

The background of the cover is a photograph. On the right, a woman with dark hair pulled back is looking towards the camera. She has a tattoo on her left shoulder. On the left, the back of a man's head and shoulder are visible, showing a large tattoo of a red rose. The overall lighting is warm and yellowish.

when you were

FIFTEEN

An Anthology About Why Adults Matter to Teens

INTRODUCTION BY DAVID SERRASOHN

FOREWORD BY THE HONORABLE ELIZABETH WELCH

INCLUDES STORIES BY:

Sam Adams, Obo Addy, Art Alexakis, Vicki Phillips, Carla Pileso,
Kim Stafford, William Stafford, and more

*Produced by Multnomah County Department of Community Justice,
Reclaiming Futures, and Write Around Portland*



when you were FIFTEEN

AN ANTHOLOGY ABOUT WHY ADULTS MATTER TO TEENS

WHEN YOU WERE FIFTEEN is an initiative of Multnomah County Department of Community Justice and Reclaiming Futures that partners Big Brothers Big Sisters of Metropolitan Portland, Oregon Mentors, Powerhouse Mentoring Program, and Write Around Portland. The Reclaiming Futures initiative is a project of The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

WWW.WHENYOUWERE15.ORG



THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO THE TEENS

who are looking for the path and to
the adults who help them find it.

Reclaiming Futures - Multnomah Embrace
Multnomah County Department of Community Justice
1401 NE 68th Ave., Portland, OR 97213
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when you were fifteen

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The goal of the campaign is to inspire concerned adults to play a positive role in the lives of youth with drug and alcohol problems who are in trouble with the law.

The *When You Were Fifteen* anthology includes stories from adults and youth—stories of the past and the future—collected between fall 2005 and spring 2006. Anyone interested in helping a teen or submitting a story is invited to go to our website at www.whenyouwere15.org.

DISCLAIMER: The names of any individuals mentioned in these stories were supplied by the writers. The “When You Were Fifteen” campaign and its participating partner organizations have no information about the accuracy of the names used, or the identities of the individuals described by the writers in these stories.

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foreword

by The Honorable Elizabeth Welch

WHY? WHY WOULD ANY OF US WANT TO RECALL OUR ADOLESCENCE?

It's an exciting time, yes. But for most of us, it was a time brimming with confusion, a period so awkward that most of us, when asked about what it was like to be a teenager, are unable to find words for it. The most we can manage is a shudder.

Many of us can point to the pivotal role that an adult played in helping us through our teenage years—helping us cope, or to make better choices. And no teens in our community need caring adults more than youth in the juvenile justice system who are caught in the cycle of drugs, alcohol, and crime.

Compared to the 67,000 kids between the ages of 10 and 18 in Multnomah County, only a small number—about 500—have drug and alcohol problems and are caught in the justice system. In many cases, having one more caring adult in their lives can make all the difference for them, and be a source of hope.

Don't believe it? Read Tiffney Hendon's story, "Reclaiming My Future." In her case, two different adults helped her get through treatment simply by taking her out on excursions—normal things, like shopping, looking for a school, and so on. Now she's clean, sober, and studying to be an engineer.

That's what Reclaiming Futures is all about. Reclaiming Futures is a nationwide initiative, sponsored by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, to improve treatment outcomes for youth in the justice system. Through this initiative, the Multnomah County Department of Community Justice partnered with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Metropolitan Portland, Powerhouse Mentoring, Oregon Mentors, and Write Around Portland to create the "When You Were Fifteen" campaign. We want to help Big Brothers Big Sisters and Powerhouse Mentoring recruit more caring adults to support youth with drug and alcohol problems who are in trouble with the law.

- We know that caring adults can make a positive difference in teens' lives. Research conducted by Public/Private Ventures shows that kids who have Big Brothers or Big Sisters do better in school, and are less likely engage in alcohol and drug use.
- Yet even though our local Big Brother Big Sisters program is growing at the fastest rate in the country, many kids in Portland have to wait years for a mentor because there are not enough adults who are ready to help.

So we asked Portland residents to contribute a brief story about what they were doing when they were fifteen, what they're doing now, and how an adult who cared made an important difference in their lives. The stories we collected (from community leaders, at-risk youth and county residents) are in your hands; by the time you read this, even more may be on our website at www.whencyouwere15.org.

By illustrating the profound positive impact that caring adults can have—and giving youth in the justice system the opportunity to voice the

small but important ways adults can help them—we hope to inspire hundreds of people in our community to be a caring force in a child's life.

Even if you read only a few of the stories collected here, it quickly becomes obvious that teenagers don't need much from us. All they need is a kind word, someone to listen, someone who believes in them even when they're making bad choices. And the results may not be visible for years, but it's what they'll remember, what they'll look back on and say made the difference in helping them get on the right path.

It's that simple. So read the stories, share them with your friends and family—and please visit our website at www.whencyouwere15.org to see how you can help a teen today.

JUDGE ELIZABETH WELCH IS THE MULTNOMAH COUNTY CHIEF FAMILY COURT JUDGE AND SERVES AS A JUDICIAL FELLOW FOR THE RECLAIMING FUTURES INITIATIVE.

introduction

by David Sarasohn

I WAS A 15-YEAR-OLD DWEBB.

And that was on my 15-year-old good days.

In fact, I was such a homework-doing, parentally-monitored, college-calculating, gym-despising, girl-terrified 15-year-old that I originally declined to write for this collection, figuring that the sheer vanilla ordinariness of my year would bore other people and embarrass me.

Reading the essays here, seeing what other people went through and what they managed, I suspect I was right. But I am pleased, and warmed, to write in this space, in admiration of other, more interesting 15-year-olds than I was.

So many of these stories have a common thread: in desperation or yearning or boredom, a 15-year-old was encouraged or heartened by an adult, by an expression of confidence or calmness or sometimes just the assurance that nobody is 15 forever. Often the effort was a fairly minor, passing moment in the life of the adult, but gleamed in the life of the 15-year-old.

Even I have one of those stories, in appropriately dwebbish form, a story that even decades later I should really reveal only under torture.

I was sitting in my American history class, right after lunch, keyed to a high pitch of anticipation for a test on the 1920's. I was, in fact,

keyed to such a high pitch of anticipation that suddenly my lunch reappeared on my desk.

Now that year, I normally lived a No. 2 pencil's distance from humiliation, and this didn't help. Trying desperately to remain calm, I asked the teacher, sitting at his desk reading something, if I could be excused.

He looked up, looked at me and my desk, said "Sure," and returned to what he was reading. Not by a tone in his voice or a flicker in his eyebrow did he suggest that there was anything unusual about a student preparing for a test by depositing the contents of his stomach onto his desk.

In a situation directly out of an adolescent's nightmares, it was something.

Years later, when I heard he was retiring, I wrote and thanked him for his teaching. I did not mention that the only word I specifically remembered him saying was, "Sure."

But sometimes when you're 15, one word is a lot.

Even for a dwebb.

DAVID SARASOHN IS A COLUMNIST AND MANAGING EDITOR AT *THE OREGONIAN*.

fifteen

by William Stafford

South of the bridge on Seventeenth
I found back of the willows one summer
day a motorcycle with engine running
as it lay on its side, ticking over
slowly in the high grass. I was fifteen.

I admired all that pulsing gleam, the
shiny flanks, the demure headlights
fringed where it lay; I led it gently
to the road and stood with that
companion, ready and friendly. I was fifteen.

We could find the end of a road, meet
the sky on out Seventeenth. I thought about
hills, and patting the handle got back a
confident opinion. On the bridge we indulged
a forward feeling, a tremble. I was fifteen.

Thinking, back farther in the grass I found
the owner, just coming to, where he had flipped
over the rail. He had blood on his hand, was pale—
I helped him walk to his machine. He ran his hand
over it, called me good man, roared away.

I stood there, fifteen.

THE LATE WILLIAM STAFFORD IS ONE OF THE NORTHWEST'S BEST-KNOWN AND MOST
PROLIFIC POETS. AMONG OTHER HONORS, HE WAS NAMED CONSULTANT IN POETRY
TO THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS IN 1970, AND POET LAUREATE OF OREGON IN 1975.

why i didn't disappear

by Sam Adams

AT FIFTEEN, LIFE WAS DIFFICULT. THERE WAS A REASON FOR THAT.

I lived with my Dad. He was a heavy drinker. Our home life in Eugene was infused with alcohol. It was an often violent place.

Once, a friend and I were on a binge. We got into a conversation about the meaning of life. We summarized life as, "booze and social mix."

Things felt pretty bleak.

My Dad and I had a combustible relationship. I had to get out of his house. I feared for my safety. So I moved out. I lived largely on my own at fifteen.

Right away, I felt better. I joined the cross-country running team and worked on the school newspaper. I got a job at Mr. Steak. I realized that I had incredible opportunities, in spite of my circumstances.

There were two teachers at school who kept me going: Sue Addicott and Byron Dudley. They didn't fawn all over me. I would not have liked that. They just showed a little extra interest.

They'd stop me in the hall once in a while and tease me. They teased me in a way that made the point clear – they expected me to do something with my life.

And because they showed that little extra interest in me, I realized that I should show a little extra interest in myself. It didn't take much. I didn't grow up in a home with a lot of positive feedback.

Sue got me into photography. It turned out that I was pretty good at it. Sue didn't pull punches with her criticism, but she always encouraged me. She told me: pursue what you like until you find something else. I'd never experienced that kind of support. I surprised myself when I won a statewide photography award.

Byron was the faculty advisor for the student government. My knees shook when I had to speak in front of any group. But Byron said something like, "You're stubborn but in a good way."

Now I'm on the Portland City Council. I am still stubborn about getting things done. When I was fifteen, me serving on a city council would have seemed impossible. Byron nudged me to try out abilities I didn't even know I had.

If it hadn't been for Sue and Byron, I would have disappeared. My siblings weren't so lucky. They didn't have the help I did to get through. They're all right now, but they struggled for a long time.

My life could have gone bad, but Sue and Byron made the difference. I knew they were there, keeping an eye out for me, and helping me to see beyond the problems in my family to all the possibilities in my life. I think every kid deserves at least one adult who believes in them like Sue and Byron believed in me.

SAM ADAMS IS A COMMISSIONER FOR THE CITY OF PORTLAND.

master mentors make master drummers

by Obo Addy

IN 1951, I WAS 15 YEARS OLD AND WORKING AS A SERVER AT THE Holy Trinity Church in Ghana. I left school because it wasn't working for me. Besides, there was no advanced education in Ghana. The British taught us how to learn quickly and then work for them. But I had other plans. I was influenced by music. I used to climb walls and listen to music. I would tell my friends, "Some day, I will be on the stage playing." I loved music and everybody knew it!

So I started looking for someone to mentor me. My father was my first music mentor when I was young. He was a medicine man by trade but he also taught me to play the drum. The most important part of what he taught me was how to watch and listen. This is how African children learn to play, learn to absorb things quickly, and learn respect. But at 15, I needed someone to introduce me to the world of music. Being the stubborn teen that I was, I didn't stick with my first mentor for long. Though he was a good musician and teacher, I didn't like his style when it came to the "business" of music. Then I found Joe Kelly Odamptan. He was a mentor to a lot of us young, want-to-be musicians. Through him our ears were trained to hear... all music, good music, like classical, mambo, and swing. In Africa, music was not like in the States. We did not have Black music at first. We only had French. I longed to hear that rhythmic American music. Joe Kelly made sure I got it. Not only did he teach me about

Black music, he taught me about Black American movies as well. *Stormy Weather* was my first. It opened my eyes to a whole new world as an African. While African Americans were being kept from knowing about us, we were also being kept from knowing them. Joe made sure those barriers were removed. "You can play any music," he would say.

When we are young, we do not understand the power and influence mentors have on our adult lives. I understood it, even when I was being obstinate. Most teens get that way at some point, but I didn't let it stop me from reaching my goals. Joe Kelly, my father, and other mentors were the key. They helped me to sustain my music career. Some of the other young musicians who played with me did not stay with it. They did not value what we learned such as loving all music, memorizing things so you don't forget them, and keeping good things in your mind. In African culture, we learn how to put things into proverbs. When we do, we don't forget them. It's like putting words into song, and young people have no problem with memorizing the words of a good song.

Over the years I have mentored musicians and dancers all over the world. When you receive what I did from my mentors as a teen, it's only natural that you pay it back to others. The proverb is true: it does take a village to raise a child.

OBO ADDY IS THE CO-FOUNDER AND ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF HOMOWO AFRICAN ARTS AND CULTURE. IN 1996 HE WAS AWARDED THE NATIONAL HERITAGE FELLOWSHIP AWARD BY THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS.

a mountain of pebbles

by Natalia Bolohan

AT FIFTEEN, I WANTED TO DROP OUT OF SCHOOL. FOR ME, HIGH school was really stressful, especially a lot of the social stuff.

My teacher Mr. Coleman figured out what was going on with me and wrote me a long letter. In it he told me that he didn't like high school either and that he only finished because of baseball. Like me, he sometimes felt high school was a waste of time and he was too mature to be there.

His letter ended with a story about pebbles. He wrote that a lot of the things we experience, like some classes for example, seem small and unimportant, like a pebble. But in the end we will have accumulated a mountain of pebbles that will add up to a life well lived. I really like that idea.

I'm now in college studying business and marketing. I know that whatever I go on to do, I will live my life by the values Mr. Coleman taught me.

please try to understand

by Mary Stirling

WHEN I WAS 15, I WANTED TO BE A CATHOLIC NUN WITH THE Sisters of St. Mary's of Oregon to teach the high school students all about art as an art instructor on the campus of St. Mary of the Valley High School. Who or what helped me do that, and how? It was my sister's classmate. She was a Catholic nun. She had told me what it was like to be a Catholic nun and about all the important duties as a Catholic nun, which taught me a lesson for my own future.

But I knew that I couldn't become a Catholic nun at all because of my disability. And one of the very strict rules with the Catholic church and the Pope is that you have to be in very good health with no disabilities at all, period. All I can say for right now is that I would like to see a lot of changes being made within my Catholic faith to make things better for all disabled women who want to become Catholic nuns in the future.

Both of my Catholic parents over-protected me when I was 15 and for so many years because of my disability. It prevented me from making my own decisions about what I wanted to do for myself independently back in the 1970's. When my mother was alive, she was so quiet to herself all of the time. She was very over-protective about me all the time. So I couldn't figure out why my mother was so quiet. She kept everything to herself when I was a teenager.

About ten years ago, right after my mother passed away, I was so shocked to hear that there had been so much alcohol drinking. There was a lot of fighting that came from my grandfather when my mother was about 12 or 13 years old, back in the 1930's during the Depression era. And that caused my mother to become so quiet. In my opinion, I feel that I have a lot of guilt held inside me because of the fact that both of my Catholic parents over-protected me by spoiling me so rotten, which led me to mental depression and violent behavior known as anger as a result of my disability that I've had for so many years. I think it was very wrong for both of my parents to over-protect me. It did a lot more harm than good, which was very frightening to me. I have one last opinion for today's parents who have a disabled child at home right now. Don't over-protect him or her because it can do more harm than good. Please try to understand that.

MARY STIRLING WAS RAISED IN PORTLAND, OREGON. SHE HAS TAKEN TWO WRITING WORKSHOPS WITH WRITE AROUND PORTLAND AT INDEPENDENT LIVING RESOURCES AND IS CURRENTLY WRITING HER AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

the man in black

by John Bernard

HIS EDITS, WRITTEN IN RED INK, WERE ALL OVER MY DRAFT. It was the third time rewriting the article for my high school paper but it didn't bother me.

Being the fifth of six kids I was used to going unnoticed, but for some reason the paper's advisor noticed me; he seemed to believe in me. I was learning to write editorials and he was going to make sure I did it well.

I didn't realize until some years later he was my first mentor. He was the first non-family member in my life to make me feel like I was special—and yet he never said a word to that effect. His name was Brother LaSalle Bosong, a Christian Brother who wore a full-length black robe with a strange white collar that looked like two starched pages of a small book hanging around his neck.

I worked hard and was never fazed by rewriting and rewriting for him. Not once did he criticize my work, he simply whittled and tuned my words—often four or five cycles. I learned about writing from him, but more than that I found something I liked doing and that I was good at. My junior year I was named editor of the paper. Halfway through that year Brother LaSalle's mom fell ill and he went home to California to care for her. My skills had grown such that I ended up for the most part teaching the journalism class the rest of the year.

Ten years later, while visiting Los Angeles, I spent the night at the Christian Brothers' residence as a guest of one of the Brothers I had kept in touch with. I was sitting in their library late that evening when Brother LaSalle walked in. Not noticing me, he sat down to read. I introduced myself and, to my complete shock, he did not remember me. After we talked a bit he seemed to remember me (although I think he was being polite), yet even though he had a big impact on my life, I hardly stood out for him.

It would have been easy to be deeply disappointed. All the time I'd thought he was treating me special, but what I hadn't realized was that Brother LaSalle was simply a dedicated and superb teacher. In fact he was so good that when I told him what a huge impact he had had on my life, he was completely surprised. This man, it turned out—I suspected—had made a difference in many lives and he didn't even know it. I was special because I had been lucky enough to have him in my life.

I earned my bachelor's degree in Mass Communication/Journalism, and spent my first few years writing for papers before putting what I had learned to work in the world of business. Today I am a senior vice president of one of Oregon's largest and most successful companies, Standard Insurance Company.

Looking back I recognize that there were a small number of people along the way who believed in me and contributed to my many successes. I am grateful to all of them, with particular fondness for the man in black who unknowingly touched my life and made it better.

JOHN BERNARD, 50, WAS BORN IN PORTLAND, OREGON AND RAISED IN THE SUBURB OF MILWAUKIE. HE IS MARRIED AND HAS THREE GROWN DAUGHTERS.

space to be

by Sonali S. Balajee

THE PERSON WHO MADE THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE IN MY LIFE AT the age of 15 was Mary Yorke, my English composition teacher and speech and debate coach at Munster High School.

One of the most pivotal moments in my life happened on April 16, 1986. On this day, I walked into school surprised to find most of the freshman halls empty. I entered my first period class, biology, to find my teacher, Mr. Franklin, holding his head in his hands. I asked him what was going on, and why the school seemed so vacant. He told me to sit down, and asked if I had heard... "Heard what?" I asked. He proceeded to tell me that one of my dear friends, Chris Steele, had killed himself the night before, committing suicide in a garage with a running car. He was 14 years old.

I needed a great amount of space during that time—Chris was one of my favorites at school, and I felt close to him. I seriously began to lose it, having almost an emotional breakdown. At this time I needed to get away... to have the opportunity to take walks and think and cry. But I lived in an incredibly overly protective and often emotionally abusive home, and was not allowed to leave the house but for school and some extracurricular activities.

I made it to Chris's funeral. The line of young folks dressed in black wrapped around the block. Seeing him in his coffin was a defining moment for me in terms of shaping my interests in youth

development, social justice, and social change. But I couldn't see any of that on that day. I came home and begged my family to let me leave for a while, just to have the chance to "be," to make sense of death at such a young age. And they didn't allow me to do that.

Mary Yorke, my dear teacher and friend, found out about this, and called them and said that I needed to come to her house to do some work. I left my house as soon as possible and just cried and reflected in her house. From that time on, Mary continued to check in on me, and provided me with a space to learn and to live at her home for the rest of high school. She made a difference for me by helping me to emotionally and spiritually survive during such a trying time... this led to a huge renaissance in my ability to dream, support myself, and believe in my future.

fifteen

by Brian Doyle

AW, WHEN I WAS FIFTEEN, A THOUSAND YEARS AGO, I WAS A complete utter bonehead mulehead doofus too shy to even look at a girl let alone speak to her like a Human Being, and too confused and self-absorbed to notice that my parents were doing the best they could despite not having hardly ten cents between them, and too frightened of the poor and homeless and drunk and mad to ever do anything but scurry away like a skittery crab, and too annoyed with my brothers and sister to realize that brothers and sisters are a motley chaotic hilarious gift of incalculable proportions, and too agonizingly worried about Me Me Me and who I would be and what I would do and who would love me to ever actually pause from my epic self-absorption and Listen to other people and See them clear and Try to salve a little of their pain and confusion and Be all amazed and astounded by the incredible grace with which people carry their loads, and the thing is that all of us have loads, all of us have scarred hearts, and all of us are confused and muddling; so all these years later, even though I am still pretty much a bonehead doofus most of the time, or at least this is what my children tell me, I know this: You have to drop your mask. You have to not be cool. You have to reach for other people or you will live in the tight safe little horrid prison of yourself. You have to learn to shut your mouth and listen to the shivers and songs in other hearts before you ever begin to discover the incredible hymns in your own. You have to find

what it is that only you can do and do it with all your might until your muscles ache and your eyes are falling out of your head and you are so tired you can't spit. The only way to find yourself is to stop looking at yourself. This took me thirty years to figure out and I stink at it but by lawd I try. Little tip: Save yourself thirty years. Tell me how it goes. Send me a postcard. My quiet prayers on your voyage.

BRIAN DOYLE IS EDITOR OF *PORTLAND MAGAZINE* AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PORTLAND.

my life so far

by Tonya Dreger

MY NAME IS TONYA. I'M A 17-YEAR-OLD FEMALE WHO HAD A PRETTY rough life. It started at 14. I started using drugs and started running away from home. I didn't have the best of home life. I've never got along with my dad. I argue too much with my mom. I have all older bros and no sisters or younger siblings. So when I started acting out everyone looked at me as the problem child. When I was in seventh grade I was raped near my middle school and no one helped. I felt helpless and abandoned. No one believed me at first so that hurt really bad. I acted out in hate toward everyone, especially men at that point. My life was hard. I got kicked out of school so that's when I started searching myself to better my education. After a year I finally got the number for this alternative school called Helensview and they told me to come and have orientations. I was almost 15 by then. After I started here I thought I would never want to leave. The teachers and staff treated me like family. They took me under their wings and kept reassuring me that I could do anything I put my mind to. Almost halfway into my freshman year I got accepted onto student council, which plays a huge role at this school. Don't get me wrong. I got into fights, but nothing too serious. Then last year, my sophomore year, I was still doing some bad things but eventually I got tired of it and realized that I needed and had to make a change. So I focused on school and things to try to better my life. For instance, getting a job, falling in love with my

fiancé and bettering my relationship with my family. Things slowly but surely got better and it seems like my life went from records reading “consistent runaway” to no more reports of being a runaway. Now it’s my junior year and I’m graduating this year, all thanks to my school, Helensview.

not just empty words

by Derrick Foxworth

THOUGH IT WAS A LONG TIME AGO, ONCE IN A WHILE I THINK BACK to when I was a teenager. It may be when I get my car washed, fill my car with gas or eat fast food. That’s because when I was a teenager, I always had a job. I worked at a car wash, a gas station and at a fast food restaurant while going to high school.

I was fortunate enough to have parents who worked hard and were always there for their family. They were my role models, and instilled in me a strong work ethic. They were the foundation of our family, and demonstrated the good values that they preached. My parents’ actions showed me that the ideals they set forth for me were not just empty words.

Looking back, I realize how my parents’ love and trust in me made me not want to turn toward drugs and alcohol. I knew that was not the path I wanted to choose. I didn’t necessarily aspire to be a police officer, yet it is probably more than just a coincidence that my twin brother, Darrel, and I became involved in law enforcement and have made a career of it. The idea of helping someone every day appealed to both of us probably because my parents showed us the values of compassion and caring for others.

Not every young person is fortunate enough to have the family life that I did. That’s why I have supported organizations such as the Boys and Girls Clubs, Big Brothers Big Sisters and the Police

Activities League (PAL) for so many years. These organizations know that by being involved in a young person's life, they can help them make better choices. Life takes many twists and turns, but when you're a teenager, just knowing that there are adults who care for you makes life's choices a whole lot easier.

DERRICK FOXWORTH IS CHIEF OF POLICE, PORTLAND POLICE BUREAU.

potato chips on haight

by Leanne Gabel

I WAS 15 IN 1966 AND 1967. IT WAS A TIME OF DEFINITIVE SOCIAL FLUX. And even at my podunk high school in Stockton, only 90 miles from San Francisco, there was a buzz about the hippies, the Haight, the be-ins, the Jefferson Airplane, the Summer of Love. Not even allowed to buy record albums because my father considered the new music to be "jungle music," I knew any inclinations I had toward wearing jeans and beads, going braless, or espousing freedom had to be covert.

Luckily, I went to a Jewish summer camp that year—in the Santa Cruz Mountains, a glorious landscape. The camp was notoriously progressive. There were all these hip city kids from San Francisco and L.A.

There was a boy from San Francisco named Cary Love who liked me. Cary Love.

"Is that your real name?" was the first thing I asked him.

"Yes," he said.

"No," I said. "That's not really your real name, is it?"

"Yes it is," he said.

Cary Love started telling us all about San Francisco. It was all true, he said. Everything everyone said about the hippies and be-ins and

Jerry Garcia and the Jefferson Airplane and marijuana was true. It was all wild and all fabulous. I lapped up Cary Love's stories like puddles of chocolate sauce in the bottom of the bowl.

"Wow," was all I could think or say.

In late September of my 15th year, my mother and my brother and my sister and I drove to San Francisco one day to look at hippies. We were walking down Haight Street when a group of shabby-looking, long-haired girls with an astonishing number of necklaces offered my mom and me some potato chips from a bag they thrust in our faces. Before I could even refuse them, my mother grabbed my arm and whispered loudly in my ear, "Don't take any. They might be filled with drugs."

That next summer, the summer I turned 16, I went to Seattle to visit my cousins for a month and French-kissed hard and hot for a sustained period of time for the first time in my life. I also gained 13 pounds eating big bowls of buttered egg noodles for midnight snacks with my cousins almost every night for that whole month, which seemed to cancel everything out.

And then I went home and got all A's so I could go to college and become something that required a big brain in math, which I thought I had, but it turned out I didn't—at least not at Stanford.

Most adults were disappointing to me then, I remember, except for the mother of my good friend Joan. Joan's mother was an artist. Well, she was a housewife, but she painted and sculpted and decorated so beautifully in her spare time that her house took my breath away. Her ability to create sumptuous, glittering, breathtaking beauty wowed me. It was as good as the time I saw Fabian or

Ann-Margaret on my block. Or the time I saw Robin Williams at the coffee place and realized he was only about as tall as a kitchen chair.

When I walked into Joan's house, I felt like I was putting on a magic cloak. The colors, the loveliness made my skin feel different, my face feel different. Joan's mother made these light fixtures, for instance, that were hanging globes of clear maché, the bulbs glowing through glued-on jewels, the chains gold and sagely glimmering. Those light fixtures seemed to sustain intelligent life. I never wanted to leave that house. Ever.

I never told my friend Joan's mother how I felt about her. Now 40 years have passed and she's become very good friends with my mother. There have been tragedies in her life. In fact, the only time I've been to her house these later years has been for funerals.

The house was still magnificent.

I too became an artist. I dumped the math early.

LEANNE GRABEL IS A POET AND ILLUSTRATOR, AND TEACHES LANGUAGE ARTS TO INCARCERATED TEENAGE GIRLS AT ROSEMONT SCHOOL & REHABILITATION CENTER.

FROM **WHEN I WAS FIFTEEN (WRITTEN IN MY 44TH YEAR)**,
BY **ART ALEXAKIS** ON PAGE 123

"I WISH WHEN I WAS FIFTEEN I'D HAD A ROLE MODEL LIKE DENNIS
...BUT ALL I CAN DO NOW IS BE ONE FOR SOMEONE ELSE. **LIKE IT
OR NOT WE ARE ALL ROLE MODELS**...OUR ACTIONS AND WORDS
CAN BREAK SOMEONE DOWN OR HELP TO MAKE THEM WHOLE."

photograph by julie keefe



mr. hoxie's legacy

by Adrian Blakely

MR. HOXIE MADE ME THINK AND THAT'S WHY HE WAS AN IMPORTANT influence on me when I was a teenager. He taught a social studies class called American Problems and he would push us to think in new ways.

Mr. Hoxie also had a lot of respect for his students; he took us seriously. I think it's so important for adults to respect young people. Plus Mr. Hoxie had a great sense of humor which made class fun. In fact, I wouldn't have minded if his class had lasted for two or three hours every day, if you can believe that.

In part because of Mr. Hoxie, I went on to get a degree as a social studies teacher. And although I never ended up in a classroom, I've gotten the chance to work with a lot of young people including working at the Boys and Girls Aid Society.

Like Mr. Hoxie, I respect the viewpoints of young people. In a way I feel like I'm carrying on his values.

seeing clearly

by Steve Hanamura

WHEN I WAS FIFTEEN, I WAS ATTENDING THE CALIFORNIA SCHOOL for the Blind, a residential school in Berkeley. There were approximately 100 students from around the state who attended the school. In those days it was not possible for a blind student to get an education in his or her home community. We attended classes right there on campus from kindergarten through ninth grade and then went to public high schools while continuing to live in the dorms at the school.

My ninth-grade year was filled with challenges, changes and new opportunities as I prepared to leave the safety of my blind community and venture into the sighted world of Oakland Technical High School. Fortunately, I met two young adults that year who made a difference not only in my life but in the lives of many other students who attended the school.

Tom and Mac were students at the American Baptist Seminary of the West; their campus was just a few blocks away from the Blind School. As part of their practicum they were assigned to teach our Sunday school class; however, they became much more than Sunday school teachers. They attended our wrestling matches and school plays. They took us on hikes and other social outings.

One of the major concerns for those of us at the Blind School was: Would we be able to become successful in a sighted world? Would we be able to date sighted people, get married, and get a job? How would we make it in the world?

As we prepared for the tenth grade many of us were going to attend school with sighted students for the very first time. Tom and Mac were there to help and encourage us through the transition process. I think they demonstrated four important qualities:

- They cared for us. This was so noticeable because they were interested in all aspects of our lives.
- They encouraged us. On those days when we felt like giving up, they offered words of encouragement without discounting how we were feeling about being blind.
- They attended as many of our school functions as they could.
- They became involved in teaching us real-life skills. They taught us how to walk with a woman as you cross the street, they helped us with our homework in high school, etc.

I still maintain contact with both Tom and Mac. I think their greatest gift of all to me was that they believed in me when I didn't believe in myself. Today, many years later, I am the owner of a consulting firm that provides consulting, training and public speaking services in the areas of leadership development, managing and leading diversity, team building, and managing personal and organizational change. I have authored two books and written several journal articles. I am married, have three grown sons and own my home. I enjoy running and biking and am very active in my church.

Life has not been without challenges since I left the Blind School, but those early years grounded me so that I could meet whatever came my way.

STEVE HANAMURA IS THE AUTHOR OF *I CAN SEE CLEARLY: A DIFFERENT LOOK AT LEADERSHIP*. HIS WEBSITE IS WWW.HANAMURACONSULTING.COM.

dust yourself off

by Michele Hartford

WHEN I WAS 15, I WAS A WRECK. I WAS IN FOSTER CARE IN LUBBOCK, Texas. I was lost and alone. I felt like I was always on the outside looking in. I always longed to be a part of something bigger. I longed to just belong. I'd love to be able to tell you some profound story about some fairy godmother who picked me up and dusted me off, but that's simply not true. I look at age 15 as the year I quit wishing on a star for my family to swoop in and rescue the little orphan I had become. I began looking outside at cliques and gangs. I looked to drugs and alcohol to numb the pain of being alone. I bought the idea of gangs becoming my family so much that I never realized I needed to have faith and belong to myself. It wasn't until I was 30 years old and sitting in prison that I discovered I needed to be true to myself and belong to me! There are a lot of children out there going through the same thing I did. If I could tell them all something, it would be to look inside yourself. You will find all the strength and support you've ever longed for. Have faith in yourself. I have faith in you. I have faith in us both.

when i met milburn porter

by Mary Josephson

I WAS FIFTEEN IN 1968. MY FAMILY LIVED IN MORENO VALLEY, California, an agricultural community. We were a military family; my father was an officer in the Air Force on a combat crew flying B-52 bombers. He was on the island of Guam flying missions to bomb Vietnam, so my mother raised us during the sixties. I went to my first war moratorium at age fifteen; I was part of the peace movement, a flower child. I loved rock music and was part of the culture. I did not think I would live long enough to grow up for a number of reasons: the A-bomb, drugs and violence, to name a few. I did not know what I wanted to be, but knew there must be more to life than the material world; there must be some kind of magic to transform the mundane world. I felt powerless, alienated from society, drifting, lost and very lonely, and hopelessly romantic.

I have been an artist from my earliest remembering. By the time I was fifteen I had tried so many mediums and yet could not find one that allowed me to express myself completely. I began to think I was not an artist after all.

My mother began taking painting classes through the officer's wives club at the home of a woman painter named Milburn Porter. She lived in an ordinary-looking ranch style home in nearby Riverside and had her studio there. My mother invited me to join her for a Monday painting class. I listened to my mother, took a chance, and went and

sat on the floor, which was my custom. They made room for me by letting me alone to paint whatever I wanted. I began to trust myself slowly, quietly exploring a new medium of expression: oil paint! Magic. Through the paint, I was able to make sense of the world, a continuous thread running through my life—a visual record. When I say painting saved my life, I mean it quite literally.

Milburn Porter was the first adult woman artist I knew, a woman painter in a man's world. She changed her name to that of a man so her paintings would be considered seriously. She encouraged me to trust in my vision of the world. My first painting sale was a portrait she commissioned, a portrait of her husband. I used the money to attend summer art college classes.

Trust someone who has life experience to guide you; look beyond the immediate and the commonplace. Find one thing you have a passion for and stick with it. Make magic.

don't lecture me

by Samantha Zimmer

HERE'S THE MOST IMPORTANT THING I LEARNED FROM MR. FRIETAG, who was my friend Brock's dad, a wrestling coach at my high school, and my counselor. Mr. Frietag said don't judge people—don't decide they're bad just because they do bad things.

High school seemed full of bad things. I had a hard time dealing with a lot of the social stuff that went on there. People just weren't very nice. As a result I ended up doing some things I shouldn't have, getting into trouble, stuff like that.

I think the main reason I listened to Mr. Frietag is because he never lectured. Instead he talked to me and shared his ideas. That's why he was such an important influence for me and why I'll never forget all that he taught me.

at 15

by Anonymous

What a shock! What are you doing,
taking me there?!

I'm in a room full of people,
if I say, they'll all stare!

How dare you grab my emotions
and drag me back to that time!

When dating someone older
was cool and sublime.

I first told my father
who said my aunt had seen

How my eyes lost their luster,
there was no longer a gleam.

But my father was distant then
as he was on "That Day."

The day a 21-year-old college student
took it away.

when you were fifteen

Took what exactly?
A hymen? My life?

What he took was quite personal.
What he took was "my right."

My right to say, "No."
My right to choose.

My rights to my body.
Win, draw or lose.

For a hymen is nothing
but a piece of skin.

But a soul is quite different,
it dwells deep within.

A soul bruised and battered
as it put up a fight.

The soul of a blue-eyed child.
He left hickeys and bites.

an anthology

Yet, silent the moment,
silent with fears.

Tell not a soul.
Dry my own tears.

No one wants to know
what went on that day.

Don't interrupt their lives,
just go out and play.

Play like I'm "normal."
Like inside I'm not dead.

Keep all the anguish and horror
quietly trapped in my head.

My mother judged me a bitch,
that's what she said.

When she saw the hickeys on me,
my neck so red.

My friends would not tolerate
any sex here.

If you'd had sex, in their book,
you were something to fear.

Then in my 20s
I ventured outside my head.

When I looked at my father
and in the moment I said...

"When I was 15, I was raped." There—I said it,
now turn your head.

Keep reading your paper
as though nothing were said.

I wanted him to hug me,
to acknowledge my plight.

Instead, he talked of my aunt's observations
and the time of my flight.

Now, I'm 40, plus a year or two, taking a chance once again
by revealing myself to you.

Don't judge me.

setting my course

by Al Jubitz

TO GET A SENSE OF WHO I WAS AT AGE 15, I REFERENCED MY 1959 and 1960 Beaverton High School yearbooks. What was I doing? Who were my friends? Who were the teachers? Which adults did I look up to? What I learned surprised me.

For years I had told people I played football only as a freshman... but there I was in the JV team picture. It was Coach McKee that respected my often futile efforts to learn the game by encouraging me to stick with it and giving me a chance from time to time. Eventually I switched to cross-country, where my speed and endurance could really be tested and catching a ball wasn't required.

The pages of the yearbook also revealed participation on the student council. I remembered being freshman class president but did not remember the executive committee. Mr. Arley Boyce gave me sound guidance and helped me believe in myself enough to speak before an assembly of my class.

Then there was the ski team and those cold, snowy days on the slopes of Mt. Hood. My brother, Abbott, encouraged me to join the team.

I saw a picture in the yearbook with me in the Latin club. I can't remember the club, but I certainly remember Mr. Fix patiently teaching Latin.

While there was nothing in the yearbook to remind me of another great teacher, Mrs. Ferrin, she saw my best work in English class. Her A++ on a term paper gave me a sense that if I really applied myself I could succeed.

Often influenced by my classmates, I liked to try different things. It was during my 15th year that I learned something important about friends.

The advice came from my father. As a 15-year-old, I was hanging with some of the more rowdy football players in our class. We were cruising the hood and leaving our mark, usually by "TPing" a person's yard. One day my father called me aside. He told me he noticed the friends I had chosen and said to me, "Al, you have a choice. You need to decide if you are going to be a follower or a leader." I thought about that statement for a long time. I knew he was right. I also knew that my conscience was bothering me about some of the rowdy things in which I was involved.

That fatherly guidance may have led to my leaving the football team and choosing a new group of friends—track and field types. Cross-country was more me. With the runners I didn't have the pressure to be cool in a negative way. Even though track was a team sport, the events were more individual, allowing me to attain my own level without a lot of peer pressure. I found a new inner strength.

One thing I remember doing all through high school was smiling at people in the hallways and saying “Hi.” While some would say this is strange behavior, it worked for me because I liked most people and wanted them to like me.

My advice to young people is to be involved in a school activity. Try it for a while. If it isn't right, try something else until you find your personal fit. Also, be polite and courteous to everyone. Ask questions and seek guidance from adults. Allow at least one adult to know you, for you will need an adult to write letters of recommendation as a senior.

Ask yourself if you are hanging with the right people. If not, do not. There are many people that will lift you to your potential and others that will want to drag you down. You have the power to choose which set of friends you want. You are the greatest contributor to your own success by making solid choices on friends, activities, adults you admire, and habits you learn. Oh yes, challenge yourself to learn all you can.

AL JUBITZ IS PRESIDENT AND FOUNDER OF THE JUBITZ FAMILY FOUNDATION AND SERVES AS DIRECTOR OF TWO PRIVATE START-UP COMPANIES.

the year everything changed

by Brittney Misho

MY NAME IS BRITTNEY. I AM 18 YEARS OLD. WHEN I WAS 15 MY LIFE was hectic; that was a bad year for me and my family. As that year started out I was all about school and dance. I was so happy. I thought that nothing bad could happen to me. But I was sorely mistaken.

In January my world came crashing down. My grandmother, Mary, the only person in the world I could talk to, was diagnosed with leukemia and told she only had a month to live. I was so hurt I didn't think I could go on and live my life without her. I kept thinking, “How could this happen to me and my family?” I didn't understand—she was such a healthy woman. I wanted her to get better so badly; she was supposed to be here when I graduated and when I got married. She was such a strong person. She told me that everything would be OK, that she was going to fight it.

She out-lived the month the doctors gave her and actually lived for seven months, long enough to watch her fourth great-grandchild be born, and long enough to watch my little sister and I dance in our end-of-the-year performance. She was so passionate about our dancing. I worked so hard that year to make everything perfect for her. Luckily, it was perfect. She finally passed July 10th, 2002. She was at home. I sat with her while she went.

It's because of her that I still dance today and that I'm finishing high school and going to college. I'm doing it all in her memory.

my mentor

by Andy Ngo

THANKS TO MY YOUTH PASTOR RYAN I FEEL LIKE I'LL ALWAYS HAVE a place where I can go when I need help or someone to talk to.

My home life was tough and until I met Ryan, I had no one to talk to about personal problems. The great thing about Ryan is that he always seemed to know when something was wrong and would ask me about it. He also invited me to hang out at his house when I needed a break from mine.

Ryan also mentored me career wise. As long as I can remember, I've been interested in photography and film-making and it just so happens that Ryan also runs a film production business. He let me help out on projects which gave me a good first-hand look at how the film business works.

I'm now a student at UCLA film school. But even though I'm a state away, I know I'll always have a home with Ryan if I need one. That means a lot.

mother wisdom

by Carla Piluso

THE YEAR WAS 1970. RICHARD NIXON WAS PRESIDENT, KANSAS CITY won the Super Bowl, Baltimore won the World Series, the Beatles broke up, Maya Angelou wrote *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, the liquid crystal display (LCD) was invented in Switzerland, computer-scanned binary signal codes (bar codes) were introduced in England, IBM introduced the floppy disk, Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin both died drug-related deaths at the age of 27. Vietnam was in the news. My family was opposed to the war, so I was, too. I turned 15.

I was a sophomore at Andrew Jackson High School in Portland. I was pretty usual but felt pretty unusual. I was not ugly, but I wasn't pretty either. My yearbook photo highlights what I would now describe as long, stringy hair, but my memory is that it was the look of Cher (and easy to hide behind). Heavy dark-framed glasses, the look of sophistication or nerdification (depending on which day it was) and pimples that could be "dot-to-dotted" in the fashion of a road map. My weight was an issue. More so for others, who never hesitated to mention it. Some, well-intended ("You would be so pretty if..."), others a bit more direct ("fatso," "chubby..."). Those who mattered the most never said much of anything. I liked to think it didn't bother me, but it did. I felt liked but not popular. I had a good group of friends. We were the good students. However, by popular standards, a bit socially inept. Life was a melodrama (see above). But life was OK.

I liked sports and the heated discussions in social studies class. Both had a competitive edge. Sports for girls were pretty limited and I wanted to “letter.” Gymnastics and track were not options for this chubby girl, swimming and tennis were. Sports were my “fit.” I thrived on teamwork and the ethics of fair play (OK, once or twice my play was not so fair). I earned my letter.

Social studies was competition of the mind, regarding the ethics of society. The answer didn't have to be right if you could make your point. That did not make sense to me. How could you be right and wrong at the same time?

One of my strongest memories from being 15 was a time when I wanted to go skiing after school. The dilemma? I was scheduled to play tennis. So I asked my mom what I should do. (Hoping, of course, that she would see the value in skiing.) Her reply was, “You do what you think is right.” Mother guilt, mother ethics. I played tennis and lost (mother karma). I have never forgotten that conversation.

Today, I am the police chief of Gresham, the fourth-largest city in the state of Oregon. My mother passed away from breast cancer many years ago, but I think of her often as I struggle with tough decisions. The popular answers would be so easy. To be liked would be so easy. To do what is right can be so hard. Next to my desk are my mom's exact words: “There is no right way to do a wrong thing.”

CARLA PILUSO IS CHIEF OF POLICE FOR THE CITY OF GRESHAM. CHIEF PILUSO ALSO SERVES AS THE CHAIR OF THE MULTNOMAH COUNTY COMMISSION ON CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY.

sister marion

by Susan Burton

THE PERSON WHO HELPED GET ME TO WHERE I AM TODAY WAS a nun, Sister Marion. She was a teacher at the alternative high school I went to.

Sister Marion understood that not all of us do well in structured environments—I sure didn't. Rather than making us sit in desks all day, she made school exciting. She took us on field trips, on camping trips and let us do hands-on projects that were interesting and fun. She actually made me want to go to school.

In fact, I continued school after that and graduated with a nursing degree. Would I have finished high school without Sister Marion? Yes, one way or the other. But I know I wouldn't be where I am today without her help.

“I PREFER TO SEE FIFTEEN-YEAR-OLDS AS CHILDREN,

**'CAUSE THAT'S WHAT THEY ARE. US ADULTS AND SOCIETY ARE WHAT MAKES
THEM WANT TO BE ADULTS. WE PORTRAY THE WORLD AS FAST, SLICK, AND
DISHONEST. MONEY THIS AND MONEY THAT, SEX, VIOLENCE, DRUGS AND ALCOHOL.”**

photograph by eringracephotography.com



FROM **DEAR FIFTEEN**, BY **ELLA AMANDA HALL** ON PAGE 94

beginning my journey

by Elaine Rice

FIFTEEN WAS A TOUGH YEAR FOR ME. EVERY NIGHT I WOULD LIE IN bed, terribly worried, sweating and feeling incredibly guilty. For a year I could not even say the word out loud. Shame followed me everywhere. I was just becoming aware that I was a lesbian.

My stomach still churns when I remember those times. Who could I talk to? Who could I trust? I finally spoke to the minister of another church who fasted and prayed with me for three days. My family didn't notice that I only ate a bite or two at dinner. When I told my best friend, she stopped talking to me. The three days of fasting and praying did nothing except allow me to start dealing with this awful dilemma. As a member of a fundamentalist church, I had no idea anyone on earth took pride in their "deviant" sexuality.

I finally told my own minister's sister, Meg, and she ran to tell Steve, our minister. Suddenly my secret was out of control until Meg explained that Steve had known for several years.

Steve came to my home once when I was too upset to function. My mother wanted to know why I was spending so much time with him and I gave her no explanation. "Be back by dinnertime," she said, knowing that I fully intended to go with him, permission or not.

Reeducation was key, he said. I needed to learn how to be a woman, wear feminine clothing, walk and think like a woman. Up to that point, I was most comfortable in jeans and a T-shirt. Dresses and frilly, pink things made me want to puke. I tried to conform but I felt like a fraud.

"You should think of Jesus as your lover," Steve told me when I was a little older. I couldn't believe he was telling me this stuff. Beulah, another minister, came to our church and ministered to people, whether they wanted it or not. She put her hands on my head and began praying fervently. I was so embarrassed and, not even able to listen to her because I was so terrified, my face reddened and I sobbed uncontrollably.

At 21 I saw a psychologist who asked me what I wanted to do with my life. "Become a nurse, a missionary, a deaconess in my church, and teach Bible studies," I parroted back, just as I had been taught. Finally I realized I couldn't stop being gay and made my move, left the church, but not before Steve told me the elders had prayed and felt led to offer me free room and board in the church commune where I had been living, free maintenance and gas on my car, schooling to become a nurse and missionary, if I stayed. I knew it was a lie and said "no" to him for the first time in my life.

Eventually, I found a lesbian psychologist and my journey as a lesbian really began.

ELAINE RICE WRITES: "TODAY I AM OUT AND COMFORTABLE WITH MYSELF, I HAVE NO PROBLEM TELLING PEOPLE I AM GAY BUT COMING OUT WAS A PROCESS OF MANY YEARS. I AM 50 TODAY."

a different kind of teacher

by Sheldon Lester

I WOULDN'T BE IN COLLEGE TODAY IF IT WASN'T FOR MISS GRUNHOUSER, a teacher I had in high school back in Arizona.

I had Miss Grunhouser the first year she taught and I think that's what made her different from some of the other teachers. Because she was young, she knew what we were going through. She had just gone through the same types of problems and experiences. I guess the best way to describe her is she was a teacher who was also a friend.

Miss Grunhouser challenged us. She had fresh perspectives and forced us to think and talk about ideas in new ways too. She even had me thinking about my life in new ways, which is why I'm now in college studying automotive technology.

my personal independence day

by Christopher C. L. Robinson III

MY NAME IS CHRISTOPHER ROBINSON. AT AGE FIFTEEN I WAS LIVING with my father in Williamstown in southern New Jersey. I lived in a wooded area which had small lakes and ponds to fish from. I grew up with three sisters and one brother. We had a simple quiet life but there was a terrible family secret. A secret no one within the family talked about, but knew about very well.

On the surface our family appeared as normal as any other family. Beneath the surface there were storms brewing. I was being abused by my father, bullied by the kids on the school bus, and ostracized by some of the local kids in the neighborhood and even at church I couldn't find peace. I was someone who had learning difficulties stemming from years of childhood beatings from age six, ending at age fifteen. My mother was my main abuser. I was the result of a terrible rape which deeply affected her mental state. My mother also suffered and struggled with drug addiction.

Within the wake and aftermath of my experience with abuse and my mother's death, I was left devastated. I developed mental illness and became emotionally disturbed. I had little self-esteem; I hated myself. I hated my family and I hated the abuse. It was reported by family members that somehow I brought shame to the family.

Out of reaction to all the beatings and verbal abuse I started acting out. I broke things, robbed neighbors' houses, I stole a car and I began running away from home. It was as if a fire was burning bright, deep within my soul. Bear in mind I wasn't a mean or bad child. I was a desperate young teen struggling with anger, outrage and survival.

Most of my early childhood was consumed by trauma and abuse. I had been so distracted by the effects of trauma. It was as if the horror pictures of memories in my head would not stop playing. I would relive each abusive episode over and over again. While most fifteen-year-olds were out playing sports, dating girls and going to high school proms, I was struggling with staying alive, being beat up by bullies and hated for being a black guy in an almost all-white community.

One day I just couldn't take any more abuse. I made a life-altering choice. To save what was left of my sanity I ran away from home for good. I never even finished school. I ran away to San Francisco, California. It was there I met a trans-gender person named Christine Taylor. She was the person who offered me free mental health therapy sessions. It was my first attempt at coming to terms with realizing I had been abused, traumatized, and discovering the fact I am gay. Christine Taylor supervised a non-traditional mental health agency in which I began to gain some recovery. Christine was patient, kind and very compassionate to me. She used to be a man, but had gone through a sex change. I had always admired Christine for her strength and courage. I can only imagine how much strength it took to go through a sex change. Christine Taylor inspired me to accept myself and come to terms with being gay and being a survivor of chronic abuse. She was also helpful to others, helping them to heal and move forward with their lives.

Today I have been accepted at Portland State University. For me this is a milestone. When I earned my GED (General Education Diploma) in 1995 at age 29, I was really feeling good about myself. It has always been my dream to become a doctor. I will major in psychology. I am now 39 years old. I have a good mind and a warm heart. I believe with God's help I'll reach my academic goals. I have been through far too many hard and painful times. The way I see it, education is my ticket out of poverty, and also to an enhanced self-esteem. I look forward to living my new life once I finish college in six years. I guess I am a late bloomer.

going to the bookstore

by Gainell

I STRONGLY BELIEVE THE ONLY WAY TO ACHIEVE SUCCESS IS through mentors. Mentors offer important gifts—the trick is recognizing and accepting these gifts.

I'm lucky, growing up I had a lot of great adults in my life. Among them, my Aunt Tonda and Aunt Shirley really stand out. They're the people I can most depend on. No matter what, they'll always be there.

One of our favorite outings when I was 15 and younger was going to the bookstore. My aunts would load me up with books. I guess it paid off. I was an English major at Portland State and at graduation I had the honor of giving the commencement address. I know my success at school has a lot to do with those book shopping trips and their support.

life will be different after 15

by Mo

MY LIFE NOW IS SOBER. I'M LIVING AT THE JUVENILE DETENTION HALL in a rehab program. I'm now putting my life back on track. While I'm in rehab, I'm getting my GED and experiencing life as a clean and sober person.

I want to graduate from college. I want to be married with kids living in my own house. I don't want drugs a part of my future.

I believe that only I can get me to where I want to be. I need to make a commitment to myself to stay away from drugs and follow the right track, set goals and accomplish them. Support helps, but it takes my willpower to do what's right.

breaking into the truth

by Kim Stafford

WHEN I WAS FIFTEEN I GOT THIS IDEA TO BREAK INTO MY CHURCH AT night—just to stand inside and feel God’s power. I didn’t want anyone else around. I didn’t want the minister, the choir, my family—no one. Just God and me.

About midnight, I snuck out, and walked two miles to church. Around back, I climbed an ivy vine to the roof over the fellowship hall, and started trying the windows on the second floor. All locked. Even my knife failed to get one open—the blade, the screwdriver, the awl. Nothing worked. I tried to pry off the skylight. No go. I had to climb down and go home.

The next Sunday, I went upstairs before Sunday school and unlocked all the windows. I sat through the lesson, went home, went to bed in my clothes. But when I climbed the ivy vine again at midnight, the windows were all locked. Why did God not want me? Was the janitor onto me? I felt like a criminal, but I had to win. No one else could understand what I needed: to sing for God, alone, in deep darkness. I couldn’t explain this.

The next Sunday, I went upstairs again to open the window locks. But when I turned around, the assistant pastor—Jim—was watching me.

“I’m glad you are here,” he said. “There’s something very important I want to tell you.” Gradually, the others arrived. When there were about twenty of us kids in the room, he asked someone to close the door.

“There is something I want to say only to you,” he said. We all looked at each other. I was forgetting about the windows, my plan to sing for God. What was this man going to tell us? Did he know about me?

“When you love someone,” he said, “it is important that you find a private time to be with that special person.” He let those words sink in. My God! He was telling us about love, sex—what no one in my family ever mentioned. Everyone looked down.

“The first person you touch,” he said, “you need to touch with tenderness. There should be no hurry, no fear. This is a sacred time. There is no place for hurry or fear at a sacred time.” I was in some kind of dream.

About a month later, Jim was fired. He gave a last amazing sermon on hypocrisy, the foolishness of our war in Vietnam, and how we each had to decide for ourselves what God wanted us to do. I looked up into his eyes, and he looked down from the pulpit at me. Did he smile?

I never knew if he knew what I was all about. But he tried to give me some truth that everyone else was afraid to mention. It changed my life. I've had my direct line to what I needed ever since that man spoke to me without fear. Now I do that with others.

KIM STAFFORD IS A WRITER AND A TEACHER IN PORTLAND.

someone to look up to

by Joseph Prior

IT WAS ACTUALLY AN OLDER TEENAGER WHO HAD THE BIGGEST influence on me when I was in high school. His name was John and I admired him for a lot of reasons. He was friendly and well liked. He was popular, but in a good way, not in the way some people are popular in high school just because they act cool and all that.

Also, he wasn't afraid to hang out with younger kids. He'd do things like skateboard and surf with us; it was great.

Finally I think I've always liked John because he's smart and responsible. He has a wife and kid now and he's taking great care of his family. He's somebody I'll always look up to.

a humpty dumpty who'll never fall

by Victor Trelawny

I HAD COME BACK TO MY JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL THE JANUARY AFTER I graduated, having hurried to arrive so that I might catch Mr. Reed between when he finished teaching and left for home. As luck would have it, I saw him right inside the front doors, behind the counter in the main office. That I had never thought of Mr. Reed as Humpty Dumpty—that he was not known among students as that—surely indicated the respect we had for him. He was at most five-foot-five, round and bald, with a fair complexion and a preference for tiny bow ties.

Seeing me enter the office, he smiled and stepped around the counter, saying, “What a pleasant surprise.” I wonder now if he realized as we shook hands that I was standing a bit odd—with my left arm pressed awkwardly against my body. I had on a winter coat and hidden out of sight was the result of hours and hours of effort since he’d last seen me. I was concealing this object because I wanted to surprise him then, because I wanted to make sure nobody else saw what I had with me.

Mr. Reed, I felt certain, would understand. Everyone else might simply be made uncomfortable at what lay inside the bronze, spray-painted half-sheets of cardboard held together by two knotted strands of recording tape.

As answer to Mr. Reed’s question about what brought me back, I reached inside my coat and, like an assailant grasping his gun, I drew out *Alone But Thinking*, my first full-length collection of poems.

I no longer remember how Mr. Reed reacted to the strange thing he saw in my hand or what I said by way of explanation. All I remember is that within a few minutes he had invited me to visit him at his house the next Saturday afternoon after he had had a chance to read closely what I’d written.

Mr. Reed lived with his wife and four children, two away at college, in a ranch house not much bigger than the one I shared with my mother and sister. But his had a finished basement, which is where his study was and where we spent most of that Saturday afternoon talking about my poems. Mr. Reed pointed out what he liked and questioned passages that seemed to him obscure, a quality I had never considered might be part of my style. Before I left, he encouraged me to send some of the poems to magazines and told me how to do that.

I was still fifteen when one of the poems appeared in *Oregonian Verse*, the poetry section of the Sunday newspaper. A week later I got a check for a dollar, my first payday other than what I had taken grudgingly for a crate of berries. But before the check came I had

already received something that meant much more—a phone call at home from Mr. Reed. He told me how proud he was of my accomplishment and how my career as a writer had begun. Before he hung up, he said with his familiar self-mocking laugh that maybe the title to that poem was all right after all, if the editor had let it go.

As it turns out, that was the last time I spoke with Mr. Reed, though I have thought of him consistently throughout my life. He introduced me to poetry, something I continue to love, and was kind and encouraging in a way he did not have to be. Long ago I also realized he was right about the title to that poem.

my diary records my 15th year

by Shura Young

BY AGE 15, I'D LIVED MY ENTIRE LIFE IN A HOME VIRTUALLY ISOLATED by my controlling and emotionally abusive father. I was afraid of people. I lived in a fantasy world. My diary was my closest friend. My diary records my 15th year:

Dear diary, I suffered with homework from 7-10 p.m. and ruined my birthday. I have a boy I love from a distance each semester in school. Boys tease, poke and compliment me, but I'm terrified of them. Dear diary, Why must I be so shy?

We have to read Les Miserables in English. I can't read it. Daddy says if I can't read Les Miserables I'll never succeed at anything in my life. I work hard at homework, but I can't understand or remember things well.

Daddy calls me stupid a lot. He gets very mean. Sometimes he hits or threatens to. Mummy takes me to see a psychiatrist. I think it's because I don't have friends. The psychiatrist asks me if I have any problems at home. I say, "No."

My dolls are Ginger and Muffie. I make wooden furniture for their apartment: desk, bed, sofa, shelves, lamp and wardrobe. I sew all their clothes. I also make clothes for myself. Mummy and I go shopping a lot except when she has anxiety and can't go out.

Everything has to be cleaned all the time. I clean my room, bathroom, other rooms, yard and patio. In July, Mummy announces it's cleaning week. I clean the house for five days.

My brother is 10 years younger than I am. When he doesn't obey Mummy, I give him a lecture on responsibility. It must work because he cleans his room.

I start designing houses, create and furnish a new house on paper and a new family to live with. In school, I love art.

Daddy yells at me, especially at dinner. I have to go to my room without eating.

There are increasing family arguments. Daddy gets mad at me for no reason. I hate him.

Mummy sees her psychiatrist. She cries and tells me she thinks sometimes of slitting her wrists.

Dear diary, I'm tired of doing the same thing every day and being so quiet.

Please help me. Other girls have friends and family and relatives, even boyfriends. I feel like I'm an outcast. I'm terrified—if I have no one to have lunch or snack with, I hide in the girls' bathroom. My stomach is knotted up and I can't eat a lot.

I don't get help until age 17, when I go into major depression. I see a therapist for four years. He helps me become sociable and talkative. But because the abuse isn't recognized and treated (it was 1963), I

become sexually promiscuous and addicted to alcohol. Then, I enter a 23-year, emotionally abusive, controlling relationship.

When I am 52, my current therapist recognizes the childhood and domestic abuse. And I am finally healing for the first time in my life.

SHURA YOUNG HAS BEEN AN ARTIST AND WRITER ALL OF HER ADULT LIFE. SHE IS CURRENTLY WRITING IN ORDER TO HEAL FROM, AND TO EDUCATE OTHERS ABOUT, CHILDHOOD AND DOMESTIC ABUSE.

FROM **LEAVING HOME**, BY **VICKI PHILLIPS** ON PAGE 136

“SHE HELPED ME SEE
THAT I COULD DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT”

photograph courtesy of portland public schools



generations

by Roseanna Ellis

When I was fifteen it was a very good year
For flat-chested girls with no independent means...
I was a typical teenager who did not know beans,
Did not dance or sing or stay out late drinking beer

Like the "in" girls in my class: homebody, as it were,
I guess most people would have called me quick to cling,
But I liked staying home—always Mommie's helper
Around the house, out shopping, out walking!

Yes, my Mother was always my best friend: partings,
When I was fifteen, were hard, though I had good friends
At school, and I always learned many things;
But mostly I learned from my parents, and their amens...

And their stories of life when they were young and free...
Maybe it's different if you have young folks
Who are always busy, always on the go,
But my parents were already old slowpokes,

And had already done what they'd wanted to do.
Mother was fifty-five, Father was sixty-five.
I guess they felt lucky just to still be alive.
But that made it harder for me when I lost them!

For they both died so very soon... and I was left...
When I was fifteen and sensed that they'd soon be gone,
That Time was short, that I would soon be bereft,
That I would rise up in a cold and lonely dawn...

I realized that I would have the rest of life
To discover the awesome outside world
Without them! Time was a well-honed knife,
Time was fleeting, Time was tricky, Time was curled...

When I was fifteen, I was innocent and green,
Reaching out to dream, to live, to learn, to burn,
Reaching out to the wide sense of history
That my loving parents represented to me...

When I was fifteen...

surviving on my own

by Emily Ryan

I WAS KICKED OUT OF MY OWN HOUSE WHEN I WAS 16. I HAD NO money, no plan, no place to live. Today, I'm supporting myself and putting myself through college with jobs, grants and scholarships. I'm a shift leader at the Portland downtown Ben and Jerry's, which operates in partnership with New Avenues to train homeless youth for the job market. I'm also on the board of the Commission on Children, Families and Community, the Multnomah Youth Commission, and the Poverty Advisory Committee.

I owe my survival and success to some very special people. One is my older sister, Willow, who is one of the most influential people in my life because of all the love, respect and advice she gives me. I was also supported by the community at Cleveland High School, where I never missed a day, not even when I was homeless. I loved it there; it was diverse and everybody knew me. At Cleveland I was also helped a lot by Bonnie Acker, my counselor, who is very understanding, not judgmental and just gets it.

I'm kind of scared that I won't be able to make it on my own. But it makes a big difference knowing I have so many people who support me and care about me.

science fictions

by Juliann Easton

I WAS A FRESHMAN IN HIGH SCHOOL THE YEAR I TURNED 15. That year I was taller than all but one of the girls, and half the boys. That was a vast improvement over junior high, where I used to walk down the hall and be a full head taller than almost everyone else! Their heads came up to my chin. In high school, there were LOTS of boys taller than me! I liked to read science fiction and work crossword puzzles, two things I still enjoy. Like many freshmen, I felt geeky and awkward, not pretty, and not popular.

I have a photo from that time. I see a tall, slender girl with laughing blue eyes and brown wavy hair. She is wearing a beret and her shoulders are hunched a bit. She has a nice bust and long legs. I think, *If she would stand up and relax, she would be beautiful.*

I spent most of my time and energy that year studying and reading, creeping around on the fringes of the social groups that high school is full of. Only one teacher made any impression on me that year. Mr. Williams taught the science class. My head was already full of science from reading science fiction, so I really sat up and paid attention in that class. I wanted to be a rocket scientist, or maybe an astronaut. Mind you, no one had gone to the moon at that time. So "astronaut" as a career choice did not show a lot of forethought. Mr. Williams made every class fun. He would mix clear liquids, and get blue, or red, or gold. He occasionally blew things up, to our great

delight. Sometimes things he would mix gave off horrible smells. When that happened, the boys would show how tough they were. No smell bothered them! The girls could squeal and giggle and pretend to gag. I wrote a 15-page report in that class, on the passage in Ezekiel about the wheel within a wheel, and how that was a record of a visit from a flying saucer. Mr. Williams encouraged my fantasy career ideas, and kindly gave me an “A” on the report.

He made me forget about being awkward and feeling unlovely and too smart. He encouraged me to dream, and to work for my dreams. He encouraged me to try new things, and not to be afraid.

I blossomed that summer after my year with Mr. Williams. One of the new things I tried was bleaching my brown locks blonde. Boys started hanging around the farm. Ostensibly they were there to work with my Dad for some pocket change or date money. They ranged in age from 16 to 22. That was the year the Rolling Stones’ “(I Can’t Get No) Satisfaction” came out. We all sang it, with aching and longing, eager to get out into the world and get our own satisfaction, sure that we could do it far better than the guy in the song.

Mr. Williams, the things I learned from you never left me. You planted the seed of the idea that I could have dreams, and work to make them true. Thank you.

JULIANN EASTON CURRENTLY LIVES IN PORTLAND, OREGON WITH HER SPOUSE AND FOUR CATS. ONE OF THE CATS, PONCE DE LEON, IS 104 IN CAT YEARS. JULIANN IS 55.

courage

by Marnie Maurina

WHEN I WAS 15, MY REGULAR LIFE CHANGED AND TOOK A TURN FOR the worse: my mother was ill and had an operation for brain cancer. After the surgery, she was paralyzed on her entire right side. She had to learn to talk, walk and write all over again. It was very frustrating for her to try to talk because a completely odd word would come out. I remember how sorry I felt for her, and our whole family, as she slowly struggled to make letters with her left hand (because the right hand hung at her side). She was courageous in more ways than one.

One of my little sisters was about eight months old and once, my mother instinctively jumped up out of her chair to cuddle with her baby, but she tumbled right over and started to cry. Dad picked her up and said: “Oh, Vi, I’m sorry.” That’s when I knew the power of instinct and how powerful our brains are—for that instant, it allowed her body to move.

I had something for which I wanted to apologize. So, even though Mom was in a coma by then, I asked to be alone with her, told her I was sorry, and SHE SQUEEZED MY HAND. That’s when I knew that people in a coma can still hear. And I knew she loved me and forgave me for my teenage silliness.

When I was 15, I was madly in love with Bruce. He was tall, like my father, and nice-looking, a senior at my high school. I gave him qualities he did not possess and embellished the ones he did have. I was totally codependent! Of course they didn't call it that then, they simply called it "boy-crazy." All these years later, it makes sense to say that I did obsess about him—to have a daydream, a fantasy—something to think about when my reality really was very difficult: cooking and cleaning house and caring for my three young sisters.

Also, when I was 15, I drove my Dad's huge 1957 swept-wing Dodge, giving my cousin a ride home to Gresham without a driver's license. My cousin still teases me about all the curbs I ran over. I still wonder why my Dad didn't get more angry with me than he did!

Two years later my life took another turn for the worse: my mother died. It was very sad and I am still missing her and realizing how much her long illness and death affected me.

what was i doing at 15?

by Jim Thayer, M.D.

I WAS IN EIGHTH GRADE AT ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN SCHOOL IN Bremen, Indiana (actually I was only 14). I now work as physician for the Multnomah County Health Department. I work with many people who are homeless and have mental health problems, including addictions.

Mr. Mantle helped me get there.

School was pretty easy for me. I was generally not very interested and I was really not interested in working hard. I would do the minimum to get by. I also wasn't very organized and I was constantly doing my homework at the last minute, usually while I was supposed to be paying attention in the class just before. Sometimes I would just "forget" to do my homework.

One day in the winter of eighth grade, my teacher, Mr. Mantle, decided that I had "forgotten" my homework one too many times. He told me that if I cared so little for school, then I would have to leave. He said that other people needed his time to help them get their education and that I was wasting both my time and his. He said that there were very few things worse than not using the talents we have. That day, he sent me home from school and told me I could only return when I decided to do my best.

My parents grounded me for six weeks. When I went back to school I was mostly mad at Mr. Mantle and scared that I would get kicked out again. But by actually doing my work, I started to take on a whole new attitude about learning.

I know it would have been much easier for Mr. Mantle to just lower my grade for missing my homework, but he cared enough to try to get my attention. I think that I would have spent a lot more years trying to just “get by” if he hadn’t done what he did. The lesson for me was that it isn’t about the grade or the result; it is all about the effort. It is one of the most important lessons I’ve learned.

look at me now

by Jackie M.

IT WAS 1974. I WAS IN THE SEVENTH GRADE. I WAS WHAT THEY called a mean girl. I lived across the street from the school so I was always on time. I was raised in a foster home. My foster mom and dad were way cool. I would get up and go to school without any trouble, but I had my ups and downs. I was known as the “mean kid.” I would beat people up all the time. The kids that I beat up would be too scared to tell on me, so I never got into any trouble. I did play sports in school.

It was very hard being raised up in a foster home. You just don’t know where you fit in. You know that they are not your real folks and that these are not your real sisters. But they try to make you feel loved and happy. I should talk about how I felt. I just never felt like I fitted in the family. I had a lot of anger and hurt. I just could not understand why my family did not want me or why I had to stay with these people. So I was just mean to people—that way, I did not have to feel any pain. And that way, no one could get close to me, so I could not be hurt by anyone, and no one could hurt me. Fifteen was a hard time, but look at me now.

JACKIE M. IS THE MOTHER OF THREE SONS AND WORKS AT CASCADIA BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CARE. SHE HAS SERVED AS COMMUNITY FELLOW FOR RECLAIMING FUTURES—MULTNOMAH EMBRACE.

dear fifteen

by Ella Amanda Hall

I'D LIKE TO SAY TO YOU THANKS FOR THE GOOD TIMES WE HAD together, all the smiles and laughter we shared. I remember being the most popular girl in school, my grades were up to par, I was the teacher's pet. A lot of the females envied me and disliked me, they always mistake my kindness for something else. I could be a nice gentle person, and friendly when I had to be. I did get into many fights, and protected a lot of my friends. *Mi vida loca*, that's what we would say to each other.

I had a bond with all of my friends, we were a family. I had friends that lived in halfway houses and group homes. They had tragic stories and came from nothing but yet they were still in school every day they could attend. For some reason I befriended girls that got picked on or talked about. I wasn't the popular type that teased others concerning their appearance. I thought it was wrong, and cruel, and I would stick up for my friends any day.

You have to look at people from a different perspective. They're acting the way they do for a reason, they are crying out, and being a drug addict, prostitute, or a dope dealer is how they send out their message for help. The fifteen-year-olds I knew blamed themselves, and always vented about their parents not being available

when they needed, or how they weren't able to talk to their parents 'cause they had no relationship at all. Being fifteen and trying to live up to the family values is challenging.

I prefer to see fifteen-year-olds as children, 'cause that's what they are. Us adults and society are what makes them want to be adults. We portray the world as fast, slick, and dishonest. Money this and money that, sex, violence, drugs and alcohol. We provide the cosmetics and provocative clothing. Why, at fifteen, do you need a cell phone, or a car, or even a credit card? Those are adult items, let your child be a child until the right age. We as parents and adults are supposed to be responsible mentors that our children will mimic. Just think about it: they're only fifteen, we're grown and have lived most of our lives.

I'm 24 years of age, single with two children. My life wasn't honey and rolls but I have a lot to show for it now. I've opened up my home to a sibling family of four, they've been with me and my family for two years now. It's because of Jesus, I won't give credit to no one else. He's my hero, and that's the God's honest truth. My family and I had to completely submit to our Lord and Savior.

my goals

by W

I AM NOW IN THE DONALD E. LONG HOME. I HAVE BEEN HERE SINCE November 1, 2005. I have been in three units so far. Each unit has 16 rooms and an isolation room. I have stayed on my best behavior most of the time to avoid getting in trouble with other youth and staff.

There is a “level system”—there are only four levels. The system gives bad-behavior kids less privileges, and good-behavior kids good privileges. I have gone from level one (where everyone starts) to level four. Level four is very rare, most people just can’t go there.

I want to get the best out of my treatment program, then I want to graduate out of “Juvie Hall.” I want to go to Benson High School and graduate with a great scholarship for a technical college. I also want to move to Nevada, where I was born.

Adults will be able to help by listening to my needs and correct or help me to realize what I need to correct. Adults can give me advice to stay on track and on task.

the chandeliers are falling

by Joshua Todd

EVERY DAY I HAVE OPPORTUNITIES TO INTERACT WITH MIDDLE school and high school students who need support, guidance, a friend, or just a cheerleader. I count myself lucky to be immersed in a period of people’s lives that is not only transitional but also transformational. I love what I do and don’t know if I would be here if it was not for a very special woman, Mrs. Glenna Sobol.

Glenna volunteered at the local church in Minoa, New York, a small town just outside of Syracuse that boasted its very own grocery store, an ice cream shop, and one of the largest confluences of train tracks on the eastern seaboard. I moved to Minoa when I was 12, just after the death of my mother from cancer. We moved to be closer to my father’s family, whom I had never spent very much time with, and in the process left my two older sisters, my older brother, and all my friends. I was incredibly lonely in Minoa. My mother’s death was very raw and overwhelming for me then and would remain that way for several years. The only thing I had to look forward to was the youth group at my local church. The people were nice, I liked getting away from my house, and there was a woman there who always said hi, knew my name, and asked how I was doing—Glenna.

To my surprise, I was invited to join the youth group in a trip to Louisville, Kentucky for the national Catholic youth conference after only living in Minoa and being part of the youth group for three or four months. That trip changed my life. As we entered the grand ballroom, where the first gathering would be held, I noticed an immense chandelier strung high above the crowd. My first thought was not of its beauty or style but, and I said this out loud to the group, “Wouldn’t it be horrible if that chandelier fell and killed all those people below!” Glenna’s ears pricked up and she walked over to me and said, “You know, that is the third or fourth negative comment I have heard from you in the past couple hours. Do you realize how often you put yourself down or focus on the negative aspect of a situation?” I honestly didn’t realize. My mom’s death put a gray haze over my life and I hadn’t stopped to notice that I didn’t really enjoy much anymore. Glenna gave me a small notebook and a pen and told me she wanted me to just jot down every time I had a negative thought. I didn’t have to share it with anyone, it was just for me. After three days in Louisville, my notebook had more notes than I expected and Glenna’s little exercise helped me realize I probably wasn’t very much fun to be around and that I could, sometimes, choose to focus on the positive. I did that. Little by little, more and more—it didn’t happen overnight, but that weekend helped me get out of my depression and begin the road to healing the pain that my mom’s death had caused. It also made me more fun to be around and helped me adjust and make friends in my new home.

Glenna continued to be a positive force in my life throughout high school. After a year, I was president of the youth group and Glenna taught me how to run a meeting, get things done, and achieve my goals. My passions were ignited and I realized that young people

had the power to make a difference. I became an activist and channeled my pain, anger, and sorrow into making the world a better place, just like my mother had always tried to do. I’m not 15 anymore, but the youth I work with are. I don’t know if I will have the impact on any of them that Glenna had on me but I do know that everyone needs somebody, sometime. My thank-you to Glenna is to try to be the “somebody” she was for me for someone else. I strive to pass along the gift she gave me.

“WITH RECLAIMING FUTURES CAME ABBEY, A FAMILY ADVOCATE WHO SUPPORTED AND HELPED ME THROUGH THE PROCESS. AGAIN, I GOT LUCKY. **I KNEW AFTER OUR FIRST MEETING THAT SHE WAS IN MY LIFE FOR A REASON.**”

*photograph of tiffiney hendon and abbey o'connor
courtesy of the robert wood johnson foundation*



FROM **RECLAIMING MY FUTURE**, BY **TIFFINEY HENDON** ON PAGE 139

spiritual awakening

by Christine Campbell Brousseau

WHEN I WAS 15 MY FATHER WAS AT HIS WIT'S END WITH ME.

I was not a troubled teen per se, but I certainly was troubled with the whole concept/meaning of life and with general teenage angst. He decided to hook me up with one of his good friends and colleague, Linda Bliss.

Linda was also a yoga instructor and spiritual guru. Linda decided to enroll me in her hatha yoga class as a favor to my Dad. The resulting experiences I shared with Linda changed the course of my life.

Not only did she open my eyes to yoga and what it can do for me physically as well as mentally but she helped me find my sense of being. She gave me my first book that related to philosophy and spirituality and she taught me how to be open-minded and aware of the universe around me. Mostly she taught me to believe in myself and my individuality.

Now it is 15 years later and I am still a practicing yogi. I want to thank Linda for taking the time for me when I soooo needed it. She truly is a hero in my life and without my experiences with her I don't know if I would be where I am today. Thank you Linda!

unlocking inspiration

by Kathryn King

WHEN I WAS 15, I WAS NOT A BAD KID, BUT I WOULD SAY I WAS A lost kid. Attribute it to being one of those "latch-key kids" of the 1980's with parents who were not really around much. Both of my parents worked hard, but they were divorced and dealing with their own issues. So I became one of those kids that would say or do things to get attention. Being a bit of an "ugly duckling," some of the attention I attracted was the wrong kind back then, but for the most part, I stayed out of trouble, got good grades, and never drank or used drugs. My mom was a big believer in church, so from birth on my sister and I were taken to church. This was not very exciting for a teenager, until we changed churches. The new church we attended had a very active youth group.

Chuck Paulson was our youth leader, with his wife Jane. During a time when a lot of kids need guidance and stability, Chuck and Jane were there. We attended groups and fun activities several nights a week or on the weekend. Who could forget the campouts four times a year? Not me! I didn't realize back then what a big influence this had on me, but I think it was significant. It gave me social opportunities where I actually developed social skills. For me, it was a good emotional and spiritual support. I grew to love people outside of my immediate family, and started to develop self-confidence. But that confidence soon faded.

Years later I fell into a faster lifestyle; I can't quite remember how or why, but I did. By my senior year I was skipping class a lot and experimenting with drinking every now and then. I even smoked pot once or twice. Believe it or not I managed to graduate, but barely. My GPA didn't win me any awards!

With college nowhere in sight, I spent the next three years drinking and using heavily. After nearly daily use I eventually had to stop or, I should say, was somewhat forced to stop with police intervention and the grace of God. This revelation instantly took me back to when I was 15. Remembering my parents who had done their best and the youth groups with inspiring leaders like Chuck and Jane, I knew I had much greater potential than my years of drinking and drugging.

I found my way to drug and alcohol treatment and by age 21 I was a sober, successful "young person" in AA. That began the rebuilding of what is now a beautiful life. I went back to school, finished two bachelor degrees at Portland State University, and went on to become licensed in real estate.

Although I was conflicted about religion, I knew that I believed in God, and I have kept exploring an open belief system. Today, I have a strong spiritual and emotional life. I have come full circle, knowing that there is a greater power in the universe that guides us if we are willing to listen. Although I do not follow a specific religion, I think there is a path for each of us and I have found a very loving one that works.

I am now 13 years sober. I run a successful real estate firm, own several rental properties, and I've owned my home since I was 25. I have spent many days spreading the word of a better life simply

by sharing myself with friends and family around me. They get to experience the person I am today, after all of the simple days of putting one foot in front of the other. If given the opportunity to say something, I would say "thanks" to the people who were a positive influence in my life through all of the years. When I needed encouragement there were sages and guides all along the way who showed me love and compassion.

In the end, if you just pick your path and work your plan, keep it simple and never give up, day-by-day it can and does become a beautiful life.

who i am today

by Kym Carmichael

DURING MY SOPHOMORE YEAR, I WAS LIVING IN A SMALL TOWN south of Boston, Massachusetts. I had a good family, we were middle class and I had really just about everything I needed. I had no childhood traumas other than a short hospitalization for a kidney infection and the loss of pets over the years.

In many respects, I looked like a “good” kid. I didn’t get in trouble at school, I got pretty good grades, played on the tennis and field hockey teams, and had a job at a local donut store. In other respects, though, I wasn’t looking so good. I fought with my parents pretty much constantly. I was doing a lot of things I should not have been and doing a lot of dangerous things. I didn’t realize how prevalent drugs and alcohol were in my life until I went to college and heard about other people’s high school experiences. Sometimes I think back and think most of my town probably should have been in rehab or getting some sort of mental health counseling.

I made my way to Portland about eight years ago, after living in Arizona and Texas for about 10 years. I cherish my family, which includes my six-year-old son and my two-month-old daughter. I am currently employed as a family advocate. I have a master’s in social work and am trained as an art therapist. I have been working with

children and families for about 10 years. In all my experience working with our most vulnerable children, I wholeheartedly believe in the power that adults can have in positively influencing kids.

When I think of the adults who were in my life when I was 15, I think of names, get flashes of faces. Some were good folks and some got made fun of a lot, but none really left a lasting impression on me. Though it may sound rather cliché, my parents are really the reason I have become the person I am today. They weren’t perfect, but everything they did was out of complete dedication to me and my younger sister. They were, and continue to be, exemplary role models for my work ethic, helping others, the importance of family, dignity, and grace. While I did everything in my teenage years to be just the opposite of them, I would now hope I could say I’ve turned out like them. I consider myself very fortunate.

my momma

by Teddy Hall

WHEN I WAS 15, THINGS WERE A LOT BETTER THEN THAN THEY are now. I was in school and I was drug free. I'm drug free now, but when I was 15 I hadn't tried drugs or alcohol neither. My mom was a positive influence on me in many different ways. She worked, kept the house clean, and she kept food in the fridge and clothes on my back. She would make sure that my homework was finished before I left the house, watched TV or played any video games. She's also influenced me into getting a job and my first job was at the Oregon Zoo. She gave, taught and showed me good manners and respect and I thank her for that. My role model is my momma.

mister wesley

by Ken Boddie

THE RUNS AT THE CLINTON AVENUE RECREATION CENTER WERE always the best in town. If you lived in Rochester, New York, and you thought you had game, then Clinton Avenue was where you had to prove it. Playground legends were made there. Glenn Hagan with his 1001 moves. Larry Lane with that rainbow jumper that seemed to pour down from the heavens. Dan Panaggio running offense like the coach he later chose to become. I played with all of those guys, even though they were a lot better. Track and field was my thing, so basketball was my second sport. But my training as a long jumper gave me "mad hops," as they say, so I could block shots and get rebounds.

My dad Thurman helped run the place. A former football star at Cornell University, he made a career as a referee when he wasn't at Clinton Avenue. But the director, Mr. Wesley, was always there.

Alvin Wesley was born May 29th, 1919, in Texas. He was an educated man, with a master's degree from NYU. Mr. Wesley was passionate about working with young people, and the Center was the perfect way for him to satisfy himself, educate us, and make a real impact in our lives. Though he never fathered children of his own, he was a father to many.

Mr. Wesley moved to Rochester in 1967. So he had already been there for six or seven years by the time I turned 15. I was a real gym rat

when I wasn't out on the track, especially during the cold, often brutal, Rochester winters.

Mr. Wesley (we always called him that, never by his first name) taught me a lot about respect, and its rewards. We all respected him, despite his quiet, yet friendly demeanor. To have that happen was no small task.

Clinton Avenue wasn't in the best neighborhood. Street thugs sometimes hung around the place. Neighborhood rivalries simmered. It would have been easy for bad things to happen there. But, amazingly, nothing ever did. Mr. Wesley had a lot to do with that. He tried to connect with anyone who walked through the door. He genuinely cared, and helped young people solve problems, even if it was just getting you something to eat, talking to you, or giving you something to do to keep you off the street. We saw him get tough, too. He threw a few people out. But he was like the Godfather. He'd give the order, and the regulars who respected him would actually do the tossing. He didn't tolerate people messing up a good thing, and neither did we.

A lot of the Clinton Avenue regulars went on to bigger and better things. A few of them ended up dying young, or in prison. But while we were at the Center, nobody wanted to disappoint Mr. Wesley.

He passed away five years ago. But Mister Wesley proved that one person can make a big difference that lasts many lifetimes.

KEN BODDIE IS A REPORTER AND ANCHOR AT KOIN-TV IN PORTLAND. HE IS A GRADUATE OF CORNELL UNIVERSITY, TEACHES BROADCAST MEDIA, AND IS ACTIVE IN THE COMMUNITY.

turning point

by Shawn Biggers

MS. SHUMWAY, WHO WAS MY ENGLISH AND SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHER at Portsmouth Middle School, made a big difference for me.

I see eighth grade as a kind of turning point in my life, a time when I became more serious about school and my future. Ms. Shumway took a special interest in some of the kids, including me—we hung out with her in her classroom at lunchtime, that sort of thing.

She seemed to be able to sense how I was doing and could communicate her support and empathy, sometimes even nonverbally. She also gave me a lot of good advice. Things she talked to me about carried more authority than some of the stuff I heard from other adults. That's because she really took the time to know me, which made her ideas meaningful and relevant.

I'm now a college sophomore studying languages—Russian, Japanese and Spanish—and sociology. I'm also a co-chair for the Multnomah Youth Commission. I believe Ms. Shumway helped get me to where I am today.

alex

by M. Tizon

WHEN I WAS 15, I WAS RUNNING AWAY TO SEATTLE WITH THE HOPES that Winston, the man who raised me for the first three years of my life, the man who called himself my real dad, would take me in and raise me even though he hadn't seen me since I was three.

I was miserable at home with my mom for all kinds of reasons and that's when I got it stuck in my head that life would be so much better if I lived with Winston. So I stole money out of my mom's purse, snuck out in the middle of the night and bought a Greyhound ticket to Seattle. I didn't have a plan and I had no idea how he would react to me showing up on his doorstep.

The first thing he did was make me call my mom. The second thing he did was make me wash off all my makeup. Other than that, he had no idea what to do with me. The feeling was mutual.

I ended up spending the summer with him and his wife, who hated me, and their son Shawn, who really hated me. I spent most of my time waiting for Winston to get off work or sitting around during one of their many parties. But while I was waiting around to fit in with a family that really was not my own, I got to spend some time with my big brother Alex, who happened to also live in Seattle. Quiet afternoons at his place, eating good food, having great conversations about all kinds of important things like life and books and movies. He never had much to say about the fact that I'd stolen money and

run away. He just took me in the way that I was. He accepted me. That summer I spent in Seattle was an educational experience. I learned that where you come from is not necessarily where you belong and where you are right now is exactly where you should be for a reason.

Twenty years later, I live and raise my own family in the same house I couldn't wait to get out of. Ironic but true.

There are so many adults who had a part in raising me to be who I am today, but if I had to choose just one, I would pick my big brother Alex. So many people will tell you who to be, how to behave and what to do, especially when you are a kid, but Alex was not that kind of brother. Instead, he taught by example. Reflective and always true to himself, Alex taught me and still teaches me today, to question everything, to listen deeply to your own voice and to be courageous in what you do. He also has taught me not to be too quick to judge others or yourself and to accept people as they are. By following his own path and often going against the crowd, Alex has found success for himself in many ways, one of them as a writer. A husband, a father of two, an amazing big brother and a Pulitzer Prize winner, Alex is the picture of success and courage to me, and his simple yet powerful example of how to live life is a constant inspiration.

fifteen was a whistle stop

by Susan Troccoli

FIFTEEN WAS A WHISTLE STOP BETWEEN TWELVE AND 25—A STOP on the bullet train that depended on who talked to me and what they said. The best part of life then was Julius, my Great Dane, and the long hikes we took—just him and me—on Vasquez Rocks, where the guys from Hollywood made spaghetti westerns when they were saving money.

I went to William S. Hart High School. We could see some buffalo from our schoolyard because William S. Hart was a famous cowboy in the old days and he had a ranch there. That was very cool. Buffalo. Bet they are not there now.

Even more than Julius and those buffalo, I remember some teachers—the weirdest and the best I ever had, all in one place, all trying to grab their piece of my head as the train went by.

Mr. King Wisdom was my history teacher. Can you believe that? What mother would do that to a kid? Mr. Wisdom was kind of white and pasty with skin like a newt and when he was mad his veins stuck out purplish blue on his forehead. We made his veins stick out a lot. It was because he could never have any fun with himself or with history—ever—so I guess we had to do it for him. Mr. Wisdom thought questions were something to beat back with a big stick. My Mom said Mr. Wisdom had no sense of irony. I don't know about that but

I know Mr. King Wisdom had a big mission in life to make me care about history and it didn't work. When you are fifteen, it is hard to care about history at all, especially if somebody bulges up like a purple beet when you ask questions.

Mr. Alexander was way different. He taught English and poetry and lots of Shakespeare. He would get so excited about Shakespeare that it was kind of embarrassing, but all of us in Mr. Alexander's class knew how much he cared. He wanted us to ask a million questions. The hard part about Mr. Alexander was that he cared so much, it made him upset if someone was bored or disrespectful to Shakespeare.

Once he used a cussword on a girl in my class—a girl who thought she was something special—and she and her parents made a big deal of it and demanded Mr. Alexander be fired. The school board met to talk about it and everybody was talking about it around the school. I felt terrible. I felt as bad as when I heard President Kennedy was shot, because Mr. Alexander was a hero to me. On the day of the school board meeting I made a long sign with butcher paper and red marker that said "Who shall cast the first stone?" Then Walter Cieplik and I marched with the sign in front of the classroom where the meeting about Mr. Alexander was being held. I got suspended and my Mom had to come and meet with the principal

but I didn't get grounded or anything bad. My Mom told my Dad that night after I was in bed and I think they were laughing. Dad said, "What are we in for with this girl, Jean?"

The other teacher I remember was Bill Black from New York City. Mr. Black was a drama teacher and he always looked way better than anyone else at the school in the way he dressed that it wasn't even funny. He had these great ties and shoes with tassels. He was short but very handsome with black shiny hair and glasses that looked good on him. He was a comedian too. When he was directing a play and we goofed off or flubbed our lines, Mr. Black would purse his lips, raise his eyebrows, and toss his tie over his shoulder. A quick flick of tie and we knew we hadn't got it right yet.

Mr. Black picked different kinds of plays than we were used to and told us to "stretch and grow." Stretch and grow, stretch and grow, we heard it so many times it cracked us up. When we put on *Dracula*, Mr. Black cast Denny Hesalius as Count Dracula but he had to go get Denny out of detention to come to rehearsals because Denny was the biggest juvenile delinquent in the whole school. Nobody could believe how amazing Denny was as Dracula and how he stayed in drama class after the play and was always there on time.

Mr. Black gave me and Phil Lanier a Chekhov scene to do. I didn't know anything about Chekhov. Phil Lanier and I were supposed to have been in love once, but now we were married to other people. We were supposed to be walking on an icy cold street in winter—looking in windows at Christmastime I think—when we bump into each other. I had to say: "Oh, it's you!" to Phil Lanier, who always laughed out loud because he was a jerk. For some reason, Mr. Black was sure we could do this. He took me aside and talked a

lot about what a woman might feel running into an old lover on the street, many years after their affair. I didn't know what he was talking about, but I thought about it.

Then, one rehearsal—who knows why—Phil stupidhead Lanier was still fifteen, but I wasn't. I saw him on the street in the icy cold winter and I said: "Oh. It's you," and I pushed away one burning tear that sneaked down my face and smiled to show Phil Lanier I was really happy in my life. Mr. Black didn't toss his tie that day and Diane Raynor (the prettiest girl in school with long black hair and skinny in the right way) didn't laugh.

SUSAN TROCCOLO IS A WRITER AND GARDENER. SHE SERVES ON THE BOARD OF WRITE AROUND PORTLAND AND IS CURRENTLY FACILITATING A WRITING WORKSHOP AT THE DOUGY CENTER.

FROM **MASTER MENTORS MAKE MASTER DRUMMERS**,
BY **OBO ADDY** ON PAGE 21

"WHILE AFRICAN AMERICANS WERE BEING KEPT FROM
KNOWING ABOUT US, WE WERE ALSO BEING KEPT FROM
KNOWING THEM. JOE MADE SURE THOSE BARRIERS WERE
REMOVED. **'YOU CAN PLAY ANY MUSIC,'** HE WOULD SAY."



*photograph courtesy of
homowo african arts & cultures*

free

by Jersey

RIGHT NOW, AT THIS VERY MOMENT IN TIME, I AM SITTING IN MY classroom, which happens to be located in Unit A of the Donald E. Long Home, meditating upon the fact that I am turning into a full-blown, 18-year-old adult today and I'm doing it in f***ing Juvie.

I want to be in Big Sur, camping in the Redwoods, where the beauty of nature is so overwhelming that it's impossible to utter a word. Or maybe I want to be in L.A. or San Francisco, watching the mad people enjoy their madness and listening to them make too much sense for comfort. Maybe, though, I just want to be in Portland, because Portland is home, and every time I come home I fall in love with someone or something beautiful. Or maybe I just want to be anywhere but here. Freedom would be more than good enough.

Adults in general could maybe open up their beady little eyes and realize that because I reject the norm, because the American Dream nauseates me, I am a societal lost cause, but I'm not hurting anyone. So let me go. Let me be.

trouble

by Rebecca Shine

AT FIFTEEN I FANTASIZED ABOUT MY OWN DEATH AND THE outpouring of affection it would warrant. Later that year, when a motorcycle hit me and I wound up in the hospital with a broken pelvis, broken ribs, a ripped spleen and a chipped knee, I wondered if I had caused the accident.

It was better than a funeral actually. I saw the extraordinary support and affection, but I was alive to receive it. After a month in the hospital, I lost the use of my legs and worked diligently to walk again with physical therapy. I turned sixteen in the hospital.

Within a year, I would become pregnant the first time I had sex and arrange a subsequent abortion. I would drink and smoke marijuana on the weekends and use cocaine in between classes during the school week. My depression – which had likely existed for a number of years – would emerge in full force.

It's not that I didn't have significant adults in my life. In fact, I had two outside of my parents I credit with helping me make it through: my piano teacher, whom I saw weekly, and my best friend's mother – both of whom seemed to sincerely care about me and not so much about my actions or accomplishments.

But I never told those adults the truth about what my life looked like and felt like. You just didn't tell adults. They didn't understand. They freaked out. You'd get in trouble.

I try to be a different kind of mentor now to two fifteen-year old students at Roosevelt High School. They seem surprised every time I tell them true stories about being fifteen, and every time I listen to their stories with interest, but without shock or judgment. I believe I can only support them if I understand them.

I'm lucky not to be a parent or teacher or principal. I don't have to monitor them or discipline them or assign them responsibilities. My job is simply this: to learn how these remarkable young individuals see the world. What it looks like. How it feels. Why they make the decisions they do. What they dream about. What they are afraid of.

Their lives can be tumultuous, their suffering hard to witness. But as my colleague, Hanif, once said to me, "Out-love them, out-last them." So while their daily experiences make it hard for them to believe in trust, justice, safety and kindness, I strive to remain a stable source of support. My goal is to be steady and genuine.

The truth is, adults don't listen hardly at all to young people and when they do, they usually debate their point of view immediately. It's no wonder young people don't want to tell adults anything real and adults find youth mysterious. Mentor a teen. Learn to see the world from another pair of eyes.

REBECCA SHINE OWNS HER OWN BUSINESS. SHE AND HER PARTNER, ANNE GALISKY, FOUNDED GRAHAM STREET PRODUCTIONS TO PRODUCE DOCUMENTARY FILMS.

when i was 15

(written in my 44th year)

by Art Alexakis

WHEN I WAS 15, I WAS LIVING IN MY HOMETOWN OF SANTA MONICA, california in a one-bedroom apartment with my mother. i slept on a foldout couch and i hid my cigarettes and marijuana in the planter box outside my front door. three years earlier, we were living in a housing project five miles away in culver city where, inside of six months, my brother george died of a drug overdose at the age of 21, my 15-year-old girlfriend committed suicide (i was 12), my mother was diagnosed with cancer for the first time (she recently died of lung cancer) and i was arrested for burglary, vandalism, and being under the influence. i spent some time in a juvenile detention center, and was shipped off to roseburg, oregon. when i returned to california about the time of my 14th birthday, my mother decided it was in my best interest to move back to upscale santa monica, and i attended the same jr. high school that my brother and sisters had attended some years earlier. i was the youngest of five children, so as the baby of the family (and the only son left), i was told it was my job NOT to do drugs, NOT to get in trouble with the law, NOT to be sexually active, and by no means to turn out like my big brother, whom i of course idolized and wanted to be just like. so, instead of honoring my mother's wishes, i became REALLY good at lying to her, and i did exactly what i wanted to do.

by the time i was 15, i had this down to an art form. i would tell my mom that i was taking a city bus to go see a movie, then i would take the five dollars she gave me and i would buy alcohol and speed, get in my older friend's car and go to parties that i had no business being at ...

i would tell my mom i was doing odd jobs for the nice 25-year-old man who lived in the front apartment, when actually i was dealing pot and LSD for him in exchange for heroin and cocaine that i would shoot up in my mom's bedroom before she came home from work. my mom always wondered why i was so skinny but had no appetite for dinner ...

i would tell my very religious mother that i was going to a nearby church on sunday mornings, then i would take the money she gave me for the collection plate, go across the street to the liquor store, buy cigarettes and steal beer and alcohol, and then i would sneak back to the apartment building adjacent to ours, where i would party and have sex with the 19-year-old college student whose parents were also out at church. i loved sundays ... sundays meant getting high and having sex!

when i was 15, i was jumped and beat up on new year's day by a group of boys from a neighboring town, whose ringleader was a 17-year-old boy who had a problem with me sleeping with his girlfriend and taking his money and drugs from her ... so my friends and i stole a gun from my alcoholic stepfather and went looking for this kid. i fully intended to shoot him (only in the leg, of course) but the girl in question called the police. they caught and arrested me for the third time in three years, this time for possessing a stolen fire-arm. the detective told my mother that since i was a repeat offender i was going to be sent to juvenile detention for at least a year unless

i was sent out of state ... so i was shipped off to texas to live with my father (whom i had seen once in ten years), where i promptly gravitated to the same kind of friends, so this cycle of lying, drugs and self-destructive behavior continued ...

this cycle continued in one form or another (i kicked hard drugs in 1984, and i got sober in 1989) up until a couple years ago when my lying and my sexual addiction cost me my third wife and many of my friends.

when i was 15, i dreamed of being a rock star because i felt that if i was famous, i would be accepted and liked and popular for a change. i was a weird kid who had been abused and abandoned. i grew up in a family (and neighborhood) that was full of anger and resentment. i hated my reality, so i learned to create my own reality through lies and the escape of self-medicating with drugs, alcohol and sex.

when i finally achieved success in my 30's, i had been clean and sober for ten years, but i still hadn't learned how to like and love and accept myself, until i met an amazing man by the name of Dennis Maclure, a therapist who had dealt with many of the same issues in his own life that i was going through in mine. i had finally met someone i could allow to call me on my own crap ... while he didn't ever buy into my games and self delusions, he believed in me and what i could achieve and what i could become. and even though i'm in my 40's and dennis is in his 60's (sorry, dennis!), i feel like he has helped me become more of an adult through his patience and honesty, sense of humor, and plain old compassion.

i wish that when i was 15, i'd had a role model like dennis in my life, but all i can do now is try to be one for someone else, not just my

13-year-old daughter, but for anyone who comes into contact with me or my words, because like it or not, we are ALL role models ... and our actions and words can break someone down or help to make them whole.

ART ALEXAKIS IS LEAD SINGER FOR THE BAND EVERCLEAR.

after completing residential treatment

by Alexa Bukovskaya

LIFE IS FULL OF ENDINGS, BUT EVERY ENDING IS A NEW beginning. Back in October [2005] I finally got myself into treatment. I had been in outpatient, but that didn't really cut it for me because I was much too deep in my addiction to even think about quitting. I was dependent on dope like a fish is on water. I didn't know what life was without it. All I knew was the whole idea of sobriety, I knew the talk of it... but truth be told, I had no idea how to actually do it. I have finally come to the end of that chapter in my life and I am here before you now to give you a sneak peek into my new beginning.

Today I stand before you 47 pounds heavier, a real smile on my face and a new chance at a good life. When I first got to De Paul Treatment Centers, I was a vicious, malicious, frail tweaker with a BADD DDDDD attitude. I had so many problems that I didn't want to admit to, see, or—least of all—talk about. With time I began to understand how to recognize and accept my past and present in a healthy, safe manner. I know that being able to talk about my past and see how it connects to my life now is one of the most important tools I have gained while here at De Paul. Although I still have a hard time radically accepting some things, I always do—so acceptance is another important tool I have mastered. The third most important tool that I have acquired here at De Paul is honesty. In my

addiction, I would constantly lie just to lie. I did it because I knew I would get away with it and no one would question me, even if they didn't believe me.

Being the dope man—well, dope woman—meant I had a grip on people's need for drugs, so I thought I had some power that could control people. And I used my drugs to do just that. Thinking back to all that now, I feel so much remorse for all the addicts that I used for my own evil ends. I know that I did many wrongs in my addiction, so nowadays, when I become part of the community in a helpful way, it makes me feel really good.

Every Tuesday I am secretary to the Narcotics Anonymous (NA) meeting called "the nooner." I have my own keys to the church and I have many responsibilities in NA now. I am also a mentor at James John Elementary to a fourth-grade girl. I see her every Wednesday. I am also helping small non-profit organizations like Friendly House coordinate all their volunteers and to co-host large annual events like this year's auction.

I plan on going to aftercare here at De Paul. I plan on attending meetings at the "the nooner," Blackbelt, Volunteers of America, and New Attitudes. I have been to all of these meetings consistently and I plan to continue to go. My sponsor, Charlesetta, has been really helpful in getting me to my meetings. I connect really well with her and I'm happy she's my sponsor.

I will be going to Portland Community College for school for at least six months before I start thinking about doing the foreign exchange program in Russia. I would be attending the University of Moscow.

I hope you see how much I have grown in the past four months ... it's been a long, hard road, but I can't wait to keep on going down it. I want to thank everyone who helped get me here. I have a really special place in my heart for you.

ALEXA BUKOVSKAYA IS 18 YEARS OLD AND ATTENDS PORTLAND
COMMUNITY COLLEGE.

sink or swim

by Patty Farrell

WHEN I WAS 15, I WANTED A BOYFRIEND. SINCE I WENT TO AN all-girls Catholic high school, to get one was no easy feat. But I was convinced that other girls had hordes of boys calling, their only problem being the choice of whom to date on Saturday night.

I had three best friends. We called ourselves the Mafia. We hung together on the edges of the gym at the school dances, where girls outnumbered boys 4 to 1, and wondered why we rarely got asked onto the floor. Surely it was because the other girls were skinnier, had straighter hair, better teeth, cooler clothes.

The Mafia kept me sane at a school where a straight-A student could get a “C” in religion if she questioned the teachings of the church. I had to escape. My parents said yes—as long as I went to another Catholic, all-girls school run by nuns. Back then, Portland had several to choose from. So I switched schools and suddenly, the nuns didn’t seem so bad. But I was 16 by then, and nothing seemed as dark as it had at 15. And I had a boyfriend.

Throughout my teens, I swam for the NE YMCA in Hollywood. Our coach, Dick Slawson, pushed us hard. Gasping-at-the-edge-of-the-pool hard. He also taught us about commitment, values, and the importance of teamwork. He didn’t care what we looked like, what we

wore or how popular we were. He cared if we showed up at practice and gave him our best. Today, Dick remains one of my role models as a world-class master’s swimmer and tennis player in his 70s.

Some of us on the team were straight-A students; others spent more time in the principal’s office. But we all knew we were part of a community. We worked hard to keep the faith and trust of the adults who cared about us. Every summer, the team went to a meet in LaGrande, where we camped and cooked out. My parents couldn’t make the trip because I had five siblings at home, so I would tag along with one family or the other. Everybody welcomed me at their campfire.

Today, I hear people say that parents need to step up, take more responsibility. As a parent of two teenagers, I do believe it takes a village. I would not be who I am today had it not been for the adults who helped me along the way—my parents, my coach, other swim team parents and yes, even the nuns.

finding the lighter side

by Jack Ohman

WHEN I WAS 15, I WAS LIVING IN ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA AND following the 1976 presidential election carefully. I decided that I would volunteer for the local campaign of a state representative. The candidate was 25, barely older than I was, and he was the incumbent. I spent months walking from house to house, from apartment to apartment, handing out campaign brochures and listening to the stories of all the constituents.

I learned how many different varieties of angry, vicious dogs there were, how many people would answer their doors semi-clothed or naked, and how many people were completely turned off by the political process. I also discovered how many people were lonely, without resources, and struggling to make ends meet. I met idealists and snobs, the politically aware and the politically illiterate. Consequently, I developed a sense of humor about how the political process works in this country, and discovered that I would eventually either want to work in politics or commenting on it. Later, I worked in a congressional campaign and decided at that time to follow my artistic and writing impulses and applied for a job as political cartoonist at *The Minnesota Daily*. This later led to my syndication at age 19, and a job at *The Oregonian* at the age of 23.

While there were many aspects of being 15 that I would never relive again (dating, acne, the proper disco clothing selection, and suffering through the Saturday Night Fever Era), I recall feeling like the world had possibilities as well as pain (my grandfather died when I was 15, and I will never forget seeing my mother in tears in the living room, and I thought my own dad had died). For fun, I fished constantly, hung out with friends of various levels of repute, read, played tennis, and avoided all substance abuse.

Now I have a 15-year-old daughter of my own, as well as two sons older and younger, and I think that having been 15 is excellent training for raising a 15-year-old. I tell her the face will clear up, that boys are complicated, that we all try to do the best we can, and that it usually works out—something most 15-year-olds forget.

JACK OHMAN IS A NATIONALLY SYNDICATED POLITICAL CARTOONIST
AT *THE OREGONIAN*.

FROM **WHY I DIDN'T DISAPPEAR**, BY **SAM ADAMS** ON PAGE 18

**“IF IT HADN’T BEEN
FOR SUE AND BYRON,**

I WOULD HAVE DISAPPEARED.”

photograph by julie keefe



leaving home

by Vicki Phillips

I GREW UP ON A SMALL TOBACCO FARM IN FALLS OF ROUGH, Kentucky, a poor community about 90 miles southwest of Louisville. My mother and stepfather bought the farm when I was seven years old; they got it for the back taxes owed. The land was overgrown with brush and weeds. The house had four rooms, with no flooring and broken-out windows. It had no running water—our bathroom was an outhouse. After a while we got flooring and a hand pump for water, but I never had an indoor bathroom while I was growing up.

We raised or grew everything we ate. We went to the grocery store about once a month for staples.

In all my years growing up, I never went to Louisville, even though it was an hour-and-a-half away. Our radius was a couple of small towns near the farm. I had no frame of reference for the rest of the world—except through books.

I read every book I could get my hands on. Anytime I wasn't doing chores on the farm, I had a book in my hand. That was how I learned about places beyond Falls of Rough. Reading made me curious about the rest of the world.

Our neighbor, Gerry, lived on the next farm. She would invite me to her home and tell me stories about her life as a young woman—how she grew up in my town, graduated from high school and moved to

Louisville. She told me what Louisville was like, what it was like to live with roommates, get a job—all these incredible experiences. She met her husband in Louisville and moved back to our town to raise her kids. Gerry never told me to escape. But she helped me see that I could do something different without betraying my heritage. I could leave the only community I knew, and still come back.

The high school was 35 miles away. I rode the bus an hour-and-a-half each way. I never got to participate in sports or other extra-curricular activities; by the time I got home at 5 pm, it was time to do the farm chores.

Two grade schools fed into the high school—one rich, one poor. When teachers found out I went to McQuady, they knew I came from poverty. In my entire high school career, not one adult talked to me about going to college—no teacher, no counselor, not the principal. I had straight A's, and I graduated in the top 10 percent of my class, but they thought that because I was from Falls of Rough, I would never go to college.

My friend Cindi thought otherwise. Cindi came from the rich school, and we mostly didn't mix with those kids. But she and I ended up in the same business class and became great friends. Cindi wanted to come to my house and meet my family. I said no, I was too

embarrassed. But Cindi wouldn't let me get by with that. She said, "I'm coming." And she had a great time with my family. Nothing bothered her. She took me to her home where I first saw how the other half lived. We often talked about the injustice of it all.

It was Cindi who took me to get my driver's license in her car. It was Cindi who convinced me to take the college entrance exams. My parents didn't know I went to take them, or even what they were. I got accepted at Western Kentucky University with a scholarship and a work-study job, and that's when I first told my parents I was going to college.

My stepfather was dead-set against it. He said if I left, I should never darken their door again. I left for college with my stepfather not speaking to me and my mother in tears. I think in her heart, my mother always wanted me to go, but she just couldn't stand up to him.

Don't misunderstand—my stepfather was an incredibly generous man. He would give you the shirt off his back. He just didn't want me to leave. In our town, everyone gathered on weekends, brought a musical instrument and played and danced and ate homemade ice cream. Those were his values. He had heard about college life and was afraid it would change me for the worse. He had no frame of reference for college—he never knew anyone who had gone. I was the first in my family to even think of going to college.

To his credit, he reached out to me later. He admitted that college didn't change my values after all. And when my little sister was old enough, he encouraged her to go.

VICKI PHILLIPS IS SUPERINTENDENT OF PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS BUT STILL RETURNS TO KENTUCKY TO VISIT HER MOTHER AND REMAINS IN TOUCH WITH GERRY AND CINDI.

reclaiming my future

by Tiffiney Hendon

WHEN I WAS 15, I STARTED DOING METH. BY THE TIME I WAS 16, I was using meth every day. It was practically a way of life. I had dropped out of school and was living from one awful place to the next. I would just up and leave without telling anyone where I was going. Disappearing was normal for me. There were times when I would be sitting and thinking that I could seriously be hurt or killed and no one would even notice. It was normal for me to disappear for long periods of time. This really scared me. I was going to some extremes I always said I wouldn't go to. So I opened my eyes and looked at the people around me. They were fully grown and had been doing drugs for years. I didn't want to end up like them with no place to live, no food to eat, and destined to be nothing in life. Then my eyes "closed" again and I just kept doing what I was doing until the day the cops picked me up. They took me to a place called New Avenues for Youth and called my DHS (Department of Human Services) worker. By the time she got there, I was a total mess. I knew I needed help. She probably would have just put me in a foster home, but I told her I needed inpatient treatment. So I went to a temporary foster home until a bed opened at the treatment center.

Once in treatment, it only took two weeks for me to become bored. So I hooked up with a girl who was planning to run for it. I decided to go with her. I assured myself that I would come back that night,

within our grace period. That never happened. I ended up drinking and the next thing I knew, I was getting high again. I kept telling myself the entire time I was out there, "I'll go back to treatment tomorrow."

Almost a month later, "tomorrow" actually came. Unfortunately it was a long month. My use got heavier than before. I saw things I had never seen before. I was becoming a zombie. This time I could no longer close my eyes to what was going on around me. I called my caseworker and told her I was ready. I had surrendered the control that I really didn't have to begin with; I was completely out of control. She picked me up and I went to treatment. With only the clothes on my back I was now serious and certain about how I was feeling and what I needed to do.

Getting clean and going through treatment was not like going to Disneyland. It was hard. I had to change my whole life and deal with very hard personal issues every day. Who helps you through that? It surely wasn't the friends I'd used with. It was caring adults. For those who are lucky enough, it's family. Not for me. My parents used drugs too.

But this time in treatment, I got lucky. I got a great counselor, Linda. She was amazing. She knew I didn't have family members who could do things with me. She even came in on her day off and took me to a softball game. That's what mattered to me. She was straightforward but nurturing. We got to a place where she could tell me things I didn't want to hear, but needed to hear, and I would listen. I know now that this is what adults do when they care.

While in treatment, I was informed that I had a pending charge. "I forgot all about that," I told myself. I figured this was only a test of

my commitment to my journey. The day came for me to meet with a juvenile court counselor. With a felony charge over my head, I didn't know what to expect. When she came to meet with me, to my surprise, I was offered a diversion program through a program called Reclaiming Futures. I hadn't been convicted yet, but I figured if I didn't take this offer I probably would be.

With Reclaiming Futures came Abbey, a family advocate who supported and helped me through the process. Again, I got lucky. I knew after our first meeting that she was in my life for a reason. She taught me how to properly interact with others. In the world I came from, we interacted by yelling and screaming. She taught me how to process, vent, and still be able to laugh about it. We shopped together and had coffee. Abbey helped me research different churches because I wanted to go to church. It was also Abbey who led me to the program at the community college where I not only have the opportunity to earn my high school diploma, but earn college credit as well. Since attending college, I have learned that I am really good at and enjoy math. I looked into different majors where I could use this gift and have decided to become an engineer. Abbey is very proud of me. I could not have made it without her.

It has taken a long time for me to get over some of the things that have happened to me. Nearly a year ago I started talking to my mother again, after almost three years. She has been clean for 18 months and is in clean and sober housing. We have a better relationship now than we did throughout my whole childhood. She has learned not only to be my mom but also my friend. Instead of feeling lucky, I feel blessed.

As I look back over my journey, which is not over, I think about all the youth in treatment who aren't as lucky. They come in alone and

leave alone, many of them without completing treatment. They don't have the same safety net of trusted adults. A girl I was in treatment with did not want to talk to me because she was ashamed of using again. Little did she know, this was not my first attempt at treatment either. If she could have had an Abbey or Linda, she too could have achieved success. This makes me sad. At the same time, it makes me want to be a voice for other youth like myself.

I'm currently working in a pediatric clinic and volunteering with Reclaiming Futures, the same program that helped me and other youth in the Multnomah County justice system overcome drugs, alcohol and crime. We are working hard to get youth the treatment they need and get hooked up with mentors to help pull them through. My goal is to let adults in my community know what we "really" need to make it: adults involved in our lives no matter if we have functional parents or not. We deserve to start over. We deserve to have our futures reclaimed.

TIFFINEY HENDON IS A 19-YEAR-OLD STUDENT AND RECLAIMING
FUTURES SPOKESPERSON.

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