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# ThreeSixty

Minnesota Teens Report Stories & Issues That Matter

## THE JOURNEY AHEAD

Preparing for life after high school

■ Pages 12–17, 20–21



## @16 with Byron Buxton

The Minnesota Twins rookie talks high school stardom, pressure and life after the MLB. ■ Page 18





# A summer to remember at ThreeSixty

## ThreeSixty's summer at a glance

- 50 high school participants from across the Twin Cities metro area
- 71 volunteers, representing approximately 40 organizations, businesses, universities or high schools
- 36 reported stories and personal essays written by summer camp students
- 90 percent of students indicating interest in joining ThreeSixty's school-year program

## About the ThreeSixty Scholar Award

Each year, high school seniors who are graduates of ThreeSixty programming compete for the ThreeSixty Scholar award – a full-tuition, four-year scholarship to study communication and journalism at the University of St. Thomas. Currently, there are four ThreeSixty scholars attending St. Thomas.



Amira  
Warren-Yearby,  
2015 Scholar



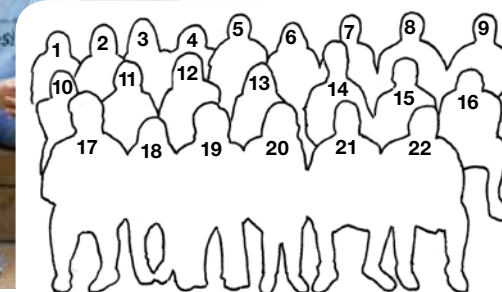
Deborah Honore,  
2014 Scholar



Simeon Lancaster,  
2013 Scholar



Grace Pastoor,  
2012 Scholar



### Graduates of the ThreeSixty Journalism Non-Residential Journalism Camp

June 15-26,  
University of  
St. Thomas,  
St. Paul

1. Razeqa Aliyi, St. Paul Central High School
2. V. Lee, St. Paul Harding Senior High School
3. Ana Freeberg, Minneapolis Roosevelt High School
4. Yusra Abdi, Ubah Medical Academy
5. Chad Faust, St. Paul Central High School
6. Talia Bradley, Minneapolis Roosevelt High School
7. Aaron Young, St. Paul Johnson Senior High School
8. Aidan Berg, Minneapolis Southwest High School
9. Allison Ahern, The Blake School
10. Asha Hurreh, STEP Academy
11. Destiny Yang, St. Paul Harding Senior High School

12. Kaylyn Vang, St. Paul Harding Senior High School
13. Melisa Robles Olivar, Minneapolis Southwest High School
14. Lucas Johnson, St. Paul Academy and Summit School
15. Sebastian Alfonzo, St. Paul Central High School
16. Zekriah Chaudhry, home school
17. Renelle Mensah, Breck School
18. Bayan Algazi, St. Paul Harding Senior High School
19. Nesani Sabal, DeLaSalle High School
20. Skyler Kuczaboski, St. Paul Harding Senior High School
21. Michael Stiefel Alperin, St. Paul Central High School
22. Andy Moua, St. Paul Harding Senior High School



### Graduates of the ThreeSixty Journalism Residential Journalism Camp

July 12-23,  
University of  
St. Thomas,  
St. Paul

1. Viky Moua, St. Paul Harding Senior High School
2. Alejandro Hernandez, Minneapolis Roosevelt High School
3. Joseph Xiong, St. Paul Johnson Senior High School
4. Nayni Paung, St. Paul Harding Senior High School
5. Tsimnuj Yang, St. Paul Harding Senior High School
6. Zaid Khan, Anoka High School
7. Ashtyn McKinney, Eden Prairie High School
8. Marissa Abara, Wayzata High School
9. Cher Vang, St. Paul Harding Senior High School
10. Louisa Akoto, Coon Rapids High School
11. Kristy Ornelas, Coon Rapids High School
12. Yoko Vue, St. Paul Central High School

13. Reyna Tejada, St. Paul Harding Senior High School
14. Pa Zong Moua, St. Paul Harding Senior High School
15. Griselda Sanchez, Cristo Rey Jesuit High School
16. Jennifer Delgado, Cristo Rey Jesuit High School
17. Leydi Pliego, Cristo Rey Jesuit High School
18. Ann Jerry, Blaine High School
19. Va Yang, St. Paul Johnson Senior High School
20. Autumn McKinney, Eden Prairie High School
21. Erianna Jiles, Como Park Senior High School
22. Emma Vervair, Osseo Senior High School
23. Janie Xiong, St. Paul Harding Senior High School
24. Sher Eh Ler Tee, Roseville Area High School



REAL STUDENTS. REAL STORIES.

# ThreeSixty

Volume 6 • Issue 1

JOURNALISM

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Email [threesixty@stthomas.edu](mailto:threesixty@stthomas.edu) with comments, letters and questions about participating in ThreeSixty.

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# Growing and improving

TAKE 50 METRO-AREA high school students, bring them to the University of St. Thomas for summer journalism camps, and what do you have?

For starters, a bigger magazine.

Inside this issue of ThreeSixty Magazine, you'll see more than 40 bylined stories and essays from graduates of this summer's ThreeSixty Non-Residential and Residential journalism camps, as well as from two promising young ThreeSixty interns (also former ThreeSixty campers themselves) and from another former ThreeSixty standout.

For comparison's sake, there were 24 stories in the May-June issue. In the issue before that, 29.

Why so many more stories this time? It's simple. We're growing.

Not only did we host two summer journalism camps at UST in St. Paul (per usual), but we also increased our size, nearly doubling the number of students from the previous year's camps (27 total). This rapid growth allowed us to reach and teach more diverse teenagers than ever before. About 90 percent of our summer camp students were individuals of color.

Summing up the summer into a



**By Miles Trump**  
Program Manager

few sentences is no easy task – so, of course, I'll try to do it in one: We had a lot of fun, but we worked hard, too.

Students in our summer camps learned the fundamentals of journalism, from interviewing to writing, ethics to social media. They wrote (and wrote, and wrote some more), each diving into a piece that had the opportunity to be published.

They interviewed others, whether it was a ThreeSixty camper or a stranger on the UST campus; a nutritionist who could speak about the 'freshman 15' (page 12) or a former Division I athlete who could speak about choosing a different path after college (page 13). They also heard from and worked with more than 40 gracious volunteers, whom we can't thank enough for the support.

Did I mention they wrote a bunch? Students in the Non-Residential Journalism Camp in June were tasked with writing a "personal essay," or a compelling narrative about their life. We believe each

student who comes through our doors has a story to tell, and this camp provided those students with an outlet to do so (pages 4-7, 23-30).

In the Residential Journalism Camp in July, pairs of students were each given a story to report under the theme, "Preparing for life after high school." The 24 students in the camp wrote about everything from Cristo Rey Jesuit High School's unique work study program (page 20) to athletes making decisions on which college to choose (page 21); from a feature on a local cosmetology school (page 15) to a story on how to write the best college essay (page 14). All of these stories also can be found in the Sept. 5 edition of the Star Tribune and Pioneer Press.

The magazine you're holding in your hands (assuming you're not reading this online) is the result of a beautiful mixture of students' experiences this summer: stories and photos, headlines and deadlines, ambition and anxiety, challenges and successes.

It also symbolizes what all of us at ThreeSixty – from the staff to the students – are trying to achieve as we move into a new school year: Growing and improving in everything we do.

## CONTENTS SEPTEMBER

**What's your story?** In camp this summer, we challenged our students to tell their stories – the stories that changed their lives, shifted their perspectives and molded them into the people they are now. ■ **4-7, 23-30**

**Goodbye to the yellow school bus?** As part of a pilot program at St. Paul Johnson, students will begin riding Metro Transit city buses this fall, as well as start school an hour later. ■ **8**

**Young activists:** ThreeSixty looks at the ways young people have taken a stand with activist group Black Lives Matter Minneapolis. ■ **9**

**It's OK to laugh:** Metro-area teens have been sharpening their improv skills while competing in the ComedySportz High School League. ■ **10**

**CVE reaction:** ThreeSixty gets local Somali community members' thoughts on the Countering Violent Extremism pilot program, an effort to reduce the effect of youth recruitment by overseas terrorist groups. ■ **11**

**Preparing for life after high school:** ThreeSixty journalists tackle the issues and cover the stories surrounding preparing for post-high school life – everything from how to write that pesky college essay to how to choose which college you should play for, from programs that help give teens a better future to individuals who are choosing the road less traveled after high school. ■ **12-17, 20-21**

**@16 with Byron Buxton:** The Minnesota Twins rookie – who is also the No. 1 prospect in all of Major League Baseball – sits down with ThreeSixty to talk baseball and life. ■ **18-19**

**Sports, religion and fashion:** New athleticwear allows Twin Cities Muslim girls to play sports comfortably while maintaining their religious customs. The U of M, along with local girls, helped design the outfits. ■ **22**

# Remembering my aunt Maria

PHYSICALLY AND emotionally rocked from the ride down the apple orchard's hill, I turned around on my sled to look at my aunt, who had been seemingly close behind me the entire time.

Aunt Maria was sprawled out across the snow, bundled in a puffy jacket with her New Balance running shoes facing up and her sled slowly sliding away from her grasp.

"I think I hurt my back!" she attempted to exclaim over bouts of her own boisterous laughter. "I'm so old!"

I could hardly contain my giggles as her dogs, Bubba and Cleo, draped their furry bodies across ours, her short, dark brown hair reflecting off of the shimmering, white snow.

Each year of my life, I yearned for the opportunity to visit her and my uncle Ted's cozy bungalow in Homer, Minn., just outside Winona, with its

personal  
essay



By **Chad Faust**  
St. Paul Central  
Senior High  
School

magical view of the Mississippi River. Despite our difference in age – Maria was in her late 40s and I wasn't even a teenager at the time of the sledding mishap – we were the best of friends.

Our friendship was cut short, however.

My aunt, Maria Faust, died of ovarian cancer on Dec. 11, 2011, at age 52. I was in eighth grade. The woman who was beautiful in every single way, with a vivacious laugh, lovable personality and passion for just about everyone and everything, was no longer with us.

The times I spent with Maria are some of the most memorable moments of my life. The activities we experienced – playing Scrabble,

walking dogs – and the lessons I learned from her are all permanently engraved in my mind. The most important thing we ever did together was bird watching.

Armed with a small, flimsy bird book and a child-sized pair of black binoculars, we would watch for the vast ranges of birds that dotted her bird feeders, in plain sight only feet from the dining room window. Maria and I would look out for new, intriguing birds that we hoped to see, and even tally the number of certain birds we witnessed every day.

We scolded the bluejays as they knocked the poor, helpless grackles about the birdfeeder. We marveled at the immense talents of the red-bellied woodpeckers, pecking away at the dozens of trees that surrounded the house. We looked for barn swallows and cardinals, who brought more joy into our lives with their elaborate color and spirit. Bird watching was special to us, in every aspect.

Maria also was an active fixture in the city of Winona for more than 20 years, particularly with local arts. She spent a great deal of time volunteering for the Minnesota



PHOTO SUBMITTED

Chad Faust (right) with his aunt, Maria, in the winter of 2006 in West St. Paul.

Marine Art Museum and the Winona Arts Center, and supported the Great River Shakespeare Festival. Maria even had her own newspaper column, titled "From the Seasonal

Kitchen." In her memory, my uncle, Ted Haaland, Maria's husband, organized the annual Maria W. Faust Sonnet Contest after her death, and **MARIA continued on page 31**

# Lessons from a broken Venezuelan toilet seat

THE ONLY THING MORE embarrassing than breaking a toilet seat, is breaking a toilet seat in a country where it costs several times more than it does in the U.S.

Take it from a guilty party.

Our flight from the decaying Valencia airport was set to leave in a few hours. My mom had packed for my careless 12-year-old self in exchange for a promise that I would load the car. I had fulfilled my end of the bargain, and the car was now moving.

Earlier that morning, exhausted, I had entered the bathroom and sat down on the plastic toilet

personal  
essay



By **Sebastian Alfonzo**  
St. Paul Central  
Senior High  
School

seat, just like I do in Minnesota. A loud crack from the seat shook me awake. I thought the zigzag crack looked well done at first, like something you'd seen on nice pottery. I walked out of the bathroom as quickly as I could and left the seat broken.

My family left Venezuela in 2004. Being 5 years old at the time, I didn't realize what I was leaving. My mom comes from a family of six and my

dad from a family of four, most of whom live in Venezuela with their own families. We have visited a few times since our move.

Back in the car, I noticed young children outside dressed in dirty clothes, selling candy bars rather than sitting in a classroom. Dogs missing patches of hair with eyes so red their pupils were lost.

My cousin was once attacked on a busy street for her flip phone. My aunt and her family were held at gunpoint for the valuables in their car. I wasn't just leaving the danger and the poverty, I was leaving my family. I was fortunate enough to leave for "The Land of 10,000

Lakes," while they had to stay and face the barrel.

As I boarded the plane later that day, I was relieved to be escaping. I could be one of those children selling candy bars on the street. I could be paying \$80 for toilet seats.

As that thought concluded, a bigger part of me stepped up and decided that being relieved wasn't acceptable. I was leaving the situation, but that did not make it any less real for any of my family, or for the millions of people living in Venezuela.

I looked around the plane. On board I saw families, men, women with the same exhausted look I saw on my mother's face. I wasn't the only one dealing with these emotions of hopelessness, I was just new to them.

That's the last time I've been to Venezuela. Since then, I've become more educated on the

situation there. I am thankful to have grown up in the U.S., where I have the resources and tools to make a positive impact on the lives of others.

At the same time, I've learned that just because I am no longer in Venezuela doesn't make me any less responsible to do something about the situation there. I need to take it upon myself to work for change, because many in need don't always have the tools to do so. I should not be cynical, because that would be truly ungrateful.

The perspective that trip provided me is one I take into everything I do. I want to make things better for others, and I believe I can.

When I return to Venezuela, whether it be a year from now or a decade from now, I will bring the tools necessary to make people's lives better – and a carry-on full of toilet seats.



# Wrestling with womanhood

MY FRIEND AND I were walking the streets of southern France with an almost unbearable heat seeping in from all directions. We were making our way to the beach, burning up, yet still happy to have each other's company.

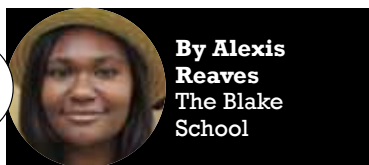
A loud honk startled us, and we turned to see an orange-looking old man smiling at us in his car. He began shouting a slew of vulgar things he wanted to do to us, or rather, to our bodies.

Instinctively, I grabbed onto my friend's arm and buried my face into her shoulder, feeling the intense sting of embarrassment.

"What do we do?" I asked her, genuinely confused.

She told me to just ignore it. Her eyes fixed forward, and her expression hardened. I couldn't understand her response at the time. She had put on a guise reserved for these

personal  
essay



By Alexis Reaves  
The Blake School

situations. However, by the time I went home, I too was learned in the ways of women.

I was 16 when I arrived in France for a year abroad, relatively young and relatively alone. My head was flushed with romantic ideas from too many movies and not enough maturity. I was still a girl.

For me, womanhood wasn't the first time I bled between my legs. Nor was it when I was introduced to the piece of cloth that I'd tie around my chest. No, my banishment from girlhood was much more sinister.

It was, above all, my body, or more precisely, the reaction to it. My French host mother often made comments about my weight. She

praised me when she found me thin, tutted if I became heavier. I was interrogated about my mom's figure, which was her way of encouraging me to stay slender.

I wasn't sure how to react to this scrutiny. Never before had an adult taken such an interest in my weight. There was a time in elementary school when other children had. I starved myself that summer.

I sense my classmates were forced under this humiliating inspection as well. There was hardly a time when a girl wasn't dieting. A friend once showed me an inventory of half-naked pictures of herself in the mirror. She thought a space between her thighs determined her self-worth.

Another girl's host mother assured her it was OK to look pretty, so she veiled herself in makeup. I, too, began fixing myself. Each day I poked my eyes with eyeliner, smeared foundation on my face and buckled in high heels. At times it felt as though I was a one-dimensional creature whose value depended on how much I could attract men.

They were at cocktail parties, REAVES continued on page 31



Alexis Reaves surveys a town in the Basque Country in France in May during a study abroad trip.

PHOTO SUBMITTED

# Strength can mean more than muscles

IT'S RECESS; every kid's favorite time during school.

The sun beats down on all of us as we scrape our knees and ruin our clothes.

I'm 6 years old, my velcro shoes are covered in mud and grime, and my school uniform is untucked and disheveled.

I run over to my group of friends organizing a game of tag. The instant I get to the group, I hear, "Ooh, Lucas is here!" Initially, I'm excited with the response, eager to spend time with my friends. But what follows is a comment I have never forgotten.

"Lucas is 'it' because he's too slow to catch us."

personal  
essay



By Lucas Johnson  
St. Paul Academy and Summit School

Since birth, I have had an undiagnosed muscular deficiency, an extremely rare and, as far as my family and the doctors are aware, completely new condition. I couldn't swallow when I came home from the hospital, I stopped breathing sporadically throughout my infancy and I couldn't walk until age 2. Doctors were unsure if I was going to be able to even lift a fork to feed myself when I grew older.

Usually with a genetic weakness, a treatment plan and specialized care and equipment are used for a person's entire life. But my situation was thankfully not nearly as severe. I've had no need for serious equipment, such as wheelchairs or crutches, to ensure my well-being, which is truly a blessing. However, I've had a number of bracing programs to ensure my posture and gait were not worsened as a result of weak core and support muscles.

Naturally, I've had countless doctor's appointments to both check my physical progress in terms of muscle growth, and to attempt to diagnose whatever my body's dealing with. When each of these appointments rolls around, I dread having to duck out of school and explain to the teacher, or even the class, why I have to leave. Confused faces and whispers generally follow. It bothers me beyond belief, and I constantly wish I

could change the way I am.

With this reality comes a daily battle and a necessity for patience and understanding. I go to public pools and I get stares as my dramatically thin body wisps by. I play pickup basketball and hear snickers as I approach the court, before they even know my ability. Honestly, I'm just always in a tough spot. I am able to do physical activity but at a dramatically lower level than my peers. I can shoot a basketball with ease, but I can't compete when it comes to outmuscling an opponent in order to score. I can run, of course, but my endurance is miniscule. I can build muscle, but the energy I exert while exercising is far higher than it would be for a normal person. And that's where I struggle.

But then I get to the hospital. I see kids my age confined to motorized wheelchairs who are forced to breath through a tube. I see kids who

can't walk without crutches. I see kids who need help desperately, but there's only so much a doctor can do.

Once I step through those sliding doors covered in Blue's Clues and superhero stickers, I instantly regret complaining. In comparison, I am a picture of health in that hospital – I can walk, run, jump and relieve myself without any aid. Although I may be challenged, I am constantly reminded of what I could be dealing with.

I'm frustrated every single day of my life that I can't compare to others' physical abilities, but in the same sense, I am incredibly gratified to be able to move at all. There are days when I get fed up, wish I could change and daydream of a better me, but I've started to catch myself and realize that I am who I am, and there's nothing I can do to change that.

JOHNSON continued on page 31

# Working hard on my path forward

WALKING INTO A ROOM full of strangers is scary. Especially when you're the newest and youngest person there.

I knew this feeling all too well. I remember walking into a conference room at Children's Hospitals and Clinics of Minnesota in Minneapolis on my first day volunteering about five years ago, and feeling butterflies roaming around in my stomach. I thought, "Why is everybody staring at me?"

Now that I think about it, I laugh. I was nervous for no reason at all. I was walking into a room full of people who shared the same interests as me. People who wanted to serve their community, just as I did.

personal essay



**By Daniela Garcia**  
Edina High School

Normally, when I tell adults I volunteer, they don't always believe me. They ask a lot of follow-up questions, almost like a test to see if I'm telling the truth. But, to their surprise, I am telling the truth.

As a Mexican American, I try to do everything I can to refute what people perceive as the stereotypical Hispanic girl by getting the best education, and the most out of life, that I can. With this education I plan on getting into college, starting my career and

becoming successful as a journalist and, later, in the field of law.

I always try to push myself to go the extra step because I believe that my future will represent who I am and will show my ambitions in life. I try to never lose motivation because I think it can be helpful when I need it, such as in journalism.

If I want to be successful, I need as much support as I can get, and my mom is my No. 1 fan. She is hard-working and sacrifices all she has for me and my future. I feel as though I owe it all to her, and I want to attribute my successes to her. Her hard-working job, her strong independence and her self-confidence have taught me that along my journey, I need to be prepared for whatever is coming. Her support drives me forward.

A while back, my mom encouraged me to join the speech team at my high school. I didn't think it was a good idea, but I joined anyway.

And even though I didn't enjoy it at first, she said I would at least learn something in the process.

She was right. While on the team, I learned that speaking in front of people is not scary. Being on the speech team requires you to think on your feet, and staying ahead of the game is key to scoring a one (one is the highest ranking you can get, out of five).

During my summer breaks, I try to stay busy by enrolling in camps, studying for the ACT with tutors and practice exams, and working as an intern at a law firm. Summer camps are one of the many things I do to get ahead. This summer, I participated in a mock trial with students, along with a lawyer who ran the trial. I'm hoping it helps me make the mock trial team in my senior year of high school. These people, and new activities, have brought diversity to my life and have even changed my opinions and perceptions.

ThreeSixty Journalism, another

summer and school-year program I'm enrolled in, has helped me decide what I want for my future, in terms of education after high school, and has helped guide me onto a steady path toward journalism. Being a journalist requires you to think on the spot, which can be tricky. But thanks to the experience I have had, I am better prepared to do so.

Thanks to all these things, I feel prepared for what's next. Through networking, I have met professionals who have great connections and want to see me succeed. And the best part of my journey is that all the work I have done will help me toward my dream of becoming a journalist and later entering the law field. I have met students who are just as enthusiastic as I am, and who also have a passion for hard work and becoming successful.

I look forward to my future, knowing that every day is a baby step closer to my dream.

# A lesson in being truly grateful

AS I STARED at the black streaks of slimy, putty-like goo that were thrown onto my bedroom ceiling during my 10th birthday celebration, I resented my living situation.

I hated the fact I shared a tiny bedroom with my older sister and mother in my grandparents' basement. But, because of my mother's sickness and inability to work, moving to our own place was out of the question.

And at 14 years old, I absolutely hated that.

I hated explaining my living situation to other people. I felt ashamed, and like a charity case, compared to them. While my friends were always moving to new houses and had their own rooms, I stayed where I grew up, and always had to help. Same neighborhood, same house, same everything. When I was around my friends, I felt like they looked down on me.

personal essay



**By Skyler Kuczaboski**  
St. Paul Harding Senior High School

Although I loved my family, being with my autistic older sister, my heavily asthmatic mother, my grandma's home daycare children and my arguing grandparents was overwhelming.

So when my best friend, Nina, invited me to visit her family in Montana for about two weeks, I thought, "This is exactly what I need, a getaway."

The drive to Montana was beautiful. I watched the landscape grow and mold into tall, grassy hills and huge mountains. I expected Montana to be much more beautiful than Minnesota. It seemed the farther we drove, the more beautiful

the world seemed to be.

But, despite the amazing scenery, I did not expect to see so much strife.

Nina's family lives in Lame Deer, Montana, a Cheyenne Indian reservation. I remember the old rusty cars without wheels just sitting near the border of the town. There was a group of five or six "rez-dogs" with big, blood-filled ticks that had probably been on their grimy fur for a few weeks. One dog, who caught my attention rather quickly, lost his nose from sniffing an exploding firecracker a few years back.

The struggle wasn't any better inside.

We visited her aunt's house. Stacks of beads, magazines and other various objects towered in her tiny house. The kitchen had stacks of old food and dirty dishes, next to an empty fridge.

The children who sometimes stayed with her aunt had faces covered with purple bruises and brown dust from the dirt roads. Her aunt would take them in if their parents never came home. One of the girls, who was 14, had the obligation of driving out to the casino or bar

to find their parents. Many of the children on the reservation drank alcohol and smoked pot.

At her aunt's, the children would sleep in a small room with one set of bunk beds. Every night, before bed, each would put cotton balls in their ears to avoid cockroaches from crawling in while they were sleeping.

There was nowhere to escape the heat or the boredom in between the thin walls of her house. Despite these negative aspects of their life and Rita's house, it was a safe haven for a lot of children. A safe haven, with a revolving door welcoming new children to stay for the night.

The reservation had patches with gas stations and liquor stores. Most of her family members have never been to a McDonald's or a Walmart. It was nothing to me, but it meant the world to them to take a bite out of a crunchy chicken nugget, just once. To leave the reservation just once, to see what else was out there beyond the dirt, gas stations and the liquor stores, just once. People who desperately wanted to drive out of Lame Deer, past the pine trees, away from the mountains and toward

opportunities – just once.

But most of them won't. Most will never have the opportunity to leave. While there is no written restriction about leaving the reservation, there is a fear of leaving home. It is scary to leave a community of support and family behind. This fear likely kept many away from jobs, a complete college education and whatever else may lie beyond the pine trees.

At that point, I realized while my life may have seemed unpleasant and exhausting on the surface, I was fortunate. Although little has changed, at age 16 I still have a roof over my head, a bed to sleep on every night and a family I know is always going to be home. I have had resources and multiple opportunities, for which I am now thankful.

When I got home from my trip from Montana, I fell into my family's open loving arms. I was thankful to be home, back with my crazy family in our cramped room.

Life doesn't magically improve when one visits a poorer area. But learning to be truly grateful for what you have in life can really change your perspective.



# Climbing higher, growing stronger

AT AN ELEVATION OF 7,290 feet, we – 40-some American high school students – started hiking up the mountain single file, placing one foot in front of the other while we tried to keep pace with the person in front of us.

Around us, the cold, bleak, snow-capped mountains stood on either side of the closed-in valley, with brown grass signaling the approach of winter. As students occasionally passed each other, I would watch them continue up switchbacks, or trails, that made us doubt whether we would ever reach the top of the 10,825-foot Swiss mountain.

We had to grit our teeth and keep

personal  
essay



**By Allison Ahern**  
The Blake School

moving, with only our thoughts as company.

The wind whipped through the mountains, gradually growing stronger as we gained altitude. I felt defenseless from the cold, despite donning gloves and a hat, but I also felt determined to finish the hike, joining the others at the top.

My breath was deafening amid the silence of the hike. Behind me, people hiked slowly, heads bowed

against the wind, not talking for fear of exerting too much energy that would otherwise be used to hike up the steep switchbacks. The wind soon became unbearable, causing people to stumble and fall on the trail. But we all moved on, struggling against the steep grade, sometimes slipping on ice but always getting up.

Slipping once, I felt hopeless, wondering how I would ever make it to the top, but I got up and continued on, struggling against the wind.

One student had to drop out when I was only halfway done, but I continued and tried to keep pace with the other students, my legs and lungs burning, feet hurting.

After several hours, we all gathered inside the mountain-top shelter, devoid of people except the 40 of us. Smiling and laughing, we huddled together, detailing our own personal experiences during the hike.

This hike up to Gornergrat – the

top of the mountain – was one of many events that our group participated in during our stay in Zermatt, Switzerland, as part of a fall semester abroad. I wanted to use Swiss Semester, sponsored in part by my school, The Blake School, to broaden my horizons as well as to make myself more open.

The hike enabled me to reflect proudly on my physical accomplishments as well as realize that I could be more outgoing, both in class and with friends. The experience taught me that whatever I set my mind to, I could accomplish.

Although the hike was difficult, we all grew in our own ways by realizing that we could complete the hike with the many difficulties involved, or by improving our mental strength through overcoming adversity. Looking back, I was pleased with my accomplishments, from the physical to the academic.

The high school sophomores

on the trip came from various high schools in the U.S., and we all participated in activities such as hiking, downhill skiing and rock climbing. Our hikes took us all over Switzerland and showed us the many different towns from Lausanne, a part of the French side, to Zermatt, a part of the German side.

The academics, with classes ranging from geology to art history, were difficult. We also covered traditional subjects, including math and language, during the semester abroad.

Besides the tears and laughter at the end of the program, there was a sense of relief due to the end of finals, although students and teachers were downcast because it was the last week before everyone went back to their home school.

Now, former students always recommend the program to rising freshmen with a reminiscent smile about their adventures spent in the mountains of Switzerland.

# The journey with my mother

MY FATHER LEFT on Christmas 2011.

I kind of saw it as a present, rather than a tragedy.

I wouldn't miss the colored pencil drawings scribbled on the walls, the smell of damp socks, mice poop under furniture, cockroaches creeping through the cracks and dirty dishes on display the majority of the times.

When we were living with my father, we lived in homes in poor condition. He believed, "If it works, it's good enough."

He was an engineer. He used to be a math teacher, and he had enough money to travel to so many places, yet he chose this lifestyle. So that's how we lived.

I didn't understand why.

"Was our family not worth more than that?" I wondered. But the apartment became the only place where I can clearly remember when everyone

personal  
essay



**By V. Lee**  
St. Paul Harding Senior High School

was together before everything went bad.

We went through a lot in the next five years. But through watching my mother struggle and succeed, I learned how hard work and determination can lead to happiness.

My father left my mother for another woman, who is now his fourth wife. With my father absent, both of my youngest siblings had to go live in Laos because we were struggling financially.

Now it's just my mother, brother and me. We packed our bags and finally moved out of the apartment we had lived in for more than two years.

When he left, it carved a very bad

image of a "man" in my head. I felt like I couldn't trust anyone anymore. I didn't care about people leaving me. I lost trust in the word "forever." He had made an oath to my mother, "til death do us part." For a man to break that kind of promise made me afraid of something called "love."

We were moving to a temporary house in Richfield. It was small, but about twice as large as the apartment. My mother was still trying to buy her own house, continuing a dream she had with my father, but now by herself.

Two days after her birthday in 2012, my mother finally bought a house in St. Paul. The same day, she also bought a brand new red 2012 Toyota Camry.

I felt proud of my mother because of all of her hard work. Even when we didn't get along, I was still thankful for everything she had to offer for the family. When she achieved her goal, I felt like there was no obstacle for me to reach mine.

When we got into the house, it was unpleasant. The first thing I wanted to do was paint the walls because it showed evidence of misbehaved children, causing a flashback to the apartment. The drawings on the walls

weren't as bad, but they would be the first thing someone would notice if they stepped into the house.

We knew we had to remodel everything. The first thing we did was install new toilets. Over time, we repainted the walls, kitchen cabinets and the house. We also removed the carpet, replacing it with wood floors.

I didn't really help her with the hard work, but I did clean a lot of the mess she made while she was remodeling. This kind of made us become closer because we were creating a family bond – something we barely have – by building a place to call home.

Two years later, my mother's boss gave her a very special Christmas gift: plane tickets to go get my siblings back in Laos. When we went to thank him, she was crying tears of joy, thanking him in broken English. The happiness I felt was simply not as powerful as my mother's.

When we went to thank him, I was speechless. I didn't know how to react because I would have never thought someone was this generous. Also, I was so confused. I wondered what the transition was going to be like.

My siblings are with us now and

attending elementary school.

It's a blessing to have everyone together as a family, despite the fact my father will never be in his position ever again, or any other man. I don't mind it.

I am thankful for what I have because of where I am now. I have a roof over my head, food to eat, education and the affection of people around me. But I am truly thankful for my mother's hard work and dedication to her dream. She was determined, and her kids were her motivation.

Thanks to my mother, four years after my father left, I'm finally living in a nice home environment for once. The house my mother bought is still our home today. It has improved so much since the first day we arrived. The walls are white and the floors are clean. When I take a step in the house, I'm reminded that anyone can do anything if they're dedicated to what they truly desire. This home symbolizes my mother's hard work.

And my dream is to do better than where I am now, because I am given opportunities my mother didn't have. You can say I have my mother's dedication.

# A new beginning to the school day

## Pilot program at Johnson HS trades yellow buses for city buses, pushes school start time back one hour

AS ST. PAUL JOHNSON moves its start time an hour later this fall, riding the classic yellow school bus may become a thing of the past for most students.

Johnson will begin a year-long pilot program in which school will begin at 8:30 a.m. and, as a result of the later start time, students will ride city buses to school instead of yellow school buses. The school will provide students with Metro Transit bus fare.

“If you change the start time at the high schools, it has an impact on all of the other yellow school bus systems,” said Micheal Thompson, the Johnson Senior High School principal. “We would have to have a different way to get kids to and from school.”

If this pilot goes well, later start times and city bus travel could spread to all the schools in the district, according to Jacqueline Statum Allen, the school district’s assistant director of strategic planning and policy. It would follow suit of Minneapolis’ transition to public busing a few years ago.

Prompted by University of Minnesota research that says about two-thirds of high school students aren’t getting at least eight hours of sleep at night, the St. Paul Public Schools district decided last year to start school at 8:30 a.m. instead of 7:30 a.m.

However, the district ran into a roadblock with transportation.

The district discovered that it would either have to almost entirely rearrange its yellow bus transportation system, or use Metro Transit. But changing the yellow busing



By Maya Shelton-Davies  
ThreeSixty intern

system would mean elementary students would have to wait outside in the dark during winter mornings, according to school officials.

When the plan was first announced, parents generally thought the additional hour of sleep was a good thing, according to Statum Allen, but some were uncomfortable with students using Metro Transit busing.

“It is a change, and it’s understandable,” she said. “They are unfamiliar with public transportation and they are familiar with the yellow school bus, so that’s what they are comfortable with.”

Students at Johnson will receive all-you-can-ride cards for the school year, allowing them to travel anywhere on buses or train lines between 5 a.m. and 10 p.m. each day.

“It increases the flexibility for students,” Thompson said. “I think that all students should take advantage of programs at school like sports and extracurriculars. And that’s more of a possibility, since we know that they’ll have that way to get home.”

### Seeing pros and cons

Aaron Young, an incoming senior at St. Paul Johnson, appreciates that students can use cards to travel anywhere, but he sees both pros and cons with the pilot program.

“If school starts earlier at 7:30 a.m., I think people would want to



A Metro Transit bus waits at a bus stop in St. Paul. This fall, students at St. Paul Johnson will be taking public transit buses to school instead of the classic yellow bus as part of a pilot program.

get to bed earlier, by around 11,” he said, “when an 8:30 a.m. start would make them feel like they could stay awake later.”

Sebastian Alfonzo, a junior at Central High School, is hopeful Metro Transit will be useful for students. Earlier this year, Alfonzo was one of three youth leaders in the St. Paul Youth Commission who coordinated a separate pilot program to evaluate the use of Metro Transit in getting students to and from school.

“I can see it being a challenge to make [public transit] work,” Alfonzo said. “But if they can succeed at Johnson, then it’s possible to have the entire district using Metro Transit.”

In this pilot, Alfonzo’s group was given a \$10,000 grant, which it used to buy bus cards for 11 Harding students and three Central students, to advertise the project at the two schools and to work with Metro Transit staff.

“We found out that these cards were very helpful for students, especially lower-income students,” Alfonzo said. “It gave them more freedom to be independent in how they got around.”

The only problem was that



Young



Alfonzo

students would lose their cards, Alfonzo said. At Johnson this year, lost cards will cost \$10 to replace.

Riding the city bus also could allow Johnson students with jobs and after-school activities more freedom to get around the metropolitan area, according to Statum Allen. On top of that, according to Thompson, it allows students to stay after school more and stay on top of academics.

However, parents of 82 Johnson students so far have opted-out of the Metro Transit cards with concerns primarily regarding safety, according to Thompson.

“Some parents aren’t really supportive of the public busing because they don’t want school transportation with strangers on it,” Young said. “However, my parents both don’t have a big problem with it.”

### ‘I believe it will work...’

The district coordinated an in-depth analysis with Metro Transit before deciding which school would use the pilot program. Buses for all district high school students and specifics such as addresses, routes, timing, transfers and walking time were included in the evaluation by school officials.

“We’re a good choice for the pilot because we have two major bus lines near our school on Arcade and Maryland,” Thompson said.

Through this process, the district and administrators at Johnson have been paying close attention to Minneapolis and how it began using later start times and public transit. Thompson met with administrators at Patrick Henry High School in Minneapolis, which is demographically similar to St. Paul Johnson, to figure out how the program succeeded there.

“We have results from Minneapolis saying that they started with the pilot, and now all of their high schools use it,” Statum Allen said. “It worked really well for them, and I believe it will work just as well for our students.”



# Young people take a stand with Black Lives Matter

*Editor's note: This story was reported in the spring of 2015 and published on ThreeSixty Journalism's website in June.*



**By Simone Cazares**  
Recent high school graduate and ThreeSixty alum

ZEPH KAFFEY IS HAUNTED by the repeated images she has seen of black men and boys dying.

For months, she followed reports of police brutality against black people on the news. At first, she didn't know how to respond. But in recent weeks, Kaffey, who will be a student at DePaul University this fall, decided that enough is enough. She decided to get involved with Black Lives Matter Minneapolis to lend her voice to the protests.

"Seeing my brothers, seeing people that could be my father on television being slaughtered by the police has really motivated me, because they look like me, to get involved," Kaffey said. "Because it could be my brother next. It could be my dad next. It could be my friend next. And I would hate to see that happen. The fact that my people are being killed and are being looked down upon has been hurting me a lot."

*"The black community obviously for years [has] been targeted, discriminated against and been put down. I think it's time we stand up."*

— Zeph Kaffey, student

In May, Kaffey, then a student of Benilde St.-Margaret's School in Minneapolis, was among hundreds of Twin Cities high school students who walked out of school for a rally at Martin Luther King Park in Minneapolis to protest charges against members of Black Lives Matter Minneapolis who gathered



Zeph Kaffey, 18, then a student at Benilde-St. Margaret's in Minneapolis, attended the protest on May 1 in Minneapolis.

SIMONE CAZARES/THREESIXTY JOURNALISM

at the Mall of America in December.

The Mall of America and the city of Bloomington are pursuing trespass and disorderly conduct charges, among others, against 11 protesters, who pleaded not guilty in March. (Some charges have been dropped since this article was first reported and published.)

"Instead of doing something negative about it and being dangerous and violent I just decided that protesting — and I'm a spoken word artist — spreading the word through spoken word, social media, making statuses, sharing different articles and educating people on this issue is going to help them become more comfortable having a conversation about this," Kaffey said.

Nekima Levy-Pounds, a law professor at the University of St. Thomas who is among the protesters who were charged and are fighting the charges, is heartened by young people fighting for what they believe in. Levy-Pounds, also the newly-voted president of the Minneapolis chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), became involved in Black Lives Matter after traveling to Ferguson, Mo., following the death of 18-year-old Michael Brown last fall. After a police officer killed Brown, thousands took to the street in protests that captured the attention of people across the country.

"I thought I was an activist before that," Levy-Pounds said with a laugh during a March interview. "Then when I went, I was thinking, 'No.' I was an armchair activist apparently.

"But after that experience, I saw young people who had been tear-gassed and crying and trying to get themselves back together, but after the teargas wore off they were going right back to standing and protesting and having standoffs with the police, and so that just blew me away. When I got back from Ferguson I was a changed person. I just felt the spirit behind the protest. It reminded me about the things I had studied



Levy-Pounds

about the Civil Rights Movement. So I was all in at that point."

Through her work with Black Lives Matter, as an advisor and spokesperson, she has continued to watch young people grow and stand up for what they believe in.

"It's just amazing to see young people lay it all on the line for what they believe in and to see the level of creativity and ingenuity that they bring to the table," Levy-Pounds said. "And I learn so much just from being connected to them. There are certain things that I can add just from a legal perspective or based on some experience that I've had in dealing with government and the media. But they bring a lot of the energy and creativity and very strong organizing backgrounds to the table."

Some young people, however, say convincing others their age to be involved in the movement is a challenge.

"I think there are a lot of people who are still kind of disconnected," said Abdi Ali, a member of Minneapolis' The Black Liberation Project, an organization made up of primarily black people that deals with the reality of being black in America, Ali said. "They know about movements but they don't want to get involved with it."

Ali said that one of the reasons he hasn't seen young people involved is because of time.

"A lot of people do sports or extracurricular activities," Ali said, "and when you do that plus school, there virtually is no time after that in the day."

Although getting involved in their communities can be challenging for teenagers, the issue of African-Americans dying at the hands of police have rallied a dedicated core of young people. And occasionally, they are joined by many of their peers.

On the day of the student walkout, teenagers from across the Twin Cities poured into Martin Luther King Park. **PROTEST** continued on page 31



Protesters gathered on May 1 in Martin Luther King Park in Minneapolis, carrying signs and chanting, "No justice, no peace, prosecute the police!"

SIMONE CAZARES/THREESIXTY JOURNALISM



# When comedy becomes a sport

## Local students learn competitive improv in ComedySportz High School League

INSTEAD OF A FOOTBALL, baseball or frisbee, students in the ComedySportz High School League have been tossing around jokes.

ComedySportz Twin Cities is an improv outlet in Minneapolis distinguished by its game-like, competitive format in which two improv teams go head-to-head, taking topic suggestions from an audience. Through the years, 21 metro-area schools have joined the ComedySportz High School League, where students learn as much as they can about the improv format and gain new skills.

The ComedySportz High School League, which also takes place in other cities throughout the U.S., is the “largest and most successful improv training program for high school



By **Maya Shelton-Davies**  
ThreeSixty intern

students in the country,” according to the ComedySportz website.

Sophia Wright, a recent Edina High School graduate who spent two years participating in the High School League locally, attributes improv comedy to building her confidence.

“Since I’ve joined the ComedySportz High School League, I’m much less afraid,” Wright said. “I feel like I can handle being in front of an audience and answer questions better, especially presenting in the

classroom.”

The High School League is just like any extracurricular when it comes to commitment and organization, according to Doug Ocar, sales manager and co-owner of ComedySportz Twin Cities. In a typical season, each team has scheduled practices, a coach, a tournament with the other teams and optional shows hosted at schools or community centers.

Teams interested in joining the ComedySportz league need an adult supervisor and a willingness to expand upon useful skills, according to Ocar. These skills include collaboration, confidence, listening and audience interaction. And “making others look good,” Ocar said.

“The skills are very transferrable between improv comedy and real-life situations,” Wright said. “Real-life situations are always improved with comedy. People like to laugh.”

Improv creates an environment where it is OK to make mistakes because there are other people on stage to help out, Ocar said. The competitive aspect of ComedySportz isn’t as important as the team effort toward entertainment value.

“It wasn’t like we were competing with each other, we were just performing alongside each other,”



PHOTO COURTESY OF DOUG OCAR AND COMEDYSPORTZ

Students in the ComedySportz High School League practice with coaches. A total of 21 metro-area teams have participated in the league since its inception.

Wright said.

One of the most important aspects of improv comedy is being able to play well with others.

“As kids we play and we learn about the world through playing, and we can still learn about the world through play,” Ocar said.

Ocar wants to offer the option of participating in the league to as many students as possible, which is why the league is in a transition period. The league used to run from January through March, but during that period, it was able to accommodate only a small number of teams at once. Now, Ocar said he wants to make the coming season longer.

“If the league is more spread out throughout the year, it’s more likely that we’ll be able to cover more schools and expand the High School

League,” Ocar said. “More schools involved and less pressure on my coaches and their schedules. We want to be more accommodating.”

At first, Wright was hesitant and afraid to make a fool of herself in front of her peers, but “in order to improve at something, you have to be willing to make a fool out of yourself in front of people who are much better than you,” she said.

“I would say, if you’re skeptical, just go for it,” Wright said. “The worst that can happen is that you don’t enjoy it and you don’t do it the next year.”

“With High School League, though, it’s impossible to not enjoy it. You’ll definitely take something away from it, make new friends, and pride yourself in all of the different things you can accomplish.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF DOUG OCAR AND COMEDYSPORTZ

ComedySportz High School League teams pose for a photo after the ComedySportz annual tournament this year.

### Metro-area schools who have participated

Armstrong High School  
Buffalo High School  
Central High School  
Chanhassen High School  
Chaska High School  
Convent of the Visitation School  
Cooper High School  
Cretin-Derham Hall  
Eden Prairie High School  
Edina High School  
Holy Angels Academy

Hopkins High School  
Lakeville High School  
Maple Grove High School  
North High School  
Robbinsdale High School  
St. Louis Park High School  
St. Thomas Academy  
Simley High School  
Tartan High School  
Woodbury High School

SOURCE: COMEDYSPORTZ TWIN CITIES



# CVE pilot sparks debate among local Somalis, Muslims

## Community leaders worry about program's safeguards against surveillance

A PILOT PROGRAM to help curb recruitment of local Somali youth by overseas extremist groups has sparked debate within the Muslim and Somali communities about the program's safeguards against surveillance.

The Countering Violent Extremism pilot program, also known as the Building Community Resilience program, is led in the Twin Cities by U.S. Attorney Andrew Luger in an effort to "address the community-identified root causes of radicalization to violence," according to Ben Petok, a spokesperson for the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Minnesota.

Some Somali and Muslim leaders are concerned about the program becoming a means of surveillance on their communities, while others believe the pilot could be a step in the right direction.

The federal government-led program is designed to join primarily Somali Minnesotan community members and federal authorities in the fight against violent extremism recruitment through economic development and outreach activities, according to Petok. The program seeks to create community-led intervention teams, as well as bring mentorship and afterschool programs, scholarships, job trainers and placement officers into the Somali community, according to the Department of Justice's website. Minnesota boasts the largest Somali population in North America, with the vast majority living in the Twin Cities.

Leaders of the pilot program are at work trying to identify partners and funding for the program in Minneapolis and St. Paul, according to Petok.



By Lujain Al-Khawi  
ThreeSixty intern

However, some Muslim community leaders, such as Jaylani Hussein, are worried about the "blur of lines between surveillance and community outreach."

Hussein is the executive director of the Minnesota chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations. Like others, he is concerned the program may increase surveillance and marginalize the Somali community, even pointing to the dangers that the loose interpretation of the program's terminology could bring.

"Our initial reaction was, 'What are the safeguards against abuse?'"

and we saw that previous outreach programs (similar to the CVE program) actually blurred the lines between surveillance and outreach," Hussein said.

The previous outreach programs Hussein referenced were used in some European countries in recent years after attempted terroristic activities in Europe and the Middle East. One program CVE is modeled on is the Prevent program in the U.K., which "failed," according to Amber Michel, CAIR-MN's civic engagement manager, because it created a "division in the community" between federal authorities and the general Muslim population.

Petok refuted the idea that the outreach efforts would be a means of surveillance.

"The notion that a community-led program to bring resources into the Somali Minnesotan community is somehow a cover for surveillance is baseless and naïve," Petok said.

Some local Somali leaders, however, are hopeful about the program.

Omar Jamal, a consultant for the charter school education system in Minnesota, is a leading voice for

the Somali community, specifically regarding youth. Jamal, who debated Hussein about the CVE program on CNN in February, is part of a minority of Somali community members who publicly support the pilot.

Although he said he does not think the CVE program will prevent youth from joining terrorist groups, Jamal believes that "young people respond to a call," and he hopes that the program's proposed youth internship and mentorship opportunities will be that call for Somali teens.

When asked about some Somali leaders' concern with the program, Jamal said, "There is nothing that is all positive."

### Reasons for recruitment

Although Somali organizations and many Twin Cities mosques have tried to get involved in the anti-recruitment process, Jamal believes the recruitment problem is less about Jihad and more about the problems of underemployment and social alienation within the Minnesota Somali community.

He spoke of cases where poor, single Somali women are unable to understand or control their young boys due to the age gap and cultural differences.

"The problem is the absence of the father in the house," Jamal said.

Factor in issues of poverty,

unemployment, low education levels and gangs for some in the Somali community, and it can lead to youth being recruited, according to Jamal. Drugs and psychological problems stemming from having left a war-torn country also can play a factor.

However, CVE leaders cannot begin to tackle the subject of recruitment without first addressing the topic of U.S. foreign policy, leaders such as Jamal and Michel say.

"When we see drones killing little kids in Yemen, it is that that does more to drive recruitment to these organizations than any 'slick video,'" Michel said. "You cannot target people who are healthy, happy, and feel respected, engaged, heard and listened to, and convince them to join an [extremist] organization. But you can easily target people who ... see their sisters and brothers are being killed around the world, then yeah, then that becomes very fertile ground."

### 'Suspicion' and 'confusion' in the Somali community

Groups such as CAIR-MN urge that anti-recruitment activities should stay away from the FBI and Department of Justice, and instead be led by local nonprofits and government agencies such as the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

There have been many meetings held in the Twin Cities to foster trust between the U.S. Attorney and Somali community members, but there is still much "suspicion" and "confusion" regarding the program, according to Jamal.

A special committee within the program will be assigned to research the causes of violent extremism recruitment and better understand Somali history and culture to "... increase positive engagement between law enforcement, government, and the Minnesota Somali community," according to a "Memorandum of Understanding" that Luger signed in May to help alleviate concerns.

Whether the pilot program will work remains to be seen.

"I do not think Mr. Luger can stop recruitment," Michel said.



Leaders of the Minnesota chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations sign an official statement in opposition of the Countering Violent Extremism pilot program in May.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CAIR-MN

# Weighing in on the 'freshman 15'

## Living a healthy lifestyle doesn't always come easy for college students

JOHNNY MCGIBBON, a senior at the University of St. Thomas, wants to eat healthier, but he says he can't. "I live in an upperclassmen dorm that doesn't have a kitchen. For me, that feels like I've gone back 20 steps," said McGibbon, who is also a peer educator for the St. Paul university's Health and Wellness Promotion Team. "So I don't have fresh produce I can store. So now it's going back to what's convenient – what can I make in two minutes in a microwave?"

Studies show that the "freshman 15" is a myth, but there is plenty of truth to college weight gain and the difficulties of living a healthy lifestyle in college.

The "freshman 15" commonly describes the weight gain of U.S. students in their first year of college.

Originally, the phrase was the "freshman 10," coined by the New York Times in 1981. It was later altered to "freshman 15" to accommodate America's increasing weight, according to The Atlantic.

Students gaining approximately 12 pounds during four years of college is more realistic than gaining 15 in the first year alone, according to a 2012 study at Auburn University in Alabama.

"There are plenty of interesting articles out there that looked at studies across long periods of time," said Dr. Katherine Lust, a nutritionist



By **Va Yang**  
St. Paul Johnson High School



By **Zaid Khan**  
Anoka High School

and the director of research at the University of Minnesota's Boynton Health Service. "What they find is that it is more the norm that first-year students will gain about five pounds."

Why do college freshmen gain weight? According to Lust, many students are on their own for the first

time and have to make nutritional and healthy lifestyle decisions without parental input.

"You don't have your parents saying 'eat your vegetables,' so when you get on a college campus, all of a sudden you have even more choices," she said.

"So you have decisions about what you eat and when you eat it. You have [to make a] decision about how much you sleep, which can affect your weight," Lust added. "You have [to make a] decision about how much activity and exercise



Coughlan



McGibbon

you engage in. You have choices of whether you want to consume alcohol or not."

According to kidshealth.org, having a well-balanced diet, exercising regularly and getting enough sleep are ways that college students can curb weight gain. The website also states students should watch their alcohol and nicotine consumption. Alcohol adds calories and smoking makes physical exercise more difficult, according to the website.

Gender also plays a role in weight gain. Men are more likely to gain weight in the first year of college than women, according to the National Institute of Health. A study also pointed out that men were less concerned and had fewer strategies for weight control than women.

Therese Coughlan, also a senior and peer educator at St. Thomas, said living a healthy lifestyle in college is easier said than done.

"To be healthy is more expensive and, at times, commitment is more difficult," she said.

Students may find it helpful to talk to their doctors or to the school health center for advice. But some college students say school administrators need to meet them halfway and have resources available for students wishing to live a healthier lifestyle.

McGibbon said it comes down to a 50-50 effort from the school and the individual students in order to create a healthy lifestyle on campus.

To promote healthy living on campus, McGibbon's health promotion team hosts the Wellness 5K Run/Walk down Summit Avenue in St. Paul each year. The 5K, which is open to St. Thomas students, faculty, staff and alumni, is one example of how students and administrators can collaborate.

"It's a team thing between students and the administration," he said.

Lust agreed, emphasizing the long-term benefits.

"If we can learn to make good choices as a young person," she said, "then we can make good choices as we grow older."



MARISSA ABARA/THREESIXTY JOURNALISM

Delaney Simmons' synchronized swimming career has taken her from her hometown of Sioux Falls, S.D., to the Twin Cities, and now to college in St. Charles, Mo., where she will compete for national champion Lindenwood University.

# Swimmer graduates early to pursue Olympic dream

## Harding grad Simmons hopes to compete on big stage for synchronized swimming

DELANEY SIMMONS WAS 7 years old when she took up the sport of synchronized swimming, a pursuit that in a few years meant weekend commutes from Sioux Falls, S.D., to the Twin Cities for more intense training and competition.

A couple of years into high school, Simmons went all in on the sport and its demands. That meant leaving her family and friends behind and relocating to the Twin Cities permanently. It later meant graduating early from St. Paul Harding Senior High School in pursuit of the Olympic dream.

"My (former) team was pretty small and the goals of my team were just to have fun and obviously we worked hard," said Simmons, 17, "but it just wasn't the intensity that I wanted to achieve my goals."



By **Marissa Abara**  
Wayzata High School



By **Viky Moua**  
St. Paul Harding Senior High School

Leaving Sioux Falls, her hometown, was a big transition, Simmons said.

Through a connection with coaches in the Twin Cities, Simmons moved in with her grandparents in St. Paul to concentrate on training. She joined the St. Paul Stars, one of the top synchronized swimming **SWIMMER** continued on page 32



# Reaching the athletic crossroads

## Deciding whether to keep playing can be a difficult choice for athletes

TWO FORMER DIVISION I athletes – one a Minnesota native, another who played in the state – have divergent ideologies about life after their collegiate careers.

Donald Lynn Wilhite II, 25, a former University of Minnesota football player known to his friends as D.L., found a career path away from the field, while former Hopkins star Marvin Singleton, 22, is pursuing his passion as a professional basketball player.

For student-athletes, the decision to pursue their sports after college isn't always entirely left to them.

Fewer than 2 percent of Division I athletes make it to the professional level, with the exception of baseball and hockey, according to the NCAA.

Bob Madison, the activities director at Mounds View High School, said many of his former athletes have had to decide when to call it quits and move on.

"Going from an athlete to being a general part of society and the workforce is a really tough transition because you miss your teammates, you miss the physical activity, you may even miss physical contact in some situations," Madison said.

Wilhite was 5 years old when he first held a football. Eventually, his parents and coaches recognized his talent, which one day might've catapulted the young player into the pros.

But Wilhite had doubts.

"I wrestled with it a lot," said Wilhite, a native of Lexington, Ky., who led the Gophers with 8.5 sacks and was named to the All-Big Ten



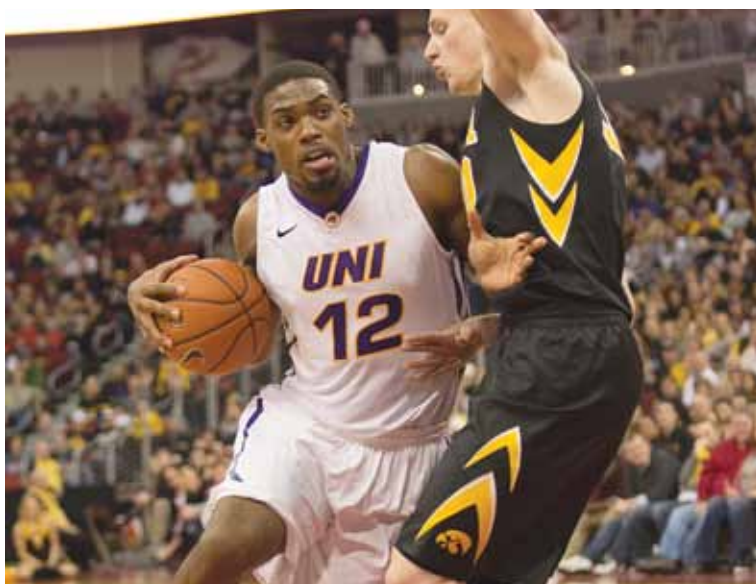
**By Tsimnuj Yang**  
St. Paul Harding Senior High School



**By Leydi Pliego**  
Cristo Rey Jesuit High School

second team in 2012 as a defensive lineman. "I was one of the best athletes in the country, at least statistically, for Division I."

Wilhite's accomplishments were splashed all over the media. He also was recognized not only for his athletic talent, but also his academics and community service.



Marvin Singleton (12), a 2015 graduate and former men's basketball player at the University of Northern Iowa, drives against an Iowa defender during a game last season. Singleton, a Minneapolis native, is pursuing playing basketball overseas.

After some thought, Wilhite decided he didn't want to play football for a living, and he didn't need it to achieve success. But leaving football after graduation wasn't easy – for him or his parents.

"I left the country and I went to France and Italy," he said. "I was all over the place."

His parents had had other plans for their son.

"I had to have a lot of discussions with my pops," he said. "He wanted me to make it there. I was so close. I understand why that would hurt his feelings."

Eventually, Wilhite's parents came to agree with his decision to not play professionally.

Wilhite, who now works in the human resources department at Cargill, was more intrigued by how he could make a difference in his community, similar to the people who helped him along the way.

"I feel like it's my duty to do that," he said.

He found motivation to help the community through Athletes Committed to Educating Students, an afterschool program founded in 1994 that is designed to help tutor and mentor students from low-income families.

"Some of the kids that he worked

with were a reflection of his upbringing," said former ACES executive director Chad Caruthers, now the executive director at ThreeSixty Journalism.

Singleton's story is different.

Singleton grew up in north Minneapolis and dreamed about playing professional basketball (He also was a part of ACES, but as a student.).

Singleton became a standout forward for Hopkins High School and helped carry the Royals to three consecutive state championships from 2009 to 2011. He went on to play at the University of Northern Iowa, where he averaged nearly five points and five rebounds per game as a starter his senior season. He was named to the Missouri Valley Conference All-Improved Team his senior year, and UNI finished 36-7 with the 6-foot-6, 237-pound forward in the starting lineup his junior and senior years.

Now, Singleton is in the process of trying to play professional basketball overseas. Teams have shown interest. He's just waiting on the phone call.

"They could call any day, and I could be gone any day," Singleton said in early August.

He's willing to take the best offer available to get his foot in the door,

he said, although he wouldn't mind playing in a tourist location. In the meantime, he was working out and coaching a local basketball camp in the Twin Cities in August.

Basketball keeps him sane and motivated, he said.

"It's just the love of the game, I can't give it up," Singleton said about continuing to pursue basketball. "I'm not done. I'm not done yet. I just want to keep playing as long as I possibly can and after that, then I can do something with my degree to get a job. In between in the summertime I could probably get internships here and there to use my degree, just to have some experience on my resume, but I can't really stop playing now. I'm addicted to it."

The NBA is still a goal, too, he said.

"... You never know the journey you have to take to get there all the time," he said. "It might not always work out the way you want it to, but you can never stop working, you can never stop dreaming."

Although they're on different paths, Wilhite is happy with his choice, and so is Singleton.

"Whatever you do, there's probably a million people who want to do that, too," Wilhite said. "It's really about, what can I do to set myself apart?"



D.L. Wilhite, right, a former University of Minnesota defensive lineman, rushes against an Iowa defender during a 2012 game for the Gophers. Wilhite now works for Cargill.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MIKE DUNLOP

PHOTO COURTESY OF MINNESOTA ATHLETIC COMMUNICATIONS

# Beating college essay stress

## Successful essays draw on personal experience, experts say



By Emma Vervair  
Osseo Senior High School



By Jennifer Delgado  
Cristo Rey Jesuit High School

STUDENTS PICK OUT colleges. They fill out applications. And then they have to write essays.

And University of Minnesota Senior Admissions Counselor Steve Baker says students stress out way too much.

The essay is only one piece of the college application puzzle, and Baker encourages students to draw on their personal experiences. Experts say a

good college essay should be honest and tell a story of a defining moment in a student's life.

A good essay "tells your story, and gives us context into your situation, about you as a person, about you as a student, your work ethic, your grit," Baker said. "Essays that tell that story are helpful for us."

Every year the University of Minnesota receives more than 46,000 applications. Most of them come with essays, although the university does not require one, Baker said. Admissions officers read all the essays from beginning to end.

"Any material that students submit as part of the application process is given very careful consideration," Baker said. "We read and review every statement, every essay, all the way through."

During the 2014-15 school year, Cori Paulet helped St. Paul Public Schools students write essays that

stand out. Paulet, then a graduate student at the University of St. Thomas, taught personal narrative writing at Johnson Senior High School and Harding Senior High School as part of a ThreeSixty Journalism project funded by the St. Paul Foundation.

"I remember spending a lot of time on it," said Paulet, thinking back on her own stressful college application essay process.

Paulet met with students regularly to help them write college essays and guided them through peer editing and revision. Other professionals also helped students craft their essays during their project.

Writing the essay can be



Paulet



Baker

challenging, Paulet said, because students tend to restate questions, write academically and not let their personal voice come out.

"A lot of the students had a really hard time writing about themselves," Paulet said.

However, students shouldn't worry too much about overselling themselves, Baker said.

"That's what I always encourage students to do as I'm working with them through the writing process, is don't be bashful," he said. "Brag about yourself."

Baker added that a common mistake among

students is being too general in their **ESSAY STRESS** continued on page 32

# More minority students taking PSEO courses

## Participation from students of color has increased 53 percent since 2007-08

MINNESOTA'S MINORITY students are increasingly taking college classes during high school, according to the Minnesota Department of Education.

In 1985, Minnesota became the first state in the nation to establish Post-Secondary Enrollment Options for students in high school, allowing them to earn college credit without having to pay tuition.

Twenty years later, a 2005 University of Minnesota report found that minorities were under-represented in the program. Efforts since then have shown progress.

Minority students taking PSEO has risen 53.4 percent since 2007-08, from 841 students to 1,290 in



By Alejandro Hernandez  
Minneapolis Roosevelt High School



By Janie Xiong  
St. Paul Harding Senior High School

2014, according to the Minnesota Department of Education. White students' participation increased by 22 percent in those same years.

Issraa El-Khatib, 16, an upcoming senior at Blaine High **PSEO** continued on page 32

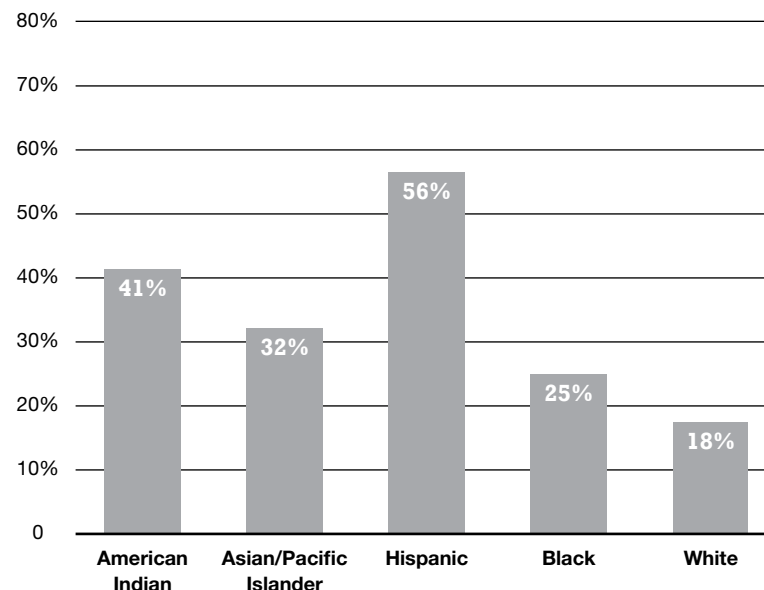
Minority students taking PSEO

841 students in 2007-08

1,290 students in 2014

a 53.4% increase

Percent increase in PSEO participants from 2007 to 2014



SOURCE: MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



# Styling a future in beauty

## Hands-on learning, career options among reasons students pick cosmetology school

TAWNI KRAMER WANTED a job that would help people feel good about themselves inside and out.

So, she turned to cosmetology school.

Kramer is one of many students in Minnesota who choose cosmetology school over a traditional four-year university each year.

Cosmetology school certifies people to work with hair, skin and nails in the beauty industry. School officials say that such trade schools are a great option for students who are creative and want to get into the workforce quickly. Full-time



By Ann Jerry  
Blaine High School



By Pa Zong Moya  
St. Paul Harding Senior High School

cosmetology students typically finish within a year.

"I'm a fast-paced kind of girl," said Kramer, 20, who attends the

Minnesota School of Cosmetology in Woodbury. "I like getting stuff done."

Nicole Linscheid, a counselor at the Minnesota School of Cosmetology, admits students such as Kramer every year. For hands-on learners, trade schools are a good option after high school, Linscheid said.

"Some people aren't book learners," Linscheid said. "They can't sit in a classroom all the time and retain the information."

Kramer is living with family in Hudson, Wisconsin, while commuting to the Minnesota School of Cosmetology in Woodbury. The school teaches about 150 students on two campuses in Woodbury and Plymouth. Tuition is \$20,200 for the program, which lasts 10 to 12 months.

Kramer starts her day at 9 a.m. and attends school for about eight hours, stopping only for a short break. She spends the day setting up, working with two to three clients, checking in with teachers, cleaning tools and completing assigned projects.

**COSMETOLOGY** continued on page 32



Tawni Kramer, a student at the Minnesota School of Cosmetology, uses specialty curling techniques to style customer Andrea Hernandez's hair in July.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JILL HOCKING/MINNESOTA SCHOOL OF COSMETOLOGY

# The Genesys of a career

## Twin Cities nonprofit Genesys Works provides training, internships to students



By Louisa Akoto  
Coon Rapids High School



By Sher Eh Ler Tee  
Roseville Area High School

A TWIN CITIES PROGRAM is providing a boost for economically-challenged students looking to get a kickstart in the changing job market.

For seven years, Twin Cities nonprofit Genesys Works has given students real-world training in marketing, business and IT careers with the goal of supplying trained workers for companies in the metro area.

"For many of our students, this is

their first job experience," said Joe Cudzilo, Genesys Works' marketing and communications manager.

The program is competitive, with 900 students applying and 250 accepted this year in the Twin Cities. Those students enter an intense eight-week training program that prepares them for the possibility of a year-long internship.

Nimo Mohamed, a senior at Al-Amal High School in Fridley and a student in the program, was looking for experience in the professional workplace. So far this summer, she has worked with Excel spreadsheets and transferred data – things she had never done before.

"It should be a requirement" for students, Mohamed said of her experience with Genesys Works.

Genesys Works has programs in the San Francisco Bay area, Houston and Chicago, and another opening soon in Washington, D.C. It

expanded to the Twin Cities in 2008. Over the years, Genesys Works has collaborated with more than 50 partners in the metro, such as Target, U.S. Bank, General Mills and 3M Corporation.

"We have a lot of support from

the corporate community," Cudzilo said. "They see Genesys Works as a pipeline for students who come from diverse backgrounds and who are the next generation of professionals in Minnesota."

**GENESYS** continued on page 33



Nadiira "Nadirah" Farah speaks to a group of people as part of Genesys Works.

PHOTO COURTESY OF HAI NGO



Preparing for life after high school

# Building homes, and a better future

## Tree Trust YouthBuild program helps disadvantaged students make a difference, earn diplomas

A METRO-AREA PROGRAM that fixes up houses sold to low-income people also helps young people get their diplomas.

Tree Trust YouthBuild helps disadvantaged students maintain a job while earning their high school diplomas or GEDs and contributing to the community by rehabbing houses in the Twin Cities. Those houses are then sold to low-income families.

“But the main thing is helping kids with barriers succeed,” said



By **Nayni Paung**  
St. Paul Harding Senior High School



By **Joseph Xiong**  
St. Paul Johnson Senior High School

Maja Numainville, the YouthBuild program coordinator.

TreeTrust YouthBuild, which began in 2006, has 25 students in the program who earn high school credit while gaining construction experience. The program had 60 applicants this year.

“I get to use my skills on the job site,” said Ivette Pineda, an incoming senior at the Minnesota Internship Center in north Minneapolis. Pineda has rehabbed houses, raised money for the program and even built a staircase.

Pineda has learned a lot through the program, she said, and will use what she has learned throughout her life.

“When you get older ... you can build your own house and don't have to ask other people to (help) since you already have the skills and the experiences,” she said.

The program is geared toward low-income young people between the ages of 16 and 24, including those who are in or who are aging out of foster care, those with disabilities, and more.

“A lot of kids don't grow up with **BUILDING** continued on page 33



PHOTO COURTESY OF TREE TRUST YOUTHBUILD

A Tree Trust YouthBuild Lead Construction Trainer (left) works with a participant on fixing up a house earlier this year in north Minneapolis.

# Far from the ocean, they learn about sea service

## Minnesota teens gain sea experience in U.S. Naval Sea Cadet Corps program

HE'S MORE THAN 1,000 miles from the ocean, but Ben Gallentine is part of a Twin Cities program that exposes young people to America's sea-base military services.

Gallentine is a cadet in the U.S. Naval Sea Cadet Corps, which uses monthly meetings, weekend drills, boot camp and, yes, ocean-going experiences to teach teens about the Navy, Coast Guard and Merchant Marine services. It also helps them develop citizenship and leadership skills.

“I just came back from field



By **Cher Vang**  
St. Paul Harding Senior High School



By **Autumn McKinney**  
Eden Prairie High School

medicine [training] in Florida,” Gallentine said recently.

He and other cadets also recently

rode in a UH-60 helicopter.

“I think it's important for people to try out what they want to do, before they go and do it,” he said.

Gallentine, entering his senior year at Minnetonka High School, will be advanced to a cadet petty officer in the program and is under contract to become an Air Force pararescue jumper.

Jacqueline LeVvintre recently graduated from the program with top honors as the highest-ranking cadet – chief petty officer – and obtained a Navy ROTC scholarship, for a Marine option, at the University of Southern California. She started the junior program at age 10, influenced by her father, who was an instructor in the Cadet Corps for 21 years.

**SEA SERVICE** continued on page 33



From left, Lt. j.g. Allyson McCormack, Cadet Airman Ben Gallentine and Cadet Chief Petty Officer Jacqueline LeVvintre of the U.S. Naval Sea Cadet Corps Twin Cities Squadron.

AUTUMN MCKINNEY/THREESIXTY JOURNALISM



# College ambition means burning the 1 a.m. oil

## College Possible helps low-income students make college a reality

RECENT HIGH SCHOOL graduate Augusta Allen had good reason for staying up until 1 a.m. nearly every night.

The long hours and extra responsibility had an endgame: to improve her chances of getting into college.

As a junior, Allen signed up for a nonprofit program called College Possible Twin Cities, which aims to improve local low-income students' chances of being accepted into college. Founded in Minnesota in 2000, College Possible Twin Cities, which is one of five College Possible locations in the U.S., does this through coaching and support.

Allen dove into the College Possible curriculum, which included assigned packets and homework to be completed over a matter of days. The long hours spent doing extra work – she also had her regular course work at St. Paul Central High School to complete – turned out to be well worth it when Allen was accepted into the College of St. Benedict in St. Joseph, Minn., on a scholarship.

“I signed up and they really gave



By **Griselda Sanchez**  
Cristo Rey Jesuit High School



By **Ashtyn McKinney**  
Eden Prairie High School

me empowerment,” said Allen, who will be a freshman at St. Benedict.

College Possible students are pushed hard from the start. Allen went through a rigorous interview process and was accepted into the

program as a junior at Central.

Once Allen was in, she began her busy weekly schedule. The school day would start early, at 7:30 a.m., and would end at 2 p.m.

Instead of going home like other students, she would head over to the College Possible classroom at Central two days a week. The College Possible coach and students would briefly describe their day before diving into a two-hour session about science and other subjects.

“You have a lot of motivation in the room,” Allen said.

Sometimes, if Allen and her classmates were lucky, their coach would give them a 10-minute break. Other days it would be only five minutes.

After break, they would dive into another subject. Near the end of the two-hour session, there would be time for games, practice and questions about other subjects.

Between practice ACTs and the actual test, Allen has taken seven



Senior Mai Thao (left) with her coach Jiksa Tafara during a College Possible session in January at Robbinsdale Cooper High School.

exams, she said. It may seem like a lot, but from a student's first practice test to the final test, those who took the test last year have had about a 25 percent average increase in scores (per results that were returned in late July), according to Sarah Russell, a College Possible Twin Cities program coordinator.

Russell said the students' desire to achieve makes her passionate about the work she does.

“I am encouraged by my students because they try so hard and want to

succeed,” Russell said.

As a result of College Possible's success, Russell said, the state of Minnesota is giving \$500,000 to the program over the next two years. Another success of College Possible includes reaching its goal of 20,000 students in the program nationwide – a goal met four years in advance, said Russell.

There are more than 1,800 College Possible students in Minnesota. Russell has the opportunity to see students less fortunate than herself succeed.

“They were just amazing human beings that just didn't know how to make it happen,” she said.

Even after Allen goes off to college, Russell said, her assigned coach will help her for the next four years. College students who are in College Possible have a 57-percent graduation rate, compared to a 28-percent rate for non-College Possible low-income students, according to Russell.

“We stick with them through high school and college,” Russell said.

Said Allen: “You build a really strong relationship.”

Allen said she feels the same eagerness about her new journey at St. Benedict as she did when she first began College Possible her junior year. She is thankful for all she has received from the program.

School nights were hard for Allen, but all the work paid off, she said.

“I'm really excited,” she said.



Coach Caitlin Gibson with a small group of juniors in January at Robbinsdale Cooper High School

### College Possible at a glance

- This year, six students won Bill Gates scholarships.
- Low-income students are attending Princeton University, Harvard University and Barnard College.
- Based on a Harvard study, College Possible students are 10 times more likely to graduate college than other low-income students.



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## The Minnesota Twins rookie prospect talks life on and off the baseball diamond

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PROFESSIONAL BASEBALL  
PLAYER.

Top prospect.

Future doctor?

Byron Buxton's Major League Baseball career has just begun, but the rookie already knows what he wants to do when his playing days are over.

"Eventually, I want to go outside and live a little bit and try to pursue that dream of getting into sports medicine," Buxton said from the Twins' dugout at Target Field on a warm July afternoon.

But for now, the 21-year-old from Georgia is busy focusing on his young, promising career as a centerfielder for the Minnesota Twins.

Less than two weeks after Buxton, the Twins rookie who is considered the top prospect in baseball, was called up from Double-A Chattanooga in mid-June, he was forced to sit out after injuring his thumb while sliding into second base against the Chicago White Sox.

However, Byron was "very hopeful," he said in late July, not just for his recovery, but his future as a professional baseball player.

All eyes have been on the five-tool player since he was drafted second overall by the Minnesota Twins in 2012. The word "potential" has become synonymous with his name.

Before his rise to the national spotlight, Buxton grew up in Georgia, playing baseball, football and basketball in high school. He was offered a full-ride scholarship to play baseball at the University of Georgia – his dream school. But after considering the offer, and even contemplating playing college football for the Bulldogs, he decided to sign with the Twins instead.

That decision proved successful.

Buxton found success in the minors, despite battling injuries in 2014.

Before his injury in June, he was hitting .189 with five runs, a double, a triple and 15 strikeouts in his first 37 major-league at-bats.

Despite his minor setback, Buxton is determined to give his best for the team, the fans and, his son, Brixton.

**I'm going to have you take me back a little bit, if you do not mind. Around what age did you know you wanted baseball to be a part of your future?** Maybe age 11 or 12. That's when I started being a little more serious about it. I grew up playing basketball, that's what my dad played in high school. Just wanted to try out baseball, and ever since then, I had a pretty good passion and love for the game.

**What was it like receiving national attention as a high school baseball player?**

Quite nerve-wracking. I mean, coming from a small town where I [was] at, you do not expect to see as many scouts and performance directors there at the game, so it was kind of nervous growing up playing a game, but at the same time, it was also fun because you are playing side by side with your friends.

**What was it like being drafted No. 2 overall, and going from high school to the minor leagues?**

It was a tough adjustment, especially pitching-wise. I did not see as much



By Lujain  
Al-Khawi  
ThreeSixty  
intern



*"I think the most exciting thing is making a dream come true, making it to the big leagues and playing in a big-league stadium."*

quality pitching as I did when I first got in, but you have to overcome and adjust to the pitching, just stay focused.

**Walk me through the experience of getting your major league call-up in June.**

I was on the road in Birmingham, Alabama, and they called me into the office to talk about base running, so I did not pay any attention to it and walked back out, and everybody was in the clubhouse saying a manager came in and he announced that I was going up. And just a lot of excitement and joy came through me, especially when it is one of your childhood dreams.

**Were you expecting this news to arrive when it did?**

Not at all, especially, we were in a playoff race down there, so I wasn't thinking or expecting a call-up anytime soon, so it was definitely a very exciting and unexpected moment.

**What have been the biggest changes between playing in the minors and the majors? And how have you handled those changes?**

Definitely, the pitching here is a lot better and pitchers have more than one out pitch. Other than Double-A where they've got pitches but they don't spot up as well. And I have to adjust by getting more experience, getting more at-bats and just being focused and having quality at-bats while you are up there, trying to grind out at-bats to help your teammates out.

**How do you handle all of this pressure, or hype, surrounding you entering the major leagues?**

Just try to stay humble and respect the fans here. I mean they obviously like me a lot here, and I do not want to do anything to, how can I say, not be on their good side. So, I will do

everything I can in the community to keep the fans happy.

**What has the road to recovery for your thumb been like so far?**

I think the toughest part of this road is just watching your teammates out there, and you cannot go out there and play side by side with them and try to have a few more games, but it has been pretty good. I come in when they are on the road at 9 [a.m.] or 10 [a.m.], and I do my rehab work, I run every day, I throw every day, just try to stay in shape and try to keep my arm in shape until they get back.

**Are you hopeful?**

Yeah, very hopeful.

**What are your goals on the field now that you are in the majors?**

One of my biggest goals no matter where I am at is just to go out there and give 110 percent because you don't know how long you'll be able to play this game one day, and you just don't want to take anything for granted. I want to go out there and give my best shot every night.

**What's it like playing alongside Torii Hunter, and what has your relationship been with him?**

Very fun and energetic. I mean we do not keep anything dull or blunt. The relationship together has grown a lot since spring training. We got to know each other a lot. Really, we just come out here and try to do as much as we can while we are at the field together. Just relaxed.

**Is he a pretty relaxed guy?**

Oh yeah. Not even close to uptight.

**How did your experience playing high school ball shape who you are today?**

It just really taught me what I really wanted to do after high school. Baseball was definitely my option of what I wanted to do, so I worked



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MINNESOTA TWINS

Buxton, who was called up to the Minnesota Twins in June, is one of baseball's top major league prospects.

### The Buxton file

**Profession:** Minnesota Twins centerfielder

**Age:** 21

**High school:** Appling County High School in Baxley, Ga.

**Career highlights:** Drafted by the Twins with the No. 2 overall pick in 2012.

Awarded the Minor League Player of the Year in 2013 by Baseball America.

Called up to the majors in June 2015. Rated as best prospect in baseball by MLB.com in early 2015.

**Find 'em:** On Twitter at @OfficialBuck103 and on Instagram at @buckdaddy103

extra hard in high school to try to get where I am at today. My coaches and family helped me out as well. Even if they did not want to do it, they would go to the field with me and throw with me. I am very thankful and grateful for them.

**You were interested in playing college football, too. Why did you decide to focus on baseball?**

I had a lot more passion and love for the game of baseball. I started playing football my seventh- or eighth-grade year of middle school.

I just played football just to stay in shape, friends are playing, just to not be working or having a job. Other than that, that is the only reason I played football. I played basketball until my sophomore year. Then, I started running over into baseball, and when that happened, I stopped playing basketball my sophomore year and just focused on baseball. I played football my junior and senior year, but the biggest focus is on baseball.

**How do you like living in Minnesota?**

Oh, I like it. Definitely a different environment from the one I am used to, so I try to get out as much as possible on my free time before I come to the field every day.

**What advice would you give to high school athletes who want to enter the pros?**

Definitely make sure you do your schoolwork. That was probably the biggest thing for my parents. When you are out there, make sure you give your best effort because high school is going to end one day and the world is going to come. You do not want to be surprised by it. And, just have fun while you are there. You know high school life, it was fun, but I took it too seriously to where I didn't do other things that I wanted to do while I was there. So, now that I am out here in the real world, it's pretty focused.

**What are you most excited about going forward?**

Right now, I am very excited to be ... close to getting back out here playing. I think the most exciting thing is making a dream come true, making it to the big leagues and playing in a big-league stadium.

*This is an edited transcript of this interview.*

# Students hone skills in unique work study program

## Cristo Rey program gives students real-world work experience in Twin Cities

CHRISTIAN MEJIA KNOWS how to stay busy.

Each week, the Minneapolis high school student has to juggle classes, soccer practice and, for one full day, a job.

Like all students at Cristo Rey Jesuit High School in south Minneapolis, Mejia has to balance his studies and work at the same time as part of the school's Corporate Work Study Program, which provides students with work experience that helps them pay for more than half of their tuition bill.

"It helps better prepare them to go on to college and go on to their careers," said Kris Donnelly, the executive director of the program. "They get to learn technical skills in a way that a normal student doesn't."

Every student is assigned a job based on his or her skills and must go through a two-week training during the summer. A team of four students takes turns in the same position at a company without missing class.

Each student is given one day from Monday to Thursday and one Friday every month to work from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Cristo Rey has longer school days and a school year from August to June to fulfill academic studies and work time. Companies pay the school \$30,000 for a team.

"When our students start interviewing for scholarships for college, they interview really well because they are mature and they have thought things through differently, so I think they get an advantage in those areas," Donnelly said.



**By Reyna Tejada**  
St. Paul Harding Senior High School



**By Yoko Vue**  
St Paul Central Senior High School

*"It helps better prepare them to go on to college and go on to their careers."*

— Kris Donnelly,  
executive director of CWSP

Mejia, 17, a senior, has attended the school since his freshman year. He works at Convey Compliance Systems, a tax and technology company based in Minnetonka, and helps people with technology issues.

"They treat you like a young adult," Mejia said. "I don't feel like I get left out whatsoever."

It was not Mejia's choice to attend Cristo Rey; it was his parents'. His transition from middle school to high school was difficult because of the schedule and workload. But, he said, he discovered that Cristo Rey was a "great opportunity" because he gained skills that will help him in the future.

However, school is more stressful than work, he said.

"I actually get happy when the workday is coming up because I feel like it is an opportunity to catch up on homework or projects" during

non-working time, he said.

Jenae' Jenkins, 17, a senior, said she updates computer files at Diversified Distribution Systems, a supply distribution services company in Brooklyn Park.

"I love the people at my job," Jenkins said. "They make me feel like I'm part of their little community." She also feels ready for more work responsibility, she said.

Cristo Rey is one of 30 schools across the nation that is part of a network of Jesuit Catholic schools. However, students of all faiths are welcome.

The first Cristo Rey High School opened in Chicago 20 years ago, and the Corporate Work Study Program has been a part of the school ever since. In the beginning, the program was a way for students to help the school financially, but soon the school realized its students were being challenged in different ways.

In Minnesota, the work study program includes more than 90 companies and nonprofits, including Dorsey & Whitney law firm and the Science Museum of Minnesota.

Cristo Rey students pay approximately \$13,250 per year for their education, but the work study program helps families pay more than half that cost. Financial aid also is available.

Mejia said he plans to study engineering or business in college. His interest in technology developed through one of his jobs during the program.

Jenkins said she is indecisive about whether to study nursing or enter the National Guard.

Either way, Jenkins would not change anything about her Cristo Rey experience, she said.

"In the long run, I really like it," she said. "I wouldn't want to trade [this] high school at all."



Nafiso Shire (left), a 2015 graduate of Cristo Rey Jesuit High School in Minneapolis, works with Lucy Werenicz in April at the Minneapolis office of Children's Respiratory and Critical Care Specialists, PA, as part of Cristo Rey's Corporate Work Study Program.



Jenae' Jenkins (center) and Christian Mejia (right), shown with Kris Donnelly, the executive director of Cristo Rey's Corporate Work Study Program, are students in the Corporate Work Study Program at Cristo Rey in Minneapolis.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CRISTO REY



# Athletes make the call on college

## Student-athletes can face difficult choices in picking a school to play for

RECENT COLLEGE GRADUATE Marvin Singleton would tell any high school athlete not to let anyone, even friends or family, choose a college for them.

“Picking a college as an athlete is almost the second-biggest decision you’ll make in your life besides getting married,” said Singleton, a Minneapolis native who graduated in 2015 from the University of Northern Iowa. Singleton received a full-ride four-year basketball scholarship to play at UNI after graduating from Hopkins High School.

Student athletes face difficult choices when choosing a college – whether it’s because of scholarships, influence from family and friends, location or personal taste. These decisions more than likely will affect the rest of their lives.

For Singleton, a scholarship wasn’t the primary focus. Rather, he was looking for a school that fit his personal taste and met his academic needs.

“I chose a school based off of academics,” he said.

Bob Madison, the activities director at Mounds View High School in Arden Hills, echoes Singleton, saying that college decision-making shouldn’t solely be based on scholarship money.

“I would tell students, don’t make your decision based on scholarships,” Madison said, adding that students should also consider geography, their preferred profession and areas of interest.

About 2 percent of high school athletes receive college scholarships



By Erianna Jiles  
Como Park Senior High School



By Kristy Ornelas  
Coon Rapids High School

or some type of financial aid, according to the NCAA’s website.

Over the years, Madison has worked with many athletes and has witnessed these decisions firsthand. He has found that even though a student might be offered a scholarship, down the road the scholarship may not be the ultimate reason for choosing a school.

“(Former Mounds View baseball player) Sam Hentges was drafted a year ago,” Madison said. “The day after we won the state baseball championship, I sat down with him, and we talked with him and his dad. His senior year is when he blew up, commits to the University of Arkansas, (but he) never went there.”

Hentges was drafted in the fourth round of the 2014 Major League Baseball Amateur Draft by the Cleveland Indians, according to baseball-reference.com. In his first two seasons, Hentges has played for the Indians in the Arizona League.

Alexis Nelson, an incoming senior at St. Paul Harding High School, is a



Madison

standout girls tennis player who has verbally committed to the University of California, Berkeley. She emphasizes that scholarships were only one factor in the process.

“I spent so much time on tennis, where it just kind of became, “This is how I’m going to go to college; this is how I’m going to pay for my education,” she said.

### Scholarship opportunities

But who gets these scholarships? Mounds View’s scholarship athletes in the last two years have been predominantly females, Madison said.

“But you have to be really careful when you just say scholarship to athletes, because if you’re a girl soccer player, a scholarship might be \$2,000 a year, but if it costs \$50,000 to go there, a scholarship is this big,” Madison said, making a pinching motion with his fingers.

About 53 percent of student-athletes at the Division I level receive some athletic aid, according to the NCAA. At Division II, it’s about 56 percent. At Division III schools, which don’t give out athletic scholarships, about 75 percent of student-athletes receive grant or need-based scholarship assistance. However, the average aid is \$13,500, according to NCAA figures, which is often less than a third of the full cost to attend the school.

All scholarships are not equal, Madison said. Athletes should do the math.

“I would say, right now there are more opportunities for female athletes to earn scholarships,” he said.

However, he added: “If you’re a male athlete, and you’re going to play football or basketball, odds are you’re going to have a larger scholarship than the female athlete who’s going to be a soccer player or a swimmer, etc.”

While recruitment opens doors, it also contributes to the difficulty in choosing the right college. Often, more than one college makes an offer to an athlete, creating a stressful situation.



KRISTY ORNELAS/THREESIXTY JOURNALISM

Marvin Singleton, a former Hopkins basketball star, chose to play basketball at the University of Northern Iowa, where he graduated in 2015. Singleton says high school athletes shouldn’t let others heavily influence their college decision.

“You do feel pressure as the recruit, especially when schools contact you that you might not want to go to. You have to be able to say no,” Nelson said. “Eventually weed out what schools you want and what schools have attractive qualities.”

### Role of family, others

Family can play a key role when choosing a college. In Nelson’s case, her family wanted her to choose what she considered to be the best fit for her. Nelson also was reportedly interested in North Carolina, Stanford and LSU.

“They were really supportive in that they just wanted me to take my time and make sure that I was visiting the schools that I was looking at, making sure that everything felt right with the other girls that were going to be on the team, and the coach,” she said.

Singleton encourages students to make an independent decision instead of being influenced by the people around them.

“Take your time, make sure you make the right decision that’s for you and your family,” he said.

“Don’t make the decision based

off of what other people want you to do or what they think is best for you,” Singleton said. “But don’t take too long. You don’t want to take too long and miss out on [an] opportunity.”

### Other influences

Social media also can have an effect on the future of an aspiring high school athlete. Madison said students can be great athletes and not be recruited because of what colleges see on their social media posts.

“When you post something on social media ... would you want your grandparents to see it?” Singleton asked. “That’s a filter to put through your mind, because if you don’t want your grandparents to see it, you probably don’t want your future college coach to see that as well!”

Talent is a major consideration for student athletes, but being conscious about other factors, such as social media, academic priorities and personal preference, are also important.

“The process, it has a lot of factors, so it can be pretty difficult,” Nelson said. “But if you know what you are looking for in college, then that helps a lot.”

# New sportswear allows Muslim girls to play sports, practice religion

## U of M, local girls team up to create culturally sensitive athletic uniforms

WHEN MUNA MOHAMED was in middle school, she had a hard time finding a private space to play basketball.

Mohamed, now a senior at Augsburg College in Minneapolis, is Muslim and wears the hijab, a head-cover some Muslim women choose to wear in observance of their religious teachings. As well as covering her hair, she covers her entire body from men who are not related to her.

For this reason, Mohamed was unable to wear typical sports clothing, which usually shows legs and arms, while playing in public. Nor was she able to find a place without men so that she could wear whatever she wanted.

"I did not have an opportunity to get a space where I could feel comfortable and respect my culture and



By Lujain Al-Khawi  
ThreeSixty intern

religion," Mohamed said.

This is no longer a problem for some local East African and Muslim girls. The girls, along with leaders of the girls' Cedar-Riverside program, teamed up with the University of Minnesota and community members to create culturally sensitive athletic-wear that allows girls to play sports comfortably while observing their Muslim religious practices.

"We designed a uniform that allowed the girls more freedom in movement, but of course, allowed them to remain covered and uphold cultural and religious norms," said

Dr. Chelsey Thul, a kinesiology lecturer at the University of Minnesota and one of the project leaders.

While the uniform covers all but the girls' faces and hands, it also allows for comfort, safety and flexibility while the girls remain physically active.

The project was led by Thul, the University of Minnesota College of Design, the Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport, the Girls Initiative in Recreation and Leisurely Sports (G.I.R.L.S.) program and Fatimah Hussein, who started the G.I.R.L.S. program in 2008.

### Creating the sportswear

The sportswear project was set in motion after the idea of girls-only gym time for local East African girls. When Hussein witnessed the lack of athletic opportunities for girls in her community, she founded the G.I.R.L.S. program, which promotes healthy physical activity in a culturally appropriate environment for Muslim and East African girls in the Cedar-Riverside community, in

2008 at the Brian Coyle Center in Minneapolis.

But girls in the program still complained about the skirts and the uncomfortable, long-sleeved shirts they had to wear, according to Thul, who was a volunteer research consultant for the program.

"We would hear girls talking about their clothing as they were trying to do physical activity," she said. "Their long skirts made it hard to do a behind-the-legs dribble... [Then] it hit me, 'Oh my gosh, what if we could have the girls create their ideal vision of a culturally-sensitive physical activity outfit?'"

About two years ago, Thul approached Dr. Elizabeth Bye, a professor at the College of Design, about a plan to design culturally sensitive sportswear, and Bye agreed to help with the design.

"It sounded fun," Bye recalled. "... This [project] spoke to a lot of my students."

Although sportswear tailored toward Muslim women already had been designed, not much was

available to younger females, nor were there culturally sensitive uniforms specific to an individual sport.

With the help of a more than \$120,000 grant from the Minnesota Agriculture Experiment Station that was due just two weeks after Thul approached Bye, Bye's graduate students and the G.I.R.L.S. team set out to design sportswear that would defy today's conventional norms.

The entire research and design process took about two years. Instead of teaching in a classroom, Bye taught her students the design process by having them swim and try out multiple sports to observe the situation "with a little bit of a different eye," she said.

A relationship between project leaders and the Somali community also developed. Some of the girls' parents even volunteered their time to help develop the sportswear through community feedback events.

Although there was some concern that the sportswear would not adhere to Somali culture's strict guidance on modesty, the overall community and parental feedback was positive, according to Thul.

"Parents in the community were very supportive," Thul said. "They were very excited that their girls were leading the way with this project."

After the prototypes were assembled, parents and some local community members sewed the final products in local mosques.

"You could not believe the difference it made," Bye said about the finished products.

To unveil the sportswear to the community, a fashion show was held in the spring at the Brian Coyle Center. G.I.R.L.S. participants displayed two different outfits: Some wore a black and blue striped sleeved physical outfit, which is to be used for any sport, and others showed off a red basketball uniform.

When asked about the outcome of the project, Mohamed, also a G.I.R.L.S. coach, said, "It's about time!"

### Looking toward the future

One big surprise during the project was the announcement that the girls **SPORTSWEAR** continued on page 33



At a fashion show this spring, a pair of G.I.R.L.S. participants model the new culturally sensitive athleticwear.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WARREN BRULAND



Dr. Elizabeth Bye from the University of Minnesota's College of Design goes through some of the prototypes designed by the G.I.R.L.S. participants in her office in July.

LUJAIN AL-KHAWI/THREESIXTY JOURNALISM



# My life as a gamer

I CAN FEEL my sweat-encased fingers stick to the keys. The rapid pounding of my heart resounds in my head. I hear the powerful boom of the woman's voice as we land the winning hit, "Victory!"

Gaming is my life. My world. My being.

Without it, I'd probably go back to doing nothing but listening to my mother's loud, pitchy lectures. Gaming has opened me up to the world. It has helped me find a community of people to connect with.

Gaming has brought me into a world where everyone supports each other, most of the time, and can share experiences. A world where everyone is connected.

Before, I'd get home from school, watch Anime on the computer, eat, sleep and repeat.

My mother used to say to me, "Get off the computer before your eyes go blind," which was quite the jinx, because I ended up getting glasses.

personal  
essay



By **Destiny Yang**  
St. Paul Harding  
Senior High  
School

Sometimes I'd play soccer for my school team, the Community School of Excellence Stars, otherwise known as the CSE Stars. We actually did quite well, winning 10 of 10 games, but I wasn't devoted because I was lazy.

In the end, school became irrelevant to me. So did people. I didn't care about my grades, my friends or even what my family thought of me. I was on the path toward depression and seclusion, and yet, I still did not care.

Eventually I began to drastically gain weight, jumping to 110 pounds from 93 pounds within a year. People started to notice, specifically some of the young boys, or as I used to call them, "wild beasts." They would call me "fat" in Hmong or "double chin" in English.

Those words and my indifference were keeping me from social activities. They painfully and slowly drained my life. My confidence was basically a game of "Where's Waldo?" I'd constantly have to look for it, find it, hold onto it and find it again with the flip of a new page.

My siblings and I were not as close as I wished we were. My mother remarried when I was 14, and my step-brothers, siblings and I found it hard to relate to each other.

That is, until I started to play Black Ops II on PlayStation 3. BO2 is a first-person shooter game, created by Treyarch in 2012. My step-brothers and siblings were always playing BO2, but I never glanced at it.

But on an uneventful Friday, I decided to give BO2 a chance, just because my brothers seemed to enjoy it so much. After I started playing and really immersed myself in the art of BO2, my siblings and I started to interact and became more comfortable with each other. We could argue without ever actually getting angry.

We would joke about how bad each other's skills were while also banding together to fight other

teams.

Looking back, we might have seemed a little aggressive, or even violent, but it was all for the love of the game. Gaming brought us closer together as a family.

A good friend of mine introduced me to League of Legends (LOL), a multiplayer online battle arena computer game created by Riot Games. I discovered a large portion of my eighth-grade class that was part of the LOL community.

The day I started playing LOL, that community embraced me. I made friends I could trust, and they actually trusted me, too. Friends that included me in their "clique," friends I could talk to over the microphone while in-game, friends who would support me in times of need.

We played LOL, went out to eat ice cream, played poker, competed in sports – and we still do to this day.

It also brought me closer to members of my family that were part of the LOL community, such as my brother, Dexter, and my four uncles, Toua, Kongh, Kaiser and Chai. We then had something in common to talk about, which led to more

interaction and communication that created a stronger bond.

These bonds changed my monochrome life to a vibrant fluorescent one. They were the foundation of my transformation.

After I started gaming, I became more confident in myself and began to enjoy school again. My communication skills with other students started to improve. I made friends outside of the LOL community. I even lost all the weight I gained in the past year. I overdosed on confidence and found a close-knit community. I never wanted to stop gaming.

My mother often lectured me saying, "Don't play so many games; it's bad for you," or "Stop playing games and cook something. You're older now and need to learn."

Of course, I would get angry at her for belittling my world, but then I would remember who I was before I started gaming. It was a hard time in my life.

Some people disconnect themselves from life, and all they need is something to reconnect them. For me, that reconnection was gaming, and I'm grateful for that.

# More than helping with cleaning

THE BROOM BRUSHED the floor of the kitchen as my mom sighed.

"Mom, do you need help with anything?" I ask.

"No," she responds in Hmong. "Go help your dad outside."

She doesn't always reject my help, so it makes me wonder what she's thinking.

I walked out the door slowly, making sure she didn't need any help. Before I knew it, I was outside. My dad dragged out the lawn mower and told me, "Start mowing the lawn. I'll pick up all the fallen branches."

Quickly, I got to the grass. Going backward and forward with the lawnmower, I watched as the grass shortened under every step. When

personal  
essay



By **Andy Moua**  
St. Paul Harding  
Senior High  
School

I was halfway done with the front yard, my dad said, "Let's empty the grass into the bag before you keep going. Help me put some of the branches into the bag, too."

I could tell my dad appreciated my help. It was as if I took a load off his shoulders. In fact, his shoulders loosened when I took the hard work.

My family and many others look like average families that live in St. Paul. It's hard to notice that our parents and grandparents are refugees who fled from Thailand. They came

to the U.S. poor, looking for ways to give us kids better lives, but they still rely on us for help.

Eventually, we finished all the yard work. After washing up, I crept into the kitchen, where my mom was cooking dinner.

"Do you need any help now?" I ask.

"No. Go do something," she replies.

I felt disappointed because I couldn't help her like I helped my dad. Walking to my room, I looked to see if there was anything I could do for her. Unsure of what to do, I grabbed my backpack and tossed it onto my bed. After closing the door, I crawled onto my bed and sank into my blankets. Before I knew it, I fell asleep.

I woke up, then looked at my phone. It was around 10 p.m. I lay in my bed, gazing into the black sky through my window.

Bang bang bang!

My oldest brother, Ricky, cried

out, "Mom, stop hitting your head against the wall!"

I listened closely as I sunk into the darkness of my room. I heard my mom sobbing and yelling at my older brother, Tommy, with a shaky voice.

"Don't you understand what we went through to get here? We've been trying to help you, but you won't focus on school. You have bad grades because you only focus on tennis and you haven't thought about your future. It's already your senior year, how are you going to face graduation?"

Tommy was speechless. Tears filled my eyes as I curled up into a ball of blankets. Shutting everything out, I closed my eyes and fell back asleep.

I was frustrated with Tommy while laying in the dark ... helpless. He couldn't see that we came from a poor family that ran for our lives. This was the first time that I heard my mom break down because of my brother. This experience taught me

how emotions are not always spoken, but can be seen through actions.

Nobody was in the house when I woke up. I went into the basement and looked where my mom hit the wall. Walking to my computer, I sat in my chair, then hit the power button. I looked at the dust on my black monitor, recalling my mother's words to Tommy.

"I could surprise my mom by doing the housework," I thought to myself. I felt an urgency to clean the house for her. Hearing what she was going through, I felt I could only help by cleaning. I didn't think of myself as a boy voluntarily doing what's often seen as girls' work – but a son trying to help his parents.

Instantly, I shut off my computer and ran to the laundry room, throwing all our dirty clothes into the washer. I pulled out the vacuum and started cleaning.

Seeing how everything became cleaner made me think of what my **MOUA** continued on page 34

# Becoming resilient, in and out of the pool

IT WAS COLD. Freezing Cold. Like the sub-zero temperatures of Antarctica.

I heard my brain warning: “This is an emergency, it’s time for the standard protocol.”

Suddenly, I felt my blood racing to my heart, finding a place to settle. I saw in my hands the transformation: wrinkled purple hands with veins like Freddy Krueger’s. My muscles weakened, leaving me with no circulation. Shock came over me. The burning sensation was excruciating, like a wildfire.

My captain was flustered, informing my coach I should get out of the

personal essay



By Aaron Young  
St. Paul Johnson  
High School

pool. I did. I walked in embarrassment to the bench, disappointed I couldn’t perform. I sat with my head in my hands, peeking in agony as my teammates swam.

I decided to clean up and change before meeting my parents. I informed my dad about the incident, and scheduled a doctor’s appointment to get answers.

The next day I was told I had

Raynaud’s disease, a condition where my blood flows to my heart in order to keep it warm, leaving the rest empty-handed. The aftermath was overwhelming, and I couldn’t handle the situation. I was devastated.

I spent the rest of the year off the swim team to figure things out.

One year later, I was determined to try again as a sophomore. My dad bought me swimming gloves, a cap, and a jacket to keep me warm. My times improved for both freestyle and breaststroke events by working hard and learning from teammates about technique.

It seemed like I was on top of

the world until suddenly, I got sick, this time with a bad sinus infection, which meant time off from swimming. It made me slower. I struggled upon return, appearing sluggish and unprepared. My mentality was in the wrong place: I just wanted the season to end. When the conference meet arrived, I didn’t make the cut.

It hurt. But I knew I had to stay for taper, a month-long period to prepare for the conference meet, and prove myself to everyone. Practice would reach an extreme. I swam 5,000 yards at a rigorous pace every day. I remember after practice my coach telling me he was impressed. The recognition motivated me to come back and prove my worth. I also found it beneficial that I could improve on my conditioning and endurance.

I finally had momentum. During the offseason, I continued to swim.

I swam across Rush Lake twice in preparation for the 500-yard race.

Just when I thought I was problem-free going into my junior year, I was forced to take yet another detour. I was sidelined for the first week of the season to recover after having a cyst removed. But I eventually got a break. I got back into the pool, feeling unstoppable on my own turf. I would race others in the pool, trying to beat them.

It was my time.

I felt like myself. I wasn’t getting out of the pool anymore because of the pain, rather I fought against it, pushing even harder to reach the other end. I was becoming a good swimmer and teammate. A man who overcame whatever got in his way. I was getting faster, dropping times left and right. I learned to pace myself and stay consistent. I even

**YOUNG** continued on page 34

# Grandmother is a friend, role model

MY 69-YEAR-OLD grandmother, Jamila, is part parent, teacher and best friend.

Most of all, my grandmother is a role model to me, because she taught me everything I need to know to become successful in life.

She is a woman who taught me how to respect my family and other people around me while growing up in Ethiopia. For example, she told me to respect elders and treat people how they want to be treated. She taught me how to speak Amharic and inspired me to go to school because of the opportunity she did not have when she was younger.

My grandmother was married at the age of 16 and did not complete her education. She wanted her children to go to school, but they could not because they had to help out with chores in the house.

When my mother was pregnant with me, my parents applied for a visa to travel to the United States.

personal essay



By Razeqa Aliyi  
St. Paul Central  
High School

When my parents filled out the paperwork, they did not yet know if I would be a boy or a girl, so I was not on the application. But instead, they put my siblings’ names on the paperwork. Because of this, I was not able to travel and stayed behind with my grandmother. My parents, sisters and brother arrived in the United States in 2005.

Later, when my father traveled back to Ethiopia and told my grandmother that it was time for me to come to the United States, I was excited about the prospect of seeing new things. But I also realized that I would be leaving my grandmother, who raised me for 11 years.

When it was time to board the plane, Jamila asked, “Do you have to go?” I held back tears.

“It’s time to board the plane, Razeqa,” said my uncle, Awel.

As I walked to the plane, I did not look back. I sat down in my seat and tears filled my eyes. I realized I would not see my grandmother for a long time.

My parents, Munira and Jemal, came to America because they wanted to give us the opportunity to get an education. But, life in Minnesota brought its own challenges. I missed my grandmother. Her sense of humor always made me feel comfortable. Comfort was anything but what I was feeling. I did not speak English nor did I know anyone in school. The language barrier, change of surroundings and classroom settings were difficult to grasp.

Slowly, things started to get better. I learned how to speak English at school. And my brother, Nuradin, who had already been in Minnesota for six years, taught me new vocabulary words. In 2012, I felt like I had to accept the fact that Minnesota was going to be my home.

Another thing I learned from my grandmother is that family is important and always sticks together. After being here for five years, I realized I depended on her because she was



ThreeSixty journalist Razeqa Aliyi (right) as a younger child with her grandmother.

the only family I had.

My grandmother lives in Ethiopia with my aunt and cousin. My goal is to visit her when I am in college, to let her know that my respecting elders and being successful in life

was all because of her.

I talk to my grandmother on the phone every other weekend, and so do my siblings. Hearing her voice reminds of the good times we’ve shared.

PHOTO SUBMITTED



# Learning from my mother's sacrifice

THERE SHE WAS, the woman who carried me in her womb with every inch and every muscle of her body for nine straight months, exasperated on the couch next to my 4-year-old sister.

It didn't occur to me until I was 14 years old that my mom had her own goals to achieve within her lifetime. I had viewed her only as the person whose life revolved around making sure her children's dreams came true. I never saw her as an individual who had dreams of her own. It was something I was going to find out for myself.

Even after leaving Mexico for America, she probably never imagined that she would have to sacrifice her aspiration of becoming a schoolteacher to work a minimum wage job, wake up at 3 a.m. for work and not return home until the late afternoon.

She was stuck in an endless routine: Work, sleep, eat, repeat.

One late afternoon, I arrived home from school. The apartment was quiet, enough to only hear the voices of the actors in the soap opera on TV. I stood in the doorway, observing the place I called home, but my eyes firmly narrowed onto her.

I noticed her crinkled hands and long, mahogany arms bent with exhaustion, lying unevenly together on the couch.

I kept looking at her, observing her, remembering what she would always tell me.

"You don't want to be working in these unskilled jobs. These jobs aren't for you, they won't get you as far in life as you want."

This has always stayed in the back of my mind.

She wanted me to have the life she could have had, but even better. For her, this "land of the free" gave my siblings and me the potential to succeed far more than we would

personal  
essay



By **Melisa Robles Olivar**  
Minneapolis  
Southwest High School

have in Mexico.

My mom could have been a schoolteacher. But she didn't choose that path. She couldn't. Under the circumstances in Mexico, and with the lack of resources, there was no



Melisa Robles Olivar, left, at age 6 with her mother at the Mall of America in Bloomington.

possible way for her to be able to sustain herself and her family, and achieve her wish of leading a classroom of kids.

What she doesn't know is that her dream of teaching did come true. She's the greatest teacher I know. And I have learned a lot from her. She's hardworking. She is always grateful for her children and for having a job. And she never gave up when things got tough.

That woman, who's resting on the couch, as tired as she is, may not have become a schoolteacher, but the choices she did make have allowed me the opportunity to pursue my dreams.

# Loving myself

"WE WANT 'THUNDER Thighs' on our team," shouted a classmate.

All the girls in gym class darted their eyes toward me. I had no words. And while most laughed, I ran to the bathroom.

I didn't cry. I was mad.

I never showed this anger in front of others, but it did affect me. Why wouldn't it? I was human.

When I got in the comfort of my room, I looked in the mirror constantly. Staring at my reflection, I became unhappy. I wasn't just self-conscious about my large thighs yet, but my fat lips, giant nose and Nicki Minaj-like butt were some of the other things I started to examine closer than ever. It would be years of torture before I learned how to feel comfortable in my own skin again.

The development of my poor body image started in eighth grade. I began to watch "90210" and "Gossip Girl." Both of these shows showed predominantly rich, white teenagers. One of the main characters in "90210" had the body that I wanted. She was a beautiful, white girl with blonde hair and big, blue eyes. She was petite with a thigh gap.

In "Gossip Girl," one of the main actresses also was white, blonde and thin. Her thighs didn't move when she walked and ran. Mine did. And I thought there was something wrong with that.

Social media didn't help the situation. I created a Tumblr in search of other body types. I didn't see any. I saw the same cookie-cutter body: white, thin, blonde girl. I noticed many had huge blue eyes with lots of mascara.

The sad thing is that most of these images were of younger girls. They all looked like clones. I was so tired of not seeing anybody that reflected my body type or race. I couldn't relate. It saddened me more and more.

With this desperate search, I ended up turning to magazines. "Seventeen" was the first teen magazine I picked up. And I was shocked.

personal  
essay



By **Nesani Sabal**  
DeLaSalle  
High School

I thought that because so many teens talked about it, the magazine would be relatable. I, again, saw the same image.

The pretty girls in the magazines looked so happy, while I was the complete opposite.

However, I remember the exact day I broke out of my shell. This confidence literally grew over night. I woke up super happy. I went straight to my mirror and smiled. I smiled because I was truly proud. I finally had the courage to express myself through my clothes. I felt comfortable. I wore shorts to ValleyFair. They were a pair of pink denim shorts with sparkles, that I hid (Target brand, but I loved them.).

*The pretty girls in the magazines looked so happy, while I was the complete opposite.*

My friends didn't even care about my thighs. They were drawn to my trendy shorts. I felt so free, not only because no one said anything, but because I felt a lot happier.

Spoken word also was a great discovery.

"Thick thighs, big nose and juicy lips. All the things 'they' teach you to hate, I love," wrote a poet.

I wrote this line everywhere. Notebooks. Pencil cases. I got in trouble a couple times for writing it on a desk. That line made me feel comfortable in my own skin. Even my "thunder thighs" were growing on me.

I felt all the freedom I was looking for, in one line. Who knew it would only take one line?

PHOTO SUBMITTED

# The act of helping

I LURCHED FORWARD in the backseat of my mom's green minivan, restrained only by my seatbelt, so she could see me in her peripheral vision while driving.

personal  
essay



**By Aidan Berg**  
Minneapolis  
Southwest High School

"Ugh, why do I have to do this?" I asked her.

"You need to learn the importance of helping others, not just for them, but for yourself," she muttered through gritted teeth.

Her tone had gained more than its fair share of exasperation from my hours of groaning. Ever since she told me that cold Saturday morning in November that our family was volunteering to prepare food for the homeless at a program called Loaves & Fishes later that night, my day had consisted of complaining, pouting and half-baked excuses to try to get out of going. I spasmed in my seatbelt, sat back and crossed my arms tightly, like all kids do when they don't get their way.

Through my 11 years of life I had always considered what I wanted first and thought about others second. It's not like I was

some budding sociopath; I was just self-centered, like many kids are. I always fought with my older brother for "control" of the television, argued over who deserved the last cookie, and when I didn't win an argument, I would call for one of my parents to come resolve the dispute (meaning agree with me).

I pretended to empathize with people as long as it didn't take time or effort from me. It was an act, a way of being seen as a caring person without having to do the work that goes with it. At the time, I didn't have enough perspective to understand looking out for other people is important. Acting upon empathy is a necessary behavior of a healthy person. I didn't know this when I was 11, but I was about to find out.

Upon arriving at Loaves & Fishes, I was surprised to see just

how many volunteers were bustling around. A dozen were cleaning and arranging the many wooden picnic-style tables in the large center area into seven rows of six tables. Another dozen people were over by three large serving tables, laying out bowls and platters of homemade comfort food, fruits and vegetables. A lot of healthy food, to be expected. Being an 11-year-old, I noted the absence of desserts at the table. It didn't help my mood.

A middle-aged blonde woman with a clipboard approached us, asked for our names, told us our jobs and sent us off. As I met the adults I would be working with, pretending to care, all I could think about was how badly I didn't want to be there. How I didn't want to know any of them. I was having a horrible time.

Shortly after that, we heard an announcement: the homeless were coming in. The moment I had been dreading all day had arrived. People of all ages and races began filing into the room, slowly making their way toward the serving table. I maintained my friendly face as they approached and I began scooping out food.

*By the end of the night, much like those I served, I felt refreshed, refilled and much more willing to face the next day.*

I quickly noticed something – I was so busy working, I couldn't think about pouting or what I could be doing with this valuable time. Then something important happened, something that shaped the person I've become.

I had taken a bathroom break, making sure to wash my hands thoroughly before returning. As I exited, I bumped into one of the homeless men. He was African-American, about 60 years old. His face appeared to be lined from worry and sadness. His hair was the type of gray-white reminiscent of a typical freezing, overcast winter day in Minnesota. He was very tall, 6-foot-5 or so, and really skinny. His black jacket vest hung off his body in a way that told me it probably fit him well many missed meals ago.

He looked down at me, recognizing me from the serving line. He smiled at me, and the relief and thankfulness his big, dark eyes projected have stayed with me five

years later. He put his left hand on my shoulder and extended his right for me to shake.

"Thank you," he said, and walked past me into the bathroom.

For the rest of the evening I didn't think about how I could be playing video games or watching basketball in the warmth of my house. Each time someone walked past me I wondered what they had gone through, what their story was.

By the end of the night, much like those I served, I felt refreshed, refilled and much more willing to face the next day. I hadn't just helped those people, I had discovered how doing things for others was good for my well-being. My encounter with that tall, gray-ing man changed me forever, and definitely for the better. Now when a classmate asks me about homework, or I see someone struggling with something, I know I have to do whatever I can to help.

It's not an act anymore.

# Discovering the power of language

I NERVOUSLY STEPPED through the classroom doorway with my father trailing behind me.

personal  
essay



**By Bayan Algazi**  
St. Paul Harding High School

I was 11 years old when I attended school for the first time in America. My father, Mohammed, explained to the teacher that we just moved from the middle eastern country of Jordan to Florida and that I did not understand English. I spoke Arabic.

I understood when my teacher welcomed me and introduced me to my new classmates. But everything

else was foreign.

"¿Hola, cómo estás?" the teacher and students asked me. I couldn't answer. I listened to their language and thought it was English. Finally, I realized it wasn't. My family and relatives were expecting me to learn English in school. When I spoke on the phone with my relatives back

in Jordan, they were surprised and shocked about me learning Spanish as a second language, but found it funny and exciting. My uncles and aunts wanted me to stay on the phone for hours speaking Spanish, and they still do, especially, my uncle Hassan.

"Oh that is amazing, you should teach me Spanish, Bayan, so we will be the only ones in the family who speak Spanish and start a business," said my uncle.

In Miami, I picked up Spanish in three years, and now I'm able to read and write fluently. I remember when I used to go shopping with my mother, Sumaya, I had to translate what the cashier was trying to say.

What surprised me was that learning Spanish opened my eyes to a whole new world of opportunities.

"Hola, mi nombre es Bayan," I said

*What surprised me was that learning Spanish opened my eyes to a whole new world of opportunities.*

as I introduced myself to Spanish-speaking people.

"¡Tu sabe Español, qué bueno!" said people who were positively surprised about my ability.

My school was very diverse, and learning English and Spanish helped me meet people from many different cultures.

In 2013, when I was 14 years old, my family moved to Minnesota to receive an even more diverse education. I started as a freshman at Harding Senior High School on St. Paul's east side. I quickly discovered our new environment was the best place to perfect my English language

skills. I'm even interested in learning Hmong.

I often serve as an interpreter, helping teachers better communicate with new English Language Learners, or ELL students, from Latin American countries.

"You speak Spanish very well, and I think you should study languages in college," my father always said encouragingly.

I plan to major in communications and journalism in college. And I want to empower people to feel confident about sharing their stories and viewpoints in their native languages.



# Finding a voice through sports

“WHAT SIZE ARE your shoes?” the man asked.

“What?” I turned to see the only person waiting at the bus stop.

“Your shoes,” he said, gesturing at my feet.

“Eleven,” I answered.

“My son has shoes like that,” he told me. “His shoes are size 17s.”

The conversation was weird but interesting. It was a comic reminder

personal essay



By Zekriah Chaudhry  
Home school

of the opening scene in “Forrest Gump.”

“Does he play basketball?” I asked.

The man nodded. After a few more words, the exchange somehow turned to a chat about Minnesota

sports, a friendly “how about those Twins?” talk.

When I was younger, I would have answered with an “oh” or an “um,” but I was different back then. Now I am a sports fan, and I can carry a conversation about sports and other things. But there was a time when I was much less comfortable talking to people.

The change started when I was 7. I was at home with my parents, listening to announcer Joe Buck call the Super Bowl XLII broadcast on TV. My parents’ excitement was rubbing off on me.

“That’s right, run out of bounds! Stop the clock,” my dad said eagerly.

And then, “Touchdown, New

York!” Buck said as New York Giants receiver Plaxico Burress caught a beautiful pass in the corner of the endzone. The sideline erupted. The fans at the stadium were full of either pure joy or complete heartbreak, and my mom and dad couldn’t have been happier.

That was the moment I wanted everything to do with sports.

My mom and dad, who were not Giants fans, cheered for the underdog to blemish the then-perfect record of the undefeated New England Patriots.

I know the underdog mentality made the Giants special to me at the time, and now as a Vikings fan, I still love it. I couldn’t contain my

excitement for the Giants as their bench stormed the field, showering in the confetti rain.

The season was over, but I wanted to relive that, like a captivated reader left frustrated by a cliffhanger. By the time the next football season rolled around, I already knew some of the best players on the Vikings team: Percy Harvin, Jasper Brinkley, Adrian Peterson and Brett Favre.

And I wasn’t done there.

Before, football had been the only sport I followed, but I was ecstatic when my dad told me he was bringing me to a Twins game.

I knew the rules of baseball, but Joe Mauer was the only player I **CHAUDHRY** continued on page 34

# Ready for my life after high school

ABOUT TWO YEARS AGO, I was dorm-room shopping.

I was moving out of the house for the fall semester.

Saying goodbye to my parents.

Meeting my new roommate.

Don’t be mistaken – I’m not describing my experience going to college. I won’t do that until this fall.

These are all things I experienced while still in high school.

When it came to preparing for life after high school, I did some regular things most people say are important to do before graduating. I played basketball and soccer, I quit basketball and soccer to join the mock trial team, I joked around, and I stuck with things I was passionate about.

I also did a couple more unorthodox things to better set myself up for the future. For instance, I’ve spent the past five years reporting for ThreeSixty Journalism and learning more about journalism as a future career path.

However, what has prepared me most for college, and life in general, was the four months I spent away from home in 2013 at Conserve School.

Conserve School is a semester-



By Maya Shelton-Davies  
ThreeSixty intern

long boarding school way up north in Land O’ Lakes, Wisconsin. As far as I know, the unincorporated town near the border of Michigan’s Upper Peninsula has nothing to do with the butter company. What Conserve does do, though, is bring 60 new students from all over the country to its beautiful campus each semester to enjoy and learn about conservation, ecology and sustainability.

I was in the school’s seventh semester as a junior in 2013, and this fall, the students in semester No. 11 will arrive at Conserve. It makes me feel kind of old, even though only two years have passed since I first arrived on campus. Looking back, if there’s one thing I can say, it’s that I left that place as a better, more adventurous person.

Even though I feel journalism is my true calling, I always have been a passionate advocate for environmental-friendliness and conservation

of wild places. Conserve School was a great fit for me because of its sustainability-centered curriculum and its focus on environmental stewardship. It wasn’t hard to be able to thrive there.

However, at Conserve, I faced obstacles, too. Throughout the semester, I ran into more trouble than I thought I would in managing my time and doing homework. It’s such a cliché to say that, but it wouldn’t be a cliché if it weren’t true.

Living on more than 1,200 acres in one of the most beautiful places I’ve ever been, with 60 people who I grew really close with – some more than others – came with its obvious distractions. I mean, who in their right mind would sit and write a paper when they have the option of spending the evening kayaking with friends, or staying out to see the Aurora Borealis?

I know college will come with its fair share of distractions as well. As a freshman this fall at the University of St. Thomas, I’ll have everything the Twin Cities offers nearby, as well as new friends who may draw me away from doing what I need to do. This time around, though, I feel more comfortable going into it. I have a better idea of how to prioritize everything I want to do while staying on top of schoolwork, reporting for TommieMedia (the university’s student-produced news website) and



Maya Shelton-Davies during her semester at Conserve School in 2013.

PHOTO SUBMITTED

working.

Also, there will definitely be more responsibility in college than at Conserve. I know that. But because of my experience, the new-found independence that some students feel won’t come as a shock to me. Transitioning into college feels natural.

Leaving home for a semester also helped me come into my own. Not only did I build substantially on my confidence, but also I built on my independence. Now, I truly feel prepared to live away from home again.

Also, it’s because of Conserve School that I’ll be a part of UST’s Environmental Sustainability Learning Living Community this school year. I’m truly excited for all

of the sustainability work that will come from this opportunity.

Of course, I won’t be the only one making a transition this fall. My parents will no longer have me around the house. The good news is, they’ve already been through this.

Two years ago, they were right there with me, going dorm-room shopping and helping me move in before saying goodbye.

My mom cried for a couple of weeks after I flew the coop. But now, she’s ready. As I prepare to leave again, she says it’s a lot easier to let me go having already gone through it once before.

Beginning this newer, bigger chapter in life, I can honestly say that I’m ready, too.

# Turning my disappointment into a high note

IT FELT AS IF bandits had banned me from lead clarinetist in my high school band ensemble.

I hadn't expected it, because I thought I had done enough to deserve this honor. Not receiving first chair, or even second chair, was a downer, but it wasn't all that it seemed.

I had been playing clarinet since the fourth grade, and then switched to bass clarinet for ninth grade. When I finally got into the advanced band, I was third chair behind two seniors, and I felt destined to become first chair after they graduated. I practiced lightly, and when the time came to audition, I felt ready. Even though I stumbled through a few mistakes on sight reading and scales, my hopes were still high.

I felt pretty good the next few days and had no doubt I would see

personal  
essay



By Michael  
Stiefel Alperin  
St. Paul Central  
Senior High  
School

my name at the top of my sections list next to the wooden double doors in the band hallway. The list was the first thing I saw when I got to the room. The suspense was nerve-wracking.

Third chair again. What a downer. I felt there was some sort of mistake. Maybe there was an error and the list had gotten mixed up. I expected it would be fixed, but after that day I knew it was no mistake.

It felt like a downgrade, and it would take a push of teamwork to lift my spirits back up. This was the year I expected to get first chair, to beat the less experienced and to lead the section. Third chair is not the worst

chair in the world, but knowing I could have done better and being irritated about it made it worse.

This feeling didn't give me a good attitude toward the kid in the immediate chair above me. He used my irritation to his advantage.

"Oh, I thought that was my knee!"

This was a daily sarcastic, childish insert of his after placing his hand on my knee. This badgering brought me to a lower place because it felt like a daily reminder of my lower skill level. I could usually shake off weird actions like this and move on. Unfortunately, I allowed this to bother me, encouraging his actions. It piled on slowly and my self-esteem was hurt.

Making things worse, the band was split and the higher chairs played with other high chairs in concert band, while I was downgraded temporarily to fourth chair in a city-wide

honors band. They were excelling and somewhat advancing, and I was stuck in the same place. At the time I thought the split was proof of their skill level, but slowly but surely, it made me realize the value of teamwork and determination.

Acknowledging that I had not practiced and taken lessons like they had, I therefore was not up to their caliber of skill. So, I began taking lessons and gained new playing techniques, improving my skills. I was determined to practice, which resulted in immediate improvement.

I also discovered being a lower chair gave me more freedom to practice new skills in class. I found we could work off each other, and I learned the importance of teamwork. I could give support when the sophomores were having trouble in a piece and maybe accel at it in the process.

These realizations made my band experiences more pleasurable. I could play along with all the odd stuff that had evolved from the knee annoyance. I could joke back with the person in the second chair and it didn't bother me or remind me I was less skilled. "I could be a better team player, as well as a better leader, for the last part of the year, even if I wasn't first chair."

I learned about teamwork from my experiences in band. I learned to live with any decision, and use a non-optimal decision as a chance to improve my skills. I also learned to have thick skin when people try to exploit my irritations. Even if the current situation seems bad, there is always room for improvement.

It might not be immediate, but the smallest thing might make the whole experience worthwhile.

## My journey to happiness

I STARE INTO the antique body-length mirror mounted on the wall in the bathroom.

I examine the "flaws" I see in my seventh-grade self as I try to curl my pin-straight hair so that I fit in with the popular girls. I put on a mask of makeup, a short black skirt and an atrocious hot pink crop top, trying to conform.

When looking for friends during my sixth-grade year, the popular girls stood out to me. I started talking with them, and pretty soon I was one of them. Allowing myself to fall into that situation became a learning experience for me.

When I walk into school, I am not smiling, despite the fact that I am with the popular girls. In fact, none of us seem to be truly happy. We all just trail behind our queen bee

personal  
essay



By Talia  
Bradley  
Minneapolis  
Roosevelt  
High School

*... Happiness will come  
with loving yourself.*

— a skinny, blonde girl with a dream figure and bright blue eyes that every guy falls for.

We all look so uncomfortable and out of place. I always wonder why I can't be as happy as our "queen bee." This unanswered question is my constant struggle.

Unhappiness and constant high anxiety follow me everywhere I go. I have no idea why I am not happy, even though I am with the popular

girls. My father always tells me, "All I want for you is that you are happy."

I always respond the same way.

"But dad, I don't know how to be happy."

By this time I usually started crying.

Disappointing him was never my intention, but that is exactly what happens. He turns his back, rolls his eyes, sighs, and then he is rather hostile. But I can't blame him. He is doing everything he can do for me, as is my mother.

My sweet, emotional and rather introverted self feels horrible. My emotions go wild. I do not know whether I should throw a book in anger, or throw myself on my memory foam bed and cry.

My parents have no idea what to do with their desperately unhappy and helpless daughter, so they send me to therapy.

I thought trapping me in a room that smelled like old library books with an old gray-haired woman was stupid.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CLAIRE KUJOME

Talia Bradley at Lake Nokomis in Minneapolis, a location she describes as "a special place where I have grown into the person I am today."

"How is this going to work?" I ask myself. "I know this is never going to help. I am not crazy!"

Admitting that I was wrong was hard, but I had to do it. Therapy helps.

I find myself astonished by the things I am telling Kirsten, the child

psychologist, after being hypercritical. She puts me through exercises that show me my self-worth, and she always tells me I am a strong, young girl. Through this experience I learn that the constant exclusion and overly  
**BRADLEY continued on page 34**



# 604 pages of the Quran, memorized

AT 4 A.M., MOST TEENAGERS are usually sleeping in their cozy beds. I was 12 and wide awake.

Memorizing the Quran.

Even when my teacher doubted me, even when I doubted myself, I did it. I memorized all 604 pages of the holy text.

I was born and raised in Minneapolis. But when I was 8, my mom, siblings and I moved to Yemen, while my dad stayed behind to provide for our family. He visited us a few times in Yemen, but didn't live with us. We made the move because we wanted to live in an Arab community, and also because my mother was born in Yemen.

Our time there didn't last long. After two years, war broke out, and we traveled to Somalia. My mom believed if I was serious about memorizing the Quran, it would be easier to do so being immersed in a Muslim community. And that's when my journey to do what many probably think is impossible started.

The Quran is 604 pages. It's also in Arabic, which I learned a little of while I was in Yemen. Muslims memorize the Quran, a recommended practice, because it is the guideline of our beliefs. I set a goal to finish the Quran before I left Somalia.

I started the Quran when I was 10 years old, about a week after we arrived at Dar-Al-Quran, a special school that teaches only Quran. Students who are beginners form a circle and read it out loud. But as you get older, you grow out of that routine, and the teacher expects you to study and pass without assistance.

After three years in Africa, I was able to memorize only half of the Quran.

During the summer of 2013, my dad came over for a visit. It was the first time I saw him in three years. I was happy to see him, but I felt

personal essay



By Asha Hurreh  
STEP Academy

guilty because he came before I could finish the memorization. My dad said he was happy I already had finished half of it, but knew I could do the rest if I put more work into it. Just hearing someone believe in me was a great feeling. So I promised myself that I wouldn't let my dad down.

From that day on, I started waking up at 4 a.m. to memorize the Quran. I would break down the page into smaller portions and then try to read it. I listened to the Quran on my iPad three times in a row to make sure I was pronouncing it right. Then I would repeat it, again and again, until I memorized every word.

Two pages took approximately an hour-and-a-half to memorize. Afterward, I would go back to sleep. But if it was a school day, I would just get up and get ready for school.

At the beginning of March, when I had only a fifth of the Quran left, my mom broke the news to us that our passports were about to expire, so we were heading back to America soon. I was determined to finish; I couldn't go back to my dad without finishing. He sacrificed so much just so I could memorize the Quran.

I told my teacher I was returning to the U.S. soon and wanted to finish. He said I could do it, I just need to try harder.

Later that night, I decided to stop going to regular school for that last two months, so I could attend Dar-Al-Quran in the morning and afternoon. This was difficult for me because I was only two months into the second semester and I was going to be tested on everything, which meant a lot of studying on the

**HURREH** *continued on page 34*



Renelle Mensah poses for a photo last June in Liberia.

PHOTO SUBMITTED

## Finding myself in a foreign country

DESTINATION:  
Liberia, West Africa.

Travel distance:  
7,690 miles.

Mission accomplished.

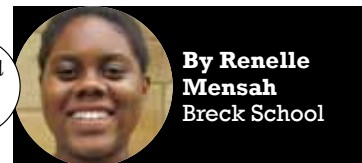
We arrived at Roberts International Airport around 11 p.m. After getting through customs, hailing a taxi and dealing with stolen luggage, we – including my mother, aunt, cousin and I – left the airport around midnight.

With that, my month-long stay in Liberia, the homeland of my entire family, began.

The next morning we set out to travel the cities and landmarks that my parents had grown up around. With our driver navigating the potholes and ditches, my mother recounted the vast memories and stories attached to the various buildings and people we encountered.

She showed me the strict, Catholic school she attended, where the nuns hit your knuckles with a ruler if you were disrespectful. She took me to the Atlantic Ocean, where she constantly played on the beach for hours with friends. Most

personal essay



By Renelle  
Mensah  
Breck School

importantly, she took me to the house she grew up in, the house she truly calls home.

Through reliving my mother's childhood, I realized how her youth experience vastly differs from a majority of the children who are living in Liberia today. My mother grew up with movie theaters, shopping malls and private education. Today, many Liberian children have never seen a movie, wear their siblings' old clothing and do not attend school. This is largely due to an intense civil war that forced the country to rebuild from scratch.

I also realized how my life vastly differs from many of the native teenagers.

As I slouched in the luxury truck with the air conditioning rolling across my face, I saw many sun-beaten children laboring for every cent they made. I saw teenagers – some younger than my tender age of

16 – bargaining and selling goods on the streets and in the markets to buy clothing or their next meal. They would shout, “\$10, Ma! \$5, Ma!”

They were eager to sell the shirts off their backs if that entailed an income. With my stylish Nikes and polished nails, I quickly realized that I was their equivalent of the “1 percent.”

As my trip progressed, I began to notice the severe wealth difference between the native population and myself, despite the fact that we were both Liberian. I slept in cushiony beds, while others lived in huts outside the gates of my residence. I wore brand name shoes, while others traveled barefoot. Some walked to their destination, while I traveled in a truck with a towing capacity of up to 10,500 pounds. I quickly developed a deep appreciation for my life that I had never known before.

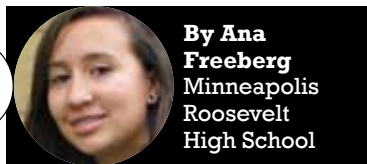
I also discovered a sense of civic duty to improve the lives of the less fortunate in my own community. I actively strive to achieve this goal through social awareness, volunteer work and community service.

After high school, I plan to carry out my goal through a career that involves advocacy and humanitarianism. Through these continuous and focused efforts, I will leave the world just a little better than how I found it.

# Beating the blues, with help from the blues

*"Music is powerful. As people listen to it, they can be affected. They respond."* —Ray Charles

personal  
essay



By Ana  
Freeberg  
Minneapolis  
Roosevelt  
High School

BEEP. BEEP. BEEP. I push the buttons on the little radio in my armrest and listen to the low humming of the powerful airplane engines. Static comes over my radio as I change between the 12 numbered stations, hearing classic rock then Spanish music.

Then I come by radio station No. 9.

I stop changing stations and register the familiar music that floods my ears.

I sit and listen to a smooth combination of saxophone, piano and the voice of none other than Ray Charles.

I lean back in my seat, close my eyes and let the music take me back into my memories.

It's the first week of May in 2005. I see the interior of an old red Saturn, pink fuzzy cotton socks with white grips and mom struggling to walk down long hallways after laying in bed all day.

My mom is at Abbott Northwestern Hospital in

*After a few days of  
nonstop jazz, the music  
began to give me  
a safe feeling.*

Minneapolis with severe pneumonia.

"They were taking a chest X-ray when I fainted in the X-ray area the first night," my mom later told me.

I knew back then that something was wrong. No mom at home, and dad was constantly stressed.

My dad was left with the responsibility of taking care of me, 4 years old at the time, and my 3-year-old brother. As I asked my dad about the events later, he told me, "It probably started with walking pneumonia, and we didn't catch it, and she didn't really let on how sick she was."

As a temporary family of three, we visited mom each day. And every day, my dad would play a Ray Charles album on our way to the hospital.

He had the blues. So, he listened to them.

*"No peace, no peace I find  
Just an old, sweet song  
Keeps Georgia on my mind"*  
—"Georgia," by Ray Charles

It was an emotional time, my dad said, and to have a slow song to listen to was nice.

"I liked the song 'Georgia,' because it's sentimental, it has, to me, emotion in it, and it's not sad but it's just emotion," he said.

I felt unsure about whatever was next.

After a few days of nonstop jazz, the music began to give me a safe feeling. We only listened to it when we would go see mom, so I knew everything would go alright.

"You guys were small, 4 and 3, and so we would go, and there would be chairs, or you would sit on the bed with mom, and you would just lay there with her," my dad recalled.

When my family was in a hectic time, car rides and Ray Charles helped me feel more comfortable and safe. I still turn to music when something happens, because it helps me relax and gather self-control.

"I think everybody [the family] was very concerned, very worried. Especially when she had to go back and had all the fluid in her lungs," my dad remembered. "For a period there it felt like it was getting worse and worse in the intensive care."

Every night, nurses would come and check on mom, which led to no sleep for days, and she wouldn't get any better.

Mom was tired and needed quiet. When Andres and I would get restless, we would ask to go walk to the cafeteria. Dad would always want to hurry back to the little room, which was quite boring for a pair of little kids.

"One night, I literally put my chair by the door and I stood there, and I didn't allow any of the staff to come in and check her so she could just get some uninterrupted rest," my dad said. "Then, she felt better and then she kept getting rest, and then

she had to get a lot of rest when she came home."

Finally, after almost two weeks in the hospital, my mom came home.

My dad tried to make it as normal as possible, but my brother and I always knew something different was going on every day. We needed to be quiet most of the time and needed to help a little bit around the house.

*"That's why I know,  
Yes, I know,  
Hallelujah, I just love her so"*  
—"Love Her So,"  
by Ray Charles

The station began to play commercials again. I sat up in the leather airplane seat. The TV was showing "The Imitation Game"

I looked down the row of seats and saw my jet-lagged but perfect family, coming home from a totally different place than we were at that stressful time. I turned my attention to the movie and relaxed.

How lucky am I to have the family I do? I should never take it for granted.

# No other option but success

I SAT IN MY dad's taxicab waiting for my sister, silently observing all the movement around me.

personal  
essay



By Salma Ali  
Ubah Medical  
Academy

I watched the overworked single moms walking to the bus stop, their wailing children in tow. I listened to the sounds of traffic, and closely observed a dirtied homeless man shuffle down the street, begging with his eyes. The late afternoon sunset shone a golden glow across everything.

My father's voice broke the trance I was in.

"Do you have water, habibti?"

I snapped my head away from the busy downtown street and made contact with my father's old eyes.

"I do," I said, and threw my bottle to the front seat. And I watched him swallow pill after pill after pill. I was in awe as to how such a tiny human being could handle that. Then suddenly, I was choked with a feeling of helplessness.

My dad suffers from a long list of medical problems: diabetes, hypertension, digestive problems and a high risk of stroke, his doctor says. He works almost all hours of the day. The rare moments that I do catch

him are in the early mornings when I get up for school or when I'm reading late into the night.

He is mostly absent in my life and in the lives of my eight siblings. He works tirelessly so my family can survive. But doing so has endangered his well-being.

He believes that this is his worldly sacrifice. And I believe that in order for his suffering to not be lost in vain, I have no option but to be successful.

But, the odds are already stacked up against me.

I am a black, Somali, Muslim immigrant woman living in a society that is systematically rooted in anti-blackness, Islamophobia and sexism. I come from not loving who I am

and, furthermore, not knowing who I am. A small hole existed in my life because I did not have any faith in myself. I see the people in power are mostly old, white men who have held their positions for a long time.

The only power I hold is over myself. I have the keys to better my life and get an education.

The one message that always found itself leaving my parent's lips – "aqoon la'aan waa iftiin la'aan," which roughly translates from Somali into English as "to be without knowledge is to be without light" – was instilled in me as a means of survival.

I am an honor roll student. I stay up long hours, working on homework and studying. I am also involved in extracurricular activities, such as the debate team, track and field, and the science and

engineering club. I work hard to occupy my time wisely and build up my resume for colleges to see. That performance does not belong to me alone. It comes with the blood, sweat and tears of my parents.

I owe it to those who raised me, who suffer day in and day out for my comfort. I aspire to find pieces of me that match with my parents – to have their selflessness, perseverance and strength. I owe it, though, mostly to myself to ignore those who did not believe in me and trust that I do have the capacity to be something in this world. And lastly, I owe it to all the little girls who are like me and see me as a role model, who might also think that their dreams are not valid because of where they are from.

Our dreams as cab drivers' daughters are valid. I cannot wait to witness our success. You will see.



**FAUST** from page 4

it has become an international event, encouraging writers in every corner of this world.

Nevertheless, Maria was a fairly simple human being at her core. I like to think I've tried to entertain that personality trait myself, in an attempt to have a better life. After all, she was the happiest person I've ever known in my life. Her laugh always shook her whole body, causing her stylish earrings and fit figure to swing all over the place. People were drawn to her, both for this wonderful laugh and for the charming smile that followed it. Who wouldn't want to experience that zest for life?

All I want is to show her the human being I've become. I want to tell her about everything I'm doing with my life and all I plan to do in the future. I want her to know I see the good in every person I meet, just as she did. I want her to see the maturity she helped me develop, the things I do for others and the confidence she helped build in me. I want to tell her I am incorporating greens more and more into my diet, as she begged me to do, but I still can't seem to digest those dreaded beets.

When I look out my window, I often see evidence of nature's bounty: a little chickadee perching on a wobbly branch, or a small robin digging hopefully to find a worm in the drenched, soggy ground. These instances we witness every day are often overlooked. But I can't overlook them. To me, every seemingly insignificant moment that nature brings me each day reminds me that Maria is watching me.

I am thankful for the person she helped me become through the years, and for the memories we made. There is so much sadness in the world, but Maria taught me that there is always something beautiful to appreciate. Maria may be gone physically, but the values she instilled in me as a young child will remain for the rest of my life.

If only she could see me now. I know she would be so proud.

**REAVES** from page 5

their liver-spotted skin wrinkling up around their eyes as they inquired about my non-existent sex life.

"Careful, Jacques, she's a minor!" they said.

The men were in cars, whistling and honking as I forced myself to look straight ahead. They were in the street, pestering me for a date, whispering lewd things in my ear, unwilling to take no for an answer.

I was outwardly polite as a fury ate away at my insides. This anger was double-edged: One side pointed at those who thought they were entitled to harass me. The other was

**JOHNSON** from page 5

Although I may be lacking physically, I have no such deficiencies when it comes to mental strength. Whether that comes from a personality trait or a compensation for minimal physical strength, I may never know. However, I believe that mental and emotional strength are accentuated when you have a greater challenge in your life.

This phenomenon most certainly does not apply to only me. There's a reason why you hear countless stories about those with health challenges displaying immense amounts of courage and perseverance; it's because they have to. Without mental toughness or a positive outlook, you've chosen to let your condition beat you, and that baffles me.

Yes, I can't do a push-up or sit-up, and yes, my body is shockingly thin, but does that mean that the positives in my life are harder to find? Absolutely not.

Although I have a challenge that almost no one else in the world is experiencing, focusing on that aspect of my life clouds my opportunity to enjoy far more positive things. I have made the conscious decision to not focus on what is out of my control. That change in perspective makes way for things that mean far more to me, such as personal relationships.

And that change in perspective outmuscles any amount of physical strength.

turned inward – mad at myself for accepting this degradation, for wanting to scream yet smiling instead.

Nothing in the U.S. had prepared me to deal with male attention. How could I have known what to do when a charming young British man placed a hand on my knee? Or when he brushed the hair out of my face? Or when he cupped my chin in his hand to better appraise me?

I remember seeing myself in his pupils. Staring at my reflection, I thought about the large gap of time between girl and womanhood, and how quickly it had elapsed in just a few months.

**PROTEST** from page 9

King Park. Encouraged by speakers, they carried signs and chanted, "No justice, no peace, prosecute the police!" Later on, the students joined the International Workers' Day march.

Students also expressed their outrage and stood in solidarity with Black Lives Matter protesters who were charged.

The December protest at the Mall of the America was part of a wave of protests nationwide following grand jury decisions not to indict police officers who killed unarmed black men in New York and Missouri. At least 1,500 protesters gathered at the mall.

Levy-Pounds is facing eight misdemeanor counts, including trespassing, unlawful assembly, public nuisance and disorderly conduct, and aiding and abetting for each of those charges. She said in March she believes the charges were racially motivated and that Bloomington City Attorney Sandra Johnson, who is prosecuting the case, is on the wrong side of history.

"[The Mall of America] brought in about 7,000 people into the rotunda on at least two occasions and rolled out the welcome mat to them," Levy-Pounds said. "When we came on the scene, because we were Black Lives Matter and because of the fact that they stereotyped us to think that there would be rioting or vandalism, we were

I couldn't look into his eyes for the rest of the evening.

By the end of my year in France, I no longer fell down flights of stairs while wearing heels. I applied eyeliner without blinding myself. I shaved my legs without leaving nicks. And yet it wasn't enough.

"You're free to wear red lipstick," a friend said, quite casually. "Just know that everyone will think you're a slut."

And I flashed back to my school in America again, a classmate feverishly arguing that a girl was a whore, but "it was just different" when a boy did the same. I knew these rules existed

before I left, though I never imagined they'd apply to me.

"One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," French feminist Simone de Beauvoir once wrote. How does one become a woman?

I know the expectations. I've considered them carefully, though I can't decide whether to follow them or not.

As I write these words, I feel stuck. Stuck between whether to laugh at the absurdity of the situation or be enraged by it. Or perhaps I should cry, not only for myself but also for the women who came before me, and the girls who will come after.

*"They see what's going on in the schools so they should use their voices in that capacity, and if they need support from Black Lives Matter they can always reach out and we're willing to support young people in those situations."*

– Nekima Levy-Pounds, UST law professor, Black Lives Matter Minneapolis leader and president of the Minneapolis NAACP.

met by police in riot gear. We were met by a hyper-militarized response, which I call a racist reaction to a nonviolent peaceful demonstration."

Like Levy-Pounds, Kaffey believes that black people are being singled out by police.

"The black community obviously for years [has] been targeted, discriminated against and been put down," Kaffey said. "I think it's time we stand up. ... [But] when we stand up for ourselves we are charged, we are put in jail and quickly silenced."

While Levy-Pounds likes seeing young people involved in Black Lives Matter events, she also believes young people should take the initiative and speak up for what they believe in.

"If there's an issue that is on their minds and that they feel very strongly about, they don't have to wait for Black Lives Matter to take up the issue," she said. "They can actually organize within their schools. They can have die-ins within their schools. They can talk to the administration if they feel that

inequitable practices are occurring ... They see what's going on in the schools so they should use their voices in that capacity, and if they need support from Black Lives Matter they can always reach out and we're willing to support young people in those situations."

Although Kaffey doesn't think she will see equality for all in her lifetime, she hopes this new movement helps pave the way for future generations.

"I know Harriet Tubman freeing the slaves, she didn't think she was about to solve equality right there. Martin Luther King Jr. didn't think he was about to solve everything and I know doing this isn't going to solve everything, but look at [where] we are from there," she said. "She freed the slaves, he was in the Civil Rights Movement and look at where we are. Look at the rights that we have because of those people. So I think that now it's important that we start to do the same thing to get ready for our children to have a more equal America and future."

### SWIMMER from page 12

teams in Minnesota, which competes nationally. She found it much more demanding, using words such as “scary” and “intimidating” to describe her new team.

Simmons wanted more opportunities, so her father suggested she graduate high school early. She finished school in the summer and will attend Lindenwood University, a private Division II school in St. Charles, Mo. The Lady Lions synchronized swimming team won its first High Point title in program history at the U.S. Senior National Championships in April in California.

“It’s been a lot of growing up quickly, working with counselors and teachers on how to get these credits and go to college a year early,” Simmons said.

Having competed in the Junior Olympics seven times and at nationals three times, Simmons is hoping that competing at the collegiate level will give her a shot at trying out for the 2020 Olympic team – her ultimate goal.

“My goal is to make the national team, which basically is to swim for the team,” she said. “I think it would be awesome to swim on an Olympic duet, but right now my goal is to be on the team.”

Simmons spends several hours a day practicing routines – between three and six hours per day, roughly four to six days per week.

“Everyone you know, they train a lot more hours and are a lot more strict on your lifestyle outside of the pool, too,” Simmons said.

Johannah White, assistant coach for the St. Paul Stars, has helped encourage Simmons through hard practices and tough competitions.

“Delaney is great to work with and she has a lot of potential and a lot motivation,” White said. “She likes to try to motivate the other athletes.”



White

*“I think it would be awesome to swim on an Olympic duet, but right now my goal is to be on the team.”*

– Delaney Simmons, synchronized swimmer

Having a packed schedule full of advanced classes and also working part-time as a life-guard, Simmons has had thoughts of quitting at times. Synchronized swimming can be challenging, but Simmons has looked to others to find inspiration.

“It’s really inspiring for me to look at people before me who have done similar things,” Simmons said. “Most of the girls on the national team and on the top clubs teams and collegiate teams – everybody has given up something.”

With the guidance of St. Paul Stars coaches and with the support of her teammates, Simmons also has learned the importance of coping with mental stress.

“We have plenty of office talks where we’ll be in the pool – and not everybody has a good day and so if it’s been a pretty bad day, I’ll try to pull the athlete aside, Delaney being one,” White said. “We go sit in the office that’s right off the pool and just talk about what was going on, and (we’re) trying to find the root of the problem.”

Despite being unsure of what’s to come in her swimming career, Simmons is more confident than nervous.

“A lot of people look at the commitment that it takes, and I was young when I started my journey, so I was very ambitious,” Simmons said. “But really it is worth it to be able to achieve something you didn’t think you could achieve, that other people might have not thought you could achieve, so it’s worth the work and sacrifice.”

“We are not basing an admission decision on just a college essay,” he said. “A student is never going to be admitted or not admitted because of one factor.”

Both Baker and Paulet emphasized revision. Looking at the essay multiple times, reviewing it and even bringing in another person to look at it can be helpful, Baker said.

“... It’s about revise, revise, revise,” Paulet said.

### ESSAY STRESS from page 14

essays. They should be the experts on what to write, because they are the subject matter.

“For us, what is helpful in essays is to get context about you as a person and about you as a student,” he said.

Baker said he looks for students to demonstrate their writing and other skills they need in college. But an essay may not save a student with a poor grade point average or test scores, he said.

### PSEO from page 14

School, can appreciate the difference. A Muslim who was born in the United States and spent a few years in Palestine and Jordan, El-Khatib is taking courses at the University of Minnesota through PSEO. Most of her friends in the program are minorities, too.

“I think that it would be a great opportunity for minority students to get involved with PSEO,” El-Khatib said. “Being on campus is great because it’s diverse and people are really open to that diversity...”

The state-funded program, administered through the Department of Education, allows juniors and seniors to take college classes. More than 7,000 Minnesota public high school students took college courses last year through PSEO, according to the Department of Education.

“It grows every year,” said Beth Barsness of the Minnesota Department of Education, who provides guidance for families and districts. In 2008, 5,545 students took



El-Khatib

*“I think that it would be a great opportunity for minority students to get involved with PSEO.”*

– Issraa El-Khatib, Blaine student taking PSEO courses

college courses through PSEO in Minnesota, compared to 7,029 in 2014.

El-Khatib started the program as a junior and so far has earned 30 college credits. She wants to go to medical school, and the program is helping her get a headstart and save money.

“I wish more people knew about it,” said El-Khatib, who learned about the program because her sister had done it.

Schools need to be more encouraging to students, including minorities, about the program’s benefits, she said.

“If my sister didn’t know about it, I probably wouldn’t know about it,” she said.

*“It is a college. It’s just a different type of college.”*

– Nicole Linscheid, counselor at the Minnesota School of Cosmetology

### COSMETOLOGY from page 15

However, not everything is hands-on in cosmetology school.

“There are still tests. There are still assignments to do,” Linscheid said. “It is a college. It’s just a different type of college.”

Kramer’s favorite part about cosmetology school is working with clients. She especially enjoys “seeing them taking a selfie within five seconds of getting the service done.”

“I get to make people feel beautiful and make them go outside and say, ‘I feel great today. I just got my hair done. I got my nails done. I feel pretty,’” Kramer said.

But there can be downsides. Kramer’s clients sometimes ask for difficult services, she said.

“It’s really hard to tell clients, ‘No.’ It’s the hardest thing in cosmetology school,” Kramer said. “I want to say yes to everybody, like, ‘Of course I can get you to a bleach blonde when you have black hair.’”

There are many career paths in cosmetology. People can follow their passion, whether it is specializing in hair, nails, skin treatments

and more. Cosmetology graduates also can take apprenticeships in salons to gain experience and a wider range of skills.

Linscheid also noted the Minnesota School of Cosmetology has a diverse student body.

About 40 percent of people in the beauty industry in 2011 were people of color, according to a study done by the Professional Beauty Association, an organization of salon professionals based in the United States. The study also indicated that 84 percent of people in the field were women, with 61 percent of all salons in the nation owned by women.

But there are men in the field as well. The Minnesota School of Cosmetology has a male student who also is in the Air Force. He plans to open his own barber shop someday, Linscheid said.

As for Kramer, she plans to graduate from cosmetology school in about a month. Her advice to incoming students is to stay with it and be passionate about their career choice.

“Education is key,” Kramer said. “And if you can get that, take it.”



Linscheid



## GENESYS from page 15

During the eight-week training session, students are taught high-level skills and simple techniques, such as professional dressing and correct handshakes. Then, they practice with face-to-face interviews. On the last day of training, they find out if they landed an internship.

“We had maybe around 155 students in internships” last year, said Cudzilo.

Nationally, more than 800 Genesys Works students are working in internships. The nonprofit also boasts other impressive numbers: 96 percent of its students have enrolled in college and 79 percent have graduated. In the Twin Cities, 93 percent of its students in 2014 enrolled in college in the fall, and 79 percent are either still enrolled or have earned a degree, according to Genesys Works’ 2014 annual report.

A quiet teen, Mohamed was a bundle of nerves when she first arrived at Genesys Works. But near the end of her training, she was transformed.

“They taught me to be enthusiastic and have a positive vibe, take initiative and have a good attitude,” she said.

Gaining confidence wasn’t easy for Mohamed. Every morning, the team of Genesys Works students gave presentations in front of the class. These training sessions helped her open up and improve her communications skills.

The highlight of Mohamed’s training was her first time giving a technical presentation in front of guests.

“I can go in and give a presentation to people without having that fear or not knowing what to talk about,” said Mohamed, who wants to be a nurse. “Genesys Works helped me boost my confidence.”

### More info

For more information about Genesys Works, contact Krystal Stackhouse, school and community partner manager at 651-789-0088 ext. 110, or go online to [http://www.genesysworks.org/twincities/About\\_Us/Contact\\_Us/](http://www.genesysworks.org/twincities/About_Us/Contact_Us/).



PHOTO COURTESY OF WARREN BRULAND

At a fashion show this spring, a G.I.R.L.S. participant models the new basketball uniform the girls will wear for their traveling basketball team this fall.

## SPORTSWEAR from page 22

would be wearing the basketball uniform for a new traveling basketball team that G.I.R.L.S. program leaders had put together. The Lady Warriors will now compete with neighboring Minneapolis teams.

Thul also hopes to work with the Minnesota State High School League, the governing body for the

state’s high school sports, to adopt the sportswear for Muslim girls who would want to wear it while competing for their high school teams. She also is hoping to sell the two products outside of the program.

“We are looking into potential vendors to license the clothing, looking into who can manufacture the clothing,” Thul said.

Mohamed is excited about the new opportunities this sportswear will bring to her community and other girls who have shared her experiences.

“I wish I had it when I was younger,” Mohamed said, “but now that it is available for these girls, I am really, really happy.”

## BUILDING from page 16

tons of privilege and it’s a great opportunity to give an extra boost and extra support,” Numainville said.

Throughout the Twin Cities, participants are getting help with classes while working alongside Pineda and other students rehabbing homes. They are paid minimum wage.

The program begins with Mental Toughness week, where physical activities test the students’ commitment. They are then sent out to divide their time between school and the construction sites.

It’s not all hammer and nails. The students also learn skills such as writing resumes, practicing for job interviews and serving as role models.

Tree Trust YouthBuild also supports participants in pursuing interests other than construction. Pineda, for example, hopes to pursue a business career, she said.

It is good to see the students progress through the program and graduate with skills for the future, Numainville said.

It is also “just wonderful to see them be proud of themselves,” she said.



NAYNI PAUNING/THREESIXTY JOURNALISM

Ivette Pineda, left, a senior involved in Tree Trust YouthBuild, and Maja Numainville, the program coordinator, pose for a photo in July.

## SEA SERVICE from page 16

“You learn discipline and learn to be a team player,” LeVvintre said. “I supercede the standards even though I am a girl. [I] never gave up.”

About 115 teens are involved in five Sea Cadet units in the Twin Cities, Cambridge and Duluth (much of the Minnesota training takes place on the Great Lakes).

“The majority of cadets that come in, they tell me either they want to be pilots or SEALs,” said Lt.j.g. Allyson McCormack, one of the parent-volunteer instructors in the program. “No one knows anything else.”

But they learn about both military and civilian options.

Cadets can choose summer training that includes science and technology, construction, robotics and various ranks, such as petty officer and recruit training.

“We have cadets who quit before boot camp, while in boot camp, and along the way,” McCormack said. “It is sort of like a filtering process. Some graduate from high school and never join the military. And those that want to join get a good taste from it.”

The corps motto is “Test your limits,” she said.

Military recruiting is not part of the program. Police officers, firefighters and emergency medical technicians have been invited to teach. And there’s even culinary training.

The cost for the cadets can amount to several hundred dollars, including uniforms, admission fees and training expenses.

The program is sponsored nationally by the nonprofit Navy League of the United States in cooperation with the Navy.

War “is not the focus of the program,” McCormack said. “It is to produce good citizens and future leaders.”

Nevertheless, military comradeship is part of it – not fighting just for self or country, McCormack said, quoting a line from the movie “2 Guns”: “You fight for the guy that’s fighting next to you.”

**YOUNG** from page 24

learned to kick and swim at the same time. Finally, I had everything going for me.

Then ... it happened, again. Not only did my hands hurt, but so did my shoulders. It was painful and frustrating.

But this time it was different. Even though it hurt and I could only kick, I still showed up for practice and participated until I no longer could. My mentality was positive and I cheered my teammates on. During the conference meet, I clocked a personal-best 30 seconds on my 50-yard dash. With the end of the season arriving, my teammates felt they could rely on me enough as a leader that I was elected to be co-captain of the team, alongside a junior. I knew I could fulfill the role.

Today, I have learned how to approach problems from a different perspective, knowing I am capable of doing what I thought would be impossible. I believe that no matter what comes across my path, I will be able to conquer it. I hope to spread my resiliency and dedication to my teammates next year as a captain. I want to inspire

*I use the pain  
as motivation to keep me  
going in the pool.*

others and let them know that if you're feeling down and negative, just look at all you have overcome and conquered. Keep pushing forward in life, feeling both confident and courageous.

Even if I feel the burning sensation in my hands, I still fight through it. I use the pain as motivation to keep me going in the pool. Through this experience, I learned that swimming relates to the challenges we face in every day life, because it teaches us to persevere through our struggles. I now know what it takes to get through other challenges in life, whether they're personal or academic.



PHOTO SUBMITTED

**Zekriah Chaudhry** watches the Minnesota Vikings play the Washington Redskins in November 2013 at the Metrodome in Minneapolis.

**CHAUDHRY** from page 27

could identify. It turned out many Twins fans would've been okay with that, as their chants echoed throughout the stadium.

"MVP! MVP!" the crowd roared as Mauer stepped to the plate.

The Twins were playing the Detroit Tigers for the division title, and it remains the most thrilling game I have experienced.

I felt the tension building from the die-hard fans in the Metrodome. The game was perfect, and when a hit scored Carlos Gomez to give the Twins the victory, I felt relief. The guy behind me lifted me out of my seat as the fans cheered their approval.

Moments like that changed how I saw human interactions. I was no longer feeling so alone in my thoughts. It felt as though sports were the most relatable topic imaginable.

"Yes! Yes!" I shouted with the other fans.

Even better, though, I now had a team to root for and a reason to root for them. I wasn't going to throw my loyalties around from team to team, because by the time Carlos Gomez made it home, my heart belonged to Minnesota.

I started watching Vikings games religiously. As it happened, the 2009 Vikings were a good team. They continued winning, making the playoffs and advancing to play the New Orleans Saints with a trip to the Super Bowl on the line.

The Vikings and Saints game was exciting. This time, though, my team was the one who failed to win the long, competitive game.

Even though the Vikings lost, it was one of the top-five sporting events I have ever seen. I may never again see football played like that. And again, I didn't mind talking with strangers as much as before, because there was something worth talking about.

That year, I found something that could truly leave me breathless. I was inspired to think, talk and write about sports in my free time. But then, talking about anything started feeling more natural, and talking about sports just felt like good practice for those times.

But best of all, no matter if I'm at a bus stop talking about my shoes or somewhere else in life, it seems that the Vikings will still play on Sundays.

And so it seems there will always be something to talk about.

**BRADLEY** from page 28

high standards of being popular are having a negative effect on me.

Kirsten is my rock, and she has as much trust in my heart as my mother. I can tell her anything. I can smile, laugh and radiate happiness, but I am only truly happy at home and when I see her. There is never a negative thought that comes up in the conversations with her. She always points out the positives in me and my experiences.

Over time, with the help of Kirsten and my parents, I gradually gain more self-esteem. They help me build the strength to be my own person and stand up for what I believe in.

But the final battle is school. I decide to separate myself and

ignore the popular girls who are having a negative effect on me. Not to my surprise, they don't care that I left, and that just proves they aren't true friends.

It is now two years later, and I stand in that same antique body-length mirror and tell myself that I will never let other girls change me again. I get the courage to throw out those ugly crop tops, hideous skirts and overly expensive makeup. I find friends that appreciate me and a style in which I am comfortable.

As my confidence grows, I become strong enough to make my own choices in life. I continue to develop as a person, as will everyone else.

I have learned to not let others change you, and that happiness will come with loving yourself.

**HURREH** from page 29

weekend. I told my mom my idea, and she agreed.

The next week, I took finals exams for school and did OK because memorizing the Quran improved my memory, making it easier for me to study.

I went to Quran school every morning and afternoon for a month. Then my mom announced that we were going back on April 21, which came earlier than I thought because I was so busy with my memorization. I had around 52 pages left at the beginning of April when my Quran teacher told me that I couldn't finish anyway, and told me to just calm down.

That just made me even more determined to finish memorizing. I had another reason to finish now: to prove my teacher wrong, to prove that I am capable of doing anything I set my mind to. I wouldn't break the promise to myself.

I started memorizing seven to 10 pages a day. And on April 5, 2014, I finished memorizing the holy Quran. I felt I had made my dad proud, my mom proud and even myself proud. I finally reached a goal that I was struggling to reach. I felt I could accomplish anything that came my way.

I learned that if you work hard, you can reach any goal you want to achieve.

**MOUA** from page 23

mom once said: "The cleaner your house is, the longer you'll live."

The vacuum did its job, crackling with every step until I reached my parent's bedroom. Listening to the vacuum made me realize how us kids affected the house, compared to my parents. Our bedrooms were dirty, and theirs had almost nothing to clean.

Ding dong.

I ran upstairs and looked through the window. When I opened the door, I looked at my mom's face. There was a sense of relief. I didn't

get a "thank you," but seeing her relieved made me feel great joy. I helped my mom without asking, but I could see she needed it.

Before my mom broke down, I didn't pay attention to how we affected our parents. It made me wonder, "What if my dad's feeling the same way? How's he able to hold everything together?"

I still think of those questions today, and help my mom when I have the chance. I haven't helped much, but slowly I'll take the burdens off my parent's shoulders.



*"All of this has reinforced my desire to become a print journalist." —Lucas*



## Summer at ThreeSixty



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*"I wouldn't be where I am today without ThreeSixty. It gave me the experience and the confidence I really needed to be a better aspiring journalist." —Kayla*



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