

JOURNALISM PORTFOLIO

Alyson Halpert

**Pieces that appeared in The Communicator
2006-2008**

Dying

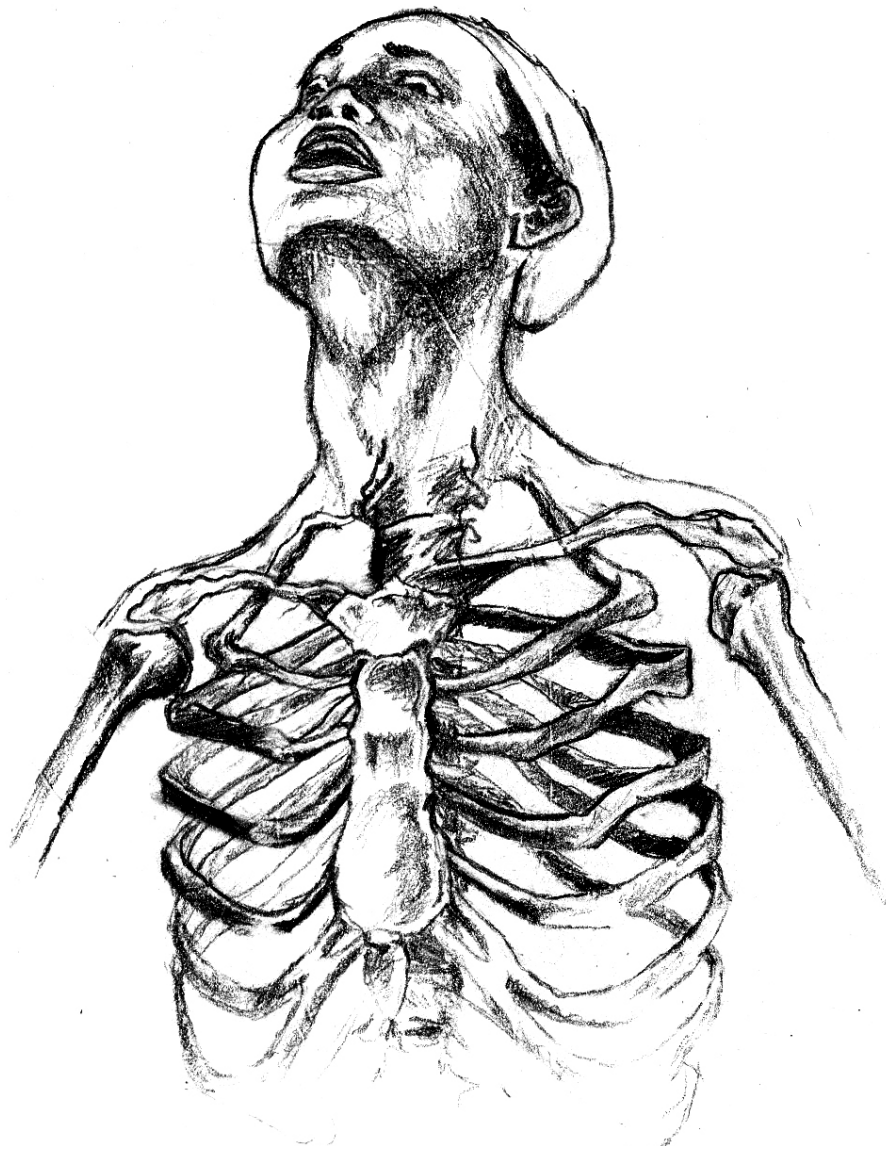
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Young girls all over America have been told
for too long they must follow an anorexic
standard of beauty.
This must change.

The day after Christmas her freshman year, Jane (whose name has been changed) looked at herself in the mirror and vomited into the toilet.

"I was kind of chubby and, you know, [at] Christmas you eat a lot. The day after I was like, man, I totally hate myself right now. So I just started to throw up what I was eating," she said.

After that one day, Jane purged again, and again after every meal. The first week, she got scars on her hands from the acid in her stomach, and had to wear gloves so none of her friends or family would suspect she had a problem.

For 16-year-old Jane, it was the beginning of an endless struggle with the eating disorder bulimia, a condition where the victim feels they are too fat, and binges (eats) and purges (vomits) in a cycle to lose or maintain weight.

Bulimia and anorexia, the two major eating disorders affecting teens today, are more prevalent than some might think. In fact, 5% of all teenagers have some kind of eating disorder. That means that one out of twenty high school students struggles at some time during their adolescence with how much to eat or throw up.

Rachel Seel, who has a Ph.D in psychology and specializes in eating disorders said that many things can bring about an eating disorder. There's never just one factor: cultural factors involving the media and pressures that we have in our society such as the media communicate that we should look a certain way. Family can be a factor if teens get negative comments about their bodies from their parents, or are encouraged to go on diets. Sometimes teens who are involved with sports or activities that demand thinness, such as ballet or gymnastics, can be at risk. There's also the impact of their own personality- are they obsessive compulsive?

"It also can be partly genetic, but nobody understands what the cause is," Seel said.

Lida Athearn was fifteen when she started her risky eating habits. She was under stress at school; she liked a boy who told her she had a big butt; "it was always something."

"Some people overeat. I didn't, when I was stressed. One day at school when I was about sixteen, one of our secretaries at the school said, 'Oh, Lida, you look really good, you look like you've lost weight.' And that for me was when [the anorexia] triggered," she explained.

One major problem with the nature of eating disorders is that unlike cancer, or diseases that are more out of control, the victims of eating disorders see the problem but often times don't want to fix it.

"I realized what was going on," Lida said, "I kind of recognized what was happening, and that day I decided if I look good losing a little weight I'm going to look even better if I lose more."

However, just like diseases such as cancer, the longer an eating disorder goes untreated the deadlier it becomes. If untreated, 20% of teens with major eating disorders die. With treatment, the number is much lower, at 2-3%.

"The illness just gets so much more entrenched into... how they see themselves and who they are. If you catch it early, it's much easier to change," Seel said.

Even the possibility of death doesn't usually deter victims in the early stages of an eating disorder. Jane, who had learned about eating disorders in health class, still decided to continue purging.

"Right from the start I knew it was going to be a problem. But I thought that the weight loss would kind of balance the [negative] health side affects," she said.

Lose weight she did; within the first month of starting to purge, Jane lost 40 pounds. She thought it was "awesome," and kept throwing up with more and more frequency.

Eating disorders often continue for many months, even years, without being noticed and treated. Unless the weight loss is drastic, victims can stay under the radar for as long as they want. With Jane, a few of her friends commented on her weight loss, but none of them ever guessed that she had been throwing up to lose her weight - and her parents contributed to the problem.

"They would say, 'Lose more weight. You look good now, don't get fat again, and lose more weight,'" Jane said.

They also told her not to purge, which confused Jane more. She made more of an effort to hide it from them- with a mild Obsessive Compulsive Disorder as an excuse; she'd take showers after dinner and throw up while the water was running.

Jane's story is another example of a situation in which an eating disorder can, and did, develop. Rachel Seel says she sees unhealthy environments like that all of the time.

"Sometimes when I really feel strongly that they're not being treated well at home, and they're having a really hard time, sometimes I just want to take them

I would like to stop because it's unhealthy, and I'm kind of forcing myself to stop. But I also don't want to get fat.

home and take care of them, but I can't do that," she said.

Victims can also take a strange pride in having their eating disorder. When Lida was 16, she made a pact with her friend to skip breakfast and lunch, and eat small dinners with their families, "so they would see we were eating." And then they would see who lost the most weight.

"She gave up on that agreement, she couldn't really do that, and I could, and I felt like, wow, I'm really special because I can do this and she couldn't," Lida said.

Because of this pride, even teenagers whose eating disorders are found out don't necessarily want to get rid of their disorder- even though they know it hurts them.

Jane told one of her friends, and soon her problem was out.

"People [who] know ask me, why do you do this, don't you know it's bad? Well, of course I know it's bad. I can't make them understand that it's really a choice; it's not like a disease. I don't view it as a disease," she said.

Essentially, victims of eating disorders do not see themselves as victims. So when friends try to help, it can have a negative affect. And as they become more and more isolated, they dive deeper into unhealthy habits.

"It becomes their identity. It feels really scary [to give it up] because that's the thing that they think they're really good at," says Seel.

Jane's friends tried to get her to stop her eating habits- to no avail.

"I told them I couldn't [stop.] Which is partially true, and I told them I didn't want to, and that they were just making me unhappy. And eventually they would give up." Jane said.

The obsession leads victims to do things they wouldn't do normally. Jane decided that she wanted to start school as thin as possible. So the day before school started, she walked downtown and purchased a box of laxatives, and took one more than the recommended dosage, in what she calls one of her more "stupid-ass" decisions.

"It was the most painful experience ever," she said of her first time taking laxatives. But she "was skinny the next day," and a month later she tried it again, slowly becoming addicted to another dangerous behavior. "I got a little hooked on them. Right before a big occasion when I had to wear something tight or if felt fat one day, I would just pop a few, and it worked."

Billie Ochberg, who worked at an inpatient adolescent psychology unit in Cleveland, has seen weirder behaviors. The setting where she worked was very much like a dormitory, and the girls would all do their laundry. One girl, named Lucy* believed that if she did her laundry after someone who wasn't thin, she would have extreme anxieties that her laundry was "contaminated."

In the end, she had to have surgery and a feeding tube inserted into her stomach. And, "Her parents had to force her into having that surgery," Ochberg said.

When Seel sees patients, she asks them what percentage of their day they spend thinking about anything having to do with weight, shape, size, food, or anything related during their waking hours.

"Most of them will say all the time, or 80% and then they're sort of sort of surprised themselves, realizing that it's taken over their whole lives," she said.

That's why it amazes her when victims are able to keep up straight A's. Many can't.

During the course of her anorexia, Lida switched schools four times. She explained that the discontent at her schools was a result of her disease. While her eating was within her control, her life was not. She barely graduated on time.

It's not just the mind-consuming thoughts of food that weaken victims of eating disorders. There are physical affects as well -to start with, the sickening feeling of hunger that Lida experienced daily.

"That hunger feeling, that feeling like you're going to throw up- that, a lot. Just, so hungry I was trying to swallow my spit to fill up my stomach," she explained.

Jane also felt the effects of her bulimia. As she threw up after every meal, she dealt with more and more problems, such as having weeks where she would pass out frequently.

"I get cold really easily. Especially right after throwing up if I stand up too quickly I get really dizzy," she said.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20

DYING TO BE THIN: CONTINUED

Sometimes victims of eating disorders will seek help on their own, but Seel said most times that's not the case-when they first come in, they're adamant that they're fine, that their parents are making them come, that they don't see anything wrong and that they like the way they look - or want to lose even more weight. "But underneath that the reality is that they're just very afraid," she said.

Nobody told Lida to go get help - she did on her own, after a dangerous wake-up call. After high school, Lida went to EMU, and started drinking her sophomore year. This is actually quite common - according to Lida, 35% of female alcoholics have an eating disorder. Finally, one night she cheated on her boyfriend and realized her eating and drinking were out of control.

"When I did that, when I realized that I could hurt him like that, I knew that I needed to get help. And that was when I hit rock bottom," she said, "I realized at that time that it wasn't me. I had morals, and I was raised in a Christian home, and I was doing all these things that I never agreed with, but it wasn't me. I was sick, I needed to get help."

There are many options for help available to eating disorder victims; Lida went to EDEN, an acronym for Eating Disorders Education Network, and they sent her to a physician named Dr. Rosen, an MD.

He told her that she had an irregularity in her heartbeat - but that he was certain with proper nutrition it would be fine.

Lida was lucky. Severe cases of anorexia can result in hair loss, a damaged immune system, dehydration that leads to kidney failure- and in terrible situations, heart problems, low blood pressure, heart rate and body temperature, bad circulation, anemia, stunted growth- and even death, according to helpguide.org, a website that specializes on mental health issues.

Where Lida got help, Jane still disagrees that she even has an illness- she admits that a skinny person who looks in the mirror and sees a fat person might have a disease. But she claims that the actual actions surround-

ing the disease are always up to the victim.

The choice, for Jane, was to continue purging despite her worried friends' wishes.

"In every fat girl's head, there's always that thing where you want to get thin. That's my goal," she said.

Seel said that's the harsh inner dialogue that's coming through.

"They're always saying, you're fat, you're ugly, you're this, you're that, and you don't deserve to eat, and it's so frequent with them and so constant that they don't even notice that it's going on. It's not really them, it's the illness."

When victims of eating disorders do decide to get better, one of the more surprising things for them is how much they've been missing. As Lida continued to go to meetings at EDEN, and met twice a week with Dr. Rosen, she found that she had other interests than her disease- she liked swimming, and scrap booking, and fundraising to help other girls like her.

"It was surprising how quickly I was able to focus on things that interested me other than what I wasn't eating," she said.

And luckily enough for Lida, she was able to repair her broken relationship with her boyfriend. Now, they're married and have children.

Seel says the rediscovery of activities is common in recovering from eating disorders. She says that sometimes victims lose interest in spending time with their friends or family, and they won't come down to dinner. They'll stay in their rooms, refuse to eat, and avoid social activities with food. It's only natural that when victims recover, they realize that there's so much more than food.

Unfortunately, some people never recover from eating disorders. At some level, Jane knows that while her purging helped her lose and maintain a low weight, it still isn't a good thing to continue.

"I would like to stop because it's not healthy, and I'm kind of forcing myself to stop. But I also don't want to get fat," she said.

It is not as easy as wanting to stop without help.

"It's a hard habit to break. I'll try to break it sometimes and I'll go months without doing it, and then one

day I'll look at myself and just [think,] I'm really unhappy with who I am right now, so I go back to it," Jane explained.

Seel said that is the difference between really being recovered, and that the real goal is for the victim to have a shift in the way they see and think about themselves so that they don't face low self-esteem issues on their weight, shape and size. "Once they make that shift, that's when they're really better."

Like many victims of eating disorders, Jane isn't worried about the immediacy of her problem. "I'm going to be unhealthy for the rest of my life, probably. But I don't think it will result in death," she said.

Lida, who has now been a facilitator at EDEN for four and a half years, said that's the opposite message of she wants to get out.

"The worst thing that we want to portray at EDEN is that you can go through an eating disorder and end up perfect. A lot of times that's not the case," she said.

In the meantime, Jane still will not seek help from a therapist or school counselor. "I want to stop for myself, and I don't want to stop with their methods. And I don't want their supervision," she said.

Unfortunately, that's typical for eating disorder victims- they want control, and their eating is the only way they can obtain that. Seel acknowledges that recovery is hard, even for those who really want it. "The illness becomes a way for them to cope with things. It's just very hard for them to give it up because they feel like they wouldn't know what to do without it."

But she says that she has a piece of advice for someone worried about getting an eating disorder: Never start diets. Changing the way you eat and having a healthier lifestyle is fine, but a restrictive diet is never productive.

"It doesn't always cause anorexia, but anorexia always starts with that."

Meanwhile, Lida is continuing her work at EDEN to help people who do make that mistake - women like her who've dealt with eating disorders.

"I feel like there was a purpose to what I went through because of what I'm doing today. I think it's a part of who I am," she said.

Closer to home

Anorexia is a killer. We see disturbing images in health class, cringe every so often when we see a model as deathly thin as a starving child in Africa, and shake our heads when we read articles that show victims growing younger and younger. But for me, anorexia hits a little closer to home.

My mother, Julie Halpert, is an environmental journalist, a mother of three, a wife and a freelancer for several really important magazines. What I didn't know about her was that when she was my age, she suffered from anorexia.

As a teenager, Julie Edelson (her maiden name) was everything a parent could wish for - Miss Junior Huntington Woods, a straight-A student, a dancer.

"When I was dancing," she said, "I became someone else, got lost in the music."

Dancing wasn't all positive for her, however. Having to wear close fitting leotards and outfits combined with her own mother's struggle with obesity caught up with her. "I wanted to be in control," she said, and began eating less and less.

Though she didn't realize there was a problem, she was "dancing a lot, burning calories and not eating as much as I should have.

Living in a house where her mother would go on yo-yo diets wasn't a great effect on her, either.

"I would see my mother struggling and I would vow not to be like her. I would see her criticize my sister, and watch her, and want that attention," she said.

Slowly, the problem became more than nervous eating habits. My mom stopped menstruating for a year and a half, and went to the doctor. "He didn't know much at the time, nobody did, but he mentioned that my eating might have been the problem.

At the time, her weight was down to 85 pounds on her 5'1" frame.

"I was never scared," she said, "and I started to eat more." But the struggle continued for a few months, and didn't stop being a threat until college.

"I was away from that original environment," she said, and almost immediately put on ten pounds. "I understood how serious the situation was, so I tried my best

[to gain weight,]" she said.

It seemed she had put the issue behind her, but to this day, she said, "I do have an obsession with my weight," she said. It is something she accepts as something she can't change, monitoring her food and watching the calories. "I do try to eat healthy and exercise regularly." Now, she weighs in at a sufficient 105 pounds.

She does worry that her problem as a teenager might affect her children, and should. Anorexia is proven to be genetic; a daughter whose mother was anorexic has about a 10% of getting the disease themselves.

"I never talk about my weight in front of my kids," she said. "I do emphasize that they eat healthy and stay active."

She's thankful that today there is more knowledge about anorexia than when she was diagnosed. "The beauty of it is that there is so much awareness," she said. "I had a doctor who never knew what it was, or how to treat it, and today it's much better."

As she put it, "Times have changed," and for the most part, so has she.

Need help? Get help.

If you're struggling with an eating disorder, here are some places you can go to get help:
• **The Ann Arbor Center for Eating Disorders is reachable at (734) 668-8585. They offer meetings and support.**

• **EDEN is available at (517) 404 6029. They also offer support groups.**
• **Your school counselor is also a good person to talk to for help and support.**

If you have a friend who is suffering, make sure to tell their parents!



photos by: cassiestanzler



Welcome to tally hall

Local band tears it up at the Blind Pig

alysonhalpert



Each member of the band has a different colored tie – Rob Cantor is yellow, Joe Hawley is red. Zubin Sedghi sports blue, and Andrew Horowitz wears green. Ross Federman adds a “metallic, edgier” feel with silver.

Together, they are Tally Hall, an Ann Arbor based-band that is on the cusp of fame. They have appeared on MTV and The Late Night with Conan O’Brien. Just how famous they are is debatable, however - the band was quick to downplay their status.

“On a scale of us to Madonna, we’re at us right now,” Cantor explained.

They’ve still come a long way.

Tally Hall’s history can be traced back to when Cantor and Sedghi went to high school together. After graduating, they both attended the University of Michigan, where Cantor roomed with Horowitz. Cantor was asked to perform at a show in the Frieze Building. The three of them played some covers and some original music, and an acoustic trio was born.

“It was a good time, and we had fun. We ended up continuing to work on our show,” Cantor said, and added that they decided to introduce a drummer into the group.

The percussionist of choice was Steve Gallagher, who was replaced by Federman when Gallagher de-

cided to focus on academics instead of music. Hawley joined soon thereafter; he knew Cantor from a musicology class.

The band was a side project and hobby for the members throughout college, and when Hawley, Cantor and Horowitz graduated they decided to take the band more seriously. Sedghi, a junior, and Federman, a sophomore, were pre-med but made the choice to postpone their education to take on Tally Hall full-time.

They looked at the situation they were in, and asked themselves if they were enjoying Tally Hall. They decided they were.

Many little things led up to the decision, but Federman’s cookie-baking definitely helped.

“They were good cookies, and I couldn’t be without them,” Cantor joked.

“Every now and then something happens that kind of makes it a little clearer that it’s something worth pursuing more professionally,” added Federman. “For me personally, the first time we sold out [at the Blind Pig] was kind of a big benchmark.”

The band saw that they had a solid fan base, and thought they could succeed outside of the city.

“What we did in Ann Arbor we wanted to do for the whole country,” Cantor said.

Sedghi joked that if it was not for Tally Hall, he would have ended up as a dump truck driver. “Being in a band felt like a little bit cleaner. Not a lot cleaner, you know you’re in smoky bars a lot, but better than driving a dump truck.”

Their dry sense of self-deprecating humor is a key attribute to their success as a band, as well as music that experiments with many genres in just one song. In the gentle, country-style tune “Be Born,” Tally Hall sings soft melodies, and in the next song they rap, “Welcome to Tally Hall.” The music is composed by Hawley, Horowitz and Cantor, and they each have methods of writing.

“Joe usually gets an idea in his head and he works it out really thoroughly. He paints a picture in his head and tries to reproduce that picture sonically,” explained Sedghi.

Horowitz and Cantor are more “rough-sketch writers.” They bring the band something that isn’t as arranged as Hawley’s, and then let the other members complete it together.

They do not know which of their songs are the best anymore. Sedghi explained that they had favorites during the recording, but that they are incapable of an unbiased opinion now.

“It’s really difficult to separate yourself from them and... judge them with your musical taste.”

“I’m sort of immune to the songs,” Cantor said, “I can’t really hear them anymore.”

However, not all things are stale for Tally Hall. They have been touring the United States and Japan, and keep things fresh during performance.

“We don’t take the show too seriously in that we just kind of roll with the punches,” Cantor said.

They try not to do the same show twice, and they speak their minds on stage.

Tally Hall played a concert in Chicago recently and Cantor messed up the lyrics to Biz Markeie’s “Just a Friend,” a cover with which they have traditionally closed the show with for several years. Sedghi called him out on it, and after a stand-off on stage Cantor challenged Sedghi to sing it instead. Cantor played his bass.

“You messed up a bit, but I helped you out,” Cantor teased Sedghi.

“The train didn’t derail,” Sedghi laughed.

Tally Hall plans to keep enjoying their music and themselves. They are not preoccupied with money, but do hope to continue the success they have enjoyed recently.

“Our goal is not to sell out; our goal is not to not sell out,” Sedghi said.

He added that they are doing what they want to do, and if they can have a stable, successful lifestyle without changing what Tally Hall produces, they will be happy.

They hope to be making relevant music and enjoying their lives.

“I think we could be doing many things,” Sedghi added. “I could go back to my garbage ways, but that’s just a pipe dream at this point.”

“We’ll just have to hope,” Cantor said as he patted Sedghi on the knee. “We’ll just have to hope against hope. You can do it.”

For Tally Hall clips we could only show you on video camera go to www.the-communicator.org and



A brand new sound system. Expensive banners. And no new teachers.

A budget divided

alyson **halpert** &
noah **glazer**
illustration by: quinn **burrell**

In Craig Levin's fifth block analysis class, there are five students crowded at nearly every table and several do not have textbooks. However, they can hear Levin clearly because he uses the latest technology installed in Community High School, Phonic Ear's Classroom Amplification System.

Do the benefits of having a high-tech sound system outweigh employing a new teacher to make that class size smaller?

Jason McKnight, a civics and Latin teacher at CHS, is frustrated that the school can spend \$6,000 on banners when he cannot get a \$300 set of dictionaries for his class. Why does the school need a banner to make the front of

the school appealing when it could have more supplies inside?

The Ann Arbor Public schools face a difficult problem when they allocate where money will go each year. There are actually two independent budgets, and it is illegal for money from the two to mix. One budget, the operating budget, pays for teachers, buses and maintenance, the other, the capital budget, is used for items like new buildings, banners and technology.

There is much debate over how these budgets should be funded and which fund is more important. What issue lies underneath the \$6,000 banners?

Separate but unequal

Peter Ways, Dean of CHS, in his capacity as Administrator for Technology Services, has had to deal with numerous complaints from Ann Arbor residents that the money could be better spent. He is extremely concerned that the complexity of this issue be fully understood.

"There's a fundamental misunderstanding as to what's possible and what's not," Ways said. He explained that the operating budget is funded exclusively by the state government. The only way for it to increase is for the number of students in

the district to grow. This is regulated by Proposal A, passed in 1994.

However, the capital budget can be increased by local ballot initiatives, which are quite easy to sell here, he said. In 2004, Ann Arbor voters passed a bond that gave the district approximately \$205 million to build a new high school, renovate existing schools and install new technology. Ways said that lawmakers convinced the public that developments were a good idea and would attract more students because the new bond would solve overcrowding at the high schools. In a way, besides completing its named priorities, the capital budget also serves as a utility to increase the number of students by enticing them into the district— a sort of advertising fund.

Ways wishes the operating budget could be raised directly instead of spending money on the other budget, but not every administrator in the district agrees with him.

Glenn Nelson, Board of Education secretary, says new technology is a good way to attract young high-skilled, high-education and high-income parents to the city who want to send their children to a top-notch public school system. It is ideal for the Ann Arbor Public Schools to be able to say that their buildings are not overcrowded and employ the latest technology.

Some students at CHS do not approve of the advertising strategy, saying that the money could be spent on more important expenses.

So far the sound systems do not appear to have made a huge impact. “I haven’t been paying much attention to them,” sophomore Dean Parrish said. “The teachers don’t seem to be using them much.” Junior Rachel Siegfried added, “It’s cool how they let people hook up their iPods in the hallways.”

Proposal A

In 1994, debate centered on cutting taxes, and Reaganomics were in full swing. According to a Michigan Education Policy Fellowship Program report, some districts had as little as \$3,400 per child while others had as much as \$10,000.

Proposal A was crafted as a remedy for this inequality and to lower taxes. Districts would no longer have to raise their own funds locally, but would receive them from the state on the basis of the number of students enrolled.

The proposal passed, but after six or seven years education funding decreased drastically. It was then that administrators of wealthier districts such as Ann Arbor began to oppose Proposal A. “If the state would fund education more appropriately, then something like Proposal A would be desirable,” Nelson says. Now, he says, wealthy Ann Arbor residents are almost able to fund their schools independently, which would save the state money. He explained that if the district could attract entrepreneurs and professionals who would pay high taxes to the state, funding would increase statewide and thus help other school districts (that is, the percentage of taxes given to education).

The effects of Proposal A are controversial. The idea of equality in school districts sounds good, but in practice most high-income districts want to succeed individually. Most educators across Michigan are not happy about the current state of funding. Ann Arbor Superintendent Todd Roberts says of Proposal A, “It’s not working [to provide adequate funding for the school districts]. It probably never was.” He says that the real value of the per-pupil funding is declining because of inflation.

There were some positives aspects of Proposal A: it succeeded in lowering property and income taxes. It slightly decreased the gap between richer districts and poorer districts.

Lobbying for change

The more a community unites, the stronger the message. I feel like this administration could do more bridge building and less wall building.

Jason McKnight’s first teaching job was in Admore, Oklahoma for a district called Plainview. He was fresh out of college and did not know anything about budgeting and schools. In Ardmore, the teacher’s union was not strong

and there was not as much money to distribute, so the administration and teachers worked together to allocate funds where they needed to be most.

In the fall of 2002, McKnight moved to the Ann Arbor Public School district. He enjoyed better pay and noted the huge quality increase in the education system from his former job. However, he also noticed high expectations from the public.

“This district tends to ignore efficiency,” he said. “There is no strong business model.” McKnight added that teachers and students expect funding for luxurious items like shuttle buses and consulting services, and that the district has a hard

time saying no.

Unlike Plainview, McKnight notices a difference in the way administration and teachers treat each other in Ann Arbor. He says because of the strong teacher union and lack of state funding, there is an unspoken divide between the two groups. This frustrates him because he wishes that teachers, administration and the public could join and lobby the state for adequate funds.

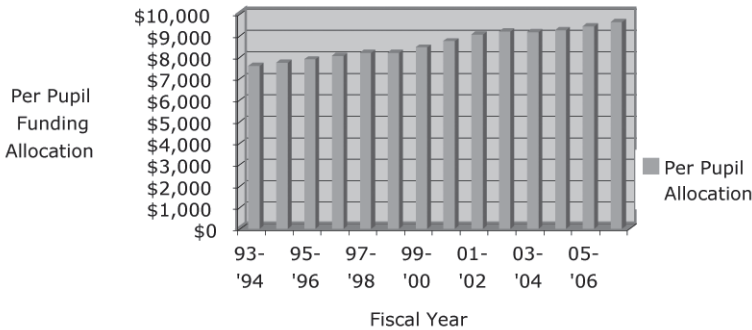
“The more a community unites, the stronger the message,” McKnight said. He added, “I feel like this administration could do more bridge building and less wall building.”

District representatives regularly pressure state legislators to repeal or modify some of the conditions of Proposal A which prevent the district from raising more money locally, says Board of Education Vice-President Irene Patalan. Superintendent Roberts, however, says that at the local level there are really no ways to get around the budget partition. The district has tried to save money on long-term maintenance expenses that would fall under the operating budget by spending the money on replacing old facilities and equipment. This summer, the capital budget paid for the replacement of several windows at Community High School that will make heating more efficient, thus shaving money off the operating budget.

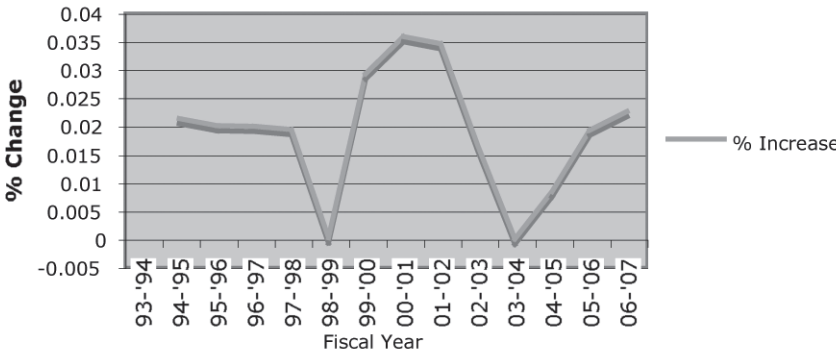
Proposal A does not prevent the district from raising money at a county-wide level, though this is much harder to pull off. Washtenaw County voters as a whole can approve a transfer of tax dollars to the operating budget. Patalan says that the district meets with leaders of the 11 school districts that make up Washtenaw County in order to get their approval. In this process, timing is important. If several districts have recently passed expensive bonds on their own, they are less likely to support a county-wide millage.

The state of the Michigan budget leads to difficult decisions, like choosing which teachers not to replace when they retire and how much money can go to buying new textbooks. “I think it really used to be simpler,” says Patalan. “We’d fight about things like the color of the t-shirts. Now we’re fighting for our lives.”

AAPS Per Pupil Funding over Time



AAPS Percent Change in Funding over Time



An evil addiction

alyson halpert
illustration by: quinn burrell

Pioneer High School student Katherine Scott (names have been changed) did not go into Claire's with intent to steal the appealing pink lip gloss the counter. She intended to take her merchandise, pay for it, and exit the store.

But for some reason, Katherine took the lip gloss and placed it in her bag. She glanced at the sales associate who was preoccupied with customers and sauntered out.

That was the first time Katherine stole. It was the middle of eighth grade. Katherine turned to her friends with disbelief, held up the lip gloss and said, "I just took this, guys," and they laughed, because they did not know what else to do.

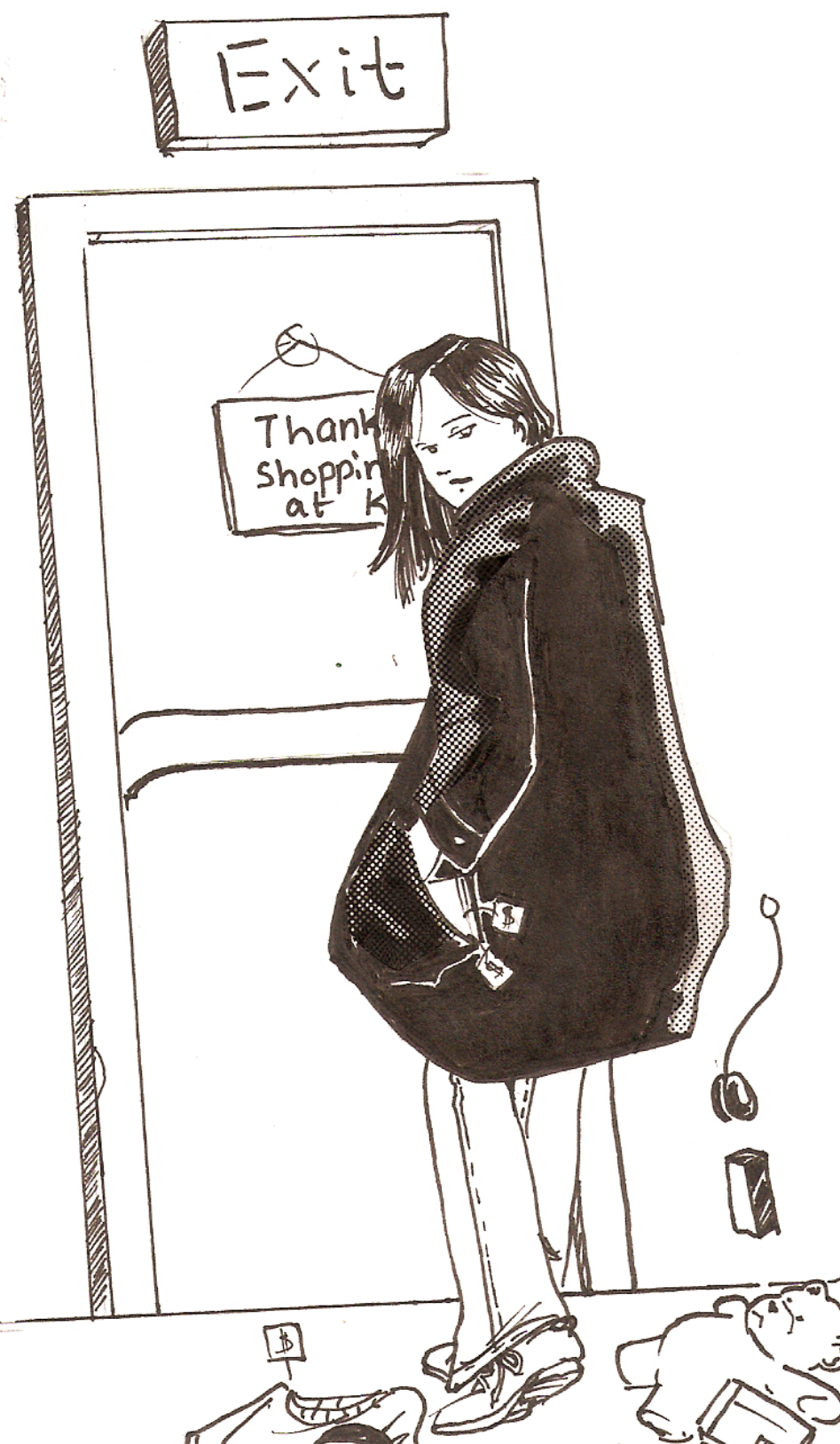
Katherine is one of many teenagers who have been enticed in some way by shoplifting. "You'd be surprised," she said, "how many of your friends have done it. People who you think are so innocent have done it. Even the workers do it. Everybody does it."

Terry Shulman is a shoplifting expert who has appeared on Oprah and other television shows, and wrote a book on shoplifting. He agrees with Katherine on some level.

"Over the last few decades, there's been such an increase in shoplifting across the U.S. -- including by professionals and gangs -- as well as an increase in employee theft and many other more severe crimes, it seems that we've become immune or desensitized to the 'little stuff.'"

Katherine continued to shoplift, and her friends started to join her. Together they came up with strategies to fool employees. In dressing rooms where employees count items, they shoved extra shirts into pant legs. In shops that had tags and codes, they found ways to snip them off and hide them in between the decorative cushions. Even though it was hard, they found ways to blend in. Katherine took because she did not have money to buy the things she wanted, and did not think she needed to pay the ridiculous prices asked of her, a common reason many shoplift.

She started to show signs of having a shoplifting addiction. Like smokers need to have a cigarette in between their fingers, Katherine and her friends accepted that they would take an item from the store whether or not they actually needed it. "You go and you assume, 'Oh, I'm going to do it again because I did it yesterday,'" Katherine said.



If Katherine did not have the money for something she wanted, she took it. As the pile of goods in her room grew, her parents became suspicious.

One day, Katherine went to Hollister with her little sister, Hannah. Katherine had taught Hannah the ways of stealing, and Hannah and her friends were eager to try them out. Equipped with money their mother had given them, they purchased some items and stole some items before heading home. At the door, their mother stopped them and asked to see the purchases.

Sweating and panicking, Katherine realized that their goods added up to about \$50 more than what her mom had given them. Partially seeing the truth, Katherine's mom asked them how they had so many things. Shoplifters sometimes dig deeper holes by lying about their stealing, and so did Katherine. She said her friend Brianna had lent her \$20 dollars, and told her mom that she had used her credit card on a few of the items.

Katherine's mom believed, or wanted to believe, what she was hearing. Katherine took the items up to her room.

Why did Katherine never get caught? She and her friends took items from Hollister, Abercrombie, Victoria's Secret and Claire's almost weekly. They were just teenagers, and by no means part of the shoplifting gangs major sales companies are so afraid of. They were not professionals. So how did they slip through the doors consistently and not get stopped?

Katherine thinks she knows why. "I talked to my friend who worked at Hollister, and he said they aren't allowed to stop [shoplifters]. It's this policy they have where if a girl needs a skirt for a party one night, that's just like thirty bucks. If you see her take it, don't stop her because its gonna make her scared to come back the next weekend with her mom and spend hundreds of dollars there. They still put tags on [the items] because they don't tell people. They try to scare you."

Surprisingly enough, this theory actually has merit. "I don't find it hard to believe that a store has this policy for petty shoplifters, young shoplifters, first-time shoplifters or elderly shoplifters," says Shulman. "A WAL-Mart memo was leaked a few months back that revealed the world's largest retailer was going to stop prosecuting all first-time offenders under 18 or over 64 caught shoplifting under \$25 in merchandise."

WAL-Mart thought prosecuting these specific groups was not cost-effective. They wanted to focus on catching professional shoplifters and gangs of shoplifters, and investigating and apprehending their own employees for stealing.

That does not mean Shulman thinks this should be a policy. "I do not believe anyone caught should be given a free pass. I believe many people will continue to steal if this happens," he says.

However, even Abercrombie confirms Katherine's claims.

Abercrombie Assistant Manager, Sarah (she declined to give her last name because she does not officially represent the company) says that employees are not allowed to apprehend customers if they see them walk out with goods that have not been purchased and alarms do not go off. "If we see someone with a skirt, we can say, 'Hey, would you like a nice top to

go with that shirt?' Then they know that you know that they have it so then they have the opportunity to give it back!" She explains.

But does this strategy work? According to Sarah, they have approximately 40 items leaving the store per week that are not purchased, and Abercrombie blames its employees for high quotas of loss. "Once the item leaves our store it's counted against our store because we should be watching customers, helping people, and making sure that they have good customer service so that they don't want to take the item," she says. If Sarah wants bonuses or special items in her stores, she must keep their loss per week quota low.

Sarah noticed one customer recently who placed items from the store into her baby carriage. She asked the woman if she planned to purchase the items, and the woman nonchalantly said "no," and left the store without the items. The problem is as Shulman explains. The woman could just as easily come back the following day and attempt to steal again, with no repercussions until she succeeds.

This policy often leaves management frustrated when they can do nothing to stop the onslaught of petty thievery. "It doesn't come down to a certain race, or a certain height or a certain body style. Everybody and anybody who can do it, does it. I don't understand why. Personally it makes me really upset. It's like this store is my home, all of these clothes are mine. You wouldn't go into somebody's house and steal from them," Sarah said.

Shoplifters do not see stealing from stores like Abercrombie and Hollister as stealing from someone's house. Katherine sees her shoplifting as "a little silent protest" of the stores she frequents, arguing that stores like Hollister and Abercrombie have prices ridiculously above their wholesale price. "I think they're too expensive for what I should be paying for a piece of cloth," she says.

Shoplifting expert Chris E. McGoeys says that it does not matter which store is a target, the act is still bad. "Many incorrectly feel or are taught that the large corporate retailer can afford the loss. If this sense of right versus wrong is lost in our society it is because of the failing of parents to instill these values into their children."

Katherine's mother had told her before, in sixth grade that she should not shoplift, but Katherine followed her mother's example rather than her words. "My parents are stupid," she said. "My mom used to tell me stories about how she used to shoplift all the time."

One day, almost a year after Katherine had first stolen from Claire's, she was back again with her friend Jordan. Jordan needed a necklace to go with her dress for the Sadie Hawkins dance, and Katherine was impatient. "Hurry up and take something," she told Jordan, and walked out of the store.

She was almost out when the sales attendant stopped her and started to search her.

"I don't have anything! What the f***, what is your problem?" Katherine screamed at the woman, because she wanted to appear innocent.

The employee continued to search Katherine, and then her friend Jordan, but found nothing.

"What the hell?" Katherine and Jordan yelled repeatedly.

The employee apologized profusely. "We were like, 'You're a douche bag.' And then we left. We had to make it look like we really weren't doing anything bad," Katherine said.

It was a near miss, but not near enough. Katherine did not stop stealing.

In the summer before 10th grade, Katherine's friend Brianna was shoplifting again, in the worst of places. Where Victoria's secret does not notice when shoppers put underwear into a bag and Abercrombie and Hollister barely take any measures to detect thievery, Von Maur is a shoplifter's nightmare, and most are smart enough to avoid it.

Brianna thought she could get away with a Kate Spade purse tucked firmly into her bag. Smugly, she walked towards the entrance and bumped straight into a large employee with a stern look on her face. Brianna had been caught.

"Oh, s***," she exhaled, and cried as employees took her to a little room. There was an estimated \$500 in stolen goods in her bag, from stores all across the mall. Every store came to reclaim their items, and the cops were called. They

could not reach her parents, so Brianna stayed in the little room for three hours. The verdict: 36 hours of community service. The worst part: Brianna had to wear the orange prison jumpsuits and the "saggy granny-style underwear" that had been used before.

"I'm never going to get in trouble again," Brianna vowed to herself. "You've caught me, I'm done."

After an estimated \$500 or more in goods, of \$10 shirts, tons of lip gloss and makeup, sunglasses, headbands, thong underwear and three bathing suits, Katherine was through as well.

"I guess I'm learning from her experience," Katherine explained. "She's grounded forever. When she started her community service, she was telling me how she might have to go to court, I just stopped shoplifting."

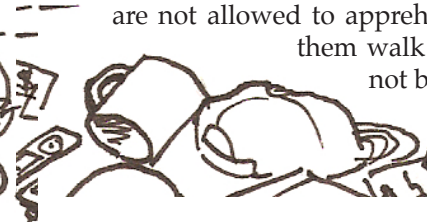
Katherine did not want her parents to find out she had shoplifted. She said she shares a trust with her mom, and tells her almost everything. "It was the one thing I couldn't tell my mom," she says.

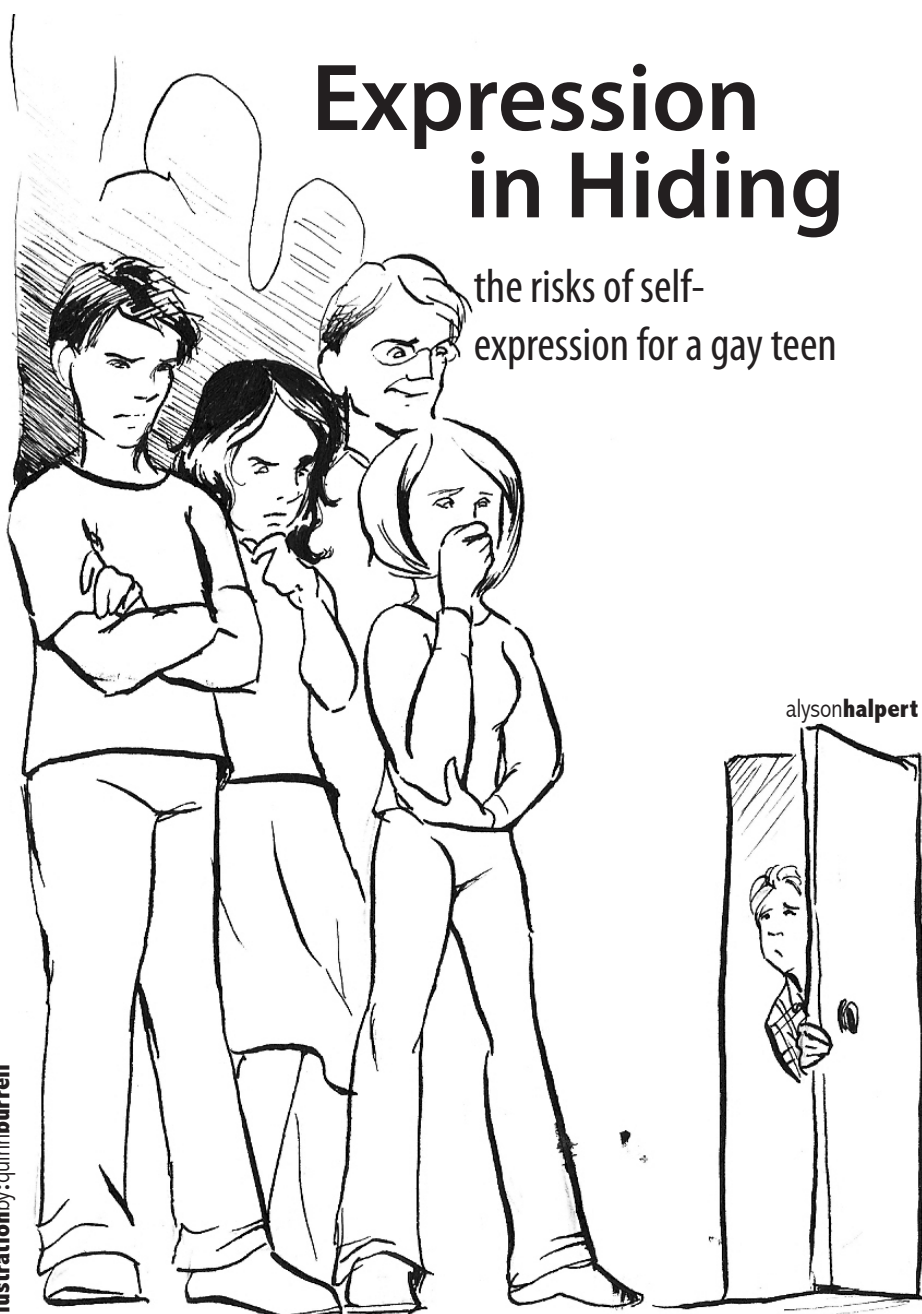
She thought it would be horrible to break that trust. "I wouldn't want to be that kind of daughter. Obviously they're always going to love me, but they won't have as much respect for me," Katherine said.

Her experience speaks for many people who believe the only productive way to stop shoplifters is to apprehend and stop them. "I do think stores should drop that little policy [of turning a blind eye to theft] they have, if they really want to stop shoplifters," Katherine agrees.

"They should know people are going to steal if they don't protect their stores."

SHOPLIFTERS do not see stealing from stores like Abercrombie and Hollister as stealing from someone's house.





Expression in Hiding

the risks of self-expression for a gay teen

Yoni Siden, 17, was a freshman at Pioneer when the first piece of fruit flew by his head. At first he thought it was just “people being stupid, throwing fruit around,” but soon it became apparent that the apples and oranges were aimed at him.

Siden says the fruit onslaught was intentionally aimed at him because he is homosexual. He is one of many high school students who struggle to get through ado-

lescence and deal with discrimination at the same time. According to the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), 64% of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) youth say they feel unsafe at school. A total of 92% of LGBTQ youth report hearing homophobic remarks, and 84% have been verbally harassed, the group says.

An identity questioned

Siden has experienced harassment from the moment he entered the sixth grade. He did not yet know he was gay, but others suspected he might be. “There are things about me that play into a lot of those gay stereotypes,” Siden explains, “the cadence of my voice, the way I carry myself, the things I talk about. People tell me it’s even in the way I walk.”

The second day of school in the gym locker room, a student approached him and asked his name. Siden told him, and the boy said, “Well, now we know who the faggot is.”

The memory is still vivid to Siden. It was the first time he was labeled. He had not yet started puberty and realized he was homosexual, so he was very confused. “Being called gay is automatically a mark on somebody’s head. It’s something that’s wrong about you, something that’s weird about you,” Siden said.

Siden continued to struggle as students isolated him and frequently called him “gay” and a “fag.” “Middle school is hard for anybody, let alone for somebody who is relatively different in any way,” he said.

Because of this, the journey to self-acceptance is often difficult.

Sterling Field, 16, is a junior at Huron High School. During middle school, he did everything he could to convince himself he was straight. “I thought [being gay] was kind of... not good,” he said. He dated girls, tried to “get off” to girls, and thought about them a lot, but it did not work. Field decided to hide his sexuality.

At parties, he danced with women and pretended to like it. He avoided the topic of whom he liked, and often lied about his sexuality, which he felt badly about. He kept thinking, “What’s wrong with me?”

Kim McKenzie, an openly homosexual staff member at Community High School, says this is common of teenagers who are “in the closet,” or hiding their sexuality. “It’s almost like having a secret,” she says. “If you’re not comfortable with your own sexuality, you

tend to push people away... you don’t set up the bond you could with other kids.” She explains that it hinders emotional and academic development and often relationships with parents.

Teens are also afraid their friends will be disgusted if they find out. “It is lonely...lonely and scary. A lot of the time you feel fake, because you can’t be who you really are,” McKenzie says.

Field felt the same way. “No one else was like this, or at least no one that I knew,” he said. He tried to remedy that, and logged onto Myspace.com to make friends with some gay guys. Then, one of his friends told him she was bisexual. “She kind of dragged me out of the closet,” he explained.

He told his dad and sister he was bisexual. Then they told his mom. She told Field he was attracted to men just because he was at the age where he was “so horny he would do anything.”

Most homosexual youth view their feelings as legitimate, and see coming out as telling their friends and family about an aspect of who they are. “Without a doubt, it takes a lot to admit that you’re different, that there is something that makes you legally inferior to other people, and socially inferior in many people’s eyes,” Siden says. “Just like an African American person cannot hide their skin color, an LGBTQ person can’t hide who they are forever.”

Discrimination

Sarah, 17 (her name and identifying details have been changed), jumps up from the table, returns with a Koran and points to a paragraph midway down the page: “What, do you indeed approach men lustfully rather than a woman? Nay, you are a people who act ignorantly but the answer of his people was no other except that they said, turn out Lut’s followers from your town, surely they are a people that would keep pure.”

The selection outlines an Arabic view on homosexuality, which is resoundingly negative. Sarah’s family is from a Middle Eastern country where homosexuality is illegal and no gay rights exist. She has lived in the United States

LGBTQ Timeline

In the Bible

God tells Abraham that he intends to destroy the city of Sodom because of the residents’ immorality. The two main views of his reason are the resident’s inhospitality or their sexual immorality. The word sodomy refers to acts of oral and anal sex, considered homosexual activities, of the men in Sodom. God’s condemnation becomes a central part of Western attitudes towards homosexuality.

6th and 7th Centuries

Homosexual desire is accepted throughout antiquity – in Rome and Athens for example. Some people see it as an opportunity to show their superiority since relationships involved a passive role (such as a boy) and an active role (such as a man in his 20s or 30s). Sexual exploits of Zeus, Hercules, and Achilles suggest that attraction to another man is a sign of masculinity

1220’s

Italian Catholic priest St. Thomas Aquinas says that the purpose of sexual activity is procreation, a mechanism designed by the Christian God to assure prosperity of the human race. He concludes that homosexual activity is a violation of God’s design.

her whole life, and known that she is mostly attracted to women since her freshman year of high school.

Like many LGBTQ youth, Sarah was out to her friends but not to her parents. Teens keep this a secret from their parents for many reasons – some because think their parents would not believe them; others because their parents would evict and disown them. The National Gay and Lesbian task force reports that 50% of teens who come out to their parents or guardians experience a negative reaction and 26% are told they must leave home.

Sarah is not the kind of girl who likes negative attention. Even though she has been going out with her girlfriend, Jennifer, for months, she rarely kisses her in public like other lesbian couples she knows. She says this would not be the case if she were with a guy. She introduced her girlfriend to her parents as a close friend, but they grew suspicious.

One day, Sarah and Jennifer went out to dinner. While they were out, Sarah’s mom called and demanded to know where she was. Because Sarah knew her mom would not approve, she told her she was at school. Her mom, suspicious, drove to school and found her daughter was not there. “Are you dating Jennifer?” she asked.

Sarah conceded that she was, and her parents were furious. They said she could not see Jennifer anymore, and threatened to home school her or send her back to their country of origin. “They said, ‘Oh, but we know you, that’s not you,’” Sarah said, “they think I’ve been brainwashed or convinced by somebody.”

For now, she continues to date Jennifer secretly despite her parents’ wishes. Her parents check Sarah’s phone bill to see whom she has been calling, so Jennifer blocks her number. Her dad drives to her school at lunch to make sure her car is in the parking lot. “They basically spy on me,” she explains, “More than anything, I really wish my parents would accept it and let me do whatever I want.”

Sarah says her parents do not believe she is homosexual.

“It sucks. When I grow up and have a

family... I want my family to know my background, and my parents. I want to be able to take them to [my family’s country] and walk around with my wife.”

However, she does not have any regrets. She is more independent and has acquired an “amazing ability to lie.” The discrimination is worth the pain. “I like to live in the present,” she said. “I love Jennifer, I love spending time with her, so why not enjoy myself?”

Other instances of discrimination pose more immediate threats. By the time Siden was a sophomore, he was used to people harassing him and calling him names. However, the negative feeling seemed to be growing. “I never felt [my homosexuality] was wrong,” he said, “but I felt very troubled by what was going on around me.”

He tried to leave school one day during lunch, and found a large truck was blocking his way out of the parking lot. Everybody in the car was looking out the windows, laughing and yelling, but Siden could not hear it.

If you’re not comfortable with your own sexuality, you tend to push people away...

He took another exit, but took a turn and realized he was driving behind the same car, which had started to drive very slowly. Siden recognized the group of guys who were driving it, and saw a car full of their friends pull behind him. “It became clear that it was something malicious,” he recalls. The car behind him, also large, started to speed up. “I found myself getting totally boxed in,” he says. “If anybody accidentally hit the gas or slammed on the breaks a little too hard, if anybody slipped or pushed somebody else, that’s the end of me.”

His safety was compromised, so he took a sharp right into a church parking lot and lost the other cars.

The day he got back to school he was nervous. He knew who the kids were

and had a class with one of them. But like many teens who are victims of discrimination, Siden did not want to report the harassment because he feared retaliation. Walking from his car into the building early in the morning, Siden listened to the same group of students taunt him and yell slurs against “the faggot, the gay kid.”

Siden no longer felt safe at Pioneer High school.

A common denominator

Experiences for LGBTQ teens range from immediate acceptance to violence and harassment, but one constant seems to be that teens trying to discover their sexuality in an intolerant atmosphere do not have an easy time.

Field became depressed in the December of his freshman year, the same time he began the process of coming out. The third week before school got out, he started to cut himself. After winter break, he tried to commit suicide five times with alcohol and pills. On Martin Luther King Day, he took 35 Benadryl tablets and was hospitalized for six hours. In inpatient therapy after, he told his parents he was gay, not bisexual. His mother cried for several days.

During his sophomore year, Siden revealed his sexuality to his parents and discontinued his relationship with his father. He suppressed his feelings of anger, shame and insecurity. Siden went to a psychologist and was diagnosed with a plethora of mental health conditions, including depression.

In the eighth grade, Sarah discovered she had a crush on a girl in her classes and got attached. She knew she could not be in a relationship with her, which hurt her. She thought she could never be with anybody she would love. She did not want to be gay, and did not want a life of discrimination and hardship. She became careless with pills, and took them frequently. One day she took the whole bottle, and hoped she would not wake up. She did. Later, she found she had triggered a liver problem.

Stories like these are common. Ac-

cording to SIECUS, 33% of LGBTQ teens reported suicide attempts, compared to 9% of all other students.

What is being done?

Siden thought that being homosexual would not be a big deal. “I wasn’t really anticipating the reaction. I was told all my life that Ann Arbor is liberal... progressive and outgoing... Ann Arbor may be progressive and outgoing, but not necessarily towards LGBTQ youth.”

After the incident when he was run off the road, reactions were varied. Some people he told did not want to believe him, and told Siden he had misinterpreted what had happened. Others said it was only a matter of time before the smaller harassment escalated. A large number of people told him they could not believe anything like that could happen in Ann Arbor, to a friend of theirs.

He went to a close teacher and she sat down with him. “She told me, ‘I don’t know what to do. Nobody gave me a handbook of how to deal with these issues, especially when they fall on something as delicate as sexual orientation,’” he said.

To limit his time at Pioneer, he dual-enrolled at Community High School and Washtenaw Community College. He was sure CHS would offer him the accepting environment he lacked at Pioneer.

He gave a presentation for one of the health classes at CHS, and was surprised to read in one of the student evaluations, “Tell the faggot to stop acting like a bitch.”

Immediately, the issue was dealt with by Robbie Stapleton and Dean Peter Ways, who was surprised to learn that being called a “fag” was routine for Siden.

The repeated situations turned Siden into an activist. He is co-president of the Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) at Pioneer, and they are working on a large project, a district-wide climate survey. Siden wants school to be a safe and productive place for LGBTQ youth.

(continued on page 16)

1730's	1930's	1950	1961	1973
Movement of churches' message to one based on "nature" has been occurring for the past several centuries. The Dutch mount an anti-sodomy campaign, along with other discriminatory campaigns, and execute as many as 100 men and boys.	During the World War II, LGBT are persecuted in Nazi Germany and an estimated 15,000 gay men are sent to concentration camps. At least 100,000 gay men are arrested. Nazis believed that homosexuality was potentially contagious. The number killed is unknown.	During the Red Scare, Senator Joseph McCarthy suggests that gays are Russian agents. The McCarran Immigration Act says that aliens who intend "to engage in any immoral sexual act" is counted as a class "of aliens [that] shall be ineligible to receive visas and shall be excluded from admission into the United States." At this time the Surgeon General lumps homosexuality under the heading of "psychopathic personalities."	Illinois becomes the first state to repeal its outlaw of private homosexual acts between consenting adults.	The American Psychological Association decides that homosexuality is no longer a mental illness.

LGBTQ Timeline (continued)

1974

Elaine Nobel becomes the first openly lesbian politician to be elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives. The U.S. Civil Service Commission issues new guidelines barring discrimination based on "homosexual conduct."

1979

Over 200,000 LBGT individuals have a march for their rights on Washington. The date becomes the starting point for National Coming Out day.

1986

In the case of Bowers vs. Harwick, the Supreme Court upholds the right of states to ban private, consensual gay sodomy.

1990

Restrictions on homosexuals through the McCarren-Walter Immigration Act are officially lifted.

1993

Transsexual Brandon Teena is viciously murdered before he can testify in a rape case. His death sparks outrage as an extreme example of hate crimes against LGBT.

2003

US Supreme Court strikes down sodomy laws in Lawrence vs. Texas. Their decision rendered Texas' anti-sodomy laws unconstitutional. The law had discriminated between same-sex and heterosexual couples in determining criminal activity.

(continued from page 9)

At CHS, Ways says he is comfortable as a homosexual staff member but wants to create an understanding between students and staff and form a harassment policy so another incident does not take place.

McKenzie says the CHS GSA is working towards a middle school outreach program, a short presentation about homosexuality and coming out with situational role-play to help create safer environments from the start.

Field is proud that he can help others get through the coming out process as

president of his GSA. "I'm very happy that I'm gay," he says, "I wouldn't have it any other way."

Siden thinks the situation in Ann Arbor can be remedied, as can most situations involving homophobia. "Let's use that progressive attitude, that liberal attitude, to really make this an environment for LGBTQ youth which creates safety and security. Students should feel proud of who they are and be comfortable with who they are," he said.

Siden is convinced that all it takes to accept an LGBTQ youth is to get to know them. The summer before junior

year, he traveled to Israel with teens from all over the United States. They had all checked each other's Myspace and Facebook pages, where he had listed his sexuality. Everyone knew that Siden was gay from the moment he stepped off the plane, including a friend named Dillon. "Up until that summer, every other word in his sentences was 'fag.' Everything was 'so gay,'" Siden said of Dillon.

Siden sat next to Dillon at dinner one night, and the two of them bonded. Siden's friends told him that Dillon had not used the word "faggot" in

three weeks, and thought Siden was "pretty cool."

McKenzie agrees that exposure leads to understanding. "People are afraid of the unknown," she says, "When you are afraid of something, the first reaction is to say mean or derogatory things about it." She says, and Ways agrees, that students should learn about LGBTQ authors, and the history of homosexuality that dates back to Grecian times.

"People get over racism, too," says Siden, "It's not engrained in somebody's psyche to hate."

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Op-Ed

This editorial will appear in the next edition of the Communicator. This is not a page from our paper.

November 4th -- A step forward, step back for civil rights

What I have to say feels so obvious. It is a wonder I even must write it: All Americans should be equal under the law, and religion and state should be separate.

This was why, when I woke up on November 5th, I was shocked and disappointed to discover that our supposedly forward-moving society had taken a jolting step backwards. Proposal 8 had passed in California.

Proposal 8, the most heavily-funded measure in California on both sides, amends the state constitution to define marriage between a man and a woman. Measures similar to this one have now been passed in 30 states. The passage of the proposal will reverse the ruling of the California courts that states same-sex marriage is constitutional.

As the nation is celebrating the victory of our first African-American president, a large minority of Americans have been re-reduced to second class citizenship.

Something we should have learned a couple of decades ago is that separate is not equal, and it frustrates me that people do not understand that. Some of the most liberal people I know have told me they believe that gay people should have the same rights – civil unions and benefits that come with marriage – but not the actual title. To me, this harkens back to a time when African-Americans had to use separate facilities than whites– supposedly of the same quality, just different. Unless we have the exact same rights, including marriage, we are separated and reduced to something other than full citizens. Blame religion, fear; it does not matter. Denying gay marriage is a matter of hate and discrimination. It says so directly in the official language of Proposal 8: “Eliminates right of same-sex couples to marry” (*italics mine*).

When I expressed my anger that afternoon after one of the most liberal states in the union passed a law in favor of eliminating rights, friends were sympathetic. That’s no good, they said, but look – we just elected a president for change; I’m sure things will be better. They forgot or did not know that even our new President Elect is

not in favor of equality, which is ironic because his election is the result of hard work in civil rights movements. Because of his religion, Barack Obama is not in favor of gay marriage.

Mine is not a popular opinion, but I am not content with Obama’s support of civil unions only. Separation of state and religion states that nothing, including bigoted interpretations of the Bible, should affect the rights of our citizens. Clearly this constitutional value has not sunk in. Much like we look back on presidents who were not in favor of women’s suffrage and civil rights for black Americans, I can only hope that one day we will look at this and cringe, wondering how our leaders could deny minority rights so publicly – and in fact, for public approval.

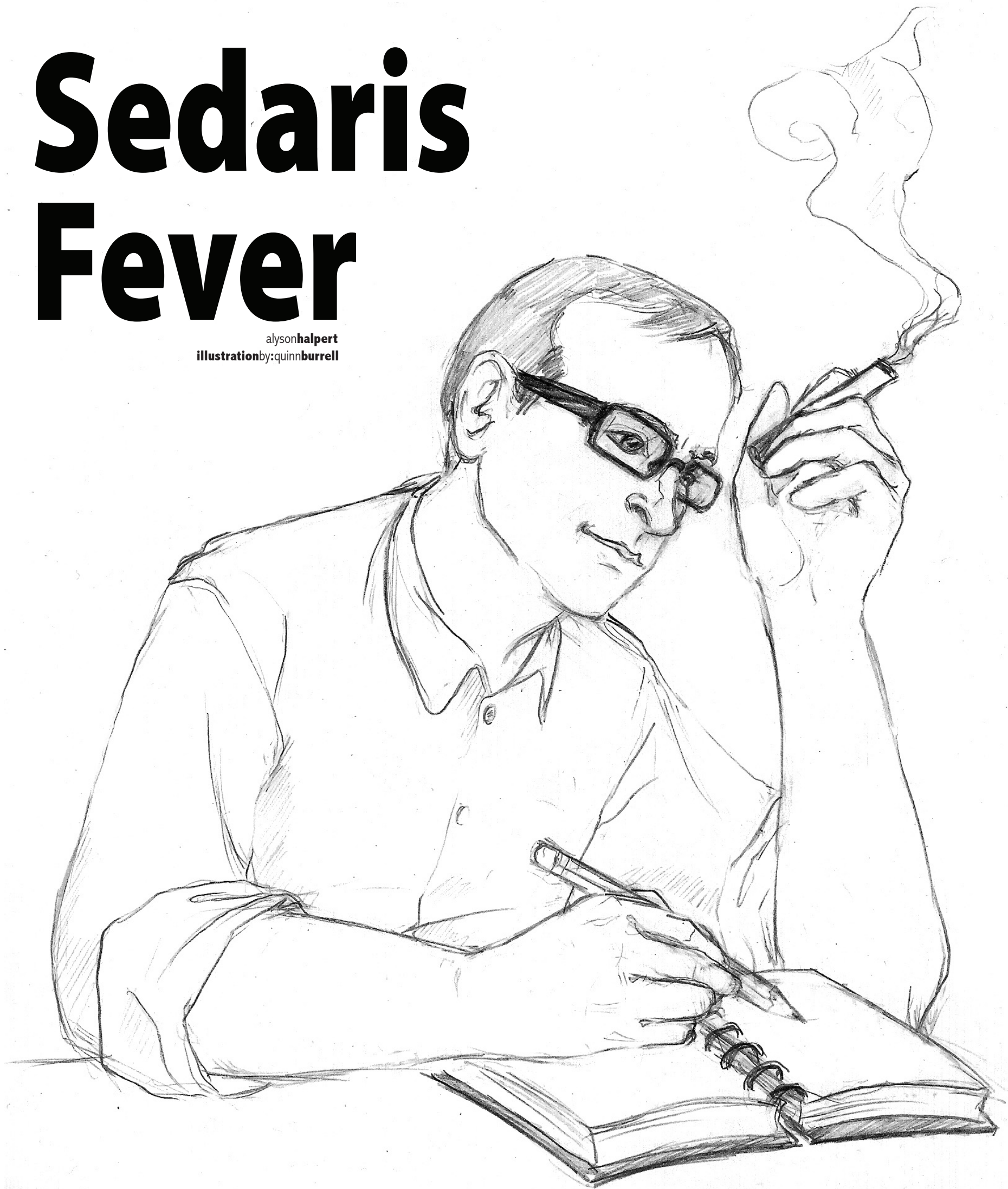
Proposal 8 passed because of this same religious fervor and homophobia, playing to parents’ fears that their children could think being gay is okay. A frequent point made by Proposal 8 proponents was profiled in a commercial where a little girl approaches her mother and says, “Mom, guess what I learned in school today? I learned how a prince married a prince, and I can marry a princess!” A 36-second youtube.com video showed a baby playing with two dolls dressed in wedding apparel, a man and a woman, with the caption, “Marriage. It’s simple.”

The kind of homophobia implied in those ads, and the thinking behind gay-marriage bans – that some love is better than others, that homosexuality is a choice one makes with abandon, that children should not learn acceptance in schools – is what fuels marriage laws. To name anything else would be a farce.

As a lesbian and an American, it disheartens me to feel the apathy and homophobia of our nation echoed in these gay-marriage bans. I know that alone, gay activists will not be able to create equality. I will believe in change when all Americans want to protect basic rights, and when they understand that being able to vote away equality is scary and threatening not only to gays but to everyone. On November 4th, 2008, our country elected a black president. But in the fight for civil rights, we have so much further to go.

Sedaris Fever

alyson halpert
illustration by: quinn burrell



David Sedaris has been profiled in The New York Times, Newsweek, Time and has appeared multiple times on national television. Despite how busy he is touring the country with his best-selling book, the author and NPR commentator made time for a private interview with a Communicator reporter.

Sedaris is well known for his comedic short stories, which portray him as a quirky but average guy living with his partner, Hugh Hamrick. He often recounts lively stories about his family.

"Oh, I can't do that now," Sedaris says as a Borders representative passes him a stack of his latest book, *When You are Engulfed in Flames*, to sign. "I can't concentrate." Instead, he focuses exclusively on his interview and recalls his years as a teenager, and what makes him the unpretentious writer he is today.

Nervous ticks, family dinners and the loneliest girlfriend in Raleigh, North Carolina

Sedaris hated high school until he joined the drama club. "I had friends, and something that I wanted," he says. "It didn't make me a good actor, but it did make me feel special." The first lead he got was in *The Skin of Our Teeth*, a drama by Thornton Wilder. Sedaris, who suffers from obsessive-compulsive disorder, appeared normal during all of the rehearsals.

Opening night, all of Sedaris's nervous ticks came back. In front of the audience he jerked his head and rolled his eyes and had to touch certain objects on stage. He emitted little noises. The people on stage with him had never seen that side of him, and did not know what to do. "I think what was worse was talking to people who were kind enough to pretend not to notice," Sedaris says, "Because you had to notice it. Seeing the pity in their eyes is what made it really traumatic."

The theater was not the only place where Sedaris had to act. Throughout high school and into college, he had to pretend to be heterosexual. "In 1975 in North Carolina if you were to say, 'I'm a homosexual,' you would have been stoned to death," Sedaris explains. "Really, they would have killed you. And the people who killed you would not have been taken to court. They would have just been seen as doing a public service."

Senior year, Sedaris got a girlfriend to keep up his heterosexual reputation. He looks back on her now as "the loneliest girlfriend in Raleigh, North Caro-

lina," because they never did anything. Once, the loneliest girlfriend's parents were out of town and so Sedaris slept over. He wore her father's pajamas and they slept in the same bed. She kissed him, and he made an excuse to go use the telephone. He laughs, saying he didn't know what else to do.

"It was easy to believe that I was the only one," Sedaris said of being homosexual. "At that time too, it was the worst thing that could possibly happen to you."

The Sedaris dinner table was where he found solace, and the source of his comedic zeal. He and his five siblings sat around the table every night trying to make his mother laugh. "She wasn't stingy with her laughter," he says. Go out on a date on Saturday night? He would rather spend hours with his family.

When people say to him, "Oh, I love

my mouth. I don't mean to blow my own trumpet, but some of it was pretty good."

He shouted to shoppers, "Come see Santa for help with your checkbook! Santa understands all problems related to checkbooks!"

"I enjoyed doing it," Sedaris says, "It was scary how much I enjoyed doing it."

Writing, for Sedaris, started out much the same way. While he was hiking through the Pacific Northwest at the age of 20, he started to keep a diary on the backs of the placemats at cafés he visited. He purchased a sketchbook and started to write there. "I knew what I was writing was really bad, but I thought, 'so don't read it.'" He allowed whatever he wanted to spew onto the paper, and did not worry if it was good or not. "When you're first starting something it makes sense that

and notebook and wrote everything down. "Notebooks scare people more than a camera does," he explains.

Beverly Hills, missed opportunities and condoms

Back in high school, Sedaris and his girlfriend had dreamt of moving to New York and becoming stars on Broadway. 10 years ago, Sedaris called her about a play he wrote to be performed at the Lincoln Center. He said, "It's time. I have a part for you. You're going to move to New York and we're going to what we've always dreamed of." She turned him down.

"When you get old like me, it's not the things you did that you regret, it's the things you didn't do," Sedaris explains, and adds as an afterthought, "And all the people you didn't have sex with."

Currently, Sedaris is very content with Hamrick, his boyfriend of 17 years. Recently, the mayor of Beverly Hills called and offered to marry them. "I was like, 'don't want to get married, don't want to get married, don't want to get married, BEVERLY HILLS?' If they threw in a hotel, I might do it," Sedaris says.

He talks enthusiastically about the court case in California which legalized a possible marriage between him and Hamrick, but adds that some people will not be. A woman on a recent book stop said to him, "Next thing you know they're going to want to marry dogs and cats and God knows what-all." He laughed and said, "Thank you so much for equating me with an animal that licks its own a**hole."

At the end of the interview, down-to-earth Sedaris has one more surprise. "I always try to have little gifts for teenagers at a reading, because I'm just so honored that they came. Like other people say they have better stuff to do, but teenagers are the only ones that actually do," he says.

Sedaris and his brother-in-law went to Costco to buy tiny pain-reliever packets, but they did not have them. "Instead, I bought a box of condoms as big as a cinderblock, because they were light," he says.

He lays out a tiny shampoo bottle ("Mint Thyme,") a packet of condoms and a pair of sunglasses he bought at a flea market in Athens, Greece. "I thought they were very old," he says of the sunglasses, "but I found a website on the handle. Your choice," he says, beckoning to the options. I take the sunglasses, and we exit the room so he can give a reading before traveling to his next destination. I try them on. "They make you look very Grecian," Sedaris says.

Want more David Sedaris?

Check out these books written by the best-selling author

Holidays on Ice

When you are Engulfed in Flames

Naked

Me Talk Pretty One Day

Barrel Fever

Dress your Family in Cordurouy and Denim

the stories about your dysfunctional family," he is often confused. "I can't think of a family that functioned better," he says. "We all really liked each other. I always felt very safe at home."

"I wanted to be sophisticated, and I wanted us to live in New York City and I wanted to be rich and this and that, but this is what I had instead. Looking back I wouldn't have traded it for anything, not any part of it."

Pygmies, Santa Claus and getting published

Sedaris's philosophy towards his writing is similar to his old philosophy working as an advertiser for a mall Santa Claus. He held the job before he was an acclaimed author, swaying mall visitors to go see the jolly old fat man.

"I never assumed that people were going to be swayed by what I said or even interested," he says. "When I did sales pitches, crap would come out of

you're going to be really bad, so I decided not to beat myself up over it and I've just been doing it ever since," he says.

16 years later, his first book came out. "I was never in a hurry," he says, "I had seen enough people try to press their writing on others before it was time for them to actually do that." He figured that when the time was right, someone would tell him. After he was on National Public Radio for awhile, someone did just that – several publishing companies asked him if he had written a book.

He still has the same "anything goes and anything can be written about" attitude. He speaks very guardedly about an experience he recently had in a taxidermy shop in London. It started with a skeleton of a pygmy and ended with a teenager's head in a bag. "It was really creepy and really delicious," Sedaris says. The taxidermist had been to prison. After Sedaris walked out of the shop, he immediately grabbed a pen



A



alysonhalpert



look



behind



the curtain



The male suspect was on the run from the police for an hour and fifteen minutes when teacher Christina Sears-Etter looked him in the eye and realized he was just a person. As he bolted out of the Community High School gymnasium, his face reflected the confusion and chaos of the day's events. He passed a group of squealing students and said, "I'm not going to hurt you, I'm not going to hurt anybody."

The man paused, unsure, in the hallway. That was when Sears-Etter, the dance teacher, stood face-to-face with a suspect wanted for credit card fraud and evading police. He started walking backwards, but Sears-Etter walked with him, no more than three feet away from his 6'3" frame.

It was a moment of humanity buried in the cat and mouse chase. "You need to get upstairs to the office right now," Sears-Etter told the man as they walked, "Everyone's been looking for you for a very long time."

The man looked like he might be considering it. "If everyone's looking for me, why should I go upstairs?" He asked. They reached the end of the hallway near the stairwell, and Sears-Etter spotted her co-teacher walking down the stairs. In the moment she motioned to the other teacher, the man had started out the door of the stairwell.

That confrontation was one of the many times that Community High School staff and students found them-

selves involved in a 3-hour long police endeavor last Thursday, Sept. 25.

"And then we're off to the races."

The day's events began at 11:18 a.m. when Ann Arbor police were dispatched to Main and Liberty. The four suspects were thought to be using stolen credit cards, and provided false identification to the police. Officers began to cuff the men, and it went smoothly until one man with a cuff on one of his arms shook away and started to run.

Credit card fraud is a felony, and resisting arrest is another charge. The police did not believe him to be dangerous, but immediately set about catching him. "I would want to know why he is running," said Officer Lyle Sartori, who was in charge of the operation. He says that sometimes people run from the police because they are scared and do not know what else to do, but other times "you have a guy who doesn't want to be arrested because he's wanted for killing two guys in Flint."

Police sent out a description of the man: 6'3", wearing black jeans, a black baseball cap, a silver necklace with a cross and a black shirt. At 11:37 a.m. when he broke the cuff, the chase began "and then we're off to the races," said Sartori.

The man ran downtown for eleven minutes, popped in an out of a build-

ing and continued until he was sighted at various locations on CHS property. He walked into Jason McKnight's first floor classroom and asked to use a fan. McKnight asked the man if he was a new student, and the man replied that he had just started. McKnight knew he had not, and told him to leave. Dean Peter Ways called in the reports to the police, and within minutes they were at CHS.

Lockdowns

CHS students were still on lunch hour, dispersed across the school and Kerrytown district when police arrived at the school. Sartori was almost positive the man, who ran in and out of another building, was not inside anymore. "I've never been involved in a case where a subject being chased stays in an occupied building," Sartori said. Still, as CHS went into its first lockdown, police searched. First, three officers and a staff member did a preliminary search meant to be "fast and furious," according to Sartori. It would locate a problem, if it existed, quickly. Then the officers completed a secondary search, using the help of staff members to unlock doors. There had been no more sightings reported, and the police did not find the suspect.

The lockdown was called off, and police resumed the search off-campus. Students re-entered the building for classes.

In the CHS gymnasium, the Dance Body class faced Sears-Etter, doing abdominal workouts when the teacher spotted out of the corner of her eye an arm behind the curtain at the back of the room. The man had concealed himself during the searches.

She clapped her hands, and said, "Get up! We're leaving!" She thought the man would stay hidden, but he noticed them leaving and bounded out to the door. After their brief confrontation, he was spotted running from the building by J. White, a CHS custodian.

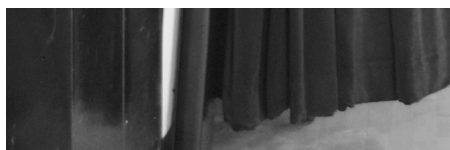
CHS went back into lockdown, this time for the 90 minutes it took to catch the suspect.

Concealment and craft

During the chase, police received different reports of the man's clothing. At 1:45, a canine officer downtown spotted the suspect at Main and Kingsley solely from the silver necklace peeking out from the back of his neck. He was wearing a different outfit, a white T-shirt with an "M," yellow shorts, black shoes and black socks. He carried a bag. The officer described what he perceived as the man's attitude walking down the street: "I see you and I know you see me, but I'm just walking along doing my own thing." When the officer apprehended him, he dropped the bag and started running through residential neighborhoods, the officer not far behind. The policeman watched the



Picking apart the the CHS lockdown



suspect jump off a 10-ft stone wall in a tiered backyard, and lost him after a block and a half.

Officers set up a perimeter and start searching at Main St. and Felch. They went up a driveway of a private residence under construction, and under the new wood deck there were bundles of pink insulation. An officer saw a small portion of the suspect's show hanging out, and finally the chase ended at 2:18, three hours after the initial police dispatch.

CHS left lockdown mode a second time, and continued with the rest of the day. Staff had attempted to keep students calm, and had for the most part succeeded. "I wasn't really worried about my safety at all," said senior Matt Rice, "although it was certainly disconcerting when they put us back on lockdown because [the police] missed finding him the first time."

Sartori explains the suspect had concealed himself so well that it was difficult to find him during the searches. They also believed he had simply ducked in and out of the building. "I've never had a suspect holed up in a building like that," Sartori said, "This suspect was highly motivated... and he was good." He added, "A lot of this comes down to your best guesses with the knowledge you have at that time."

During the chase, the suspect was able to shake off a cuff, change his clothes, run in and out of a building, hide in a crowded school and use

props (his bag) to deceive police. At the same time, it was clear to Sears-Etter and the others that dealt with him that he was a desperate, confused man.

Sartori was pleased with the staff and student's handling of the situation, and he and the others involved see positives that came with the chaos of the day. "I did tell the staff that the school district couldn't afford this type of training," Sartori said. The events happened during a lunch hour, whereas drills usually do not, and students took the lockdown seriously because it was real. As for the glitches, Sartori said, "You can train, train, train, but a real-life incident is always going to bring to light issues that need to be addressed."

Ensuring security

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Last year, Community High performed two district-mandated lockdown drills. Students learned that "check your clocks" was code for an emergency lockdown, and both drills began with that phrase spoken over the PA system.

On September 25, during the school's first actual lockdown, Dean Peter Ways did not use the code phrase. What happened to "check your clocks"? "If we had said 'check your clocks' some people wouldn't have known what that meant," said Ways. He explained that emergency preparedness experts recently advised against codewords because it is advantageous for everyone in a locked-down building to hear the available information. "In a worst case scenario [during lockdown], someone's in school wielding a knife or a gun," said Ways. In that situation, people would need to know the position of the assailant in order to avoid that area or barricade certain doors. For this reason, according to Ways, "Schools across the country is being told not to use codewords" to introduce lockdowns. Another reason is that students will inevitably make up stories if they don't have the facts.

The guidelines are changing.

Before the September 25 lockdown, Community's lockdown guidelines "were not in one place," said Ways. Teacher e-mails and memos circulated and, consequently, inconsistencies emerged. For example, a teacher's memo with new lockdown procedure might contradict instructions in the district-provided flipchart. Perhaps most importantly, said Ways, "In the past these [lockdown] guidelines were not shared with students."

That changed on Tuesday, September 30, when forum leaders received a

purple sheet entitled "Updated Safety Guidelines," specifically to share with their forumettes. The single sheet is a clear, concise plan for future lockdowns. It contains crucial phone numbers and instructions that will help students and especially substitute teachers in the event of a future lockdown.

The recent lockdown has raised concern about student safety and school preparedness. Ways has received feedback since the lockdown, and although not a single parent or staff member has criticized the school response, a small number suggested implementing greater safety measures. According to Ways, one parent proposed adding Magnet Card Readers at Community entrances. Under this system, students and staff would be provided with a magnetic identification card that would open the doors. Ways said the chances of a Magnet Card system "is very unlikely. It's restrictive and hard to manage, and you'd have to have a person on the door for visitors.

"I think every [safety] suggestion must be considered," said Ways. In the coming days and weeks, Community's Safety Committee will discuss safety suggestions (such as locking certain first floor doors and windows) and forward some to the district, which has the ultimate say. The committee needs student and staff input, according to Ways.

The purple sheet contains guidelines. It is not a definitive policy, and, as Ways emphasized, lockdowns and school security must be a continuing conversation. "I'm persuaded by the notion that we [Community] are extra safe because we know each other well," said Ways. On the other hand, "We're downtown and freaky things may happen."

The newest lockdown guidelines

- **Emergency communication will be direct, with no code words.**
- **Students may call parents/guardian but should not call the press.**
- **"Shelter in Place" means that the outside doors will be locked, because there is a safety risk near the school.**
- **Everyone needs to know the locations and directions of their rooms (i.e. East, second floor).**
- **The Main Office is headquarters for all communication**
- **"Lock Down" means everyone is in a locked room or office, out of sight of the door and windows.**