

Chicago HISTORY

Bringing Attitude to History

The Teen Council

RAYMOND YANG



Above: Teen Council Coordinator Ray Yang (far right) meets with the Teen Council.

Below: Teen Council members planned a special teens-only celebration for the exhibition, which attracted more than 450 visitors.



Opposite: The Teen Council: Back row, left to right: Hai Minh Nguyen, Alana Heber, Teen Council Coordinator Ray Yang, Victoria Wigutow, Adam Salazar, Vanessa Alvarez, Charles Fox, Ari Fulton, Bakir Bicakcic, May Szeto. Front row, left to right: Erin Vaughn, Sable Griffin, Claire Elderkin, Matt Kane. Kneeling: Jerron Greer. Sitting: Landon Jones.

I looked forward to my first official day as the Teen Council Coordinator in July 2003 with great anticipation and a bit of trepidation. On the one hand, I was extremely excited to be rejoining the Teen Council; my time as an intern with the group had been a lot of fun. On the other hand, I was stepping into the shoes of the much-beloved Angela Rivers, the original Teen Council Coordinator. I was also entering the project not as a complete newcomer, but as someone who had become their friend over the last year. I was a little worried about how the transition of my position and the project as a whole was going to go.

Stepping into the Distance Learning Center as the new Teen Council Coordinator, the Teen Council greeted me as they always had: with enthusiasm, jokes, and some slight sarcasm. Once things had settled down, we went straight to work. They gave me an update on the last several months and everyone slid seamlessly into our new situation. I should not have been surprised. This group had impressed me from day one, and they seemed to have a knack for showing adults that they were responsible and mature beyond their years, while still maintaining just a bit of that teen attitude.

When I first met the Teen Council in September 2002, several things struck me. These fifteen teenagers made up a diverse group: ethnically, socially, geographically, even their personalities. Some craved the spotlight, while others didn't mind playing a supportive role. This group of teens most likely would never have crossed paths if this project had not brought them together. The teens took this opportunity to learn from one another about communities they had never visited, other cultures, other schools, other Chicagos. The group had already developed a tight bond after only being together for one summer, and I recall being a little intimidated as an intern when I sat in on my first Teen Council meeting. As an interloper into their space, how would I be accepted?





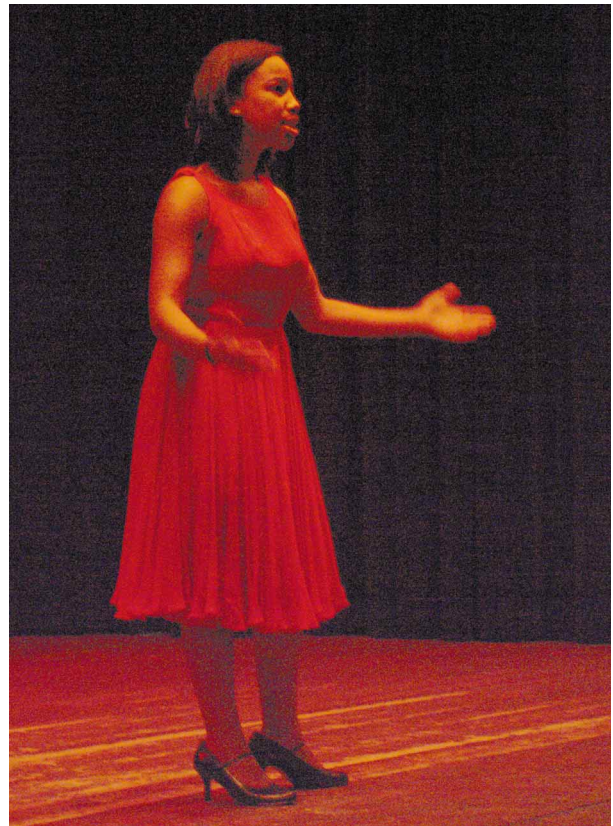
Teen Council members Claire Elderkin, Alana Heber, and May Szeto at work. During the school year, the council met every Saturday for two years working on the project. During the summer, the teens came to CHS Monday through Friday.

During my first-ever meeting with the Teen Council, they were having what I would come to know as a typically noisy Teen Council discussion. The thoughts and views that they brought to the discussion astounded me, and I listened quietly for a short while. When things began to get a little heated, they decided that they needed an outside perspective. Teen Council member Charles Fox shouted out that he wanted to know what “the new intern thought.” Put on the spot, I managed to mumble out an answer that the Teen Council did not seem to find satisfactory, so they pursued the matter by asking more probing questions. I don’t really remember what we talked about that day, but I do recall feeling a bit interrogated and frazzled! I also felt impressed, however, by these inquisitive young minds and how quick they were on their feet. I wondered if every Saturday was going to be this fast-paced, and to this day the Teen Council has yet to disappoint me.

Working with teens at the Chicago Historical Society (CHS) has been an amazing experience. The Teen Council has helped to break down the stereotypes of teens, one of the most important goals of the overall project. In fact, their involvement with the museum has benefited all involved. As the Teen Council has grown, so has CHS. When they first entered the museum, I think it would be fair to say that some people wondered whether this motley group of adolescents could accomplish the grand task of completing one hundred oral history interviews and contributing to the design and execution of a major exhibition. After all, isn’t everyone a little wary of teenagers and the things for which they always seem to be blamed? Adults today often complain that teens are rowdy, rude, inconsiderate, selfish, irresponsible, and their music is always too damn loud! But the CHS staff

often tell me just how impressed they are with the Teen Council and how these teens carry themselves so maturely. The Teen Council has altered the perceptions that many staff and volunteers had of teens, and they showed CHS how teens can accomplish great things when you give them a chance. As Teen Council member Hai Minh Nguyen stated, “Not all teens are problematic. Adults should focus on the good things teens do instead of the bad.”

This group of teenagers contains writers, artists, poets, techies, historians, and scientists. It’s impossible to classify them one way or another, and as I mentioned, that is one of their strengths. Their diversity allowed them to fit into the variety of roles that we carved out within the project. Among the group still at CHS, Landon and Jerron allowed their personalities to take over as emcees for our teens-only events. Ari was one of the masterminds behind the Teen Council play, *Coming of Age*, which was based on the oral histories collected by the teens. Vanessa has become an excellent spokesperson, appearing on television to discuss the project. Bakir was instrumental in the design and implementation of the website (www.teenchicago.org). And Alana has emerged as one of the strongest interviewers in the group. Each member of the group fits a role, and together they work as a formidable team.



*Teen Council member Erin Vaughn performed in *Coming of Age*, a production written by the teens.*



Teen Council members offered guided tours of the exhibition, sharing their perspectives on teen life—past and present—with visitors.



During their time at CHS, these teens built the foundation of the exhibition: the oral history collection. By interviewing more than one hundred Chicagoans about their teen years (reaching as far back as the 1910s), the Teen Council collected a picture of teen life throughout the century, and in doing so, created the centerpiece around which much of the exhibition was built. In addition to prominent Chicagoans such as historian and author Studs Terkel and rapper Kanye West, the interviews also featured the stories of everyday individuals in an attempt to represent the whole of Chicago: all races, neighborhoods, and decades. The stories included first dates, first jobs, and the assorted minutiae of teen life.

With the completion of the first phase of the project in June 2004, nine of our original Teen Council members graduated from high school and moved onto the next steps in their lives, as we are also doing with the Teen Chicago project. The six remaining teens, who are now high school seniors, remain at the museum performing a

variety of duties, including maintaining the website, creating expanded programming and events, planning oral history workshops and curriculum, and working on dissemination of the research and experience that is the Teen Chicago project. We are working to expand the scope of Teen Chicago and hope to reach not just the entire city of Chicago, but beyond. The Teen Council is ready to meet the challenge head on.

Raymond Yang is coordinator for the Teen Council.

Editor's Note

Every Teen Council member can describe the interviews with which they truly identified or that really touched them. These interviews and the Teen Council's thoughts on them follow. Alana discovers common ground with Harold Arai, who attended her current school as one of its first Asian American students in the 1950s. Roman Villareal's story of growing up with dreams of becoming an artist strikes a chord with Ari, a student at the Chicago Academy for the Arts. Bakir is shocked to discover the extent of bullying that Jodee Blanco endured, and how things haven't really changed. Jerron recounts an interesting and enlightening experience with the only paired interview, Deanne DeGraff and Roberta Cooper, lifelong friends and high school buddies. Landon learns a bit about tough times in Cabrini from David Maenza. And Yvette Moloney's stories of loss and World War II hit close to home for Vanessa.



*Editor's note: Teen Council member Vanessa Alvarez interviewed **Yvette Maloney**. Maloney grew up in Chicago and attended Lindblom Technical High School in the 1940s.*



During World War II, Americans of all ages helped collect newspapers and other items for the war effort. This 1945 paper salvage operation took place in the Rogers Park Office of Civil Defense. CHS, ICHi-22232.

a lot with her mother and two sisters due to their economic situation, but they always lived on Chicago's South Side. Sometimes they could afford a better apartment. I could relate to that experience, since my family and I have always moved a lot for similar reasons.

Yvette belonged to many clubs and activities in high school but she didn't belong to a specific clique. She didn't think she would fit in any of her high school cliques "because they have all those nice slips and sweaters or . . . because they have a lot of money or they have a really nice house." Instead she went out of her way to stand out: "I had a goal, something to shoot for. Be as

Vanessa Alvarez is a senior at Notre Dame School for Girls in Chicago.

have to admit that while interviewing Yvette Maloney, my first interviewee, I felt a rush of anxiety and excitement pervade my body. As I was about to interview a complete stranger who would share her personal experiences, I didn't know what

to expect, and I feared the unknown. I wondered if I was capable of conducting such a vital part of the *Teen Chicago* project. Nonetheless I tucked away these feelings of insecurity and doubt and put my best foot forward. Fortunately, Yvette and I hit it off very well from the start.

I was able to make personal connections and find similarities between her teenage experiences and my own in an interview that felt more like a casual conversation with a long-lost friend. It was definitely my favorite and most memorable interview. Thank you Yvette!

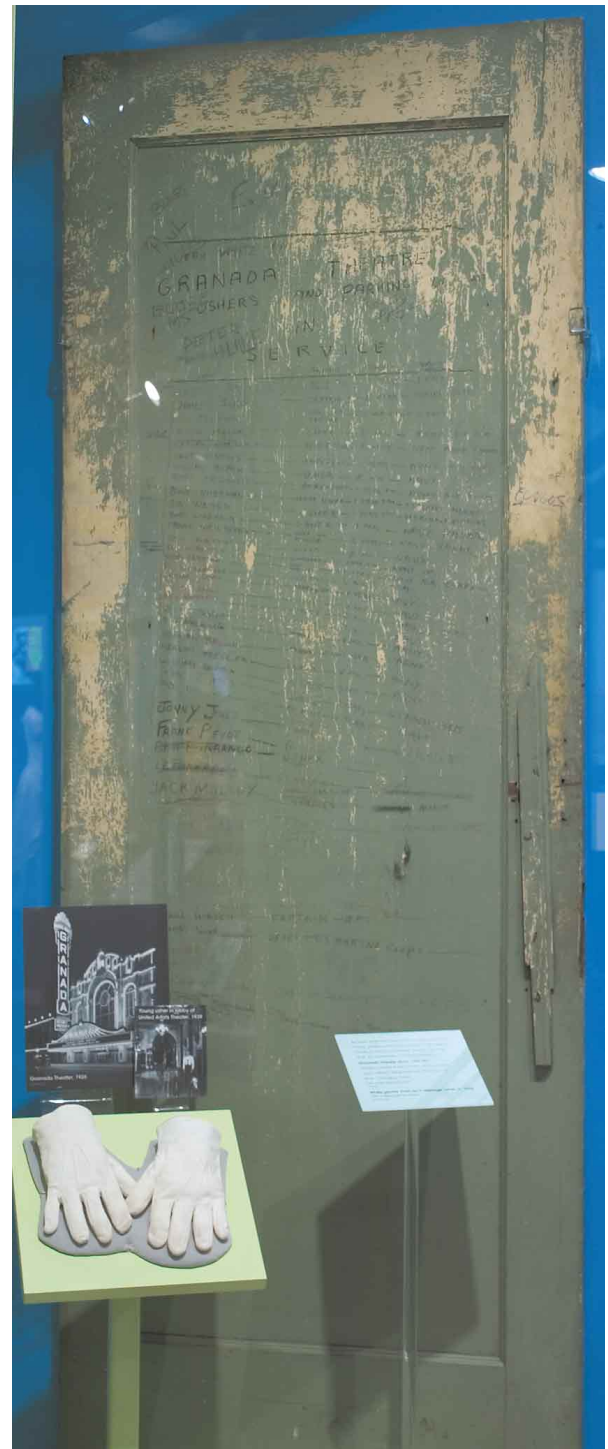
Yvette grew up in the 1940s. She moved



different as you could be." Like Yvette, I didn't belong to any clique in high school. I don't like the idea of being constrained to a specific clique. I have a group of friends that I share common ideas and interests with. But we certainly do not exclude or look down on other people, like most high school cliques do. I try to keep a very open mind when I meet new people. I look at their character and personal qualities rather than their economic background and what clothes they're wearing.

Yvette spoke very eloquently of her teenage years. I can vividly recall her describing her World War II experience: "We always did have a list in the hallway of all the ex-students and the kids' brothers who had died in the war. There was always that list." Before the war, she had never experienced tragedy. Death and dying instantly became a major factor as she grew up not only with the war but also with personal loss: her chemistry teacher Mr. Hall, who she admired very much, had a fatal heart attack, and some of her peers in her high school died of tuberculosis or in car accidents. She said, "It was just always so devastating 'cause you're so young and dying is so far away . . . well, I'm sure you know that." Yes, I knew exactly what she meant. Before the death of my fourteen-year-old godbrother, Ian, I thought of death as a very far-removed thing in life that only happened to old people. I was also able to make a personal connection between Yvette's experience with war and my own with that of September 11. Having experienced tragedy so near, I was able to connect with Yvette's feelings about death and war. Both of us came to realize at an early age how vulnerable we are.

After hearing Yvette's story, I've realized that regardless of what decade they grow up in, teenagers have always gone through similar life-changing experiences. We all share the same fears and hopes of being accepted and not rejected by our peers or society. We are individuals who are just beginning to get a taste of what life is really like. Every teen deals with emotional strain, which is normal and a part of the process of coming into young adulthood. Our clothing, style of music, and maybe even the way we interact with one another may change. But what remains the same is that our experiences are shaping us for adulthood.



From the 1920s to the 1970s, Granada Theatre ushers who were going off to war carved their names, occupations, and military assignments in the door to their dressing area. The door was displayed in the Teen Chicago exhibition.



Vanessa

Excerpts from Vanessa’s interview with Yvette Maloney

Vanessa Alvarez: *Do you remember discussing events, politics as a teen?*

Yvette Maloney: Well, we did because several very important things happened when I was teen. For one thing, the war started. Second world war. And the only president we had ever known died, Franklin Roosevelt. So those were very, very important things in the teen years. Especially the death of the president. Because he had been president for twelve years and at the time he died, I think I was thirteen by then. So that was devastating.

I was twelve years old when the war started and that was a terrible thing. My sister and I were out in the street. We had gone to the store and it was in December, so it was dark early and we heard the newspaper boys yelling, “Extra, extra, extra!” The Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor and we were just terrified. We just ran for home as fast as we could because we thought at any minute the planes would be overhead and bombing us too.

All through high school, the war was on so we were always involved with scrap drives and newspapers, bringing them to school, and patriotic rallies and buying savings stamps and savings bonds. That was the whole thrust of high school. So it was different than probably what you’re experiencing today.

We always did have a list in the hallway of all the ex-students and the kids’ brothers who had died in the war. There was always that list. And of course every day in the newspaper there was the list of the casualties. And of course there was the rationing.

It was very hard to get things, shoes especially. I was always walking around with holes in my shoes because you had to wait until the next stamp. You could use the next shoe stamp to buy shoes.

VA: *Did any of these events shape you as a teen and how?*

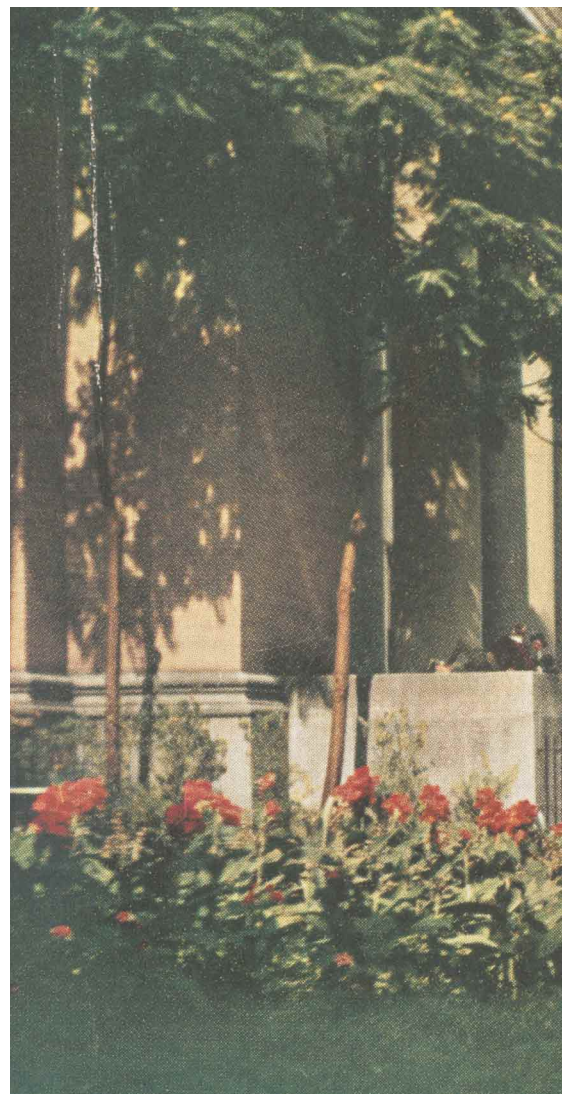
YM: Yeah, I think it made us more aware of our country and we certainly were very patriotic and that’s something that’s carried over. You don’t really lose that.

YM: We always lived in Chicago. And we lived on the South Side of Chicago. And we moved many, many, many, many times. We sat down one time and tried to make a list of all the places that we had lived and it seems like we must have moved every year.

VA: *And why did you guys move so often?*

YM: I think our economic situation changed and some times we had to move or some times we moved because we could afford a better place or different reasons. But we did move a lot.

YM: We had a chemistry teacher named Mr. Hall, and I think he was my favorite teacher. And I was really good in chemistry. I made the best cobalt and I knew all this stuff and he praised you a lot. I was kind of gabby and he would always say, “You, Yvette, I want you to make sure that nobody’s talking and that they all have their books open.”





Course I was the only one who was talking and the one without a book open. He used to tease me like this. One day we came to school, and the gym teacher sat us all down and said Mr. Hall had had a heart attack and died that morning and oh, it was so sad. I was just devastated because I just loved Mr. Hall, you know. So that was a kind of traumatic thing.

Death is sad to young kids. When I was in high school, every semester it seemed like some kid . . . died of tuberculosis. You know we don't hear of that any more but then it seemed like somebody was always dying of tuberculosis. . . . A couple of times kids were in car accidents and died. It was just always so devastating 'cause you're so young and dying is

so far away that it just, well, I'm sure you know that, you're affected more by death I think than older people are. So those were kind of traumatic things but overall I really enjoyed the high school. I really did.

VA: *And who did you talk about death with? Did you keep it inside?*

YM: We talked to each other. You know, kids talked to each other. I talked to my mother but we didn't have like now, grief counselors and things like that. They didn't have people like that around to help you.

VA: *What types of peer groups were in your school, and did you belong to one?*

YM: Oh, no. I prided myself, like, "I'll reject you before you can reject me." I thought, "Well, I wouldn't fit in with them because they have all those nice slips and sweaters," or "I wouldn't fit in with them because they have a lot of money or they have a real nice house. Well," I thought, "I won't have to bother with any of them." And so I went out of my way to be different.

And some of the kids sneaked and smoked. I never wore makeup and I wore two braids which were wet all the time because I was always in the swimming pool and that's the way I went through high school.

Lindblom Technical High School, Yvette's alma mater, in 1945. Photograph from The Eagle, Lindblom Technical High School Yearbook, 1945.





And there was a boy in high school, he was really cute, and he kind of liked me. He sent his friend to ask if I ever wore lipstick or anything. And I said, "No, I don't." You know, if you can't join 'em, lick 'em.

So I didn't belong any groups. And I didn't really like them. I had my sister and we liked doing the things that we liked to do. We were sort of backwards children. We stayed children a long time.

VA: What types of peer groups were there?

YM: Well, they weren't too many rich kids. They were the

real smart kids, who sort of stuck together and there were the real social kids, who sort of stuck together, and then there were the fast kids, they sort of stuck together. And you recognized all these people in which group they belonged. I didn't belong to any of them.

VA: What do you mean by the fast group?

YM: You know the fast girls that hung out with the boys, you know, fast girls.

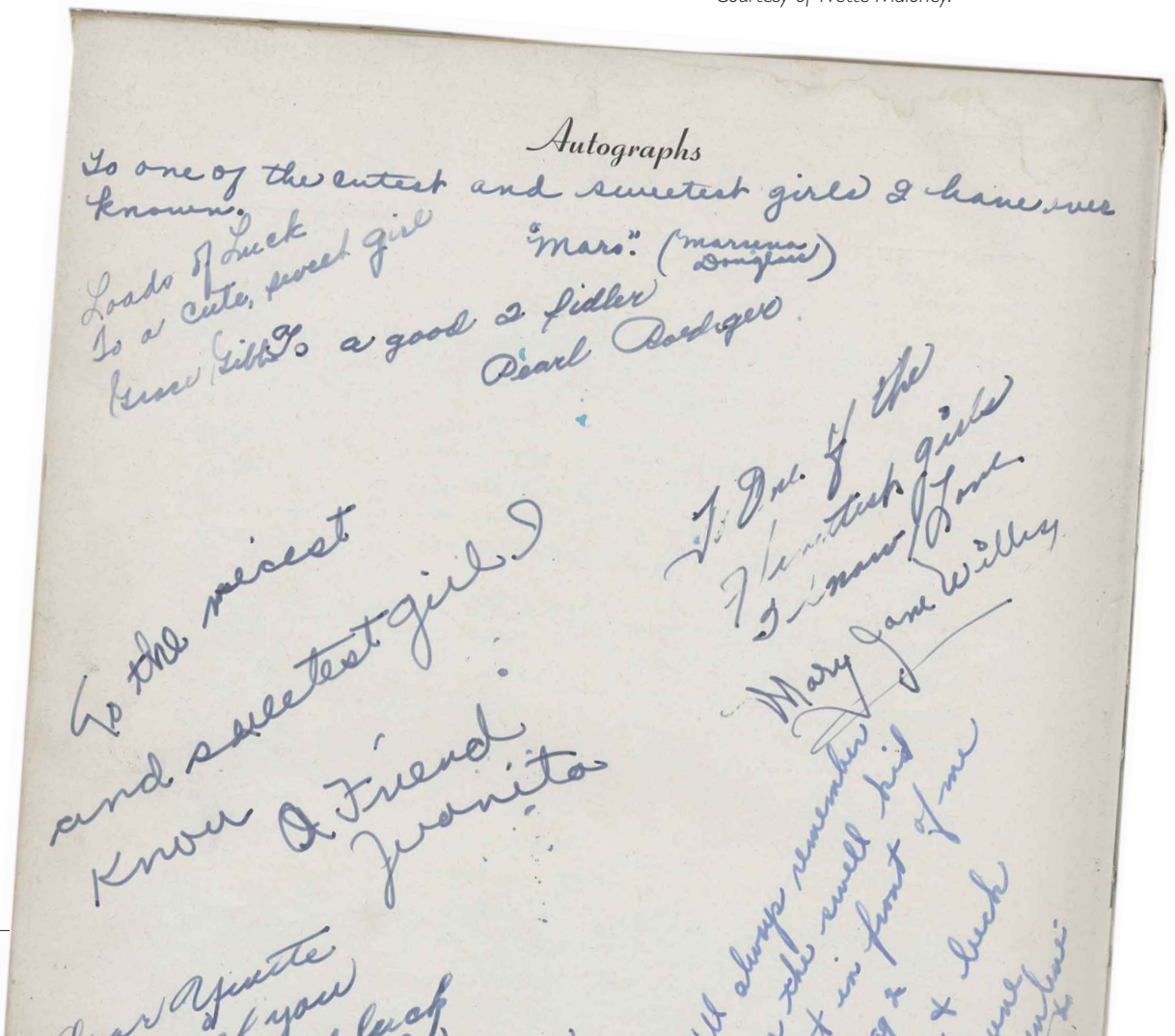
VA: Yeah, I know what you mean. How did that affect you? The peer groups?

YM: Oh, it just made me feel even more superior. I'm sure deep down it did bother me somewhat you know, but I just you know put up this front and talked myself into thinking I was better than they were anyway.

VA: But it worked, right?

YM: Yeah, it did. Got me through. I had a goal, something to shoot for. Be as different as you could be.

Signing high school yearbooks is a long-standing tradition. Many of Maloney's fellow students signed her high school yearbook, describing her as "cute," "sweet," and "swell."
Courtesy of Yvette Maloney.



Autographs

To one of the cutest and sweetest girls I have ever known.
Loads of luck
Is a cute, sweet girl
Sweet little girl a good & fidler
Pearl Rodgers

"Mars" (Marianne Simpson)

To the nicest and sweetest girl I know
Friend
Janita

To one of the sweetest girls I know
Mary Jane Willey

Dear Yvonne
I love you
I love you

I'll always remember
you're swell
& in front of me
& luck
I love you
I love you



Landon



*Editor's note: Teen Council member Landon Jones interviewed **David J. Maenza**. Maenza, a photographer, publisher, and author of Chicago USA, has photographed Chicago for more than forty years.*

When I first heard that I would be included in the Dave Maenza interview, I immediately called for the position of tech (all you had to do was pop a tape in, take a hour-and-a-half nap, and listen for the tape to stop). I didn't want to be the interviewer, because I had grown tired of doing two-hour interviews about

nothing. Most of the interviewees spent a lot of time talking about their adult lives and their grandchildren, and they didn't seem to understand the title Teen Chicago. I always felt cheated because they didn't emphasize issues dealing with growing up, race, and the special juice that makes being a teenager juicy. Dave Maenza proved me wrong, made an impression on my life, and changed my emotions toward judging people.

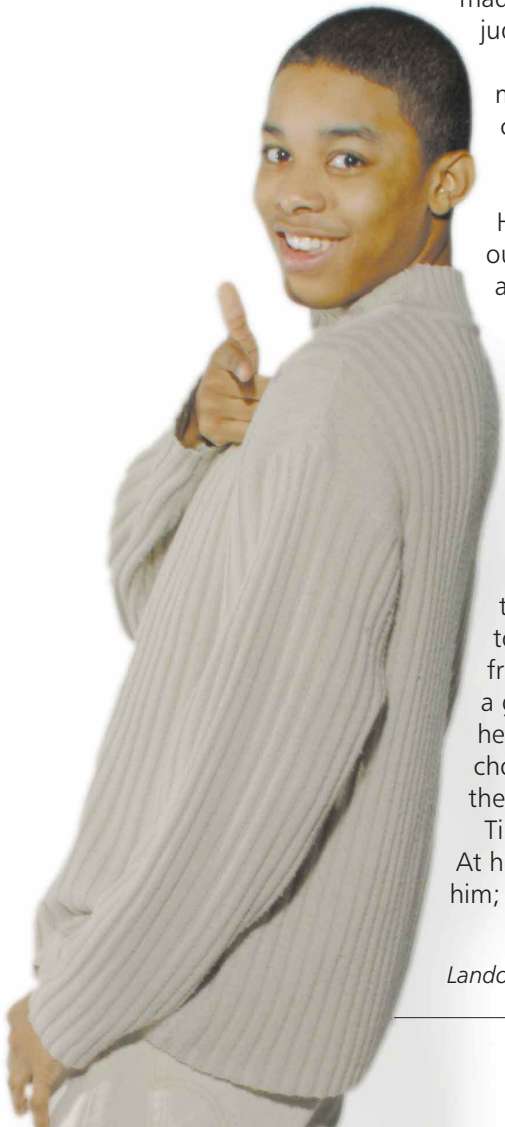
Dave instantly became one of my favorite interviews because he made a good impression when I met him. He gave me a signed copy of his book and a whole new experience with his interview.

He spoke with passion during the interview and explained each scene so vividly that I actually felt like I was back in the 1940s.

He spoke about Cabrini and how he and his friends would hang out and play baseball; he talked about wearing square-toed shoes and ducktail haircuts. He kept the interview on a personal basis: this was his story. It was all about him, which was good because I already knew about World War II. I wanted to hear about his life. He grew up in Cabrini and said it was like a country in a city, because he lived with all types of people. When it was time for all the kids to go home, he would hear mothers call out their children's names in all types of languages.

He also told us about the street gangs in the communities and how they would go around and intimidate people. If they were at the same party as you they would come up to you and the girl you were dancing with and snatch her away. If you tried to fight back, you would get jumped, which isn't much different from now. At parties, you still see people get jumped whether over a girl or because they are rival members of a gang. I enjoyed when he talked about playing sports with his friends. He wasn't always chosen to play but he made up for that by being the manager of the team or equipment.

Times were not always easy for Dave at home or anywhere else. At home he had a father that disliked him and always tried to harm him; his only form of protection was his mother. His father's attitudes



Landon Jones is a senior at Simeon Career Academy in Chicago.



Landon



Dave Maenza grew up in the Frances Cabrini Homes on the city's Near North Side in the 1940s. CHS.

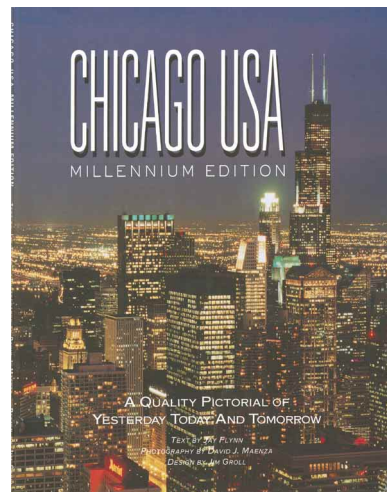
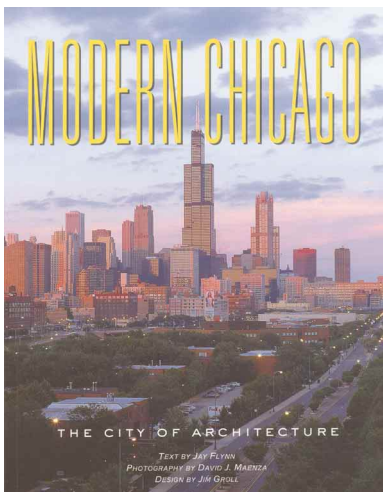
toward him upset him. Dave said that he never got a pat on the back or a "Good job, son" from his father, and he wished he had that. Like him, I never really had a father who was there for me when I had achieved major accomplishments. In school, Dave and I experienced similar problems with teachers finding an excuse for punishing us. He didn't make good grades and eventually had to leave school. He also had a hard time finding acceptance; he wasn't involved with gangs and sometimes his friends turned on him.

When he was about seventeen years old, his mother died. Soon after that his father found a new girlfriend, and Dave was forced to leave his home. He spent his "first night" as he calls it "in a one-room hotel with the single light bulb swinging back and forth." He went off to find work and did certain

odd jobs, such as being a dance instructor, until he decided that he wanted to be a photographer, his current job.

Dave's interview was like a movie: it had drama, romance, action, and suspense. I began to see that his teenage life was no different from mine. I have grown up around a diverse group of people and he and I share creative interests. His interview has given me all the inspiration I need to go back and have a better respect for the interviewees. Now whenever I know I have to do an interview, I go in with the impression

that these people are eager to have their story told. I now appreciate the stories that are told to me, because these stories are the core of history. Everyone can talk about and admire the people in history books, but you find out through these interviews that the average people are not so average at all.



Maenza's books of his photography of the city include *Modern Chicago* and *Chicago USA: Millennium Edition*. Courtesy of David J. Maenza.



Landon

Excerpts from Landon’s interview with David Maenza



Maenza played many sports with his friends. Above: Maenza (front and center) with his team, including fellow oral history interviewee Harold Arai (furthest right in the front row). Photograph courtesy of David J. Maenza.

DM: Unfortunately, it’s meaner today, and it was a hell of a lot more innocent. It was nicer and sweeter. And if you’re in the housing projects like I was and you were playing ball and this black kid would be standing there and you would say, “Hey kid, you want to play?” “Yeah.” And you started playing with them, not realizing that your mother and father and your grandfather were still carrying the crap around in their head, like “Stay away from the Polacks” and “Stay away from the blacks” and all. Well, we never looked at the world that way. “Who’s playing shortstop? Get Jimmy Shaven. He’s good.” I never walked around with the thought of a Polack or a Jew, “Stay away from him, he’s Jimmy DaGoosman” and the Cuban kid and Oscar Dougherty down the street and Morose the Greek kid. I mean,

Landon Jones: What did you do during your free time? You mentioned a lot of baseball.

David Maenza: Played all sports. I used to drive my mother nuts because I was always the captain of the team or the manager of the team. At 826 North Cambridge the lot was over there and my house was here and the shoulder pads and the hockey sticks and the pucks and the baseball equipment ended up in the hall closet. My mother would say, “Oh geez, here comes spring, I gotta get ready for baseball. They’re gonna be pulling the bats and stuff

out.” Then as a teenager we froze the backyard with permission of the fire department. They squirted a hose all over the place and we played hockey. And my mother said, “Oh geez, now it’s hockey sticks and pucks and stuff.” I mean every season there was a sport and football, shoulder pads, and the whole thing ended up in the closet right at the door. “Let’s go to Dave’s house.” You know, you pass out the equipment and whatever fit.

LJ: So how is the world now different than when you were a teenager?



Maenza and his friends sometimes cut classes to see movies at the Chicago Theatre on State Street. CHS, ICHI-29320.



Landon



Maenza (third from right) and his friends sport the ducktail hairstyles and pleated pants that were so popular among teenagers during the 1940s. Photograph courtesy of David J. Maenza.

while they're in the house maybe, knocking the "damn Polacks" and the "damn Greeks" and "those black people are taking over, they're moving in by the carload." It never affected us. We kids never thought like that.

LJ: So was it something that you were conscious of?

DM: Well, I got surprised when I saw a black kid. I thought, how neat. He must've been in the sun a hell of a long time. That is terrific the way he looks. But the black kids that you would talk to, they were just nice guys.

They were good buddies. I remember in our teenage years, Mr. Harris was our black coach and after a ball game we were sometimes invited to his backyard on Cleveland Avenue, on Mohawk Avenue, to have barbeque spare ribs. It was neat. "The game's over, let's go to Mr. Harris's house and have some food." But then Mrs. Ari, the Japanese woman, would introduce us to sushi. I'm extremely lucky; I'm a fortunate guy. Cuban food was on the menu. And spaghetti, that was real big, and they made pizzas.

I graduated eighth grade in 1949 from St. Phillip Anise School on the corner of Cambridge and Oak Streets, called ourselves the '49ers. My first year was at Tooley. I wanted to go to Wells because Ramsey Lewis was there and your buddies are there and it for me it was a life of invention. Without bragging, I'm terribly creative. I mean you can throw any problem at me and I'm going to solve it. But in school and math and studies and all that, 70 was passing. I got a 71. By the skin on my teeth, you know.

I remember seventh grade as a teenager I ditched one day because I wanted to run with the boys. We had a way of going to the Chicago Theatre. One guy would pay and one guy would open the door and twenty or thirty of us would pour in the door and filter throughout the theater and the ushers were looking for who came in. I remember shrinking down in the seats. Thought we were pretty cool until I got back to school the next day and the nun was Sister Mary Luger, I'll never forget, beat the hell out of my hands. Held them out and slapped them. The ruler. And I tried to con her and tell her I was ill or sick and they had evidently called. I ditched once in my life out of school. I wanted to be one of the guys.



Alana

*Editor's Note: Teen Council member Alana Heber interviewed **Harold Arai**. Arai and his family came to live in Chicago after World War II. He recently retired from his dental practice on the city's North Side.*

Prior to my interview with Harold Arai, I was completely unaware that he had attended the same high school (Francis W. Parker School) as I do. Arai is a successful dentist of Japanese descent. I found his teen experience to be very

admirable and unique from any other oral history I conducted over the course of the Teen Chicago project. I was especially impressed by Arai's ability to look back on his teen experience and almost critique it. As a teenager, he surpassed the rigid racial boundaries of the time and spoke of his memories very eloquently.

During World War II, Arai and his family were placed in Japanese internment camps in California. After the war, he and his family moved to Chicago into the Frances Cabrini Homes, which were economically and racially diverse in the post-World War II era. The Arai family was looking for new opportunities, away from the oppression they had experienced in California. Francis W. Parker School, in an attempt to racially diversify, offered Arai a scholarship, and he became one of the first Asian Americans ever to attend the school.

Harold Arai was an anomaly in more ways than one. In addition to attending a predominantly upper-class private school while living in Cabrini, he had to assimilate himself within the black and white tensions of his neighborhood. Since he was of Japanese descent, Arai recalls being accepted by both groups and having many separate groups of friends that would not get along if they met.

Arai attributes much of his indifference to racial boundaries and acceptance of all people to the racism and cruelty his family faced due to their Japanese heritage during World War II. As a teenager, Arai formulated very mature opinions on the various conflicts he faced. Instead of choosing to assimilate into a group or race, Arai befriended everybody and learned eternally valuable lessons.

Aside from the fact that Harold Arai and I both attended the same school, our teen experiences are very different. Despite this, the interview, along with the others conducted by the Teen Council, truly opened my eyes to a wealth of stories and lessons and the great vastness of Chicago as a whole. I discovered a common underlying theme of every teen experience—the questioning of authority and society along with an urge to separate from the restraints of childhood. What changes are the ways in which teenagers go about doing these things, which may be referred to by adults or authority figures as being lewd, lascivious, or rebellious behavior.

I feel that both Arai and I got a lot out of this interview. We were both given a chance to reflect, him on the past and myself on the present.

Alana Heber is a senior at Francis W. Parker School in Chicago.



Excerpts from Alana's interview with Harold Arai



Alana shows off her bedroom, 2004.

Alana Heber: *Do you have any enduring memories of your teen years?*

Harold Arai: . . . I learned a lot. I learned a lot of street smarts. When you live in that particular area, mind you both my parents, my mother was highly educated, was an educator, and my dad had a very middle-class job, but being forced to live in that environment, in an area where on the Near North Side in the Cabrini Projects, I guess the word is survival.

AH: *Was it a lot nicer back then than it is now?*

HA: Oh, yes, it was. It was, at that time, nicer because there were a lot of people that had gone to war. They were forced to move into that area [after the war] and you had some semblance of family there. I think now probably

there's a predominance of probably single families or divorced families, hence the problems that they have right there, from what I can gather. I mean, I've not been back there. But . . . a lot of the kids that were there were blue-collar kids, I mean, kids from blue-collar families. Mostly Italian and Irish living in that area. At the time, the black population was along the outskirts of the projects. Some had gotten in, although it was [public] housing, I think there was preferential living for people that worked with the government during the war at that particular time.

AH: *Was it nice to have so many different people from all different cultures and countries in your neighborhood?*

HA: Yeah, I learned a lot. I learned a lot because . . . the area was surrounded by a lot of ethnic groups such as Italians. The Italian area at that time was very strong from the border near Larrabee Street, and the main two schools were Saint Patrick's and Saint Phillip's. Everything revolved in the Catholic religion around these two particular churches. And every year, they would have a feast. And this feast was supposed to be religious in nature [and] basically was a way of celebrating the life of Christ and a lot of the things were based upon that. They sold a lot of chances. A lot of it appeared to be like money, etc. They had the angels walking across buildings like trapeze artists. They had, as I recall, statues of Jesus. I think . . . what probably shocked me [most] was the fact of seeing Jesus coated



The Frances Cabrini Homes on Chicago's Near North Side opened in 1942. Above: Cabrini residents, May 1951. Photograph by Mildred Mead. CHS, ICHI-36794.



While most of his neighborhood friends went to nearby Catholic high schools, Arai attended Francis W. Parker. Above: Parker students stroll between classes, 1952. CHS, ICHI-36369.

with money because . . . the immigrants felt that that's the best thing to do, to put a dollar bill or a five-dollar bill, and your life would be much better at that time. So everything revolved around the two churches at the time.

There was a public school called the Edward Jenner [Elementary] School, and my parents were not Catholic. My parents were both Protestant . . . and strongly rebuked the idea that I, as their only child, should go to a Catholic school. So, I ended up

going to a public school. Now, mind you, the public school at that time was a school wedged in-between the two Catholic schools. Whereas the private Catholic schools were I'd say 98 percent, almost 100 percent Caucasian in nature, again being Italian and Irish, the Edward Jenner School was all black. And there was friction between the two groups at that particular time. And it was a time in my life where I learned a lot. In fact, one of my closest friends is now one

of the jazz artists, Ramsey Lewis. He was in a class, I believe, ahead of me. And he is now a commentator for WNUA and went to school there, and he grew up in [Cabrini]. . . .

So, going to that particular school, and then, in the afternoon, coming back and having to assimilate myself with non-whites was quite a contrast. Because I was kind of the only Oriental or Asian American in the whole group, and I think they learned a lot from me as well as I learned a lot from them. . . . I could tell you that one of the problems that the kids had when they were growing up is that they didn't have any, shall we say, goals or aspirations. They were really going day-to-day. I mean, they would steal something or they would break a window and that was, to them, fun. There were a lot of fights in the area, generally between black and white, and yet there was respect within the area, as long as you kind of stayed in your territory. And I was kind of an anomaly, because I went to a public school with all blacks, but a lot of my friends [from home were white], and I was on the baseball team. My athletics were on the baseball team in school. And then I came back and then I would, you know, I had to assimilate myself. So it was a very interesting time in my life. I enjoyed it. As I look back on it now . . .

AH: *It made you a better person?*

HA: Yeah, I think it did. It made me stronger. . . . My dad would kick us in the pants and say, "You



Arai graduated at the top of his middle-school class and received a scholarship to Francis W. Parker. Above: A mechanical drawing class at Parker, 1946. CHS, ICHI-36487.

got to get out of this particular life,” and he gave me an incentive to do it. And I can probably count on my left hand the people that I know that probably died because of going to prison. . . . On the other hand, I know about four or five other people that have been very successful in life, such as Ramsey, Ezra Smith, John Burton, some guys that I know very well. So I was in this black/white kind of mix out there, and it proved to be very, very strong.

AH: *Were there any major personal events that shaped your life during your teenage years, and why?*

HA: I would say the opportunity to go to Francis Parker was probably one of the key events of my life. As an eighth grader . . . I was lucky to be at the top of my class, won some awards, academic awards. I then had to . . . go

[from a public school] to a school, Francis Parker, where you had the Pritzkers, the Rosenbergs and as a result, you know, I went from one income group to another income group. I had to take my ducktails and cut them down, [take] my peg

pants and make them look like regular pants, and I did look like a young, you know, city slicker that had come in. I also had to learn how to speak English. By that I mean I never spoke Japanese, but you learn a culture down in the projects how to speak. You swear a lot, and you describe everything that you see via some profanity, and I really had to clean up my act. So that was the first major [actually], I would say the second major, the first being, of course, being uprooted from our homes in California and put into those camps for five years, and then being uprooted there and then coming to Chicago and going to Parker and then my collegiate career.

In the late 1940s and 1950s, Parker officials sought to diversify the school, and top-ranked students from other parts of the city, such as Arai, quickly became attractive candidates for enrollment. Below: Parker students enjoy their lunch, 1949. CHS, ICHI-26960.





Deanne DeGraff

Editor's note: Teen Council member Jerron Greer interviewed **Roberta Cooper** and **Deanne DeGraff**. Cooper and DeGraff grew up on Chicago's North Side in the 1950s. They remain friends today.

Roberta Cooper and Deanne DeGraff are prime examples of the real meaning of "teenager." They were teens in the 1950s. They have been best friends forever, and they have never stopped



Cooper and DeGraff loved Chicago's Riverview Park, especially rides like the Pair-o-Chutes, shown above in 1956. CHS, ICHI-20029.

talking to each other. This is what they had to say.

Roberta and Deanne were both very close to their families. Roberta lived with her mother, father, and sister. Roberta's mother was a housewife, and her father was a custom tailor. Two of his accounts were with the Detroit Lions and the Chicago Cardinals football teams. He didn't make their uniforms, but he made their business suits. Roberta grew up around football, because her father used to bring football players home. Roberta's father even appears in *Paper Lion*, author George Plimpton's book about training with the Detroit Lions.

Deanne had a brother who was five years older than her, and a mother and father whom she adored. She describes her mother as assertive, "a doll of a woman," and her father as "a really wonderful, soft-spoken, great man." Her parents died two years apart when Deanne was in her twenties. Her father had Parkinson's disease. She remembers that he often stayed in the kitchen when her dates came to pick her up: "The reason I think he did that was he felt that he'd be a burden to me. That when a young man would see that he was ill they wouldn't want to date me. . . . He didn't want to . . . hurt my chances at a normal dating

regime. So that's something."

Roberta lived in Albany Park and attended Baltic Grammar School. She and all of her friends had to walk to school, but it was only a few blocks. Deanne still remembers her home phone number. She lived by Foster and rode the bus to school in the morning and walked home after school if it was nice outside.

Jerron Greer is a senior at George Henry Corliss High School in Chicago.





Fond memories of Riverview included two-cent day. Cooper and DeGraff marveled at how much fun they could have for so little money. Above: A couple splashes in a Water Bug, May 1950. CHS, ICHi-37734.

Both of these intelligent women attended Von Stuben High School. Their high school was predominately Jewish, although there was a mixture of students from all types of families—some elite, some middle class, and some working class. Roberta said, “I absolutely loved high school, everything about it.” Their high school experience wasn’t very different from school today: hard classes, easy classes, study hall, and detention. They had a dress code. Deanne told me, “You dressed appropriately. What was considered appropriately? You wore skirts, you wore a sweater, you wore a blouse. . . . Sleeveless, they’d let us wear, but not off the shoulder.” No jeans and you didn’t show any skin. To be honest, they said, they were afraid of their teachers. In fact, Deanne remembers her teacher failing his own child.

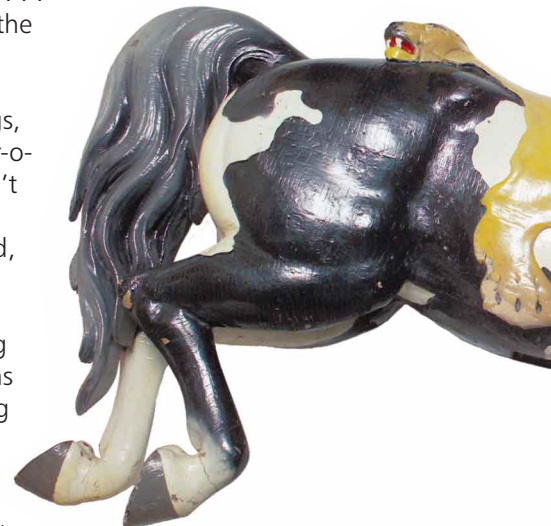
During lunchtime, they would go to the school theater or the assembly hall where they could talk and dance as much as they wanted.

They shared plenty of stories about society’s attitude toward dating and sex. They told me that they didn’t have the birth-control pill, but it didn’t mean that people weren’t having sex. “Listen,” said Deanne, “I think there was a sexual taboo, but that doesn’t mean that sex didn’t take place. . . . It happened. . . . We would talk about the nice girl and the good girl, and the nice girl went all the way and the good girl [did] not.”

I asked them what they did for fun and they told me about a place called Riverview. It was a carnival in Chicago with lots of rides, like today’s Six Flags, but “more reasonable.” The rides they liked were the Bob, Silver Streak, Pair-o-Chutes, and Aladdin’s Castle. They also told me it had things that they didn’t like so much, such as freak shows.

So, when I asked them if things had changed from then to now, they said, “Not really.” There is still the same school thing and home thing, and then you have your fun.

I picked this interview because Roberta and Deanne lived fun and fulfilling lives as teenagers in Chicago. They did the same things we do today, such as going to the movies, hanging out with friends, going to school, and dealing with everyday life. I can relate to this interview, because as they said, times are not so different if you really think about it. They were both open to answering all the questions I asked. They didn’t hold anything back, and they were very free and energetic. I would like to thank Roberta Cooper and Deanne DeGraff for a great interview and for sharing lots of very interesting information.





In August 1963, these thrill-seekers rounded the curve of the Bobs roller coaster, another favorite of Cooper and DeGraff's. CHS, ICHI-36463. Below: After Riverview's closing, its famed carousel, minus a single horse, found a home at the Six Flags outside of Atlanta. CHS acquired the missing horse in 2003.



Excerpts from Jerron's interview with Roberta Cooper and Deanne DeGraff

Roberta Cooper: We grew up with Riverview . . . That's where you went for fun. Nothing compares to it. . . . In the summer you had two-cent day on Fridays, and it was reasonable, and it was just a lot of fun. Nothing is like that.

Deanne DeGraff: Nothing today.

Jerron Greer: *So what did you guys do, what kind of activities?*

RC: It was just like now, but it was a different kind of rides, the Bobs, the Silver Streak, Aladdin's Castle. You probably never heard of any of these things.

JG: *What did you do on these rides? How did they work?*

DD: Just like you would go to Great America.

JG: *Where was Riverview?*

DD: Riverview was on Belmont [Avenue].

RC: Western and Belmont.

DD: It's not there any more.

RC: It was there for years. I can't explain it but it was much more . . . than the things nowadays, including Great America. I'm sure you could go buy something to eat there and you could afford it, along with the two-cent day. I know what it costs to go to Great America, because we take our grandchildren.



On July 2, 1904, Riverview Park opened its gates and instantly delighted Chicagoans. Above: An aerial view of Riverview, c. 1955. CHS, ICHIi-34893.

DD: And we brought lunches. Our grandmother would, I don't know about you, Roberta, did your grandma . . . take you or your mom? Sometimes we would go when we were very young.

RC: . . . We would take the streetcar.

DD: But my grandmother used to pack lunches and so we would go and you would have a wonderful day there.

RC: It was different.

DD: Yeah, it was. It was a wonderful thing. . . .

DD: When I was eleven-years old, I used to travel from the West Side of Chicago to down Pulaski, which [was] Crawford.

JG: *By yourself?*

DD: Yes, by myself.

RC: Yes, I'd go to my grandmother's on the West Side . . . and take all the public transportation.

DD: You took the Ravenswood. We took, I lived in Budlong Woods, so that's between Francisco, it's between California,



Foster, Bryn Mawr, and Kedzie. At that time, I took a bus on Foster Avenue and there was a, I remember something that affected me. There was a new park called River Park that was built between 1948 and 1952. . . . It was a beautiful park on the south side of Foster, Foster and like Francisco, or whatever. I used to get off the bus at night myself. I used to whistle a lot. You'd see a 7:00 show and then it would be over at 9:00 and you stood on the corner and talked to all your friends. . . . All the kids that

went to the show would loiter. I don't remember them every asking us to leave if we loitered on the corner . . .

I remember that I came home one day to hear my mother talking . . . to a friend and the friend must have said, "You heard about the drowning at River Park?" And I heard my mother say to this friend, "Deanne loves swimming. I'm not going to take it away from her." In other words, she was putting fear into my mother. My mother had enough fears of herself. She worried about it, but she said, "She knows how to swim. It'll be all right." I realized I think for the first time in my life how hard it is to become a parent, because they have to go through so many things. I was like 14 or 15 and I heard my mother having to explain [that] I'm still going to go to this River Park pool. I realized it's difficult when you raise children because you do worry about them, but you've got to let them fly. So you've got to let them do things.

RC: Let me tell them one thing that I see a difference of today's generation and ours. Today's generation has something over ours that nobody can speak to—it's wonderful. In our time, if you did not have a date on a Saturday, you didn't show your face. We would go to somebody's house if they were babysitting. . . . We used to walk down the street and [pull] what is called a babushka and hide, hoping nobody would see us, because you didn't show your

face on a Saturday night. Nowadays, we have grandchildren, 15, 16, 18, and young and all that. They can go anywhere on a Saturday, any night. They have friends, boys and girls are friends. It's all different. Boys and girls weren't friends really, you know, where they would see each other on Saturday night. You only went with a boy on a Saturday night if you had a date. Otherwise you had to hide, and that is a difference that nowadays I think you can't beat.

DD: Roberta, I don't remember hiding.

RC: Well, I do.

DD: . . . And there was smoking. We didn't realize how terrible smoking was.

RC: Right, my parents bought my cigarettes. There was nothing wrong with it. We didn't know it wasn't healthy. I smoked for forty years. We really didn't know it wasn't healthy. We smoked, and there was nothing wrong with it at all.

DD: Well, I know my parents didn't like me smoking, and I would hide the cigarettes, but I would smoke maybe five cigarettes a day. It's the only thing my girlfriends taught me.

RC: There must have been something when we grew up that my mother always said, "I really don't want you to take cigarettes from anybody. I'll be glad to buy you the cigarettes." And she did.

DD: But they really didn't know.



Cooper and DeGraff were teenagers during the Korean War. Above: More than sixty English girls who married American soldiers arrived from Europe aboard the U.S.S. Barry, c. 1952. CHS, ICHI-37736.

JG: At what age do you think you became a teen?

RC: A teen?

JG: At what age?

DD: At thirteen, I would say, although I grew up much earlier I think because of my dad's illness.

RC: Thirteen.

DD: We would always try to act older. We would go down, I have to tell you, we would go down to

the Walgreen's downtown, and I remember sitting with my mother one day, and I said, "That sailor is looking at me, mother." And she'd say to me, "Deanne, how do you know he's looking at you unless you're looking at him?"

We'd . . . make calls at the phone booth in there so that we would get some attention. You don't walk down the street today and see sailors and soldiers

coming in. I hope you don't have to see it again, but what I'm saying is that there [was] Great Lakes, and they would all come in on their furloughs, but they'd come into Chicago to see the sights, and it was something to see. State Street was beautiful and Michigan Avenue was gorgeous.



Ari

Editor's note: Teen Council member Ari Fulton interviewed Roman Villareal. Villareal grew up in Chicago's South Shore neighborhood in the 1960s.



The 1960s is my favorite decade from the twentieth century, so I was thrilled when I

heard I was going to participate in Roman Villareal's interview.

I arrived at Roman's house on a frigid winter morning. He lives in his childhood home, which rests on a narrow block surrounded by slender frame houses. I stepped lightly up the icy steps and was greeted warmly. Before the interview began, Roman gave me a tour of his apartment, which seemingly housed hundreds of paintings, prints, and sculptures. I was overwhelmed and inspired by his collection. Color consumed every wall and corner. After hearing the stories behind some of his favorite pieces, we began the interview.

Roman was a teenager during the 1960s. He grew up in the South Shore neighborhood, which at the time was comprised of mostly Mexican immigrants. The Villareal family lived in a cozy apartment filled with love. Roman spoke candidly, and I was instantly drawn into his teenage years.

Roman and I had similar teen experiences. We are both South Side natives, and we both found an early attraction toward art. During the interview, I found myself empathizing with Roman's struggle to tell his family he wanted to be an artist: "In a strange way I knew I was going to be an artist. This was because this was my passion."

Similar to Roman, I found myself longing to make art, which also caused great concern among my family and friends about my future. The Villareal family also discouraged Roman's interest in art. Reluctantly, he submitted and devoted more time to his work in the steel mills.

Roman describes the steel mills as an economic utopia for people living in South Shore. He credits the mills with raising the Latino population from working class to middle class. Most people who lived in the community worked in



Villareal grew up in Chicago's South Shore neighborhood. Above: A residential street in South Chicago, 1982. Photograph by David Plowden.

Ari Fulton is a senior at the Chicago Academy for the Arts. Top: Ari in her bedroom, 2004.



Villareal spent his young working years in the South Chicago steel mills, but by the early 1980s, the era of big industry in Chicago was over. Top: Blast furnace of Valley Mould and Iron Co., 1956.

Photograph by William Siegel.

Above: View of the Calumet River, looking south from the 100th Boulevard bridge. Photograph by David Plowden.

the mills for some span of time, and Roman was no exception.

At the age of sixteen, he began working in the steel mills part time, hoping to earn a promotion after high school. Despite the obstacles, he was still able to connect his work back to art. One day, while cleaning a steel runner, Roman discovered excess clay surrounding the steel. He began molding the extra clay into small tribal-like heads. His creativity sparked a decade-long mystery. Before he left the mills, he placed his sculptures all around the factory. The tiny figures became legendary among the workers, spawning fables and tall tales.

While working in the steel mills, Roman was drafted and scheduled to go to Vietnam. He rebelled and was able to delay his departure from the United States by more than three months. War can hardly be described in words, but Roman was able to eloquently illustrate its pure fear. Because of his slight size, Roman was assigned the position of tunnel rat. Vietnamese soldiers had built elaborate underground tunnel systems equipped with hospitals and living spaces. It was Roman's job to destroy these tunnels. The impact of the explosives was extremely dangerous, and Roman feared for his life. He began to feel hostility toward the government: "We became non-soldiers in the military. The war was not our war any more. Our war was to stay alive long enough to get back into the neighborhood and not be a statistic."

The sixties reflect a time when the youth of America caused great change. In my opinion, there's nothing more liberating than seeing images of a young person picketing for equal education or against the Vietnam War. The actions of previous generations inspire me. Prior to Teen Chicago, I was naive about the subject of history. I regarded history as being changeless. I didn't develop a true understanding or appreciation for history until I conducted this interview. Roman, along with the entire Teen Chicago project, taught me that history isn't objective. Other people's stories and personal accounts present different perspectives, causing history to always be in motion.

Excerpts from Ari's interview with Roman Villareal

Ari Fulton: *What kind of jobs did you have as a teenager?*

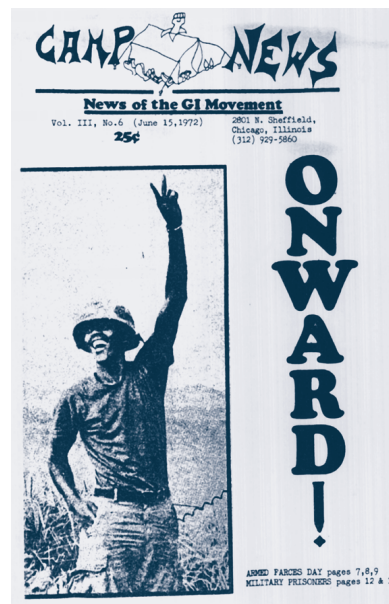
Roman Villareal: Oh, I was a shoe shine, a paperboy, delivery [boy]. I worked on the docks at seventeen years old and [in] the mill. I went to work in the mills, because . . . we needed that extra paycheck. So I used to work a full eight hours and then go to school. But I wasn't going to a school all that tough any more, so it really wasn't that big of a jump for me. But the adjustment is that you leave the world of here and go into the world of the steel mill, which was a completely different world all by itself because [it] was like a city inside.

It was almost like walking into Oz or something. It was the most fantastic fabulous place you ever walk into, but it was dirty. . . . I loved it. I became a legend in the steel mills. When I was seventeen years old . . . I was what they called a floater. I was working in different parts of the mills, but one of the first things that I noticed when I was cleaning out the pits after they run the steel through is the steel turns to cement. Not the steel but the clay that they would put down . . . and then this hot steel would run through there and then you'd have to go and break it up and thump it. So every time I'd say, "Wow. Check this out."

So by accident, I'd just grab a piece of clay. I made a quick figure, and I laid it down next to where the heat was going to come from the steel, and when [the steel] ran through there it cooked

it. It became like a little rock with a face. So I was seventeen and kind of bored in the mills. I would put one [figure] in this corner, one in this corner. I had [them] spread [over a] big portion of the steel mills, and then I got drafted in '68, and I left.

So one of the things about when you get drafted from the steel mills is that . . . you get your job back when you get out with the time you served. I got drafted. I did two years, so that means I had two year's seniority even though I wasn't there. But the coolest thing was when I got back here in Chicago, and I went back to work in the steel mills, the legend of the little head had sprung while I was gone. All over



Newsletters such as this one kept Chicagoans informed about the war.



Villareal was called to serve in Vietnam, but staged a "silent protest" to delay his departure. Above: Protestors in Chicago. CHS, ICHI-37737.



Some young men, including Villareal, destroyed their draft cards. Above: A young man publicly protests the draft. CHS, ICHI-37739.

the mills, that's all they could talk about, that people were finding these little heads, and they were saying that they came from an Indian tribe. Somebody thought they were elves. But I couldn't tell anybody, because it would kind of mess up the whole thing, right? So I had a great time . . . And then, about ten years ago, I was at a some function where I was doing an art exhibit and this man, older, got to be in his eighties now, he had one of the little heads in his possession. So, it was funny. . . . You know what? I'd rather listen to them talk about the legend of the little heads than tell them that I did it.

I was getting sent to 'Nam. I had my orders, and I was in the Fort Lee, Virginia, [group] and I'll never forget this dude gets up and tells me, "You stupid mother f-----." He says, "Look, you lose this? They're not going to pay you. It's going to take months for them to find you." I said, "Okay,

fine, cool, you know it's always on my way." My orders were to go to Oakland, California, to go to Vietnam, so I said I'm going outside and I'm looking at this guy and I'm kicking, repeating myself this guy kept telling me he kept calling me stupid and kept telling me because you know what. Why can't I be stupid?

So I grabbed my orders, ripped them in half, threw them away and went to the East Coast. Simple. Took the military two or three months to find me, but I never went AWOL. I was in another post. I just showed up at a post, and I just said, "Well I'm going to go to right here." And I picked out the most, off post, and I showed up there and the guy said, "Where are you from?" Well, I got order, but I got robbed. But I'm supposed to be here. And he goes, "Are you sure?" I'm positive, my orders. By the time they found me, it was three months. So then again . . . and they go hey, but

again I didn't do that I went south to another fort. Three more months went by. . . .

In Vietnam, you had to do a six-to seven-month tour. I was dropping time off. Every time I did that I would lose three months, three months. So by the time they actually caught me I only had less than four months to do. . . . But it was because this man called me stupid that I did it and that saved my life. But I couldn't tell you or anybody else, because then everybody else would have done it. They were called silent victories, and a lot of us did these things, but nobody would ever know. But it was like victories that . . . we were sharing among ourselves, because we knew that we weren't going to win the war against the United States government. But we could win little victories . . .

When you came back from Vietnam, you were not treated as a hero. Everybody came back from the wars in Korea and all



Ari

the other wars, they were heroes. . . . We came back like prisoners, like dope addicts, like criminals. You got out [of] the thing, and they were supposed to give you a steak dinner and all this stuff like that. They gave it to you, but they also strip searched you, went after you like you were a drug addict. There was no, "Welcome back . . . brother. You know, you did a good job in the military. Give me a hug." Nothing, nothing. They didn't do anything for the Vietnam vets.

AF: Explain what a tunnel rat did.

RV: A tunnel rat . . . the Vietnamese had an extensive, miles and miles and miles of tunnel system inside the jungle. They . . . would sleep down there, cook down there. Their hospital was down there. Everything was down underground. So the only people that could down there were people who were Vietnamese-sized, and I was one of them. And it just so happens that a lot of us that were tunnel rats were all Latino, because we almost look like Vietnamese in a strange way.

I remember when I first went into the military they used to dress me up . . . and they would reenact the war things, and my job was to pop out every once in awhile and to shoot at them, you know. So we went along with it, because hey . . . [it's] the government so you go along with it. But you have a choice, and the choice is hopefully you find out what's going on before it's too late and you can't do anything about it. I was very fortunate . . . because I knew that I wasn't

coming back as a tunnel rat. You know one thing you had with you was a stick about this long and a .45. There's no damn way that you're going to open up and shoot somebody with a .45 because it'll blow your eardrums off. You'd shoot a gun in an enclosed place? Naw. It's like, you ain't gonna hear for awhile. Let's put it that way. So to me that was a useless weapon, so why did I have it? Didn't make no sense. What they would do is

they would tie a tunnel, and they would tie a thing to you, right, and [if] you got killed they'd just pull you out. Yeah, there's somebody in there. But you're dead. I said, "Oh, no, no man, that's it."

And then I developed the phobia of [enclosed spaces]. I don't have it anymore, but for ten years I couldn't even cover my head with a blanket. . . . I never had phobias until then, and I developed claustrophobia, but I don't have it anymore, I don't think. That's what used to freak me out about.



Vietnam protesters often used symbolic phrases in their demonstrations. Above: A protester draws inspiration from the Ten Commandments. CHS, ICHI-37738.



*Editor's note: Teen Council member Bakir Bicakcic interviewed **Jodee Blanco**. Blanco is author of the best-selling *Please Stop Laughing at Me . . .* and is an expert on school bullying and peer abuse and pressure in the United States.*

Jodee Blanco stood surrounded by a crowd of kids who chanted, "Freak." "No one will ever love you." This is simply a small example of what Blanco had gone through as a high school student in the late 1970s. She endured mental anguish and physical violence, but she harnessed it into something positive.

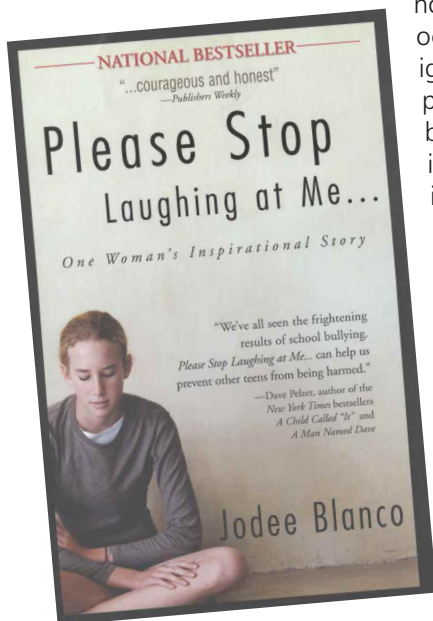
My experiences through high school have been very different than Jodee's. She was bullied,

teased, and abused by her fellow classmates. Fortunately, I haven't experienced any of this in my school but hearing Jodee Blanco's story has opened my eyes. Although I have never been tormented, I now see that many times I have been a bystander and have done nothing to stop the bullying.

Throughout her interview, I realized that my school is not perfect. I realized that things she mentioned occur in my school daily. How could I have been so ignorant to these social injustices? As the interview progressed, she explained the nature and need for bullying in high school and in life. In society, there is a natural human instinct to rise above others in a hierarchy. People climb their way up not only in high school, but also in the business world and just about every other place. The only way to "ascend" to acceptance in a particular clique is to step on others as though they were stairs. Walking through the hallways at my school, I can see someone being laughed at, someone who is trying to ignore insults whispered behind them, or someone who is being thrown against the lockers. It is by ridiculing and bringing down others that

the bullies can climb higher in their cliques.

I couldn't believe that kids said and did these things to Jodee. Her experiences seemed completely unreal. I soon came



*Jodee Blanco's book about bullying, *Please Stop Laughing at Me . . .*, became a national bestseller. Image courtesy of Adams Media.*

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Although teenagers often form close friendships during high school, some students are excluded or, as Blanco relates, bullied. CHS, TC-0187.

to realize that she spoke the truth, because I experienced something similar not long afterwards. I was getting some food with a large group of people when I saw a girl walk in, dressed in a gray shirt and jeans. She wasn't wearing any make-up and her hair wasn't striped with blonde highlights, which appears to be extremely popular just about everywhere. This girl walked over to a friend of mine and they exchanged greetings. She promptly left and as the door closed behind her, another girl gawked at my friend and said, "Why do you talk to that weirdo?"

For a moment, all things stopped. My attention shifted from my milkshake to the girl who just spoke. I tried as best as I could to keep the appalled look out of my facial expression. I was so curious to find the reasons behind this girl's statement that I asked, "Why is she so 'weird' to you?"

Before I could finish my question I was already getting a stare that equated to disbelief. "Just look at her. Oh God, she works at that dump across the street," she said. She let out a soft chuckle and turned to give her boyfriend a kiss. I stared blankly and tried to understand what had just happened. Why was this girl being made fun of when no one even knew her? Was she being judged by the clothes she was wearing, or perhaps that her hair wasn't bleached blonde?

High school life has not changed immensely since Blanco's days. I feel that even in a school with substance and compassion it will remain hollow. Many people remain shallow throughout high school and life. They live with the false assumption of rising up in their peer groups when they are really just sinking. If I can change, I know that they can as well.



Left: Jodee Blanco as a teenager. Right: Blanco today. Photograph courtesy of Adams Media.

Excerpts from Bakir's interview with Jodee Blanco

Jodee Blanco: Okay. When I was about fourteen years old. You see, gym is required in the State of Illinois. It happens to be the only state in America where, at the time that I was a teenybopper, that gym was required. And if you took gym, you had to take a shower. And, so, I remember being in the shower with other girls my age and looking at their breasts and thinking, "Gosh, they look so normal. What's wrong with me?" And as I noticed, as I started to go through puberty, which is about thirteen, fourteen, my right breast was absolutely just huge. It looked like an engorged water balloon, and it had no muscle and it just hung, and it bled internally continually. And my left one was just, it was like a knuckle coming out of my chest. And I didn't know what was wrong, and it got more pronounced, more pronounced,

more pronounced. And, so, my parents took me to Mayo Clinic and they said that I had rare congenital birth defect that articulated itself in puberty and that I need reconstructive surgery, but that I couldn't have it until I was seventeen, because I was still developing. So, from fourteen to seventeen, I had this horrible breast deformity, and I had a special bra to hide it when I was dressed, but what would I do about gym?

So, you ask about an enduring memory, my freshman year of high school, my pediatrician wrote me a note to get me out of gym, but the gym teacher was a real bitch. And she made me sit on the bleachers in my clothes while all the other kids participated in gym, and the kids would walk past me and spit at me and call me a cripple. I couldn't take it anymore, so I finally told my mom, "Listen, Mom, I'll go to gym, I'll just dash

in and out of the showers really fast, nobody will ever see me." And I was real ingenious. Every day, I would rush to gym and I was in and out of my gym clothes, and then after gym, in and out of the shower before anybody saw me. And one day, I wasn't quick enough. And the head cheerleader saw my deformity, and she said, "Oh, my God, you really are a freak." She got all the other girls in the locker room and they slammed me against the locker, I was naked, and they opened my locker door and they pulled out my bra that had all these strange straps and buckles to accommodate my deformity, and she rolled it up into a ball and they started playing catch with it like a Nerf ball. Then they took my angora sweater, which was also in the locker, and they threw it on the ground and they stomped on it and they spit at it, and then they ran out of the locker room giggling.



I was determined not to let them get to me. Determined to show them that they weren't going to get the satisfaction. So, with nothing else to wear, I put my cheap gym shirt back on and you could see my deformity through the shirt cotton, so I took my book bag and I put it front of me and I walked out of gym thinking, "I only have two more classes to go, I can get through this." And all the popular kids, guys and girls, were waiting for me outside gym class, and they started chanting, "Freak, freak, freak. You're God's worst mistake. You should have been an abortion. You should have been a miscarriage. No one's ever going to want to love you. No one's ever going to date you." And this kid I had a crush on since the sixth grade pushed to the front of the crowd and said, "Hey, Blanco, if I kiss your tit, will I turn into a toad?" And then they all ran off laughing and left me there. So that would be an enduring memory and that was the deformity. When I was 17, I had corrective surgery and then I had surgery again when I was thirty-four because the first surgery fell, and now I'm happy to say they're perfect.

A few years later, Jodee ran into some boys at school torturing another student with Down syndrome.

And I said, "Hey, you guys, leave him alone. That's really mean." And they looked at me, and they said, "You freak, you priss. Why don't you just get out of here?" I said, "No." I said, "You leave that kid alone or I'm getting the principal, I'm calling the cops."



Genevieve Cibor wearing a jacket that proclaims part of her identity: a Madonna High School student. CHS, TC-0514.



Popularity contests are common in high school. This couple was crowned prince and princess at a Cinderella Ball. CHS, TC-0369.

And, I'll never forget, because they were throwing rocks at Roger's eyes, and he was blocking his face with his hands so that his eyes wouldn't get hit with these rocks, and he was smiling because he was so innocent, he thought they were playing a game. So, I got rid of these jerks who were picking on him, and I hugged Roger and I walked him to class, because I volunteered with the special ed kids at my lunch period. And I thought everything was cool.

That night, as I was walking out of school, there had been a huge snowstorm, and I can actually tell you this snowstorm was in '79,

and there had been a huge snowstorm, and I walked out of school and I was waiting for my mom to pick me up, because it had gotten to a point where I was getting picked on so much, I couldn't ride the bus. Well, for some reason, my mom was late, and as I walk out the door, I hear these footsteps in the hall, and I walked out the door, and I saw the snow, and I looked behind me and there were the three wrestlers who I had told to leave Roger alone hours earlier and about four of their friends. And they said, "You priss, you bitch. Everybody at this school hates you. Why don't you just leave?"

I said, "Please, you guys, I didn't mean to make you mad, but Roger's so cute and that was so mean." They threw me down to the ground. Two of them helped pin me to the pavement, the other five forced open my jaw and then began shoving fistfuls of snow down my throat until I couldn't breathe. And I gagged, and I said, "You guys, please, please stop. I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Please don't hate me. Please don't hate me." The more I begged, the more snow they shoved down my throat. Suddenly, I started to asphyxiate and gag badly. So this one kid says to his buddy, this is the same kid who used to come swimming in my pool every day all summer just the summer before, said, "Hey, you guys, I think she's gagging." And his buddy said, "Cool." They gave each other a high-five and they ran off and left me there. My mother pulled up twenty minutes later and when she found me, I was hypothermic and near dead and was rushed to the emergency room. The next day when we told the principal, he said it was a horrible thing and he was so sorry that it happened, but nobody got into trouble because the wrestlers had intramural championships the following week.