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Saratoga High School >> Saratoga, CA

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WEDNESDAY SCHEDULE

Parents battle SUSD minimum day

BY Sabrina Chen

"Causes financial hardship for parents. Creates Wednesday afternoon[s] of empty hours which are wasted hours for our kids."

These are the opening phrases on the "Stop Early Dismissal" petition created by a group

of parents to encourage the discontinuation of the new weekly minimum days at Redwood Middle School and Argonaut, Foothill and Saratoga Elementary Schools.

At the beginning of the school year, the Saratoga Union School District (SUSD) decided to end school for students at

12:30 p.m instead of 2:10 p.m every Wednesday. This new policy has incited controversy among parents over the issues of childcare for working parents and fewer educational hours for students. Whether the minimum days continue into next year is now being negotiated.

District Superintendent Lane

Weiss said the idea of a weekly "early-out" day has been discussed many times in the past. He said in the past few years, the district has had seven sets of Wednesday Thursday minimum days for the middle school and 10 sets of two-day minimum

>> REDWOOD on pg. 5



Alumna Amy Chang, then a shy, awkward sophomore, twirled gracefully as she made her way across the wooden floor of Cirrus Dance & Arts, her dance studio. She was clad in all black clothing, matching her long black hair tied neatly in a bun. A dancer since age 5, Chang thought nothing would get in the way of her passion and its pursuit — until one day during her sophomore year of high school.

There were rumors going around that Chang, a 2002 grad, was gay, rumors that at the time were false, since she had not yet figured out her orientation. But when the rumors leaked into the dance studio, one of Chang's closest friends, age 12, suddenly stopped talking to her one day.

"I was driving myself up the wall thinking there was something wrong with me. I thought that I had done something wrong, that I needed to apologize

>> CHANG on pg. 16

>> staff editorial

WHY college decisions should not be based on prestige over quality of education.

STUDENT RESOURCES

Pott Foundation helps fund new counselors

BY Sabrina Chen
& Deepa Kannan

After the suicide of Audrie Pott in the fall of 2012 and the resulting fallout, the school has employed three counselors from the Counseling and Support Services for Youth (CASSY) in an effort to provide extra therapeutic support on campus.

The school offered students access to an on-campus therapist in the past, but with CASSY, three counselors are on campus to help students deal with per-

sonal issues.

CASSY is a nonprofit organization that serves students in 24 schools across the Bay Area, including Los Gatos High School, where they have been helping students for five years.

This October, the Audrie Pott Foundation donated more than \$5,000 to CASSY, inspiring individual donors to also give money in Audrie's name that totaled \$10,000.

In an email sent to the Falcon,

>> CASSY on pg. 4

CLASSES

Are Humanities dead? Alumnus says no

BY Sanj Nalwa

"Freedom comes in awareness, understanding that which we are subject to if we live passively without attention."

Sound like it was spoken by a true philosopher? Well it was.

Truman Chen, a '13 alumnus and freshman at Stanford University, is one of the few recent grads to study philosophy in college, a major that some don't consider advisable in the modern economy. The years have seen a progressive decline in students interested in the humanities.

According to a recent New York Times article titled "As

interest fades in the humanities, colleges worry," the percentage of humanities majors in colleges today is 7 percent, as opposed to 14 percent in 1970. Stanford, for instance, has 45 percent of its faculty in the humanities, but only 15 percent of the students are humanities majors.

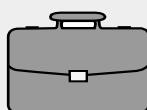
In the article, author Tamar Lewin said interest in the humanities has plummeted in



"We live in an age dominated by the advances of science," said Chen, who now attends Stanford.

recent years, and colleges are desperately trying to bolster their humanities programs as

>> CHEN on pg. 6



news >> briefs

Marching Band spreads holiday cheer

For the first time in years, the Saratoga High marching band and Color Guard performed with Redwood Middle School in the Los Gatos Christmas Parade on Dec. 7.

Drum major and senior Anup Kar believes that the parade strengthened the bonds between Saratoga High and Redwood.

"We want to get more involved in having a strong middle school to high school program," Kar said. "We want to get the middle school students used to the high school experience and have fun with high schoolers."

Kar and band director Jonathan Pwu both hope that this will become a tradition between Saratoga and Redwood.

"Letting the younger guard members meet the upper guard members, and same with the percussionists and the wind players," Pwu said. "It's really, really exciting for a middle schooler to stand side by side with a senior but then play the same music and do the same march."

Kar believes that it was a little more relaxed than field competitions.

"We marched down the street, just for fun," Kar said.

—Becky Hoag

Surgery makes science teacher take leave

Biology and Earth Science teacher Lisa Cochrum underwent an undisclosed major surgery on Friday, Nov. 22, and will not return to school until after holiday break. In order to miss the two weeks of actual teaching, she had to rearrange her curriculum and cram in a lot of material before she left.

The week before school started in August, she came back early from her trip to Alaska in excruciating pain. She went to the doctor and saw specialists who confirmed her diagnosis, and surgery was scheduled for November.

Cochrum's substitute teacher is Georgia Schultz, a former aide. Schultz will be overseeing the students as they complete some of the more "fun labs" normally interspersed into the curriculum and watching a movie.

Cochrum will return at the start of second semester and will continue her second semester curriculum as usual.

—Ariel Liu and Simi Srivastava

Second student production presented

The drama department debuted its second student production "Up" by Bridgette Carpenter on Dec. 5, 6 and 8. The production was directed by senior Ehrland Hollingsworth, and starred juniors Jay Sehmey and Andrew York, sophomore Emily Ludwig and freshmen Raymond McCarthy, Lea Moustakas and Sarah Traina.

"Whenever I've been in a show, I've always wanted to be able to watch the final product," Hollingsworth said. "Being there for the whole process and being able to see the final product has been an incredible experience."

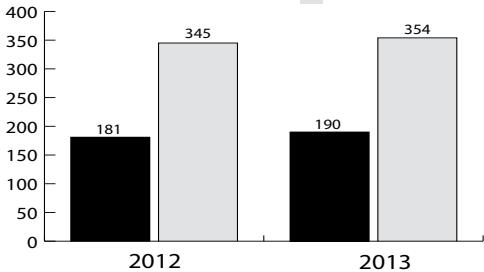
The department is preparing for the showing of its last student production of the year, "God of Carnage," directed by senior Annelise Nussbacher, on Jan. 31, Feb. 1 and 2.

—Simi Srivastava

>> falconfigures

Early Applicants each Fall

■ Number of Early Applicants
Total Seniors



>> picturethis



FRESHMAN RAYMOND McCARTHY AND JUNIOR ANDREW YORK REFURBISH AN OLD CHAIR IN THE STUDENT DIRECTED PRODUCTION "UP," WHICH SHOWED ON DEC. 5, 6 AND 8 IN THE THERMONT DRAMA CENTER.

PROGRAMS

Six Mexican students enjoy experiences in California

BY SHAZIA GUPTA
& BECKY HOAG

Before coming to Saratoga on Nov. 18 from his home in Cuernavaca, Mexico, BIU senior Andres Martinez wasn't sure what to expect.

It's an unusual experience to be able to go to school in another country. Six students and one teacher from Bachillerato Internacional Uninter (BIU), Mexico got to experience this when they travelled to Saratoga.

After coming, Martinez said, "[It was fun] to meet a lot of people, visit the most [signifi-

cant] places of Saratoga and live a new experience," Martinez stayed with sophomore Andrew Weng's family.

"It was easy [to adjust] because the Wengs are wonderful, they gave me all the attention that they could," Martinez said.

Weng was happy to host Martinez.

"Andres liked [the trip] a lot. He was really cool and laid back," Weng said.

The Mexico students visited some of the major sightseeing spots, such as San Francisco, Apple, Intel, the Great Mall, Facebook and Google.

"My favorite part was San Francisco. We took a ride all over the city and a ride on a ship," Martinez said.

While this was Martinez's first trip to California, he said the state is similar to what he had imagined it to be, except for the fact that it was "maybe a little colder."

"[When] one of my best friends [went to California last year], he told me about all his experience in Saratoga, and that made me want to come here," Martinez said.

The group returned to Mexico the weekend after Thanksgiving. ♦

DRIVES

Students start their own fundraisers

BY SHAZIA GUPTA
& SWEEYA RAJ

With the holiday season upon us, many students are starting their own fundraisers at school to give back to their community and help those in need.

In support of the victims of the freak storm in the Philippines, senior Rajan Panchal started up a donation box in the office on Nov. 13 asking for canned

I'm doing my part to make sure something gets done, no matter how small or how big."

senior Rajan Panchal

food, clothing and toiletries to help the survivors of the storm. Panchal was inspired to do this after he saw an interview of a San Jose State student who started a similar drive, and he thought it would be a good idea if Saratoga stepped up to help as well.

"The problem is that most people aren't getting any aid over there, so I'm doing my part to make sure something gets done, no matter how small

Chang started a winter clothes drive for the homeless in San Jose.

"Sometimes I'm really cold because I'm not wearing enough so I thought, 'Oh, what about the people who are on the streets who don't have clothes, who are freezing and wearing rags,'" Chang said. "We should help them because we're really fortunate and we don't know what it's like to be out begging in the streets."

However, doing a fund-

raiser without the support of a club can be difficult, Chang said.

"It's really hard [without a club] because you're doing it all by yourself and you don't really get [very much] support from other people," Chang said.

Sophomore Meghan Shah also decided to help those less fortunate by starting up a book drive overseas that provides learning materials to schools in Africa.

"It's a book drive to build a small library in Africa where they have teachers and students who want to learn, but they don't have enough materials or books to teach their students," Shah said. "If we can [gather] at least 1,450 books, the organization will go and they will build a library for the students there."

Shah had been searching for something to do to give back since last summer, and last month her book drive was assigned to the village of Lesotho by the African Library Project.

"I take a lot of my inspiration for life from books, so I want others to have books because reading changes your life." ♦

ACTIVITIES

Mock trial team readies for season

BY Ariel Liu

The mock trial team set out to San Rafael on Nov. 24 for its first scrimmage with its new coach, English teacher Michael Kim. With a team of 36 members and two teacher advisers, Kim and History teacher Jim Chin, as well as a new attorney coach, Ed Quevedo, the team competed against Kim's previous school, San Rafael High School.

While last year's team only had 17 members, this year's team has more than double that number. As a result, the program has added a JV team.

"We had a strong group of freshmen who were intrigued by mock trial and then chose to join the team," Kim said. "We also have a handful of upperclassmen join who wanted to 'do something fun and challenging' during their last year of high school."

The JV team usually competes against other schools' JV teams, but also steps in for the varsity team.

"The JV team also [act as] understudies to the varsity team, like a performance," Kim said. "If someone cannot make a scrimmage, it's good to have someone to fill in the missing role."

According to junior captain Max Chang, the JV team will be extremely

helpful in the future.

"This is the first year we have a full JV team, and it has been an incredible advantage," he said. "We have a lot more ideas and support, and the JV team has strengthened the foundation of our team."

Much of the success of the team will be determined by these new members.

"We have a lot of newcomers this year; however, they've been fantastic and have picked up the material really quickly, and are shaping up to be some of our strongest members," Chang said.

Mock trial allows students to learn about the court system and further their public speaking skills. Each year the team gets a court case, practices it and then enacts it in a real courthouse at the end of the season. Each person on the team plays a role and is either on the plaintiff or defense side. Then, the team competes against other schools in the county, state, and national levels.

The case assigned to all mock trial teams across the country this year is called People vs. Concha.

"This year's case invokes an alleged murder and various high school band students involved with a controlled substance," Kim said.

Some important members this year



FALCON // SHAZIA GUPTA

Mock trial coach Ed Quevedo talks to the students during a weekly practice on Nov. 14.

include senior Sachi Verma, the head defense attorney, and senior Charles Li, an important witness.

The mock trial season runs from late September to mid-February and ends in a county competition at the Santa Clara County Courthouse. The winner of the county competition goes on to the state competition in San Jose, and the winner of the state competition goes on to Nationals in Madison, Wisconsin.

The team has scheduled scrimmages against San Rafael, Leland, Los Gatos, and many other schools. They have also entered a Santa Clara County Invitational Tournament in January, which will have schools from inside and outside the county.

"Our success really depends on how hard each of us is willing to commit to the team. Every person matters," Chang said. ♦

PROGRAMS

Me and my shadow

WASC ALLOWS TEACHERS TO TRY A STUDENT'S TYPICAL SCHOOL DAY

BY Oksana Trifonova

As part of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) accreditation process, every six years the school must complete a self-study, which involves reflecting on the educational process of the students, analyzing it and providing feedback to improve in the future. In previous years, WASC has been able to implement many changes, such as the block day schedule.

This year, WASC has organized a program in which teachers shadow students in order to get a feel for what a student's typical school day is like.

Multimedia teacher Tony Palma said the process gave him a chance to gain insight into a student's typical school day.

"Shadowing students is an opportunity to see the students' experience and what we can do to change or improve [the school]."

>> teacher Tony Palma

ing on in the day-to-day goings-on in the classroom. It was a refreshingly positive [experience]."

P.E. and history teacher Rick Ellis described his shadowing experience as a "blast from the past," since it reminded him of his own high school days.

"The classes definitely differed in the way they were structured, and the teachers were entertaining," Ellis said. "The classes all seemed like they were engaged, so I thought all in all it was a good experience."

According to Palma, his shadowing experience was diverse, informative and eye-opening.

"It's awesome to get an opportunity to go into a classroom and see how students react to other teachers, how they learn, to see the experiences they have and obviously to see how they act differently in your room than they might in somebody else's," Palma said.

Palma's experience allowed him to also see the different aspects of his own students outside of his classroom.

"I got to not only focus on the student whom I was observing but also see some of my own students interact in different ways," Palma said. "It was really a positive experience as an educator." ♦

Shadowing students is an opportunity to see the students' experience and what we can do to change or improve [the school].

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EVENTS

Student programmers recruit for Hackathon

BY Miles Albert
& Minu Palaniappan

This spring, Paypal's San Jose Headquarters will be packed with high school developers programming in languages like HTML5 and Java. Sophomore Spencer Yen has been recruited by the hackathon to raise interest among other students.

Yen is planning to take most, if not all, of the Application Developer's Club to the hackathon, since it is directed more to beginners.

He believes this hackathon is more of a learning experience than a competition, since only high school developers are attending and most will be amateur programmers.

"Basically, you can go to the event not knowing how to write one line of code and come out of the event knowing how to make a simple app or a simple website," Yen said.

The hackathon, which will last for 24 hours, expects more than 500 attendees, according to event organizer

Shrav Mehta, a senior at Monta Vista High.

"Our goal is to introduce as many people to computer science as possible with our hackathon," said Mehta. "We are here to provide the mentorship and training needed to become a great developer."

The event has garnered many high school representatives from Harker, Cupertino, Lynbrook, Monta Vista, Saratoga, and many other Bay Area high schools.

The hackathon has also received a sponsorship interest from big-name companies in the Silicon Valley such as Yahoo, Github, Gunnar Optiks, Udacity, the CK-12 foundation and Google X. As a result, winners of the hackathon will receive impressive prizes and internship opportunities with Yahoo and several start-ups based in San Francisco.

"I can already tell you, the speaker list is going to be awesome," Mehta said. "We have some impressive tech celebrities ready to speak." ♦

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EVENTS

Spirit week tries for popular themes

BY Rohan Hardikar

Nov. 18 marked the beginning of the first spirit week of the school year, as students donned mustaches and other forms of facial hair to dress up for Mustache Monday. The rest of the spirit week included Tuesday Mathletes vs Athletes, Western Wednesday, Disney Thursday and Formal Friday.

This year, the seniors won the Spirit Week competition with a total of 101 points while the juniors earned 88, sophomores 55 and freshmen 25. Each day during lunch, students could go to the top of the quad steps to receive class points for dressing up.

The Spirit Commission made some changes to promote more class participation to combat lack of spirit the school has shown in past spirit weeks. When planning, the commission used student input for the themes instead of having the commission decide, and they got the word out early by creating a Facebook group and including reminders in principal Paul Robinson's weekly emails.

"After looking at the general number of participants that reported to the commissioners for spirit points, [I'm] pretty

impressed," head commissioner Vivian Wang said. "The numbers were higher than our own expectations, so it's a sign that we're doing the right thing."

However, senior Katie Truong said that this week didn't go as well as other past spirit weeks because it seemed people didn't want to dress up.

"There would be some really spirited people who dressed up every day, but other than that people didn't really seem into it," Truong said. "Maybe if there was a Pajama Day, then people would want to participate more."

According to freshman Maya Prasad, participation was higher than she expected in the freshman class.

"The best day was Formal Friday because [we] dressed up in professional suits and walked around looking like lawyers," Prasad said. "Also on Monday, people had drawn some crazy mustaches on their faces, and it was really funny to watch."

Although there were mixed opinions about the success of this particular spirit week, it was still a chance to promote community among students.

"I think it is an excellent way to raise school spirit," Prasad said. "Especially



Courtesy of VIVIAN WANG

Spirit Commissioners senior Jessica Pham, junior Christina Chin, sophomore Allison Lin, junior Adrienne Kim, senior Vivian Wang and junior Guita Pardis dress up in plaid shirts, bandanas and cowboy hats for Western Wednesday, the third day of Spirit Week.

for freshmen, spirit week gives people chance to express [themselves] and show what we can do as a team."

Wang said there will be more spirit

weeks scattered throughout the year, but after mixed reviews of this first one, the goal still remains to increase participation. ♦

CASSY >> Counselors provide another student support system

continued from page 1

the Pott family said, "We selected their organization because it was such a perfect fit for all the things that we were hoping to accomplish on the youth counseling side of our charity."

The Pott family said that they became familiar with CASSY after meeting Polly Naber, whose daughter attended Los Gatos High and took her life four years ago. The Nabers also have a charity that benefits CASSY.

Assistant principal Brian Safine said the 1440 Foundation, a nonprofit organization, has also helped to fund CASSY at Saratoga High. Using these donations and district funds, CASSY has been able to help fund several services on campus, including the Common Roots program run by peers, depression and suicide awareness presentations and crises intervention and treatment.

"Both the Audrie Pott Foundation and CASSY are working together to support teens by having comprehensive mental health services available on local school campuses free of charge," Bay

Area CASSY director Liz Scheoben said. Common Roots co-founder senior My-Lan Le said that CASSY counselor Kim Cousens is the adviser of this organization and was involved in training the peer counselors.

"[Cousens] advises us if we have any questions on what we're doing," Le said. "Since she's a professional, she can tell us how to better approach certain situations or when things are out of our control."

In addition to Common Roots, Scheoben said that the CASSY staff at the school, consisting of Cousens, Jessica Wang and Kelly Christie, have presented to freshman health classes and plan to do the same for 10th through 12th graders throughout the year.

"We do a presentation on mental health awareness, including depression and suicide," Scheoben said. "We talk about warning signs and healthy ways to cope [and] safe cyber practices."

According to freshman Stefanie Ting, the CASSY presentation

taught her that students shouldn't be afraid to ask for emotional help.

"It's nice to know that there's someone there to help you when you can't help yourself," Ting said.

Approximately 70 students see CASSY counselors regularly, Safine said. Although the school's four guidance

counselors are the "primary points of contact" for students, Safine said a counselor, teacher or friend may refer someone to a CASSY counselor anonymously if he or she feels that individual could need the extra help. The CASSY counselors can be found in room in the office during school hours. ♦

>> THE profile

Kim Cousens

Ever since her first job in college at a psychiatric hospital, Cousens has always dreamed of being like the inspirational therapists and counselors that she worked with and making a difference in the lives of other people, especially children.

Determined to make that dream a reality, Cousens completed graduate school and moved on to work for 17 and a half years at EMQ Families First, a large mental health program for children and families. She then worked at Fisher Middle School for an additional 10 years before coming to Saratoga last year.

"I do love that my job is always challenging," Cousens said. "I feel like I have something to give, and impacting someone's life in a positive way is very meaningful to me."

As a CASSY counselor, Cousens said she hopes to get to know her clients.

"The first step is to just talk to someone, and then acknowledge whatever feeling they are having is normal and help

them cope with whatever is coming up," Cousens said. "[Then help] them identify what their coping skills are, what they need to do for support and how they can be taking care of themselves."

In order to help students work out their problems, Cousens uses methods that help students come to terms with their own feelings.

"Sometimes I will have people draw about their feelings," Cousens said. "We might do some role play. If someone is having a hard situation, I could pretend to be you, you could be pretend to be the other person."

Through her dedication to the students, Cousens has faith that all people are capable of feeling better.

"I have such a strong belief in human potential and people's ability to do what they achieve," Cousens said. "I have a lot of hope. If they don't believe they can get better themselves, then maybe they will trust that I know."

Impacting someone's life in a positive way is very meaningful to me.

>> Counselor Kim Cousens



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FALCON FOCUS: WESLEY CHAFFIN

Senior sports his unique stock of humorous shirts

BY Jay Mulye

On one of senior Wesley Chaffin's shirts, three cartoon boys roast their hot dogs and one of the boys' weiners falls into the camp fire. "It's all fun and games until someone loses a weiner," the shirt proclaims.

This comical shirt is one of many in Chaffin's collection, started in seventh grade. Chaffin's dad came across the website shirt.woot.com and asked if Chaffin would like to have a "random funny shirt."

"Every day that he found a shirt he thought I'd appreciate, he'd just ask me if I wanted to get it," Chaffin said. "They sell one shirt every day for \$10, so you have to be fast if you like one."

Chaffin also has a shirt that is scattered with images of video game controllers and often engages his peers by asking them to "recognize as many controllers as possible."

However, Chaffin's favorite shirt in the collection is a shirt depicting a banana knocking on a door, followed by two bananas and an orange.

The shirt visually depicts the knock-

knock joke with the punch line "Orange you glad I didn't say banana."

"Sometimes people don't get the shirt so I start telling them the knock-knock joke," Chaffin said. "But sometimes, people don't know what a knock-knock joke is, so then things get hilariously awkward."

Another memorable moment Chaffin remembers was when he was wearing a shirt with the night sky and constellations drawn on it.

"My aunt saw me wearing the constellations shirt and thought I had a special love for stargazing and wanted me to go to some special stargazing event," Chaffin said.

Chaffin enjoys wearing specific shirts on different occasions. To science class, Wesley enjoys wearing his shirt that spells out science using the periodic elements.

On days with physics tests, Chaffin wears his tie-dye shirt, which he made when he finished retired science teacher Bob Kucer's Chemistry Honors class and claims that "[the tie-dye shirt] is infused with the power of Kucer."

"If I am running out of shorts, it dic-



Senior Wesley Chaffin shows off one of his shirts, which shows subatomic units' charges with emotional faces.

tates what shirts I wear because I like to be fashionable and match my outfit," said Chaffin, jokingly. ♦

REDWOOD >> Early dismissal upsets parents

continued from pg. 1

days for the elementary school, scattered throughout the course of one year.

"This schedule was mainly implemented for teacher training," Weiss said. "But there was a lot of distance between the weeks where teachers would get training, and parents couldn't remember which weeks were early-outs. So there was a lot of complaints about how the system wasn't consistent."

Adding to the need for more minimum days is the switch in public education to Common Core standards—something teachers need training and time to put in place, Weiss said.

"Essentially, you gained back the Thursdays that were minimum days, and the Wednesdays that were already shortened, got a little bit shorter," Weiss said. "Also the teachers would be able to use this extra time to collaborate."

However, many parents are concerned about their children's education because the policy reduces hours of valuable school time. Some parents were upset that they were not informed about the new policy until August.

"Our community was caught off guard because of a level of communication issues," said Rishi Kumar, a Redwood parent. "I think teacher training is very important but at the same time, the parents feel that school time should not be compromised."

Weiss agreed that communication with parents and the rest of the community did not go well.

"We could have done a much, much better job," Weiss said. "We announced it at PTA and board meetings, but that's not enough. We needed to do more."

Weiss said that because of the lack of communication, many parents approached the district with unhappy reactions. However, he said that he did

receive many positive reactions.

"Some people approached us and said, 'Thank you. Finally. My kid needs a break in the middle of the week. And it's consistent,'" Weiss said.

Kumar and 327 other parents have signed the "Stop Early Dismissal" petition posted on Change.com.

Kumar has also approached Weiss with other parents to present their opinion of the new policy and to offer solutions for what students could do on Wednesday afternoons.

"We suggested to [Weiss] that we should potentially offer some recreational activities, for example programming, to supplement learning," Kumar said.

The problem with this idea is that after-school education requires money the district does not have.

As a result, the district created a free after-school daycare at the Warren-Hutton house, located near Redwood for students to go after school.

"It's not the best of arrangements, but it's something we have to go with," Kumar said. "Our kids have a safe place, and the teachers will get the training, so it was overall a good trade off for this year."

Kumar added that although this arrangement has appeased the opposition, it is still important for both parents and the school board to consider changes for future years.

Currently, Kumar said there is a new contract being negotiated by the Saratoga Union School District and the Saratoga Teacher's Association regarding the process of training teachers for Common Core.

"It's currently a closed negotiation where the public is not invited," Kumar said. "There has been recommendation from certain members of the community that they should open up the negotiation so the parents can provide feedback for all terms in the negotiation

that is currently going on."

Weiss said that because of strong reactions from some parents in the community, the district is doing a survey to see where parents stand.

He said that there are areas of the schedule he would like to explore with parents, the teachers and with the rest of the community.

Kumar stated that no matter what, the students' educations should always be everyone's first priority.

"Redwood is super critical in getting kids ready for high school and our school district is a top notch, high performing district," Kumar said. "We need to negotiate a contract that doesn't take away from instructional minutes."

Weiss agreed that students should always be a school district's first interest.

"I can only hope that it's better for the kids," Weiss said. "Teachers are getting more and more training and support for the Common Core, and the latest research says that when teachers have time to collaborate and work together, school life is better for all the students." ♦

>> THE bigidea

Early Dismissal Policy

What it is?

Redwood Middle School students are dismissed at 12:30 p.m. every Wednesday.

What is the argument?

Redwood Middle School students who aren't maximizing their learning potential because of the decrease in school hours a week, and parents who are unable to retrieve their children from school as a result of this earlier dismissal.

Why is this being implemented?

The earlier dismissal policy is mainly in action for teacher training and shifting public education into Common Core standards.

What lies ahead?

There is a negotiation between the Saratoga school district and teachers' association about next year's schedule. The parents want it to revert to the original one; however, nothing has been decided.

SPEECH AND DEBATE

New season, new captains

CAPTAINS LEAD TEAM TO SUCCESS IN RECENT INVITATIONAL

BY Rohan Hardikar

Led by this year's recently appointed captains, the speech and debate team ranked in almost every event at the annual Santa Clara University Invitational on the weekend of Nov. 23.

In the individual event category, senior Akshay Madhani and juniors Jimmy Xiao and Agastya Gupta broke to semifinals in open extemporaneous speaking. Seniors Jason Li, freshman Mitali Shanbhag and senior Mohith Subbarao ranked second, third and fourth, respectively, in open original oratory. In original interpretation, junior Supriya Khandekar ranked third.

For Lincoln Douglas Debate, sophomore Shrey Desai made it to quarter-finals, and sophomores Sweeya Raj and Michelle Chen broke in varsity public forum. Senior Aditya Choudhary and junior Rohith Krishna also made it to octafinals in parliamentary debate.

The team has shown impressive results for their second tournament, which point to positive signs for the rest of the season.

"We have had a pretty good start to the season," said team captain senior Kush Maheshwari. "Hopefully as the season goes by, we can have as much success as we did last year."

Before the tournament, Head Coach Erick Rector announced new captains for most of the events this year. Subbarao, Khandekar and junior Anjali Manghnani have been appointed IE captains. Juniors Sudeep Raj, Rohan Bhardwaj and Jerry Yang are the parliamentary debate captains. Seniors Justin Liu and Parth Kejriwal are Public Forum captains; Krishna and junior Deepthi Kannan are Lincoln Douglas captains. Rector has not announced any names for extemporaneous speaking.

According to Maheshwari, extemp is one of the hardest events because of the high number of participants and that no one made it to finals in the first two tournaments.

"Our speech and debate team are getting to quarterfinals and semifinals so we are working hard to break that barrier and push students into the final rounds," Maheshwari said. ♦



Manghnani



Khandekar



Subbarao



Bhardwaj



Raj



Yang



Kannan



Krishna

DOWNTOWN

Holiday festivities animate Saratoga

BY AnantRajeev
& DeepthiSampathkumar

Every year during the holiday season, downtown Saratoga is filled with spirit as the annual Christmas tree is resurrected and bright and colorful lights deck out the streets.

"I love Saratoga downtown during the holiday season because of the bright lights and the central tree," junior Aisha Pai said. "The mood of the season is just so great."

The spirit of Christmas can be seen in the decorations outside Villa Montalvo, the cultural hub stationed in the heart of Saratoga.

"In the [Montalvo] Art Center there are always a lot of concerts and the spread of holiday cheer during the winter," junior Anshika Maheshwari said. "The lights on the trees and decorations make it a much nicer place to be around."

Every year, there are holiday boutiques held at Montalvo.

The school also puts on its own Holiday Boutique, which was held on Nov. 23 this year.

At these boutiques, vendors sell many festive items for shoppers in preparation for the holiday season.

Saratoga has progressively increased its festivities over the years.

"My parents grew up here and my mom remembers [Saratoga] not having as many lights and decorations as it does today," sophomore Darby Williams said. "[Even if] the downtown she knew wasn't as spirited, she re-



The city arch in downtown Saratoga is illuminated by holiday decorations.

members an old movie theater that used to show holiday movies."

Students feel the spirit of downtown adds to the holiday season.

"Although Saratoga downtown is small, once the lights are up and the trees are assembled, the holiday cheer spreads all around," sophomore Naved Krishnamurthy said. ♦



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CHEN >> Decline of humanities in schools

continued from pg. 1

a result.

Chen is one of the few bucking the trend.

"It's fashionable nowadays to joke about the utility of the humanities, and this attitude becomes perpetuated by the lack of courage to really address the issue," he said. "People forget this — that science cannot answer everything, and science itself is a branch of philosophy."

Chen was first introduced to philosophy by his father, who often made philosophical claims.

"I wanted to train in my mind to be better at finding logical fallacies both in other people's words and my own. It's surprising once you realize how illogical we are when we speak," Chen said.

Chen said that many parents, especially at SHS, are wary of their children majoring in philosophy, given the perceived lack of job options open to philosophers. He feels majoring in the humanities is discouraged not only at SHS, but across the Silicon Valley.

"We live in an age dominated by the advances of science," Chen said. "Humanities are discouraged as a major because of their lack of marketability when compared to jobs that require, for example, computer science."

Chen feels this is a practical reality that often forces students out of the humanities, and that Saratoga High is well known for having more science-oriented students than humanities students.

Last year, out of the 1,186 AP tests taken by Saratoga students, 650 of the tests administered were in math or science, as opposed to 536 tests being administered in the Humanities, including alternative study art, psychology and music theory. For some of the AP tests, students self-studied for and took at another school.

"It makes sense for parents to be worried about majoring purely in the humanities," Chen said, "especially when the economy is so rough and unforgiving."

A culture of left-brainisms
Situated in Silicon Valley, Saratoga

Last year, 650 AP tests taken were in math or science, compared to 536 in the Humanities.

lead to several career options, including law, business and neuroscience, among others.

When at Saratoga High, Chen made sure to spread his love of philosophy to students and staff. He started the philosophy club, which is still active. Additionally, in his junior year, Chen did his History Day project on Epicurus, a relatively obscure philosopher, who in Chen's words, planted "the seeds for Humanism, thus bringing about the Scientific Revolution."

Although Chen is currently undeclared, he said he plans to pursue a dual major in computer science and philosophy.

"What I want to major in has been heavily influenced by my what is essentially an obsession with philosophy," Chen said. "I can't let it go." ♦

'TRANSGENDER LAW'

School awaits new law

BY AshleyChen
& SherrilynLing

On Aug. 12, Gov. Jerry Brown signed AB 1266, an amendment to the California education code that will give transgender students access to sex-segregated bathrooms, sports and more regardless of their gender at birth.

For example, a transgender female will be allowed to join girls' sports teams and use the girls' bathroom, "irrespective of the gender listed on the pupil's records." The law will likely take effect on Jan. 1.

Like Proposition 8, a law giving gay and lesbian couples the right to marry that sparked mass protests in 2008, AB 1266, or the "transgender bathroom law" as it is colloquially called, is the subject of intense backlash from conservative groups.

So far, the law is a non-issue at Saratoga High. Principal Paul Robinson said he does not expect drastic changes to happen anytime soon for bathrooms on campus.

"I don't know if there's anything we can do [in response to the law]," Robinson said. "We have to abide by the law and what the law means."

After the governor signed the bill into law, the organization Privacy for All Students has created a petition to force a statewide vote on the bill. However, the initiative does not look like it will succeed.

Although the organization received more than 620,000 signatures, the signatures are only about 75 percent accurate so far, compared to the 95 percent rate of accuracy required.

This means that around 25 percent of the signatures are forged or otherwise invalid.

In the event that the signatures do pass verification, California would vote on it next November, and in the meantime, the law would be suspended pending election results.

One alternative suggested by the California Catholic Conference, which called the policy a "'one size fits all' politically correct agenda," proposes that decisions regarding the accommodation of transgenders be made at the level closest to the issue.

This would give schools the authority to accommodate transgender students who want to use bathrooms based on gender identity, not sex assignment at birth, on a case-by-case basis. ♦

SPIRAL OF FAILURE

WHY TEACHING THE SAME CONCEPTS EVERY YEAR DOESN'T WORK

BY Ashley Chen

How many times do students need to learn about the American Revolution to "get it?" Apparently the answer is four: once in fifth grade, eighth grade, 10th grade and 11th grade. This model of education, which is prevalent in American schools, is called "spiral learning," in which students return to the same basic concepts on a periodic basis, but with increased complexity each time.

The application of this idea is simple. In fifth grade, kids learn that the American Revolution happened. In eighth, students are asked to memorize the Bill of Rights and Preamble of the Constitution. Two years later, they analyze the causes of the war, and during junior year, they read Thomas Paine in APUSH.

According to psychologist Jerome Bruner, who designed the spiral method, it is more effective, because students are able to hammer down on fundamentals before learning more and more abstract material.

In reality, though, the result is that students become weary of the American Revolution as they are forced to regurgitate the same information again and again. In its current form, spiral learning is not an effective teaching method.

A recent paper by Vicki E. Snider, a professor from University of Wisconsin, supports this idea. Dr. Snider analyzed how fractions are taught in a common spiral-curriculum math textbook called Scott Foresman-Addison Wesley (SF-AW).

The SF-AW textbook spends three weeks learning about the basics of fractions in third grade, including one lesson on the concept of "fractions equal to 1." In the following year, SF-AW discusses that concept in only one example problem, and in fifth grade, students are expected to apply this to adding and subtracting fractions with unlike denominators without review.

The textbook assumes students remember the briefly covered concept from the year before, but for students who were too young to understand it in third grade and didn't catch it fourth grade because the teacher didn't have time to teach it, mastering these advanced problems will be virtually impossible.

The fundamental problem with spiral learning, especially in mathematics, is that it teaches a concept superficially. The goal is to introduce the concept, so the students will recognize it when they see it next year, and only one lesson is allocated for it.

As a result, some students never really "get" the concept of fractions and are left to struggle as they are funnelled into the next level by teachers who never worry about their lack of proficiency because they figure the students will learn the concept again next year. Likewise, students learn to loathe those topics they never actually understood, and recognize that by avoiding those subjects when



>> THE bigidea

Spiral learning

What is it?
Students learn similar concepts every few years of school.

The benefit
Often, it is easier for students to understand the fundamentals of academic material.

The downside
Students can grow tired of learning about the same topics multiple times.

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year, they
can get by.

Supporters of spiral learning sometimes point to China's highly successful science curriculum, which splits each year of secondary school science education into physics, chemistry and biology. The system seems to be working: In 2009, Shanghai, China, ranked first in science education among more than 70 countries, while the U.S. took 23rd.

Compared to our school's science curriculum, which forces freshmen into one year of biology followed by one year of chemistry, China's spiral curriculum looks attractive. However, this link is a correlation, not a causation.

According to professor Norman Northridge, California State University professor of science education, compared to an American student, the average Shanghai student spent 140 percent as much time studying biology, 200 percent chemistry and 280 percent physics.

Clearly, the amount of instructional time is the key to Shanghai's success in science education, not its spiral curriculum. While spiral learning may appear to be an powerful way of teaching, American schools need to recognize the truth: A spiral curriculum is simply unproductive.

Instead, we should look to other styles of curriculum, such as a mastery-based one, where, as the New York Times put it, "understanding of a subject is constant and time is a variable," and each student learns at his or her own pace. Rather than looking back, we should embed old concepts into new

ones with the expectation that students remember, not reteach old material.

E d u c a -
tion, at its core,
needs to identify
where students are
academically and
challenge them ap-
propriately. Without
this crucial element,
which spiral learn-
ing does not pro-
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will inevitably
fail to en-
gage stu-
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Courtesy of JIWEI WANG

FOURTH PERIOD

STAFF POLICY

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The staff of *The Saratoga Falcon* is committed to objectively and accurately representing the diverse talents, cultures and viewpoints of the Saratoga High School community.

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College selection should not be so focused on prestige

>> candid caricatures



CATHERINE TANG

for the name.

Take, for example, a student preparing to major in Computer Science. According to the college rankings by U.S. News, Carnegie Mellon University, a school that is not very well known and ranked No. 23 in the nation overall, has the second best Computer Science program in the nation, right behind that of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The student should then strongly consider attending Carnegie Mellon rather than Yale, for instance, which has the glory in name but is not ranked in the Top 10 Computer Science schools.

Prestige does not necessarily mean a superior education when dozens of other colleges can provide the same.

Opinion of the Falcon Editorial Board

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The Saratoga Falcon staff voted 16-5 in support of the editorial.

BY MINU PALANIAPPAN

Apple's sense of innovation has never been questioned since it began releasing products that not only dominated electronic platforms but also trailblazed new product lines that would reinvent mobile and desktop computing.

Unfortunately, its streak of producing jaw-dropping products has come to an end. Apple's lack of innovation is especially apparent in its questionable software and hardware decisions.

The root of Apple's failure started with its bland and boringly consistent hardware design that originated with its concept of the iPhone. The original iPhone had a 3.5" screen display with a rectangular body that boasted simplicity and beauty; the product was a crowd-pleaser that influenced tech-heavyweights such as Samsung and Motorola to produce their own smartphones.

The great design seen in Apple's first iPhone stemmed from their talented design team and the stewardship of late CEO Steve Jobs.

With Jobs at the helm of Cupertino-based the company, its success and its

thirst for innovation was never questioned. Apple continued to reaffirm the iPhone's success with their release of the iPhone 4: an iteration of the iPhone that hosted the retina display, which is a liquid crystal display that produces the sharpest images.

The iPhone 5s, however, is not much more different than the iPhone 4. Yes, there is a longer screen and a faster processor, but the phone still seems small compared to equally priced Samsung Galaxy S4s and Google Nexus 5s.

The iPhone's screen size has been one of its major setbacks. Users would like to have a larger screen real-estate because the dramatically larger screens offer far more functionalities than the narrow and long iPhone screen dimension.

Apart from its hardware, Apple's iOS 7, the company's latest mobile operating system, is purely an Android copy-cat with disarrayed colors and design languages.

The default icons in iOS 7 are atrocious and look like cheap copies of the flat-style icons one would find on Windows 7. In addition, Apple has added various toggle buttons that al-

lows users to easily turn off WiFi, change screen-brightness or play different music, which are almost identical to these features in Android.

Apple has undoubtedly lost its footing as the leading pioneer in the mobile and computing market. Without an influence similar to Steve Jobs, Apple will find it hard to dig themselves out of this hole, but customers hope to see another day when Apple once again regains its identity as the champion of technological innovation. ♦

>> the big idea

Apple's Downfall

The root of the problem

Apple has failed to be innovative with their hardware design of the iPhone.

Hardware failures

The screen size is still not large enough on the iPhone 5 compared to equally priced phones.

Appearance failures

The iOS 7 copied Android phones with a similar design and lacks creativity.

Apple: a tech company of the past

YouTube blunders with paid channels

BY Miles Albert

Ever since Google bought YouTube for \$1.65 billion in 2006, the company's stock has steadily increased.

YouTube's content is improving and expanding, and people usually don't mind watching 30-second advertisements for each video — or at least as long as they need to watch before hitting the skip button. The company's revenue is growing, and so is the number of monthly users.

But YouTube is still not satisfied. The company now allows certain channels to charge their subscribers \$0.99 or more per month, money the channels must split with YouTube.

Is YouTube that desperate for money, or is it just greedy?

The company should expect a decrease in audiences if big-name channels decide to make the switch from ad revenue to monthly paid subscriptions.

This new feature could po-

tentially be a major problem not only for YouTube, but for people who rely on the website to stream videos.

YouTube hasn't released much information on the topic, but this paid-channel initiative has been in effect since May 2013.

Since then, dozens of new paid channels have emerged, from "Sesame Street" to "National Geographic Kids," which both charge \$3.99 a month for people to subscribe to them.

Some may argue that the new paid-subscription option can bring in more content that would otherwise not have been on YouTube, which is a plus.

However, this is hardly beneficial to the channel's revenue since most users are unwilling to throw away their hard-earned change for a few videos a month.

In fact, for the entire month of October, all paid content on both the Sesame Street and National Geographic Kids channel

has received under 50 views per video.

Considering these are popular brands, earning a few extra bucks a month through their small number of viewers on YouTube is nothing.

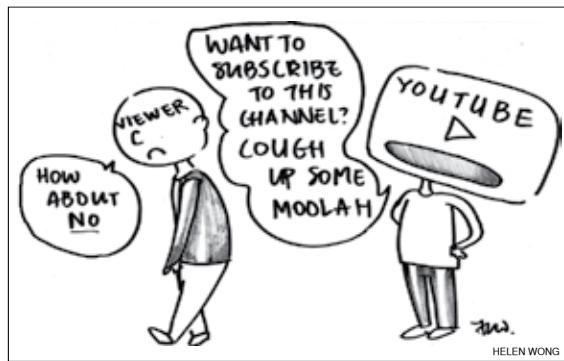
YouTube recently decided to release a statement on its blog saying that any channel with a YouTube partnership and over 10,000 subscribers is now eligible to begin charging for its content.

Basically, any channel with a decently sized audience can charge its subscribers and in return drastically reduce its audience size.

After all, more paid content may generate fewer monthly users, and fewer monthly users can create a large decrease in revenue and possibly content as well.

YouTube is reaching a point of no return. In the near future, more popular channels will shamelessly demand money from viewers. Then, as other

>> candidcaricatures



HELEN WONG

channels notice this trend of selling-out, they dive into this "opportunity" believing they have struck it rich.

However, give it time. People will ultimately just stop watching videos on YouTube

and move on with their lives — maybe they'll just stick to TV.

YouTube will be forgotten as well as the paid channels it once held, all because of this dumb attempt to earn more money. ♦

Testing companies must respect student privacy

BY Tiffany Zheng

In the last week of October, College Board and ACT were sued for selling student information without the proper consent of students. The case against these testing companies, representing Illinois resident Rachel Specter, claims that students' names, test scores, birth dates, Social Security numbers, phone numbers and home addresses were being sold to third parties, mainly colleges, for a profit. Each name was allegedly sold for around 37 cents by the SAT and 38 cents by the ACT.

Specter filed the report in a federal district Illinois courtroom, demanding

over \$5 million in damages because College Board was "unfair, immoral, unjust, oppressive and unscrupulous."

Millions of American students were targeted and violated by colleges because of the sales made by the test-taking companies.

There are the obvious security issues with this system. The information sold by the testing companies could result in a serious case of identity theft. Students should be able to take this standardized test without having to worry about third parties purchasing and attempting to market their information.

This sale of student information may appear a light offense at first. If you dive

deeper, though, serious infringements begin to surface. When your Social Security information ends up in the wrong hands, credit card fraud, government fraud and finance fraud can all occur under your name.

These testing companies' recent selling of test takers' information violates privacy rights. Students should be able to keep all their personal information to themselves, without the colleges prying fingers attempting to find the "more intelligent" American students.

Although these testing companies do offer the opportunity for students to opt out of sharing personal information, nowhere does it ever state that the infor-

mation provided by test takers will be sold for a massive profit, especially not highly protected information such as Social Security numbers.

Thus, the system perfects a cycle of exploitation. To get into college, students must take tests. The testing companies, in return, sell the test-takers' information to colleges, which use the information to advertise to students, cementing their prestige and keeping students applying.

Test taking companies should not be allowed to sell student information to third parties. If they are so desperate for money, they should increase the testing fees instead. ♦

Budget cuts hurt public higher education system

BY Robert Eng
& Tiffany Zheng

\$813 million was slashed from the University of California (UC) budget in 2009.

This massive cut, although it occurred a few years ago, has affected all 10 schools and, most of all, UC Berkeley. Berkeley has suffered nearly \$150 million in cuts since 2010, forcing the school to lay off instructors, organize furlough days and increase service fees, resulting in an increase in tuition.

Berkeley plans on raising the fees even more as the years progress, further hurting students and undermining its mission to offer an elite education for a reasonable cost.

Fixes to the budget situation have been slow to come. Sure, a few years have passed since the budget cuts were made, but a scar has been made in the UC system.

There is absolutely no guarantee that the cuts of funding money will not occur again.

Since the cuts, students have begun to start uprisings against the increase in tuition.

While it might be, as former chancellor Robert Birgeneau called it, part of the

Transferring these funds to the education system will enable reforms to reinvigorate the public school system...

"protest culture" of Berkeley, these disputes have resulted in multiple student injuries.

The public university system in California is sinking like the Titanic. The system is failing quickly, weighed down by insurmountable financial troubles. A bailout of the water may be needed, but in the long run, a sustainable option must be pursued.

America, California in particular, must change its spending and taxing trends.

Disregarding the political deadlocks driven by bipartisanship, taxes must be raised across all income levels, in particular through the implementation of a graduated income tax.

A reduction in spending on the military and social programs must occur because these systems are unsustainable.

The truth is most of us need to pay more in taxes if we want to have a better society. Investing in education can be the best use of public funds since it results in people getting good jobs and thus paying more taxes.

Transferring these funds to the education system will enable reforms to reinvigorate the public school system, maybe even in the direction of high school and middle school levels. ♦

Schools should implement online monitoring system

BY Andrew Jiang
& Anant Rajeev

This school year, the Glendale School District, located in suburban Los Angeles, hired a firm to monitor middle and high school students' public postings on social media.

The firm was hired to search for possible bullying, drug use, violence and suicidal threats.

Many schools in California are starting to monitor students' social media activities for the purpose of student safety.

At several schools, educators can punish students for their behavior online if that behavior extends to something that would enter the school environment.

Students are minors. They have limited rights to the First Amendment. Therefore, schools have the right to monitor their students' online behavior.

Schools should be able to monitor students online, but should only be able to punish them if their online behavior can be considered any form of bullying.

Even though there may be inappropriate content on a student's online profile, as long as it doesn't affect the safety and well-being of another student or group of students at school, the school has no business getting involved.

According to the Saratoga High School's bullying policy, which can be found on the school website, the district board defines cyber bullying as "harassment of students or staff, such as bullying, including cyber bullying, intimidation, hazing or initiation activity, ridicule, extortion, or any other verbal, written, or physical conduct that causes or threatens to cause bodily harm or emotional suffering ..."

If a student is potentially causing "emotional suffering" to another student, it can be considered a form of bullying. Because of this, the student deserves to be punished.

Furthermore, a school's primary purpose is to educate students. Students must feel safe at school to have a proper education.

If a student's academics are at all affected in a negative way by another student on social media, it is the school's job to get involved and clear up the situation.

Some may say online monitoring by schools is a direct violation of students' privacy.

But a school must do everything in its power to ensure students are in a position to learn, even if it means sacrificing online privacy.

In short, online monitoring is a good idea for schools, but should only be acted upon when students' online activities interfere directly with academics. ♦

Midterm appointments for ASB, commission positions necessary

BY Robert Eng
& Shazia Gupta

Pick a commission, almost any commission, and look deeply to see what's going on.

A couple of the commissioners will likely be doing most of the work; some help out when asked; others rest on their laurels and won't work even if prompted. This dynamic is created by a flawed appointment process, a surefire formula for a complacent commission.

Traditionally, commissioners for the next school year are chosen at the end of the current school year by the new ASB officers. These yearlong appointments lock in officers' positions, and sometimes also their incompetence.

The current system allows for a continuous pattern of apathy, creating a school with subpar commissions unable to fully complete their duties. This reflects poorly on the ASB who appointed them, leading to students losing faith in their government.

To prevent this from happening, the school should have midterm commission appointments after the start of the school year. Although a complete lack of job security is unwanted, the mere threat of possibly being removed or replaced

will keep people alert throughout their entire term.

If this system is enforced, then the new commissioners would have the needed motivation to start better organizing their assigned school-wide activities and events: elections commission with transparency, rally commission with more frequent rallies, etc. This would also put pressure on officers to make sure that these are quality events and that serious effort was put into them.

These much-needed changes would bring positive results. With a more involved student government comes greater school spirit, something the school could use a little bit more of. An added bonus of midterm commissioner appointments is an increased participation in student government.

While those who were not fulfilling their job are removed, opportunities open for others. These opportunities provide further involvement in school enterprises so that someone who would be committed is given the chance to prove themselves.

Some may think that having officers step into positions at the end of the previous school year is better because it is easier to organize for the next year. Yes, it may be easier, but is it effective? The

>> THE bigidea

Midterm appointments

A broken system

Commissioners have no incentive to work once they are appointed. As a result, many of Saratoga's commissions are dysfunctional.

The solution

We need mid-year evaluations for commissioners.

>> candidcaricatures



commissioners are in no way accountable for their actions (or in more cases, inaction) throughout the entire year.

With a new system, the commissioners will be held accountable because their performance will be evaluated midway by the ASB officers. Through this process, the ASB would be given a chance

to weed out those who bring down the commissions by their inactivity.

Whatever the case, the school must do something to ensure an efficient bureaucracy, one that improves school spirit and student body participation so we can grow and live up to our label as the best high school in America. ♦

Renewing school spirit

BY Bruce Lou

Saratoga's school spirit is dead.

We've only had two rally this year. Our football games are more often than not a motley blend of colors rather than a sea of red. People who actually show a semblance of spirit are derided and laughed at by others. I've heard many variations of attacks on school spirit, including such vitriolic remarks such as, "Spirit doesn't get you into college, so why bother?" and "Rallies are fake and loud."

This isn't new. The school's spirit has been in decline for a long time, and the ubiquitous academic pressure that permeates through the school is perhaps to blame.

It isn't much of a secret that few remember, let alone dress up for, spirit days. It isn't much of a secret that dozens of people sit in the library during rallies, just a few yards away from the gym, trying their best to ignore the sounds and music emanating from the nearby building.

For many, a second not studying is a second wasted. And I can't blame them — the pressure to do well academically, to get nothing but straight-A's, is sky-high here.

But people need to understand that a half-hour rally's not going to kill them or their grade.

are important, and I work my butt off to get good grades.

But still, I go to football games and cheer for the team until my throat hurts. When I leave this school a couple years from now, I don't want to leave with no memories other than those of studious toil. I want to leave with the knowledge that I managed to get every little bit out of the high school experience.

One peculiar thing I've noticed about the school's spirit is that there really isn't a lack of spirited people. However, the general mood of the student population is apathetic toward any sort of school spirit.

This causes many people who would have been spirited to act indifferent to school spirit in an attempt to fit in.

Having school spirit, it seems, is unpopular and a cause for embarrassment. It really is the cool thing to say "I don't care about school spirit."

I'll admit, I've even said it a few times when people said I was too enthusiastic about school events.

But as dismal as the situation sounds, all hope isn't lost yet — we can revive our spirit. We need to drop this charade not caring about spirit. If only everyone who cares just stopped pretending that they didn't care, we'd have a much more lively school. And hey, who wouldn't want that? ♦

Students struggle through finals without authentic 'dead week'

BY Nelson Wang

Saratoga's zombie apocalypse comes twice a year. In these weeks before finals, the virus of stress spreads like influenza and the dead men walk asleep.

Masses of students can be seen stumbling around especially slowly during the week before finals, invoking an image of a zombie apocalypse. But this isn't because of some cult ritual or a new virus; it's simply because of the pain of the suffering students due to the overload of work.

Many colleges offer a chance for students to study more in the week before finals by having a "dead week." Saratoga High desperately needs a better enforced "dead week" — the antidote to the Saratoga dead man virus.

Colleges generally don't introduce any new material and don't assign any work during this week in order to give students as much time as possible to study.

Despite some teachers' best efforts to reduce work others continue to pile on homework assignments and give out tests and quizzes. If students are taking difficult courses that may be similar to college level courses, then they should also be given the "dead week."

Take, for instance, a poor senior who foolishly decided to take five AP classes, participate in band and attend after

school community college classes including multivariable calculus. He already suffers on a daily basis, but the week before finals, the earth becomes a torture chamber without a "dead week."

Not only will he have to juggle his extracurriculars and study for all his finals, but he will also have to continue to do work and possibly study for tests that week. Not to mention that he might still need to work on his college

While education is an obvious priority, a high school's main priority should be the students.

applications, most of which are due Jan. 1, just weeks after finals.

Granted, it may be his fault for taking so many classes, but the lack of a dead week only worsens this problem. We should be encouraging students to follow their passions and to explore their curiosities in these challenging classes.

Why are we blaming students for taking difficult classes when we could, by instituting a dead week, make their lives far less painful?

For the poor souls of these high school students, the stress is unhealthy, to say the least. Studies, such as from the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, have shown again and again

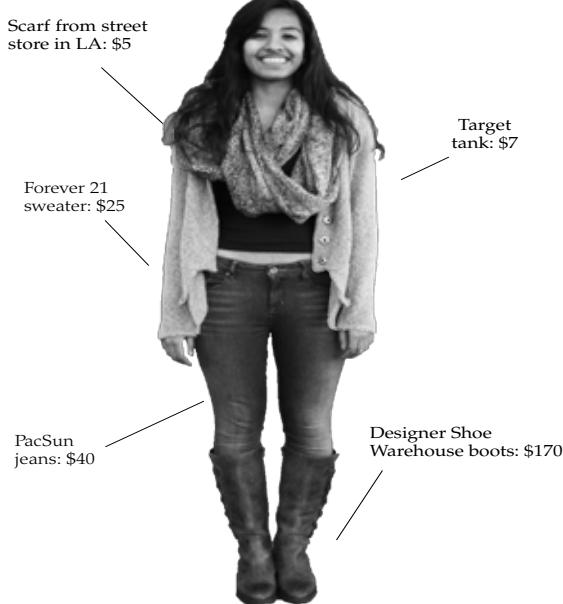
that stress is extraordinarily unhealthy for human bodies, especially in the case of teenagers who may still be developing.

While education is an obvious priority, a high school's main priority should be the students. Even schools like the Coast Guard Academy recognize the importance of a dead week and reduce the amount of military work the students have during this week. When even a military academy thinks students need to have less stress during the week before finals, it's a clear indicator Saratoga High should do the same.

With so much stress during this time, the academic performance of the students will likely decrease as well; as a result, the school can't even properly measure and evaluate what students have learned with the final exams.

Also, these finals are worth a large part of students' grades, so it is imperative that they work at their full potential. Even if a complete dead week is not yet possible, teachers should strive to make the week more "dead."

By giving students a dead week, students can do their best and thus, have an accurate reflection of their education and efforts, shown through their finals. Why not give students a week for this self-learning, redigesting and much needed studying? ♦

STYLE FILES**Trishika Shetty, 12****Winter tradition leads to celebrity encounter**

BY Catherine Tang

Aspen, Colo., is known for its high-brow celebrity culture, as many celebrities spend their winters in Aspen. A few years ago, junior Carmine Drohan was lucky enough to spot Barry Bonds, a former star baseball player for the San Francisco Giants, on one of her winter trips.

Since age 5, Drohan and her family have flown to Aspen every winter break for a week to ski and relax. The Drohan family usually goes to Aspen for one week during winter break in December and for ski week in February. Although the Drahans go to Aspen the most, they have also spent breaks in Telluride, Colo.; Snowbird, Utah; and Salt Lake City.

"We usually ski until about [3 p.m.] then my parents will crash, and I go shopping in downtown," Drohan said.

Shopping and skiing are Drohan's favorite activities, but she also likes spending time with new friends that she makes while skiing.

"There is a cute little movie theater too, so I like to go there also," Drohan said.

One year when Drohan, then 11, and her brother were shopping, they saw Bonds and his former wife.

"Not much happened, but I was sitting next to this lady in a boot shop and this big guy was standing next to her," Drohan said. "[My brother] Ethan and I

were trying to decide if the big guy was Barry Bonds or not because we love the Giants."

When the woman went to pay at the register, Drohan and her brother head the cashier say "Elizabeth Bonds."

"As [Bonds's] then wife was paying, he came up to me asked me how old I was and I tried to casually reply 'Eleven,'" Drohan said. "Ethan and I were like 'Wow.'"

Although Drohan and her brother figured out the superstar's identities, they did not approach Bonds about it.

"We didn't even tell them we knew who he was or anything since they were on vacation," Drohan said. "But being in his presence was cool enough."

The encounter with Bonds is one of Drohan's most memorable experiences in Aspen and she hopes to make more memories this winter and see more celebrities.

"I'm really excited to go to Aspen this year. Maybe I'll spot some more stars."

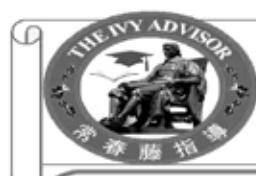
>> junior Carmine Drohan

Drohan also hopes to keep this tradition up through college.

"I hope to continue going to Aspen even through college because this tradition has become one of the most-looked-forward-to things of the year," Drohan said. ♦

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Scrub life: Senior wears same clothes all week

SURPRISINGLY, NOBODY SEEMS TO NOTICE WARDROBE REDUNDANCY

I still remember the first time I wore sweatpants to school.

I had been sick that one fateful week in junior year, with a nose that rivaled Rudolph's and a headache that felt as if an angry child was taking a cast-iron skillet to my brain. Too tired to mull over my outfit that morning, I donned my favorite ash-grey sweatpants and went to school.

The rest of the day, I endured taunts of "Grace Ma is wearing sweatpants? The world must be ending" and "How sick are you?" from my friends.

Until recently, I had been one of the girls who spent a good 10 minutes each morning staring at a closet full of clothes, thinking there was nothing to wear. So when I agreed to wear the same clothes to school for an entire week for newspaper, I was convinced that there would be some outstanding reactions.

The first day of the experiment, Tuesday, Nov. 12, I walked onto campus wearing my grey Forever 21 cardigan, rose-colored Tilly's tank top, American Eagle jeans and Havaianas flip flops. I



GRACE MA
Oh Ma Goodness

planned to talk to as many people as I could (despite having nearly shouted myself mute at a K-pop concert the previous evening) to get as many people as possible to notice my outfit so they would realize when I wore the same clothes for the next few days.

Wednesday morning, I donned the same clothes again, awaiting confused looks and weird glances from my

peers. The rest of the week proceeded in a similar fashion.

No one noticed.

By Friday, I thought the entire school population had gone blind or something — how does a girl wearing the same exact clothes four days in a row go unnoticed?

The results of my social experiment made me feel silly for worrying about others judging me on what I wore for so many years. Why had I spent mornings stressing over what to wear to school if

people didn't even notice?

The only answer I can come up with is that people overlook trivial things like clothes much more than we think. While my friends did harass me over the sweatpants incident, I doubt many of them even remember that day now. With tests, extracurriculars and other responsibilities, where in students' minds could they remember little details about

others' appearances?

Clearly, the 10 minutes spent stressing over what to wear to school each morning was 10 minutes wasted. 10 minutes a day totals to 35 minutes each school week, or 30 hours every school year.

The takeaway is this: People care about their own lives a whole lot more than they care about anyone else's. Whether this is good or bad, society can judge that. However, I know that I will no longer be spending any more than 2 minutes on my outfit each morning — and if this results in me wearing what I wear to sleep to school, so be it. ♦



FALCON // SIMI SRIVASTAVA



Reporter curses self with platinum blond locks

BLACK TO YELLOW, A HAIR'S JOURNEY

I have black hair, just like most students at Saratoga High. So when I was asked by the Falcon Lifestyles editors to come up with something crazy to do and gauge people's reactions, I thought it would be cool to dye my hair bright blond and see how others responded.

Not my best idea.

First of all, the bleaching process was long and painful. The professional stylist at a salon in Los Gatos stuck a product in my hair that slowly stripped my hair's color and made it a lot lighter. However, this process took a long time and the product burned my scalp.

It took me over an hour to bleach my hair, and once done, I realized right away how stupid it looked. My hair was bright blond, which is not an especially good look on me (mostly because I did not dye my eyebrows, which remained black).

Since I changed my hair color so radically, I stuck out like somebody who had decided that he was going to celebrate Halloween every single day. And because I tend to be somewhat reserved, talking to so many people about my hair was as enjoyable as explaining to my parents why I was doing this.

On the first day with my blond hair,



ARMAN VAZIRI
He's Our-man

was bombarded with questions, strange looks and laughter from both students and parents.

With blond hair also came a variety of new nicknames, including Eminem, Slim Shady, illegally blond and, most of all, blonde.

However, students were not the only ones judging from afar. Walking in downtown Saratoga, I could see every adult's head swiveling to look at me as they drove by. It was pretty easy to guess that everyone who looked at me was thinking that I looked strange.

It's amazing how others can make you feel self-conscious just with looks; it made me feel like going inside and hiding from people.

After the first day, I did not feel like continuing the experiment. Still, I was determined to follow through with the blondness for at least another day. At home, I encountered questions on how my day was from my family and, of course, more laughter.

The second day was pretty similar to the first, except I was getting used to all of the laughing and looks that I was receiving. By the end of the week, I didn't feel bothered at all.

Despite all of the goofiness of my hair,



FALCON // SIMI SRIVASTAVA

there was a reason to this assignment. I wanted to see how people react to those who look different.

My friends simply laughed at my hair, but people who didn't know me reacted differently. I received disquieting looks when walking by students I didn't know, and it made me feel like I was always being watched. This was probably because it is not often that people in Saratoga bleach their hair, so when I did it ap-

peared very strange to most people.

Through this experience, I learned that appearances don't necessarily define people. I learned that being the target of judgement — snap judgements based on appearances — is both real and painful. I learned that people can be defined by outer appearances, without regard for the actual person.

Finally, I learned that I really don't look good with blond hair. ♦

The love doctor: Great pick-up lines gone wrong

I'm not exactly what most people would call a player. Although I'm part of the water polo team and, according to multiple sources, have an "amazing body," I do not go out of my way to flirt with girls.

But when I, a sophomore, was given a chance to flirt with upperclassmen for a newspaper story, I immediately jumped on the opportunity. Even though I knew I could end up making a fool out of myself, it could also turn out to be one of those stories I could tell my future kids 30 years from now.

To start the flirting, I decided to approach all the girls with the same pick-up line, and if all went well, I would have their number by the time one of us had to go. After searching for cheesy pick-up lines on YouTube, I found a few I liked.

Senior Karen Sung, who happens to be the editor-in-chief of the other newspaper staff, was my first target.

During lunch on Nov. 18, I spotted Karen walking toward me. With as much confidence as I could muster, I walked up to her and flirtatiously (at least I hope it was) said my pick-up line: "Hey do

you have a band-aid, cause I scraped my knee falling for you!"

To my disappointment, an awkward silence followed. I tried introducing myself, but I guess my stunning smile and amazing pick-up line was not enough to flatter her. After a few "um's" and "what's," she bid me farewell and walked away.

Even though it was a complete failure, I was optimistic. My thought was it could only get better from here. I promised myself that my next attempt would be much smoother, and that I would actually engage in a conversation with the girl.

Walking down the hallways during break, my wingman senior Jay Mulye, a fellow Falcon staff member, spotted my next target: senior Rachel Li.

I was genuinely nervous as I didn't want to have another awkward exchange with a stranger. Still, I walked up to her and said the same pick-up line I used on Karen. (I know it was a huge mistake to use the same pick-up line twice; don't hate.) Rachel wasn't impressed, so I went on to say "Sorry I had more pick-up lines, but I was just so mesmerized by

your eyes and forgot all of them."

Rachele didn't look as creeped out as Karen did, but she was still uncomfortable. We went on to introduce ourselves, but before it got too awkward, Jay came along and started to feel my rock-hard abs.

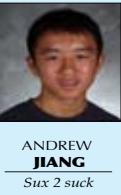
"Dude, have you felt this guy's abs? They're so hard! Go ahead, feel them," Jay said. Jay then walked away while Rachel stood there looking freaked out. She never did feel them, thanks, bro.

She then went on to ask if I was doing this for a dare or something. At first I said it wasn't, but our conversation became increasingly awkward so I gave in and told her I was doing this for newspaper. Feeling that I could not continue this



Sophomore Andrew Jiang recreates the moment when he "picked up" senior Karen Sung, but he only made the conversation more awkward for both of them.

FALCON // SIMI SRIVASTAVA



ANDREW
JIANG
Sux 2 suck

chat any longer, I said goodbye and then walked away.

So after this brief experiment with flirting, my flirting may need a bit of work and that pick-up lines really are as cheesy as they sound. Pick-up lines seem to always work in movies but in real life, they're not as much of a hit.

So to any ladies interested in me, just hit me up. I promise I won't use cheesy pick-up lines. ♦

EXPERIMENTS

FALCON REPORTERS PERFORM OUTRAGEOUS TASKS AND DOCUMENT THEIR PEERS' REACTIONS

GRAPHICS BY KELLY XIAO



The ultimate challenge of golden silence

Let's just make one thing absolutely crystal clear: No one in my 15 years has ever called me talkative. And yet when I faced the challenge of not talking for one day, I crashed and burned into a sorry little mess of sentient and audible ashes.

I thought the challenge would be a piece of cake. On a daily basis, I talk more than I want to, and I thought I'd enjoy my ironclad excuse for avoiding small talk.

On the night before my experiment, I whipped out a red ink pen and scrawled on my left hand, "I can't talk today. Social experiment for newspaper" and basked in my own self-confidence, ready for the next day.

I chose Wednesday for my experiment since there are fewer hours of school, and fewer people would ask "Why can't you talk?" More importantly, I do not have Mr. Nguyen's English 10 class on Wednesdays, where participation is 15% of our final grade and scored on a curve. (It's definitely grades over newspaper, right?)

Sadly, my expectations took a nose-dive when I woke up panicked at 8 a.m. and realized that I hadn't finished my Trigonometry Pre-calculus Honors homework yet. Since I couldn't talk to anyone, I wouldn't be able to ask anyone for clarification on the assignment. I also



ASHLEY
CHEN
Little Green Frog

remembered it was my turn to explain a homework problem in math class, and I still needed participation points from Spanish.

"Oh shoot," I muttered under my breath — and then freaked out again. Two words. Did they count? I hadn't said them to anyone else ... sighing, I marked two lines on my hand, one for each word, and headed off to breakfast. My goal was to stay under 100 words, I reminded myself. I hadn't lost yet.

Those hundred words chipped away at lightning speed, though. In the next 10 minutes, I added another nine words to my total by accidentally talking to my mom. The green tallies on my hand started to smudge against each other, and I considered starting my word count over. After all, I still needed participation points in math and Spanish, and those 11 words didn't matter because I hadn't gone to school yet.

I counted them anyway, telling myself I wouldn't need to talk at all during newspaper. Ironically, that class — the one where I thought everyone would understand my predicament — comprised the hardest 90 minutes of my day.

"Hey Ashley, what's up?" greeted sophomore Shreya Tumu as I walked in the room.

I nodded awkwardly and sat down in the computer beside her.

"Can you quiz me on history?" she said.

I gave her an apologetic look and started working on one of my stories. Typing into my browser, I wrote, "Can't talk today. Newspaper story" since all that was left of the message on my hand were illegible ink smudges. She continued to talk to me, but became increasingly frustrated because I couldn't say "I know" in response to her or share any of my thoughts with her.

Shortly afterwards, Mr. Tyler decided to take attendance, so I sat down in my seat next to Life co-editor, junior Amy Lin.

"How's your story going?" she asked.

I smiled.

"It's your day, huh?" Amy said, and turned around to talk to someone else. I felt so isolated in my self-imposed exile into silence.

Worst of all, I couldn't complete any interviewing for any stories that day because interviewing, unfortunately, requires talking. Despite my carefully constructed efforts, this challenge (which I had devised for myself) was starting to inhibit my daily life in some major ways.

By fifth-period math, I felt like my thoughts were going to hurricane out of my mouth into one angry rant. Without

words, I couldn't do anything. While everyone else huddled around discussing one problem, I pretended to be interested in my world history homework.

Finally, I surrendered in math class when explaining my homework problem to the class. I didn't count the number of words in my explanation and fell back into regular chitter during lunch and after.

I had failed my challenge, but strangely it didn't bother me. Instead, it showed me just how much I talked every day — and how precious little phrases like "I know" can be in holding a conversation. ♦

>> falconfigures

100

The maximum number of words Ashley was allowed to say

117

The number of words said before she gave up

5

The number of hours she lasted before quitting

'Catching Fire' surpasses previous film with impressive interpretation of book

BY Ashley Chen
& Shreya Tumu

Warning: Spoilers for "The Hunger Games," "Catching Fire" and "Mockingjay" follow.

Before the 75th Hunger Games began, Haymitch Abernathy (Woody Harrelson), the District 12 mentor, remarks, "I think these games are going to be different."

The same can be said in comparing the movie adaptation of "Catching Fire," the second book of Suzanne Collins's international bestselling trilogy, to its predecessor, "The Hunger Games."

Crammed with riveting scenes filmed with a non-shaky camera, "Catching Fire" wows the audience with its spectacular storytelling.

The storyline of "Catching Fire" follows protagonist Katniss Everdeen (Jennifer Lawrence) after she and Peeta Mellark (Josh Hutcherson) win the Hunger Games, an annual competition in which 24 tributes must fight to the death until one victor remains.

The year before, Katniss and Peeta survived by threatening to commit suicide together rather than kill each other, but their public defiance of the oppressive regime sparked protests against the Capitol, the ruling government.

As a result, President Snow wants to eliminate Katniss, the symbol of the rebellion.

The film succeeds both in establishing important scenes and rounding out the story's villains by emphasizing their humanity.

For example, the onerous personality of antagonist President Snow (Donald Sutherland) is countered with scenes

that showcase his relationship with his granddaughter (Erika Bierman).

At the same time, Snow's ruthlessness is also emphasized as the movie strongly implies that he uses poison to kill enemies, a plot point that Collins does not introduce until the final novel in the original series.

The movie also differentiates itself from movies where the audience merely watches the film. When we were watching the movie, the audience cheered with growing exhilaration more than a couple of times.

Towards the end of the movie, when Katniss shattered the dome enclosing the tributes, the audience shouted with euphoria as if the rebellion has been brought to life in the very theatre. One person even yelled out in Spanish.

Another major plus was the movie's incredible faithfulness to the novel. Little details, from fellow tribute Finnick Odair (Sam Claflin) offering Katniss a sugar cube to Johanna Mason (Jena Malone) stripping in the elevator, enhance the experience for watchers who remember plot details from reading the books.

Inevitably, the moviemakers must cut certain scenes, and Madge, the mayor's daughter and Katniss and Gale's friend, never makes an appearance in the movie.

However, because Madge was not an important part of novels, this has little impact on the overall film.

As in the previous installment, President Snow and the current Head Game-maker, Plutarch Heavensbee (Philip Seymour Hoffman) are heavily featured.

The two frequently discuss inhumane strategies for quelling unrest in the districts, and their power over those in the

arena is highlighted as they manipulate geography at will.

Of course, considering the ending of the movie, it is ironic that Snow and Plutarch believe they wield ultimate control over the Games.

Also, even though much of the book's power lies in its ability to communicate Katniss's thoughts, the movie, too, effectively conveys Katniss's emotions through Lawrence's superb acting.

Near the end of the movie, Katniss's hesitation to shoot her ally Finnick, revealed by her quivering hands and long delay in releasing her arrow, illustrate her morals with murder-

ing someone who saved the life of her lover, Peeta.

In the final sequence, after Katniss is lifted up from the Hunger Games arena, the camera zooms into Katniss's eyes, and the moviegoer can at once become

privy to Katniss's despair and resilience.

Of course, like any other movie, "Catching Fire" is not without its flaws. For example, Katniss's quiver must have been sprinkled with magical pink fairy dust, because even though Katniss never retrieves her arrows after shooting them, it is always full.

In addition, although Katniss is supposed to be 17 years old, actress Jennifer Lawrence is 23 and looks a little too mature for her part. Lawrence is also noticeably taller than Hutcherson, leading to awkward camera pans that have to move up to show Lawrence's head.

Despite these minor issues, "Catching Fire" is a great film that is a diversion from studying for finals. A huge improvement from the previous movie, "Catching Fire" exceeds expectations with phenomenal acting, accuracy and more. ♦

Modern-day music industry has lost true focus over time

BY SanjNalwa

Justin Bieber, Katy Perry, Justin Timberlake, One Direction. These artists, among many others, earn hundreds of millions annually. Their songs are endlessly repeated on the radio and their record companies are constantly bombarding the public with their picture perfect images.

Together, these artists mostly prove that in order to be commercially successful, singers must be physically attractive. Or so it seems.

Ever since commercialized music became common, record companies have been signing off artists based on their physical appearance rather than their actual musical talent.

Even bands such as The Beatles and The Beach Boys wouldn't have been as successful if they were older or overweight.

When music videos became a popular form of art in the '80s, the artist's "look" became even more important to his or her success. MTV, through its popularization of music videos, caused a major transition in the music industry.

Genuine musical talents, such as

Adele and Ed Sheeran, who write their own songs, have been relatively ignored in comparison to many of the aforementioned artists, most likely because of their lack of "appeal."

One may argue that Adele and Sheeran do get radio time, but they aren't featured as frequently on mainstream magazine covers or posters as Justin Bieber or One Direction.

Singers who cannot have their "look" marketed have to work twice as hard in order to receive the same amount of exposure as their relatively talentless counterparts.

Try to picture an alternate universe in which listeners listen to music, but never see the artists who sing or write the songs. In this world, listeners would most likely opt for the musicians whose music they believe sounds the best rather than those who look the best.

If listeners would choose their preferred artists based on musical artistry, rather than simply listening to the artists backed by the strongest advertising teams, they might help counter the sad state of the modern music industry. ♦



Katy Perry featured on Seventeen magazine.

'Ender's Game' boycotted

MANY OFFENDED BY AUTHOR'S HOMOPHOBIC VIEWS

BY Michelle Leung
& Carolyn Sun

Orson Scott Card is almost as well-known for his homophobic views as for his bestselling 1985 science fiction novel "Ender's Game," which was adapted into a film released on Nov. 1.

According to skipperdgame.com, Card claims that "Regardless of law, marriage has only one definition, and any government that attempts to change it is my mortal enemy."

Card doesn't just speak about his views; he spent four years as a board member of the National Organization for Marriage, a non-profit political organization which was established in 2007 to work against the legalization of same-sex marriage in the United States.

Since the film version of "Ender's Game" came out, Card's personal views have been brought into the limelight. A Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) organization called Geeks OUT has been calling on all filmgoers to boycott the movie because of Card's anti-gay actions.

They reason that, as a producer of the film, Card profits from movie tickets, DVDs, toys and any other "Ender's Game" merchandise purchased.

However, others say that the film really has nothing to do with the author's views. In fact, the theme of compassion and empathy expressed throughout the story could be seen as the complete opposite of Card's statements.

Sophomore Saro Acharyo believes that the boycott targets the wrong issue; the movie and author are not connected.

"The boycott is a bit ridiculous," Acharyo said. "Yes, the author will get more money and benefit from the film, but the production team has distanced themselves from that side of [Card]. They omitted all anti-gay terms and themes from the book."

Sophomore Quan Vandinh said Card's beliefs are morally wrong, but the boycott is essentially useless.

"I don't see how boycotting [is really effective]," Vandinh said. "If everyone just stopped and no one watched the movie, then [it would be effective], but it was a good movie."

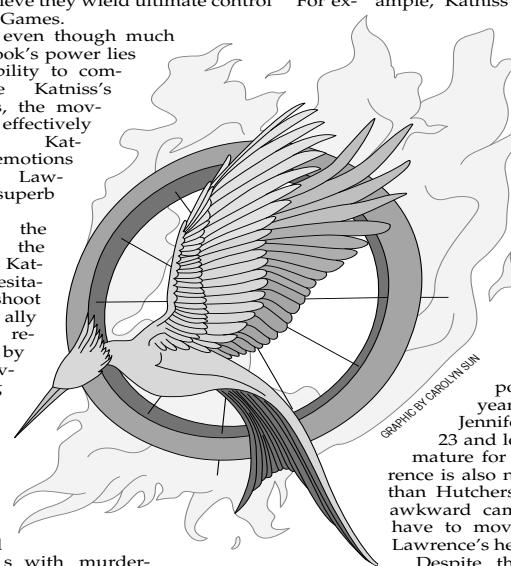
Although Card's personal views may be disagreeable to some, unlike many other movie adaptations, "Ender's Game" made a decent attempt at expressing the book.

"I thought the movie was pretty good in translating the book to the big screen," Acharyo said. "There was a lot of material to cover, which affected the movie in that the pacing felt really rushed."

Even students who didn't read the novel thought the movie lacked something.

Vandinh hoped for more character development with the main character Ender, saying that the film didn't showcase Ender's journey but rather had him stay the same throughout.

"The book is far superior to the film as you are able to really go into Ender's psyche and find out what he is thinking," Acharyo said. ♦



With few flaws, 'The Book Thief' is a must-see for all fans of novel

On a Sunday evening, my friend junior Sherrilyn Ling and I took a spontaneous trip to the movie theater, instead of working on our piles of weekend homework. We had been planning to see the film adaptation of the ever emotional "The Book Thief" by Markus Zusak for weeks, and we were overwhelmed with excitement. Fifteen minutes late and counting, we scurried to some available seats near the back and watched the trailers roll.

It dawned on us that we might have been the only teenagers in the room, as we were surrounded by middle-aged couples. So with our best movie decorum, we silenced our cell phones and settled into our seats.

I was instantly relieved when the film began with Death as the narrator. My greatest worry was that director Brian Percival would omit Death as the storyteller and instead opt for the main character Liesel Meminger (Sophie Nélisse) as the narrator. Thankfully, Death was a constant character throughout the movie.

However, I don't agree with the director's choice to not include war flashbacks of Hans Hubermann (Geoffrey Rush), Liesel's foster father. To me, the flashbacks heightened the meaning behind his faithful accordion by showing the debt that he feels towards the Vandenburg family and the terror of past and present wars.

I was also disappointed that the film did not include the story that Max Vandenburg (Ben Schnetzer), the young Jewish man that the Hubermann's hid in their home, wrote for Liesel. His story held symbolism that was crucial to the story.

On the contrary, I enjoyed the scene in which Max and Liesel made fun of Hitler, taking turns pretending to be his mother and scolding him.

This interaction portrayed their relationship well and gave us understanding that two characters had similar backgrounds, as both of their families had

been taken from them; Liesel, being given to a foster family in order to protect her from her communist background and Max leaving his mother behind to hide with the Hubermanns.

In addition, the casting for a number of characters was spot on. Emily Watson completely captured and embraced the role of Mama Rosa, Liesel's foster mother. Her cold-hearted and harsh facade is enough to terrify children in the theatre. It isn't easy to believe that the same actress later portrays Rosa's more nurturing and loving side.

Liersch was a perfect Rudy, portraying him as adorable and loveable. The audience was able to understand how the war has wronged such a sweet kid, even without the many scenes in which he establishes his character.

To me, the most powerful, disturbing and memorable scene showed the beatings and destruction that the Jewish faced while a children's choir sang a song which praised Hitler and his ideals.

To hear the screams and begging of those being beat pierce the angelic and innocent voices of children honoring Hitler through song was unnerving to say the least.

Death's sarcastic and drawled voice of narration was much appreciated. However, Death was not portrayed as introspective and intelligent as he was in the novel. Because Death was missing these aspects, the audience also missed out on his bitterness towards the meaninglessness of life and death.

If anything, I thought that the movie adaptation portrayed Death as haunting and sinister, wherein the novel Death is more disheartened. A scene I could do without is the "heart-wrenching" last kiss that Liesel bestows upon Rudy moments after he utters the words "I love you," with dramatic pauses in between each word, and dies from a bombing.

By not killing off Rudy as suddenly as the others who died, the film failed to illustrate the unfair cruelty that the war imposed on so many.

The final scene, where Liesel and Max are reunited, was too abrupt. I assume that it was kept simple so that emotion could shine through and avoid the "reunited at last and run into each others arms" cliché. Instead, it felt lacking and rushed, and left the audience without closure.

Despite its few flaws, the film was done extremely well. A story as in-depth and delicate as "The Book Thief" is difficult to do justice on the big-screen, but Percival did it brilliantly and even brought additional understanding.

While not perfect, the movie complements the book, and I recommend any fan of the book to see it. ♦



LAUREN LOUIE
Eyvy Louie!



GRAPHIC BY CAROLYN SUN



SCHNETZER

personified Max extremely well. The movie adaptation of Max brought him to life in a way that surpassed my imagination. His character was charismatic and genuine. My only complaint was that his determination and guilt were absent.

'Music colors my life': A girl and a passion for music

SENIOR GLORIA BRECK PURSUES MULTIPLE INSTRUMENTS AND A POSSIBLE MUSIC DEGREE

BY Ariel Liu

Senior Gloria Breck, then 5, nervously stepped on the brightly lit stage at her first piano recital.

Minutes earlier, her dad had reminded her that smiling was of the utmost importance, so as she walked on the stage, she flashed a brilliant smile at the audience. She then carefully took her seat right at the edge of the piano bench, placing her foot perfectly above the right pedal.

"I took him very seriously and gripped fiercely, like a lunatic, throughout 'Singing in the Rain,' and also through the plaintive piece that followed," Breck said. "My teacher waved frantically for me to stop grinning because it was scaring audience members."

Breck said that at the time she felt confused as to why she was being criticized for smiling; however, she now knows that smiling wasn't wrong.

"I pursue music because it makes me smile," she said.

Breck first started playing piano 12 years ago when her kindergarten teacher noticed she had a way with the maracas during the music portion of class. Her teacher then encouraged her to sign up for a group lesson.

"I was very happy at the time, because I'd grown up watching 'Baby Mozart,' and now I could make music of my own," Breck said.

Three years later, her younger brother junior Samuel Breck began practicing the violin. Breck liked the sound the violin made and asked her parents for violin lessons as well, boldly taking on a second instrument.

"I love the violin for its portability (toteable to the park), sociability (self-domin solo), and connectivity (of sound, but primarily to the listener's heart),"

[Music] is my inspiration, sometimes headache and always joy."

senior Gloria Breck

she wrote. "And [I love] the piano for its versatility — in 88 keys lies a spectrum of symphonic color."

But as she grew older, pursuing the two instruments proved more difficult than she anticipated.

"I remember throwing my books out of the window in frustration. I used to hate practicing because my mom nagged," she said. "Perfecting a piece is as painful as detangling hair — I had to isolate knots and brush through them patiently."

However, as they often say, practice makes perfect.

"Precise practice ensures that neither skill set is half-baked. Time may be held constant in the extracurricular equation, but I can increase one variable: focus," she said. "By allotting energy efficiently, I have carried both instruments to a pre-

professional level, in hopes that the two-part harmony continues into a career."

Music has forced Breck to learn how to balance her time between playing in a school orchestra (Saratoga Strings), practicing her instruments outside of school and her other extracurriculars, such as art and writing.

"Music absorbs a lot of time and thought," she said. "I practice in chunks and estimate that it adds to four and a half hours a day, plus a little bit at school and in my head, a significant chunk of every other waking hour."

Despite the time it takes, Breck's passion for music has made its mark on her future.

She intends on continuing down the music path throughout college and beyond.

Breck plans to play piano and violin in a college and hopes to attain a degree from a conservatory.

"Music colors my life — it is my inspiration, sometimes headache and always joy," she said. ♦

UPCOMING FILMS:

What to look out for this month in movie theatres

THE TRILOGY

'The Hobbit: A Desolation of Smaug'

Bilbo Baggins and Gandalf assist the dwarves in reclaiming their homeland from Smaug, the fire-breathing dragon (Dec. 13).

Starring: Martin Freeman, Ian McKellan, Richard Armitage

GUMP, MEET DISNEY

'Saving Mr. Banks'

The author of "Mary Poppins," P.L. Travers, reflects on her past life as she negotiates with Walt Disney for screen rights (Dec. 13).

Starring: Tom Hanks, Emma Thompson, Jason Schwartzman, Colin Farrell, B.J. Novak

BATMAN + KATNISS

'American Hustle'

A con man and his partner are introduced to a world of powerbrokers and mafia (Dec. 13).

Starring: Christian Bale, Amy Adams, Jennifer Lawrence, Bradley Cooper, Jeremy Renner

NOT-SO-SECRET

'The Secret Life of Walter Mitty'

A man daydreams his way into a world of romance, action and heroism, until he finally gets a real world adventure (Dec. 25).

Starring: Ben Stiller, Kristen Wiig, Adam Scott



All Photos Courtesy of AMY CHANG
GRAPHICS // SAMUEL LIU

ALUMNA AMY CHANG KISSES HER WIFE KATE SASOON AT THEIR WEDDING ON DEC. 21, 2012.

CHANG >> Alumna's battle for acceptance of her orientation

continued from pg. 1

to her," Chang said.

For the next few excruciating weeks, every time Chang walked into the studio, her friend would pick up her bag and leave without a word, worried that Chang was pursuing her as a girlfriend.

After weeks of desperate attempts to get her friend to talk to her, Chang finally got an opportunity at the dance studio's annual open house showcase, open to the public. Prospective customers innocently engaged in small talk, picking up pamphlets and helping themselves to spring rolls, completely oblivious to the drama that was to come.

Chang approached her friend for the umpteenth time, but this time, before she could squirm away, Chang cornered her.

"Just tell me what went wrong. What did I do?" she demanded, her temper rising. She had lost her calm, and the girl, intimidated, began to cry.

"I was pretty emotional, pretty upset. I wasn't being super calm and clear," Chang said 13 years later. "I was really embarrassed that it was so public that I had made her cry."

Jumping to her daughter's defense, the friend's protective mother yelled at Chang in front of everyone, publicly disdaining her, even though Chang had not done anything wrong.

"The thing about rumors, is, people talked about you behind your back and when I asked them to their faces, all her mom would say is that I was too old to be her daughter's friend," Chang said.

Chang's mom later told her that her friend's mom had suspicions because her daughter and Chang would send letters to each other — alleged proof that they were having an affair. But at the time,

Chang was just confused and hurt.

"After I was yelled at in front of everyone, my [dance] teacher took me aside and told me I should leave. He was trying to protect me, but at that time, it just added to my feeling that I [did] not fit in, that I will never fit in."

Chang did not speak to that girl again for 11 years.

"I felt very upset because even if I turned out to be gay, that doesn't necessarily mean that I would want to kiss every girl that I was friends with," Chang said. "I hadn't even figured out if I was gay or not, and I was already experiencing the discrimination as if I were."

Today, Chang is happily married. While she is no longer the timid Chinese dancer, her journey to the marriage (now one year old) has been riddled with barriers and obstacles.

Coming out

In her first year of college, Chang made the decision that many closeted gays fear — to come out to her parents. Although she was nervous, her parents had told her when she was in high school that they would be accepting if she came out as gay, which she said was "quite liberal for Asian parents."

When she told her parents, just the three of them in their bedroom, their re-

action was mixed.

"Their initial reaction was, 'OK, we support you,'" Chang said. "But then they [got] really nit picky about my girlfriend at that time and said, 'But, we don't want her to come over to the house, not because you're gay, just because we don't like her.'"

Chang said that they probably were just as critical about her choice of partner as they were about her brother's girlfriend.

"Back then I totally felt like they were not OK with me being gay and were just in denial about saying so. And now I don't feel that way anymore," Chang said. "I think we are so ready, so prepared for people to reject you or to have a bad reaction."

Regardless, Chang is grateful that her family was understanding about her orientation. As her family members started to learn that she was gay, Chang said she was fortunate that they did not make a big deal out of it.

For example, one day when Chang was heading home, she saw her grandmother in the driveway of her house. Her grandmother said, "I just dropped off noodles and soup; don't forget to put that in the fridge," and in the same sentence, "By the way, are you homosexual?"

Although her grandmother was surprised by Chang's honest response, she nonetheless understood. Her main concerns, however, were whether Chang would be able to start a family and endure discrimination in the workplace.

"She was obviously coming from a place of love and concern, but what I was most grateful for was she was like 'Of course we would still love you,'" Chang said. "We wouldn't discriminate against you, but the rest of the world might."

In response, Chang reassured her, saying, "I'm not ruling [being heterosexual] out; I could still meet the right guy, I'm open to that." She continued, "People in Berkeley [where Chang lived] are cool with things like that, and I could always adopt a baby."

However, Chang said she has heard of much worse reactions.

"[My wife] had a girlfriend who was Cantonese and Filipino," Chang said. "When she came out to her parents, it was a much bigger deal. I've heard stories about somebody's partner coming out and being kicked out and dismissed."

While Chang's family was understanding, not all of the people in her life were as supportive.

Pressure to be straight

Throughout her journey to realizing her identity, Chang has encountered much opposition that have made her try to change who she was. Almost every person she had confided in during high school tried to talk her out of it.

"They'd be like, 'Oh don't worry you're just a late bloomer,'" Chang said. "'You're totally straight; your hormones haven't kicked in yet. Some day you'll find the right boy, the right guy."

In fact, when Chang was 18, one teacher in a dance conservatory in China told her that if she "wasn't disgusted by the sight of heterosexual couples being affectionate with each other, then [she] couldn't possibly be gay."

Confused by these misconceptions,

Chang decided to experiment with being straight.

"I tried for many many years to get myself a boyfriend," Chang said. "I felt like that would solve a lot of my problems and that then I could be normal."

Yet, Chang said that it is sad that being "normal" is equated with being heterosexual.

"I really don't like that term 'straight' because it implies that the rest of us are crooked," she said.

Adding to the pressure to be heterosexual were the social expectations associated with being gay at Saratoga High.

"In Saratoga, it just seemed to me that if you were to be gay, it [would have] to be your entire identity or existence," Chang said. "You'd be defined as the gay person."

Even in college at UC Berkeley, Chang struggled to fit the gay stereotype. She tried to join Asian and queer clubs, yet found them too political, adding to her confusion.

"I'm not ashamed of being gay anymore, but I don't really want to do political rows and stuff, and it seemed to me like if you're gay, you have to be visible or you have to make a statement for gay people," Chang said. "But I didn't feel comfortable doing that so I thought I must not be gay. I must be straight and a late bloomer like my teachers say."

Being gay at Saratoga

Chang has always been socially awkward. She never smiled in high school, worried she might invite conversation. She would often sit alone at lunch in the poetry classroom or the ceramics classroom, a safe distance from the rest of the crowd in the quad.

With her pen nestled behind her ear and a handy notebook always with her in her black backpack to match her black outfit, Chang loved to write. A pair of Chinese drumsticks would hang loosely from her back pocket, a token of her passion for the arts.

At the school, Chang found it difficult to find someone who she could relate to, who was also confused about his or her orientation. In fact, she said that most people were either openly gay or deeply closeted.

"There were a couple of people all in the drama club who were like 'I'm going to be an actress and I'm gay, and it doesn't matter, and I have a crush on this celebrity or that person,'" Chang said. "It was interesting because after I [had] figured out my own orientation and come out to my own family pretty successfully, I realized slowly how many of these people that I went to school with had been gay."

Face-to-face discrimination was less common on campus. However, Chang said that covert discrimination lurked in everyday conversations.

"People joke, and this is not just in high school, people say, 'Oh that's so gay' all the time," Chang said. "And we don't stop to think about that."

Even if the intent behind the words is harmless, just saying them aloud can cause harm, according to Chang. Few students, if asked, would openly condemn homosexual rights. But in their daily interactions, those same students who claim to respect gay people will use "gay" interchangeably with "lame."

Chang compares these everyday insults to the discrimination against obese people.

"You would never actually point at someone who was kind of overweight and laugh at them," Chang said. "But there's still all this kind of unconscious covert discrimination happening on a daily basis. And [people] absorb it."

In high school, Chang felt distinctly uncomfortable in the presence of such language.

"For the friends I was closer to, I would tell them, 'Can you use some other word?'" Chang said. "And they didn't get it, because they didn't think of me as gay. They didn't understand why it was uncomfortable."

When Chang was a freshman, a junior boy three and a half years older asked her to junior prom. Because she loved to dance, Chang excitedly agreed, envisioning a magical night of ballroom dancing and friendly socializing. However, her date imagined something slightly different.

"He really wanted more of a boyfriend-girlfriend relationship, and I was really uncomfortable," Chang said. "He was older, he wanted to move faster. But I was like, 'But I barely know you, can't we be friends first?'"

That prom was the first and last dance she ever attended in high school. During her sophomore year, Chang had a crush on a senior girl who had hinted that she may have been bisexual. A talented participant of drama and choir, Chang's crush was her ideal prom date.

However, her crush at the time was interested in a junior boy, and Chang felt intimidated by the competition.

"I wanted to go with [her], but I couldn't even think of how I would ask that," Chang said. "I never asked, and pretty much I just didn't go to any of the regular dances after that."

Even so, Chang grew to really care about her.

"She was the only person I ever had a conversation with about being homosexual or bisexual," Chang said. "She was one of the few people I talked to about the dance studio incident."

When Chang was a sophomore, this friend committed suicide.

"She talked about suicide too, but it was always like a joke; nobody took it seriously until she actually did it," Chang said.

Chang struggles to get the words out



CHANG, WHO LOVED TO WRITE, ALWAYS HAD A PEN NESTLED BEHIND HER EAR AND A HANDY NOTEBOOK IN THE CROOK OF HER ARM.

—she stammers.

"It changed how I felt about people and how you think you always have more time to get to know them or tell them that you love them," Chang said. "It made me feel like I have to be nicer to people."

After her friend's death, Chang began wearing all white, the color of mourning in her friend's Buddhist culture.

The tail end of high school

Chang's self-separation from social scenarios did not end at school dances. After her graduation, her parents urged her to go to the Grad Night to party with the rest of her graduating class, but Chang decided not to.

"If I were totally honest with myself now, I didn't feel like I fit in. I didn't feel comfortable," Chang said. "I just didn't want to go celebrate in a group setting."

Instead, Chang had other plans in mind.

"What I ended up doing was going over to [my future] girlfriend's house and spending the night with her," Chang said. "That may actually have been the first night we kissed."

Despite these incidents, Chang said that she was not alone in her journey to self-acceptance. In fact, English teacher Catherine Head helped her get past the discrimination she had to suffer.

One day, before class started her senior year, Chang told Head about her confusion, and painfully recounted the incident at the dance studio.

"She got really upset on my behalf, and I actually found that very helpful. Nobody had actually said to me, 'That wasn't right, what the [dance studio mom] said to you,'" Chang said. "I was all wrapped up in the 'But what if I'm not [gay]? What if they just made a mistake?' And [Head] said, 'Even if you weren't [gay], they shouldn't have said that.'"

Head is no stranger to the discrimination the LGBTQ community suffers. She has long been promoter of LGBTQ rights and hopes to revive the Gay Straight Alliance group at the school.

Even though this particular conversation with Chang, just one among many, happened 11 years ago, Head remembers it as clearly as though it were happening today.

"Who you choose to love or who you do love — sometimes we don't choose — does not change the feelings that you have when you love," Head said, repeating her words to Chang. "And if you feel embarrassed, if you

feel shunned, if you feel oppressed, it just makes it that much harder to reach out to the people who you love."

Head recalls reassuring Chang "with a broken heart" that her feelings were a good thing, that she was a good person.

"Anybody who is going to criticize [somebody for their orientation] isn't right," Head said. "When you talk to somebody, you don't know if what you're saying is going to help, because hurt can be very intense. I'm glad to know that it helped her. And I'm glad she married; I'm glad she's happy."

Now, 10 years later

After double majoring in dance and English in college, Chang slowly started to adjust to being open about her orientation.

She now works as an acupuncturist and dance choreographer. She met her wife Kate Sasso in college when they both worked on a spring showcase together (Chang was dancing, Kate was taking a stage management course).

After dating for a long time, they got married a year ago.

"It was really beautiful to see all of my family and all of her family all in the same place, and all of my relatives dressed up and supportive, sharing the same event and celebrating us," Chang said.

Although she has settled down, that does not mean that she does not still face challenges. Even now, Chang said she sometimes hides her orientation from her patients.

"Occasionally, if one of my patients or somebody who I don't feel 100 percent comfortable with asks about myself, I will just change the pronoun, and tell them all about my husband," Chang said. "In Chinese, the pronunciation for 'he' and 'she' is the same, so usually I can just kind of not go there."

In addition, Chang said that sometimes her desire to one day have children gets in the way of fitting the misconceived gay identity.

"People who don't want to have kids [are] not very sensitive about those of us who do," Chang said. "There are people who are like, 'We are gay, we don't need family structure, we don't need any of the societally imposed ideas or definitions.' But there are still people who aren't like that."

Despite these minor setbacks, however, Chang said that her life experiences have shaped who she is today, and she is prepared to face any future hardships head-on.

"I definitely think I would be a very different person if certain things hadn't happened. I can't actually imagine what it would be like," Chang said. "Now that I'm no longer trying to be straight, I feel like I have so much more energy to do other things with my life." ♦



AMY CHANG (SECOND FROM RIGHT), WITH HER WIFE KATE SASOON, (SECOND FROM LEFT), MOM AND DAD AT HER WEDDING.

Staff members Samuel Liu, Sherrilyn Ling and Amy Lin met with Troy and Tessa, pseudonyms for a boy who is gay and a girl who is lesbian.

ON COMING OUT

Samuel: When did you come out with your parents and what was it like?

Tessa: It wasn't like a big event. They've just kind of always known, but they didn't really take it seriously until I told them I was going on a date.

Samuel: What do you mean they've always kind of known?

Tessa: My parents are pretty white. They're not actually white; they're just not traditional, so it was pretty chill. I don't know the date. I would say a couple years ago but they took it seriously like last year.

Troy: My parents had suspicions since like sixth grade.

Tessa: Wait, how long have you known?

Troy: Around sophomore year.

Tessa: Oh really? I've known since like sixth grade.

Troy: Well, I've had suspicions since like sixth grade but —

Tessa: Suspicions? [Laughing]

Troy: No 'cause I don't act on my tendencies so I was just really like ... WHY ARE YOU LAUGHING AT ME. I told them at like the beginning of the school year. The exact date? I'm pretty sure it's like September ... let's say seventh or eighth. I told them while I was driving. Very good thing that I was driving. They were OK with it. They weren't upset, both of them were pretty supportive especially since they're traditional Chinese and religious, they both took it really well.

Tessa: I can't believe that. I told my mom on the way to softball practice. And she stopped the car and she was like "Oh my God." My mom was shocked. But like I guess she knew it was coming, but she was still surprised that I was actually serious. Because they knew, like my dad knew and my mom was just not taking it seriously. But when I did tell her that I was going on a date she flipped out a little bit.

Samuel: Do you think she flipped out just because it was your first date?

Tessa: Oh yeah, mostly because I'm a sophomore and she's a senior.

'Fantabulous'

THE FALCON TALKS TO HOMOSEXUAL STUDENTS

Samuel: So why do you tell them on the way to somewhere?

Tessa: Because you can get out of the car. [laughter] But also because I have two other sisters, and when I'm in the car with my parents it's when I can be alone with them. And they can't judge me when they're driving.

Troy: For me, that day, my older sister was at work and my younger sister was at a friend's house. So it was just dinner with my parents, and so I didn't want to tell them in the restaurant, because I didn't want them to make a scene so I told them in the car. And I made sure I was driving. Make sure you're driving and not your parents because my dad would have been like WHAT?

Sherrilyn: What would your mom have done?

Troy: My mom would have stopped the car and been like [Turns around and gives a death glare with jaw dropped]

Amy: So cars are good places to come out.

Tessa: But honestly, just don't make a big deal out of it because it doesn't change who you are. You're still the same person. You're the same person but fabulous.

ON BEING GAY IN SARATOGA
Samuel: More of a serious question. Saratoga High is a pretty liberal place, the majority of students here would vote democratic. But it's still a high school, you still have gossip traveling like wildfire, so the question is, what is it like to be gay in a place that is Saratoga?

Troy: I don't really take it as gossip. I think gossip has a bad connotation. If people tell other people, it's not a big deal because it's not like I go around saying, [Whispering] "Do you know Sherrilyn's straight?" Like it's not a big deal.

Tessa: It's nothing that I'm ashamed of.

Sherrilyn: Are you ever a little bothered by it, though?

Tessa: Yeah, if people go around thinking I'm going to rape a bunch of little girls, then that's annoying.

Troy: It's when people want to use the fact as a source of information that makes it seem like they know something. When people go around saying, "Do you guys know this do you guys know this" that's annoying. When you treat it as such a big deal it's a little strange.

Tessa: And it's also just annoying that people just assume that that's just who you are and they embrace those stereotypes and put it to who you are.

ON THE 'GAY-DAR'

Samuel: Can you guys tell who is gay and who is straight?

Tessa: I have excellent gay-dar.

Troy: She is really good, mine sucks.

Tessa: I knew [Troy] was before he knew. I have terrific gay-dar.

Troy: She probably knew about me before I was born.

Tessa: My gay-dar is fantabulous I'm not going to lie.

Troy: I think half the school is secretly. One out of 10! That's 10 percent.

ON GENDER IDENTITY

Samuel: So California's AB 1266 looks to permit students to use bathrooms "consistent with his or her gender identity, irrespective of the gender listed on the pupil's records." There's a movement in California that is looking to go against the bill, for "common sense" purposes of gender identity.

Troy: What do you guys think of this? My understanding is that homophobia is on its knees but transphobia is still prevalent.

Tessa: I think it's just important to embrace whoever you are, and people that stand in the way are just kind of on one side of change and I mean, eventually, people are going to realize that. So just keep —

Troy: I don't really get the question,

but I feel like I would say what [Tessa]'s saying.

Tessa: I would say just keep in mind the side of change, and what side you'd rather be on.

ON REACTIONS OF FRIENDS

Samuel: What were the reactions of friends and classmates?

Troy: I thought a lot of my friends knew, but actually everyone didn't.

Sherrilyn: Yeah, you thought we all knew!

Troy: I literally thought everyone knew since eighth grade they were just too nice to say it or didn't want to bring it up because it's uncomfortable. But all of my friends took it really well. I haven't met one friend who hasn't taken it super well yet.

Tessa: I don't regret telling anybody.

ON BEING 'FANTABULOUS'

Samuel: Anything to add?

Troy: Well, she wanted to add that being gay is fantabulous.

Tessa: Yeah it is!

Troy: Don't be ashamed of who you are.

Tessa: Yeah, I feel like adapting is something I had to do before I came out because being around the whole straight culture is kind of awkward.

Samuel: Why?

Tessa: Because, you know, it's just when my friends were all desperate for boyfriends, it's just something that I never — but you know ever since coming out I'm just starting to embrace more who I am.

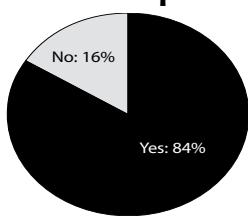
Sherrilyn: Anything you were afraid of before coming out that was keeping you from doing it?

Tessa: Yeah, definitely. I definitely thought that my friends would think differently of me. When I came out one of my friends asked me if I actually liked her, so that was one thing I was afraid of.

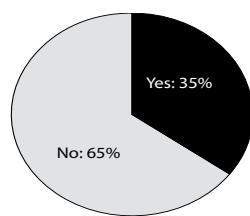
Troy: Wait I love that. I love it when they think, "Do you like me" and I'm like "No" I love it when that happens. They're full of themselves. This is probably the weirdest interview you guys have ever had. ♦

For the full interview, visit www.saratogafalcon.org.

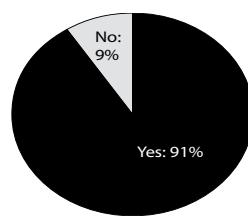
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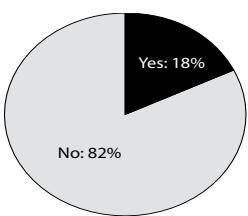
Do you accept homosexuals?



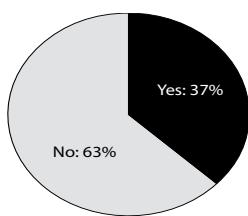
Would knowing that a friend is homosexual make you treat them differently?



Have you ever heard any rumors about a student being homosexual?



Have you ever spread any rumors about a student being homosexual?



Do you think there is enough LGBT support for students at Saratoga?

Counselors encourage students to talk over LGBT issues

By Becky Hoag
& Kelly Xiao

It is common for students to question their sexuality at some point or another. So who can they turn to with questions and concerns?

There is no commonly accepted step-by-step process on how to address this topic, the way there is for suicide or bullying concerns.

The lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community (LGBT) is a group that has relatively few assemblies dedicated to it, and its related topics are usually delicately tiptoed around. Saratoga High used to have a LGBT club but it dwindled. Under these circumstances, it is no surprise that some students feel unsure who they can talk to about concerns related to coming out to their friends

and families. The question is, how do the counselors typically tackle the issue?

"We are really open, and we'd love to talk to students about this," guidance counselor Frances Saiki said.

Saiki has been working at the school for seven years and has helped many students who come to her with questions or concerns regarding this sensitive topic. Two main concerns Saiki has seen in the students she has talked to are worries about being accepted by their family and friends and concerns about being true to themselves.

She has also noticed that students are afraid to speak to their parents.

"Sometimes they feel that it's like expectations have been placed on them, spoken or unspoken, with their family or their culture," Saiki said.

The counselors are doing their best to make any possible LGBT students feel as comfortable and self-assured as possible in the road to discovering their identities. Counselor Monique Young has several ideas of how to interact with such students.

"I would talk about it with them like any other issue or personal concern that any student is going through," Young

said. "[I would also] discuss how they're feeling on campus or in general, any problems they're having or any concerns they're having specifically and talk them through it."

While the guidance counselors are there to help, Young also encourages students and peers to do their best to ease fellow students' transitions to their new identity.

"Be there in any supportive way," Young advises.

On a larger scale, Young encourages any students questioning their sexuality to confide in a trusted adult.

"If it's something that's on the student's mind and affecting their daily life in a negative way," Young said, "then they should definitely consider talking to another adult who they trust about how they're feeling." ♦



counselor Frances Saiki

>> The Stats

5 Kilometer Race

Junior Stevie Sum ran in the CIF state meet for cross country on Nov. 30. He got 14th in the division III race with the time of 15:50. "The race in general is just super nerve wracking because there's so many people and such a high caliber of runners," Sum said. "I'm still happy, though, because I improved from last year."

13 Points scored

Senior Dharini Ramaswamy contributed 13 points to the 51-30 girls' basketball win over Leland on Dec. 3. "In the last couple minutes of the forth quarter, we had some key free throws, key lay ups and some great steals," Ramaswamy said.

>> The Preview

Boys' Soccer (1-0)

Key player: senior Will Guy
League: DeAnza

This year, the team has a solid defensive line and midfield, but they lost their best forwards from last year. In order to succeed in the competitive League, the team will need to capitalize on goal scoring opportunities.

Girls' Basketball

Key player: senior Dharini Ramaswamy

League: El Camino

This new team is much shorter but they are more quick than they have been in the past. The hardest obstacle the team will face is guarding the taller opponents. In order to succeed, the young team needs to find their confidence.

Boys' Basketball

Key player: junior Michael Cole
League: DeAnza

This year, the team is a lot smaller than last year. The team lacks in height that they had last year so they are really trying to speed up the game to make that weakness into an advantage.

Girls' Soccer

Key players: seniors Lindsay Webster and Taylor Moran
League: DeAnza

With a new formation this season and several new additions, the team is training players to play different positions. The team needs to implement their strategies from practice on the field to win.

Wrestling

Key players: senior Graham Grant and junior Christian Murabito

League: El Camino

The team has a lot of new guys, so their goal this year is to increase the competitiveness among the new players. The team has also lost a key player, junior Araad Sarrami, who transferred to Bellarmine.

Senior fan basks in Miami Heat's bright achievements

BY Minu Palaniappan

Senior Kevin Sun was in heaven — or something close to it.

Walls were coated with a vibrant red, covered with colossal posters that showcased Miami Heat basketball stars and populated with NBA memorabilia. To the right were dozens of Miami Heat championship T-shirts and to the left were Miami caps and foam fingers.

The 2013 gift shop rendezvous was part of a trip to Miami — the hometown of Sun's favorite basketball team, the Miami Heat.

"I wanted to buy absolutely everything," he said. "My only regret is that we got to Miami about a week after they held the championship parade down Biscayne Boulevard, so I was disappointed to miss that."

Sun first watched the league in 2006 when the Heat were playing the Dallas Mavericks in the NBA finals. Sun saw a Dwyane Wade who dominated the majority of the finals series.

"His body control is remarkable; he's capable of finishing a variety of shots through contact and has had a history of making circus shots," Sun said.

Wade's performance inspired Sun to continue to watch the NBA, but Sun's respect for the team and Wade greatly increased when he learned about Wade's off-court character.

"Off the court, [Wade] has an inspiring story and has dealt with many personal issues very skillfully. In addition, he's a fantastic father to his children, something that is uncommon with professional athletes these days," Sun said.

Still, Sun believes that the Heat was one of the most disliked teams in 2010-11 due to the unfair criticism all-star forward LeBron James received because of



Courtesy of SUN FAMILY

Senior fan Kevin Sun poses with a Miami Heat shirt in a sports store in Miami, Florida.

his choice to telecast his decision to leave the Cleveland Cavaliers on ESPN.

"The 2010-11 Miami Heat became one of the most hated teams in sports history and with the media in this generation of sports, the hatred was constantly fueled," Sun said. "Eventually, nearly everyone came to draw the conclusion that James is not only an eternal failure as a player, but an indecent human being."

James, now the centerpiece of the Heat offense and defense, was another player that Sun supported.

"I defended James and the entire Miami Heat vigorously and constantly, arguing with waves upon waves of critics both amongst my friends and random strangers over the Internet," Sun said.

Sun also compared and researched Miami Heat statistics during the 2011 NBA season, and he used his data to write comprehensive essays that attempted to defend James and the Miami Heat on social media hubs such as YouTube and

Facebook.

"You can imagine how I felt when the Miami Heat ultimately lost in the 2011 Finals with James playing poorly and the critics feeling validated," Sun said.

As a senior, Sun now has to worry about college applications. Among the many colleges on Sun's list is the University of Miami: a top-50 college located near the Heat venues.

"I often joke with my friends that I would go there solely because I'm a Miami Heat fan, but it's not a large reason for my applying there," Sun said. "It has a very ethnically diverse student population and is one of the best colleges in Florida."

Though he has fantasies of lacing up as a member of the Heat, he would also love to coach for the team or work in its front office.

"If that doesn't work out, I'm always capable of handing out some nice soft towels at timeouts," Sun said. ♦

Pros and cons of weightlifting in P.E.

SOPHOMORE EXPRESSES HER CONCERN ABOUT CROSSFIT

I'm not complaining. Well, I am, but it's more of an investigative complaint. Answer me this: Why do I wake up sore every Friday morning? It's because of weightlifting, which I am required to do for P.E. credit.

Perhaps the most difficult part about weightlifting is that it never gets any easier. We use different types of lifts and increase the weight weekly. But with every increase my calves and knees are weaker than a drowned rat, so much so that there was a time I couldn't even walk for a day due to the pain in my calf. So when do we stop?

Without taking the right precautions, like maintaining the right form and not lifting more than your body can handle, weightlifting can be hazardous to a 15-year-old girl like me. I'm constantly worried that one wrong lift will cause this

soreness to never leave.

My P.E. teachers say that constantly working out by pacing my accomplishments, not doing too much at one time and stretching often will alleviate the soreness. They say that my body will get used to my lifting so much at one time. But my sore body begs to differ. I've been lifting for one and a half years and the soreness always comes back the following day.

Although there is no specific evidence, there has been much speculation that weightlifting can actually stunt the potential human growth. The belief comes from the fact that growth plates at the end of bones are the last part of bones to harden, making them more vulnerable to fractures. These fractures, which can occur when doing exercises like squats, may cause unequal bone lengths.

But in a way, weightlifting can also be the safest of sports, considering that eliminates the dangers of the more aggressive sports. You can't get collisions or major bruises in weightlifting like you can get playing football, soccer or basketball.

There are definite benefits to weightlifting as it can strengthen muscles, promote healthy blood pressure and cholesterol level and even help growing teenagers maintain a healthy weight. Plus, there's the psychological aspect of it. Weightlifting boosts confidence and self-esteem, bringing a sense of self-accomplishment with the weekly increase in the amount of weight lifted.

After researching pros and cons, I've concluded that I shouldn't worry. In the long run, weightlifting can benefit me in numerous ways. So to my fellow struggling-to-lifters: Learn to embrace the soreness and think of the positives of weightlifting. ♦

>> togatalks

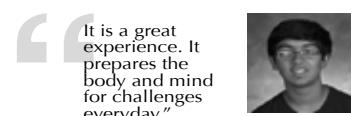
How do you feel about weightlifting for P.E.?

It is a great experience. It prepares the body and mind for challenges everyday.

sophomore Josh Dey

It is a complete waste of time. I'd rather spend time improving pull ups or running.

freshman Eileen Toh



Point Guards

CP3

Chris Paul (Los Angeles Clippers): Paul is a crafty point guard who is known for throwing exciting lobs to DeAndre Jordan and Blake Griffin. With a strong shooting ability and a knack for racking up assists, Paul is undoubtedly the best fantasy option for this position.

SC30

Stephen Curry (Golden State Warriors): A member of the Splash Brothers, Curry is notable for his remarkable three-point shooting percentage of 44 percent. If he goes on a shooting streak, he will carry the team to a safe victory. However, by selecting Curry, owners are risking their team's strength since Curry is often known to injure his ankles and sit out long periods of time.

TP9

Tony Parker (San Antonio Spurs): Known as the French maestro, Parker is well-known for his pick-and-rolls. His knack for getting into the lane and hitting easy shots makes him the most consistent point guard in this top five, scoring an average of 21 points per game.

KI11

Kyrie Irving (Cleveland Cavaliers): Also known as Uncle Drew in his Pepsi-Max commercials, Irving continues to excite the NBA with his varied play-making ability. He is the most versatile of all the NBA point guards since he can shoot the deep three-ball while also performing acrobatic moves in his drives toward the basket, sporting impressive percentages of 38 percent in three-pointers and 47 percent in two-pointers.

TL3

Ty Lawson (Denver Nuggets): Lawson is undeniably the quickest point guard on this list. Having led the Nuggets two consecutive years in the playoffs, Lawson has perfected the fastbreak game and as a result, he completes exciting drives and jaw-dropping lobs.

Forwards

LJ6

LeBron James (Miami Heat): He is the best player on Earth and averages high numbers in all statistical categories. Consider him a jack of all trades: he can single-handedly carry your team to a victory any day of the week.

KL42

Kevin Love (Minnesota Timberwolves): Although he suffered many injuries last season, Love is stronger than ever this season. Averaging 27 points and 14 rebounds, Love can consistently pour in high numbers with ridiculously impressive efficiencies.

KD35

Kevin Durant (Oklahoma City Thunder): With a 6-10 body and a 7-5 wingspan, Kevin Durant is the most lethal scorer in the NBA. With long arms, Durant can get to the hoop with ease or shoot fade-away threes to tie heated games. In addition to his outrageous scoring abilities, Durant posts impressive rebounding numbers along with a stellar FT%.

PG24

Paul George (Indiana Pacers): Many say he is a poor man's version of LeBron James. This Indiana star averages 25 points, 2 steals and 8 rebounds a game; he is versatile and can fill many of the categories you may need to land a victory.

GM10

Greg Monroe (Detroit Pistons): This Detroit center can not only score the ball with his back-to-the-basket abilities but can also grab rebounds for second chance opportunities. Monroe, who is currently averaging 17 points and 12 rebounds, can also steal the ball frequently and give his fantasy owner frequent blocks. With a major upside and a young age, Monroe will likely grow in his fantasy numbers.



2013-2014 TOP NBA TALENT

BY MINU PALANIAPPAN

FALCON BREAKS DOWN TOP PLAYERS OF 2013-2014 NBA FANTASY BASKETBALL BY POSITION

Centers

DH12

Dwight Howard (Houston Rockets): Also known as Superman, Howard is a dominant force in the paint due to his undeniable athletic abilities. He can bully just about anyone in the paint, ultimately allowing him to easily score buckets and grab boards.

NV6

Nikola Vucevic (Orlando Magic): Straight out of Switzerland, Vucevic has become a dominant force in the NBA. This Orlando Center has a great mid-range game and a soft touch near the paint, which makes him a versatile center who will dramatically increase the field goal percentage (FG%). In addition, his rebounding ability is highlighted in his 13 boards a game. He's guaranteed to have a double-double every night and dominate the game downlow.

RH55

Roy Hibbert (Indiana Pacers): Roy Hibbert is all about the blocks. Forget points, rebounds and free throw percentage (FT%) when a center can provide on average five blocks a game. Blocks are a rare commodity in fantasy and as a result, Hibbert's value is exponentially higher.

BL11

Brook Lopez (Brooklyn Nets): This Brooklyn center has become the center of attention in New York City. With the best offensive game in the NBA and an average of three blocks a game on the defensive end, Lopez gives owners the best of both worlds. In addition, he sports a great Free Throw percentage that is a rarity in most centers.

CB1

Chris Bosh (Miami Heat): Often considered the smallest contributor of Miami's "Big Three," Bosh has developed a shooter's touch to accompany his scoring and defensive abilities. Not only can he hit mid-range jumpers easily, he is now considered a three-point threat in the NBA. As a result, Bosh will help to earn those extra three-point stats that can push owners ahead in the three-point category.

Rookies

MCW1

Michael Carter-Williams (Philadelphia 76ers): With one of the best debuts in NBA history, MCW made his case for rookie of the year early on. With numbers all across the stat sheet and a starting role on the 76ers, Williams should be considered as a high draft pick due to his upside and playing time.

VO4

Victor Oladipo (Orlando Magic): Projected to be the second-coming of Dwyane Wade, Oladipo has a strong defensive presence. He will give any owner consistent steals with a solid number of points. His tenacity and endurance in late game situations will give owners the opportunity to get extra minutes from him, ultimately resulting in more numbers.

BM23

Ben McLemore (Sacramento Kings): This Sacramento shooting guard has had a very poor start and it's quite disappointing. But with elite athleticism and an undeniable shooter's touch, McLemore has the most talent out of all rookies. He should be watched as the season continues since he may gain a starting role on the Kings and pour in numbers.

The Takeaway

This year's fantasy talent is very respectable; the rookies have high ceilings and many players from last season have improved tremendously. If owners have low picks and want to get solid players, they should make sure to get gifted players on poor teams. Not only will they facilitate and score, but they will average a plethora of minutes. With this mentality, owners are sure to dominate their leagues. ♦

SHAKEN BY A CONCUSSION

EVERY YEAR THOUSANDS OF HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETES GET CONCUSSIONS. STAR QUARTERBACK JONATHAN WALTERS TELLS HOW HE DEALT WITH HIS.



FALCON // SIMI SRIVASTAVA

by Miles Albert
& Ashley Chen

"There's really no feeling like it."

Senior quarterback Jonathan Walters stands a few feet away from the open door of physics teacher Matt Welander's classroom. As he shifts his weight back and forth, he begins to describe his first concussion.

"I was running into the end-zone and I got [hit] by another player," Walters said. "My head was spinning ... It's just a nightmare because there's nothing you can do."

Walters, one of the team's star players and co-captains, was first diagnosed with a concussion after Saratoga High's Sept. 20 game against Willow Glen. Although Saratoga won, Walters paid a price for it.

"I didn't celebrate after I got the touchdown," Walters said.

The following morning, Walters woke up to intense dizziness. He was forced to spend the next two to three weeks working his way through the recovery process and told to avoid watching TV and using his computer and phone.

The recovery process

According to athletic trainer Liz Gilmore Alves, the emotional impacts of a concussion can be severe.

"A lot of people end up depressed because you're taking away everything they like," Alves said. "Unfortunately, depression symptoms can mimic concussion symptoms."

The first step is waiting for all of the athlete's symptoms to go away, said Alves. Afterwards, he must retake a cognitive test, and Alves compares Walters's current numbers to his preseason results.

"[The test] is not an exact tool of whether you have a

concussion or not, but at least it gives [Alves] something to work with," said head varsity coach Tim Lugo. "If we see scores down in certain areas, we'll hold kids out of practice."

Finally, as Walters put it, the recovering athlete can "take little baby steps [towards playing again]." Starting with working out on the stationary bike, Walters progressed toward using the elliptical, running and going back to football.

During his recovery process, one positive aspect Walters recalls is the high level of support he received from his peers.

"They understood my situation," he said. "People were telling me to just relax. Coach Lugo told me to go home a couple times during practice because he just wanted me to get better."

Adjustment after returning

Walters returned to the football field on Oct. 11 to play against Milpitas. Luckily, by that time, he was fully recovered and suffered no second injury. However, as a result of his concussion, he said, Lugo asked him change his playing style slightly; he is now supposed to "slide, instead of [trying] to run people over."

Despite the difficulties Walters faced as a result of his concussion, he stated adamantly that he would not change anything about his football career.

"[Before joining football], I knew there was a risk, obviously, but ... it's hard to prevent something like that," Walters said. "[Concussions are one] of the [game's] setbacks, [but they're] a small part."

However, playing the sport may have a lasting impact on athletes. When an athlete gets a concussion, he becomes more likely to receive a subsequent, more severe concussion, Alves said.

Growing number of cases

Alves has seen a growing number of concussions over the years, though Alves stated that may be due to a greater level of awareness — athletes who would have shrugged off a headache a decade ago are now often prompted by teammates to see a doctor.

"I didn't even know [Walters] had the concussion during the game he got it," Lugo said. "He didn't say anything about it after the game. It was one of [his teammates] that went up to [Alves] and said, 'I think you need to check him.'"

Even with the top safety equipment, Alves noted, football players are still at risk of a concussion. However, it is a risk many players are willing to take, even those who are aware of the possible consequences.

In addition, football isn't the only sport with a high concussion risk. Many other popular sports, including basketball and soccer, make up the more than 136,000 concussions U.S. high school students experience every academic year, according to the Center for Disease Control and Mayo Clinic.

The school's situation mirrors the "concussion crisis," as dubbed by PBS, surrounding the National Football League (NFL). As concussions receive more media attention, and ath-

letes and spectators become more familiar with the injury's risks, pressure on the NFL to respond to the problem with reforms has increased.

The negative effects

The negative effects of concussions are well documented; according to neuropsychologist Maryse Lassonde, chair of Developmental Neuropsychology at Université de Montréal, she and other researchers have observed "abnormal brain wave activity for years after a concussion."

More significantly, these effects do not go away with time. Lassonde found athletes who had suffered head trauma 30 years prior often suffered thinning of the cortex as in Alzheimer's disease, and memory and attention deficits. Concussions are often linked with later diagnosis of chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), a disorder that causes degeneration of brain tissue and result in dementia, depression and more.

This past August, the NFL agreed to pay \$765 million for "injury settlements, and care for former players who suffered brain injuries," according to the Huffington Post.

This problem isn't going away. According to PBS, around 180 incidents of brain trauma are recorded every season in the NFL. Ann McKee, a neuropathologist at Boston University, found that 33 of 34 brains of former NFL players suffered from chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE).

Despite the possible long-term effects of concussions, the reality is that athletes, like Walters, will continue to play the sports they love. In his own words: "Concussions are a small part of football, and it is still one of the greatest games ever played." ♦

>> CONCUSSION STATS

■ 3.8 MILLION

High school students suffer from concussions.

■ 13.2% OF INJURIES

In school sports are reported to be concussions.

■ 50% INCREASE

In the number of students with concussions from the 1997-1998 to 2007-2008 academic years.

■ 3 TO 6 TIMES

Greater chance that a person who has suffered an initial concussion gets another one.

■ 2 OUT OF 3

Concussions occur during competition.

■ 92% INCREASE

In number of emergency department visits by minors due to concussions between 2002 and 2011.

■ 9 DAYS OR LESS

Are needed by 50 percent of athletes to recover from a concussion.

■ 67000 CONCUSSIONS

Are diagnosed in high school football every year.

GIRLS' SOCCER

'Fierce' sophomore seeks victories

By Sabrina Chen
& Deepa Kannan

Only a few seconds remained on the clock before halftime during a preseason soccer game against Carlmont High last year.

The score was tied 0-0. Sophomore Lauren Plesse raced down the field with the ball at her feet, her face intense, eyes unblinking.

"My adrenaline was going, and I was only focused on putting the ball in the net, and when the ball went in the net my teammates and I came together and celebrated," Plesse said. "Moments like these are ones that I will never forget."

This goal was the first of Plesse's many goals playing as a freshman on the school's varsity team last year.

Plesse has been playing soccer ever since she was 4 years old. Her passion for the sport motivated her to join her first club team when she was 8.

She now plays right wing and center forward for club soccer, and center midfield on the school soccer team.

"It's a really great experience to play high school soccer," Plesse said. "Especially to play as an underclassman, I got to know and make relationships with a bunch of upperclassmen who are really nice and really good."

Plesse first got involved in the sport when her dad pushed her to join AYSO, a local recreational league, so that she

could play with her older brother.

Ever since then, she has continued to play through high school because she "likes the competitiveness of the sport."

Even now, Plesse said her dad continues to motivate her to get better.

"On weekends, when I don't have soccer practice, we go to Congress Springs or the high school to work on certain techniques I should improve on," Plesse said.

Although she has no aspirations to play soccer professionally, she said she wants to play at the college level. Plesse's priorities in college will be split equally between keeping up with school and playing soccer.

Plesse's teammate, junior Anisha Nagarajan, said that even though Plesse was only a freshman last year, she was a key starter on the team.

"[Plesse] is a center midfielder and what their position does is very integral to the team," Narayan said. "And the way our school team plays is we do a lot of defense passes to midfielders and the midfielders to the forwards, so running the midfield [is important]."

Nagarajan added that Plesse is especially good at finding the ball and making impressive runs across the field.

"She's really fierce," Narayan said. "Even though she looks like this sweet, little girl, she can be scary on the field."

Plesse said that the most inspirational moment for her during the last season



FALCON // JADE BISHT

Sophomore Lauren Plesse cuts through the Mountain View defense in a game on Jan. 25.

was the team's epic defeat against rival Los Gatos.

"Our goal through the season was to make sure that we compete with Los Gatos and give them a run for their money, and we actually did that," Plesse said. "My goals were to try my best and complement the team and come out with a win."

And Plesse, with the help of her teammates, did just that.

"It was also really exciting because it was our Senior Night and the crowd was really energetic, especially playing under the lights at night," Plesse recalled. "You always want to score goals, but my main 'goal' is always to make sure you come out with a win." ♦

BOYS' SOCCER

From AYSO to the top

DEFENDER SENIOR ANDREW FIRTH STEPS UP AS A DOMINANT PLAYER ON VARSITY

By Anant Rajeev
& Catherine Tang

Although senior Andrew Firth began his soccer career like many other young kids at AYSO, he has grown more in his soccer career than many others have. Firth is ready to step in as an essential defensive player for the varsity boys' soccer team this season.

As Firth has grown from a young soccer player just looking for fun to a key player, he looks back at his young soccer career and recalls some fond memories.

"I was pretty much the same as any other AYSO player; playing everywhere and messing around," Firth said.

Even as just a young tike in recreational soccer, Firth's determined personality hasn't changed over the years.

"One moment I remember while playing AYSO is the time I was playing as goalie and the ball hit my hand hard. I was literally bowling," Firth said. "But I refused to go out of the game so my coach just left me in goal while I cried."

Firth slowly progressed into a more lethal player as he grew older and after some convincing from a friend, he decided to join club soccer team in fifth grade to improve even more.

"I still know a lot of the guys from my original club team, and I even still play club soccer with some of them now," Firth said.

Firth, who stands at 5-foot-8, isn't the tallest soccer player, but that hasn't hurt his game.

"My favorite part about soccer is that size doesn't matter as much as it does in other sports," Firth said. "It's more

about your ability and effort."

His teammates also speak highly of his abilities on and off the soccer field.

"He's probably one of our best players this season and is always positive," senior defender Brandon Le said. "Off the court he jokes around and makes practices enjoyable."

With the possibility of senior center back Will Guy not playing this season due to club soccer conflicts, Firth is stepping up as a dominant player in the right defensive position.

The team has also lost several important seniors in the past couple years to graduation, but Firth is still determined to work toward a good season in the top division, De Anza League, this year.

"Our goal for the varsity team this winter season is to stay in league and not get relegated," Firth said. "Hopefully we can make it happen." ♦

>> THE bigidea

Boys' Soccer

The league

The team plays in the De Anza League, the upper of two leagues in the Santa Clara Valley Athletic League (SCVAL).

Key returning players

Returning varsity players seniors Nikhil Goel, Will Guy and junior Samuel Junqua will help the team to victory.

Key additions

Sophomores Matt van den Berg, Anant Rajeev and freshman Brennan Wu will be valuable new assets to the team.

WRESTLING

Athletes set high goals for season



Courtesy of Henry Wei

Junior Christian Murabito, senior Graham Grant, alumnus Henry Wei and Araad Sarrami (from the left) pose with first place medals after league finals last year.

By Michelle Leung
& Kelly Xiao

As the 2013-2014 wrestling season starts, senior Graham Grant and junior Christian Murabito are looking to build on their successes last year.

The previous season's CCS tournament saw Grant win the individual title at 220 pounds with Murabito finishing fourth at 160 pounds.

Grant has built an impressive wrestling resume in his four years here. He has grown to love the sport.

"I love how as an individual sport, your success is solely determined by the work you put into it," Grant said.

He thinks the wrestling squad, which is coached by Arnaldo Gonzales Jr., is ready for more success.

"We have some very good members on the team this year so I think we can have a big presence at league and CCS," Grant said. "I personally hope to place at state."

Murabito, whose older brother, Alfred who graduated in 2012, was an excellent wrestler in high school, wants to continue the family legacy. But, Murabito's love for wrestling is not only something that runs in the family.

"I love the character building aspect of [wrestling]," Murabito said. "I can control how well I do and I don't have to worry about my team."

Murabito, too, has high hopes for this upcoming season.

"I think season will go great and I hope to place in state," Murabito said. "I look forward to seeing how I will do this year." ♦

Your success is solely determined by the work you put into it.

>> senior Graham Grant

GIRLS' BASKETBALL

Sophomore finds success on varsity team

By Tiffany Zheng

Sophomore point guard Nicole Prowse bounces the basketball twice, feeling the textured rubber underneath her fingertips during a practice. She bends her knees slightly, and tosses the ball in an effortless arc into the net.

Prowse is on the girls' varsity basketball team as an underclassman, and she is only one of three sophomores on the team.

Although the age difference could potentially alienate members of the team, Prowse feels like the fact that she is one of the youngest players is more of an honor.

"I actually enjoy being one of the youngest members on the team because I get to look up to all these great people around me," Prowse said. "They really show us how to improve, and it's really nice to have big sisters to help me out."

Her favorite part about basketball is the team aspect and the environment of the sport.

"It's not a one-man sport — it's a team sport. So in order to improve, you really have to trust your teammates and depend on them to do what they need to do," she said.

Prowse said that basketball requires a large time commitment.

"We practice around two hours a day, and we lift for about two hours a week, and we do yoga for injury prevention for around one hour a week," Prowse said.

As a dedicated player, Prowse said that she plans to play throughout high school.

However, she is still unsure about continuing to play in college because she is only a few inches above five feet in height.

Still, Prowse foresees a great season for the team.

>> **bigidea**

Girls' Basketball

The league

The team is in the El Camino league.

Key players

Senior Tivoli Sisco, senior Trishika Shetty and junior Mikayla Davis will help lead the team to victory.

Important matches

The girls will take on Monta Vista on Dec. 12.

confident become a better leader," he said. "As a sophomore, it's sometimes difficult to be demanding, but as a point guard it is a crucial part of the role."

According to Davey, Prowse has become a very fierce defensive presence.

"Nicole is a tremendous defender and works very hard in practice," said Davey. "She makes all the other girls better by her intense defense."

It isn't just Davey who sees Prowse

"My goal is to progress as a team as well as do well in League," she said. "I also want to get to know my teammates better this year."

Varsity coach Mike Davey believes that Prowse has a bright future in basketball ahead of her.

"She will improve offensively and also as she gets more confident become a better leader," he said. "As a sophomore, it's sometimes difficult to be demanding, but as a point guard it is a crucial part of the role."

According to Davey, Prowse has become a very fierce defensive presence.

"Nicole is a tremendous defender and works very hard in practice," said Davey. "She makes all the other girls better by her intense defense."

It isn't just Davey who sees Prowse



FALCON // SIMI SRIVASTAVA

Sophomore Nicole Prowse defends against Branham High School offense on Nov. 25.

as a valued addition to the team. Sophomore Erin Norris also praises Prowse for her defense skill as well as her overall personality on the team.

"She's a really nice and crazy team member," Norris said. "If you ever need to get your weird out, go to her."

Captain Senior Dharini Ramaswamy feels that the underclassmen on the team are really making the overall team

better.

"All of our younger players are really stepping up and we are a really fast team and I think we are going to have a really good season," said Ramaswamy.

Ramaswamy has high hopes for the team this year.

"I really want our team to win league and make it further into CCS this year than last year." ♦

BOYS' BASKETBALL

Junior point guard utilizes quickness to pace Falcons

By Andrew Jiang

Playing against Monta Vista for the championship game for the Prospect tournament last December, the boys' junior varsity basketball team was up by two with 5 seconds left in the game in the fourth quarter.

Monta Vista inbounded the ball and shot a half-court shot out of desperation. As the buzzer rang, the ball swished through the net. The Falcons lost 49-50 because of the 3-pointer.

Ever since that crushing defeat, junior basketball player Michael Cole has worked his hardest each day to improve his game.

Cole is the starting point guard for the boys' varsity team. The best parts of his game are his shooting and driving to the basket, but he thinks he could still improve his dribbling and defense.

Standing at 5 feet 10 inches, Cole often has an advantage because of his quickness.

"[My height] makes it harder for me to score around the rim especially when there are other tall centers in the middle [of the paint] waiting to block your shot," Cole said. "At the same time, my height allows me to be quick which gives me an advantage over many players."

Cole started playing organized basketball in sixth grade because all of his older siblings played.

"I love the competition of basketball the most," Cole said. "I love competing against others and testing my skills."

According to Cole's teammate, senior center Kevin Chun, Cole is a huge part of the team.

"He is the leading scorer for the team and is a very skilled shooter, best on the team," Chun said. "He sometimes gets too hard on himself when he makes a

mistake, but other than that, he is fun to be around and a great basketball player."

Cole's parents fully support his basketball and frequently come to his games to cheer him on.

"My parents encourage me to play basketball as they find it very entertaining to watch, and they love coming to my games," Cole said.

Cole's role model is Warriors' point guard Stephen Curry, and he loves to watch him play.

During the spring, Cole plays for the Amateur Athletic Union for "more practice and for an opportunity to play better teams."

Outside of school practices, Cole goes to the weight room several times a week and goes to the basketball courts to work on other skills such as dribbling and shooting.

The team's new coach, Temo Barrera, said he can also see the dedication in Cole.

"Michael is the definition of a student athlete," Barrera said. "It is a pleasure to coach a player who is not only passionate about the game, but is willing to put in the work on the fundamentals in order to improve his skill level."

Cole likes the team's chances this year.

"I think that the team will be pretty good this school year [and we] feel confident going in to the season," Cole said. "We want to really control the game when it comes to offense since we are clearly not a very tall team."

Thinking down the road, Cole hopes to play in college.

"I expect a lot of myself and I hope to be able to play in college, but I will not be too bummed out if that does not work out," Cole said. ♦

1. Provide fundamental knowledge and understanding of art and design processes.

2. Train skills in visual communication and self-expression

3. Offer distinguishing extra-curricular activity for Ivy League college applicants.

>> snapshots



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FALCON // SIMI SRIVASTAVA

KICKING TO VICTORY: Captain Nikhil Goel (12) played against Wilcox in a 1-0 pre-season win at home on Dec. 4.**UP THE ACTING:** Andrew York (11) and Emily Ludwig (10) practice in a rehearsal of the student production "Up."**RALLY:** The cheerleaders performed at the rally on Dec. 6 during tutorial.**LUNCH BUNCH:** Teachers came together on Dec. 6 for a PTSO lunch.

Santa Claus: Real or a child's fable?

SOPHOMORE REMEMBERS CHILDHOOD

The holiday season is quite frankly my favorite season ever. The cold yet refreshing weather (#sweater-weather), the special Starbucks cups and the plethora of Daniel Martin's classic songs ringing through the malls ... these are some of the many things I love about December. But I'm forgetting something — the gift bestower himself.

Santa Claus has played a crucial role in so many childhoods. Whenever I see the lines of eager kids in the mall, I can't help but reminisce of my obsession and ardent love for Santa Claus.

Like most little kids, I thought Santa was real.

I remember waking up on Christmas morning when I was 4, going to the tree and, to my delight finding the Barbie shop register that I yearned for. At this moment, the phone next to me rang. My mom picked it up and said, "Santa is on the phone for you, Deepthi!"

As a gullible as any 4-year-old, I gushed my thanks and adoration to Santa for bringing the bright pink shop register. Santa chuckled in reply and told me to be a good girl.

A few minutes later, my dad arrived from upstairs. As I ecstatically told him all about my call with Santa, he seemed bemused. (Little did I know that "Santa" was my dad.)

As the years progressed, I started to become doubtful about Santa's existence. My cousin, who is six years older, would constantly tell me there was no such thing as Santa. (Shocking, right?)

For my part, I decided not to believe my cousin. I just assumed he was a "bad boy" since he was always doing annoying and tortuous things to me like punching me, shoving me into wall and "accidentally" throwing a basketball at me ... but I'll save that story for another time. I assumed that

DEEPTHI
SAMPATHKUMAR
Da Deepster

this misbehavior was the reason that Santa never visited him on Christmas morning.

In 2004, my faith in Santa was still going strong. That year, my family was going on a trip to Italy, and I was filled with suspicion and wonder about how Santa would be able to complete the feat of delivering my gift to my house. After checking the tree at my house numerous times before I left, I knew that there was no hidden gift. Santa would have to deliver my gifts before we returned.

When we returned on Dec. 27, I was delighted to find my present underneath the tree. (This time my mom sneaked in and planted the present while I was in the car to the airport to Italy). Obviously, I was astounded by this feat of Santa's. I was reassured completely that Santa did in fact exist.

As the years progressed, during the first few years of elementary school, I realized that my cousin was right. There was no dramatic moment when my

faith in Santa was lost; it was more of a gradual process. Finally,

I had to face the reality that there was no Santa.

Although the concept of Santa Claus is improbable, crazy, and in some cases a safety problem (a stranger coming into your house through the chimney ... what?), I realize that it has added so many more memories and joyous moments into my younger childhood years.

So as Christmas nears, it is hilarious and cute to watch my younger cousins get all excited about Santa. And unlike my older cousin, I'll do my part to maintain their childhood belief in Santa Claus knowing that they too will one day realize that the jolly, chubby gift bestower is not real. I mean I am Santa-struck too at one point. ♦

Whenever I see the lines of eager kids in the mall, I can't help but reminisce of my obsession and ardent love for Santa Claus.

buzzworthy >> Yim's challenge

by Michelle Leung
& Carolyn Sun

For the longest time, math teacher PJ Yim's so-called push-up challenge remained undefeated.

The premise seems simple: a student does one push-up in the first 15 seconds, two in the second 15 seconds, three in third 15 seconds, and so on until 15 push-ups in 15 seconds. But it's simple in a misleading way — and no Yim student at the school had ever beaten it.

Since 2008, Yim has always introduced the challenge during the arithmetic sums unit, which students treat with the usual ambivalence until Yim mentions his famous challenge.

"When we get to the arithmetic sums during second semester, kids are usually kind of 'duhhh' and tired," Yim said. "So I try to make it more fun for them, wake them up for a couple minutes."

Yim learned about the push-up challenge from a friend who was a two-time Olympic wrestling medalist.

"I don't think I ever [completed] it when I was younger," Yim said. "I got to maybe about 13 or 14 [rounds]. That was when I used to be able to do 80 plus push-ups per minute, which is not too bad."

Yim has never seen any student in his class complete the push-up challenge in

front of him, though he has heard that world geography and PE teacher Rick Ellis has completed it.

Additionally, senior Mike Fitzsimmons reportedly completed Yim's push-up challenge as a sophomore. After hearing about it from a friend in Yim's class, he decided to try it, with his friend senior Eric Kao videotaping him for a media arts project.

"[Kao] was trying to prove it can't be done," Fitzsimmons said. "He knows that I can do a lot of push-ups, so he was like, 'If you can't do it, nobody can.' He was filming me, wanting me to fail. He was even cheating on the clock a little bit."

Ellis completed the challenge four years ago.

"The challenge was very difficult," Ellis said. "And [I] don't think I could do it again."

Yim jokes that he would treat his student victors with a steak dinner, but only because he believes none of his students will ever win.

"It would be kind of weird to be sitting across [each other] with candlelight," Yim says. "I tell them they can join me in my next dinner, but it would be kind of awkward." ♦



>> top ten

MESSED-UP WAYS TO RUIN CHRISTMAS

- 10** **Uncover the truth behind the toy factories in the North Pole.** The elves are slaves working in a sweatshop. Christmas is a capitalism fable.
- 9** **Go to the Goodwill store and buy everything.** Of course, some people may suffer. I gotta pop some tags...
- 8** **Make eggnog out of eggs with salmonella.** ~Christmas Spirit~
- 7** **Steal all the presents from the orphanage.** Actually, that's way too messed up. Don't do it.
- 6** **Stand under mistletoe with a special friend.** Remind them that mistletoes are parasites, draining the life force of their partners like your partner draining your wallet. How romantic.
- 5** **Knit a scarf or a sweater for someone.** Infect it with smallpox to give them a feverish warmth. #sweater-weather
- 4** **Light up the Christmas spirit.** Literally. Fill the ornaments with gunpowder and light the trees on fire.
- 3** **Prepare a great Christmas dinner.** Grandma ran over a reindeer. Roadkill for dinner.
- 2** **Break into people's houses and eat their cookies.** You're just trying to keep the Santa myth alive.
- 1** **Use math to calculate the numbers involved in Santa Claus's trip around the world.** Given Santa's speed he would disintegrate in 4.26 thousandths of a second. Santa's dead. Sorry.

>> Nelson Wang

>>> THE schoolscope section

December 13, 2013

CULTURE of
JUDGMENTBROKEN, SCARRED,
ONE GIRL SUFFERS
IMPACTS OF BULLYING

By Samuel Liu

Editor's note: Ruth is a pseudonym to protect the subject's privacy. She is not the person in the photo illustration.

On the morning that led to the worst days of her life, Ruth woke up, ate her breakfast on the car ride to school and walked into her first period class. She was sleep-deprived and depressed: Her eyes were rimmed with dark circles, her flowing, black hair was unusually unkempt.

She had lost almost all of her friends in the past week. Even worse, she had lost her boyfriend, who had stopped returning her messages. She knew what people were saying about her. "B****." "She deserves to be treated like s***." "She does this all the time."

She went through her classes



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY DEEPTI KANNAN

THE SUBJECTS IN THE PHOTO ARE NOT IN THE STORY

A victim's confession
A JOURNEY FROM PAIN TO ACCEPTANCE

By Anonymous

I don't need your tears. I've shed more than a few of my own. I shed them two years ago, when I wrote:

I can't bear it any longer. The pain, the loneliness. That feeling crawls up on me and chokes me, its fingers pressed around my throat. I hate it... I have nothing. No one at school gives a damn about me. I tell myself to stop feeling sorry for myself, but when that bell for lunch rings, I wonder what I will do.

I shed them just a few minutes ago while reading this excerpt, the impetus for this piece.

I don't always cry, though.

I didn't cry when I sat by myself lunch after lunch, invisible but for sneer and scorn. I didn't cry when my friends stabbed me in the back, one by one. I cried later, at night, alone, convinced no one cared about my existence.

But listen, I don't need your tears. I learned to stop crying, to stop pitying myself. I would like to say I have come a long way since my former vulner-

ability and weakness, but I also have by no means forgotten, for the scars of childhood are only built over, broken bricks melded together.

No, I still remember, but it's with a changed perspective. I do not write this in a plea for sympathy, nor in a rage of hatred and revenge. I am simply going to retrace

my steps from misery to today.

Hopefully, then I'll understand.

ISAT ALONE on the swing-set, dragging my skinny legs in the tanbark under the bright, piercing sun. I was in second grade, and I attended a small, private elementary school. Upon hearing the sound of footsteps, I looked up with hopeful glee; perhaps someone had noticed me.

To my surprise and content, three "popular" girls strutted their way over to me, and one offered to push me on the swings. I willingly agreed.

The vision was blurry because of the tears... but the pointing and the laughing was undoubtedly clear.

Higher and higher I flew, so high that I almost didn't realize when I had been deliberately pushed off the slippery seat, landing on my bottom in a pile of muddled tanbark.

Voices of mocking derision

echoed around me as I drowsi-

ly rubbed my eyes open. All I could remember was a dull ache in my back

as I struggled to get back on my feet. The vision was blurry because of the tears that slowly streamed down my face, but the pointing and the laughing was undoubtedly clear.

I never really understood what I had done to cause that incident. Maybe I was too eager, or perhaps it was my short bob-cut that offended the others. My mom insisted that I cut my hair that way because it looked "too adorable." Tell that to the them, I thought.

Once, I remember walking to the girls' bathroom in

>> JOURNEY on pg. S4

Academic totem pole leads to inferiority

"How was the test?" your friend asks. Before you can answer, though, she says, "I got a 96." She grimaces. "I could've done better, though."

"I, uh, did OK." You think of the squalid tomato C nestled in the top right corner of your trig test and avoid your friend's eyes as you say the words.

Sound familiar? We've been part of this conversation countless times — on both sides. As any Saratoga student can attest, academic pressure is a huge part of the school, and this obsession with high scores leads to a negative cycle of judgment.

For us, the competition to be the best began four years ago, when as sixth graders, we took the placement exam for Redwood Middle School Math Club. Since neither of us knew much about math, we were

placed in the second-to-lowest group, the Green Team. A year of embarrassment followed, as each club meeting reminded us of our shameful incompetence.

The clear team divisions did more than wound our sixth-grade egos. It separated us from the "smart" kids, the ones who sauntered into our classroom whining about scores we could only dream of achieving. Those godlike creatures became aliens to us; we didn't feel welcome in their territory, and we felt their scrutiny when we asked them for help.

We found an identical predicament upon entering high school. Our formerly relaxed friends turned into stress-filled strangers who bookmarked Aries on their computers and skipped lunches to study for tests in the library. They fussed over the health of their GPAs

>> ACADEMIC on pg. S4

KELLY XIAO
Kelly BeanASHLEY CHEN
Little Green Frog

RUTH >> 'EVERYONE HATES ME'

SCARRED BY SOCIETY

OUR CULTURE OF COLLECTIVE HATE — FUELED BY JUDGMENT — CREATES MISERY, SELF-HATE, AND ISOLATION.

We are the cause of our culture. And we are the cause of their misery.

continued from pg. S1

barely functioning. After lunch, she broke down, crying. In seventh period, she barely heard a word.

When she walked to her locker after school, she saw her ex-boyfriend talking with two of her former best friends — both girls — and she snapped.

Numb, Ruth didn't quite know what she was doing when she walked up to that group of ex-friends. Unthinking, she could barely hear herself when she told — demanded — that the ex-boyfriend talk to her. Near insane, she had no idea what was happening when she lashed out.

"NO, I won't talk to you," the ex said, trying to leave. She grabbed his arm — he's much larger — and old friend was yelling something into her ear but she didn't, couldn't, wouldn't hear because she was shoving the friend into dirty gray lockers, pushing her off balance, slamming her into cold metal.

"It was shocking. I'm a physical sort of person — I use hands when I talk, hold on to people, but I never tried to hurt anyone physically before," she said, years later. "I was desperate to talk to him, to talk to my friends, to reverse time, to make up for what I had done."

"I was desperate for someone to LISTEN to me. For someone to understand."

Everyone else fled, but for Ruth and her friend, who cried pathetically. Though trained in the martial arts, Ruth knew she couldn't hurt anyone, especially not this girl who she'd known for so long.

But when Ruth went home that night to an orderly Saratoga street, sobbing with the only friend that hadn't abandoned her, lying awake surrounded by the pink and red of a cheery room until 4 in the morning, she wondered if there was someone worth hurting. Worth killing.

"I laid on the floor and thought if I was dead, everyone would be so much happier," she said. "If I wasn't so naive, then everyone would be happy."

FROM TEEN TRUTH LIVE to Speak Up for Change, the school has struggled mightily to combat bullying. In many ways, it's been successful, as Saratoga is quite an accepting school. We have relatively few problems with racism, homophobia or gang violence. We have parents who care about their children, educators who never close their doors to students.

But the reality is that, inevitably, some students still fall through the cracks. Talking to Ruth and others, I have struggled to understand why stories like that of Ruth exist, why — even after all the efforts educators, counselors, students and parents put into combating bullying — some students at this school feel bullied, belittled and suicidal. Pinning the reason solely on human nature leaves little options for change.

While the following three cases might not represent all the students suffering from bullying, perhaps they can provide some insight.

Audrie Pott was bullied by her peers, culminating in a terrible party that ultimately contributed to her suicide. She

believed that illicit pictures of her were circulated around the entire school, that she would be judged for a night she could not even remember. Adrian, an anonymous boy The Falcon profiled last year, had tried to take his life multiple times before, largely the result of bullying from his circle of friends. Ruth, too, was bullied by close friends, and like the others, thought, "The entire school hated me."

The common thread among the three was that all experienced bullying by their inner circle of friends, a double-edged sword — one edge sends the abuse; the other removes friends when the victim needs them most. For Ruth, the collective judgment she faced made her reconsider her very life.

RUTH IS YOUNGER THIS TIME, think 11 or 12. She's rather chubby, straight hair placed like a mop on top of her head, and the old pictures show her smiling and flashing white teeth.

Her flaw is her over-exuberance. She is, to some degree, even to this day, the kind of person who throws affection at people even though it might not be returned, happiness with no afterthought.

In the sixth grade of her private school, Ruth created an account on Formspring, a site where the user receives anonymous questions. It was the first time she was overtly bullied, and she was shocked by the insults she faced: "Oh you're so ugly put a brown bag over your head."

"I didn't know why they were so mean to me," she said. "I didn't understand ... I tried to be nice to everyone, never tried to hurt anyone, so I didn't understand why these people were trying to hurt me."

Because her parents couldn't afford more, Ruth wore regular skirts, sometimes even pants. Her second-hand clothes clashed with the short skirts most girls wore.

"I tried to fit in with the popular group. They didn't like that. Because I tried," she said. "I was different, so I was an easy target."

Ruth liked to hold hands with people, so she was accused of being a lesbian, in typical, middle school homophobic fashion. Girls would mock: "Do you want to rub me with canola oil?"

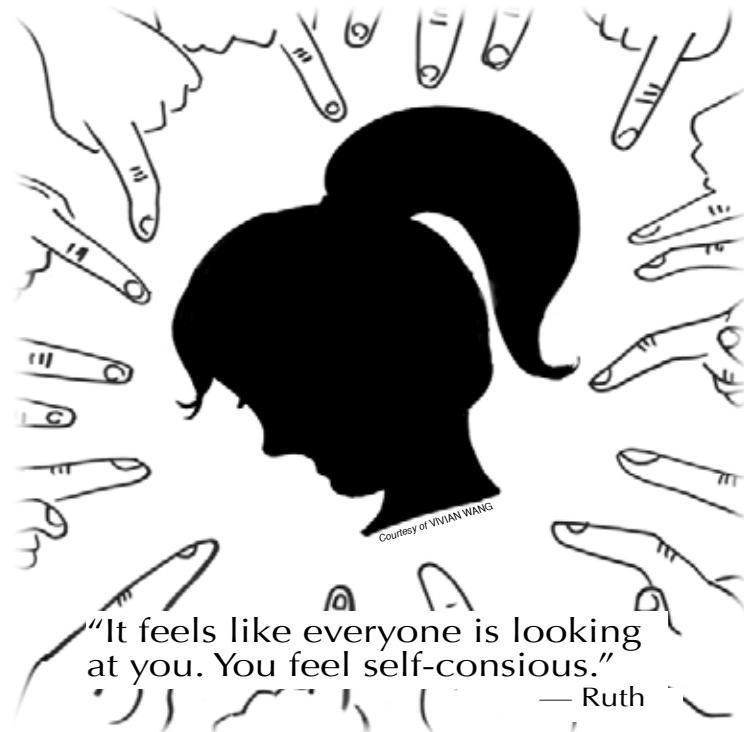
Ruth has a remarkable repulsion for self-pity; even going over these events she is composed, matter-of-fact, almost methodical. This happened first. Then that. She is surprisingly understated, and the answers have to be coaxed from her. But she had a hard time maintaining composure when recalling the incident that made her decide to transfer to Redwood Middle School.

One seventh-grade recess, she left for a student council meeting. When she came back, she overheard a group of girls going around, asking, "Would you be sad if Ruth died?"

"No, we wouldn't care."

"Ha-ha she can die."

"Even my best friend said no," Ruth said. "I was speechless. I just stared, not feeling, then I tried to laugh it off. So I ran away and went to the bathroom and



"It feels like everyone is looking at you. You feel self-conscious."

— Ruth

cried."

Ruth left the private school, undoubtedly scarred, but still trying to remain the same, bubbly, effusive girl she was before. And for a while it worked. Eighth grade passed with by little difficulty. She entered freshman year with excitement.

"Yeah, I was really excited," she said. "I don't know, I thought it would be different. Really funny in retrospect."

EVERY YEAR ALL INCOMING freshmen, including Ruth, undergo a series of anti-bullying inoculations. The assemblies often repeat the same themes: be kind, reach out for help, make a difference.

Last year, '13 alumnus Sasan Sadaat and others helped lead one of the most successful anti-bullying programs the school has ever seen — Speak Up for Change Week, a program unusual in that it featured student speakers. Initially cynical and skeptical, much of the audience was brought to tears by the testimonials of their peers.

"I'm proud of [Speak Up for Change Week] because [it] demonstrated the unifying experience of pain, which makes everyone feel less alone," Sadaat told me.

But when I asked Sadaat whether Speak Up for Change had permanently altered Saratoga culture, he gave an unexpected response.

"That's easy, no," he said. "Even I didn't change permanently from it, and it was my idea."

The problem with assemblies, Sadaat said, is that kindness only flourishes momentarily.

"[It's] like when you go to a camp and you love everyone you met there, you're all 'bff's,' pics go on Facebook, you wish

you didn't have to leave camp and return home, you can't wait to have a reunion," Sadaat said. "That lasts a good two to four weeks, but it fades."

"[Assemblies are] helpful for half a day," Ruth said. "I think they have really good intentions in mind, but it just doesn't work that way. If someone truly wants to change, it has to be from themselves, from within. No matter how much you do on the outside, if [you yourself] aren't motivated, [it] won't work."

RELECTING ON the physical alteration and fallout with friends, Ruth is the first to admit that she held a large part of the blame, calling herself "selfish." But even with her mistakes, it's hard to justify the bullying she received afterward.

What people were hearing was being spread by a certain group of people, and Ruth said that many of the allegations were twisted, misunderstood by outsiders who formed snap judgements.

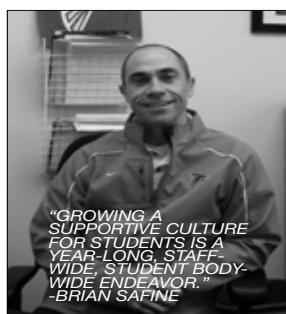
When Ruth woke up the day after the alteration, she didn't know how she would get through school. She was a wreck and worried her notoriety had spread.

She was right.

"Ha-ha I heard you punched [the friend]," peers jeered at her in class.

"[I] literally thought everyone knew," Ruth said. "It feels like everyone is looking at you. You feel really self-conscious — when you have no one to talk to, no friends who are willing to talk to you, you assume they hate you, as well."

In her fifth period, she was pulled out of class and sent to a counselor's office. She expected to see Eileen Allen, the counselor who had been helping her; instead, Ruth met a different counselor (Al-



"GROWING A SUPPORTIVE CULTURE FOR STUDENTS IS A YEAR-LONG, STAFF-WIDE, STUDENT BODY-WIDE ENDEAVOR."
-BRIAN SAFINE

FALCON // SIMI SRIVASTAVA

13, 2013

>> School's antibullying efforts



FALCON // DAVID SPARKMAN

>> Speak up for Change Week During the week of Jan. 21, teachers included lessons about promoting a positive atmosphere at school. In school-wide assemblies, staff members including English teacher Erick Rector and counselor Eileen Allen, speaker Scott Bachovich and students shared personal experiences to inspire change on campus. "I'm proud of [Speak Up for Change Week] because [it] demonstrated the unifying experience of pain, which makes everyone feel less alone," alumnus Sasan Sadaat said.

Courtesy of <http://www.teentruth.net>

FALCON // SHAZIA GUPTA

>> Teen Truth Live

On Sept. 6, freshmen, sophomores and juniors attended an assembly where they listened to Teen Truth representative Erahm Christopher speak in the McAfee. The program included a 20-minute documentary about the Columbine shooting and a discussion about various solutions to the bullying problem on campus.

>> Common Roots

Seniors My-Lan Le and Anup Kar co-founded Common Roots last year to provide peer-to-peer support for those who need it. All peer counselors are trained by CASSY counselor Kim Cousins. "The Common Roots students are skilled in paying attention to social media sites, where many students spend their off-campus hours," assistant principal Brian Safine said.

len had left for a work-related conference). Because she had physically assaulted another student, she was threatened with suspension and ordered to stay away from the ex-boyfriend.

"It was psychologically damaging," Ruth said. "Instead of helping me, asking how I was feeling, [they said] 'This is what you should do. Don't talk to him. Don't associate with him.'"

"They were watching me like I was some monster. [So I thought] there must be something wrong with me."

IN THE FOLLOWING DAYS, Ruth fell deeper and deeper.

Unknown assailants egged her house in the three following weekends. The first attack was nothing — she cleaned up the broken egg shells and moved on. The second attack involved eggs and graffiti: "you are a [expletive] slut," read the green paint emblazoned onto her garage wall. But the last one was especially damaging. Assailants poured broken eggs and sand onto her mom's car, creating a glue impossible to remove.

"Well, first off — GENIUS," she said. "Whoever came up with that is damn smart. It literally stuck like glue; we were so scared that it would damage the car and my mom had to drive the car to the carwash with a portion of the eggs still stuck on it. [It was] embarrassing as [expletive]."

While she speaks flippantly about it now, Ruth was deeply depressed. But somehow she survived, working through school and eating lunch alone. She said that if everyone had abandoned her, she wouldn't have survived the dark times.

"NO," she shakes her head vehemently. "I wouldn't have made it, without [the friend] and my mom. No way, no way. And God ... [It was] a feeling that maybe one day would be better."

While she no longer had suicidal thoughts, she had begun to hate the school and its culture.

In a diary, she wrote: "I don't even know what to say. I really [expletive] up big this time. I ruined it for everyone, except the people who like to see me fall and get hurt. I can't even talk without getting choked up, and I've had tears streaming down my face endlessly."

The stupidity level of this school has reached such a high that I cannot even explain how I feel right now. I don't even think it's worth it anymore."

COUNSELOR EILEEN ALLEN sits in her office, a bright place full of well-wishing memorabilia from students and countless college banners. Allen is one of the seven counselors and therapists at the school, three of whom were just hired through Counseling and Support Services for Youth (CASSY). The school has a startling ratio of 350 students to one counselor, which Allen says is "pretty unheard of in

California."

In Ruth's case, the school had to consider the safety concerns of the ex-boyfriend, whose parents had intervened and requested that Ruth no longer have any contact with their son.

"I love working with [Ruth]," Allen told me. After the altercation, she continued to help Ruth, and Ruth told me that she greatly appreciated Allen's counsel.

"My goodness, she is one of my favorite adults on campus," Ruth said. "She knows more about me than a lot of my friends, and she's always there to answer my questions regarding anything."

But, even so, Ruth felt that at the time she was "burdening" her counselor and her remaining friend. After a while, she started keeping her problems to herself.

The problem is that no matter how good counselors are, sometimes they can't be there when students need them the most — when the student is up at 3 a.m. dealing with suicidal thoughts — and they can't be expected to, for a whole myriad of reasons from privacy to work hours.

Common Roots, a new program led by students, looks to eliminate this disconnect. While the student counselors were extremely hesitant to release information, they told me of a recent event when Common Roots counselors discovered a suicide note on social media, talked to the student in question, and contacted the police. The police found that the student had already prepared the method of suicide when they arrived at the student's house.

Assistant principal Brian Safine, who declined to comment on the specifics of the case, said that "The Common Roots students are skilled in paying attention to social media sites where many students spend their off-campus hours."

Safine said that the battle against bullying is an on-going effort. He listed, at length, multiple "small things" that improved Saratoga High's culture, from student-athletes to section leaders in music to "staff members who meet with the at-risk, depressed students ... who work to know each student by name."

"I could go on," he said. "But you get the idea. Growing a supportive culture for students is a year-long, staff-wide, student body-wide endeavor."

THREE MONTHS that followed the altercation were difficult, but Ruth had gotten over the worst stretch. Around June, she decided to change herself, to prevent something as traumatizing as that year from ever happening again.

"I re-evaluated my friendships with

many people," she said. "Before, I considered myself friends with basically everyone I interacted with, and never questioned whether they considered me a friend in return."

"So I guess I was more careful in who I considered a 'friend' and decided not to trust as easily. Trying to be less naive, you could say. But I still genuinely care for everyone, I just don't assume that they care for me in return."

Even through all of her suffering, Ruth maintains that it was for the better.

"No matter how much I hate to admit it, some of the things people said regarding my selfishness and what not were entirely true," she said. "I wish it hadn't been thrown at my face like a grenade, [but] it still helped me reflect and change myself to become a better person."

The interview finished, she gets up and leaves. I head off in another direction, but I can't help but be reminded by the scene in "The Breakfast Club," when the jock, the nerd, the princess, the weirdo, and the future-convict overcome their differences and pour out their hearts to each other (albeit, fueled by cannabis).

As high schoolers, we learn to put up so many walls around us, so that to actually have empathy for another human being becomes difficult. Like Ruth, we eventually learn not to trust, to speak out against another rather than for. We judge, because it's so easy, because it's our culture.

The problem with the lens in which we combat bullying is that we assume that bullying is visible. We assume that we can tell when a classmate is being put down, that we will know when to step in and intervene.

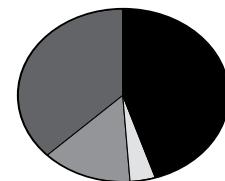
But so much of the time it's subconscious and passive. Someone tells you a story about another person. In the instance you nod and say, "Wow that person's an idiot" or, "Wow, she's a slut," you become one in the faceless mob, this faceless ghoul that stares at the person while she lies in bed, contemplating suicide, wondering why everyone hates her.

Truly, the ocean of collective hate is composed of none other than a multitude of hastily formed judgments. It is a group effort: We are the cause of our culture, and we are the cause of their misery.

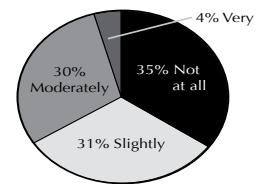
Ruth had only one wish for our school. "...that when people said something like 'I hate her' to others, that people who didn't even know me wouldn't just agree and say 'Same I hate her' ... It would have made me feel as though not the entire school was against me. Like there was at least some hope, or some people who wouldn't judge." ♦

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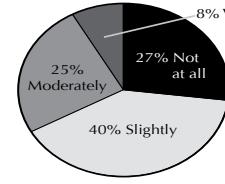
Which of the school's bullying policies are most successful?



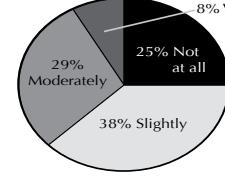
How effective have the school's antibullying efforts been thus far?



How comfortable do you feel to approach a counselor if bullied?



How concerned are you with bullying at the school?



The Falcon polled 100 students.

ACADEMICS >> Harms of grade-crazed atmosphere

continued from pg. S1

as if speaking of their dying puppies. As for us, we learned to dodge the topic altogether.

Day by day, we began to feel more and more inferior. We began to seek the company of those who shared our less-than-perfect grades, whose eyes we could look into without feeling shame. We're still friends with high-scoring students, of course, but it's different.

As freshmen, after teachers passed back tests, we dreaded the inevitable question, "How did you do?" Then our failure would be scrutinized and dissected under our friends' shocked stares. It had always seemed better to just lie about our grades.

When it comes down to it, it's hard

to tell others about our private struggle with grades. We tell ourselves that we're tough and independent — and we harbor the irrational hope that lying will motivate us to achieve the grades we claim to have.

At the same time, we're guilty of inflicting the same pressure on our friends. We, too, check Aeries far too frequently and are self-proclaimed grade-grubbers who will beg teachers for that extra half point.

Even crazier than the bragging rights over top grades is the pecking order created by what classes students take.

We remember the frenzy last year during schedule requests as our peers chose between honors and regular Chemistry.

"Are you taking Chemistry Honors?"

"I don't know, I might just take regu-



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lar." The former walks away, wordless.

Sure, we're guilty of doing the same, but we still hope that the time we are occupied with choosing between classes like AP US History and regular US

History, we will have moved past our culture of judgment. With luck, the academic hierarchy on campus will have faded away in the transition between sophomore and junior year. ♦

JOURNEY >> From suffering and tears to self-respect

continued from pg. S1

second grade, when another girl promptly reminded me, "Shouldn't you be going to the boys' bathroom?" After that I resolved to never cut my hair again, and I lived up to that pact all the way until seventh grade. I did not understand until then how powerful words could be. If one comment changed my behavior for five years, perhaps we should choose our words carefully.

The bullying continued throughout elementary school. I remember crying at night, fearing the morning when I would have to go back to that wretched place, and face those wretched people. If it wasn't apparent enough, one girl declared to my face, "Nobody likes you. I'm sorry, but it's true."

It was then that I realized I needed a change. My bubbly, outgoing personality did not fit well with the socially isolated 30 kids in my grade, or at least that was what I told my parents when I gently requested to switch schools.

I ENTERED REDWOOD MIDDLE school with surprising optimism. I was determined to start clean. But the world of the public school system was so new to me. Sixth grade girls in short skirts fought over boys and gossiped about the latest couples.

Desperate to fit in and avoid the judgment I had suffered in elementary school, I exchanged my overworn uniforms for new clothes, all picked out by my mother. Big mistake.

The next day, the scrutinizing eyes of the members of the popular crowd scornfully stared at me. I felt like I was auditioning for a play, my every feature examined by those who would decide my social fate. I let their opinions consume me, which was my biggest flaw.

When changing my appearance was not enough, I decided to make a Facebook account, rather counterintuitive in retrospect. Like any excited first-time Facebook user, I started to post silly statuses, not expecting the comments I would receive.

At the beginning of the holiday break, I posted a status that read

"I'm going to die of boredom."

"YAY!" someone commented.

"Well you know what, I'm still alive," I replied, trying to defend myself.

"NOOOOO."

It was the first time someone had ever wished I was dead, and the words etched themselves into my brain. Even if I were to remove them, they still remain to this day untouched on the Internet, exactly as they were.

The next day, the same person posted on my wall "I'm sorry for being mean to you ... PS: my dad forced me to do this."

My only response was "lol." What else could I say?

Other comments followed. "Ugh, I hate you." "Just go to your [expletive] where you belong."

Fed up, I temporarily disabled my Facebook account, my last post being "Actually I'm going to cancel my fb account. After all, everyone hates me on it."

SEVENTH GRADE passed by uneventfully. I had situated myself into a group of friends, and felt for the most part, accepted, but not for long.

Gradually, throughout the course of eighth grade, I realized that the group seemed to avoid me. Whenever I proposed hanging out, they made up excuses to get out of it, except for when I offered to host a gathering at my house,

I somehow acquired a cloak of invisibility, but unlike Harry Potter, had no control over when to take it off.

or when I told funny jokes for them to laugh at. In effect, the friendships were one-sided.

One by one, they started to turn their backs on me. The girl who had been my best friend started to drift away, without me even realizing it. When she neglected to invite me to her birthday party the following year, I knew it was over for good.

One day in the beginning of freshman year, my last close friend suddenly stopped talking to me, leaving me no explanation, not even a quarrel to precede it. I lay in my bed struggling to figure out what was wrong with me, what I had done wrong. Sleep didn't come easily for weeks.

Those feelings of confusion eventually morphed into anger and frustration. I felt like a used tissue, thrown away when they were done with me. Any time I tried to approach them and apologize for whatever I had done, they deliberately got up and left.

One that excludes is cowardly, but at the same time, ingenious. All you have to do is turn the other direction and let the victim blame themselves for it. And

the best part is, it comes at little moral cost. "I didn't push her, I didn't insult her, I just stopped talking to her. No big deal."

Although friendless, I wore a mask upon my face to hide my loneliness, and produced a fake smile to those who even bothered to talk to me.

I approached a group of people my freshman year during lunch one day and sat a mere two feet away. Not one person noticed me or even said hello. I ate lunch alone, and it wasn't the first time. I somehow acquired a cloak of invisibility, but unlike Harry Potter, had no control over when to take it off.

As an extrovert forced to be mute, I became overcome with fear, fear that no one would ever notice me, fear that I would lose my identity. It was these feelings that drove me to write that note in my diary. It came to a point that I feared my own birthday, that no one would remember.

A SELECT FEW INDIVIDUALS made all the difference in my life at the end of freshman year and the beginning of my sophomore year. They reached down into the hole I had dug myself, and pulled me out by looking past superficial barriers of appearance and social status, and appreciating me for who I am.

Slowly but surely, I began to take off the mask more often, and let people see the real me. In doing so, I rediscovered my identity, my passions, my values and realized that there is more to me than the insults and comments claimed there was.

And soon, I stopped crying all together.

Yet after all the obstacles I had to face to get to where I am now, I would not take any of it back. If it were not for the disparaging insults, I would have continued to change myself to fit the expectations of others. If it were not for my "friends" who abandoned me, I would never have understood that true friendship stems from a deeper appreciation of each other's ideas.

But most importantly, I learned to stop caring, to stop valuing the opinions of others over my own.

Frankly, changing this attitude is a matter of time, but it was well worth the wait. People can either accept me or judge, but either way, no one can hurt me now. ♦



Courtesy of VIVIAN WANG