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CELEBRATING POSITIVE CHOICES

lison

DECEMBER 2008



Michelle Larcher de Brito

*The seventh-youngest player to win a
Women's Tennis Association tour
main-draw match.*

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I'm Just Saying...

At school these days everyone is remembering Chris. I was playing my fiddle, and Chris's dad said, "When I heard your fiddle playing, it reminded me of Chris. She used to play the fiddle all the time." Or someone will say, "Remember when Chris used to wear that polka-dot dress?" Or: "Remember when Chris said I had a cutie haircut?"

Chris was a great kid. She was fun-loving and easygoing. I never saw her in a bad mood. She had a great smile, and she liked to use it. She was the only one of my students to wish me a happy birthday on my Facebook page. I wish I'd taken a minute to write her back and ask how she was doing. It was the last thing she ever said to me.

About a month ago Chris was on her way home from an after-prom party. It was a party without drugs or alcohol. But they'd stayed up all night, and everyone was tired. Her boyfriend was driving. They'd just dropped off her best friend at church. Her boyfriend pulled out onto a major road, and an oncoming car crashed into the passenger side, where Chris was sitting. She was airlifted to a big hospital, but it wasn't enough to save her life. About 12 hours after she was hit she passed away.

Remembering Chris

It was a week before the funeral. A grueling week of following her Facebook page (which was left up as a memorial) and reading comments people left to her and about her. A week full of crying, and hugging other people you saw crying. A week of putting your grief on hold until you made it to the funeral, where you had a chance of getting it all out with all the other people who were hurting.

Chris was a Christian, so her funeral was full of hope that everyone would see her again someday. Her brother, Jimmy, handed out a little card he'd written about what Chris believed. Her dad spoke a few words. People remembered her and what a great person she'd been.

But the bottom line is that everyone still misses Chris. And they're still remembering her. Just yesterday I read a Facebook post by her best friend saying she'd seen a purse while she was shopping that reminded her of Chris.

No one thinks their next moment could be their last, and it wouldn't be a healthy way to live if we did. But some tragedies are preventable. When you're driving, drive. Don't talk on your phone, don't drive tired (which is just as dangerous as driving drunk) don't drink, and don't eat. Just drive. And maybe, just maybe, you'll end up where you were going.

Until next time, have fun, be cool, and make good choices,



Céleste Perrino-Walker
Editor

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ACROSS THE CENTRAL LINE

By Elfriede Volk

Illustration by Jenn Kakoyannis

*As the dancing light particles
solidified into an image,
I stared at a blood-streaked face and recognized Cam,
who lived only three doors up.*

You are supposed to honor your parents, but what if they are unreasonable? Take driving, for instance. By law anybody 16 or older can get a driver's license with parental approval. But that law wasn't good enough for my parents.

"You can get your license when you can sign for it yourself," Dad told my oldest sister when she broached the subject.

"You're not being fair to your children," a coworker told Dad when my brother suffered the same indignity. "Everyone else his age is driving."

"As a policeman, I've seen too many kids involved in accidents."

"Driver inexperience. It can happen even if you wait until they're 40."

"True, but then they won't have as long to regret it."

My other sister accepted Dad's rule without complaining, but when I turned 16, I pointed out what I saw as a double standard.

"You've let me drive the tractor in the orchard since I was 12, and I drove the truck when we gathered the wood from the trees you cut down. So why can't I

drive on the road?"

"Because you don't have a license."

"Only because you won't let me get one. It's easier to drive on the road—no trees to knock down." (Dad wouldn't let me forget the time I started the tractor without taking it out of gear, and knocked over the tree where Mom was picking.)

"I'm not worried about the trees."

"But you've seen that I can handle a vehicle . . ."

"Yes, but can the other person handle his?"

As my seventeenth birthday came and went, I watched all my friends get their licenses and hot-rod around town. Dad's stupid rule even put a crimp in my social life. During the Christmas holidays I was invited to a party at a friend's house 45 miles away. I wanted to go so badly I would have walked. But my parents wouldn't let me, and since they were busy and I didn't drive, I couldn't

go. Totally miserable, I tried to drown my sorrows in the latest *Star Trek* when the phone rang.

"Turn on the TV!" Carla, a friend from school, screamed in my ear. "There's been an accident and 10 people were hurt. One of them's Sunshine . . ."

Dropping the phone, I flew back to the TV. "Sunshine" was our code name for Randy Stolp, a boy I liked. Just before the holidays Randy had asked me to write him a card. Not wanting to betray my true feelings, I wrote, "I don't really know you, and don't want to know you, but have a nice Christmas anyway." He had laughed, and read it to his friends before tearing it up.

The audio on our old TV came on before the picture. "... the road was bare and dry, and police have ruled out alcohol . . ." As the dancing light particles solidified into an image, I stared at a blood-streaked face and recognized Cam, who lived only three doors up.

"No!" I screamed. I reached toward the screen to wipe the blood away, but the image faded, and the

announcer heartlessly went on to other things.

The phone rang again. "You saw Cam?" Carla asked. "They say a crew cab with three teenagers inside crossed the centerline and crashed head-on into a van carrying two families."

Described as "the worst motor vehicle accident of the holiday season," the crash made every newscast, and I watched every one. When I tried to sleep, jumbled phrases invaded my dreams—"critical condition . . . charges to be laid . . . claimed the life of the mother of a baby . . ."

"What a terrible load of guilt for a young person to carry," Mom murmured as we watched the news together.

I lashed out at her then. "Why do you guys always assume that it's the young person's fault?" Crying, I dashed from the room.

The next newscast brought two bombshells. "According to Mrs. Stolp, mother of the driver of the crew cab . . ."

"No," I screamed. I almost missed the part about a passenger climbing into the back and Randy trying to wipe the mud off the seat.

The second bombshell came at the end of the telecast, with the grim announcement that the accident had claimed another victim from the van. With that, something inside me died too.

Alone in my room, when my tears had finally stopped flowing, I thought of what my father had said. The rule I had thought unreasonable now seemed to have lost its harshness and became radiant with love.

Slowly I got up and went back into the living room where my parents still sat, their faces reflecting my pain.

"Mom, Dad," I said, hugging them. "I want to thank you for making that rule about not driving until I'm older. And thank you for sticking with it."



North Carolina Teens Penetrate the Smoke Screen

A Smoking Gun

With all the knowledge we have today about the dangers of smoking and secondhand smoke, you'd think that the world would have wised up. However, statistically, even though smoking is the number one preventable cause of death in the United States, twice as many people still die from tobacco use each year than all alcohol, car crashes, homicides, and fire-related deaths combined.

Tobacco Double-talk

Unfortunately, the start of this decade also saw more teens and young adults starting the habit since the 1980s. This doesn't surprise Adam Goldstein, M.D., M.P.H., an associate professor at the University of North Carolina School of Medicine. He says that's the plan of big tobacco.


BY JOYCE LAIRD

"The tobacco industry is very clever" Dr. Goldstein says. "They spend more in a single day marketing their products than the entire health industry spends in a year in countermarketing. They hire the best minds to do this. It's very difficult for any adult to tell kids what's cool and what's not cool, but kids need to be made aware that those running this industry, are not their peers. The 'geezer' generation runs the tobacco industry and they are saying, 'Hey, these kids are so stupid, we can make a million bucks off of them a day.'"

"If you look at what the industry ads have been saying for the past five to seven years, they are slick," he says. "The theme is 'choice.' They make it look like they support non-smoking choices, when in reality, they are doing just the opposite by telling kids they even have a choice. What they very seductively say is 'Don't smoke while you're a child, but in the long run, it's about personal choices. Nobody can force you to do anything. You should make the choice not to smoke if that is what you want to do.' Baloney! It should never be a choice to smoke or not to smoke. The only choice is being manipulated by the tobacco industry into thinking that it even is a choice."

Once they get kids to experiment, many become regular smokers and then it's very difficult to get them to quit. Quitting is hard once you're hooked. Most "quitters" are middle-aged adults who are trying to undo the damage they've done

Note: Teens shown are not the subjects of the story.



to themselves and, hopefully, add some healthy years to their lives. But damage from smoking doesn't just disappear because a 20-year pack-a-day habit stops. Problems can show up years later. Although it's great to quit, it's better never to start smoking.

Kids in North Carolina Blow Away the Smoke

In North Carolina one of the things being done is called "Youth Empowerment." Instead of tossing endless doctors' warnings and medical statistics at kids, the anti-smoking information is actually coming from other youth. "We're showing them firsthand that 80 percent of kids don't smoke and that cool kids really think that smoking is stupid. These kids stand up and tell their peers about the tobacco industry's manipulation. It's doing more good than any lecture I could ever give," Dr. Goldstein says.

North Carolina has also structured a media campaign called "Tobacco Reality Unfiltered," sponsored by the North Carolina Health and Wellness Trust Fund. This focuses on messages directed toward youth, again using only peers talking about a parent, grandparent, or other relative who is suffering from or has died from a tobacco-related disease. The message is linked to family and told one-to-one from teen to teen. "The stories are real. The kids are real. It puts the message into a personal perspective that every kid can relate to," Dr. Goldstein says.

Finally, state-wide "quit lines" were initiated, designed specifically for kids who want to quit smoking. "Many kids aren't very

comfortable talking to parents or doctors about health issues like smoking. Quit lines for adults have been very successful. So we just started lines exclusively for them," Dr. Goldstein says. "Now a kid can call 1-800-QUIT-NOW (800-784-8669) and receive proactive counseling free. We just started in 2006. About a half dozen other states have them. It's working great."

A Clear Horizon

It's tempting to think that dying happens to other people. The truth is the truth, however, and the teens of North Carolina are bringing it home to their peers: smoking kills. Smoking is unattractive. Smoking stinks. More than 400,000 people are dying every year from cancer and heart disease directly related to smoking, and that is not going to stop until every kid says, "If anyone offered me a cigarette, I would refuse it." Then the goal will have been achieved. With Dr. Goldstein's support and encouragement, the kids in North Carolina are well on their way of achieving this goal. What can you do in your state?

**To see what people across North Carolina have
to say about tobacco, check out this link:
www.healthwellinc.com/trustories/default.html.**

Michelle Larcher

Getting to the Top One Tournament at a Time

By Elisabeth Deffner
Photo provided by the author



Last year Michelle Larcher de Brito became the seventh-youngest player to win a Women's Tennis Association tour main-draw match. She was 14 years, one month, and three weeks old, and she had just turned pro.

"It's really nice to be pro; everyone just treats you completely different," says Michelle, who lives near Tampa, Florida. "As soon as you enter the pros, everyone treats you with a lot of respect."

Everyone except her older brothers, that is.



"They push me around sometimes, like they always did," she jokes. "They still think they're better than me—but if you ask me, the answer's no!"

Michelle grew up watching her twin brothers, Sergio and Sebastian—four years older than she is—play tennis. She wanted



her de Brito:



to play, too—and at about 3 years old she began learning how. When the boys started playing competitively, and advanced to the final round of a tournament, eventually winning a trophy, Michelle could hardly wait for the opportunity to win a trophy of her own. “My mom told me, ‘You’ve got to play better, practice more, so you can get a trophy too,’” recalls Michelle, now 15.

So she did. When she was about 8 years old, Michelle started competing in tournaments organized by some of the many



tennis clubs in Portugal, where she was born. Her first tournament she won.

But her first match on the pro circuit she lost.

“To tell you the truth, I was crying,” Michelle admits ruefully. “It was really tough. But that just made me stronger. It made me want to be a really great pro one day. ‘Sometimes losing is better than winning because you learn so much, and it makes you so determined that the next time . . . you’re going to win.’”

A Healthy Attitude

Michelle and her family moved to the United States when she was 9 years old so she could focus on tennis. Her days are filled with practice, fitness training, and schoolwork almost from the minute she gets up at 6:00 a.m.

Michelle hits the gym at 7:30 a.m., warming up, running, doing weight training, and—of course—playing tennis. Later in the morning, at 11:30, she heads to the private school she attends. After school she changes and hits the courts again for more practice. Then it's back home for homework, dinner, and an early night.

"I get up early in the mornings and I make sure I go to bed early to get good rest; without rest, you don't practice too good," she explains. "It takes a lot of discipline, and for sure a lot of hard work."

Tennis may be work—but it's a lot of fun, too. Michelle has a passion for the sport and a drive to improve at it—and she appreciates the perks of playing competitively, such as getting to see new places (in January she competed in Hong Kong) and earning her own money (which she likes to spend on clothes and shoes).

Her discipline and athletic drive also make it easy for her to turn away from substances such as alcohol, drugs, and tobacco.

"I want to be healthy; I want to live a long, happy life," she explains. "I'm quite fortunate not to have been offered any [substances, but if you are,] you've got to say no and just walk away—even if it's tempting. You have to think about your health and future."



Taking Her Time

Though Michelle looks forward to advancing in the pro rankings; to turning 18, so that she will not be restricted in the number of tournaments in which she can compete; and to playing Maria Sharapova, one of the top female tennis players in the world, she doesn't spend a lot of time speculating about her future.

"I try not to think too far in the future," she says. "I just take it tournament by tournament, day by day. I'm going to keep practicing, keep playing tournaments, and see how it goes."

Michelle likes to get dressed up on important occasions, and to hang out with her friends whenever she can (and to talk with them on her cell when she can't). She's a regular 15-year-old girl with a not-very-regular career—one she hopes will be

part of her life for years to come.

As a child learning to play tennis, everything was a challenge: learning how to move her feet, adjusting to holding the racket, getting in enough practice time. But the longer she played, the more Michelle loved tennis; the more she improved; and the more she wanted to play.

Her patient and consistent effort has paid off. At 9 years old, she earned a scholarship to the IMG Bollettieri Academy (Nick Bollettieri is a prominent tennis coach who has worked with nine number one players—including Andre Agassi, Boris Becker, Monica Seles, and Venus and Serena Williams).

Michelle was the youngest person in the top 500 players on the WTA Tour

rankings, breaking the top 300 before she turned 15. Earlier this year she played in the JB Group Classic exhibition competition that featured just seven other players, among them Sharapova and Venus Williams.

Michelle is aware how much she's accomplished at such a young age, and that there are still many goals she wants to achieve. But she's in no hurry. Steady work has built her an amazing career at a young age, and she hopes that steady work will continue to take her where she wants to go—like facing Sharapova across the net.

"When I actually see her, I see how aggressive she is, and I think, 'Oh, yeah, I can wait a little while!'" Michelle says with a laugh. "If everything goes well, I'd definitely like to play Maria Sharapova—but I've still got a little while to go."



GOOD 4U

*Grab the fire extinguisher!
Our topic this month is hot!
We're talking peppers
here—jalapeños, red chili,
cayenne. If you're looking to
add a little zing to a hum-
drum meal, peppers are the
secret. And guess what?
They're good for you too!
Listen to these "hot" facts:*



By Richard G. Edison,
PA-C (physician assistant-
nationally certified)

Peppers come in a huge variety of shapes, colors, and flavors: golden bell, pimento, Hungarian yellow wax, red chili, jalapeño. Just saying the names makes your mouth water and your eyes burn!

Packed with vitamins A, C, and E, peppers may help prevent cancer and improve your immune system. They may even reduce inflammation associated with asthma and arthritis.

Vitamin K, found in abundance in peppers, protects your cells from damage, strengthens bones, and helps your blood clot if you get a cut.

The lycopene in peppers helps prevent cancer of the bladder, pancreas, and prostate. It may even help prevent lung cancer.

Capsaicin, the ingredient responsible for setting off a five-alarm fire in your mouth when you bite into a hot pepper, is loaded with health benefits, including possibly preventing prostate cancer, lowering cholesterol, and boosting immunity. Capsaicin, applied in an ointment can relieve pain from pulled muscles and arthritis. It is even being used in an experimental anaesthetic to block pain during surgery.

A study in Taiwan showed capsaicin prevented fat cells from forming, at least in test tubes. If these studies hold up under further testing, it could give a whole new meaning to "burning off fat."

Hot peppers were at one time blamed for causing stomach ulcers, but now it's believed they can actually help kill the bacteria responsible for most ulcers.

Many people think the seeds are the hottest part of the pepper, but that honor actually belongs to the white membrane where the seeds attach. Take too big a bite of this area, and you'll soon be begging for a fire extinguisher—just don't use water on this fire. Try a dairy product such as milk or yogurt or a piece of bread. Water will just spread the fire around.

Hot peppers are used to treat migraines, and muscle pain, relieve nasal congestion, and may even decrease your risk of developing diabetes.

Eating hot peppers can suppress food cravings, which may help you lose weight.

In cultures in which hot peppers are a big part of the daily diet, people are less likely to have heart attacks and strokes.

Like everything else in your diet, don't overdo it when it comes to eating hot peppers. Studies in Mexico and India link high hot pepper intake to an increased risk of stomach cancer. So take it easy. When it comes to hot peppers, a little bit goes a long way.

Red, green, orange, yellow. No matter the color and no matter the flavor, peppers are a "hot" addition to any meal. So be a little daring. Add a little "fire" to your diet and give your health a boost at the same time—and keep some bread or milk handy for emergency use!

STAY IN CONTROL. AVOID THE TRAPS

The Way to Play



By Jessica Van Dessel

Illustration by Ralph Butler

I still remember the handheld electronic game my brother got for his birthday one year. It was only a toy, but it took some skill, and it was so satisfying when you won. My brother preferred outdoor sports, so the game sat around the house, and I got my hands on it.

I'd play one game.

OK, two games.

Well, actually, three games—but only three.

But then I'd be at the next level, and I'd have to try to beat that, and—hey, how'd it get to be dinnertime already?

For you, maybe it's Minesweeper. Or the latest Nintendo titles. An

DON'T QUIT WHEN IT GETS TOUGH.

online multiplayer role-playing game (RPG). Gaming is your relaxation, your favorite hobby . . . Your life?

Humans are wired to get a thrill out of winning. That's what computer and video games do: they make us feel good. Which is fine. As long as you're playing the game. But sometimes the game starts playing you.

Do any of these statements sound familiar?

- When you're gaming, you feel as though you "just can't stop." Sometimes you get so involved you forget to eat.

- You feel bored, restless, or grouchy if you're not gaming.

- Your grades are slipping. You can't keep up with assignments. You fall asleep in school.

- You've given up other activities so you can spend more time gaming.

- Your family complains they never see you. You've stopped hanging out with friends, or your only friends are gamers too.

- You find yourself lying or faking stuff so you can play more. (For example, you pretend to go to bed; then, when everyone else is asleep, you get up and turn the computer back on.)

- You often have headaches, dry eyes, and pain in your back, neck, and wrists.

If any of this is true, then you've gotten so hooked on winning that you're ignoring life. Think that's an

exaggeration? Here's what one guy wrote about his gaming obsession: "I have to go back to school next year to repeat the same three courses I botched up . . . I have no REAL friends . . . I know that playing games for the past seven years has basically handicapped me mentally."

Friendships, family relationships, education—these things are hard to repair. Get out of touch with the real world and it's hard to get back. That pain in your wrists could be carpal tunnel syndrome, a chronic health problem. Those hours you've spent gaming will never come back.

This isn't fun or relaxation. This is a part of your life that has gone out of control. Try taking charge again:

- Get your gaming stuff out of your room. You'll feel less tempted to play. And don't put the console in the garage or the attic; put it somewhere other people can see, like the dining room. You'll feel more motivation to be responsible.

- Make limits: "I'll only play for 30 minutes on a school night." Set your alarm so you don't lose track of the time.

- Make a system of points and penalties: if you stick to your limit, you can play for an extra hour on the weekend. If you go over it, you can't touch the computer all Sunday.

- Since it can be hard to enforce rules on yourself, consider getting a parent to do it. Or ask a friend to call and nag you until you turn off the game. Or let your little sister hide the controller—whatever works.

- Get involved in nongaming activities—a sport, a club, a part-time job. Spend time with people who don't game.

- Finally, take a good, hard look at your life outside of gaming. Are you using the games to "run away" from tough stuff that's going down at school, or in your family? If so, get help for those problems. Hiding in your PlayStation will only make things worse.

If nothing is working, you could try what I did when I was hooked. I accidentally dropped and stepped on my game. The screen cracked. The buttons stopped responding. That was the end of my habit!

It's drastic, but it's an option. Delete the programs from your computer. Throw away your discs. Put the Xbox in the dump.

Ever heard the expression "Life is a game"?

It's not.

But you could say that gaming is a little bit like life. What do you do when you play? You work hard to acquire new skills. You practice until you're perfect. You face down difficulties. You don't give up until you've won!

All for a blinking light and some electronic cheers.

Life is more advanced than that. But you can approach it the same way. Stay in control. Avoid the traps. Don't quit when it gets tough. And you'll find yourself playing on a whole new level.

It's Listening



By Greg Woodburn

Dear Greg,

My Algebra II final is coming up, and my crush asked me if I would do the long and boring review packet for her. I know this would be cheating, but it's not like I would be taking the actual test for her, and it is a ridiculous amount of problems. What should I do?

—Confused by Cupid

Dear Confused,

I'm glad you agree that doing the review packet for your crush is cheating—which means you can't do it. No matter how many arguments you rationalize for doing someone else's work, your conscience is still going to be uneasy. You should tell your crush that you feel uncomfortable doing her review work. What you can in good conscience do, however, is offer to help her study for the final. Not only will she respect that you are sticking to your morals, but studying with her will allow you to spend more time together than simply handing off a packet of papers. Good luck on your final—hopefully you can score some high points in your class and with your crush!

Dear Caught,

I can certainly understand why you feel torn. Friendships change, and this can be hard to deal with for everyone involved. You should embrace your growing friendship with Heather, but at the same time make an extra effort to include Ashli. Also keep an eye open for chances to spend one-on-one time with her; for example, maybe you two can start a routine to get together once a week. The fact that Ashli told you how she feels shows what a great relationship you two have.

Dear Greg,

Ashli has been my best friend since elementary school, but this year we only have one class together. One of my newer friends, Heather, and I have five classes together, so we are spending a lot of time with each other. A few days ago Ashli told me she is feeling left out because Heather and I are growing closer. How can I share with Ashli what's going on in my life without rubbing it in that she wasn't there?

—Caught in the Middle

**It's
your turn to
give advice.**

Dear Greg,

I play the saxophone in my school's jazz band and have lots of good friends in the band. This year, however, we have a new teacher. We can all tell he picks favorites, focusing almost all his time on their skills. I feel sad and neglected. Jazz band isn't nearly as fun as it used to be. I don't know what to do. Help!

—Playing the Blues

Should Playing the Blues:

- Quit band and start his own music group?
- Tell his friends how he's hurt that they don't sympathize with him?
- Stay in band despite his unfair teacher?

Make your opinion heard

at www.listenmagazine.org/imlistening.
Then check back next month when
the results are posted!

Are You Gullible?

Each day brings new things to buy, and people who need to sell them. How do they do that? With television, magazine, and Internet ads. But is everything that's advertised the truth? **Take this quiz to find out if you believe everything you see:**

- 1. You've been trying to lose weight, so you're excited when you see an ad for a weight-loss pill that helps you drop pounds really fast. The "before" and "after" pictures are so dramatic. Do they make you want to invest in the product?**
 - a.** Before and after pictures are just the proof I need that the product works. Count me in!
 - b.** Pictures aren't proof of anything. Photographs can be altered easily with computers. I'm not buying it.
- 2. At the local fair you approach a booth selling brand new DVDs. Three for just \$15! But you need to sign a contract agreeing to buy at least 15 DVDs within the next year. The contract is long, so the woman gives you a quick run down. What do you do?**
 - a.** I sign quickly. I won't find a deal as good as this anywhere else.
 - b.** I walk away. I don't have time to read the contract, but I know there must be a catch.
- 3. Where would you go first to find more information on an advertised product that you were interested in purchasing?**
 - a.** The company—they know more about it than anyone.
 - b.** Someone who's tried the product, who doesn't work for the company, and will give me their honest impression of it.
- 4. You are at your favorite electronics store when you are approached by a salesperson. You show him the ad you brought in for a cell phone that you and your parents agree is a good deal. The salesperson tells you they don't have that exact cell phone, but can show you another one that's just as good (only more expensive) and comes with a "better" monthly plan. What do you do?**
 - a.** I take advantage of the cell phone the salesperson is showing me. He knows what he's talking about.
 - b.** I ask the salesperson to find out which location does have the advertised cell phone. That's the one I want, even if I have to go a little farther to get it.



If you answered mostly a's, you're a little gullible when it comes to advertisements. You probably believe that all people are good and won't lie to others to make money. Unfortunately they will. Don't believe everything you see or read. And don't be afraid to ask for someone else's opinion.

If you answered mostly b's, you are savvy when it comes to the media. You know the little tricks people can use to make something look like it really works. You ask around before investing in something you're not quite sure about.

Remember that advertisements are made to sell products, and honesty doesn't always equal sales. Advertisers know what people want, and they'll claim they have it. Even if they don't.

WINDERMERE BLOGOSPHERE

Written by Dallas Woodburn Illustration by Jeremy Shires

"This week it is Phoebe's turn to write on our class blog. As you know, the assignment is to blog about a personal experience in the past year that has affected you."



I really wanted to be involved in the school play last spring, but when the callback list was posted . . .

"Costumes? You put me in charge of costumes?"



"I think you'll be great at it. You have a very creative eye."

I guess I can give it a try.

"But I want to be an actress . . ."

"Just try it, Phoebe. See what you think. Costumes are crucial to a show's success. We really need you."





"Terrific job on the costumes, Phoebe! You really went above and beyond."

"I love the dress you made for me! Is it OK if I keep it to wear to the prom?"

"I really like my dragon costume. You're talented!"



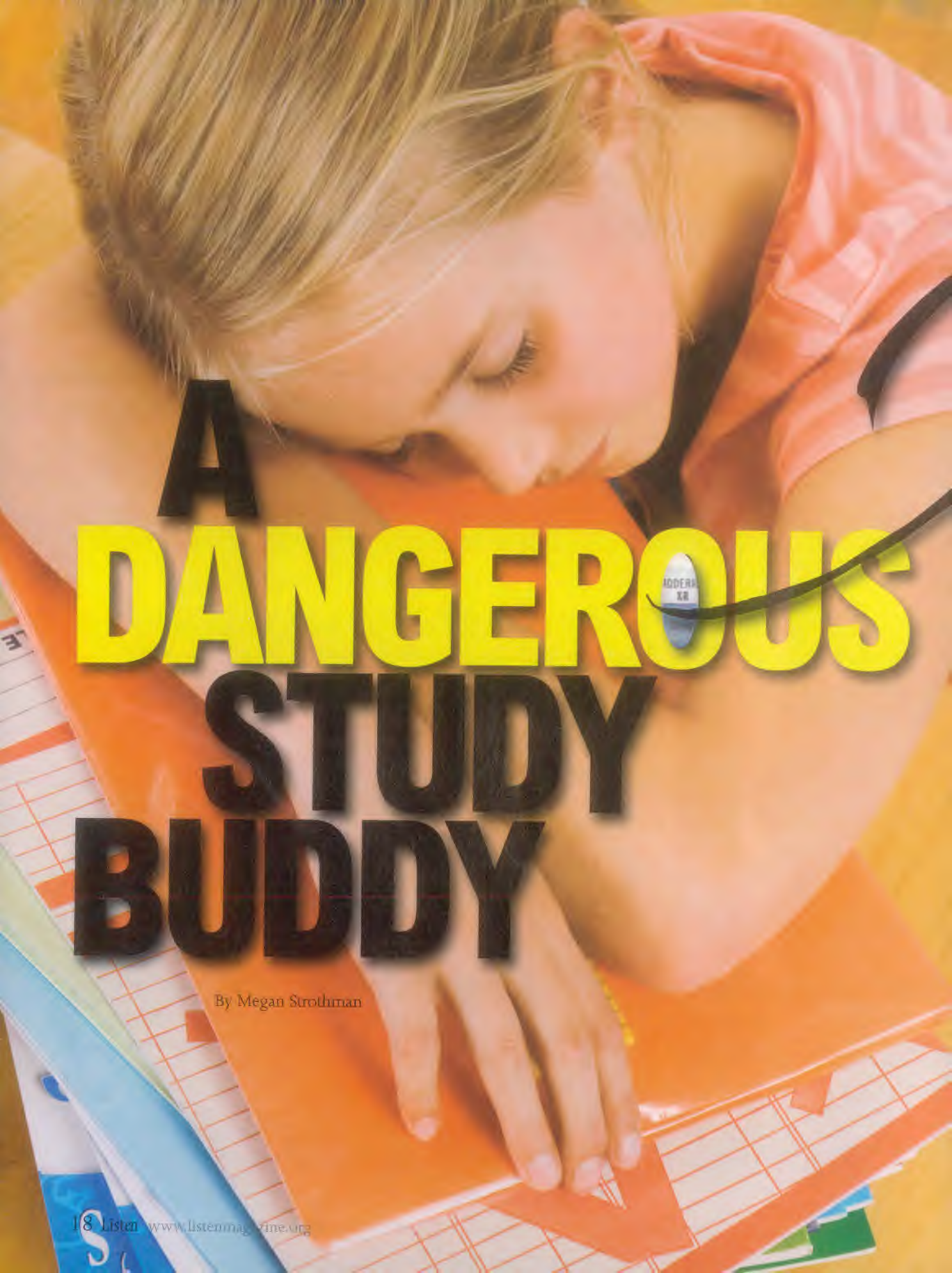
"Thank you! I actually loved making the costumes. Now instead of becoming an actress, I want to be a costume or fashion designer."



Sean: That is really cool that you designed those awesome costumes.

Anthony: You showed how important it is to keep an open mind—otherwise you might never have discovered how much you like fashion.

Lynette: I'll be looking for you as a costume designer on Broadway someday!



A DANGEROUS STUDY BUDDY

By Megan Strothman



ADDERALL is quickly replacing strong study habits for millions of high school and college students across the nation. In fact, some believe it is now the most abused drug on campus, even over alcohol.

Adderall, a commonly prescribed medication for those diagnosed with attention deficit disorder (ADD), has found popularity as a study drug. While some teens fake ADD symptoms to get a prescription, taking it without one is illegal. Students without prescriptions have little to no trouble buying Adderall from friends or classmates who actually do suffer from ADD.

According to the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, people between the ages of 18 and 25 are more likely than any other age group to abuse prescription drugs. Take John, for example, who wants to keep his last name confidential. John, a junior at Middle Tennessee State University, has used Adderall even though he doesn't have a prescription. After hearing about this stimulant from a friend, John decided to experience the effects for himself.

"I know it's illegal, but who doesn't do illegal things?" he says. John's

carefree attitude shows students' perceptions of misusing prescription drugs as more accepted by society. They don't feel that they're doing anything particularly wrong, says Chris Killmeier, Walgreen's head pharmacist in Louisville, Kentucky. Because they are prescribed by physicians, medications such as Adderall are often considered safer than illicit drugs and may therefore be more attractive to students.

According to Killmeier, the growing problem of prescription drug abuse is related to the high level of accessibility. Adderall has become the primary amphetamine on the market, filling on average 20-25 prescriptions a day, Killmeier acknowledges. Since 1996, 50 million prescriptions have been written.

The use of Adderall is greatest among students attending more competitive colleges. A student at the University of Dayton, Kara, admits to giving her friends Adderall. "I give it to them when they ask me because I feel bad saying no," says Kara.

Able to get her prescription refilled only every 30 days, Kara has to monitor how many pills she has left. "I actually have ADD and need Adderall to function in school," she says. "My friends tell me I'm funnier when I don't take my Adderall, though, so sometimes on the weekends I will skip," says Kara.

As the individuals who suffer from ADD prefer not to take their medication every day, there becomes a market for it. While Kara freely gives her prescription Adderall away, other students sell their drugs from \$2 to \$10, depending on the dosage. In the students' minds, it enhances grade performance. Giving away Adderall, to Kara, is a simple way of helping out her friends. They forget that selling or distributing the drug is a federal crime, says detective Todd Vittitow of Louisville's Metro Narcotics Technical Operations.

Students say that while caffeine may help keep you awake, Adderall actually aids in boosting concentra-

tion. During finals week, or before SAT/ACTs, Adderall abuse increases to an ultimate high as students consume the stimulant like candy to stay awake while studying.

"Students will be packed into the library pulling all-nighters, then carry on the next day without any sleep," says Kara. According to Shire Pharmaceutical's Adderall XR Web site sudden termination following prolonged high-dosage procedures results in extreme fatigue and mental depression. Coming off Adderall can feel like coming off cocaine, but it is not viewed as such a serious drug of abuse.

Insomnia is just one of the many side effects of Adderall. If a person takes enough Adderall, they risk increased heart rate, higher blood pressure, irritability, dry mouth, weight loss, and mood swings, says Killmeier. Students who begin using Adderall as a study aid find they are unable to feel confident in their study habits and learning skills without the drug. Many users then become completely dependent on it, needing increased amounts of the substance to receive the same effects.

Paul Coleman, president and chief executive officer of Maryhaven—central Ohio's oldest and most comprehensive health-care facility treating more than 8,000 patients a year—said that any time there is an addiction, "it opens the door for further use of illegal substances [such as cocaine abuse]."

Coleman added that when a person has an addiction, no matter if it is to a prescription drug like Adderall, or a drug like cocaine, you are "basically unaware of the side effects." However, students continue to believe the benefits outweigh the risks.

It is best for students to engage in healthier and risk-free options to achieve academic success. Spend more time in the library, exercise to clear your head, eat healthy meals, and get lots of sleep in order to be in the best condition to hit the books without the use of Adderall.

HOW DO YOU

Have you ever dreamed of making your own movie or TV series?



By Tim Morgan

If you have, you're in luck—it's never been easier to produce your own movie and release it to people all over the world. Watching and producing your own movies can be fun, but there are a few things to watch out for.

There are a number of sites that allow you to create videos on your home computer, edit the videos, then upload and share them with people around the world. At the time of this writing, the largest and most popular of the sites is YouTube, but every one of the sites operates in basically the same way. And you don't need to be a Hollywood studio to post a movie on YouTube—everything from a camcorder to a Web cam, even video from a cell phone, can be posted.

Anyone with a video camera, computer, Internet connection, and something to say can post to YouTube. Submitting and watching videos are free, and there's no limit on the number of videos YouTube allows you to submit. According to a YouTube spokesperson, there is no plan for the foreseeable future to impose a limit.

An exciting section of the YouTube community is the contest area. Companies such as Sketchers and Nestle have sponsored short

video contests in which the prizes range from money to free products. YouTube has been in business only since 2005 and is excited to offer contests sponsored by established companies. Guidelines and submission deadlines vary by contest, and the contests change constantly, so be sure to keep an eye on that section!

YouTube doesn't restrict or rate the videos. You can submit virtually anything as long as it's not inappropriate and you follow a few rules. First of all, you need to own the copyright to the material you want to post. This means you need to have created everything in the video: the content, music, etc. Unless you want to get into serious trouble, you can't just copy a scene from your favorite TV show or DVD and post it to YouTube (be sure to read the copyright guidelines before you submit your first video.) Second, the video must be less than 10 minutes and smaller than 100 megabytes.

Who determines whether or not a video is "inappropriate"? Good question. YouTube offers some guidance in its community guidelines. While YouTube supports free speech, including unpopular points of view, some things just aren't allowed. Pornography, gratuitous violence, racial or ethnic slurs, stalking, and other predatory behaviors are prohibited. If you see a video on YouTube that makes you uncomfortable or offends you, it's very easy to report it. Below every video is a "flag as inappropriate" link. Click that, fill out a form, and YouTube will review the video and possibly remove it.

TUBE?

Also be aware that sometimes YouTube can blur the line between what's real and what's not. In 2006 a teen calling herself LonelyGirl15 hit YouTube with a series of slick video blogs. LonelyGirl15 claimed to be homeschooled by her ultrareligious parents, using the Web as a way to reach out to others. Many thought she was a real teen; some thought she was a hoax. As it turns out, LonelyGirl15 was an experiment in storytelling—and a highly successful one at that. Though the series has moved off to a site of its own, at this time LonelyGirl15's YouTube channel boasts more than 100,000 subscribers and more than 13 million views.

As a YouTube producer, you have total control over your videos. You can decide to release your work for everyone to see and enjoy. You can keep the video private and share it only with friends and family. You can let people post comments on your video, and you can comment on videos other producers have posted. You have the ability to review comments and choose whether or not to publish them. At any time you can delete comments from your video, or even shut them off. It's your work and your choice.

As with anything else on the Internet, you'll want to be careful with what you post on YouTube. You'll definitely want to make sure you keep your phone number, address, and school out of your videos. You should also keep an eye out for anything in the background that could help someone figure out



Illustration by Ralph Butler

where you live, such as the name of your street, or the family car.

YouTube lets you create your own TV channel—something that didn't exist just a few years ago. It's exciting, and if you keep a few simple rules in mind, it can be a fun and safe way to express yourself.

By Keri Collins Lewis

Photos provided by the
Freedom Writers Foundation

PENS, NOT GUNS:



in common? "We hated school, we hated our teacher, and we hated each other." Long-standing divisions based on race and the subsequent gang-related violence left these young people feeling as if they were in an undeclared war and each day could be their last. They watched friends and family members die young, and figured their fate was the same, but they were helpless to do anything. One wrote of the rivalry between Asian gangs and Latino gangs: "It's just two sides who tripped on each other way back when and to this day make other people suffer because of their problems. . . . So our reasons might be stupid, but it's still going on, and who am I to try to change things?"

The Freedom Writers

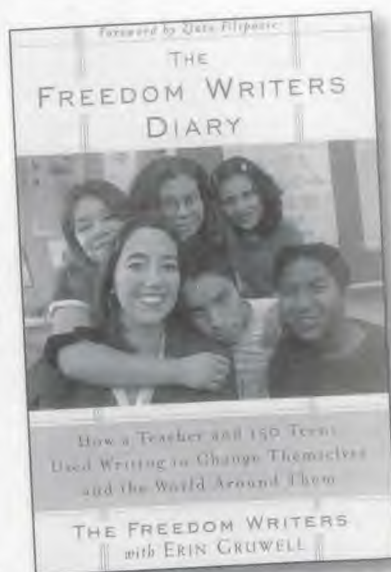
Writing for Change

Erin Gruwell's first teaching assignment: English for "at-risk" freshman at Wilson High School in Long Beach, California. As a new teacher, she was full of enthusiasm and innovative ideas. Her classroom, however, was full of jaded, angry teens. "Whether it was official or not, we all knew that we had been written off. Low test scores, juvenile hall, alienation, and racial hostility helped us fit the labels the educational system placed on us: 'unteachable,' 'below average,' and 'delinquents,' they explained. What did they have

Challenged by her students' disdain for reading, Ms. Gruwell searched for books these urban teens could relate to, stories written by teens facing violence and discrimination, including *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* and *Zlata's Diary: A Child's Life in Sarajevo*.

Understanding that others had faced the same challenges without losing hope inspired the students from Room 203. Then Ms. Gruwell gave them an assignment that would change their lives—they began writing journal entries emulating the heroes of the books they'd read. Soon their fears, dreams, and deepest

secrets spilled onto the pages of their diaries: drive-by shootings, addictions, sexual abuse, gang beatings,



Gang members. Teen alcoholics. Drug users. No one expected them even to stay in school, much less graduate. But with hope, hard work, and the help of one committed and creative teacher, 150 "unteachable" students not only finished high school, but went to college, published a book of their collected writings, and became the subject of a movie starring Hilary Swank. Who are these amazing kids who beat the odds? The Freedom Writers.

and abortion. But mixed with those dark themes, many students wrote of a growing respect for Ms. Gruwell, and their belief that they could create better lives for themselves. One entry read, "I was always known as the person that was going to be a drug-gie, or get pregnant before I turned 14, and drop out. Now I have the chance to prove them wrong."

Working for Tolerance

Over the course of their high

the Freedom Writers' work, and keeping each person's work anonymous to preserve their privacy—and in some cases, protect their very lives. Additionally, they gathered medical supplies and clothes to send to Bosnia, traveled to Washington D.C., to emulate the bus trip of the freedom riders, held a candlelight vigil to honor friends and family lost to violence, and led a peace demonstration. Enthusiasm for their English class carried over into other subjects,



Erin Gruwell



ERIN GRUWELL, HILARY SWANK, AND THE ORIGINAL FREEDOM WRITERS PHOTOGRAPHED ON THE SET OF THE MAJOR MOTION PICTURE, "FREEDOM WRITERS"

and Northern Illinois University, indicate the mission of the Freedom Writers is more crucial than ever. To spread their message of diversity, tolerance, and peace, Ms. Gruwell and her students created The Freedom Writers Foundation. They train teachers in the Freedom Writers' method and stress

school careers, the 150 freshmen became a tight-knit group as they learned to look past their differences and appreciate their similarities. After studying the civil rights movement, they named themselves the Freedom Writers as a tribute to the freedom riders who fought against segregation. The more they learned, the more determined they were to take a stand against the intolerance that divided their school, their community, and the world. Their passion for Anne's and Zlata's stories inspired them to gather favorite diary entries of their own, compiling a book of

and their grades improved dramatically. Their "ghetto class" was so popular, that there was a waiting list to get in! During their senior year everyone's dedication paid off. Doubleday, the same publisher of Anne Frank's book, offered to publish their compilation as *The Freedom Writers Diary*, and take their message of tolerance and overcoming adversity to a broader audience.

Pens, Not Guns

As violence rages all over the world, tragedies on school campuses, such as the shootings at Virginia Tech

"the importance of picking up a pen, rather than a weapon, whenever there is a problem." For more information about the Freedom Writers, check out *The Freedom Writers Diary* from your library or go to www.freedomwritersfoundation.org.



PLUGGED Media Arts and

Technology and media arts in particular can help teens learn new ways to express themselves.



Teens today are comfortable using technology that wasn't around when their parents were young. Some teens

even teach their parents how to manipulate different software. In fact, teens are "plugged in" most of the time to one form of technology or another: iPods, PlayStation, Nintendo, Xbox games, the Internet, or good old-fashioned TV. This can sometimes be a bad thing (if you turn into a lump on your couch for instance), but technology can also be a really good thing. Technology and media arts in particular can help teens learn new ways to express themselves. While not new, media arts are gaining popularity. Many teens will go on to study these technologies in one form or another. In college you might study graphic design, computer animation, videography, and other interactive technologies. But you don't have to wait until college to learn media



IN: Blogging

arts. Lots of teens are learning new technology techniques now, and using these skills to do lots of cool things.

Let's say, for instance, that you want to make a video. YouTube, one of the largest collections of online videos anywhere, offers a few tips. First, you need to find out if the camera you're using is digital or analog. If it's a digital camera, the video can be transferred to the computer via your USB port after filming. If the recorder is analog, you'll need to reformat the video using a converter box. The box basically converts the analog data into a digital format. After the video is in digital format, it's a fairly self-explanatory process to get it online. Use YouTube or a similar video sharing site's online tutorial to show you the ins and outs of uploading. But maybe we've gotten ahead of ourselves!

Before you can upload a video, you need to figure out what to feature. Do you want to film your brother's awesome skateboard ollie,

or your friend staging a cooking show? Want to make your voice heard to end animal abuse, or interview someone you admire? The subjects and themes for making a really cool video are pretty much endless. Once you've decided on what you want to film, there are a few important things to remember.

Lighting is key. If your subject is outdoors and you are filming directly into the sun, your image will be really washed out. Likewise, if it's getting dark out and you don't have any artificial lighting "on the set," it might be hard to make out

what you're filming. Sound is also important. If you're trying to capture your BFF's solo at the talent show competition and the sound quality makes her sound like Daffy Duck, there might be problems.

A few other things to keep in mind: Try to keep the camera steady. You might want to invest in a tripod, or borrow one. If not, try to place the camera on a stable surface while filming. A scene that wobbles and wiggles all over the place may have its place, but most of the time it will just make your audience nauseous.

Reel Grrls, a video and activism group based in Seattle, is made up of young women ages 13-19 who combine their love of media arts with their passion for activism. One part of their program shows teens what happens "behind the scenes" in the media world. "We learned that these extra-skinny models are taken down on computer and made to look even skinnier than they actually are," says Emily, a 14 year





face, and look like a model. In Reel Grrls I learned that I can use the media to influence other people about what's real."

Media arts really are for just about anyone. Many teens log on to the Internet, using networking software to connect to their friends and other teens around the world. Xiyin, a 19-year-old, started blogging when she was 13. She wrote mostly about the bands she liked and her friends. Xiyin began writing in an online journal at age 8, but feels that putting what she's writing online for others to see inspires her. "I always find myself more motivated to write things when I know that somebody, somewhere, might be reading it," says Xiyin.

Since her first journal entries, Xiyin has moved into blogging and other social networking sites. Safety is a concern for her and a lot of other teens. The fact that personal information and photos can be on display for the whole world to see can be exhilarating but also dangerous. It's important to be careful what information is shared or posted online. Caitlin, who is 17, says she and her parents are aware of the risks of online communication. "They know me, and they know I'm not careless about the power I have on the Internet," says Caitlin. She was 12 when she started blogging, and later added digital photography and then editing to her media arts

skill set as she worked on a documentary about her school's marching band.

So the important things to keep in mind when creating media arts are: safety (who's going to see it?), subject (what are you trying to do or show?), and of course, fun!

old Reel Grrl. "It's pretty gross actually," Jamie, who's 17, decided through her work with Reel Grrls, that she wants to pursue a career in filmmaking. "I want to change the world, and the media is the best way to do it, because media controls society," she says. "If I'm behind the camera, I control it." Fifteen-year-old Wendy feels that Reel Grrls opened her eyes to the media as well. "There are so many stereotypes about how we should look, so much pressure on girls to be thin, have an acne-free



WHAT'S UP WITH THAT?



Rachel Bishop
Curt VanderWaal



**My friend says she smokes because it helps her stay thin.
Is this true?**

—Isabel, age 16

We're glad you asked this question, Isabel, since it's a common belief among many smokers. It's true that smoking does decrease your appetite, so some people may not gain as much weight as they might if they weren't smoking. However, a recent study found that smokers are actually losing healthy body mass but often keep the same amount of fat, which generally leaves them flabbier. So while smoking may seem like a good way to keep your weight down, when you add this problem to all of the other risks of smoking (such as heart disease and lung cancer), your friend would be wise to choose exercise and sensible dieting to stay thin.

600,000
In 2005 almost 600,000 people
went to the ER

**Two kids at my school just got busted by the cops for selling
painkillers to other students. Why did they get in such big trouble?**

—Ryan, age 14

Because the kids who buy these prescription drugs are using them to get high, Ryan, and taking them without a prescription—or selling them—is against the law. One recent study found that about one in five U.S. teens have misused powerful prescription painkillers like Vicodin and OxyContin. Because they are prescriptions that can be found in medicine cabinets at home, 40 percent of teens believe it's safer to take these medications than illegal drugs. These medications are easy to find, too—almost 90 percent of all Internet pharmacies don't require a physician's prescription to order a lot of medicines, including many tranquilizers and painkillers. Unfortunately, using these drugs to get high has really increased visits to the emergency room. In 2005 almost 600,000 people went to the ER for serious problems from misusing prescription drugs, more than 21 percent above the previous year. Please tell a teacher, guidance counselor, or principal about kids who are selling these medications, because they can really mess people up.

26.9
Listerine is 26.9
percent alcohol

**The girl who uses the locker next to mine brings
mouthwash to school, and sometimes it looks like she
drinks some of it. Isn't that a little weird?**

—Chris, age 15

Good question, Chris. Although she might have a bad breath problem, it's more likely that she's drinking the mouthwash for its high alcohol content. For example, Listerine is 26.9 percent alcohol, compared to about 5 percent for beer. Drinking mouthwash can make people sick, but it's cheaper than buying liquor and a lot easier to hide. Some stores are actually moving their mouthwash products behind the sales counter to try to reduce its abuse. It would be good to let your school guidance counselor know about your concerns and let him or her follow up with your friend to see if she needs help.

No Fun and Games



By Shirley Anne Ramaley
Illustration by Rusty Barger

I stared out the window of the school bus. There was nothing to look forward to today. No computer, no TV, no Xbox, nothing but homework. I had promised my folks, and knew I couldn't break that promise. All because I hadn't turned in my homework and my grades had dropped. If only my dad

hadn't caught me up late one night playing games on the computer.

I sighed as I stepped from the bus and waited for Barry's bus to arrive from grade school. My parents paid me to watch my younger brother until Mom got home from work, but they hadn't realized I'd spent that time playing computer games. At least Barry hadn't snitched on me, but it didn't matter. Dad figured it out himself.

Barry jumped off the bus with his usual grin. "Hi, Chad. Are we going to play games again today?"

"No games," I said.

"How come?" Those were Barry's favorite words lately.

"Never mind; we just aren't. We'll do homework instead."

"But you never do your homework," Barry said.

I didn't say anything. It was true, or at least it had been true for the last semester of school. Now it

The phone rang, and Jason asked me to come over for “just a few minutes to play this awesome new game.”

would have to change, but it wasn't going to be easy, I thought to myself.

Barry often took a nap after I fixed him a snack, and this afternoon was no different. When the phone rang and my best friend, Jason, asked me to come over and play “just a few computer games,” I reluctantly said I couldn't.

“How come?” Jason asked, reminding me of Barry, who now slept soundly on the couch.

“I got in trouble,” I said. “No computer, no TV, no anything for a month at least. I'm not even supposed to be talking with friends on the phone.”

I turned on a tape and opened my history book, my least-favorite subject. After struggling through part of a chapter, I realized my study habits were at an all-time low, mainly because I didn't want to study.

The phone rang again, and Jason asked me to come over for “just a

few minutes to play this awesome new game.” I glanced over at Barry, sound asleep on the couch. *No one will know if I leave, and I'll be back before he wakes up*, I thought to myself.

“I can only stay a few minutes,” I said to Jason.

Quietly shutting the door behind me, I ran the three blocks to Jason's house. Sitting side by side, Jason easily beat me the first two games.

“I've got this figured out now,” I said, “so watch out.” I won the next two.

“Hey, man, now we're tied,” I said. “The next game decides the big winner.”

Jason's mom came to the door. “Boys, want anything to eat?”

“Sure, thanks,” I said.

“Hey,” Jason said. “Remember, you said only a few minutes.”

“Oh, no! I forgot!” I raced out of the house and down the street.

I yanked open the door to our house and ran into the living room.

No Barry sleeping on the couch. I checked the bedrooms and bathrooms, even the garage and kitchen, all the time calling for Barry.

“I've really blown it this time,” I said to myself. “Mom and Dad will never trust me again.” Mostly I was worried about Barry. Only 6, he didn't always use his best judgment. Then I realized I didn't always either.

Just as I picked up the phone to call Mom, the door opened, and Barry walked in.

“Hi, Chad,” Barry said, a big grin on his face.

“Where have you been?” I asked.

“I went to the store. I took the \$2 I saved. See the neat candy I bought?” Barry held up a sack from the drugstore.

“Barry, you know you shouldn't walk to the drugstore alone,” I said. “It's two blocks away, and you had to cross McDonald; that's a busy street.”

Barry shrugged. “No one was here, so I figured it would be OK.”

“I'm sorry I wasn't here,” I said. “It won't happen again. Promise.”

“Can we play games on the computer then?” Barry asked.

I shook my head. “Like I said, no games. Probably no games for a long time. In fact, after Mom and Dad hear about this it will probably be a very long time.”

“I won't tell,” Barry said.

“I'll tell,” I said. “Time I owned up to my mistakes.” I lightly punched Barry's arm. “Thanks anyway, kiddo.”

I stared at the computer a long time. I realized the computer wasn't at fault. It wasn't going to be easy to kick the habit, but with my grades in the basement and my parents now really mad at me, I was going to do it.



By Mary Rahn
Photos provided by the author

INTERVIEW WITH

Talia Leman



Talia Leman is not your typical eighth grader. She is already the CEO and founder of a nonprofit organization, RandomKid (www.randomkid.org), a foundation that helps kids help others. As such, Talia has worked with kids from 20 countries and has reported close to \$10.5 million for her RandomKid-guided initiatives, which include funding wells in Africa to provide nearly 5,000 people with clean, safe water and building a school in Cambodia for 400 kids who didn't have access to an education.

Listen: How did you get the idea for RandomKid?

TALIA: The sight of Hurricane Katrina's victims crammed together in the Superdome—frightened and angry—really got to me. I didn't think there was anything a 10-year-old kid could do to make a difference. Yet I just knew I had to try.

My plan was to rally \$1 million from American schoolchildren to help the hurricane survivors. When I told adults, they smiled. They thought I was . . . cute.

Three months later, when we kids reported having raised \$5 million, it was our turn to smile, because we were way more than cute. The children of America did make a difference—a \$5 million difference.

Kids may not seem like a powerful group—after all, we don't earn a living, and we can't drive yet. But it is incredible what seemingly powerless kids can do. ABC National News reported that our fund-raising efforts for Hurricane Katrina relief ranked with the top five U.S. corporations. Can you imagine that? A bunch of kids making a difference so huge that we ranked right up there with Wal-Mart, Exxon, and Amoco?

I knew if kids could produce that kind of result for one disaster, we had to create an organization to harness our kid power for the other disasters we face. That's why I started RandomKid. We help kids make a real, true difference by unifying kids across the nation with similar goals in order to increase their financial impact so that they can really change things.

Listen: What lessons have you learned through your experiences with RandomKid?

TALIA: Author Margaret Mead was right when she wrote, "Never doubt

that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

Listen: What is your favorite part about volunteering to help others?

TALIA: Knowing that we are both helping others and teaching kids how to be caretakers for our earth. We need to get it right in my generation!

Listen: Do you have any advice for other young people reaching for their dreams?

TALIA: "Don't stand idly by." Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel said that, and they are good words to live by. It is easy to feel small as one out of 6 billion people living on this earth. But that's all it takes: one person. One Mahatma Gandhi. One Rosa Parks. One Abraham Lincoln. When one person does the right thing, it is contagious. People know it and feel it. You won't have to convince them. You just have to show them a way.





How Do You See It?

Let us tell you a story . . .

Two men lay helplessly in their hospital beds. Their room was barren and desolate. One man named Travis was placed next to a window, and for an hour each day the nurses would help position him so he could look out the window next to his bed. The other man, Jacob, was not so lucky. He didn't have a window.

The highlight of each day came when Travis got to look out the window. He described in detail for Jacob all the beautiful things he saw. One day an unsettling thought came to Jacob: "Why should Travis get the window view?" As time progressed, his envy turned into resentment, and his character became sour.

Late one night Travis had a heart attack. Jacob was awakened by his groans, but he did nothing. He didn't even push his own button—which would have brought the nurse running.

Later, when he felt the time was right, Jacob asked the nurse if he could be moved to the window. Slowly and painfully Jacob propped himself up to take his first look out the window. Finally he would see the beautiful world outside. When Jacob eagerly leaned over to the window, he was shocked! The window, faced a bare brick wall.

Why was Travis so happy while he was alive? There is only one way to explain it: He chose to be. Happiness is not something that awaits us each morning. Nor is it something that comes automatically when we look out a window. Happiness is a choice.

Nice weather, a compliment, or even a big bank account does not guarantee that we will live a life of happiness. If we wait for our circumstances to be "just right," then we're not experiencing all the joys life has to offer. Look for the positives in every moment, and you'll find there is much more to enjoy and appreciate.

The way we feel is based largely on what we're focusing on at that point in time. If we choose to focus on positive things, guess what? That's right—we'll feel good. So how do we focus on positive things more often? Well, it begins with the questions we ask ourselves throughout the day.

For example, if you ask yourself a poor question such as "Why does this class stink so much?" You will be able to list all the reasons you don't like the class. If you're focusing on all the reasons the class is awful, it's going to be really hard to enjoy it.

On the other hand, if you ask yourself, "What's great about this class that I haven't noticed?" then your brain will search for all the good things the class offers you. Once this happens, you'll feel much better about the class, and as a result, your grades will probably improve too.

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LISTEN
Pledge**

As part of the community, I choose to be a part of the solution rather than the problem. I believe everyone is important, including me. I CHOOSE to respect and treat others the way I would like to be treated. I CHOOSE to set the example of a caring individual, regardless of what others may choose to say or do. I CHOOSE to avoid alcohol, tobacco, illegal drugs, violence, and illicit sex, because these prevent me from reaching my goal of being the best I can be, and "doing the best I can do." **THIS IS MY PLEDGE.**

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