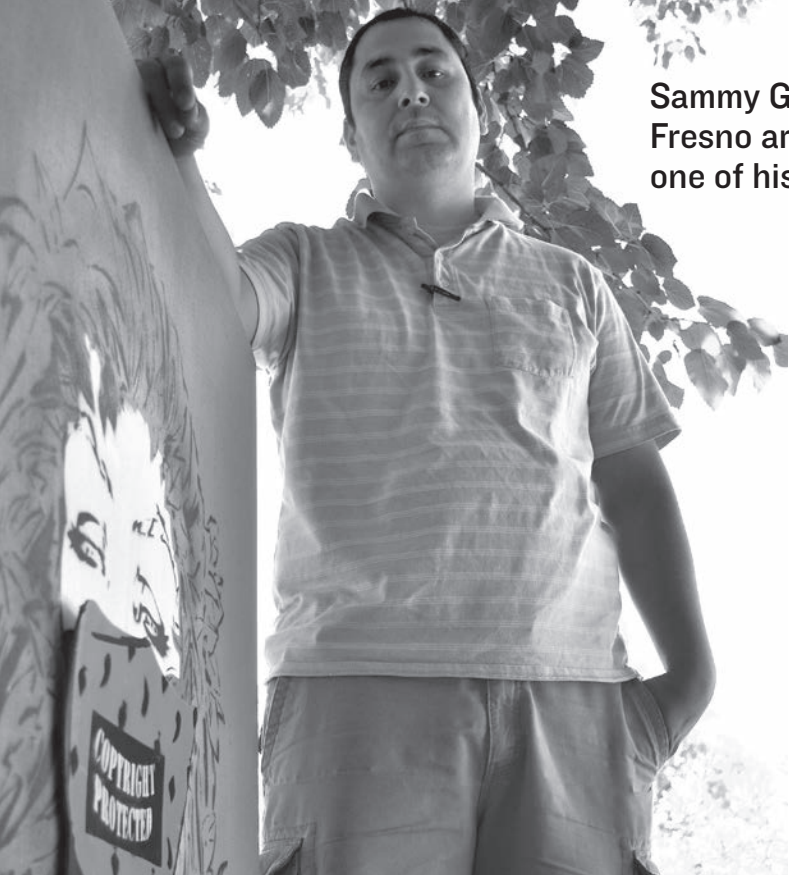
Many times, I think parents and adults don't see the new truth in middle school. Sometimes, the truth can hurt someone if they don't find out about it soon enough. Almost everyone goes through it and there is a difference in the way middle school was back then versus now.

"Back then, a lot of issues we have now were things that were kept down low," said Chris White, director of the West Fresno Boys And Girls Club. Things were easy to say instead of how things are.

"Everything is so easy to get," Ruby said. "Getting weed is like getting water." All the bad things were easy to come by.

Everyone knew that middle school was the big change for so many reasons. "Always do your hair in the morning," said Ruby, when asked what she had learned about middle school. She also added, "There are many lessons, like never talk about someone you don't know because if they find out; they think you're talking bad things about them."

Everyone has a different view about middle school. Some say it has changed. Others say that it is the same, but is it really? With a lot of social networking sites and texting, it can make life a **Continued on page 26**



Sammy Gonzales, a Fresno artist, displays one of his pieces.

Fresno's Artistic Expression

Story and photos
by Kevin Shelton

Bright colors, long hard-hitting strokes and inspiration from an object can be found on many walls of Fresno's Tower and Mural Districts. One of those murals is my favorite. It is of a woman surrounded by musical instruments as if she is pouring herself into the sounds of the instruments with captivating eyes. The viewer can only wonder what emotion the painter had in creating the art.

Art is all around us and can be known for its enjoyment, expression, textures and sometimes shock. People use art for creative expression and to communicate, while others use it for therapy or to relieve stress, anger, or other emotions. Art can be found in many careers such as fashion, architect design, or photography. It is also used in marketing and graphic design. Nowadays, art has many digital uses as well through the creation of websites and mobile phone applications.

Dixie Salazar, a local Fresno artist said, "Each artist is trying to solve a problem or problems that relate to their own particular obsessions." Salazar has been doing art for more than 40 years. She is a multitasking artist who works with several media including oils, collage, watercolor, painted collage, assemblage and photography.

Salazar's work has been featured extensively on the West Coast, in cities like San Francisco, Las Vegas, Merced, locally in Fresno, and even New York. Her paintings have many colors, different combinations of forms, and provocative abstraction, according to her website.

For Salazar, creating art is almost a world with no meaning but has to do more with the emotion built into the piece. "Time has almost no meaning when I'm working," she said. "Often I don't feel pain or hunger, it is much like a meditative state, but I'm fully aware."

In addition to being a successful artist, Salazar is also an accomplished writer. She published her first novel, "Limbo," in 1995, along with three volumes of poetry the same year.

To Salazar, it's not about the money or the recognition. "You must give up expectations for concrete rewards," she said. "You probably won't get rich nor get the recognition you deserve most of the time, you'll have to do it just because you cannot not do it." Even though some people might over-romanticize art, in Salazar's view, "it's hard work that is enjoyable."

Sammy Gonzales, another local artist, feels there's an unknown force that drives his pieces. As a Fresno native, his art reflects and portrays the area and its flavor. Though he has been interested in art for a very long time, he has only recently decided to take it up as a career after realizing his true love and talent for it. Gonzales focuses on oil paints, digital media, illustration, and even photography.

Gonzales' art includes dynamic colors and long strokes. Since he studied kinesiology in college, he likes to use his knowledge of the human body to breathe life into his art. "I really just give them free reign all the time, letting my inner child kind of take over and drive my limbs to create what they will," Gonzales said.

Although there are many things that

Gonzales enjoys about art, the most challenging thing for him is how people perceive or misread his art pieces. For Gonzales, "being misunderstood [or] constantly being under pressure to impress or show your skill" are big challenges.

Gonzalez feels that doing art in a city like Fresno is all about genuine passion. "Most artists I see in Fresno live it, breathe it and do it because Fresno has not been known for being the biggest art town in Cali," said Gonzalez. "I think those that choose to do it here are the real deal because they are in it and that's just what they do."

Though many artists put out great work, some feel no recognition for it. Salazar also feels the recognition level is fairly low. She states, "Fresno does not support the arts very well. [People who buy art in Fresno] prefer to go out of town thinking they're getting better quality, which is not necessarily true."

Though Fresno may not be considered the artistic capital of the world, it is still a place where many artists are doing some great work. This work can be seen all along the walls of many buildings in the mural district and other parts of Fresno, and in pieces of local landmarks such as the Fresno Water Tower or the Veteran's Memorial Auditorium. Fresno is fortunate to have raised talented artists, such as groups like The Muralistics and those devoted to beautifying Fresno's Mural District along with other parts of downtown. "Big places I see art taking over," said Gonzales, "[includes] the majority of the downtown area and really turning it into a place to chill and see art and experience raw creativity."



Dixie Salazar, a Fresno artist, has been creating art for over 40 years.

A recent community art project involved a group of local youth, led by The kNOw Youth Media, who painted a mural at Louie Kee Market in West Fresno at Tulare and B streets to celebrate what it means to create a more vibrant community. Louie Kee Market is a family owned business serving the community for over 80 years. The theme of the mural, “Making Fresno A Better Place,” included images of cultural diversity, the Central Valley, and other local images viewed through the eyes of young people.

The mural, spanning almost a half-block long, depicts the passion that young people have to build a better community. Transformed from normal brick wall to community art, it is something the viewer has to see in person.

When the mural was unveiled in late 2010, community members across West Fresno expressed amazement with the hard work and dedication put into it by the young artists. “It shows that anything is really possible if you just come together and create [it],” said Ricky Reyna, one of the youth artists. “[You] just got to believe you can do it.” The market has grown in popularity and many local residents often go by the mural to take photos of it or pose next to it.

Another opportunity to enjoy art in Fresno is at ArtHop through the Fresno Arts Council, which takes place every first and third Thursday of the month in different galleries and museums throughout Fresno. At ArtHop, community members can attend at no cost. ArtHop is a great time to enjoy local art and build connections with artists and community members. For more information on ArtHop, check out their website at fresnoarthop.org.

As Fresno grows, so will the art and the opportunities to enjoy art. For artists like Salazar and Gonzales, it is about trusting their heart no matter the outcome or recognition. “[Art] has given me a sense of identity,” said Salazar. “It’s who I am.” **tk**



“Crazy Dog Dances Under The Moon,” D Salazar

Photos courtesy Dixie Salazar

Truth Be Told living hell. It went from being bullied face-to-face to cyberbullying, which is also called “gassing.” Then there are the new famous music groups that many kids say are the best and they pretty much worship them. One example is the Taylor Gang Or Die.

Then there are the OFWGKTA, which is a short term for the music group Odd Future Wolf Gang Kill Them All. Then the more famous people come in like Nicki Minaj and Drake, Lil Wayne. “Many kids go

off and want to be more like them,” said White.

“The worst part about middle school is there is so much judgment on how you dress, who you hang out with, if you have nice hair, what shoes you wear, how you talk, how smart you are,” Ruby added. This might explain why when people go out trying to become like their idols, they end up judging other people who aren’t dressed like them. The new truth in middle school is sometimes the truth can hurt for those who don’t know it. **tk**

The Beat Within

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 Juvenile Justice Campus. The Beat Within, Fresno team is John Esquivel, Wilena "Willy" Wallace and Mai Der Vang.

Nothing But Love

I feel like the main two people in my life that I need forgiveness from are my mother and son. I want my mother to forgive me because she raised me well and I pay her back by making bad decisions. My mother has nothing but love for me. She raised four kids with no father figure in our lives.

My mother did a darn good job. To be honest I love my mom with all my heart, but I really don't know why I make bad choices. I try hard to do good, but trouble follows me.

My son is only two months old, and I've never bought anything for him. I only saw my son a handful of times. I don't want him to grow up the way I did with no father. I hope my son will forgive me for not being there for him.

It hurts me a lot when I get to hold him and I think about what I can do for him. Don't get me wrong I try hard to be there, but I end up in places like this. I'll beg them both for forgiveness, but I have a feeling they may never forgive me.

-Mervyn

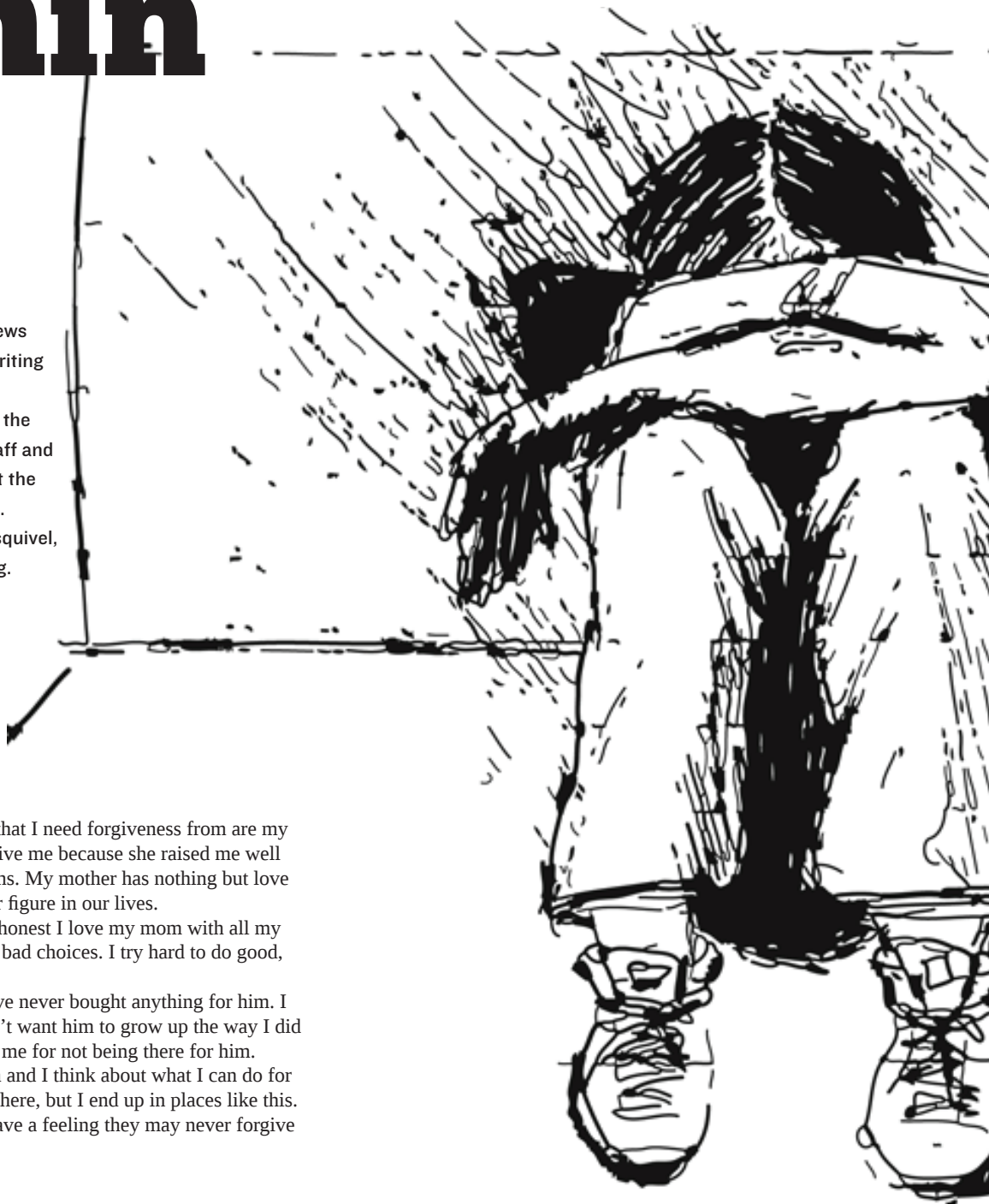
My Small World

In my small world, all I see are pimps and prostitutes, drugs and homeless people, sellers and users. In my small world, all my friends are either pregnant or have a baby already. In my small world, dads are not there and moms are taking care of the babies by themselves.

In my small world females don't know who their baby's dad is. My world is really small and all messed up behind drugs, prostitutes, pimps and addicts.

But I refuse to end up like the rest asking for dollars; don't know who my baby's father is. I just hope and wish my small world changes.

-Coyia



Artwork by The Beat Within

When I Lost It

When I was young, I found out I was going to be a father. I was so happy. Then all hell broke loose. The girl I was with found out that I had beat up her best friend pretty bad and she completely hated me for it. About a month or so later, she came up to me and told me she had an abortion because she didn't want a baby from the guy who sent her best friend to the hospital. She got into a car and took off and I've never seen her since.

Right then and there, that's when I lost it. I broke down and started crying. After the tears were gone, all that was left was hate. I couldn't think right or act right. I went completely distorted. All the guys who wanted to fight me—when I got hit, I never felt it. I just kept going till they were on the floor and I beat them to a pulp. The loss of my body destroyed me mentally and emotionally. When people tried to help I pushed them away. I truly believe I wouldn't be alive today if it weren't for my best friend April.

One day a few guys I had beat the crap out of found me and tried to jump me. I took three of them out no problem, but when it came to the fourth, I just wouldn't stop hitting him. I was on top of him and hitting him with his blood gushing out and splashing on me. I was so mad and not in my right mind I forgot about the fifth.

It turned out he had pulled a knife and was going to stab me. My friend April yelled my name and I could hear the fear in her voice. I looked up and saw him swinging with the knife to my head. I jumped back and picked up a big piece of wood to hit him with, but he grabbed his homies and left. My anger almost cost me my life.

I have never been the same. I was once a good kid with good grades, but after she told me about our baby, I've been like an empty shell until this day. I break down and cry and sock whatever is in my reach. Once it got so bad that I blacked out and woke up with blood on me not knowing where it came from.

Every day I think about my baby and I die more and more every day. I truly fear for my life because I know one day I'm gonna reach that point I was at again. This time I don't think I'll be able to stop. Even though my baby was never born, I love my baby so much, so freakin' much. I never got help for my problems. I can feel it in my heart. It's like a ticking time bomb. One day I'm gonna go over the edge and never be able to recover. The day my baby lost his or her life, I lost mine.

-Jesse

Without My Parents

I grew up and I never had a father by my side with my mother. It was pretty hard but my mom and me got passed that. My mother is a drug addict but I never laid a finger on that stuff.

I saw the way my mother changed in her appearance and personality...I was scared! I started to hang out with people like my mom and saw the pain they went through.

My situations are family problems. Mother still does drugs to this day...Father found a new family living happy and sober...brother and sister in foster care with the same foster parent.

My dreams are to graduate high school into college and to have a better life than I did as a child...I don't want to be like my mother...but I ended up in juvenile hall.

-Selinda

I Opened The Door

I opened the door and there in front of me was my little sister. When I saw her face she smiled wide and told me that she loved me. I gave her a hug and told her how much I missed her and loved her.

She started telling me about her cheerleading practice and how much she liked it. I told her that I was proud but when I tried to hug her again she was gone. I opened my eyes and realized I'd been sleeping.

-Dontrel



It's Real

A lesson learned is coming here cause once the cell door closes you know that it's real. And the food is nasty. It's not a place I would want to come to again. I hate how we have to ask before we could move and when to shower.

The advice I would give other people is to do good cause this place ain't fun. While you're in your cell you think about all the bad you did, and by then it's too late cause all you can do is face the consequences. Before my little bro can do bad, I'll put him in check, cause this place is bad and that's all I can say. But it taught me a lesson to not do anything that would get me put back in here. I can share with other people that this place is no heaven.

-Gilbert tk

I was once a good kid with good grades, but after she told me about our baby, I've been like an empty shell...

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Divorce Doesn't Have to Break a Family Apart

By Mary Vang

I never thought something like divorce could happen in my family.

I remember not seeing my mom when I woke up for school one morning and not seeing her when I came home. I thought she had just been at work and would be there all day. After school, my siblings would come home and do things we normally do. My brother would play his video games while my sisters would go out with their friends or watch TV. I would be watching my brother play games or watching TV. My dad was always in his room sleeping or working.

I heard rumors among my sisters that my parents were splitting, but I was young. I didn't think much of it. I figured out that my oldest sister, who was attending UC Santa Barbara at the time, was the first to talk to my mom and was the only one who knew what was really going on. She had phoned my other sisters to tell them what was going on.

I would always ask, "Where's mom?" But they would always answer, "Don't worry about it." I was young so I didn't understand the term divorce. I didn't know that my parents were going to get a divorce. The next day my mom came home, but only for a while. She grabbed her stuff and said, "I'll be at auntie's place. Don't worry about me, I'll come back to get you and your little sisters." And she left.

Three days had passed and my dad told me and my siblings to sit around the dinner table so he could talk to us. I was scared because whenever we had a "family meeting" it was usually because someone had gotten in trouble. We all sat down and I looked at my sister and

whispered, "What happened?" My dad started to speak. He told us that he and mom would be getting a divorce. The younger children, me and two younger sisters, would be going with my mom. The five older ones would stay with my dad.

It was the first time I ever saw my dad and sisters cry. It was shocking to me. I didn't know how and what to feel or what to say. I never thought something like divorce could happen in my family.

It has been almost six years since my parents' divorce. I remember moving out of the house to stay at an apartment with my mom. I remember saying bye to my sisters and brother thinking about the next time I would see them. I remember not having a close relationship with them.

But after six years, we see each other almost every day. It's as if the family never split. We tried hard to stay together even when we weren't really together. I feel that even though the divorce broke my parents apart, my siblings fought to not let it break the small relationship that we had as sisters and brother. The relationship grew and became stronger as the years passed. I think that my strong relationship with my siblings would never have happened if we didn't have that obstacle.

Even though something negative happened to us, we turned it into a positive outcome.

Divorce happens every day to families everywhere, and **Continued on page 30**

Absent Dad

By Te'Lona Love

W

hen I was a child, my friends thought I was pretty lucky because I had both parents in my life. Most of them either didn't have their mother or father in their lives, and me being a child, I would ask them why they only had one parent.

Now, as an adolescent, I understand why some parents separate or are absent from their child's life.

Many people judged my family and I based on our last name. They think having the last name "Love" is showing it all the time and being there when someone needs you. They were wrong. We were all there for each other all except the one we inherited the name from. I'm not trying to put my father down or say he's not a good dad. All I'm saying is that he could have been more part of me and my brothers' lives.

As a child, he taught me a lot of things, like how to fix a belt on a car and how to fix a ceiling fan. That was when I was "daddy's little girl." Things changed and eventually he did too. I don't really know what happened to him, but I was no longer daddy's little girl.

My mother became my father and my father became a stranger in our home. It seemed like the only person who knew him was my mom. When they used to argue, I didn't want my dad to leave my life, but now, I honestly don't care what he does. If he chooses to leave, all I can say is adios amigo.

Growing up, all I really wanted was a father figure. I would wish for it, but I gave up long ago because it seemed like the more I wished, the more he became a stranger walking around the house.

I recently noticed that it is the same routine almost everyday. We get up in the morning and walk past each other in the hallway. I'd say, "Hey dad," then he'd say "Hey Nonnah." Not much of a conversation for a father and a daughter who have lived together since the day she was born.

My mother once told me that my dad wanted a girl so badly since he already had two

sons. If he really wanted me, maybe he should have been there for me all these years. It's funny how I barely know my dad even when though we live in the same house, eat the same food, and ride in the same car, but he shows no emotions for me. When I see other fathers walking or playing with their children at a park, I feel like breaking down and crying. I have wished for that my entire life but it hasn't happened and may never happen.

At times I used to wonder why my mother didn't move on to a better man, one who would treat her better. Then I realized the reason she's still with him is because of me, and that she

I didn't want my dad to leave my life, but now, I honestly don't care what he does.

doesn't want me to grow up without a father like she did.

As a child, I always wanted to have my dad around. And now I wonder, had I should just kept my mouth shut, where would our lives be today? Would I be happy with the life I could have had without a father? And how would the rest of my family feel?

To learn more about the importance of

a father, I spoke to Lamar Henderson who coordinates All Dads Matter, a program through the Merced County Human Services Agency. They provide a boot camp for dads so they can learn to be a better father.

"Fathers play a tremendous role," he said. "Kids do better in school if they have a father in their life."

I was surprised by some of the statistics he shared, including the fact that 71 percent of high school dropouts come from fatherless homes. My dad was a high school dropout, and I don't want to become one as well.

Lamar shared with me that 90 percent of homeless and runaways come from homes without a father. I found this surprising because when my brother was younger, he would run away a lot and we didn't know why.

I also found out from Lamar that 70 percent of juvenile offenders come from fatherless homes. I know many fatherless people who have gotten locked up, including my brother.

My dad also has two other daughters from other relationships and I wonder what they think about him being absent from their lives. Even though they may be grown, I'm sure they are happy they met him at least once in their lives, recently at a graduation.

He honestly was never daddy-material. When I was younger, I always tried to impress him by playing sports and by doing things most girls my age wouldn't do. My brothers seemed to always get more attention than me, so I was kind of a tomboy.

Being the only actual daughter in his life, we've at least had some good laughs and good talks. We wouldn't talk for hours but we sometimes talked for a minute or two about things that popped in our heads. When he cracks jokes, I laugh for a long time because we rarely talk so whatever he says to me is just hilarious. I don't have a lot of memories of us together, especially if I can count most of them on both my hands.

My mom told me that my dad never really had his own father **Continued on page 30**



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Tribute to a Leader



L to R: Mai Der leading a writing workshop with The Know's writers, Mai Der and The Know youth in a group activity, and Mai Der accepting one of multiple awards the organization has received under her leadership.

When people think about The kNOw, they think of Mai Der Vang, and for good reason. Mai Der has led The kNOw since it began in 2006. Her vision and energy has grown and sustained the organization to where it is today. Not only has she been a phenomenal visionary for The kNOw, but she has also left a very positive mark on over 60 young lives. Below are some memories and thanks from members of The kNOw, past and present.

"There aren't that many people that come into my life and make me really think about life. Mai Der is one of those special people that has given me a voice. She gave me an opportunity to voice my opinion and I feel so grateful to her. She is a great mentor and has given me so much. I wish the best for her in New York." - *Victoria Phosykeo - 2008*

"I know you're gonna be off doing great things in New York, and I wish you the best in everything you do while you're there. I just want to let you know how much I appreciate everything you've done for me in the past; YOU, Anna, and the rest of the group helped me learn some cool things about myself that I use every single day and I'm very grateful to have had that opportunity in The kNOw. Thank you so much Mai Der! I love you and I will miss you." - *Jana' Fuller - 2010*

"Mai Der, I am so thankful to have met you. I am so glad I was able to be a part of The kNOw, I only wish I could have stayed longer! You made The kNOw such a great place to work, learn and just hang out. You have always been there for me when I needed to talk about something or if I needed help with something. You are such a wonderful person and role model for all of us who have been with The kNOw. I would have never been in the Valley

Storytellers Project if it weren't for you entering my writing and believing in me to do a good job. I wouldn't have thought I could have done anything like that, but because of you, I was able to! I am so grateful for The kNOw and the impact it has had in my life. I know that without you The kNOw would not be what it is today and you are awesome for making it what it is! I wish you the best of luck in all you do!" - *Kristine Balliet - 2011*

"Being a member of The kNOw was truly one of the greatest experiences I have ever had. It changed my life and how I viewed the world and helped make me into a much stronger and better person. However, The kNOw could not have been this great without its director. Mai Der, you are a great leader and did your job with a passion and love. You showed us new goals and dreams for ourselves for the future. You are strong, passionate, optimistic, knowledgeable, wise and equipped with a strong heart. It is hard to lose you as director of The kNOw, but it is good to see you pursue greater things now. All the best wishes and luck to you on your new path." - *William Thao - 2010*

"I have so much to say and appreciate about you, Mai Der. I'm happy that you are beginning a new chapter of your life. You

helped me start mine when I was a freshman in high school. It was your patience and constant observations helped me become a writer. All those wonderful memories we have shared at The kNOw will be forever engraved in my heart. You are truly the best. I love you Mai Der. I'll visit you in New York!" - *Jesse Andrews - 2006*

"Loving, considerate and non-judgmental are three words that come to mind when I think about you. You have inspired me, and not only that, you loved, supported and encouraged me. It was you who drew me back to the meetings every week.

You believed in a part of me that I didn't believe in. You helped me to speak and stand up for what I believe. Thank you for listening to me, for showing interest in my life, what I was going through and how I was feeling. On top of that, you helped me to express it all in a positive way; through writing.

Thank you for never giving up on me and pushing me to think outside the box. By your actions and facilitation skills you showed me how to be neutral and not biased or judgmental. You showed me how to love unconditionally and how to accept others who are different than I am.

You made me want to be a better person, not just for me, but for the next generation.

Tribute

I remember one of the members telling me that I was like another Mai Der. Do you know how much joy that brought me, to be considered like you? You're a living legend in my book. When the world counted us out and said we were a lost generation you took a chance on us. I hope that you will count my accomplishments as your accomplishments because you have definitely influenced me in many ways.

So I hear you're starting another chapter - going to grad school in New York! That's great, I'm so happy for you! I love you so much Mai Der, remember 'Love is Power!'" - *Laqusha Locke - 2006*

"I hate to see such a beautiful spirit like Mai Der leave The kNOw. I'm such a good writer

Absent Dad

around. Maybe that's the reason he's not much a father. I realize that's something to consider. "What was their relationship like with their own father, what kind of role models did they have in their life?" said Lamar. "How's the father supposed to behave, how does a father feel successful in his endeavors of being a dad?" I guess those all are things that impact how fathers act, but still I wish he could change.

Every so often I'd wonder what he thinks of me, his "baby girl." Does he like who I have become as a young lady and how I try to stay out of trouble, make good decisions, or how I'm not "fast" like some females I know who

Divorce

every day to families everywhere, and it breaks families apart. Tracy Fulton, an expert marriage and family counselor, said that divorce can have a really profound impact on a lot of families. It can cause young children to have problems, such as difficulty communicating with others when they are older. People view divorce as a horrible thing that can happen to a family, but many people don't see the true reason for getting divorce.

There are good reasons and of course, the reasons that are not so legitimate. Some movies and media show that the aftermath of divorce leads to sisters and brothers hating each other and daughters hating their mothers. But it doesn't always have to be like that.

Broken families can work together to bring back "family" relationships.

Fulton said that almost anything can be positive if you want it that way. She even knew people who divorced and remained best friends even after that. I, of course, was affected by divorce like any other child would be. I had a hard time communicating with others and I didn't know how to socialize. My parents getting divorced could have been the cause, but as I grew up, I learned to communicate better and become more outgoing. I didn't let my parents' divorce affect my life in a bad

because of what you taught me I will always be grateful for that." - *Kiya Williams - 2006*

"It has been a pleasure to have known and worked with you. Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to become part of The kNOw and I wish you nothing but the best in all your future endeavors." - *Phillip Omeje - 2012*

"Mai Der, I want to say thank you for all the things you have done for me. You helped me so much more than I can thank you. You showed me a better path rather than the bad one I was on. There's so much I want to say but I'm not sure how to put it down.

You gave me a place in The kNOw even though I was in a bad place at the time. You

grew up without a father figure? Is he proud of me? These are things I've always wanted to know but never had the guts to ask.

All these years, he's been a dad without really being a dad. I ask him for 20 bucks, he gives it to me. I ask to go hang out with friends, he lets me go. Basically he thinks he's playing the role of a father but in reality he's not. Instead, I wish he were there for me to talk about life so we could have a better bond. I wonder if he feels any emptiness in his life.

"It's a source of pain and empty place in your heart that as a father, you can't drink, you can't smoke, you can't do anything that's gonna fill that gap like the love of your child," said Lamar.

way. "I learned something positive, taken positive things from something terrible that has happened," said my older sister Mickie, "I tried to remain positive and strong to show an example for my younger siblings."

As my family split, I thought I wouldn't be seeing them much anymore. But now we see each other almost every day, whether it's at church or just hanging out. I always tried to remain positive and not let my parents' divorce bring me or my family down. I see or hear that when families split, it's difficult for them to communicate. I'd understand if they lived across the country, but a phone call won't hurt once every week. And I saw my family almost every day of the week and that's what kept our family relationship strong.

Parents can have a difficult time when going through divorce. It can be both parents or just one parent having difficulty going through the change. Kay Lee is a divorced mom who was married at the age of 15. Because of her strict culture, she was forced to marry someone who she never really knew. And that of course led to her divorce. During her divorce, Lee told me that she felt lost and confused, because it happened so suddenly. "If I could do it all over again, I would've chosen a different path," she said. Lee hated her married life, and divorce was the only way out. But now, she is happy

never treated me differently because of what I had done. You have never once stopped believing in me even when others have and because of that you have a permanent place in my heart. You are one of the kindest and most understanding persons I know and you deserve all the best.

I am sad to see you leave but I am also very honored to have had the chance to have met you and I am grateful to have had you in my life. I know you will go on to do great things wherever you go and anyone that gets to meet you will be lucky. I won't say goodbye, because those are forever, but instead I will just say see you later, because I hope to in a few years see you again." - *Jane Carretero - 2012*

tk

When it comes time to talk to his baby girl, it's like he's speechless, seeking for some kind of help just to make the words come out right, and when they do come out, it's nothing important. I wish he could just ask me about my day, or about school. I don't recall him ever saying "I love you" to anyone except my mother.

In the future, I really hope he and I can create a better understanding of each other and can actually spend some father-daughter time together. Like Lamar said, "As long as you're still drawing breath, it's never too late to reach out to your child." tk

with her new husband of 10 years, who she knew and dated for a while, and their children.

Aside from forced marriage, couples can divorce for many other reasons, whether it's an abusive relationship or people just falling out of love. I asked Lee what she thought on how divorce affects children. She told me, "It'll bring out insecurity. It doesn't matter how much they are loved." Jewlia, Lee's first child with her ex-husband, was a baby when they got a divorce. And even then, she would be affected growing up without a dad for a while. She also said this as an opinion about divorce in general, "It's not good, in general, it's not good. Whether we are culturally married or today, modernized," said Lee. "It still has an impact on who we are. I don't think divorce is good at all. I see it as a negative thing, unless you're in an unhealthy situation, then I see it as a good thing but if it's just your differences, then no."

Many view divorce as a horrible thing. It tears families apart, but the aftermath doesn't always have to be negative. Families shouldn't just give up after divorce, they should work even harder to build their relationships. tk

I snapped this photo of my niece looking up to the sun and watching the birds. She was enjoying the beauty of the sun as it was shining through the trees, and the birds chirping, and covering her eyes so she had a better view of the birds. This photo makes me think of her happiness and her laugh. she loves to laugh a lot. She is five years old.

Photo by Kevin Shelton





The kNOW Youth, Summer 2012



“The purpose of The kNOW is to give the youth of Fresno a **voice**, a chance to be **heard**, and a chance to be **known**. Many times, a lot of the youth’s concerns go **unheard** and remain **overlooked**. Here at The kNOW, not only do the youth have a chance to **speak freely** and be **appreciated** for it but they’re also given the opportunity to **participate** in community activities and policies. This is why The kNOW is amazing, the hearts of the youth and their leaders **shine in various forms**”

Our Youth Projects:

- News
- Podcasts
- Reviews
- Blogs
- Print Magazine
- Photography
- Forums

“To support and equip young people with media skills as a means for telling their stories and the stories of our community.”

