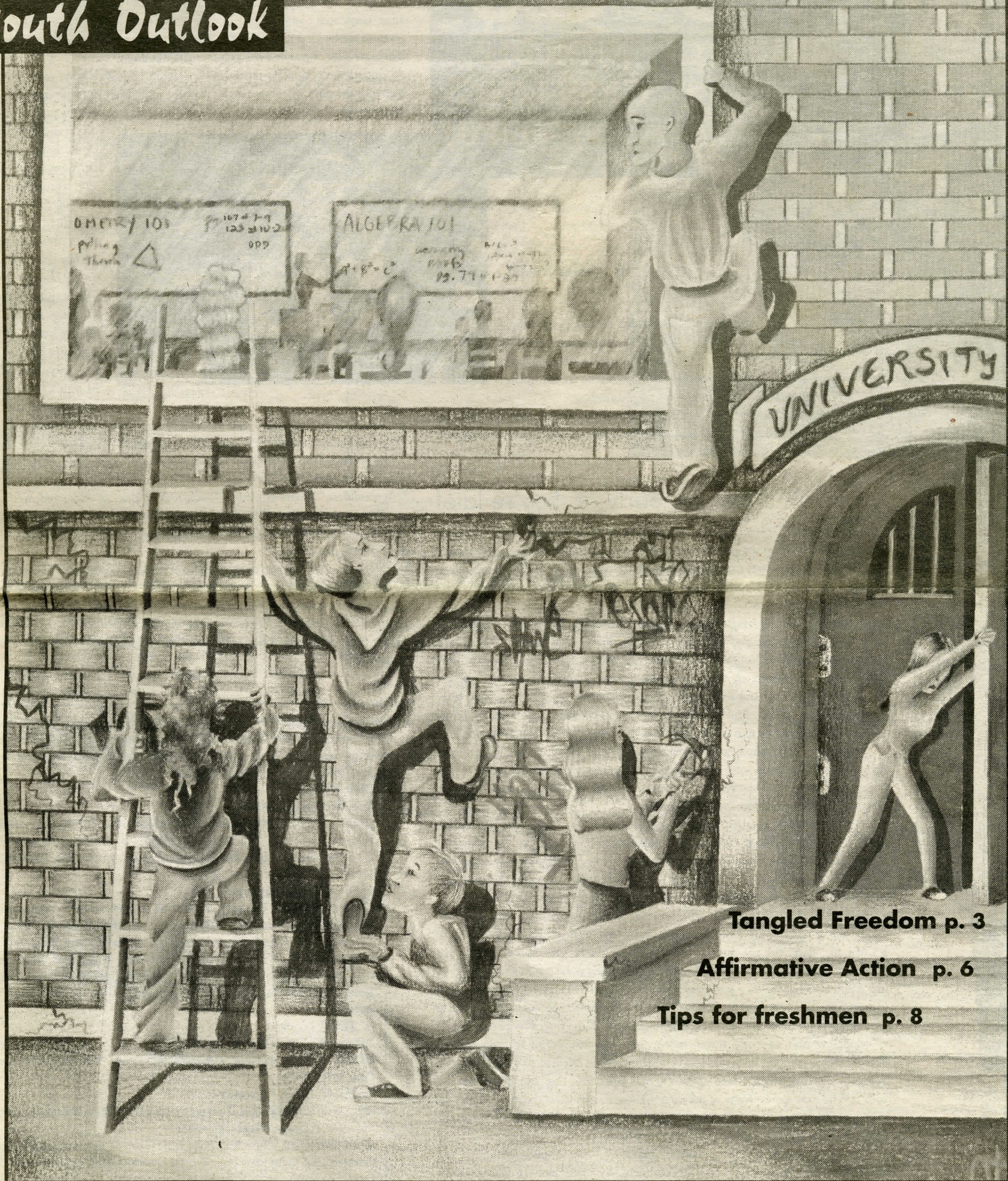


YO!

SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 1995 • VOL. 5 • NO. • 4

BACK
TO
SCHOOL

Youth Outlook



Tangled Freedom p. 3

Affirmative Action p. 6

Tips for freshmen p. 8

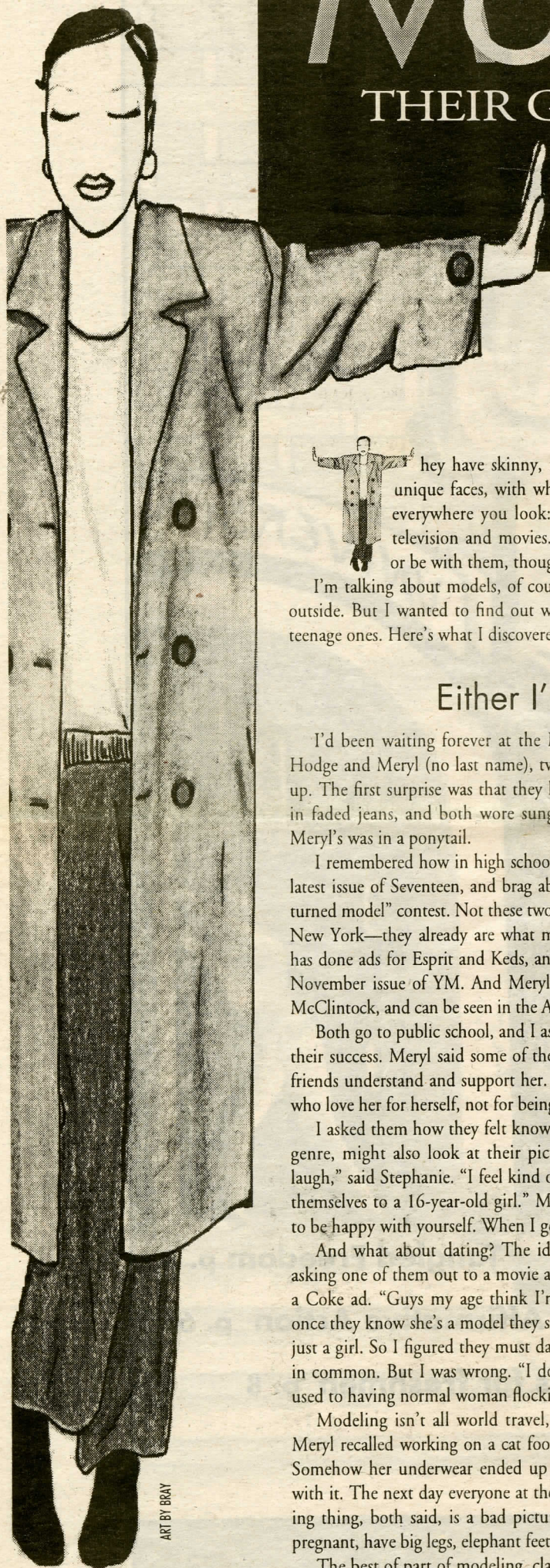
COLLEGE

WHAT'S IT WORTH? WHO'S IT FOR?

Roundtable p. 4

Models

THEIR GLAMOROUS, GRUELING LIFE



ART BY BRAY

By Stanley Joseph



They have skinny, toned bodies topped by glowing, unique faces, with white teeth and shiny hair. They're everywhere you look: billboards, magazines, catalogs, television and movies. Everyone wants to be like them or be with them, though few would admit it.

I'm talking about models, of course. We all know what they look like from the outside. But I wanted to find out what they were like on the inside, especially the teenage ones. Here's what I discovered:

Either I'm early or they're late!

I'd been waiting forever at the McDonald's on Haight Street when Stephanie Hodge and Meryl (no last name), two models from Mitchell Management, showed up. The first surprise was that they looked like normal teenagers. Both were skinny in faded jeans, and both wore sunglasses. Stephanie had her hair in pigtails, and Meryl's was in a ponytail.

I remembered how in high school all the girls would gather around to look at the latest issue of Seventeen, and brag about how they'd sent their photos to the "reader turned model" contest. Not these two! No need to win a contest or wait for a call from New York—they already are what many girls dream of becoming. At 16, Stephanie has done ads for Esprit and Keds, and she has a seven-page spread coming out in the November issue of YM. And Meryl, who's only 14, recently shot an ad for Jessica McClintock, and can be seen in the April, May and June issues of Teen magazine.

Both go to public school, and I asked them how their female classmates reacted to their success. Meryl said some of the girls act judgmental towards her, but her close friends understand and support her. Stephanie said she only hangs around with girls who love her for herself, not for being a model.

I asked them how they felt knowing that much older women, of the 30s and 40s genre, might also look at their pictures and long to be like them. "It makes me laugh," said Stephanie. "I feel kind of bad! It just seems like they shouldn't compare themselves to a 16-year-old girl." Meryl added, "They have to realize that you have to be happy with yourself. When I get older I hope I won't be like that."

And what about dating? The idea of a five-foot, baggy-gear, acne-faced boy asking one of them out to a movie and getting a "yes" seemed like something out of a Coke ad. "Guys my age think I'm too good for them," said Meryl, adding that once they know she's a model they see her as something to be conquered rather than just a girl. So I figured they must date male models—at least they'd have something in common. But I was wrong. "I don't date them," insisted Stephanie. "They're so used to having normal woman flocking all over them. They think they're so suave."

Modeling isn't all world travel, money and glamour, according to these two. Meryl recalled working on a cat food commercial where she had to do fast changes. Somehow her underwear ended up in the makeup artist's bag, and he went home with it. The next day everyone at the agency knew about it. But the most embarrassing thing, both said, is a bad picture. Meryl ran down the possibilities: "You look pregnant, have big legs, elephant feet or a funny face."

The best of part of modeling, claimed Stephanie, is that it builds character. "You become a better person," she said, "because there's so much rejection that you learn to know yourself."

They think they're so suave?

Back when most little boys were dreaming about being cowboys or Superman, Wenty Barrett was imagining himself on the cover of a magazine. A 22-year-old black model for the Stars agency, Wenty looks like your average clean-cut athletic type. He said he got his start in fashion shows at school, and then hooked up with

an agency. Since then he's shot ads for companies like MCI, Mervyn's and Nike.

I had to wonder how he felt auditioning for jobs and being judged by his appearance. Guys aren't supposed to care how they look, right? Wrong. "My looks were given to me by God," said Wenty. "I'm so fortunate to have the looks to be a model. There are a lot of people who wish they did but don't."

But seriously, how do other guys feel about it? Just imagine trying to play football with the guys when your body is worth more than your life insurance. Imagine the remarks—"You look better than your girlfriend," etc. Wenty assured me that was

all in my imagination. "I don't feel uncomfortable or funny about it (modeling) around my friends," he said. "They give respect and think I can go far. They understand there's money involved."

Thinking of all those ads featuring couples in sizzling poses, I asked Wenty how it felt to hold or kiss a girl who wasn't his girlfriend in front of a bunch of strangers. He told me he likes it and

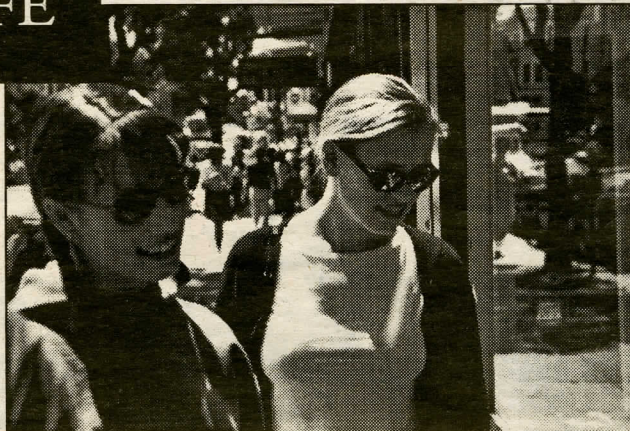


PHOTO BY STANLEY JOSEPH

doesn't mind getting close in public. But as far as unstaged romance goes, he said, "I'm not into female models because they're too skinny. I really like thicker girls."

In his daily life, Wenty said, "A lot of girls say I look great. 'He's fine' or 'He's cute.' I have no problem with that." So what exactly attracts them to you?, I prodded. "My shoulders," Wenty explained, "because they stick out and people notice them."

The downside of modeling, Wenty said, is waiting to see if you've got a job or not. "It can blow your self-esteem. A lot of people get out of the business because of that. It's rough out there."

When the last flash of the camera is over, what comes next for these models? Meryl and Stephanie want to be fashion designers, and Wenty plans to become an actor. After interviewing these three I realized young models are just like the rest of us. They're geared up like us, listen to the same music, and have their own goals for the future. The only difference is that they've landed a part-time job we'd all love to have. YO!

YO!, a journal of youth life in the Bay Area, is a project of Pacific News Service. YO! works closely with the Freedom Forum Pacific Coast Center, the Center for the Integration and Improvement of Journalism at San Francisco State University, Youth Radio, the Media Academy at Fremont High School, Hospitality House, Omega Boys Club and Chinatown Youth Center.

EDITOR: Nell Bernstein

ASSISTANT EDITOR: Andrea N. Jones

EDITORIAL ADVISORS: Dennis Bernstein, Bob Beyers, Sandy Close, Ted Fang, Jon Funabiki, Felix Gutierrez, Pete Hammer, David Inocencio, Nina Martin, Eric Newton, Margaret Norris, Steve O'Donoghue, Richard Rodriguez, Franz Schurmann, Ghanya Thomas, Paul Tran, Joan Walsh, Kevin Weston

EDUCATIONAL DIRECTOR: Lisa Margonelli

YO! STAFF (partial listing): Rick Aguirre, Khai Ali, Hanif Bey, Chaya Bell-Gumaer, Michael Buffington, Selby Bullard, Loi Bui, Melinda Busch, Christian Cagigal, Brent Calderwood, Keith Chan, Vitin Cruz, Lyn Duff, Tom Eppenberger, Ron Fox, David Gaither, Serge Jones, Tandenico Jones, Stanley Joseph, Sang Yong Kim, Nishat Kurwa, Russell Lash, Angela Lew, Patrick Macias, Ri'Chard Magee, Malcolm Marshall, Tucky McKey, Patrick "Chop" Mendoza, Kelly Miller, Pamela Misa, Fariba Nawa, Samantha Oak, Romy Ruukel, Pao Sae Chao, Mark Schurmann, Ladie Terry, Gabrielle Turner, JR Valrey, Edward "Cash" Wallace, Chris Wu

ART DIRECTOR: Tucky McKey

DESIGN + LAYOUT: Mitche Manitou

ARTWORK: Bray, Brent Calderwood, Steele Faltis, Flynn Gleason, Tucky McKey, Armand Tam, Liz Thayer, Jerod Wheaton

PHOTOGRAPHY TEACHER: Kim Campisano

PHOTOGRAPHY SUPPORTERS: Ilford, Photographer's Supply, Oriental Photo Distributing Co., Harvey Milk Photo Center, Rick Rocamora, Rosalie Blakey-Wardell

PACIFIC NEWS SERVICE'S WORK WITH YOUTH IS SUPPORTED BY: Arca Foundation, BankAmerica Foundation, Lillian Boehm Foundation, S.W. Cowell Foundation, Mary A. Crocker Trust, The Nathan Cummings Foundation, Freedom Forum, Gap Foundation, Wallace A. Gerbode Foundation, Evelyn and Walter Haas Fund, Luke C. Hancock Foundation, Walter and Elyse Haas Foundation, James Irvine Foundation, Walter S. Johnson Foundation, Pacific Telesis, San Francisco Foundation, Stulsati Foundation, Van Lobens Sels Foundation, Zellerbach Family Fund

YO! is a Bay Area affiliate of Youth Communications, a network of teen newspapers produced across the country and headquartered in Washington D.C.

Please direct inquiries about joining the YO! network, subscribing or advertising, to Nell Bernstein, PNS, 450 Mission Street, Suite 204, San Francisco, CA 94105, (415) 243-4364.

Tangled Freedom

Grandma, Shirley Curls, and Me

By Andrea N. Jones

“What would you like done today?” the receptionist asks me as I stand in a daze before her counter. It’s been ten years since I’ve set foot in a beauty college, and the question of what style to choose means more than the receptionist could know.

I can’t even contemplate the question without thinking of my grandmother. Before I was born, Louise Russell was famous for the hairstyles she’d fabricate in the back of her home in San Bernardino. I heard stories of women traveling the 60 miles from L.A. to have my grandmother make them glamorous. I’d sit in her back room and imagine the scene: The pressing comb in its tiny stove, Grandma swinging her Marcells (metal curling utensils) around like Bill Pickett while managing to maintain a slippery patch of pink pressing wax on the back of her hand. These women of the forties and fifties would ride back toward Hollywood like poised Divas—hair silky, curled or waved.

By the time my baby-soft hair had grown into a thick, bushy mane, my grandmother was too old and tired to mess with so much hair. She preferred to take me downtown to the beauty college and let the “girls” deal with me. I’d sit while Grandma made arrangements with the receptionist for two “colored girls”—a sophomore for her and a senior for me. Heads would turn as my stylist and I crossed the room, and I’d grin back, not caring whether the women were marveling at my cuteness or at the discombobulated state of my woolly ponytails.

“Are you tender-headed?” my stylist would ask, fingering through my hair, and I’d stoically contend that I wasn’t. I’d suffer through minor tugging and pulling and leave the school with bright colored bands around my neatly twisted hair and the scent of cherry shampoo and coconut hair grease in my nose.

After Grandma died, I had to resort to home-relaxers and occasional visits to over-priced, over-made up stylists. But ten years later, it was memories of my grandmother that pulled me back to the beauty college—this time at Laney College in Oakland. I’m still sitting waiting for my stylist when it becomes clear that the beauty college wouldn’t be quite the cherry-scented idyll I remembered from my childhood.

One student with nearly 1,600 hours under her belt—almost enough to graduate—is calling out her sister-in-law for phoning in and asking if “someone at the college” could do

her hair. “I was like, ‘I can do your hair,’” recounts the irate stylist. She’s proud of her skills, as she should be: She’s hooked herself up with the same wispy golden curls that hip-hop balladeer Mary J. Blige probably pays big money for.

My student dresser, Yvette, is round and beautiful with long Gucci braids (thick twisted plaits), and reminds me of the young women dressers who used to look so old to me. “I always did my friends’ hair,” she tells me as she wraps a shiny metallic smock around me. “When I started this, I just fell in love with it and started dreaming about having my own shop.”

Yvette takes my hair down from the loose bun I wrapped it up in this morning and fingers through it. “My hair is

Classes were suspended for two days. A couple of the students did her hair and make-up for the burial.

Back at her station, Yvette gives me a generous dose of brown gel to cast the wet set of my choosing. I decide on fat Shirley curls all overflowing from my crown and into my face. But just as Yvette is emptying out the bag of plastic rollers, I spot a young hairdresser with large sculpted fingerwaves and become inspired. Yvette adds enough gel to hook up some fingerwaves in the front, leaving enough hair free at the crown to make my fat curls successful.

I look in the mirror and my own face takes me back a generation or two. Back in the day, young black women’s creativity might have been restricted on the job or in daily life, but they let loose with their hair, their one pliable appendage. Fingerwaves added to pincurls added to a slick roll at the back with fat curls falling from it. *Voila*, art: a reflection of both the molder and the molded.

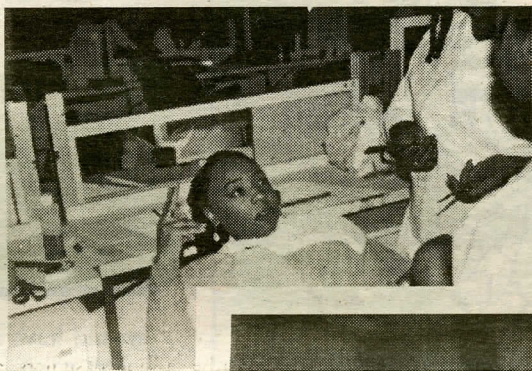
But the young women of Grandma’s generation didn’t face the conflicts today’s young women do every time we straighten our hair. Rebellious against Eurocentric beauty standards, our mothers fought for and won the right to ‘fro, braid and dread their daughters’ hair to reassert our African heritage and beauty. The result for a lot of us daughters is that we question our consciousness every six weeks: *Am I perming for my man, my boss or me? Can I love myself with my natural hair texture?*

Hair for Grandma had an entirely different meaning. She spent her childhood during the Depression caring for her six younger brothers and sisters, and her teens fighting courts and social workers to keep them. She kept them exceptionally groomed to avoid any

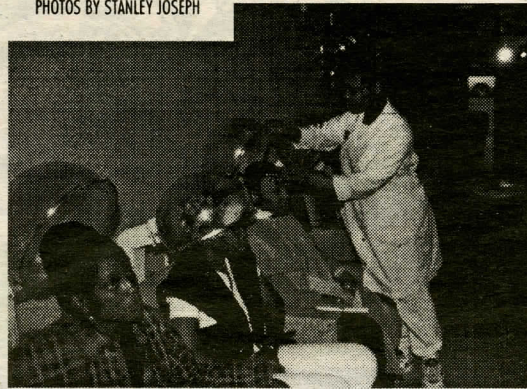
false charges of neglect, and discovered her love for self-expression through hair in the process. By the time I came around she’d gotten quite modest about her own appearance, and went to the school not to get her hair whipped up but to be pampered. She

went to be rubbed, massaged and cared for at her crown—to receive a little service for all she’d put in over the years.

By the time I get out from under the beehive drier I’m one of the last clients in the shop. Yvette removes the last moldings, *et voila*: my 1930s hairstyle, one Grandma might have worn in her youth. I’d gone back to the beauty college out of nostalgia for my girlhood, but when I look in the mirror I’m surprised to see a grown woman—one who makes her own choices and manages her complicated freedom. I think Grandma might have recognized her. **40!**



PHOTOS BY STANLEY JOSEPH



the same length as yours under my braids,” she tells me. “Maybe a little shorter.” I confess that I’ve been using Mane ‘n’ Tail, a lengthening conditioner which is all the rage. The product was originally marketed for horses, and I used to have to get it in pet stores until it caught on. Now I buy it at Walgreen’s. Yvette tells me she uses it too.

We move over to the sink and Yvette opens the five-gallon bottle of cherry shampoo. She works up a cool lather with her massage and that ambrosial scent emanates from it. I scan the room, watching young women indulging other women, and listening to the harmonic chatter that could easily be confused with gossip. Sometimes the students misinterpret the talk, Yvette tells me, and feuds begin. But for the most part they get along.

Yvette tells me something else that makes me think about how much has changed since the days when Grandma did hair. Just two weeks ago, a student who was about to graduate was shot at a party. “Candy had 1,600 hours and was really good,” Yvette tells me as she delicately towel blots my hair.

COLLEGE



PATHS AND PITFALLS

A **YO!** Roundtable Discussion

For more and more young people in California, going to college is a great struggle—if an option at all. As tuitions rise, college enrollment has dropped by 200,000 in the last three years. Meanwhile, the college-age population is projected to increase by half a million over the next decade. The University of California Regents have voted to abolish affirmative action, and the California State University system is talking about eliminating remedial education courses.

So just how critical is it to get a college degree? While experts are adamant that you'll never get a good job without one, not all young people are convinced. New graduates today are likely to earn 12 to 15 percent less in real terms than they

👉 In 1995, prison spending in California surpassed spending on higher education. Just ten years ago California spent four times more on higher education than prisons.

would have a decade ago.

YO! assembled a roundtable of young people at the crossroads between high school and college to explore how necessary—and how possible—going to college is for them. **YO!** reporter Lyn Duff moderated the roundtable.

YO!: Is college necessary?

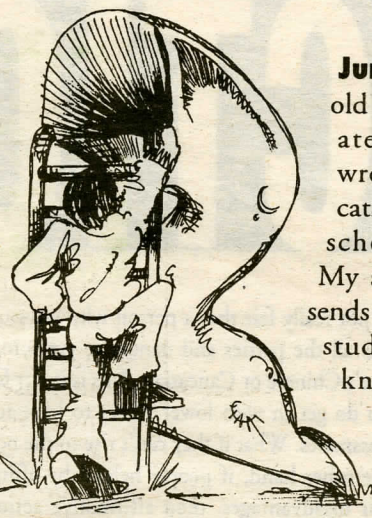
Ron Fox (a 19-year-old sophomore at community college): For me it's the only way I can get ahead. I grew up in an inner city neighborhood where college wasn't popular. People weren't even going to school. I thought I'd just learn a trade. But after high school I got a job working construction. I found I wasn't ready for the things I had to deal with—disputes with the foreman, people being let go at a rapid pace. I started thinking about college because I wanted time to grow a little bit before I rushed back out there.

Rick Aguirre (a 22-year-old high school graduate): I went for one year but dropped out because I couldn't afford it. I was working

ART BY ARMAND TAM

👉 The number of bus drivers with college degrees has doubled in the last ten years.

three jobs and sleeping in class. Currently I'm temping, I publish my own newspaper about gay and lesbian youth, and I do consulting. I'm making more money now than a lot of people my age with college degrees. But I do feel kind of incomplete. It's like never having ridden a bike when you were a kid.



Gabrielle Turner (an 18-year-old high school graduate): I have a lot of dreams, and the only thing that would keep me from realizing them would be not having that little slip of paper from college. The only thing that stands in my way is money. I have to support myself.

Kristen Romley (a 17-year-old high school senior): Where I live—Marin County—everybody goes to college. I wouldn't mind taking time off after high school and experiencing other things. But the second you enter my high school, they keep reiterating: "If you want to get into college, you have to do this, you have to do that." Everyone I've ever known has gone to college.

Al Santiago (a 19-year-old vocational education student): I knew I couldn't afford to go to a

Jun Yun (an 18-year-old high school graduate): That's what's wrong with our educational system—high schools aren't equal. My school or Kristen's sends 99 percent of their students to college. I know other urban high schools that send less than 50 percent.

Kristen: I think that wherever you live, if you want to go to college badly enough you'll find a way. There are so many opportunities.

Gabrielle: It all depends on how you come up and where you come up. Where I come from, going to college is not a main goal. You

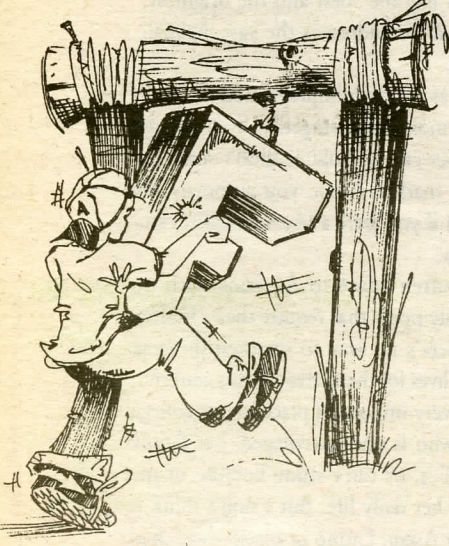
The average college student graduates \$10,000 in debt.

guys assume you're going to be successful because that's what your schools teach you. In poorer schools, it's gotten to the point where they don't even care if we get anywhere.

Al: With the reduction of financial aid and the jacking up of tuition, college is becoming accessible only to the more privileged. Everybody tells you how good education is, how necessary, but when

75 percent of young people think they will be worse off financially than their parents.

four-year college, so I decided to get training to be an EMT (emergency medical technician). After that, I hope to get a job. But it's disturbing to know that certain high schools just gear you towards a vocation and you're limited by what others perceive you as able to do.



you try to get there, society slams the door in your face.

Kristen: But if you have it in your mind to get somewhere, you can get there, no matter where you are. I mean, you can go to a library, you can talk to people, you can look anywhere.

Ron: I know it sounds ridiculously elementary, but not everybody has even basic skills like how to use a library to look up how to get a job or just do some reading.

College graduates earn 77 percent more than high school graduates.

Total annual tuition at UC Berkeley in 1980: \$766. Total in 1995: \$4,354.

Kristen: But there are these lists of scholarships—you should see them—for everything down to people with asthma. You can probably get one for being left-handed. Or you can go to junior college. If you're motivated, you'll get there.

Gabrielle: Don't assume that people who don't go to college aren't motivated. Many of us who are trying for the scholarships, who have the motivation, still have responsibilities that kids who are leeching off mom and dad don't have. And if your high school is poor, they don't hand out the right books or teach. So no matter how hard the kids study, they won't get the same education that a good school offers, and their scores won't be as high.

YO!: What do you see as a solution?

Kristen: In Marin, our community raises money. Maybe it's because they have more money, I don't know. All schools should get the same amount of money, but I don't think they do.

Ron: They don't. At one point they were going to close all the Richmond high schools because they were \$2.1 million in debt. I think they'd rather fund kids from upper-class communities than from lower-class. They figure you (Marin) guys are wizards, and they don't want to take too many chances on the lower class.

Jun: I believe that whatever high school an individual goes to, he or she can make the best of it because colleges do recognize where you

grow up and what opportunities your school offers. I think the solution is for each person to take advantage of whatever you have, because without a college education, you're going to face a tough life.

Al: But even if you want to, a lot of schools have tracking where they predetermine where you go. If you're tracked for vocational, they give you classes like metal shop and auto body. For the more privileged, they have classes to prepare you for college—how to fill out the forms, how to get the scholarship. The solution is for everyone to have the same opportunities.

Jun: If the individual truly wants to go to college, he or she can take out a loan. I'm taking out a

\$7,000 loan to go to Berkeley next year.

Ron: I agree—it's all in how bad you want it. I'm not pointing any fingers at those of you who have



Percentage of youths enrolled in college:
1970: 52.3%
1993: 65.4%

more opportunities. I'm not going to say I can't get there, because I know I will. I've just got to climb a few more steps than you. But we'll all meet up and drink tea. YO!



College?

ACTION REACTION

AFFIRMATIVE

ATTACKS ON AFFIRMATIVE ACTION DIVIDE US ALL

By Lyn Duff

According to the University of California Regents, they abolished race based affirmative action all for me. I'm a 19-year-old college school who went to an inner city high school and who lives below the poverty level. And I'm white.

But I still think what the Regents did was a disaster. Their attacks on affirmative action, and those of other politicians, are simply a way to divide people by pitting the "model minority" Asians against the "unable to compete" blacks against the "victim of reverse discrimination" whites. In reality, of course, affirmative action has not eliminated oppression based on race or gender, nor has it caused discrimination against white men as a group. Almost 95 percent of upper management positions in this country are held by white men. Even though segregation was outlawed 40 years ago, black and Latino youth on the whole receive an inferior education and are not generally "tracked" to college. It's ridiculous to think ours is no longer a racist, sexist, ghettoized society.

Governor Wilson speaks openly about people who "can't compete" in a system supposedly based on merit. In reality, not everyone can "make it" because we live in a capitalist system where only a small percentage can be on top and the rest of us have to support them. Affirmative action is certainly not enough to remedy this, but it needs to be defended, and the lie of "reverse discrimination" exposed.

WITHOUT DIVERSITY UC WILL LACK GREATNESS

By Angela Lew

I'll never forget the day I gingerly opened the envelope, then savored every word of the letter telling me I'd been accepted to Lowell, the best high school in the city. For a non-Asian, acceptance at Lowell might not have been such a big deal, but I'm Chinese. Lowell is required by law to balance out the ethnicity of the student body. That means Chinese have to have better scores and grades than students of other races to get in.

My experience at Lowell leaves me of two minds about the fairness of affirmative action. On the one hand, I believe people can't control being born Caucasian, Chinese or Latino but they can control how hard they

work. It's not really fair that a person who stays up late studying for that test, misses all the parties and dances to get into Lowell, won't make it because she's Chinese or Caucasian. Nor is it fair for black and Latino students who do get in with lower scores to have to compete with higher-scoring classmates. What if they can't rise to the occasion?

On the other hand, if people helped by affirmative action do overcome their disadvantages, then affirmative action is the best thing on earth. It can unlock a person's potential, which is something a score or grade could never do.

Moreover, without affirmative action, Lowell might turn into an all-girls Chinese school, and I wouldn't want to be part of it. What's the point of my parents emigrating from Hong Kong, which is 97 percent Chinese, just so I can go to a school that is 100 percent Chinese? If a school like Lowell isn't diverse, then the equality of opportunity that makes this country the destination of millions of hopeful immigrants would be a lie.

Two of my sisters attend UC campuses, and someday I might attend too. But without diversity, UC would lack the greatness I look forward to.

ANYTHING I GET IN LIFE I WILL EARN

By Ron Fox

As an individual black man, I feel I don't need any favors from the government. Anything I get in life I will earn.

If I got something through affirmative action, that would take a chunk out of my success. I will not let anyone say to me, "You got here because of affirmative action." I believe in hard work. I can make it through life just like people of any other race.

I do believe affirmative action has made a difference in the work world. But I also believe it's just another form of control, like welfare. Anything that is given to you can be stripped away. Something you earn can't.

If I am denied a job because of my race, I tell myself I don't need to be working under people who hold such crooked values. I don't need affirmative action to define my success.

CHECKING THE BOX MARKED "ASIAN"

By Nishat Kurwa

I used to think that affirmative action wasn't fair because merit is merit, and if you can't cut it you shouldn't get in over those who have worked harder.

Now I've come to believe that students educated in inner city schools will have a hard time measuring up to those from schools with the money, facilities and faculty to make them look like the "best and the brightest." The real problem affirmative action needs to address is the vast inequalities in primary and secondary education.

My problem with affirmative action as it's been implemented at UC in recent years is that it's tended to lump most Asians together even though many Asians have been educated in inner city schools. It didn't seem fair that just because you checked one box marked Asian, you automatically lost an opportunity you would have had if you were a black or Latino student who got the same shoddy education.

Indian immigrants, for example, often come to America with no money, relatives or friends but with family needs that require their children to sacrifice study time and grades. There's no way to distinguish these "Asians" from those who've already built lives for themselves in this country.

I think that affirmative action has a very important place in our college system when it benefits any minority who is underprivileged, has family problems more pressing than the S.A.T.'s, or can't study because of the screaming, crying or gunshots in his or her daily life. But I don't think it should benefit people like me—whether Asian, Latino or black—who had opportunities, family support and a quiet place to study. We had the chance to prove our mettle. If we didn't, it's no one's fault but our own.



IS AMERICA ONLY FOR THE RICH?

By Ladie Terry

First the problem was immigrants, then welfare, and now affirmative action. Now I see why God is allowing floods to occur, and heat waves to kill people—because America doesn't know how to treat the unfortunate. Did you know that God judges a nation by how it treats its poor? And guess what? America isn't good at this type of job. She's heading for a fall.

America is like a bully, picking on those who don't know how to defend themselves. My brother Mumia Abu-Jamal who faces execution on for speaking truthfully; my sister because she's on welfare; my friend because he's a Haitian refugee, and now me because my high school isn't the best in the city to shepherd me into the best university.

I'm unfortunate right now, for my mother is dead and my father deserted me, but I'm trying my damndest to stay in college and maintain a steady job. I didn't ask to be in this situation, but I'm here, America. I'm here in your world, and you mean to tell me this world is made just for the rich?

Even Jesus was poor, and he traveled among poor people. There will always be poor people, and you can't just dust us under the carpet like you may want because the dust will accumulate, and before you know it you'll have to buy a bigger carpet. You've already shaken our bones, right now we are rattling, and sometime in the next year you may roll us, but when we put our parts back together and learn to stand up as a body, we will fight back with a sword in our hand!

THE BOTTOM OF THE BARREL

By Mark Schurmann

Ask me about affirmative action and I will tell you not about the politics of race but about the people I know. One face comes to mind.

The other day I ran into Sarah, my godmother's son's wife, at my godmother's house. She stared at me with a half smile on her face. "Is that you, Mark? God, you've changed!"

She was right. I'm almost a completely different person from just a few years ago, 30 to 40 pounds lighter. Sarah, on the other hand, has more kids, and more trouble. Her husband has left her. Her two front teeth are separated by a large gap, her eyes bloodshot and full of some secret pain. Squat and overweight, with no formal education and no job, she's living at the bottom of society's barrel.

"What's your brother up to?" she asked. "He's doing real good," I said. "He has a job he likes, a place of his own."

"You still living with your parents?"

"Sure, until I get enough money to move out."

"That's nice, that's good," she answered with a slight drawl. I had no idea what she was thinking. I was a little scared. It was like looking failure straight in the face.

At that moment it occurred to me what "white trash" means—someone with no fun or pleasure, no hope, and worst of all, no one who cares. Because she's white she belongs to a group the media and most politicians would call "privileged."

"How's Cecilia?" I asked, referring to her teenage daughter.

"Always getting into trouble," she answers with a slight quiver in her voice. "She's thinking stupid, hangin' with the wrong crowd...I want to send her to some kind of trade school so she can get some work somewhere."

"What about City College?"

Sarah is silent for a moment—college is far from her thoughts. "When I was her age, it's what I did. Learned some skills and got a job."

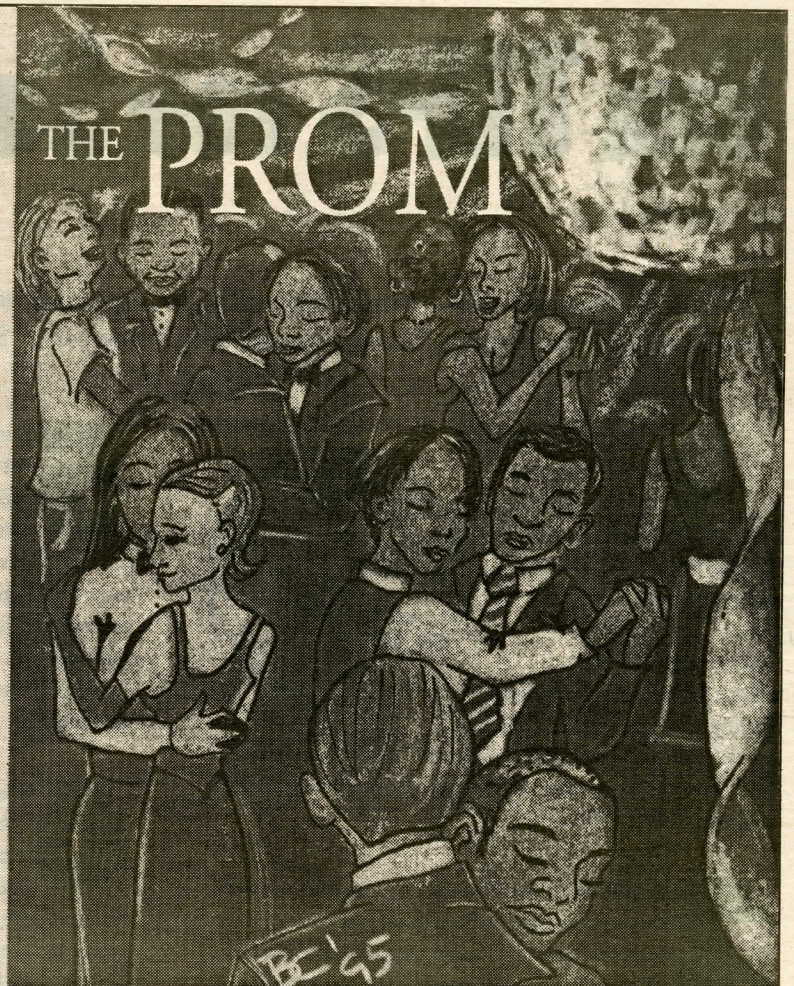
We continue to talk—about her children and my brother. Idle talk. I'm afraid to ask her about herself, afraid of the emotions such a question might evoke. I don't want to become involved. I'm afraid of her despair.

I try to string out the conversation for as long as I can, but eventually I run out of things to say.

"Your voice has changed, you sound different. You sound good," she says. I say, "It's good talking to you." She goes downstairs to the two-room in-law apartment she has in my godmother's basement.

If the point of ending race- and gender-based affirmative action is to make America more fair, the focus of concern has to shift from whose eligible to get into institutions at the top—a relatively small number—to the huge number of people being excluded at the bottom, regardless of their race or nationality. Otherwise Sarah's kids will grow up with the same despair in their eyes I see in hers, a despair I couldn't handle. YO!

OUT OF THE CLOSET AND OFF TO...



ART BY BRENT CALDERWOOD

By Brent Calderwood

"Brent Calderwood, 17, plans to take a male date to his Senior Prom," read the lead to an Alameda Newspaper Group story on lesbian and gay youth. The next day, I was barraged with threats from my Livermore High School classmates: "If you bring a fag to the prom, we'll kill you."

Every day that week I rushed home after school to clean graffiti and rotten apples from my father's house. I had just come out to him, and I knew too many gay kids living on the streets to take any chances on becoming one of them.

I rationalized my exclusion from the prom by telling myself that proms were silly, superficial and expensive—not worth the time or money. But this summer, I attended the first ever gay prom in Northern California (and one of the first anywhere), sponsored by the Lambda Youth Group and held in Hayward. Between dancing and flirting with other boys my age, I got a chance to speak to some of the prom-goers. Those who had gone to their high school proms said they'd had to either remain closeted or risk violence to do so. In this context, tonight's opportunity to be silly and superficial meant a lot.

Ken, 19, grew up in Orange County. He didn't go to his prom, he says, "because I knew I wouldn't belong there. I would not have fun." In high school, Ken explains, "being gay was something I couldn't talk about. I probably would have been killed by the football team." Ken says he came to the Lambda Youth Gay Prom '95 because he needed to: "I missed out on the whole high school experience, and something was missing inside me. I wanted to resolve something, to be able to say, 'I know I couldn't have it this way in high school, but now I can have fun.'"

Ken looks down for a moment, contemplating the buttons on his tuxedo. Suddenly he brightens and looks around Hayward's Centennial Hall in amazement, as if he's just woken up from a few years of amnesia. "I don't see many bored faces," he remarks. "My straight friends said at their high school proms the decorations were bad and the music was cheesy. But this isn't cheesy at all. It's like the straight proms you see in movies. What straight prom could you go to where the mayor speaks—or where there's an espresso bar?"

By the time the evening ends, I've interviewed many more people: two of the four protesters standing outside with

"JESUS SAVES" posters in their rubber-gloved hands; a handful of smiling parents who are volunteering as chaperones; some of the 26 on- and off-duty police officers patrolling the premises; and a dozen teenagers who've already talked to the lady from the Associated Press and don't understand why there's all this fuss just because they want to dance with each other.

The next week I visit the Lambda Youth Group, a weekly rap session in Hayward. At the meeting, the kids are still reeling with post-prom excitement. One of the most surprising prom attendees, they tell me, was Brian Morris' mother. Brian, 20, grew up in San Lorenzo. Once Brian's parents found out their son was gay, they began locking the door earlier than usual, and Brian began sleeping in his car. "If my sister is doing anything, even cheerleader practice, my mom is there!" notes Brian. "But the Lambda Prom is the first gay thing I've ever gotten her to go to. She even took two pictures of me in my tux. I don't think my mom will ever support me, but she's starting to accept me."

After the meeting, the 30-or-so kids spill out of the family counseling center and drive to a coffee shop in Castro Valley that serves as their regular post-meeting hangout. I find myself sitting across from Rachel, an 18-year-old from Hayward. Like Brian, one of the prom highlights for Rachel was the support she got from her family.

Rachel recalls how her grandmother, with whom she lives, drove to the South Hayward BART stop to pick up Rachel's girlfriend, Alaire. Rachel blushes and giggles as she describes the couple's preparations for the prom. "My grandmother helped me get into my dress, because I had to suck my fat in. Alaire got ready in the bathroom, and my grandmother helped fix the bow on her dress. Then she took pictures of us."

In the morning, Rachel recalls, her grandmother asked her why she'd gone to the prom. "I said 'to have fun,' and she just smiled at me and said 'OK.' I was happy that she supported me."

So the Lambda Youth Gay Prom turned out to be not only the prom the kids never got, but the prom many of their parents never got. Despite protesters, pickets and petitions—or maybe because of them—a lot of parents seized the occasion of Gay Prom '95 to let their kids know they loved them. In a nation where one in four homeless youths are gay kids who ran away or were kicked out by their families, this kind of solidarity is anything but silly and superficial. YO!

TEN TIPS FOR SURVIVING FRESHMAN YEAR

By Angela Lew

As a former freshman, now on to somewhat bigger things (like sophomore year), I'm very familiar with the terror, the laughter, and the excitement of each freshman day. And like many sophomores, I can't help thinking: "If I only knew then what I know now..." So with the help of several other former freshmen, I've compiled these ten tips for surviving freshman year:

1 **Study.** You may be tempted to put all your energy into meeting people, but as one recent high school graduate puts it, "You might have a whole gang of friends, but what good is that if you're still walking around the third week trying to figure out where your classes are?" And if you have too much fun, you won't pass your classes and you'll have to stay a freshman FOREVER.



2 **Be yourself** (even if you're not sure who you are). Don't imitate people you think you want to be, or become obsessed with creating an image. As Cash, 19, puts it, "If you're trying to be someone else, you're a novice. But if you're trying to be yourself, you're already an expert." If you just sit back and watch what happens, people will be drawn to you because you're more mysterious than the Human Foghorn on the other side of the cafeteria.

3 **Pick your friends carefully.** When you're sitting by yourself on a cold bench in the courtyard, you may get desperate enough to make any living, breathing creature your friend. But keep in mind that all the other freshmen are desperate for new friends too, so you really can afford to be selective. And as for people who, because of some character flaw of their own, don't want to be friends with you—forget it. You can make other friends and mercilessly slay that person later. (Just kidding!)

4 **Don't gossip.** Just think about it: If you and your friends are talking about other people, who knows what those people are saying about you? Instead of gossiping about someone you don't like, trying getting rid of those I-wish-I-could-kill-her-with-a-steak-knife feelings through another activity.

5 **Join a club.** Or try out for a sport. (I personally recommend cross country or track). This will look good on your college transcript, and you can find friends who share your interests. You can also have F-U-N without resorting to desperate measures.



ART BY STEELIE FALTIS

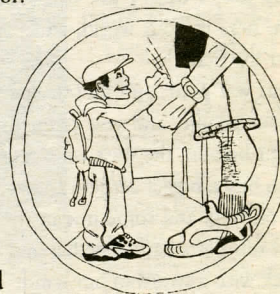
6 **Don't get taken.** For example, don't buy Fourth Floor Swimming Pool Passes when you know your school only has three floors (maybe the pool's on the roof?). Ditto for that elevator pass at the special discount price of five dollars for freshmen (the one that allows you to use the nonexistent elevator any time you can find it). Try not to be taken in by those upperclassmen.

7 **Don't fight.** Boys in particular may get challenged in the first few weeks of school. But even if you're tempted to fight in order to establish your reputation, try to rise above it. It creates a bad impression. And freshman year won't be much fun if you start it off by getting suspended or expelled.




8 **Be prepared to feel unprepared.** Freshman year is the time for a lot of changes. The friends who called you every night the first month may have drifted away by Christmas. And in a larger, more competitive school, your grades may be lower than you want for a while.

9 **Talk to upperclassmen.** Strange as it may sound, many upperclassmen actually like to talk to freshmen. They do it because they like to get their laughs, remember how it was when they were freshmen, or want to feel superior. Of course, there is that Freshman Friday tradition, where freshmen generally get harassed and egged, but they say it rarely happens to girls. If you're a guy, don't worry—egg comes off with lukewarm water. Seriously, though, I think this is just a rumor spread to scare freshmen.



10 **Break the rules.** After all, nothing is set in stone. Freshman year is about experimentation, and figuring out who you are. And a few years from now you won't even remember those humiliating freshman moments you thought you'd never forget.



Was there ever a time when you were "the new kid on the block?"

How did you deal with it?

Address responses to Stanley Joseph, YO!, 450 Mission Street, Suite 204, San Francisco, CA 94105
Please include your phone number.

We Deliver Everywhere!

Does your school get YO!?

Call (415)243-4364 for delivery



Subscribe to YO!

Subscribe to YO! (Youth Outlook), a bi-monthly journal of teen life written by young people in the San Francisco Bay Area, and get a street-level view of how young people see themselves, each other, and their world.

- \$25/one year Supporter
- \$12/one year Student
- \$50/one year Institution/organization (10 copies)

Name _____
Address _____
Phone _____

Please make checks payable to Pacific News Service and return to 450 Mission Street, Suite 204, San Francisco, CA 94105