

Listen[®]



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Brandon Slay

Olympic
Gold Medalist
in Freestyle
Wrestling

I'm a *Living
Statistic*
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By Brandon Slay as Told to Amy Hagberg

Unless otherwise credited, photos in this article courtesy Brandon Slay

Brandon Slay surprised the world when he won the Olympic gold medal in freestyle wrestling at the 2000 Games in Sydney, Australia. Now head wrestling coach at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, Colorado, Brandon is responsible for recruiting top talent and training his wrestlers to win world and Olympic medals. Learn more about Brandon and his Olympic quest at www.brandonslay.com.



Photo: Courtesy of USA Wrestling

Greater Than Gold

When I was 6 years old, my dad encouraged me to try wrestling. I remember losing my first match so badly that I ran and hid in the bathroom crying. But only 19 matches later I had a victory, and I was hooked. Of course, my dream was to wrestle for my country at the Olympics, but I had no idea how rocky the road there was going to be.

After a successful college wrestling career, I earned a spot on the 2000 Olympic team. About two weeks before I left to go to Sydney, Australia, to compete I woke up in pain in the middle of the night and discovered that my right forearm was so swollen it looked like a football.

When my coaches rushed me to the hospital, we learned that I had a dangerous bacterial infection that had to be aggressively treated with intravenous antibiotics. I was in the hospital for six days—six days I should have been training hard for the biggest wrestling match of my career. After some much-needed rest, I left that hospital room stronger than ever.

My Olympic experience wasn't at all what I'd expected. My first victory in Sydney was against the wrestler from Bulgaria. Then I faced the defending Olympic champion, a Russian who hadn't lost a match in six years. There I was, an unknown guy from Amarillo, Texas, pitted against the best wrestler in the world. Somehow I pulled off one of the biggest upsets in Olympic wrestling history by beating him. I then went on to defeat the guys from Kazakhstan and Turkey and made it to the gold medal match against the German powerhouse, Alexander Leipold.

The gold medal match was a disaster. First the referees hit me with a caution because they said I wouldn't let the German "lock" around me, and they gave him two points. I'd been wrestling for 18 years and I'd never been called for that. Then the officials hit me with another caution, this time saying I was squeezing his hand incorrectly, which again was something I had never been penalized for. It was the most awkward, unfair match I'd ever wrestled in my life... and the biggest one.

Down three points with only a minute left, I frantically tried to make something happen. I took a horrible shot and ended up losing another point to Leipold—the only clean point he scored the entire match. I ended up losing 4-0. So much for my Olympic dream. My coach was nearly speechless.

Stunned, I remember standing on the medal podium with a sort of "deer in the headlights" look on my face. My disappointment only worsened when the German reached down, patted me on the head, and said "It's OK; you can win the gold next time." Don't get me wrong, winning a silver medal in the Olympics is a really big accomplishment, but I didn't want to lose the gold that way.

Fortunately, the story doesn't end there. About three weeks after I got home from Australia

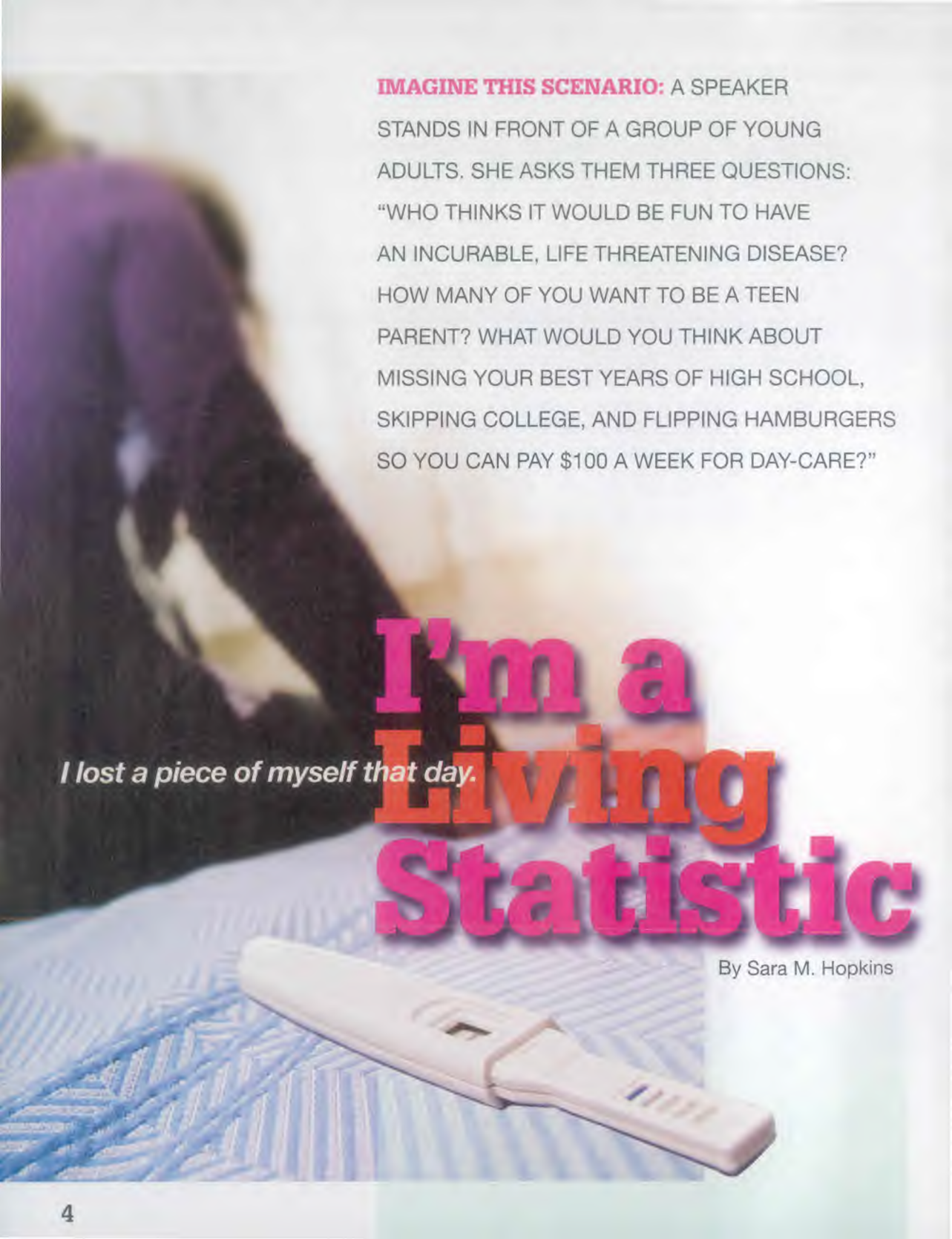
I received a call from the Olympic committee. They informed me that Alexander Leipold had tested positive for steroids—performance-enhancing drugs that are banned in competition. He didn't just have a trace of them in his system; he was something like 10 times over the limit! As a result, Leipold was stripped of his medal, bringing me from silver to gold just like that.

I was awarded the gold medal in a special ceremony held on NBC's *Today Show*—the first ceremony ever to be held outside of the Olympics. It was an amazing feeling standing on the platform waiting for my medal. An official walked up to me, put the gold medal around my neck, and said, "You'll forever be an Olympic champion."



An official walked up to me, put the gold medal around my neck, and said, "You'll forever be an Olympic champion."

One of the biggest lessons I learned from this experience is that cheaters never really win. King Solomon, one of the wisest men in history, said that ill-gotten treasure is of no value. Whether it's an Olympic gold medal or cheating to make an A on a test, when you cheat to achieve something it brings short-term happiness but no long-term significance.



IMAGINE THIS SCENARIO: A SPEAKER STANDS IN FRONT OF A GROUP OF YOUNG ADULTS. SHE ASKS THEM THREE QUESTIONS: "WHO THINKS IT WOULD BE FUN TO HAVE AN INCURABLE, LIFE THREATENING DISEASE? HOW MANY OF YOU WANT TO BE A TEEN PARENT? WHAT WOULD YOU THINK ABOUT MISSING YOUR BEST YEARS OF HIGH SCHOOL, SKIPPING COLLEGE, AND FLIPPING HAMBURGERS SO YOU CAN PAY \$100 A WEEK FOR DAY-CARE?"

I lost a piece of myself that day.

I'm a Living Statistic

By Sara M. Hopkins

Of course, no one is going to jump up and yell, "Ooh! Ooh! Me!" right? Well . . . unless you practice abstinence until marriage, that could be you someday.

How do I know? Because I decided not to be abstinent and have regretted it every day since.

My first time was when I was 16. I thought I was in love. I thought I was ready, and besides, everyone else was doing it. Boy, was I wrong! I lost a piece of myself that day. I can't explain it, but I was different after that. A sadness seemed to cling to me that I couldn't throw off. I also learned something else. Everyone else isn't doing it. Everyone might be talking about it, but that doesn't mean they are doing it. The very few people I knew who were also having sex felt the same way I did: they wished they could go back and change that moment.

Instead of doing the smart thing and deciding it wouldn't happen again, I let the guilt and sorrow take over my reasoning. I cycled through a few random partners. It just wasn't important to me anymore. Sex held no joy, love, or value for me after that first, awful time. It was nothing

more than a mindless act now.

When I saw that pink plus sign on the pregnancy test, the bottom fell out of my life. I didn't understand how it could have happened. We had used condoms! Then my doctor told me that condoms are only about 80 percent effective at preventing pregnancy and zero percent effective



at preventing HPV, or human papillomavirus, which he told me I had contracted. Not only did I have to cope with being pregnant at 17, I also was terrified at the possibility of this incurable disease that could one day give me cancer.

I dropped out of school, before my senior year, and took the first job I could find. My pregnancy was hard, and my job was grueling. My son, Dylan, was born seven weeks early. He

Our expert handles this difficult topic this month on our Web site (www.listenmagazine.org). Check out his advice and weigh in yourself on how Alyssa can handle a tough situation with her boyfriend.

was so small and frail he looked as if he would break if I touched him. It was the most terrifying thing I had ever experienced. I didn't know what would happen to him. I wanted to die. Only my love for this tiny human being kept me from completely falling apart. Thankfully, he did just fine.

That was nine years ago. I'm 26 now. Some days I feel like I'm 40. My foolish decisions robbed me of the best years of my young-adult life. I was very fortunate, though. The baby's father didn't run out on us. He stuck by me, proposed, and has supported us from day one. Out of the dozen or so girls near my age that I knew were also pregnant, I am the only one who is still with my baby's daddy. It hasn't been easy, though. Neither of us were prepared for this.

For the past nine years I have also struggled with the STD I contracted. Not only did I have to endure the humiliation of passing it on to my husband—I have been in constant fear of my life. I have had to put up with numerous uncomfortable and embarrassing tests, not to mention the warts. Gross! When I was diagnosed, my doctor informed me that I may need to undergo a hysterectomy, which would mean removing my uterus. How could I make a decision like that? Either I end my ability to have any more children, or I wait to see if I develop a cancer that could end my life! Even now, I am still paying for my past.

I often think of how I could have said no. How I could have saved my virginity for the excitement of my wedding night. How I could have had a completely different, maybe better, but definitely healthier life than I have now. I have experienced what sex inside of marriage is like. Trust me. Premarital sex could never hold a candle to it.

FOR MORE INFORMATION about drugs and addictive or risky behaviors, visit **GET THE FACTS** at www.listenmagazine.org.

Digital Danger

Brandon's grades were slipping. He withdrew from his friends, and began skipping school and stealing money. His obsession with an online game seemed to be the cause of his behavioral changes—he just couldn't get enough of it. When his father confiscated his Xbox, Brandon recklessly jumped on his bicycle and fled his home.

A month later his body was found in a cornfield. Brandon's addiction caused him to act in such a way that he lost his life.

While the Internet can play a healthy role in our culture, it is not without its dangers. Countless people have watched their lives crumble because of an addiction to digital technology. People with this addiction develop a controlling need to be plugged into cyberspace, often losing their jobs and isolating themselves from friends and family in the process.

People with an Internet/gaming addiction need to play online games for longer and longer amounts of time to reach the same excitement level. They think about gaming and the Internet even when they are offline and often lie to conceal the amount of time spent online. They feel restless and irritable when trying to cut back on Internet time and often jeopardize jobs or significant relationships in favor of their addiction.



According to Thomas Umstattd, Jr., a former gaming addict who frequently speaks to groups of teens about the dangers of digital gaming, there are several steps a person can take to help gain control. First, ask for help. Talk to a trusted friend or counselor, and ask them to keep you accountable for your Internet time. Next, find a new adventure. Instead of buying a digital game, get a skateboard. Learn to play a musical instrument. Join an athletic team. Finally, make some friends, or develop those friendships you already have. Talk on the phone or in person, but steer clear of conversations about gaming or the Internet.

You'll find a list of helpful resources for recovery at Thomas' Web site: www.cgames.com. Recovery, though difficult, is well worth the effort. There's a real world out there, with rewards of healthy relationships and a promising future, just waiting for you to join it.

Society's obsession with looks—especially weight—is often definitely taken too far. Being rail-skinny isn't a good goal, but being healthy is key to living a long, happy life. But sometimes, being overweight can be a serious health issue that requires attention and treatment. Many American teens are not just a few pounds overweight—they are clinically obese, and life isn't always happy, healthy, or easy.

Jenna,* a 13-year old, is obese. "I walked through the cafeteria for lunch a couple of months ago," says Jenna. "I sat down to eat my pizza, and a group of girls walked by me. They laughed and talked really loud about why someone so fat was eating pizza. I left the cafeteria and cried so hard that the nurse called my mom."

Jenna says she's trying to eat healthier by "cutting out fried food and not eating fast food for dinner. I've been eating fruit or granola bars instead of candy or cookies." Jenna says she became obese by not eating well or exercising.

Jenna's story isn't uncommon. Many teens are bullied about their weight, and some buckle under the pressure and continue the poor eating habits.

But teenage obesity can lead to many current and future health problems, including high

blood pressure, heart disease, breathing problems, and cancer. Getting healthy now by making a few lifestyle changes is worth it. Instead of driving to school, walk or ride a bike. Swap the weekend ice-cream sundae for frozen yogurt. Drink 2 percent milk instead of whole. Small changes add up.

Just remember to keep reality in perspective. A couple of pounds doesn't mean you're overweight, and if you think you may need to lose a few pounds, don't try crash diets or extreme exercise. Results won't happen overnight. Weight loss takes time and dedication, but it's worth it to regain your health. Have your doctor help you determine your BMI (body mass index) and decide on the best course for you.

For more info about keeping your weight at a healthy level, check out MayoClinic.com and search for weight loss.

*Name has been changed for privacy.



Tipping the Scales

"E" Ciggy No-no

Been hearing about "E" cigarettes lately? "E" for "electronic" cigarettes deliver doses of nicotine by heating a nicotine-chemical solution into a vapor. According to the American Lung Association, "no studies have been done on e-cigarettes to date regarding their health effects or their effectiveness as cessation aids. Like the "light" and "low tar" cigarettes that tobacco companies claimed were healthier for consumers, there is no evidence to

back up the claims made by e-cigarette makers. In September of 2008 the World Health Organization stated that they have "no evidence to confirm the product's safety or efficacy." E-cigarettes are also being marketed toward young people, who can purchase them in fruit flavors and online without having to verify their ages.



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THE 411



For Your

Break the Cycle (www.breakthecycle.org), the nation's leading teen dating violence prevention organization, grades states on teen dating violence, grading each state's laws on their ability to protect victims of teen dating violence seeking protection orders against their abusers.



Protection



Protection

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Thin Air

Many young kids and teens think using inhalants for a quick high is safe.

By Shirley Anne Ramaley

© iStockphoto



These products are easy to find in the home, cheap to buy at the store, and available everywhere. We all use these products, so how could they possibly harm us?

After all, even adults use them all the time. And what teenage girl doesn't use hair spray?

These products harm us when we abuse them because inhalants contain extremely toxic



chemical vapors. It is the abuse of, not the use of, inhalants that causes harm.

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) Web site, "many kids think inhalants are a harmless, cheap, and quick way to 'catch a buzz.' The chemicals in the vapors change the way the brain works, making the user feel very good for a short time. Inhalants can be found around the house or purchased inexpensively at the local grocery or general store. What kids often don't know is that in some cases the harmful effects of inhalants can be irreversible."

The vapors in inhalants can make the user feel very good. The "high" doesn't last long, though, and the user often inhales again within a short period of time. Tragically, some inhale just one time and die of what is known as "sudden sniffing death syndrome." This is caused by the heart beating very fast and crazy. It's a roll of the dice and impossible to know who will be affected to the point of death.

Everyone who abuses inhalants is affected to some degree. The damage is often permanent. Inhalants can be addicting, and the person using will need more and more of the substance, and more often.

Inhalants are part of our lives. Many of the containers have warnings on them, to be used only in well-ventilated rooms and areas. This is to prevent people from accidentally breathing in the poisons. It is no secret that legal inhalants contain poison. If they're used correctly, no harm will occur.

One inhalant, nitrous oxide, used by dentists

and commonly called "laughing gas," is now being used by some teens to get a quick high. Many partygoers consider nitrous oxide a "safe high." This is far from the truth. People have died from the misuse of this gas. Properly used in a dental office, nitrous oxide is safe and effective. Misused at parties, nitrous oxide can be a killer.

Computer cleaning products, such as Dust-Off, have created a new avenue of abuse. But "canned air" isn't just air, and it isn't safe to inhale. It's not unusual for permanent brain damage to result in kids and teens who have abused computer cleaning products, and some have died.

Inhalants are also considered "gateway" drugs. They are often the first drug kids use. Kids who used inhalants when younger frequently go on to other drugs as teens.

The abuse of inhalants is illegal and a felony in many states. Drug laws for inhalants can be difficult to enforce, but Frank Macias, a counselor who works with teens involved in drug abuse, reports that teens can be expelled from school, especially if it's a repeat problem. In some cases, teens are permanently expelled.

If you suspect a friend is abusing inhalants, it's time to be concerned. Don't wait. Talk to a school counselor, parent, teacher, or other trusted adult. For more information, go to <http://teens.drugabuse.gov/index.php>. This site is sponsored by the National Institutes of Health and NIDA. Check it out, because it's a cool place, just for teens. In fact, teens helped develop the Web site.

THEN ONE DAY MY COMPUTER CRASHED. I COULDN'T GET ONLINE FOR DAYS. I WAS A MESS. I REALIZED THAT I WAS BUILDING MY REAL LIFE AROUND MY EMPTY GAME LIFE. WHEN IT COLLAPSED, I WAS LEFT WITH NOTHING.

I DECIDED RIGHT THEN TO MAKE SOME CHANGES.

I STILL GO ONLINE AND LOG IN TO THE GAME OCCASIONALLY, BUT I'M SO BUSY NOW WITH MY REAL LIFE THAT I DON'T USUALLY HAVE TIME TO WASTE ONLINE!


NOW I ENJOY DOING FUN THINGS IN REAL LIFE. I VOLUNTEER AT A SHELTER, I PAINTED MY ROOM LAVENDER, AND I'M TAKING A COURSE IN FASHION DESIGN. I ALSO LEARNED THAT SOMETIMES REAL-LIFE FRIENDSHIPS TAKE WORK TO BUILD, BUT THEY ARE WORTH THE EFFORT! IT'S SO WONDERFUL TO HAVE FRIENDS YOU CAN TALK TO FACE TO FACE.



The Buzz About *Butterfly Gardens*



By Elisabeth Deffner



Fewer butterflies are fluttering around the world—and honeybees are dying in the mysterious “colony collapse disorder.”

If you’ve ever been stung by a bee, or if you have a horror of all things six-legged, this might not seem like bad news to you. But the fact is, it’s bad news for all of us.

Both types of insects pollinate plants; they transfer pollen from a flower’s stamen to its stigma when they dip in for a sip of nectar, or to collect pollen. As the insects transfer pollen from one plant to another, they are participating in a process that will create new seeds to grow more plants—and since they often “cross-pollinate,” transferring pollen from one flower to another, they strengthen the plant population as a whole. People rely on plants for food, medicine, and materials, so anything that keeps the plant world strong and vibrant is important for us, too.

And besides that, butterflies—of which there are more than 28,000 species around the world—are beautiful to look at. Bees, too, can be a pleasure to observe (from a safe distance!).

The good news is that you can do something about the declining populations of these beneficial and beautiful insects right in your own backyard—or even in a window box!

Make a Plan

Planting a garden to attract butterflies and bees is easy to do, but before you begin, you’ll need to do a little research. First of all, you need to find out which types of butterflies are native to your area. You can do this by checking out a butterfly field guide from the library, or by doing an online search for butterflies in your town or city. You can also go to the Web site of the North American Butterfly Association (www.naba.org) to see if there is a chapter in your area. Members will be able to give you lots of pointers!



After you discover which species of butterflies live in your area, learn about the plants that attract those particular species. Butterflies need plants to feed on, as well as plants to lay their eggs on. You'll find that information in your field guide. Or you can do an Internet search by typing in "[species name] butterfly plant" or "bee plant." You can also ask for suggestions at your local nursery, or from local members of NABA.

Once you have a list of plants, begin planning the garden itself. Where will you plant it—in the front yard, the backyard, or a window box? Do you want tall flowers or small flowers? Will any of the plants you'd like grow too big for the garden area you have in mind? Do they all require similar conditions to thrive? You may want to make a sketch of your garden space; then you can find pictures of the kinds of flowers you're considering, and move them around on the sheet of paper to see where they would look best.

Try to create your future garden in a location sheltered from the wind. And remember that it may be easier to attract butterflies and bees with groups of the same flowers, so try to plant your seeds in bunches.

After you've finalized your plan, you can head to the nursery to purchase seeds, bulbs, and seedlings.

Plant the Garden

Prepare the ground for your plants by following the directions on the back of the seed packets, or by looking up each type of plant in a field guide or online. (Make sure you are planting them in the right season, and that you are planting them the correct distance apart.) Then sow the seeds and plant the seedlings. You may also want to place a few flat stones around the perimeter of your flower garden, so that the butterflies will have places to alight when they are not focusing on the flowers.

Don't forget that butterflies and bees need water to drink! You can maintain a small muddy puddle near your flowers, or fill a bowl with sand, making sure to keep the sand moist with water. Or you can trim the sides of an empty milk carton so that they're about two inches high, and fill that with water.

One last tip: avoid pesticides in your garden. Even though these poisons are supposed to target pests, they can also harm the very insects you're hoping to attract! Instead, use natural methods of eradicating pests.

Then just sit back and wait for the flowers to grow—and the butterflies and bees to find them.



DANIEL BROOKS

of Students Against Violence Everywhere (SAVE)

Students Against Violence Everywhere (SAVE) was started in 1989 in Charlotte, North Carolina, after a high school student was killed at an off-campus party. In the aftermath of the violence, 200 students gathered in the school cafeteria and formed SAVE with the mission of promoting nonviolence in their community. In the 20 years since, SAVE has spread across the nation. Daniel Brooks, a 17-year-old high school student from Fort Wayne, Indiana, has been involved with SAVE since October 2007.

LISTEN: What inspired you to join SAVE?

Daniel: I believe it is important for me to help my community and keep it safe. The SAVE mission is to Empower, Encourage, and Educate young people about stopping violence.

LISTEN: What are some projects your chapter of SAVE has participated in to promote nonviolence?

Daniel: My chapter, the Men of Action, has done various service activities such as feeding the homeless and holding a "Day of Unity" to celebrate National Youth Violence Prevention Week March 23-27. We had guest speakers come and give kids safety tips relating to the Internet and the outside community. We also have a television show called SAVE TV that is taped in Fort Wayne, Indiana. On the show we talk to guests from around Fort Wayne who work with youth and deal with nonviolence issues.

LISTEN: Do you have any advice for other young people reaching for their dreams—especially for those who want to get involved in community service?

Daniel: My biggest advice to everyone reading this is just to live your life by helping out as much as you can.

LISTEN: What are some actions young people can take

to calm things down if one of their friends is getting violent?

Daniel: My advice is to find an adult, explain what it is going on, and ask for help. If your friend has violent tendencies, try to speak to them when they are calm, and figure out what is upsetting them. Sometimes just knowing they have a friend who cares about them is enough to make them feel better and seek help.

LISTEN: How can other teenagers get involved in SAVE?

Daniel: If you are interested in joining Students Against Violence Everywhere, you can form a group or chapter in your neighborhood or community. There is more information on the national SAVE Web site, www.nationalsave.org.

Going Once, Going Twice . . .

OK, I had a few sketchy years in high school. I was the kid who was slightly offbeat. The one who wore the odd clothes (that became popular later, when it didn't matter). The one who was too shy to be much good at socializing. That kid in the corner, with the glasses and her nose buried in a book? That was me.

When I was a senior, there was a ritual I had to go through. Seems some bright individual had come up with the idea of a slave auction. Seniors were auctioned off to the highest bidder. I don't even know what we were raising money for. The rule was you had to do whatever the person who bought you wanted you to do. (Within reason . . . I think something like toilet papering their hated geometry teacher was probably not allowed.)

Anyway, even though I sold for the most of any senior in my class (the reason for this bizarreness was that two lower school boys pitched in and bought me together), it was humiliating to stand up there and have people bid on you. And that was only the beginning. The next day you had to do whatever your "master" wanted you to, which in my case was to spend the day in a sandwich sign that proclaimed I loved the boys who bought me, sing and dance in public, stupid things, humiliating things.

Looking back on this, I wonder why I didn't just refuse to do it. The answer is simple: I was too frightened of looking different, of being difficult by not going along. That same reason, among others, motivates many kids to put up with a lot in the way of hazing or "tests" by peers. They put up with humiliation and more just to fit in. And I have one thing to say about that: Don't.

You will never respect yourself by doing something you don't want to do because of the pressure of other people. Especially if they are hurtful, shameful, degrading things. If it makes you feel bad, don't do it. Talk to a parent, a teacher, an older sibling, or anyone else you can trust. And if nothing else works, walk away. It's that simple, and you'll be glad you did.

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



Celeste Perrino-Walker
Editor

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TEXTING WHILE DRIVING

By Joy Choquette

You're pretty good at multitasking, aren't you? You can chew gum, walk, talk on the phone, and keep your BFF up-to-date on the conversation all at the same time, right? Some activities, though, don't mix as well. Texting and walking? Fine if you're fairly coordinated. The worst thing you might do is trip over furniture or bump into someone in the hall. Embarrassing? Yes. Dangerous? Not really. Texting while driving, however, is a whole different story.

A recent study paired 21 teen drivers with a cell phone for texting and an MP3 player in a simulated drive. The teens in the study that were texting and finding music on their players while driving did badly. Really, really badly. They wove in and out of traffic, made dramatic changes in their speed, and actually ran over virtual pedestrians!

While cell phone use is not a good idea while driving in general, texting is an even worse choice. You can't use a "hands-free" adapter when you're texting. You have to look at your phone, causing you to look down or to the side, not at the road in front of you. You usually need both your hands to text—one to hold your phone and the other to key in the message. Even if you're coordinated enough to hold



your phone and type with one hand, it's still a huge distraction.

Teens are bombarded with scary statistics daily, but the statistics around texting and driving are ones that you should know about. During the past few years more than 20 percent of fatal car crashes involving teenagers have been the result of cell phone use, a number likely to increase 4 percent each year. Fifty percent of teens admit to texting while driving (and those are just the 50 percent who are honest about it!).

In fact, Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD) believes that texting while driving is nearly as dangerous as drinking and driving. Many states agree. As of December 2009, 19 states had banned texting while driving. That number shot up rapidly as lawmakers discovered how dangerous texting while driving is, and it will likely include even more states by the time you read this.

It might seem harmless. It might seem inconvenient to wait until you've stopped the car to reply to a text. But texting while driving is absolutely, positively dangerous. Think about it—you are controlling about 4,000 pounds with your two little hands. Shouldn't both be on the wheel in front of you?