



# [the yo\* magazine]

\*YOUNGSTOWN'S REGIONAL CULTURE MAGAZINE FOR LOVING LIFE AND LIVING

## \*THE ARTLESS

CAN THIS AMATEUR PICKUP ARTIST GET IN THE GAME, OR WILL HE SPEND IT ALL ON THE SIDELINES?



## \*THE ARTIST

THIS RED HOT SCREAM QUEEN ACTRESS IS HEATING UP THE INDIE HORROR INDUSTRY, AND SHE'S NO SHRINKING-VIOLET VICTIM. SHE'S THE ONE WITH THE KNIFE.

IT'S DANGEROUS GOING FROM ZERO TO HERO, ESPECIALLY WHEN THE RED ZONE IS THIS HOT

EQUATING CHARISMA WITH SUCCESS: HOW MUCH DOES YOUR PERSONALITY AFFECT YOUR HIRABILITY?

HOW TO RENT IN THE YO': UNCOMPLICATED LEASING & LIVING TIPS

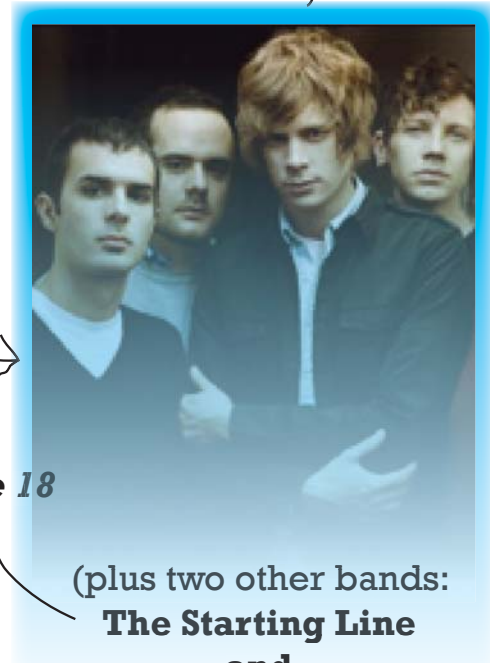
"A YO'DIARY: TRANSFORMING A FAMILY" SEEING HER SISTER BECOME HER BROTHER CHANGED THE WAY SHE SEES THE WORLD

# [the yo\* magazine]

\*youngstown's regional culture magazine for loving life and living

See what **Relient K** has to say, **page 16**

[on the cover]



(Famous band.)

**page 18**

(plus two other bands: **The Starting Line** and **Sick Puppies**)

**page 19**

## [yo\* entertainment]

**Skateboarding Epidemic:** Where have all the skateboarders in Youngstown gone? They've got an ax to grind about having nowhere to grind. **Page 6**

**Who says there's nothing to do in the Yo'?** We busted the myth. Be entertained, eat ethnic, eat good. Get full on an almost-empty wallet. Mini-reviews on cheap Valley restaurants and attractions. **Page 8**

**Queen of Queens:** She's a scream queen actress who's hot, talented and kills people for a living. Are you scared yet? **Page 10**

**Gaming Commentary:** This video game lover has plenty of ammo for Roger Ebert's statement that video gaming is not an art form. **Page 14**

**Yo' Music:** The Yo' interviews bands, and famous ones, too. Either Youngstown's a metropolis, or we're just extra special. **Page 16**

## [cover stories]

**The Artless** — A Yo' Diary of an amateur pickup artist **Page 36**

**The Artist** — This scream queen is horror film royalty **Page 10**

**Equating Charisma with Success** **Page 26**

**How to rent in the Yo' like a pro** **Page 44**

**A transgender transformation** — A Yo' Diary **Page 41**

The Guide's Guide to Youngstown is a quick reference for what to do (yes, there's something), where to go (no more excuses for being bored) and what to eat (for as cheap as \$10) **Page 8**



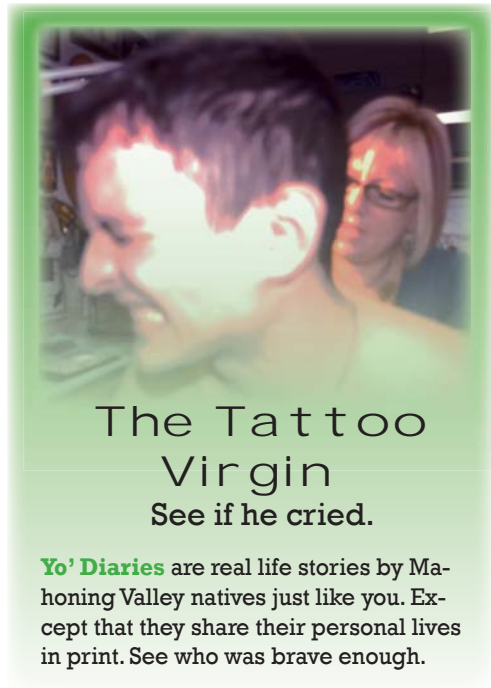


One Youngstown bride talks about preparing for a non-traditional wedding, **page 24**

# [yo\* sections]



**Waiting for revival to fix a broken road**  
**Page 30**



**The Tattoo Virgin**  
See if he cried.

**Yo' Diaries** are real life stories by Mahoning Valley natives just like you. Except that they share their personal lives in print. See who was brave enough.



**Tip:** When car shopping, ignore the salesman's polyester suit and bad combover, but read this article.  
**Page 50**

## [yo\* life]

### Relationships

**Doghandling in Dating:** Guys and girls, get tips on how to always maintain the upperhand in dating. Unless your significant other also reads this ... **Page 21**

**Planning the Fairytale Lesbian Wedding:** A Youngstown bride shares her struggles with prejudices, family rejection and love. **Page 24**

**Digging Deeper**  
**Equating Charisma with Success:** How much does your high school personality affect professional success? See how shyness could affect your hirability. **Page 26**

**Waiting for Revival:** See why an East Side resident has doubts about the recent revitalization efforts in Youngstown. **Page 30**

**Super Athletes:** These student athletes have their game faces on for double duty in parenting. **Page 35**

## [yo\* diaries]

### Yo' Diaries

**Pickup Mastery:** Like VH1's "The Pickup Artist?" Follow an amateur on his quest to become one. **Page 36**

**Transforming a Family:** Seeing her sister become her brother changed the way she sees the world. **Page 41**

**Diary of a Tattoo Virgin:** Take a peek into this photo diary about a guy getting inked for the first time, and see his face all scrunched up. **Page 44**



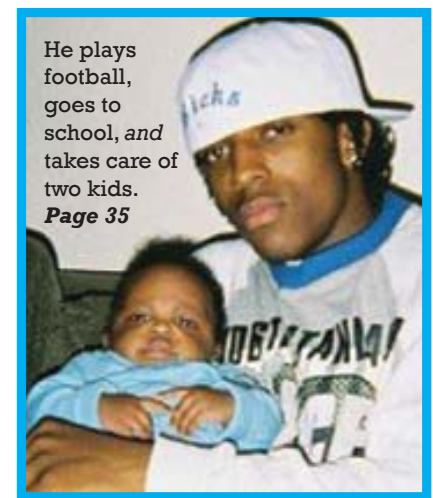
Ever wondered how Oprah's high school personality compares to her professional success? We did, so we decided to find out how much shyness can affect your hirability.  
**Page 26**

## [do it yo\*self]

### The Yo's tips on how to DIY

**Trade your lemon for sublime:** The Yo' shows female car buyers how to get the best deal. **Page 44**

**The care and keeping of a Youngstown apartment:** From the research, leasing and payment to snazzing the place up a bit, this step-by-step guide is everything you need to live on your own. **Page 46**



He plays football, goes to school, and takes care of two kids.  
**Page 35**

# editor's letter

---



Photos by Richard Boccia

Dear Readers,

**I**n dramatic movies, philosophical novels, on the Discovery channel and Saturday morning cartoons, transformation abounds. It's everywhere. It's such a universal experience that we don't always recognize when it happens to us.

Changes. A haircut, a lifestyle, a way of thinking. The theme is permanent and, at the same time, perpetually transient.

Our cover stories are about two people who transform themselves in front of an audience. One is an indie horror film actress who tries on costumes, makeup and personas for a living, sometimes calling on raw talent instead of special effects — like when she's portraying a murderous wrestler. In another role, this gorgeous starlet made her most incredible metamorphosis from beauty queen to man-eating vampire. You won't believe the makeup job on this one. From quite a sight to a total fright, she transformed into a vampire posing as a stripper who devours her victims with a certain set of body parts. Check out her double killers — they have teeth (page 12).

Slated beside the scream queen is a totally different kind of artist. His canvas is the world of women, and he started out pretty hungry. Meet Youngstown's very own Pickup Artist in one of this issue's Yo' Diaries (page 36). Even if you've never heard of VH1's reality show "The Pickup Artist," you'll be roaring as you read about the transformation of a self-proclaimed social nightmare into a smooth-talking, fedora-wearing, lady-killing Casanova. OK, sort of. He did nail the sexy new look, but see how he did picking up the any-object of his affection.

Once you read the hilariously candid pages of the Pickup Artist's diary (page 34), witness the deflowering of a tattoo virgin. His skin shall never be the same, and, oh, how he cringes! There's even a little blood if you look closely at the full-color photos.

Another Yo' Diary (page 41) is about a truly unique transformation. This writer opens up the private pages of her family-life diary, in the amazing story of her sibling's sex change. You'll be moved reading about how it changed the way she sees the world.

Transformations can also change the way people see you. Charisma — that glitter that makes movie stars' smiles glow and prom queens' crowns glisten — is out of reach for some. You may recall your own personality transformation while reading about how a few high school wallflowers blossom, or at least bud, into assertiveness (page 26).

Some transformations can be as simple, or as elaborate, as a makeup job. Others are far more permanent. We're still waiting for some, maybe because it's not their time yet. Follow the broken brick road of one Youngstown resident who is "Waiting for Revival" (page 30) in his declining East Side neighborhood.

Sometimes we can't control these changes in our lives, but we can still see tomorrow while we're living every inch of today.

We shrug off our new tattoo's sting. We adjust our fedora before sauntering into that bar.

Is the transformation complete? Is any transformation ever complete?

All that matters is that we are on our way.

Cristina Cala  
Editor in Chief





Editor In Chief/Design Editor/Copy Editor  
Cristina Cala

Copy Editor  
Sarah Sole

Layout Designer/Photography  
Brian Cetina

Business Manager  
Adrienne Sabo

Features Editor  
Rudi Whitmore

Assistant Copy Editor  
Ashley Tate

Advertising Manager  
Elena Macris

Cover Artist  
Tony Lucente

Production Assistant  
Richard Boccia

**Contributing Writers**

Andrew Berry  
Richard Boccia  
Laura Brown  
Ernie Calderon  
Brian Cetina  
John Cutlip  
Doug Dierkes  
Jeanette DiRubba  
Bonnie Hazen  
Adrienne Sabo  
Sarah Sole  
Nick Stoian  
Jesi Taafe  
Emily Thayer  
Rudi Whitmore

**contact us**

e-mail: [theyomagazine@yahoo.com](mailto:theyomagazine@yahoo.com)  
phone: (330) 941-1991  
advertising: (330) 941-1990  
[www.geocities.com/theyomagazine](http://www.geocities.com/theyomagazine)

[the yo\* magazine]





# where have all the skaters gone?

Local skateboarders have an ax to grind about having no place to grind

**M**aybe it's the persona that draws people in — that touch of anarchy. Or it could be the attitude, the clothes, and cuts and bruises. Perhaps it's the paradox of being a respected risk-taker, but still attracting the scorn of discriminating authority figures everywhere. Skateboarding still rolls — half a century post-birth despite legislation, reputation and parental supervision — and still has some creativity left in its grind.

Judging by the lack of facilities for Youngstown skateboarders to hone their skill and minds, it seems these qualities aren't high priorities for the Valley.

On the corner of Elm and Stewart in Struthers, Ben Burdi slams his board, disgusted with a recently failed trick. He balks at the idea of giving up; tirelessly attempting various kickflips, hoping just once to flip the board and rotate it 180 degrees, until his feet are numb.

Such dedication is encouraged in schools and similar institutions, but frowned upon in vacant parking lots. Naysayers argue that Burdi's wasted time could be spent studying

math or grammar, but could a non-conformist attitude be the key to revitalizing Youngstown?

Behind the veil of public disgust, boarders aren't always the delinquents public officials make them out to be. They're on every campus, at every concert and at every party. Some have made millions as lucrative businessmen of the sport, owning whole lines of clothing and gear dedicated to what they love. But no matter how it's presented, officials seem to perceive skaters as delinquents, period. Their inability to recognize such potential has been Youngstown's problem since the Steel Valley rusted away.

After all, once upon a time, non-delinquent, responsible adults voted ex-congressman Jim Trafficant into office. Of course shortly thereafter he was sentenced to eight years in prison for accepting bribes. Trusted school supervisors are suspended for falsifying documents; skaters are suspended for wearing baggy pants. The skating

population is discouraged by punishment for simply existing.

Commercially, Youngstown is paying for it. Vertigo Skatepark in Boardman closed without explanation, Stomping Grounds moved to a shady spot in Austintown, and Section 8 Skate Park in Hubbard is nowhere to be found.

Youngstown has nowhere to skate. Worse, local area skate shops suffer as well, because city ordinances make it hard to skate even in a driveway. One shop, Play it Again Sports in Boardman, has been serving the area long enough that a solid clientele would be expected, regardless of how many more businesses in Youngstown disintegrate. But even the best spots are feeling the heat.

Play it Again Sports maintained a clever balance of the usual jock sports (like football and soccer) and alternative gear from the hottest name brands. Right up front was about 20 feet of store space dedicated to aggressive sporting — a case full of bearings and wheels, a wall of shoes, deck racks, blades, helmets, pads, you name it. It was the skater community's best-kept secret of where to get the goods. Or at least, it was.

Upon entering the store today, shop regulars will find themselves quite perturbed — new uniforms, new staff, new stuff ... and no boards. The store is merely a shell of the glorious haven for curb-cutters that once was. The walls are barren and

have that under-construction look, and a few high schoolers in shirts that read "STAFF" busily check in new items. Thirty-something Margaret Jones, the shop's new owner, stands behind the counter as if she expects anyone who knew the previous store to wonder what's going on.

As it turns out, the store is indeed under construction. The previous owner closed up and left the shop up for grabs, sans equipment. Some of the old things were there, like golf clubs and baseball bats, but the boarder gear was MIA.

"I was reluctant to bring back the skating section of the store, since Mark's park closed up, too," Jones says, referring to the store's previous owner, Mark Yoo. "But then I saw how many kids come in here looking for skating gear. My first order of boards should be in by the end of the week," she adds, pointing to the empty display case longing to hold expensive trucks and wheels.

The display case sits empty, though not from lack of want. Skaters aren't disappearing. They're being forced away, Jones says. Laws, public concern or both are choking the life out of skating in Ohio.

"Kids tell me that they actually prefer the private, indoor establishments like Vertigo. It's a shame he closed up," Jones says with intense concern.

"Vertigo and Play it Again [Sports] were both owned by Mark, and last I heard he was working elsewhere.





# ban this.

It could have been the insurance money or the business itself, but I think he just got burned out."

Vertigo and Play It Again Sports succumbed to whatever problems Yoo was subject to. Somehow, the ambitious entrepreneur loses to outside sources.

Anyone can do the math: Around the time Yoo's places began to close up, more and more public areas began cracking down on the sport. Places like Struthers and Boardman have banned skateboarding anywhere that isn't a designated park. And now, circumstances are picking off parks one by one, putting local skaters in a different kind of grind.

The golden age of Dogtown street surfing is past, and law enforcement strengthened

by a conservative viewpoint constricts places where boarding isn't so popular. Skateboarders consider inventions like skate stoppers (metal studs installed on rails or concrete walls) as insulting ways to target all skateboarders rather than the few who actually cause problems.

Outdoor skate parks still exist in the area, but they are much smaller than former indoor skate parks in the area. Struthers Skatepark consists of 75 square-feet of concrete, three rails, a few roll-ins, one quarter-pipe and a fun box.

However, since there isn't much else, the place is usually packed with skaters, weather permitting. The development rests within a stone's throw of a police station and, according to *The Vindicator*, it is a quarantine

area for "young people doing skateboarding and biking tricks in vacant lots and sidewalks."

"Sooner or later there will be a serious accident and someone will be hurt or killed," Struthers donor Dan Becker wrote in a fundraising letter for the park. "The youth need a proper place to do their thing."

And that thing is now behind the PD, a place where skaters can be quickly suppressed. Becker, a respected businessman in Struthers, had the right idea.

Burdi is a typical skater who often "does his thing" at Struthers Skatepark.

"Honestly, I always want more options, but I don't really care," he says in a laid-back tone, which of course he uses to hide his "criminal" demeanor. At 15, Burdi is at the median age for the skater populace,

so he's grateful to have some terrain within walking distance.

"I used to go to Vertigo, and Section 8, but they used to host a lot of music concerts and stuff, so I'm surprised they closed, too. Now we just have this park, and the one in Warren."

Warren also followed the trend of replacing the private, indoor parks with a donor-funded, outdoor one. A police station is visible from the chain-link fence.

Skateboarding is most popular in California and Florida, two states known for being different, but more importantly recognized for their successes.

Margaret Jones has the right idea for Youngstown skating: Keep any alternative ideas alive. Open up just a little, and big things can happen.

**"Honestly, I always want more options.**

**I used to go to Vertigo, and Section 8, but they used to host a lot of music concerts and stuff, so I'm surprised they closed."**

**— BURDI on his limited options for area skate boarding venues**



Photos by John Cutlip

# “There’s nothing to do in Youngstown.” MYTH BUSTED.

## The Guide’s Guide to Youngstown

By Richard Boccia

**Y**ou’ve heard that one before. Maybe you even said it yourself. But when your friend from the West Coast visits, or your favorite uncle flies in from New York for the weekend, resist the urge to complain about your town. They’ll thank you to show them a little pride — and a lot of local attractions. The Guide’s Guide will show you how to show them what makes the Yo’ worth the visit to bust the myth of boring Youngstown.

As a resident of Northeast Ohio, you may overlook how much your area has to offer to tourists. But seeing the Yo’ from an outsider’s perspective can make you realize just how many attractions, events and even sight-seeing opportunities Youngstown has to offer.

Once you see the town’s high points, you can give a tour of the Yo’ with pride. Find the hidden gems of the Youngstown area, and learn how to show them off. Answer hard questions like “Where can we get local wine?” and “Where can we go for karaoke?” Happy touring!



### Youngstown Landmarks

#### Mill Creek Park

With three manmade lakes for kayaking and paddleboating, 15 miles of foot trails and 2,600 acres of naturalistic landscaping, Mill Creek Park makes an impression.

The Fellows Riverside Gardens high above Lake Glacier have been cultivated for 40 years. The other side of the gardens offers a breathtaking hilltop view of downtown Youngstown.

#### Youngstown Historical Center of Industry and Labor

Designed to look like a stylized steel mill, this museum commemorates a fallen industry.

#### Arms Museum

Dating back to the turn of the century, “Greystone” survives as a reminder of Youngstown’s glorious past.

### Cultural Attractions

Show your visitors a little local culture as you guide them through Youngstown.

#### Butler and McDonough museums of art

Located on the campus of Youngstown State University, the exhibits of these two museums change with the seasons, but the permanent collection at the Butler is always on display.

#### Ballet Western Reserve

A fixture in the city’s fine arts community for over 40 years, the Ballet Western Reserve dancers perform at Powers Auditorium

and the Ford Family Recital Hall — two of Youngstown’s landmark venues. The ballet also performs at the Butler and Fellows Riverside Gardens in Mill Creek Park. Catch one of the half dozen performances BWR does in a year.

#### Others

First among seasonal cultural attractions is the Summer Festival of the Arts, which brings local artisans to YSU. For the rest of the year, keep an eye on community and student theater at the Oakland theater, Youngstown Playhouse, and in the YSU Fine and Performing Arts Series.

#### Only an hour’s drive away

When you’re ready to get out of the Yo’ for an afternoon, take your tour on the road.

#### \$25 The Great Lakes Medieval Faire

3033 State Route 534  
Rock Creek, Ohio  
[www.medievalfaire.com](http://www.medievalfaire.com)

Where else can you spend an afternoon in the woods enjoying a tongue-in-cheek experience of Olde England?

The ancient chivalry of knightly jousting and royal processions mixes well with the off-color humor and anachronisms of bards and rascals at comedy shows. The lords, ladies and lieges of this medieval theme park know when to crack a joke about themselves.

## If you’re bored, you’re not trying hard enough.



## Area Attractions

**Simply Ed Karaoke** for every night of the week:

Irish Bob's, O'Donald's in Austintown, Salty Grog's, Up A Creek Tavern, Quaker Steak & Lube, Joey's Tavern, O'Donold's in Warren

**Elm Road Drive-In Theatre**

1895 Elm Road NE  
Warren

**Trumbull County Fair**

899 Everett Hull Road  
Cortland

**Canfield Fair**

7265 Columbiana-Canfield Road  
Canfield

**Small-town Sports**

Both the Scrappers' and SteelHounds' stadiums were built within the past 10 years and offer minor league sports. The Scrappers play baseball June through September, and the SteelHounds' hockey season runs October through March.

**Scrappers**

111 Eastwood Mall Blvd.  
Niles  
330-505-0000

**SteelHounds**

229 East Front St.  
Youngstown  
330-746-5600

**\$40 Canton Dinner Theater**

1275 E. Waterloo Road  
Akron, Ohio  
800-362-4100

This theater bills itself as dinner and a Broadway musical. Skip the dinner, and the pre-show lounge singer while you're at it, but stay for the surprisingly high production values and familiar performances of shows like "Grease," "A Chorus Line" and "The Sound of Music."

**Guide's Tip:** You've probably seen professional tour guides walking backward. When you're showing friends or family around town, it goes without saying that you'll take a more low-key approach. Still, there's a lesson you can learn from the pros: Focus on your guests.

Watch for the following signs of fatigue and boredom:

- yawning
- listless, glazed expression
- wild, furtive glances toward the exit



## Eat for under \$30

### \$10 Tokyo House Hibachi

1907 South Ave.  
Youngstown  
(330) 747-2231

Come for the famous orange sauce, stay to hear owner and head chef Ken Dao torture the locals with invasive questions about their personal lives. He knows the people, and doesn't hesitate to ask outrageous questions about their romantic lives as he chops, dices and ignites your dinner on the hibachi.

### \$15 El Rincón del Caballo Bayo

5525 Mahoning Ave.  
Austintown  
(330) 779-0000

"The Little Inn of the Bay Horse" is named for a Mexico City racetrack, but the gourmet food is better than any you'd find at an outdoor speedway. The fajitas include unexpected grilled vegetables like broccoli and portobello mushrooms. The ceviche cocktail appetizer mixes marinated seafood, tomato, onion, chiles and cilantro for a spicy treat unique to the area.

### \$30 Anthony's on the River

15 Oak Hill Ave.  
Youngstown  
(330) 744-7888

For a good steak after a night at the theater or ballet, try this Italian and American restaurant right around the corner from downtown cultural venues. If you'd like a bottle of wine with your dinner, this is the place. Private dining rooms are available.

### \$10 Shangrila Sushi Grill and Buffet

387 Boardman-Poland Road  
Boardman  
(330) 758-7788

One of the best Asian buffets in the area, Shangrila is family owned and boasts 200 international menu items, including American fare if your guests want comfort food. Make as many trips as you can to the sushi bar, which the chef restocks constantly. Don't miss the sweet fried bread rolled in granulated sugar — these Chinese doughnuts are authentic.



In Youngstown, you and your guests can get full on an almost empty wallet, or let that money that's burning a hole in your pocket blaze. Here are some top dining picks from the Guide's Guide.





**You could kill for this scream queen's body.  
But her twin monsters would devour you first.**

**W**ith a body worth killing for, a smile that can stop anyone's heart from beating, and enough enthusiasm to blow the world away, it should be obvious why horror film actress Monique Dupree holds the title of scream queen. What makes her special, though, among classic scream queens like Jamie Lee Curtis and Janet Lee is the luscious caramel color of her skin.

The only thing missing is the crown. From her gently rolling curls to her contagious smile, the first black scream queen shines brighter than polished gold. And she looks great in black.

Surrounded by horror movie memorabilia and Star Trek action figures at the Dark X-Mas horror and sci-fi convention in downtown Warren, Dupree sparkled as she spoke about something she absolutely adores: scaring the living daylights out of people.

Known as "Kat" to her family and "Gata" to her fans, Dupree wore a small silver cat-shaped charm on a rhinestone-encrusted choker. Her family first started calling her Kat because, like a cat, she always seemed to land on her feet. After learning her nickname, the Spanish community started calling her by the Spanish equivalent, "Gata," and it stuck.

Dupree first captured the title of scream queen shortly after entering a contest held by Fangoria Radio in June of 2006. A mere scream isn't enough to win, though, according to Fangoria's criteria. Screaming, acting, improvisational skill and sex appeal are necessary to win the night.

During the contest, Dupree met personal inspiration and legendary scream queen Debbie Rochon of the original 1968 "Night of the Living Dead." Rochon, the co-host of the show, pulled Dupree aside to say, "You are a really awesome scream queen, whether you win the contest or not." Win she did, and one queen crowned another.

A scream queen used to be the gorgeous,

but unlucky, young woman who ultimately met an undesirable end in your average horror movie. The term has evolved over the years, but it is still difficult to pin down an exact definition.

"Although most would probably describe a scream queen as a desirable young vixen with a great set of lungs, I strongly believe that many of the women in this genre have/had the ability to sicken, arouse and, most of all, scare us," defined Melantha Blackthorne, another actress crowned with the title, in a 2005 interview.

Dupree also contends that there is a lot more to horror royalty than simply possessing the lung capacity to belt out a blood-curdling shriek.

"A scream queen is a woman who can take on different facets of characters, cry at a moment's notice, be a killer."

She also said that simply being in one

**"I can occasionally play a bimbo, but I'm usually the bad guy."**

horror movie doesn't make a scream queen, which is one of the things that set her apart from other black actresses.

"The horror genre really needed somebody different, as far as the women go," she said. With a list of horror films well into the teens, as well as performances in television, radio and the Internet, it is apparent that Dupree's presence in the horror genre is one that can't, and won't, be ignored.

Dupree didn't hesitate when divulging whom she most looks up to in her field. "I've always loved Debbie Rochon," Dupree

said fondly. "She's been through a lot in this industry. She's been screwed over; she's had a lot of on-set accidents. She perseveres; she has a lot of strength. I admire her."

After making it to the finals in Fangoria Radio's scream queen contest, Dupree's phone began ringing, and she was offered a role as a vampire in "Bachelor Party in the Bungalow of the Damned." Her character, a vampire posing as a stripper, feasts away on young sex-crazed men in this Brian Thompson film. The poor men are also terrorized by face-melting acid snowballs and head-smashing garden gnomes, but Dupree's demonic, man-eating breasts are to die for. Literally.

Ever since that fateful Fangoria scream, her filmography has continued to grow. "They just started knocking down my door, and it isn't slowing down." Even though her repertoire has expanded, her first role is still her favorite. "It was so fun. The cast became a family ... we still stay in touch with each other."

Dupree first developed an interest in the horror genre when she was a small child, because she wasn't allowed to watch scary movies. Her love for them is getting stronger. "I took a liking to the industry. I'm attracted to the effects, the makeup," she explained, her eyes shining.

In regal scream-queen form, Dupree is not limited to playing the victim. In fact, she's often the one holding the knife.

"To my surprise and amusement, I got branded as the killer," she said, her cherry-red lipstick glistening. Looking at her, you wouldn't believe she could be anything but sweet. From her enthusiastic smile to her glittery body sticker, the mother of six boasts a body that most women would, well, kill for.

"I can occasionally play a bimbo, but I'm usually the bad guy," she beamed.

When she's not chasing unfortunate victims through the set of her current film, she's probably getting dressed to do just that. Dupree doesn't mind sitting idle while

~~Move over, Jamie Lee Curtis.~~  
Her name is  
**Monique Dupree.**



**“It took eight,  
maybe nine,  
hours of makeup  
because  
my boobs  
had  
teeth.”**

— Dupree  
on her role in  
“Bachelor Party  
in the Bungalow  
of the Damned,”  
where she  
played a  
vampire posing  
as a stripper  
who feasts on  
young, sex-  
crazed men

**“I want to play a female Hannibal.”**

a makeup artist covers her with goop. She loves it. For her role in “Bachelor Party in the Bungalow of the Damned,” her chest exhibited more makeup than her face. After all, anyone with the gift of sight can see that Dupree’s mammary duo is quite an area to cover.

“It was all green; it took eight, maybe nine, hours of makeup because my boobs had teeth,” she explained. When the makeup artists were done, Dupree was completely unrecognizable, and totally scary, which is an impressive feat for a movie limited to such a meager budget. Her metamorphosis is still one of Dupree’s fondest memories. “I had so much fun. It’s a natural thing for me.” Describing a role where her body parts eat men as “natural” is something only a true scream queen could say.

Not all of her roles involve such lengthy transformations. In “The Maim Event,” Dupree played a part with virtually no makeup. “I played a murderous wrestler. It was different because I was a regular psycho, not a supernatural one,” she said with a small laugh. “It was fun; it really was.”

As lighthearted as she seems, Dupree doesn’t take her roles lightly. “I think a lot of actresses don’t take it seriously. I take it very seriously.”

She takes it so seriously, in fact, that she researches each and every role she undertakes. In “Oria,” Dupree plays a role in which she must rely solely on her body language to communicate with her audience, since her character — a snake demon — doesn’t speak.

“That role was really hard. I studied snakes. ... I brushed up on my belly dancing.”

However, doing something in earnest doesn’t always mean that others will give you the credit. “Honestly, it seems as though people in other genres don’t take you seriously,” she said of one of the struggles of being a scream queen.

Dupree, like many stars, knew she wanted to be in entertainment from a young age. Her family was her very first audience — and quite a large one, at 50 to 70 people, for a novice entertainer.

“I used to perform for my family on the holidays ... and we would do a fashion show and an action skit,” she recalled. She choreographed everything herself, while her cousins shared the spotlight with her as the cast.

She went from family-viewed fashion shows to modeling, her first pose struck at the young age of seven. She wore a different personality with each outfit. “I put acting *into* my modeling.”

Successful though she was — with her



**“As corny as it sounds, I take my inspiration from my children. They’re so inspiring.”**

pictures in the “Suffolk County Choppers” and “Singles of Soul” calendars, among others — she found herself in a category all of its own. Dupree jokingly calls herself the “un-somebody,” due to her unconventional build.

“I don’t fit the build of an average model, because I have more meat on me, but I don’t fit the build of a plus-size model, because I’m too skinny,” she said matter-of-factly. Her height certainly isn’t an issue. She meets supermodel height requirements at 5 feet 9 inches tall — before putting on a set of heels.

Prior to playing murderous wrestlers or vampires with fanged mammary glands,

Monique took on quite a different role: being a mother. “I thought that my career was over,” Monique recalled of her first baby. Most pursue acting careers before having children, but Monique started her family first, taking a four-year break after giving birth to her oldest child. Now at age 32, she has six, the youngest of which is only a few months old.

“As corny as it sounds, I take my inspiration from my children. They’re so inspiring.” Her kids encourage her to take on the roles that will take her away from her home in West Virginia for extended periods of time — roles that she would otherwise reject in order to spend time with them. “They’re like little old people,” she laughed.

The next role Dupree wants to try is that of a serial killer. “I have this obsession with serial killers,” she confessed. She longs to play a character that kills for a reason — an intelligent killer — not someone who kills mindlessly. “I want to play a female Hannibal. I would love to play a character like that.”

What else would a scream queen wish for? “I’ve always wanted to meet Bruce Campbell above anyone else. I still want to meet him. I want to work with him, actually.” Campbell has been a cult favorite in the horror business, ever since his role in “Evil Dead.”

Dupree’s list of people to meet is getting shorter, since she recently spent three days with actor Tony Todd (“Candyman,” “Final Destination” trilogy) at the Dark X-Mas convention in Warren.

Though she got to check Todd off her stars-to-meet list, she missed out on a screaming contest at the convention. “I didn’t have a voice; I had laryngitis,” she explained. At least it gave everyone else a fighting chance.

Aside from screaming contests, Dupree has other things in mind. “I don’t want to just stick with the horror genre; I want to challenge myself to do other things.” Even though she is breaking into the mainstream movie industry, recently landing a small role in Denzel Washington’s new movie, “American Gangster,” Dupree wants to do large-budget horror movies. She will always go back to her first love.

“I want to do it all, but I will always come back to horror and independent films. I’m staying where I am on purpose. I’m passionate about it.”

There seems little doubt that she’ll end up on the big-budget silver screen. After all, she’s an actress who has it all — beauty, brains, talent, ambition, movie star charisma and a scream that will rattle your bones right out of your skin. Monique Dupree is making herself heard, and she’s just getting started.

Bruce Campbell, eat your heart out.

# A New Artistic Medium...

## Why video gaming is an art

By Nick Stoian

### THE ARGUMENT

"Roger Ebert is an incompetent, hypocritical idiot!" "He's a \*\*\*\*ing noob, old-azz biatch who don't know what it is he talkin bout." "Lets go pwn his a\$\$." Go to any video game blog or message board on the internet dealing with video games as art and you will be confronted by statements similar to these. The famous movie critic put his foot in his mouth in 2006 by stating that video games could never be respected as a medium of "art". He later clarified his statement in July 2007, stating on his personal website "Anything can be art. Even a can of Campbell's soup. What I should have said is that games could not be high art, as I understand it." The problem with such a judgmental statement was that it was no doubt hypocritical.

The fact that Ebert has doubtfully ever played any more of a video game than a Tetris demo on his cell phone doesn't make him an expert on the subject. It is arguable that the retraction was brought on by nothing more than a panicked reaction to the harsh criticism he received not only from developers in the video game industry, but fans of the medium as well. This comes from the man who helped co-write *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls* in 1970, regarded as one of the most incomprehensible films ever produced.

Horror novelist and video game producer Clive Barker rebuked Ebert's statement, calling the film critic prejudiced against a medium he knew nothing about and stating that the Ebert must first open his mind to the experience of video games before he sees so fit to condemn them. This sparked an ongoing feud between the two, with neither willing to budge on his ideas. In the gaming community, Barker is seen as a savior who has influenced fans and even other developers to dispute Ebert's generalization.

Ebert went on to say in his retraction that "I know it by the definition of the vast majority of games. They tend to involve (1) point and shoot in many

variations and plotlines, (2) treasure or scavenger hunts, as in *Myst*, and (3) player control of the outcome. I don't think these attributes have much to do with art; they have more in common with sports." This is a completely judgmental statement that Ebert made on a whim. He had little experience and evidence to back it up. By his own admission, he has done little experimentation with video games, yet is willing to openly slam them as a genre of art.

This does not say that Ebert is close-minded, simply uneducated when it comes to video games. He states that "Video games by their nature require player choices, which is the opposite of the strategy of serious film and literature, which requires authorial control". This is what makes art in his eyes, authorial control. He considers things like graphic novels and animation to be forms of art, why not games? Do video games not have original storylines and distinct artistic styles, like the films Ebert prides himself on loving so much? There are countless styles of different art found in video games.

### THE STYLES

First of all, let's look at the classics: 2D sprites. Flat, colorful portraits were the cornerstones of video game at the medium's conception. Some of the most widely remembered sprites exist in classic games like the *Street Fighter* and *Castlevania* series. Other notables include *Mario* and *Sonic*, though these gaming icons have migrated to 3D over the years. Widely regarded as one of the most artistic games of 2007, *Odin Sphere* used its beautifully hand-painted 2D sprites and lush, detailed 2D backgrounds to tell a story of re-imagined Norse mythology, steeped in personality and professionalism. *Street Fighter 4*, the long anticipated continuation of the series, is set to hit sometime in late 2008 or early 2009, will no doubt revamp ideas of 2D beauty, as its short, water colored teaser trailer on [www.gametrailers.com](http://www.gametrailers.com) alludes to. Recent titles include the majority

of handheld *Final Fantasy* titles and the *Guilty Gear* saga.

The second form of art in games is a relatively new format that came on the market under five years ago. Cel-shading has emerged as a new, unique art form that is garnering more respect by the day. Cel-shading is basically like a color by numbers. Specific areas of characters are colored a specific way. The art style is reminiscent of high school geometry, with various shapes coming together to build a beautiful picture. This art style is not limited to juvenile games either. Developer Atlus has since utilized the format with great success in their acclaimed *Shin Megami Tensei* series, including *Digital Devil Saga* and its sequel, *Nocturne*, *Devil Summoner*, and *Persona 3*. In fact, *Shin Megami Tensei: Digital Devil Saga* has one of the most respected opening video sequences in games today. *Capcom's Killer 7* is also an example of great artistic use of cel-shading.

This art style was not without controversy however. When the high-profile title *Zelda: The Wind Waker* announced that it would be using this relatively new art form in the highly anticipated 2003 release, the backlash from fans was extreme. The game was deemed too kiddy, too cartoony. No one in their right mind was going to purchase such a colorful game, especially since the *Zelda* series was rumored to be heading in a darker direction. As reviews and sales figures show however, the game was a hit, becoming one of the best selling titles on the Nintendo Gamecube. And the darker direction thing? SPOILER: Watch Link embed his sword in Ganon's skull and then talk.

By far, the most prominent art style is 3D animation. With the introduction of new, more powerful technology, video games broke into the third dimension. The characters now look so real that photos and game screenshots can be placed side by side and many people would have difficulty telling the difference. One of

the prime examples of this phenomenon is *Namco's Ace Combat 6: Fires of Liberation*. The jet fighter game, found on the Xbox 360, is so realistic that one of their ads even dares readers to figure out which is the real photo and what is the screenshot. *Team Ninja's Xbox title Ninja Gaiden*, was considered one of the best looking titles ever and had the storyline and fan base to back it up. A continuation of an original NES series, *Ninja Gaiden* pleased fans, developers, and critics. A sequel is due out in 2008.

But the technology itself is not solely responsible for this art. Even older titles from the original Sony Playstation have some of the best 3D images to date. *Square Enix*, then *Square-soft*, published three games from the *Final Fantasy* series on the Playstation, VII, VIII, and IX. To this day, gamers will tell you that *Final Fantasy VII* has the greatest story ever told in a video game. Indeed, it may be the only game that ever made them cry (don't deny it) with the shocking death of a main character. *Final Fantasy VIII* continued with a new great story, filled with love and betrayal. Its opening FMV is still considered one of the best ever. *Final Fantasy IX*, though younger looking, had a story just as good as its predecessors.

Finally, story should be the most important factor in gaming. Though there are stories that make an impact, Ebert is right in assuming that there are too many recycled factors in video games. For the genre to continue to be held in high esteem, constant new and unique ideas must be generated. Game developers have realized this, and many ambitious new titles like *Assassin's Creed*, a game portraying the main character as an assassin during the Third Crusade and *Psyconauts*, Tim Schaffer's hilarious romp through a summer camp for young psychics help to push the medium forward. Though for every unique title, there are several recycled point and shoot games. We know barrels explode... something new please?

## THE \$\$\$ FACTOR

If one desires to look at the impact video games have had on the market, they need only compare it film. Ebert has no problem calling film art, so let us compare video games to the "expert's" favorite topic. The revenue a film receives all too often determines whether or not it can be considered art. Let us give games the same treatment and see how they measure up.

Best sellers like Halo 3 and Mario Galaxy have pushed sales for the Xbox 360 and Nintendo Wii into the stratosphere. With guaranteed hits like Super Smash Brothers Brawl and Metal Gear 4 looming to strike in the first quarter of 2008, sales in consoles and video games can only go up. According to an article on gamespot.com, movie sales for the first week of October 2007 were at only \$80 million, the worst since 1999. The drop in sales is attributed to the September 26 release of highly hyped title Halo 3, which grossed \$170 million on its first day. This beats the highest box office opening of the year, Spiderman 3 and its \$148 million debut. Developer Bungie's Halo 3 has since gone on to make well over \$350 million at the time of this article. The hit is expected to be just as hard in early 2008 with the release of Rockstar Games' Grand Theft Auto IV.

However, high art can come at a price. Constant delays to make games perfect for the market have plagued top developers including Team Ninja, Bungie, and Rockstar Games. The hit that Rockstar stock alone took after announcing its delay of the highly anticipated Grand Theft Auto IV would have been more than enough to sink many of the smaller development companies. Bungie faced flak for months with their delays to critically acclaimed Halo 2, forcing them to seemingly rush production of Halo 3, a fact that has been cited throughout Bungie.net and Gamefaqs.com message boards.

Fans, while not happy with delays, are willing to wait if the game gets the perfection it deserves. There is not doubt that Halo 3 is one of the best titles ever produced, the problem is that it could have been even better had more time been spent on production. Bungie was forced to weigh the risks. Delay the title and risk a gigantic backlash in their fan base or release the game on time, even though it may not be a work of perfection. They chose the second option and, with the game grossing well over \$350 million so far, it



An example of hand-painted, 2D sprites against pre-rendered backdrops in Atlas' 2007 Odin Sphere for Playstation 2. Image courtesy of Odin Sphere.

seems like the right decision.

With so many top-selling titles releasing in the video game market in during the holiday season, attention shifts from what could be a great title that will stand the test of time to what movie-licensed game can developers churn out to make a quick buck in the prime of the market. Movie licensed games have become the bane of the video game industry. Seen usually as nothing more than a way to make a quick buck, many developers do not put full time and resources into these relatively cheap, usually profitable titles. However, the market has decided to shift remarkably in the past couple years.

In 2006, the best-selling title was, naturally, Madden 06. This was not a surprise to the game market, as the annual football title is guaranteed to garner high sales not matter who graces the cover. The surprise of 2006 was the second best selling title. No Final Fantasy or Metal Gear here. Rather a cartoony racer based off of the hit Pixar movie, Cars. The game, released on multiple systems just like Madden, was able to garner respect in video game communities as being one of the best movie-licensed games ever produced. According to the Wall Street Journal, "...the Cars video game from THQ was the number one selling kids video game brand and the number two overall best selling video game in 2006." It also enlarged the bank account of publisher THQ and allowed more freedom for future development, ballooning sales a reported 68% from July to September 2006.

## IN CONCLUSION

Video games have unique stories, distinct and memorable characters, and the ability to make audience members feel all sorts of emotions. After a single playthrough, gamers can emerge feeling as though they have just run a grueling gauntlet that



A screenshot showcasing Capcom's Killer 7, published in 2005 for Gamecube and later Playstation 2. The game is a dark look at the twisted mind of an assassin with multiple personalities, each of which the player controls as they fight for dominance. Image courtesy of www.gamasutra.com.



The one below is the real plane, while the picture to the left is a video game image. Images courtesy of www.mohizgrfx.com and www.watch.impress.co.jp



One of these pictures is a real A-10 Warthog. The other is a screenshot of an A-10 Warthog from Namco's Ace Combat 6: Fires of Liberation, released in 2007 for Xbox 360. Can you tell the difference? Mind boggling isn't it?

make them ecstatic, depressed, furious, shocked, and blown away. Don't believe? Try Shadow of the Colossus for Playstation 2. In his "Answerman" column, Ebert says that he is "...prepared to believe that video games can be elegant, subtle, sophisticated, challenging and visually wonderful." But believes that "...the nature of the medium prevents it from moving beyond craftsmanship to the stature of art." Lastly, "...no one in or out of the field has ever been able to cite a game worthy of comparison with the great dramatists, poets, filmmakers, novelists and composers."

Games have accomplished one thing though, they have made Ebert think: "That a game can aspire to artistic importance as a visual experience, I accept." Now all that a video game has to do in Ebert's eyes is to make him be involved in a story that involves running a gamut of emotions in quick succession, just like his precious films. Finally, Ebert has a problem with the gamer life-

style: "...video games represent a loss of those precious hours we have available to make ourselves more cultured, civilized and empathetic." On this, Ebert may have a point. To those that are religious in their gaming... please don't let it suck up your life. For every avatar you have online in World of Warcraft, part of your personality dies. This is what Ebert wants. Don't let him win.

Is New England Patriots' quarterback Tom Brady's flawless performance this year art? He is doing everything right, in perfect form, with little evident mistakes. Depends on who you ask. Who decided that Picasso was art? Smears of blue boxes across a canvas look like nothing more than spilled watercolors a four-year-old could have done to some people. In the end, art is defined by the critic. But that same critic has to be willing to be flexible and listen to the arguments and definitions of those who oppose him... not just be close-minded to anyone who disagrees.



# Relient K

Hometown: Canton, Oh.

photos courtesy of Relient K



In the beginning (1998) they just wanted to play shows ... local shows, regional shows ... any show. It wasn't about being "famous." They didn't take themselves too seriously (still don't) and the story behind their name proves it.

Relient K hails from Canton and has gone from playing shows at the local skate park and recreation hall, to playing at music clubs and festivals headlining the ticket now.

The band is actually named after guitarist Matt Hoopes' "train-wreck heap of a car," a Plymouth Relient K.

In 2000, Relient K came out with their self-titled Gotee Records debut, and even though it earned the group a Billboard Video Music Award nomination, it wasn't the album that moved the band from locally known to nationally known. Their 2001 follow-up, "The Anatomy of the Tongue in Cheek," was the group's breakthrough — it turned Relient K into a club headliner instead of an opening act.

Lead singer Matt Thiessen may have labeled them "...just regular kids," but in the seven years since their debut, they've continued to grow in popularity, making them anything but "regular."

All the members are Christians, although some fans have questioned the band's part in the Christian rock genre.

Thiessen has his own opinions about this.

"Our whole answer is, call us whatever you want. You can call us a Christian band; you can call us a rock and roll band.

And we can go out on tour with this band, and we can go out on tour with that band. But we don't care. We're just doing what we do. We're having fun. We write about what we want to write about and, you know, most of the time, that's, you know, our hearts and our faith."

Like other Christian rock bands,

the band's songs are not all about God, but the majority of them say "You" in reference to God, or talk about subjects such as becoming a better person. At the same time, many songs do state God's name directly.

One response that Matt Thiessen had on their Web site explained the difficulty of mentioning Jesus in a song without it sounding "corny."

However, this quote from Thiessen has been taken out of context, as Thiessen was just saying they didn't use the lyrics well. Some fans point out the line in "Charles in Charge" that says, "You, me, and Jesus at your mom's pizza parlor."

The band has played on MTV, but as with other bands like Switchfoot, the mainstream is a way for a band like Relient K to get Christian-themed music to non-Christian listeners. Despite criticism, the band's music still appears on Christian radio stations, bookstores, and music Web sites; they still play numerous Christian rock festivals every year.

With "Five Score And Seven Years Ago"—Relient K's fifth album in seven years and the follow up to 2004's "mmhmm," the band's third consecutive Gold album — some are bound to ask if the pop-punk band has, ahem, matured a bit?

Well, yes sort of. While the new album isn't chockfull of their characteristic puns and concludes with an 11-minute, 115-track tour de force entitled "Deathbed," rest assured, Relient K has not lost its quirky sense of humor.

The first track, the a cappella

"I don't think of it as, 'Hey, look at us, we're entertaining you.' It's more like, 'Come on, let's all have fun.'" -Matt Thiessen

vignette "Plead the Fifth," for instance, is written from the viewpoint of a 19th century man. Focusing on an outlandish conspiracy theory about Lincoln's death, the song features lead vocalist, guitarist and pianist Matt Thiessen using his mouth to simulate each instrument of a drum kit. "Crayons Can Melt On Us For All I Care," which takes longer to say than to play, is a classic Relient K goofball aside. And while the epic "Deathbed," which includes Switchfoot's Jon Foreman on guest vocals, has the somber setting that its title implies, the masterfully woven tale of a man's life and death brims with witty observations and aural ironies.

"I really love to not be serious all the time, even when I am being serious," says Thiessen, who likens the band's growth on "Five Score And Seven Years Ago" to Laffy Taffy. "It's the same flavor, but we try to stretch it a little bit.

It's still melodic, it's still rock 'n' roll; there are still a lot of dynamics. But at the same time, we're trying to write a bit differently, lyrically."

Indeed, the album is a departure for Relient K. In addition to the two story-songs that bookend the album, there are some love songs — and they're happy ones.

"I always write about what I'm going through, and I can't avoid the fact that I'm just really happy and there are some good things going on," says Thiessen.

The band broke into the mainstream in 2004 after Capitol signed them, and they released

their fourth record, "Mmhmm," which debuted at No. 15 on the Billboard 200 and produced three top five hits on Christian radio and two top 20 hits on mainstream radio. Their fifth full-length record, "Five Score and Seven Years Ago," debuted at No. 6 on the U.S. Billboard 200. It has sold at least 150,000 copies to date.

"We're still under the radar; nobody knows who we are," says Thiessen gleefully. Mmhmm, given the promise of "Five Score And Seven Years Ago," that may change.

"Before and after our shows, we spend a lot of time hanging out with kids one-on-one, showing them that we're real people," Hoopes explains. "Being in our situation feels somewhat strange to us. It's a little like being a good athlete in high school.

One day you're playing basketball and being cheered on by your classmates, and the next day, you're just you, sitting in the back of history class. I think we see ourselves as that kid sitting in the back of the class, even when were on stage. I don't think of it as, 'Hey, look at us, we're entertaining you.' It's more like, 'Come on, let's all have fun.' We define being evangelists as not only telling people about the Gospel, but living that as well."

Relient K is a band that's not afraid of being a little optimistic in a pretty pessimistic world. Their positive outlook on life has drawn a huge following, and their popularity is still growing.

"We don't take all this too seriously, Thiessen said. "It's fun and it's great to be on top and be a positive influence. Plus we love touring. But we know it's not going to last forever. Still, I think that's the brightest thing you can hope for."



## IF YOU LIKE RELINET K, YOU'LL ALSO LIKE:

Mae, Hawk Nelson, and Switchfoot

# The Starting Line

Hometown: Philadelphia, Pa.

In 1999, the band that would become The Starting Line was initiated in Churchville, Pennsylvania, via an e-mail from guitarist Matt Watts to vocalist and bassist Kenny Vasoli. The message asked if the then fourteen-year-old Vasoli, who was at that time in a band called Smash Adams, was interested in “jamming and shit”, as the message title read. Only a few weeks later, Vasoli found himself rehearsing with his future band mates Watts, guitarist Mike Golla and drummer Tom Gryskewicz.

“Growing up in Philly there was no real scene; it was mostly ska and hardcore music,” Vasoli said. “We headed more towards show in Jersey where there was more for us.”

Soon, the band started touring under the name Sunday Drive, selling homemade merchandise and a self-recorded demo cassette titled “Four Songs.” Their first official release was a three-way split with The Jimmy Tuesday Band and The Commercials, released on KickStart Audio in 2000.

Sunday Drive was soon

approached by We the People Records and asked to produce a recording session (the infamous “We the People Records Sessions”). Set for a release in December 2000, the 12 songs were initially planned to become the band’s debut full-length “With Hopes of Starting Over” on We the People Records. However, the songs ended up serving only as demos for tracks on future releases, as the band signed with Drive-Thru Records in April 2001.

On Drive-Thru, Sunday Drive soon released its debut EP “With Hopes of Starting Over.” Eventually discovering that the name “Sunday Drive” was already taken by a Christian rock band, the band changed its name to The Starting Line.

“There is no significance behind the name; it was the only name we all could agree upon,” Vasoli said.

On July 16, 2002, almost exactly one year after the release of the band’s EP, the full-length “Say It Like You Mean It” followed. The songs ranged from energetic and fast-paced



to melancholy and calm. The band covered performing on stage, with “Given the Chance.” “Left Coast Envy” dealt with feeling homesick, while “Up & Go” and “Hello Houston,” among others, aimed to get with Vasoli’s ex-girlfriend Karina. The hit single “The Best of Me” and its two music videos, as well as the second single “Leaving,” received heavy radio and TV air play, securing The Starting Line a spot on the Vans Warped Tour.

Their major label debut on Geffen Records, “Based on a True Story,” came out in May 2005. Lyrically, the band dissociated itself from the post-relationship formula that was predominant on its previous records.

The otherwise very positive and cheerful album was overshadowed by several rather angry songs, written to spite the band’s record label. Songs like “Inspired by the \$” featured lyrics that were unmistakably directed at Geffen: “Get to the point/Get it across/To the boys at the top of the ladder I’m climbing up/I have my doubt.” Another section of the song refers to a meeting the band had with the label’s executives,

where The Starting Line was asked to write more radio-friendly songs in the vein of New Found Glory’s “Catalyst” (2004) and recreate “The Best of Me.”

In 2004 The Starting Line was — at its request — released from their record deal with Geffen, and became a free agent.

In early January 2006, the band signed with Virgin Records, releasing its third full-length album “Direction” on July 31, 2007, which contained the single “Island.” The album peaked at No. 30 on the Billboard 200 chart, but it fell off the chart two weeks later. To date, the band’s highest ranking on the chart was No. 18, with their second album “Based on a True Story.” The band just completed the 2007 Vans Warped Tour and began their nationwide headlining tour in September.

Vasoli says, “The new album is about finding direction in life.”

He still makes sure to mention those who buy that album.

“The fans are the primary reason we do this; it’s amazing how people can listen to us through all the changes and hardships. I always respect the fans.”

**If you like The Starting Line, you’ll also like:**

Yellowcard, All Time Low, and Mae





# Sick Puppies

Hometown: Australia / Los Angeles

**W**ith a name like Sick Puppies, you wouldn't think hugs would play a major role in the gutsy indie crew's rise to fame, but they do, along with malls and the video-sharing site /YouTube. When they met in 1997, singer/lead guitarist Shimon Moore and bassist Emma Anzai were both fans of Silverchair and the Living End from their native Australia.

Soon Chris Mileski joined on drums and a series of live gigs led to some local recognition and the 1999 EP *Dog's Breakfast*.

The band features Shimon and Emma from Australia and Mark from L.A.

Emma has been named one of the hottest girls in rock by several music magazines including *Revolver*. "A lot of people ask about her, I've been in this band since we started and we don't think of her as a girl

really, she's a great guitarist," said Shimon. "Sure she needs her private time, but that's a given, she's a girl."

The band had landed in America and Mark Goodwin became the new drummer and the band soon worked a deal with the indie label Roadshow, which released a self-titled EP by the band at the end of 2006. Moore said, "Right when we got our excitement of being on a label, it went bankrupt. It was taking our high and making us kinda start all over."

Moore's was at an outdoor shopping mall, where he would soon meet performance artist Juan Mann, who would carry a "Free Hugs" sign around the

mall and oblige anyone who took him up on it. Moore filmed the positive and negative reactions and eventually compiled them, adding the Sick Puppies song "All the Same" as the musical bed. He sent it as video sympathy card when he learned Mann had just lost his grandmother. Mann was touched, posted it to /YouTube, and by December 2006 the heartwarming video had ten million views.

"It was the battering ram that finally broke down the wall in front of us," Moore said regarding the YouTube video.

The "Free Hugs" video, which accompanied the band's song "All The Same," earned Sick Puppies exposure on Oprah, Jay



Leno, "60 Minutes" and CNN, and inspired people around the world to begin their own free hugs campaigns. It also propelled "All the Same" into a top-requested single at commercial radio stations across North America. But while the "Free Hugs" video helped spread the music and message of Sick Puppies, the band is anything but an overnight success.

Given those ten million video views, it didn't take long for the majors to come calling. Virgin wooed them and released the album *Dressed Up as Life*.

The band's North American debut, *Dressed Up As Life*, validates the praise with a heartfelt collection of amazing rhythms, propelling beats and choruses that span miles. It's the kind of album that captures the beauty, pain and endless possibilities of life.

The acoustics and triumphant guitar riffs of the renowned "All the Same" transcend

even without the video. "My World" pinpoints the moment where epiphany turns regret into acceptance by layered instruments with simple arrangements. "Pitiful," combines start-stop blasts with a pounding atmosphere, resulting in a song that's both angry and undeniable. And, "Asshole Father" is taking a stab at animosity.

"The record is an honest reflection of what we were feeling and going through when we were making it," says singer and guitarist Shimon Moore. "There were times when we were really depressed and then suddenly we were happy. So these songs capture that whole rollercoaster ride."

"The album is honest and heavy," said Moore "...and raw and alive," added Anzai.

With infectious tunes, and equal doses of hits and hugs, The Sick Puppies are striking a blow against the pile of faceless modern rock bands that are virtually all the same.



**If you like the Sick Puppies,  
then you'll also like:**

**Silverchair and The Living End**



# FROM CAT-CALLING TO “DOG HANDLING”

THE SECRETS TO MAINTAINING THE  
UPPER HAND IN RELATIONSHIPS

By Jeanette DiRubba  
Illustration by Juliana Cala

the power.

Naylor says that men are like dogs, and you have to train them: “If they get what they want straightaway, they lose interest.”

Naylor gives a simple analogy in her book to paint a clear picture of what women should be doing:

If a dog drops a ball into your lap, he wants you to throw it so that he can play. However, if you just hold onto the ball, the dog will stay put. He might sit, look at you and wait for however long you choose to hold onto that ball. Finally, when you decide to throw the ball, he’ll be excited and bark happily. The dog will then fetch the ball, return it to you, and you’re back at square one. The ball is still in your court.

Basically, you need to be a tease because

once you give away your goods, the dogs, er, men, won’t ever come back. Just give a little away, then back off. And most importantly, you should never let them know you want to play, too. Furthermore, if you want to remain in control, you should never back down.

Naylor’s explanation for all this breaks down into the fact that men are most like dogs because they are hunter-gatherers. You should never deprive them of their hunt.

There are many women who want to have control of their relationship when they think they’ve found the perfect guy, but they go about it the wrong way. Here are some traditional flawed approaches that women tend to lean toward when they *think* they have control.

**S**ingle? Attached? Either status is not a problem nowadays because of the new ways to score big and go home with the upper hand. “Dog Handling,” a book by Clare Naylor, is a must-read on everyone’s list for a complete and full understanding of the mastery of this so-called upper-handed status.

## FOR THE LADIES

Let’s get something straight. He seems nice — sweet, genuine and caring — but how do *you* get *him* to stick around?

If you’re in a relationship or even single, who’s to say the man is not the one in control? You need to step it up, ladies, and experience what it’s like to be the one with



## RELENTLESS ROMANTIC

She wastes her time chasing after the wrong guy who doesn't show her enough attention. Don't get tied up hunting for the wrong boy, the bad boy or the boy who treats you like his chew toy. If this sounds like you, you're being dog handled. If a guy likes you, you won't have to pursue him. It's hard when you have feelings strong enough to reduce your dignity to hounding after him, but lose this loser ASAP before you miss out on someone better.



## THE GOLD-DIGGER

Admit it, you love attention. But be wary of a man who showers you with too much, especially when it's in material form. Your true feelings are clouded for someone who spoils you with pricey dinners and gifts and picks up every tab. If he does it too often, there's nothing special about it. Think of it this way: You get diamonds on the second date, and by the time wedding bells are ringing, you're bored. Ask yourself if you love him or his money before your closet turns into a collection of designer frocks.

"I was definitely in control with my ex-boyfriend, Chris," said YSU sophomore Callie Lowe. "He gave me everything because I would make him. He would do anything for me because he was my bitch. He would walk my dogs, and even go shopping for me," Lowe said.

It seems as if Lowe lived the gold-digger lifestyle rather well. When asked what happened to this oh-so-perfect-guy, she said, "I just got bored."



## THE NON-TRADITIONAL FEMME

This is the girl who calls and texts too much, and always makes the first move. Empowerment is good, but too much non-traditionalism actually gives the male the upper hand because the female makes herself too available.

Youngstown State University freshman Matt Papantonakis doesn't believe in unconventional women.

"It's an age-old tradition that the male is the head of a relationship," he said. "The woman is just supposed to be supportive. This is not a sexist comment. However, behind, and not beside, every great man is an even greater woman," Papantonakis said.

If you are always available, and always calling the shots, the man is unchallenged. He'll move on to chase someone more challenging and possibly more traditional in approach.

## THE FRIEND WITH BENEFITS

This is a no-no, especially for women who are inherently more emotional than men. A friends-with-benefits deal never works because someone is going to get hurt. Whether he has some feelings for you or none at all, you risk developing stronger emotional feelings than he. Either don't do it, or avoid this physical trap by being upfront. Tell him you don't hook up with guys you're not dating. He must either acknowledge that you're dating, seeing each other, talking — whatever you want to call it — or make you his girlfriend. If he doesn't talk about you to his friends or take you out, he's just in it for the nookie.

Wake up. I wanna cuddle!



Mmmph.

## THE DOWNSIDE

Dog handling is a masterful form of trickery, but you need to be careful when and how you choose to use this art form.

"The girl I dated was in complete control, and she made all the rules," said YSU freshman Steve Suverison. "She made me

feel so worthless."

Not all men like the feeling of a chase. A man should want to feel like he has some responsibilities for making the relationship work.

Men might view the unreturned calls or sexless relationship as rejection or a

complete turn-off. They might, in fact, lose all interest and hope in you. Just like all dogs are different breeds, so are men. You need to choose how to handle your man by understanding what his personality type is first. You can do this by spending time with him and getting to know him.

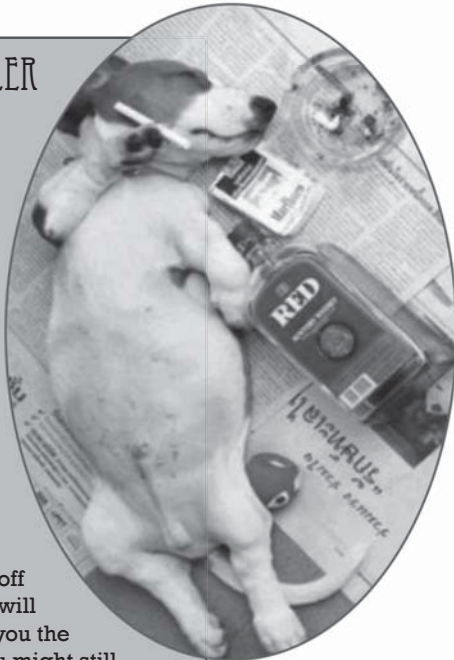
# AND GENTLEMEN

Cut the cat-calling. Women seldom like to be treated as if they were standing on a street-side corner, waiting to be picked up for some action. If you want to maintain the upper hand and control where the relationship is leading, here are four things to avoid when starting a relationship, dating or living the single life.

## THE DRUNKEN DIALER

OK. Just stop it. If you like a girl, don't drunk dial her. This is tasteless, and the unwelcome gesture is an insult. Drunken phone calls make a woman feel like she is just a piece of action and show that the man isn't ready for any type of commitment and wishes to remain single.

Drunk-dialing does not make you a "gentleman caller." If you really have feelings for her, turn your phone off when you know that you will be drinking. It will save you the humiliation later, and you might still have that special girl by your side.



## THE INNOCUOUS TEXTER

Overabundance of text messaging shows clinginess and submission, especially when the messages are so pointless that it's a waste to even contact the person.

If you can't stop thinking about her, maybe some flowers would do the trick. That will show you care without making her annoyed with your constant, incoherent text ramblings.

Don't give in to texting first every time; let her text first sometimes to establish a balance of communication. If she doesn't respond to your countless texts, it's time to move on.

YSU senior Sarah Clarke was never interested in the guy who hounded her by text. He started off as an innocuous texter but ended up losing his dignity in her book. Over a series of months, his text messages progressed from "Hey, what's up?" to "Hey, why are you ignoring me?" and, finally, to "What's your deal?"

"I ignored him, and I figured he'd get the hint, and he just kept texting me," Clarke said.

Take her advice before your tail gets stuck between your legs: "After the third message I would have gotten the hint. Nobody wants to be rejected, but it's best to keep your dignity."



## MR. HOT-SHOT

Conceited much? Impressing women is always a plus, but when you have to lie about your life, or act like the all-knowing party master, this leads some girls away. Women will also see the red flag if you're "totally cool" with her talents or hobbies just to start dating her, and then your true feelings about her yodeling hobby shine through once you get comfortable.

"I think that guys just put on this act," said YSU senior Victoria Earp. "Guys are now falling into the role that women were supposed to obtain in the past — like being pleasant and very fake upfront in social situations. Guys are turning into the Stepford wives!"

Be honest with her. She won't mind much that you haven't skydived or jumped off a cliff and miraculously lived to tell the tale. Oh, and when she asks you to watch her favorite chick flick with her, remember to not pretend to be into it and then fall asleep.

Yeah.  
I drive stick.



## THE BEMUSED BACHELOR

If you like her, tell her. Plain and simple. You're right, it's not always the man's responsibility, but girls like to feel special knowing that someone likes them. If you get rejected, at least you know and aren't pondering over whether she does or doesn't have feelings for you. Now you can move on.

Don't show mixed signals. YSU junior Zack Rebillot doesn't believe any signals. He tells girls straightaway what he expects.

"I run ... relationships because I'm sweet, and she knows that because I tell her," he said.

With complete control from one half of the relationship, Rebillot's tactic is too extreme, but if you are interested in a girl, don't try to impress her, lead her on and then try and make her jealous by throwing another girl into the picture. These are all examples of mixed signals. Your dream girl will take these signs as rejection, and you will be stuck with a decoy instead of the real thing.



By Jesi Taafe

Photo courtesy of Jesi Taafe

# There was love all around... ..but they never heard it singing

*Her parents disowned her for dating a girl. Now they'll marry in secret.*

**S**he really is going to be a beautiful bride. Her hair, shining and chestnut, falls in her face as she speaks, and she uses her right hand to smooth her side-swept bangs from her sparkling green eyes. She is almost annoyingly cute when she laughs, and even more so when her shoulders bounce up and down slightly when her laugh is no longer audible.

Drawing a cigarette to her lips and looking across a heaping ashtray, she speaks of her fiancé, her upcoming nuptials and her life.

Her name is Kellye Lynn Singleton, and she's just caught word of something that could ruin her wedding. The couple's caterer, The Regency in Austintown, has informed

Kellye that three of the servers slated to work her wedding have backed out. As her deposit is nonrefundable, she has no choice but to hope for more servers to sign up to work, and wish

horrible things on the ones who bailed. Disintegrating like the ash from her cigarette, the cheery tune of Kellye's "Here Comes the Bride" reduces quickly to "Let the Bodies Hit the Floor."

The 22-year-old bride-to-be calls her fiancé, who tells her to calm down and to wait it out. After snapping closed her Nokia, Kellye turns back to her conversation, smiling and looking relieved.

"Let's talk about something else," she says.

Up until the age of 20, Kellye was a typical college girl. She lived at home. She had several close friends and a boyfriend. She even got along great with her parents.

"We had family nights a couple days a week where we would go rent a movie and watch it together, play games or just sit around and talk. My mom was really my best friend," she says. Then, when Kellye changed, all of that changed, too.

"There were no more family nights, and no more talking, all because I followed my heart."

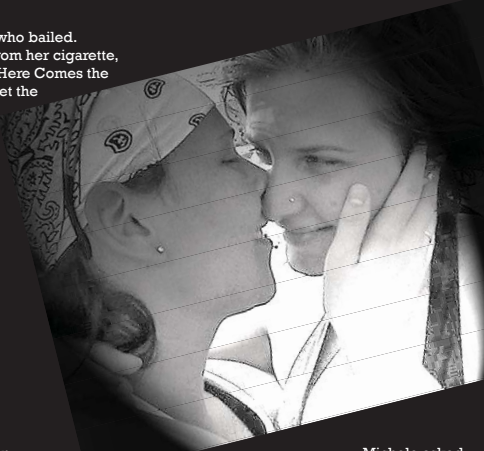
Kellye was seeing a boy named Scott when she met Michele. It was Halloween 2006. Michele Alusia was a mutual friend, and she and Kellye hit it off from the moment they met.

"I knew that we had this weird connection since the day we met. It was like ... I don't know ... fate," she says.

Kellye and Michele hung out as often as they could for several weeks after they met.

"When I met Michele, everything just fell into place. I found what I was looking for, just not what I was expecting," Kellye says, smiling, her eyes upward and hair twirling in her fingers.

The couple's first year together fell into place like any fairytale.



Michele asked

Kellye to marry her in spring of 2007 in the rose gardens at Mill Creek Park.

In the eyes of the Unitarian Universalist church that Kellye and Michele belong to, this lesbian wedding will be recognized. While this and other Unitarian Universalist churches will recognize the women as a married couple, the United States Government and the state of Ohio will not, in any way.

So why do it?

"We are doing this for us. Not for the government, and not for the state. We love each other, and this is the way we are celebrating that love," Kellye says.

In a state and country that denies the couple's union, Michele's employer does recognize the couple's partnership, however. Michele works for insurance company Liberty Mutual, which has a progressive view of same-sex partnerships. Because Kellye and Michele have been living together for more than two years, Kellye is granted insurance through Michele's policy.

But every rose of Kellye's partnership has its thorns, and her familial relationships yield deep wounds. Her close relationship with her parents ended when the one with Michele began two years ago.

"My parents are definitely not OK with the

fact that I'm dating a girl. I've already been disowned. Even if I could tell them I was engaged, I wouldn't," Kellye says.

Kellye brought Michele over her parents' house several times before she told them Michele was her girlfriend.

"They loved her. They thought she was a great person with a good head on her shoulders. But something inside me couldn't lie to them. Knowing that my parents are as religious as they are, I knew they would take it hard, but they loved her."

So she told her secret.

"I sat at the kitchen stool behind the island, my mom on the other side, and we were just talking and laughing like normal, when I just knew that I had to tell her.

"I was so scared."

Kellye says she burst into tears, hyperventilating, and braced her mother for the clandestine.

"She told me that whatever it was, it would be OK — she would always love me no matter what it was. And so I told her that Michele wasn't really my friend; she was my girlfriend."

Her mother's face went pale. She told Kellye that she couldn't approve of what she was doing or understand it, but that she loved her anyway.

They hugged.

It would be one of their last loving moments as mother and daughter.

For the next few weeks following the confession to her mother, Kellye's relationship with her parents slowly began to backslide. She recalls her mom talking to her less and less, and her father avoiding her altogether. There were days that Kellye would walk into her parents' home and see her mom crying in her daughter's room. Kellye knew that something big was coming, and it was inevitable.

"I came home one day a few weeks after I told them I was gay, and they were both standing in the kitchen, behind the island — exactly where I was when I told my mom — and told me that I was not their daughter and

they wanted me to go; they couldn't take it and I was going to hell."

Kellye's eyes are rimmed in red as she speaks. On the very verge of crying, she laughs suddenly.

"But Mich is all I need now," the bride digresses with eyes full. "She's my family, and I couldn't be happier, with or without my parents."

In October 2009, the Alusia-Singleton wedding will take place at the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Youngstown in the presence of 80 guests — all close friends but no family.

"Michele's mom and dad don't know about the wedding either, but it's a lot harder keeping it secret from someone when they're your neighbors. When they stop over unexpectedly I have to discreetly slide my engagement ring off and hurry up and stuff it in my pocket before they notice. Even though they know that Michele and I are together, they think that Michele is just going through a phase. One of us being disowned is enough; we don't want to take any chances of her being disowned, too," Kellye says.

The church in which the ceremony is being performed sits at 1105 Elm St. in Youngstown. The First Unitarian Universalist Church of Youngstown's Web site proffers a bold mission statement.

"We are a vibrant, growing, liberal religious community located on the North Side of Youngstown. We work to build a truly diverse and inclusive community and welcome everyone to our service. We honor and celebrate our differences in age, race, gender, ethnicity, class and sexual orientation."

The minister of the church, Susan Frederick-Grey, is a woman trained in molecular biology, but was moved to divinity studies at Harvard after her undergraduate degree was issued for biology. Frederick-Grey came to the ministry in Youngstown in June of 2002.

When Kellye talks of the intricacies of the wedding, her face lights up. She talks of the

bridesmaids' red dresses, the white tuxes for the groomsmen and groomswomen, and of her wedding gown. She talks about the flowers, and the reception hall, and the cake. But mostly she talks about her wife-to-be.

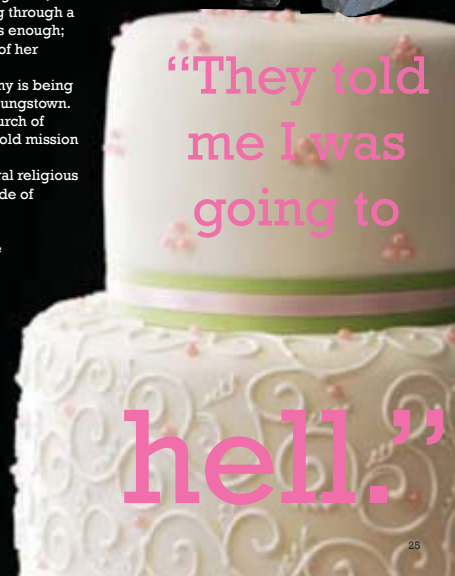
"Michele is so great. She's beautiful, and kind. She's got my back and will always have my heart. I can't wait to marry her."

She really is going to be a beautiful bride.



"They told me I was going to

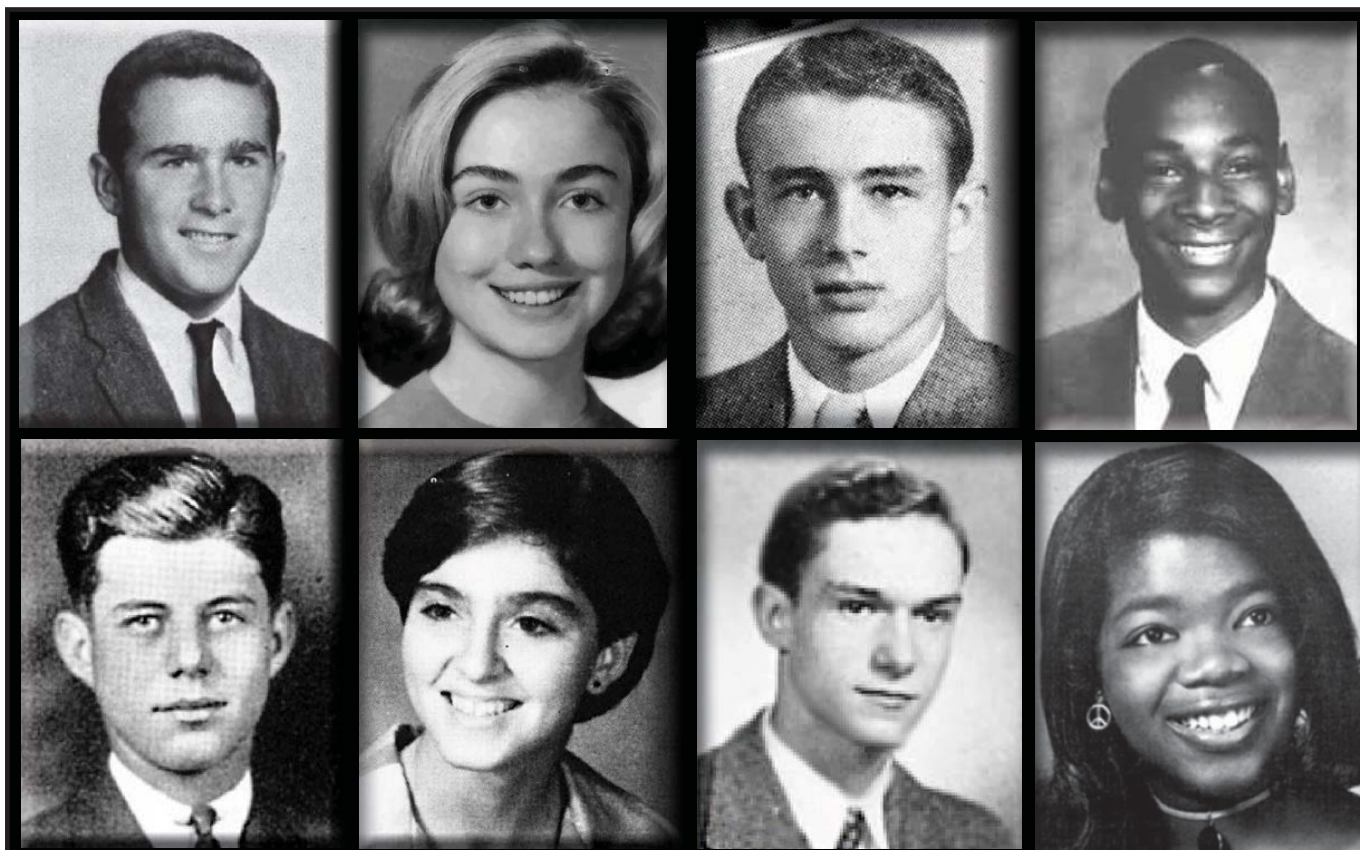
hell."





# Equating Charisma with Success

How much does high school status have to do with



Top Row: George W. Bush, Hillary Rodham, James Dean, Cordozar Calvin Broadus Jr. (Snoop Dogg),  
Bottom Row: John Fitzgerald Kennedy, Madonna Ciccone, Hugh Hefner, Oprah Winfrey

PROFESSOR DONALD  
SUCCESS?

Is your personality decided by senior year of high school, or do you get a chance to change your yearbook status?

By Sarah Sole

**A**s prom nights go, Renee Black's was becoming a disaster. Her hair remained unfinished as her date arrived, and her diamond-studded dress strap popped from its seam 10 minutes before the dance.

Post-freakout, a safety-pinned Black stepped into her date's white Cadillac and drove to the Avalon Inn, only to walk prom march amid a dulling drizzle.

With her hair relinquishing its set curls, Black plunked down at a table with her friends, unaware that, flat hair and all, she was about to be named prom queen.

Black's expected shock came for more than one reason.

"I never would've imagined getting prom queen after being with these people for three years," she said.

The crown that sat atop Black's head was the final piece of her unbelievable metamorphosis from shy sophomore transfer to beaming prom queen.

While not all of us may have had such a dramatic change as Black experienced, many of us can probably attest to a personality evolution of sorts that took place from our first day of high school to our comparatively less-embarrassing present.

Of course not all of us received our crowns in high school.

Though high school helps some transform, others may need a little more time to find their inner prom queens.

These decked-out and dazzling versions of our self-confidence, it turns out, can do more than just smile while performing the royalty wave.

In an age where charisma — or lack thereof — is a deciding factor in job success after college, the ability to mold one's self-esteem becomes increasingly important for former wallflowers.

Those who missed the boat at prom, however, may wonder

if their crowns have expiration dates.

Is your personality decided by senior year of high school, or do you get a chance to change your yearbook status?

Once part of a bandanna and jersey-bedecked crowd of 25 that would trudge back to Perkins Restaurant after football games, Black has high school memories that many of us could look upon with envy.

Black, an administration and fashion merchandising major at Youngstown State University, leads the way into her room, instantly apologizing for a nonexistent mess. Silver picture frames dot her bedside desk; a corkboard featuring more smiling photos hangs on her wall.

Some memories, however, aren't so bright and shiny.

Southington was a farm town, Black muses, sitting on her fuzzy green chair, her head beneath a multitude of the kind of colored lights that often pop up in a college girl's dormitory. There were 40 kids in her class.

Black and her siblings went to Southington High School. After her brother, one grade ahead of her, decided to transfer to John F. Kennedy High School in Warren, Black followed him to the private Catholic school.

Naturally, she experienced a culture shock upon transferring to the immense and affluent JFK. "I cried my eyes out the entire day," Black says.

Grateful for her low-maintenance polo shirt and knee-length khaki uniform, Black walked into John F. Kennedy High School with her brother, separating from him as both went to their lockers.

Between classes, she walked through the halls until she found her brother. She didn't know anyone in her grade, and people had already formed their cliques.

Playing with a miniature white YSU football, Black confesses that despite having a popular older brother, she still felt awkward.

"Where was I going to fit in?" she says, flexing her crossed feet, bare except for purple nail polish that graces her toes.

So Black started hanging out with her brother, making his friends into her friends. By senior year, she had undergone a complete change. Captain of the basketball team and a member of student council, she had shed her shy exterior. She dated the same boy from sophomore year until graduation.

Admitting that she probably picked up on some of her parents' outgoing personality traits, Black describes herself as the type of person who says hello to anyone she might meet as she walks down the street.

This friendly personality trait travels beyond social graces, if you ask Mike Clayton, assistant professor of psychology at YSU and board-certified behavior analyst. Though he admits that individual school experience affects a person's high school experience, he says charismatic people attract both genders' attention by reinforcing their behavior.

Genetics can also play a part in how charismatic a person is, Clayton says.

You know the type: Charismatic people often look you in the eye when speaking, flashing bright smiles while simultaneously winning you over with their sense of humor.

Small details play a big role in how charismatic someone seems, says Lauren Matthes, human resources representative for Cintas Corporation. A winning smile, eye contact and good posture are all facets of a strong interview.

"You don't really get a second chance," Matthes verifies.

Black took only 15 minutes to leave her mark on a job recruiter for an internship with fashion designer Nanette Lepore in New York.

While many of her fellow classmates were content with using their retail jobs as their internships, Black wanted more

excitement.

After finding the internship with Lepore and landing an interview, she began continually e-mailing the job recruiter as often as 10 times a day to verify details.

Black and her family traveled to New York the day before the interview. They found the building where Lepore's office was and even found where the interview would be, peeking around the corner to see the room.

"Of course I couldn't sleep that well," Black says, looking down, then suddenly straight forward as she confesses she was nervous.

Waiting for her interview, it became apparent that she had no reason to be.

"Out comes this girl — she looks like she's maybe 23," Black says.

Armed with 10 questions to ask her interviewer, Black sat down at a table near a showroom filled with clothes.

The fact that her job recruiter was dressed in jeans and a sweater helped her view the interview as sort of a relaxed interaction between friends, Black explains.

The confident attitude showed in Black's demeanor, transforming her soft tone of voice into a louder, more stable one. She also made sure to show her attentiveness by keeping eye contact with the interviewer throughout the entire conversation. She landed the job.

Others use similar tactics to ensure successful interviews. YSU student Ryan Grubb is one of them.

In a black stocking cap that fans his blond hair out like straw, Ryan Grubb explains how his people skills helped land him a job.

Ever since applying online for a package handler job at UPS, Grubb has applied his best people skills to the series of interviews he had to go on. He projected his voice. He kept eye contact. He used his hands



**“I cried my eyes out the entire day,” Black says of her first day at a new high school. “I never would’ve imagined getting prom queen after being with these people for three years.”**

## **SHE’S GOT CHARISMA**

Before she was prom queen, she was shy. Today, Renee Black will flash you her charming smile, and win you over the way she did in an interview for a New York City internship with fashion designer Nanette Lepore. Black considers herself charismatic and says she’s likely to say hello to anyone she might meet as she walks down the street.

## **APPLY AS NEEDED**

In an ever-changing chameleon mohawk and steel-toed boots, Ryan Grubb’s teachers stereotyped him in high school. Grubb was one of the smart kids, but he didn’t participate in many activities, nor does he as a YSU student. He says he feels a bit alienated by some people in college, but he knows how to turn the charisma on during an interview. In a recent one, Grubb made sure to project his voice, keep eye contact and use his hands when he talked.

He got the job.

## **TIPS FROM A PRO**

Human resources rep Lauren Matthes said charismatic job applicants will probably exhibit similarly high energy levels at work. Additionally, outgoing applicants are a plus because they communicate well.

“They’re gonna be a little more approachable,” she says. Anything less charismatic is often seen as a red flag. People who have weak handshakes, for instance, give Matthes a reason to think twice about hiring them.

Photos by Sarah Sole

when he talked.

“You don’t have to be a genius to unload a package, but you still want to present yourself as smart,” he says.

While he was nervous on the way to his initial interview, Grubb calmed himself down by putting the situation out of his head.

“If I didn’t think about it, it didn’t bother me,” he says.

“I’m not a very charismatic person unless I’m drunk,” Grubb says, adding, however, that interviews really don’t bother him too much.

Something must have clicked, because about a week ago he landed the job.

While Grubb pays close attention to his appearance during an interview, he values college’s freedom. There are no principals to comment on his clothing, no teachers to tell

him to stop smoking, like they did back at East Palestine High School.

Grubb wore his hair in a Mohawk in high school, in all different colors. Name a color, and at some point it was in his hair.

Clad in steel-toed boots, jeans, and punk and hardcore band T-shirts, Grubb often got stereotyped by teachers because of his appearance.

“I hate to be critiqued,” Grubb says.

Repeatedly pulled aside by the principal, Grubb was constantly told to change his hair color and his penchant for profanity.

Eventually though, once they came to know him better, they realized Grubb was, as he puts it, a “pretty nice dude.”

While Grubb describes himself as the type of person

who would talk to anyone, during most of his high school years he didn’t feel the need to talk to anyone else besides his friends. Other people had to start up conversations.

Even though he was one of the smart kids, he wasn’t much involved in high school activities.

“We kind of just did our own thing,” he says, fiddling with his frayed jeans.

During senior year, Grubb and his buddies ran the morning news. The big projection room became a sort of home, since they would often skip out on lunch, playing video games there.

They were caught plenty of times, but luckily, the teacher who was a room away never hassled them.

“As long as we brought him some food, he’d write us

a pass,” Grubb says. “There [were] times we even left school.”

For the most part, talking to kids outside your social circle was relatively easy, Grubb says, but as soon as the class project was over, people stopped talking to each other.

Clicking the metal tab on his can of red bull, Grubb says his personality has remained the same since coming to YSU.

“I kind of feel alienated from some of the people,” he says.

Though hobbies and interests often place you in various high school cliques, shyness often prevents a person from breaking down the social barriers of these close circles, Clayton says.

Shy people are often too sensitive to the cues clique members send outsiders. They will be more likely to pick up



**“I’m not a very charismatic person unless I’m drunk.”**

on being ignored, and more likely to notice when a person turns away from them in a social setting.

If a person can ignore these cues, they can keep socializing with the group.

“Eventually, they get to know you,” Clayton says.

For some, the inability to talk to someone can be quite serious.

Ken Longmore had never talked to anyone outside his own group of friends in high school.

Describing himself as the shy kid in class, the goateed and mustached Longmore puts his feelings toward high school bluntly.

“I hated Struthers,” he said.

Eventually, Longmore stopped caring that the popular kids looked down upon everyone else.

Many shy people greatly fear something as seemingly simple as saying hello to a stranger.

“They feel that they might die,” Clayton says.

Often self-conscious, Longmore hated speaking in front of his class, and waited till he was the last one left to present — most of the time.

For an English project, senior year, Longmore had to pick a song that reflected himself or a personal event, and personalize the lyrics.

He chose “Dream On” by Aerosmith because it was the only song he could think of, and he volunteered to present his lyrics first to just get the whole thing over with.

The bigger social scene at YSU has helped Longmore become more confident, since there are less people here that

**“I’m still shy, but it doesn’t bother me to be around people.”**



### **SHEDDING THE SHYNESS**

Ken Longmore hated high school, and presenting in front of a class. The summer after his freshman year of college, his shyness cost him during a job interview, when he was too nervous to make eye contact. But Longmore says college has helped him become more confident socially, and that next time around he’ll be ready and relaxed during an interview.

are likely to see him again if he does something embarrassing in their presence while presenting in front of a class.

“I’m still shy, but it doesn’t bother me to be around people,” he says.

He finds he can talk to unfamiliar people more easily. His interview skills though, Longmore says, could use some improvement. The summer after his freshman year of college, he interviewed for a job.

“I was just unprepared,” he says of the experience.

Fiddling with his pen, Longmore admits that his poor attitude might have affected his demeanor, since he didn’t care much if he got the job or not.

Eye contact was something Longmore knows he didn’t maintain during the interview, since he has a tendency to look

down all the time, in class or even when he walks around.

The next time around, equipped with a better attitude, he will be more relaxed, Longmore says.

“Nervousness was another problem,” he adds.

Like Longmore, we all have probably had learning opportunities to take away from that botched interview.

Though our yearbooks sit dusty and discarded, the interview process does not end with a “most likely to” prediction cemented in stone on our resumes.

It’s no matter if we were not all prom queens. Eventually, we can successfully learn to turn on the charm when it matters most.

We get more than one shot at our crowns. And we can get them the second time around.

A black and white photograph of a man standing on a red brick sidewalk in a residential neighborhood. The man is wearing a dark jacket over a light-colored polo shirt, light-colored pants, and white sneakers. He has a mustache and is looking directly at the camera. The background shows a row of houses on the left and utility poles with wires on the right. The sidewalk is made of red bricks, and there is a large, dark, irregular patch on the ground in the foreground.

# *Waiting for revival*

Inner city residents wait for their broken neighborhoods to heal, while recent revitalization movements for the city of Youngstown pave the golden way downtown.

# Broken Road

Andre Figueroa, 20, stands on his street among vacant lots, overgrown yards and the patchy, red brick road that represents his lack of faith in Youngstown's revitalization efforts.

Story and photos by Ernie Calderon

**A**ndre Figueroa gazes from his front porch across the brick pavement of Ayers Street with a bleak disposition. He stares at the uneven mix of red brick and rutted potholes, at the vacant lots that surround houses whose lawns are overgrown and riddled with trash. In the steadily declining East Side of Youngstown, the street itself hasn't been paved in many decades, and news crews only visit to report crime.

In fact, Ayers Street has a knack for appearing on the six o'clock news. One of the media's most recent visits to the 100 block was to cover a police standoff where a man was firing at police in his window. Figueroa, 20, recalls that it has been a long while since news crews were called to the street for anything other than a crime.

A couple of miles northwest on an average Friday night, college students dot the bright white sidewalks of Federal Plaza in downtown Youngstown. They laugh drunkenly as they walk in small clusters, crossing the smooth, fresh blacktop to barhop old, dingy favorites like Cedar's Lounge, Draft House and Barley's. Later, they're sure to amble into the chic ambiance of Imbibe Martini Bar for \$8 martinis, then down the block to dance to New York club music in the dim, red glow of Core nightclub.

The two upscale bars have nestled themselves along the perimeter of Federal Plaza within the last few years, among other new additions to the street. Bright sandstone buildings for offices and businesses have also made their home in the plaza, appeasing the public's big hopes for an extreme makeover for the once-thriving city. Organizations that bring special attractions, particularly the Chevrolet Centre on East Front Street and the DeYor Performing Arts Center on Federal Plaza, have laced their way into downtown Youngstown as well.

Several revitalization movements have bumped through the city recently, with nudges coming from the elbows of, for a lack of a better term, foreigners. Many city leaders have put forth tremendous efforts to try to get Youngstown back in the groove of things economically, socially and intellectually. A trip downtown might imply that their efforts are working. There, Youngstown seems to be thriving.

But is Youngstown a city on the rise?

Ask the cracking red bricks of Ayers Street.

They make all the difference to Figueroa, who has lived on Ayers all his life and has watched his block and surrounding blocks steadily decline. Like several Ayers' residents, Figueroa doesn't see Youngstown as a city on the rise. He has been given no proof; all he can see is those cracking red bricks outside his front door. The East Side of the city has seen no development, no new business and no change.

While downtown Youngstown begins to revitalize, Ayers is just one street that becomes part of the dissolution of the city. For Ayers Street residents, the gaps in their brick road are daily metaphors for the city's breach of preservation.

Figueroa sees the efforts to get Youngstown on track as failures for one reason: Many of the activists for revitalization are not from the city and don't necessarily represent the cultural makeup, and therefore, the needs of Youngstown.

"I feel like the city is being overrun by people who don't know what it's like to grow up here, to survive here. You have to be part of something to have any real input on how to fix it," Figueroa says.

The last U.S. Census, in 2000, reported that minorities make up over 50 percent of Youngstown's 70,459 residents, among a national average of approximately 30 percent. The average household income for Youngstown is \$21,850, compared with the national average of \$48,451.

So who is the Youngstown revitalization serving? A portion of the people utilizing the development and refurbishments downtown are college students of Youngstown State University — whose commuter students make up a majority of enrollment. Many YSU students come from the outskirts of Youngstown — Boardman, Campbell, Canfield, Poland, Liberty and Austintown. These suburbs are so geographically close, yet so economically and culturally different from the city. In contrast to the \$21,850 average household income for Youngstown, Boardman's average household income is \$40,935. The minority makeup in this Youngstown suburb is under 36 percent.

Where do the city's residents fit in? For Figueroa's purposes, Youngstown resident is someone who resides in the economically depressed, crime-ridden areas of the inner city or in the outskirts. Figueroa

“The truth remains that Youngstown is still a very segregated place. I want to get people involved, but sometimes it’s hard to get people to take an interest.”

— Brooke Slanina of revitalization group Thinkers and Drinkers

“At a group for young professionals, I don’t think that I would be welcomed with open arms. Or if I was welcomed, I wouldn’t be taken seriously.”

— Andre Figueroa, East Side resident

says he feels underrepresented.

“Downtown looks great, but where I live, not so much. There has to be a balance between perception and what is. I think that the only way to gain that balance is for people to get involved. But you have to give people an opportunity to get involved,” he says of the immediate Youngstown community.

Brooke Slanina has never lived in the city of Youngstown, but spends much of her time there, away from her home in Campbell. She is a graduate of and instructor at Youngstown State University, and is also the vice president of the board for the Oakland Center for the Arts downtown.

Slanina is a member of a group called Thinkers and Drinkers. The group consists of young professionals who meet to discuss issues and exchange ideas on how to revitalize Youngstown. It’s open to everyone, but only one minority has attended the meetings on a few occasions. Slanina and the group have been criticized for lack of diversity.

“When a movement begins, it always starts in a little bit of a clique. People have common ideas that unite them. I don’t think that you necessarily have to be from here to want to promote change and progress. The truth remains that Youngstown is still a very segregated place. I want to get people involved, but sometimes it’s hard to get people to take an interest,” Slanina said.

Figueroa doesn’t think that’s entirely true.

“I’m a young person, and I am interested in the state of my city and want to see change take place. But I feel like I’m on the outside looking in. I’ve never heard of Thinkers and Drinkers, but I think that if they were really interested in getting different points of view, it certainly wouldn’t be that hard.”

Though he’d be willing to participate in a revitalization movement group like Thinkers and Drinkers, he has doubts about their openness to diversity.

“At a group for young professionals, I don’t think that I would be welcomed with open arms. Or if I was welcomed, I wouldn’t be taken seriously.”

For Figueroa, it’s a matter of not knowing enough to be able to do enough. If those lines of communication

were kept open, he thinks more inner city residents would show up; he’s just not sure how many.

Sherry Linkon, professor of English and American studies at Youngstown State University, has done extensive research in this community and agrees with Figueroa that there is a deficient representation of diversity in some of these movements.

“What people are feeling is real,” the author of “Steeltown USA” says.

Linkon believes more interaction is needed between the educated upper-middle class and the non-educated lower class. Linkon sees the division as one of class rather than race or residence.

“There are these young professionals that have great energy and are doing great things in the city, but they need to do a better job at being more diverse.”

Certainly, one can look at some of the city’s officials and see that there is more of a minority presence than ever. Youngstown Mayor Jay Williams is the city’s first black mayor. Linkon sees this as progress but still believes that there is much more to be done in the way of forming a better sense of unity that involves the city and its suburbs.

Class and social economic status play roles in the city’s disconnection and division. There is a considerable divide between the educated well-to-do residents of this community and the blue-collar working class.

There is an underlying level of distrust between the sects. The working classes of Youngstown are almost predisposed to mistrust their managers. It was the managers who gave the steel mill workers their walking papers when the mills closed. It was the managers who didn’t listen when they said the equipment in the mills needed to be updated and, eventually, contributed to their demise.

“Part of the problem is that people don’t want to take responsibility for Youngstown,” Linkon says.

She’s referring to people from outside the city who don’t want to be associated with Youngstown’s community service and activism, but wouldn’t mind benefiting in the way of jobs or business opportunities that Youngstown can provide.

"I believe that a lot of blame needs to be put on us," Brian Miller said. Miller is a 40-year-old black man who has lived in the city for the majority of his life and resides on the city's West Side. Miller believes the people need to take responsibility for their own futures.

"We can't wait for anybody to do anything for us. The people of this city have to start with themselves."

Miller's perspective is unlike Figueroa's. His street seldom appears on the news. He looks across the street from his modest West Side home to find quite a different scene. The homes along his block are well maintained. There is only one abandoned house at the end of the block, but there are no broken windows or overgrown grass. There is potential there.

Miller's block is paved.

Miller agrees with Figueroa and Linkon that there is a division of people, but doesn't view that as the major issue in the city's troubles. He isn't concerned with who is involved in the city's restoration as long as there are results.

"I just want to see this city succeed, no matter who is at the

helm," Miller says.

Figueroa sits on his porch slouched over with his head in his hand and his elbows on his knees. Suddenly, he snaps up, almost at attention. His brow crinkles a bit as he looks down and then up the potholed street.

"Look, I'm not knocking these people for trying to get some life back into this city. It's a cool thing. I just think that they need to see us, and we need to see them. I think these people, whoever they may be and wherever they live, need to see where I come from and why I feel the way I do. They have to stop driving past my neighborhood on the way downtown like they don't see what's going on. Once that happens, you can really start revitalizing all of Youngstown, not just a few blocks downtown."

For people like Figueroa, there is a notion of neglect. While downtown Youngstown paves more of its yellow brick road with new businesses and buildings, the inner city residents wait for resurgence, looking out onto their broken red bricks.



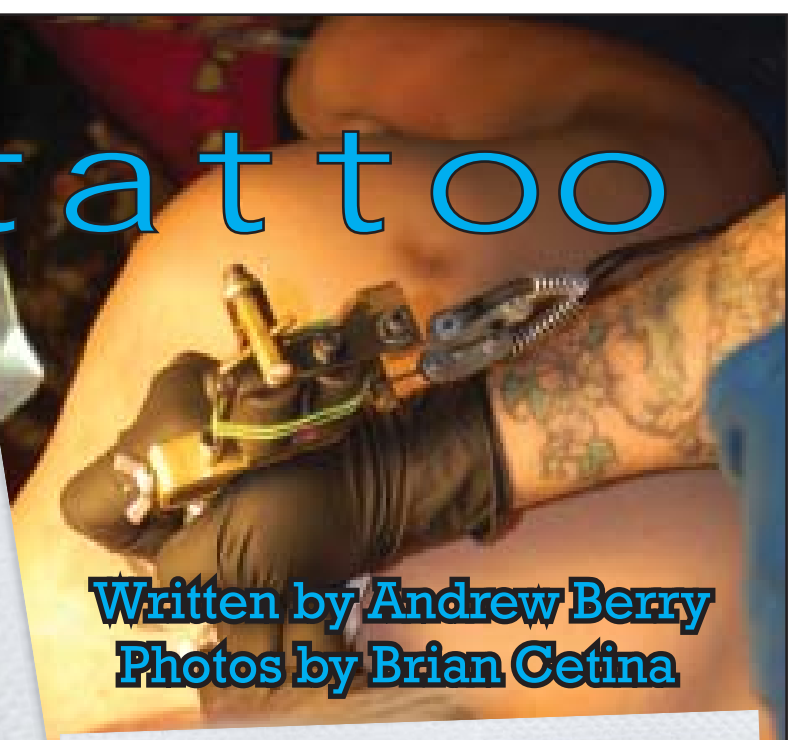
Figueroa says he can't help but wonder how many other areas in Youngstown are being neglected, and hopes that the revitalization movements will affect declining neighborhoods like his, instead of just focusing on the downtown area.



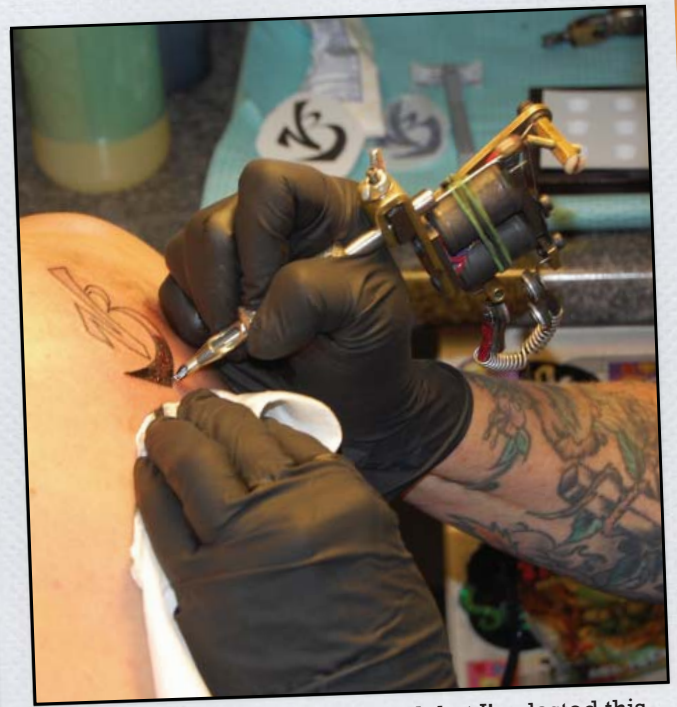
# my first tattoo



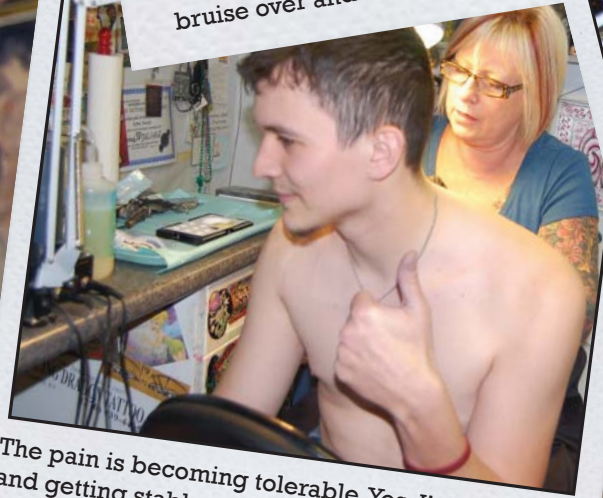
I'm actually slightly disappointed that I couldn't watch my own blood seep out of my body in the name of self-expression. Thankfully, I'll always have this picture to remind myself that you can bleed for a good cause. At the beginning of the year I donated blood, which, unlike the tattoo, gave me a sore arm that would severely bruise over and become nothing short of useless for two weeks.



Written by Andrew Berry  
Photos by Brian Cetina



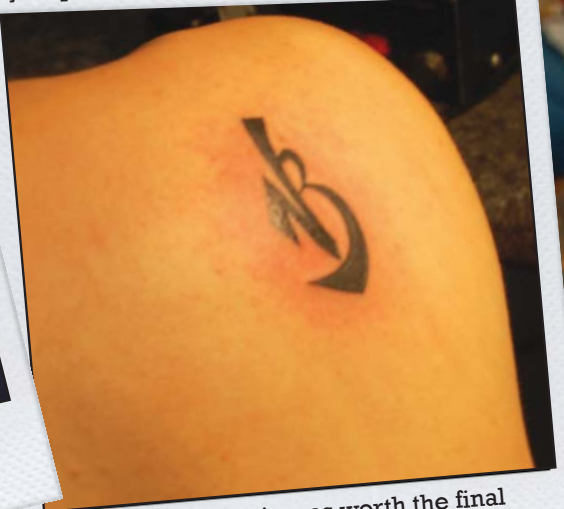
At the halfway point, I'm relieved that I've lasted this long and satisfied with the superior artistic skills of Debbie. I convince myself I can last through the pain to get my Capricorn zodiac tattoo filled in and finished.



The pain is becoming tolerable. Yes, I'm bleeding and getting stabbed repeatedly by this needle, but I flash a thumbs up to signal I'm getting used to it.



The final portion of the fill-in feels like the time I tried atomic hot sauce straight out of the bottle. Tingly at first, then regrettable.



No regrets. The pain was worth the final product, and Debbie rocked. Now I just have to keep it a secret from mommy and daddy.

# Super athletes

## These student athletes have their game faces on for double duty in parenting

By Emily Thayer

**W**earing sweaty clothes and carrying her gym bag on her back, Yandeh Joh picks her daughter Imyla up from Wee Care Day Care on campus.

She guides the stroller over the cracks and bumps while holding books in her hand.

Walking by the tennis courts, she looks to her right and waves to her friends and teammates stretching on the track while they prepare for the upcoming season.

"Watching the team practicing without me really hurts. I want to be out there," Joh said.

Joh, a sprinter and long jumper on the Youngstown State University track and field team, gave birth to her 6-month-old daughter during last season.

After redshirting for the outdoor season last spring due to the pregnancy, Joh said she is looking forward to the upcoming indoor season.

She earned the Horizon League champion honor in the 60-meter hurdles, clocking in at 9.05 in the 2006-2007 indoor conference championships.

"Track was my main priority before Imyla, but I don't regret my decision. She means the world to me," said Joh.

Joh did not have to give up her athletic financial aid when she had her baby. She claimed she only had to remain a full-time student to keep her spot on the track team.

Other student athletes have not been so lucky. The May 2007 ESPN's "Outside the Lines: Pregnant Pause" sparked controversy around the country at hundreds of universities surrounding the issue of student athletes losing scholarships due to pregnancy. The show focused on scholarship removal of pregnant student athletes and how the NCAA has been shying away from responsibility.

The NCAA excludes any mentioning of financial aid in response to pregnancy. The NCAA does, however, grant a redshirt opportunity to female athletes for an additional sixth year of competition.

The decision on how to handle the potential violation of Title IX will ultimately be left with each individual university.

According to Title IX, Section 106.40, schools are prohibited from discriminating against pregnant students because of childbirth, false pregnancy or recovery from these conditions. Additionally, schools must treat pregnancy as they treat other medical conditions.

Title IX also states that a pregnant student may be granted a leave of absence for as long as it is

deemed medically necessary. At the conclusion of a pregnant student's leave, she must be allowed to resume the status she held when the leave began.

The problem for the NCAA arises in the fact that all universities do not receive federal funding — which leaves the university with the sole responsibility to retain the financial aid for pregnant student athletes.

"The NCAA can't adopt a set policy because each school has their own missions," YSU's Associate Athletic Director Elaine Jacobs said. "Some schools don't believe in sexual intercourse before marriage, so ultimately these private institutions probably won't be in favor of retaining financial aid for pregnant athletes."

### Pregnancy policy

The YSU athletic department does, however, have a pregnancy policy put in place that does not violate Title IX.

"We were approached with a situation by a student athlete wanting to go ahead with childbirth, yet remain an athlete and maintain her scholarship," Jacobs said. "We made a decision [to establish an official policy] with what we felt was the best course of action and put it in writing for future female student athletes."

The YSU policy treats the pregnancy as any other long-term injury granting a medical redshirt to the female student athlete.

To maintain her athletic financial aid, she must be enrolled as a full-time student. Additionally, she will be granted a sixth year for competition by the NCAA.

"I was lucky that YSU already had the policy in place," Joh said. "I didn't have to fight to maintain my scholarship."

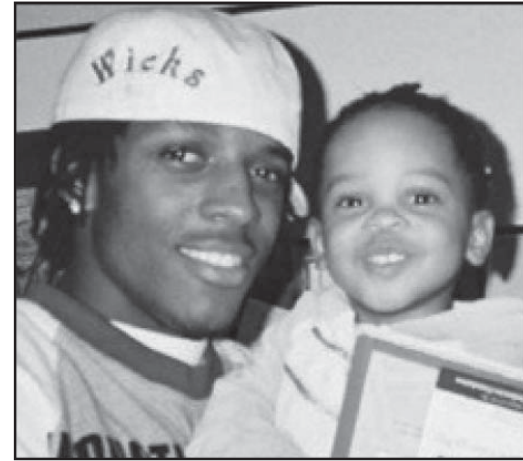
On the flipside of pregnancy, male student athletes embracing parenthood are not included in the pregnancy policy at YSU.

### What about dad?

Lenny Wicks kisses his two kids on the forehead before leaving Wee Care Day Care early Monday morning. He gets back in his car and heads to campus to start his long day of school and practice, anticipating the end of the day when he'll get to see his young ones' smiling faces.

"It's a lot harder than it looks," the redshirt sophomore said, describing the difficulties of fathering his daughter Nevaeh, 2, and son Lenny Jr., 1, while playing football at YSU.

Wicks, who has custody of his children for two consecutive weeks out of each month, places his kids in daycare every morning before class, Monday through Friday.



**NO SUCH LUCK** — Wicks, who plays football for Youngstown State, doesn't get special treatment as a parent of two: his 2-year-old daughter, pictured with him above, and 1-year-old son. YSU treats pregnancies as physical injuries, allowing female athletes to take time off.

"Having them in daycare all day is the most difficult part," Wicks said. "But I'd rather see them after practice than not at all."

Male athletes are not granted time for parenting at YSU. According to Jacobs, it is considered a personal problem.

"Men do not get special treatment because we strictly treat the pregnancy policy as a physical injury," Jacobs said. "By giving male athletes time off for parenting, the standards for all athletes would be unfair. Personal issues would arise for every athlete expecting time off."

Despite juggling 12 credit hours and three hours a day at practice on top of parenting two children, Wicks said he doesn't feel he should receive special treatment because it could seem unfair to his teammates.

"My kids always come first, but I have to be held to the same standards as everyone else on the team," Wicks said.

Both Joh and Wicks said they appreciate their opportunity for an education and athletic pursuits at YSU.

"It's not an easy task to be a parent and student athlete," Joh said. "But like any competitor, it's definitely something I want to succeed in."

### YSU PREGNANCY POLICY

Student athletes must receive medical approval to continue to participate in athletics during pregnancy. Athletes will retain their athletic financial aid for the period of the award as long as they are enrolled as a full-time student. Students are notified that they can receive a one-year extension of the five-year period of eligibility. At the beginning of the academic year after giving birth, if a student chooses to return to participate with her team, she will be able to maintain her scholarship as long as eligibility requirements have been met. If the student athlete chooses not to return to participate in athletics, she will be considered to have voluntarily withdrawn and will relinquish her scholarship. A hearing opportunity will be available if the student chooses to appeal the cancellation of her award.



YOUNGSTOWN'S OWN

# PICKUP

IT'S DANGEROUS  
GOING FROM  
ZERO TO HERO

# ARTIST

Photos by  
Cristina Cala

Pimpin' by  
Doug Dierkes



**W**omen love me. Nearly all of my friends are female. Every one of them feels comfortable telling me about their love lives, their dreams, their fantasies, and pretty much anything else that straight men would kill for.

So why am I miserable? I'm scared of doing anything with this power.

I stay as the constant companion, keeping the secrets women want me to keep, and forget those they regret sharing. I offer a shoulder to lean on and a few kind words whenever things turn south in their lives. What I never do is speak my mind to tell them I want to be more than the friend. Worse still than my lack of honesty is my attempt at dating. I've been a boyfriend to three women total, never going past gentle kissing on my part.

Why do I let this happen to me? Fear. I fear rejection by a friend much more than many people fear alienating themselves in public. When an angry lover is pummeling me, I keep telling myself, "I have nowhere else to go." Something had to be done to correct this problem.

Enter Mystery. When I saw the first promos for the VH1 reality show "The Pickup Artist," I was skeptical that a man named "Mystery," adorned with a fuzzy pimp hat and black fingernails knew more about women than I did. The show's formula did little to ease my fears. Eight varying degrees of nerd competed "Survivor"-style to see who would end up with the title of "Master Pickup Artist." The boys faced a variety of degrading challenges, from telling stories to preschoolers to wearing a man-thong at a pool party in an attempt to prove their alpha male status. I was repulsed

by this example of modern television. And yet, I couldn't look away.

I hated to admit it, but this Mystery, sensei and host of the show, had more than a few ideas about women that turned out



to be true. All the successful contestants learned key steps such as looking interesting, smiling often, and talking to everyone. His trademark "Mystery Method" isn't about getting into a woman's pants (okay, not *entirely*) so much as letting the men play hard to get. Apparently, beautiful women don't experience rejection often enough to have a reaction other than fabric-shredding desire.

Yet getting phone numbers and stealing kisses isn't what Mystery's all about. He claims that rather than focusing on finding constant company in the bedroom, the program teaches one how to build a new life. He knows all about being the awkward, socially aloof type of man because he used to be that kind of man. With one successful season of a VH1 reality show under his belt, the Mystery Method should be more popular than ever.

Regardless of whether or not the show becomes a cult classic, I think it's time to test Mystery's knowledge by presenting this crash course in womanizing

with its most difficult challenge: me. This is one of the few ways I can think of that will force me to be more social and more self-assertive. Maybe I'll end up with a decent girlfriend in the process.

## [Step 0: Admit You Have A Problem]

A school friend invites me to go out one Monday evening to celebrate his birthday. I've just absorbed a marathon of "The Pickup Artist;" I figure this is a great time to show what I know. I strap into my best clothes, use the fancy mouthwash (all mouthwash is fancy if it's rarely used) and shave off whatever stubble I missed earlier that day. I tell myself I will talk to women, I will enjoy myself, and I will become a new person. This mantra is lost once I find a radio station playing Van Halen.

What's left of said mantra is also forgotten as the evening progresses. I get a couple drinks in me, and since I have zero alcohol tolerance I'm being yelled at by the barkeep every ten minutes or so for trying to stand on my stool. Eventually my joints get too lubricated by the beer to attempt such stunts, and I find myself collapsed in a seat, leaning on my small group of friends for balance, telling them stories I soon pray they'd forget. The abusive lovers, the inexperience in the bedroom, and one or two secret crushes get aired out for the bar's entire population.

My only contact with a female outside of this circle is with one settling an argument between her friends by filing around the bar asking if zombies or vampires are cooler. When I'm finally sober enough to realize how much of a mess I've made of my social life, I quietly excuse myself and leave... twenty or thirty minutes later.

I keep saying my standards for an evening out are fairly lax. As long as my actions don't result in global thermonuclear annihilation within two hours, I'm happy. But I wasn't happy, even if the world remained decidedly un-nuked. My fear of embarrassing myself to the

*(Before we begin, I must clarify one thing: A Master Pickup Artist is not the same thing as a pimp, a player or a man-whore. Those three are all about manipulating women into sex. Pickup Artists do some subtle trickery, yes, but they aren't in it for the bed bumping so much as for the pursuit. Since Pickup Artists view this chase as a puzzle, they call it a "game.")*

public ended up becoming regret for embarrassing myself in front of my friends. The next time I go out, I can't be with them, though not just because of my obvious fears. I plan on reinventing myself to see if Mystery's game plan can really turn me into a different person.

## [Step 1: Showing Your Ass...ets]

The first step in being attractive to women is, naturally, being attractive. I'm stuck somewhere between "Renaissance Faire Outcast"

and "Radio Personality" in the looks department. According to Mystery, the material doesn't matter so much as the presentation does. Peacock Theory, the first thing he teaches his students, goes back to one of the key points of his course.

Be interesting, and women become interested in you.

Wear flamboyant shirts, tight jeans, dye your hair, maybe get a piercing — whatever you can do to convince women you stand out from the pack. It works best when you center your dress around specific subcultures (goth, jock, prep,

etc.) for two reasons. Firstly, fashion specialization places the spotlight on you instead of every other bland Bob. Secondly, there's nothing you can do that's both unique and average.

When I start thinking of my new alter ego, I ask myself one simple question: What is "cool?" Dragons.

Explosions.

British sitcoms.

Silencing a club just by showing up, then declaring it karaoke night without any concern for the bands backstage.

As the last one is the most unrealistic attempt at cool I can imagine, I run with it.

Ideally, my new style would be a black suit with red pinstripes and an undershirt with a matching black tie and fedora, and maybe some leather fingerless gloves. Ideally, I would also be just shy of 7 feet tall, ripped like Jesus and driving a '57 Bel Aire convertible.

However, my budget is firmly entrenched in the dumpster of a derelict Wal-Mart, I'm not getting any taller, and such a car is only brought out for hot rod shows. So I set off in search of the nearest thrift store, seeing if I can't adapt a new style for under \$30.

Thursday, 11 in the morning: I'm standing outside of the Village Discount Outlet, trying to avoid cringing in horror. I haven't shopped for clothes in nearly two years at this point. My wardrobe gets expanded only around the holidays, or whenever my grandfather grabs too much clothing from this shop. Silently praying Grandpa has better things to do with his time than go shopping, I struggle inside.

I have a style in mind. I am focused on my goal. I will stop at nothing to get it. Then reality sets in, and I'm scrounging

through the carcasses of suit jackets until I realize I have no idea what my measurements are. Let me remind you something about thrift stores. People come here to sell their unwanted clothes. Most often, this means "fat clothes."

I scour every section of the store, looking for something eye-catching that fits well. My arm falls asleep under the weight of numerous dress shirts and "new" pants. Total cost: \$22.65, with tax. Remembering the words of my editor, I try to start a conversation with the elder femme behind the counter. All I remember of this exchange is saying "Well, if you want me to be an optimist about things, I'm heading back to school in a couple of hours." She lets canned laughter slip from her nicotine-plagued lungs. I walk out thinking I did something half-right. Then I realize I forgot one important thing: the hat!

Getting back to the invisible rules, an interesting hat should be worn if you don't feel like pumping your hair full of gels and dyes. I saw nothing fitting that description between the racks of the thrift store. I dart to the nearest display window for a second opinion. Still nothing in terms of headgear, but a little old woman mistakes my giant white garbage bag of clothes for a green light. She immediately sets her off-white Cadillac from "Leisurely Stroll" to "Death Proof." I leap out of the way; she slams on the brakes and rolls down her window to glare at me. "Where's the damn Wal-Mart?" she hisses.

I share the gift of geographical knowledge; she allows me to live. I dust off and climb back into my car, letting the aggressive hag get a large head start before driving off in the opposite direction, to the mall. I sit in the parking lot, wondering if it's really



necessary for me to search for the perfect cranial accessory in ... a Hot Topic.

I hate these stores with a passion, and walking into the faux-brick storefront quickly reminds me why. It's not just the superstore for depressed teenagers who cry themselves to sleep; it's tackier than Graceland as well. The bulbous head of Stewie Griffin watches you from anything ink will stick to, as does Jack Sparrow, Jack Skellington and Harry Potter. Questionable music blares throughout the store, causing me to twitch and glare at a tiny plastic Daniel Radcliffe.

The pink-haired goddess behind the counter asks if I need anything, and I switch from seizure to paralysis. It takes me nearly five seconds to squeak out a "No," while losing what little respect I still had. I excuse myself as quietly as I can, waiting until I'm a safe distance from the store's windows before punching myself repeatedly in the right temple as atonement for my actions.

My next stop is Target, where I end up wandering around for half an hour in search of the men's department. Let's see ... Women, Children, Maternity ... No sign or crude map seems to be pointing toward the "socially crippled male" section. I retreat to the mall and have a similar experience, except that I fear two men are laughing at me as I enter. Why am I convinced they find my presence hilarious? I somehow drift into Spencer Gifts, thinking I can calm my nerves by staring at a plasma ball or something.

I end up walking out with a hat. Wait, scratch that. *The hat*: plain black, with five rings piercing the brim on one side under the watchful eye of a chintzy skull charm. Surely ripped out of an Avenged Sevenfold video and mass-



produced in China, this hat is the linchpin of the outfit, the persona, the new self. It's a little large, but I plan on using it when my head swells with pride, so it should all work out in the end. The skate punk behind the counter nods knowingly as I make the purchase. Is this because I'm finally taking a step in the right direction, or because he thinks I'll come back later to review their selection of inflatable girlfriends?

Hard to say.

I drive home as every radio station in the tri-state area is trying to fill their Guns n' Roses quota for the month, thinking this whole shopping for clothes thing isn't as horrible as I made it out to be.

## [Step 2: Speak Before They Think]

Now for something slightly less expensive, but equally painful. As much as I talk during class, not to mention the extent of my instant messenger buddy lists, you'd think I'd be better at talking to people than I am. It all

goes back to that unconditional fear of social suicide. Not talking should be better than saying something bad; that's the lie I've lived by for years. It's time to change this habit as well.

Mystery has all sorts of little rules for conversation. Walk in with a smile. Go after groups, as sexy singles are rarely seen alone. Instead of directly approaching your target, come from behind and to the side, or start with her friends. If you spend more than three seconds hovering around a group, strike up a discussion immediately, or get branded as a pervert. Most importantly, start a conversation with something that's both attention grabbing and non-threatening. Some of Mystery's prepared opening lines include the following topics:

\*I got a friend who just bought two dogs, and she wants to name them after an '80s or '90s rap duo. Any suggestions?

\*I have a serious question for you all. Flossing: Should it be done before or after you brush?

\*Did you see those two girls fighting outside?

After two or three of these

opening lines, or "gambits," you should be able to have a conversation with the group. Make sure you keep your stories interesting, but short. Occasionally, give the intended target a "neg," an unintended insult of sorts. Pluck a piece of lint from her clothes, offer a stick of gum, or ask her friends if she's always so chatty. The goal is to come off as disinterested, without being offensive or apathetic.

After this point, my recollection of the method starts to get muddled. Rules for isolating, demonstrating value, magic tricks, touching, groping, and kissing are all floating through my head. I just can't put them into a useful order, much less understand what's expected of me.

And then the flashback hit.

During my early days socializing in school, I spent every moment whoring myself out for the affection of others.

Give you the answers to next week's test? Well, if you insist. Inhale a fart? Why not? Break every bone in my hand? Right or left?

By the time high school

rolled around, the realization hit me like a rusty pipe to the junk. They didn't like me for who I am, but for who I pretended to be. They wanted the freak, the dork, the eternal jester who doesn't care how much rotten fruit is thrown his way. I wanted more, and my former accomplices rejected me. I reacted the way most depressed teenagers do: with uncoordinated acts of violence. Great, then I'm the freak provoked into a fight just long enough to get nailed with a detention. Every female in the school would rather have brought an inflatable guest to the prom than my sorry hide.

I snap out of the regressive trance to remember the original lesson. I was starved for attention then, and willing to change myself to get it. What's changed? I begin to question if Mystery's program is really the social panacea that I thought it was.

## [Step 3: The Field Test]

Friday night: I prepare for the first field experiment to actually test the Mystery Method. I clean up my hair in front of the bathroom mirror, steeling my nerves. I have my new look, I've practiced my conversation skills, and I've even tried to improve my smile. I stand outside the doors that lead to my first trial of the new self.

The parking lots are full, which is a positive sign that the bars are stuffed with intoxicated women who have yet to see my new identity. Then I look at myself. Hat, gray long-sleeved shirt unbuttoned to reveal black undershirt, matching pants and shoes. At best, I can say I'm a ska punk posing as a Prohibition-era gangster. At worst, I'm a fraud of a man.

I limp away; my alter ego remains untested this evening.

I retreat back home, asking myself serious questions while I finally find a radio station that knows how to put together a set list.

"Welcome Home," "Let Me In," and "Everlong," three of my unflinching, happy-making songs, played in short succession. Is this some radio station conspiracy to keep me as a hermetic video game addict? Is this God's way of telling me it's perfectly acceptable to run from social interaction? Why was I fleeing from this chance to meet a wide variety of new faces without fearing they'd remember me? I have more questions as I'm nearing the end of this journey than I did at the beginning. All of the important ones revolve around whether or not I can redeem myself for this act of nightlife cowardice.

I'm offered a second chance the following Monday: another classmate, another birthday to celebrate with liver scarring. I jump on the chance, recreating the Friday Night Look as best I can. A set of dark jeans and a bull-riding shirt from my 4-H days (another awkward and forced attempt at meeting others) join the infamous hat. My peacock feathers are a little discolored; though they still show. I review for this test like I do any other — barely, if at all. Three hours of video gaming goodness clear my mind of a majority of Mystery's teachings. Ignorance equals bliss.

I enter the pizzeria we agreed upon, as our proud birthday girl tackle-hugs me. It helps that she knows everyone in here tonight; they're all buying rounds. I interact mostly with the same group of friends as last time, except with less alcoholism (20 minutes to down one Guinness) and more interactions with their friends. I meet up with old friends from freshman year. I'm socializing, and I'm not scared

for my life.

I talk to everyone in the bar, my last remaining rule from Mystery's guidance, trying the gambit "I just turned 21, and I need a beer that doesn't taste like cold urine. What do you recommend?" It goes over a little better than expected, and I occasionally make the leap from "what are you drinking?" to "what's your name?" Hell, I even wrapped up a "set" with a compliment that could be considered flirtatious had it left anyone else's lips.

"You look lovely tonight, when can I see you again?"

That's about as far as I'd get into a conversation before growing apprehensive, but it's far past my usual record. I grow more comfortable communicating, although it leads me to the bottom of a drink instead of to the company of a lady.

Since she's full of more alcohol than your average backwater still, I make a couple attempts at the Birthday Girl as well, as she's least likely to remember if things turn tragic.

"Your dress looks nice this evening." "You're a friendly little thing, aren't ya?" "You're speaking quite clearly for being drunk enough to kill cancer."

One unsettling pause later, I'm back at it with more traditional attempts at flirting — Hand-holding, cutting her away from her friends every so often, telling her why she's attractive, and all the other standbys that my gender has (ab)used for years.

For the first time, I'm hitting on a woman. There was an odd sense of accomplishment despite the awkward pretenses I overlaid. She was smiling, I was smiling; we were both having a good time.

Why shouldn't that count as partial success?

Peacock your dress code, be interesting, pluck your target

from her group of friends — That's the basic formula of the Mystery Method. I hit all the major points, with all the finesse of an amateur. It's my first attempt at being a Pickup Artist, and it worked better than I had planned.

Despite my best efforts, I still end up driving home alone, when that fear of public humiliation comes at me like a brick wall. I excuse myself to leave long before last call, and my friends are slightly disappointed.

Truthfully, so am I, but I have the advantage of a low-brimmed hat to cover my telltale expression. Once again, I'm the only thing standing between a good time and myself. At least my attempts at increasing tolerance of social barbs are going better than my quest for a bulletproof liver.

The whole reason I developed this fear of socializing was based on my earlier days, and the uncertainty surrounding who my true friends were in school.

While I practiced the Mystery Method, every time I retreated to my friends for confidence, they patted me on the shoulder, saying, "Hey man, we got your back tonight." I didn't need to shave my head or pierce my lip to get their attention. I just had to start coming out of my room more often.

It doesn't matter if I can't charm a woman into the bedroom (okay, not *entirely*). Just like my younger days, I searched for someone to talk to. I found a circle of friends waiting.

Did I follow the Mystery Method to success? Hell no.

Does it matter? Not really, at least not to me. I may never be the globetrotting playboy that Mystery is, but I know I'll always be one of the biggest characters in whatever bar I'm at next Monday.

# Transforming a family

When her sister confessed that she was dating her best girl friend, Laura wasn't too surprised. They'd always seemed like a couple. But a second confession — that her sister was planning for a sex change — changed 13-year-old Laura's life forever.

[a yo\* diary]

By Laura Brown

**M**y brother, Ray, is not your average guy. Yes, he has a girlfriend, a full-time job, a house in the suburbs and boyishly good looks. But as he sits across from me at his dining room table, wearing his collared Ralph Lauren shirt, hair spiked up, his hairy arms waving about, I think about how Ray's personality has been his saving grace and the highlight of those around him.

My sister, Rachel, used to pull me around the house in a laundry basket. That's probably my first memory with my idol. I was only two or three years old, and yet I can still feel the sensation of pounding against the sides of the blue Kmart plastic laundry basket. She would pack the basket full of my super-soft baby blankets, tie Lucky's red dog leash to one end, and off we went. Every time I laughed or squealed she would run faster, creating my version of the Mantis, my very own roller coaster made especially for baby. In my mind, my first memory with my sister dictates how I have viewed her all my life: She never failed to make me laugh and was always running full speed ahead (even if she was running to or from drama.)

Rachel is not with us today.

One Friday night, during the summer of 1996, we went out for dinner and a movie. I felt "cool" and escaped into the world where I was still her fun little sister and not the awkward teenager who wore oversized overalls and bejeweled Keds. We had already gone to quite a few movies that summer and I thought no different of this Friday night.

We went to the movie first. I sat in the theater, with my oversized bucket of extra butter popcorn, stunned at the special effects of "Independence Day." My sister was content with her jumbo bag of Twizzlers and would shush me by flinging them in my face every time I tried to ask her if aliens were real and if they were really coming down to blow up the White House. It makes sense that we screened a movie about

radical change on the night when the word "change" would forever hold a different meaning.

Even after my popcorn fiesta during the movie, we needed dinner and decided on Friendly's Restaurant. If I could go back there now, I could point out the exact booth where we sat that night: the maroon vinyl seat with the stuffing that bulged out at the sides, in the perfect spot in the restaurant



**BACK IN THE DAY** — Laura and Rachel in 1988, eight years before Rachel decided to become Ray. In 1996, Laura's sister became her brother.

that somehow attracted the wafting smell of cheeseburgers and ice cream. I could even duplicate the menu, with its cursive print, vivid pictures and, of course, the "Happy Ending Sundae" fashioned into a smile with a cookie, whipped cream and two M&Ms.

My stomach was grumbling, and I wanted everything but settled for cheese sticks, quesadillas and a milkshake.

After we ordered, my sister gave me a super goofy face. She looked nervous, which made me nervous. She put her elbows on the table and said with seriousness, "I have two kinda important things to tell you."

"OK." I had no idea what was coming and why she was acting so weird.

"Well, first, Heidi and I are involved. We're together — a couple."

I knew Heidi was my sister's best friend and that she spent the night at our house all the time. I often had to bang on the wall for them to shut up just so I could fall asleep. Even in my innocent, 13-year-old mind, I suspected something of the sort, so it wasn't a big shocker. I still loved my sister no matter what, and I was still able to eat after this important news.

"Yeah, I figured. What's the second thing?" I shrugged it off when I should have been bracing myself.

"I'm not going to be a girl anymore. I'm becoming a guy."


People often say their mind is racing, but mine felt like it was competing in the Kentucky Derby. Every stomp of the horse's hoof was a different thought pounding the mud out of my brain. The crack of the whip made me dizzy. I just stared blankly at my sister.

"I've been on hormone pills for the past three months. I'm going to become Ray instead of Rachel, and pretty soon you can start calling me your brother."

I immediately thought of all the times I would ask "Rachel" to help me pick out an outfit for school or paint my nails. She would simply respond, "That's not my department." At that moment, the heaping mounds of food we had ordered arrived, and the steaming quesadillas made me sick.

Even though it all made sense, I still felt like I had just entered a Jerry Springer Twilight Zone and was sure that this was going to change my life forever. How was going to tell my friends? Would people





*It's  
all  
in the  
smile*

Ray, 36, and Laura, 24, are undoubtedly siblings. It's hard to tell that Ray, who started taking hormone pills at age 25, was once female.

think my sister was a freak? What about the neighbors? Everyone on our street knew there are only two daughters in our family, not an older son and a younger daughter. Would the rest of my family — cousins, aunts and uncles — accept his change? And, oh Lord, what about my mom's uncle — *Father Mike*? Visions of my great uncle performing an exorcism on my one and only sibling began to scare me.

The waitress boxed up my untouched food with a frown, as I'm sure she wondered what was wrong. I said in defense, "I'm just not as hungry as I thought I was," and the harmless lies began. I couldn't tell her that my whole world had just been turned upside down. From then on I would have to carefully tiptoe around the subject of my sister/brother, carefully confiding in only those I knew I could trust.

The transition from Rachel to Ray did not happen overnight, but the next few years were drastic. Once the hormones took effect, Rachel's voice deepened and stubble started to appear.

"I was working out one day, and a co-worker of mine noticed my forearms," Ray recalls. "They were huge. He made a joke about it and we laughed, but it wasn't until then that I realized just how much I was changing. I loved every minute of it."

After meeting with a psychiatrist for a year, he got the go-ahead for his double mastectomy.

"My insurance paid for a breast reduction, but I actually needed a letter from my psychiatrist to get them removed," Ray explains. "The letter had to state that I had been diagnosed with gender dysphoria and that a double mastectomy was part of my sexual reassignment surgery."

Ray said good riddance to his breasts and never looked back.

"I was never drawn to anything that related to being a girl," Ray explains. "I pushed the Barbies away that my parents tried to get me to play with. My favorite toys growing up were Stretch Armstrong and Tonka Trucks."

Growing up a transsexual also meant

that certain milestones were unique for my brother.

"I remember when I was six or seven, a bunch of the neighbor kids were playing spin the bottle," Ray says. "I was watching this boy kiss the girl I liked. Yes, I wanted to kiss her, but I also wanted to be a boy kissing her."

Over a decade after that fateful night in Friendly's, my one and only sibling has been accustomed to living life as a male for some time now.

"It's cliché, because all transsexuals will tell you the same thing," he begins. "But ever since I can remember, I knew I should have been born a boy. I couldn't put it into words of course, but something was definitely different."

The medical community recognizes "transsexual" as the most extreme form of gender dysphoria, which means that an individual has a feeling of belonging to the gender opposite to his or her own gender.

"Once I found out there was a term for what I had been feeling all my life, I felt

# Three Generations

Left to Right: Laura as a baby, in her mother's arms; Ray in his childhood, before his sex change; and the siblings' grandmother



Photos courtesy of Laura Brown

"I was never drawn to anything that related to being a girl."

-Ray Brown



Laura and Ray on Laura's birthday

like I could actually start to live my life," Ray says. "Things have definitely gotten easier over the years. I'm not looked at as a 'freak' anymore."

I'm continued to be surprised every day by the acceptance of others, especially of all my family members. My parents have always said, "We just want her to be happy, and if this is what she feels she was born to be, then we accept it and love her just as much as we always did." My great uncle, the priest who prided himself on being part of the "old church," was able to come to terms with my new sibling. Father Mike even gave him a new nickname: "Raybo." Of course I've had instances of classmate cruelty, but fortunately since my brother was so much older than me, kids could separate his situation from mine and leave it alone. I used to get extremely nervous before telling anyone about my brother's past. In ten years, though, our society has become so much more accepting of those who lead an alternative lifestyle, especially with TV shows like "Dirty Sexy Money," "Will and Grace," and even "Dr. 90210," which actually documented a sex change. Even "The Oprah Winfrey Show" has profiled individuals who

feel they were born in the wrong body.

I still get a lot of questions, and sometimes I still feel like I should be on the Jerry Springer show. "This kind of stuff never happens to anyone around here" used to be my way of thinking. The most common questions include "Have you ever wanted to change?" No. And of course the ever-present, "Why would he choose to do this to himself?" I believe wholeheartedly that he was born with the instinctive feeling to be the opposite gender, for who would willingly choose to bring this kind of humiliation and judgment upon themselves?

In a way, I'm thankful that this "change" has been a part of my life. I'd like to think that even if my brother would have been born a "brother," I would still have been completely open and non-judgmental to everyone, no matter their race, age, color or sexual orientation. Who knows, though? I've witnessed the thin line between acceptance and judgment, and it only takes a second to change someone's mind. I've seen my brother's self-esteem peak and plummet, and in the end I'm going to have to side with my parents: I just want him to be happy.

## Transgender vocabulary

**Gender Dysphoria**, literally a misery with regard to gender, is the condition of being in a state of conflict between gender and physical sex.

A **transsexual** is a person in which the sex-related structures of the brain that define gender identity are exactly opposite of the physical sex organs of the body. Put even more simply, a transsexual is someone whose mind is literally, physically, trapped in a body of the opposite sex.

A **Transgender** is a person appearing or attempting to be a member of the opposite sex, as a transsexual or habitual cross-dresser. Transgender is also an umbrella term covering cross-dressers, transsexuals, androgynes, intersexes (people born with a mixture of male and female physiological characteristics), drag queens and kings, third gender people, and other gender-complex people.

An **Androgyne** is a person who has both male and female sexual characteristics and organs; at birth an unambiguous assignment of male or female cannot be made (this is also referred to as a hermaphrodite).  
From <http://www.transsexual.org>.

# DON'T GET STUCK LIVING HERE

By Rudi Whitmore

Follow the steps to the care and  
keeping of a Youngstown apartment

1. Research
2. Application
3. Lease  
(if you make it this far,  
see Step Four)
4. Scrounge for  
rent
5. Make  
presentable  
(that cleaning thing...)
6. Furnish ...  
and  
(if you're really good)  
decorate

**R**ock 'n' roll, keggers, screaming rows with your significant other, and cash flow problems are all a part of being young. They're things that make life exhilarating, fresh and outrageous.

They're also things that make us living nightmares to landlords.

So what? That's not *us*. We are not extras from "Animal House." We're house-trained! Good puppies that want nothing more than to quietly live in the rental and study, or play video games.

Really.

Ha.

## The search

Landlords don't buy it either. Most of them in this area have been in the rental racket longer than we've been alive. They've heard it all, and have had to photograph the results for insurance purposes.

Local landlord Pam Krantz said, "One tenant had ferrets and a dog, and there was a no-pet policy." After leaving three notices that they would be inspecting the apartment, and receiving no reply, they entered the apartment. "He was keeping the ferrets in a cage in the back room," Krantz recalls. "Later he pulled out the carpet, hosed it down and just hung it on the fence when he moved out."

In the same building, with different tenants, a window was broken out in December.

"It was negative twenty out! They didn't even put up plastic or anything. They just turned the heat up." Krantz laughed exasperatedly. "Well, then the pipes froze. Then the pipes exploded."

Krantz said, "They put on a good show — tell you they'll follow the rules, you know, no parties and no pets, and then you come in to check up on the apartment and they've got animals, holes in the wall..." She sighed, mentally tabulating the costs. "Meanwhile you're spending all this money to get new carpets and walls, and they're trashing it all."

But we're not even in the door yet. Let's say you found a place you're interested in, called the landlord and took a walking tour.

It's pretty. And clean! With walls and ceilings! Sold, right?

Wrong. We're young, not stupid. So, much as it hurts, put on your parents' thinking cap for a minute. What kind of heater is it? High efficiency? From 1972? How are the water pipes? When was the house last inspected? Are all the outlets covered? Are the walls cracking anywhere? See mold or mildew?

We've all jokingly blamed lead-paint ingestion for every dummy who ever lived, but seriously, if your house was built before the '70s, it's a good question to add to the list.

Remember: Housing in this area is almost completely unregulated, unless you're a part of Section 8, for low-income families and individuals. Outside of that, there is no landlord registration, no test they have to pass or license to acquire. The only time the city will get involved is if a complaint is made. No one is looking out for you, so look out for yourself.

Youngstown State University senior Ariel Benes moved into an apartment quickly without any questions.

"Three months later, my plumbing broke. I couldn't shower there, couldn't wash dishes, not anything. And I kept calling and calling and calling and showing up at his place, but he wouldn't come fix it. He kept putting me off, over and over again."

In the end, despite her landlord's atrocious behavior, Benes did a bad thing: She abandoned the lease without getting legal backup.

"I was required to pay out the rest of my lease, \$400 a month in rent, until our lawyers settled it."

Oh, rent. That last eensy, weensy little problem. Logically, rent should take up no more than a third of your income monthly. We all know the rest gets split up between Ramen, \$1 beer night and gas. Make sure you understand what utilities are included in your rent: If it's all-inclusive, your rent will be higher, but outside bills will be minimal. If your rent is lower, you could be looking at gas, electric and water bills.

## The stalk

But who knows how much that could cost? Well, the gas, electric and water companies know. And you can totally call them and ask for the average cost of the bill at the address you're looking to rent.

While this all takes a bit of effort, it's not really wasted energy. It's your money, and it's great to know you're not pouring it into a slum. Besides, the better deal you're getting for your property, the more bragging rights you have at the housewarming kegger.

But before you tap that keg, you might want to do what our generation does best: cyber-stalking.

Stalk your prospective address, or at least its street. Very few people are going to tell you their property isn't secure, so let your fingers do the talking. Put the street name in every search engine and local newspapers' Web site you can think of, then sit back and glory in the brilliance of technology.

Benes might have benefited from a little online research.

"I moved into a place really quickly

... And the boys in the next apartment building over were always setting things on fire on the porch. It was pretty scary. My landlord wouldn't do anything about it even though it was his building, too," she said.

You should know how secure your street is if your search pulled up any reported home invasions, car thefts, drug busts, domestic violence or, God forbid, murder. Your mom would just never get over that. Frankly, how much crime is too much crime is a question for you and your budget. You might want to see what you can dig up on your future landlord's name as well.

Let's say it's not that bad. No murders, the rental is in pretty good shape, and the asking price is in the range you were looking for. Excellent.

## The Inquisition

But maybe your credit isn't as great as the rental. Maybe, at your last place, there were a few loud parties. Maybe you're in between jobs.

Don't lie. The kind of information you put on an application is relatively easy to verify, and lying is stupid anyway. You wouldn't want to rent *from* a liar; why would your landlord want to rent *to* a liar?

Most people will take your honesty and explanation into account, especially if they want to rent the property soon. We're young. We mess up. So did they. Just intelligently explain why it happened, and why it won't happen again.

Applications can take between a few days and a week to process and be mulled over. Credit reports sound scary, and they are, so be smart about things. Credit reports can show bankruptcies, divorces, liens, court records, charge-offs and collections.

So what's good credit? Well, any mistakes you've made with payments or instances when your accounts have been turned over to creditors will be cleared within seven years, but bankruptcies stay on your report for 10. When you apply for a major credit card or other landlords check your credit, those inquiries stay on your record for two years. The more you are approved, the better it looks. There are three major credit bureaus in the United States: Equifax, Experian and TransUnion. These companies compile and maintain over 400 million credit holders' information.

Your credit score is a bunch of numbers, compiled with lots of complicated math not covered by College Math 101, but it's easy to explain. Your credit score simply tells the inquirer how likely you are to pay back

a loan. Basic FICO scores (the prevailing method) fall between 300 and 850. The higher your score is, the lower your risk to creditors (and potential landlords, which is the point, right?).

Lets say, for the sake of luck and your charming, earnest smile, you got approved. Rock on, emerging adult, rock on.

Your landlord is going to give you a lease. Look very, very, *very* carefully at it. Leases are usually for month-to-month, six-months, or a full year. While the document is formal, it shouldn't be too hard to understand. Underline anything you don't, and ask questions. Lots of questions. Not only do you look responsible (which you totally are, right?) you'll be crystal clear about what is expected of you.

Can you bring Kitty Princess Snowball? Can you hang pictures of her on the wall? Or paint the walls that charming, baby-poo ochre color? Check your lease.

Once your landlord gets to know you, some stipulations could change, but until they're sure you're not some fly-by-night, house-demolishing slob, expect them to be wary.

So, you've been approved, you've signed your soul away for a certain period of time, you've gotten whatever utilities you need transferred into your name, and you've hooked up your Internet. You have the keys to the kingdom.

## The Castle

A relatively unfurnished kingdom. While begging furniture from grandparents and other assorted family and friends is always effective, it's a bit degrading, and there are other ways to get furnished without setting up a payment plan. Web sites like [www.craigslist.com](http://www.craigslist.com) or newspaper Web site forums can connect you to people in your area who are eager to part with their beds, couches, TVs, entertainment centers, rugs, chairs, tables and sometimes even computers for almost too-good-to-be-true prices.

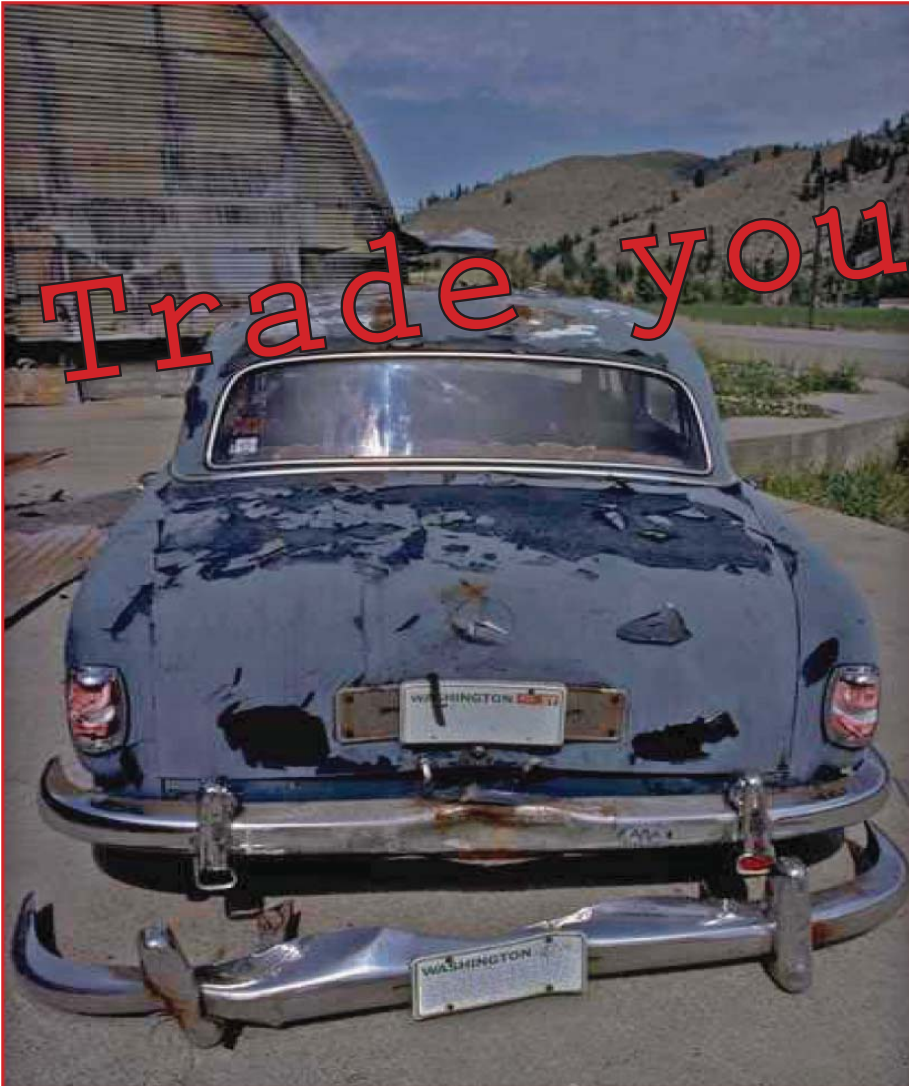
It's scary and scam-sounding, right? However, most people provide e-mail addresses and phone numbers so you can inquire, and, if you feel comfortable, bargain. Most of the time, all you need is cash and a way to get your new acquisitions home.

Now you've got it all. So sit back on your almost-new \$50 couch, in your brand-new apartment filled with friends, tap that keg (finally!) and congratulate yourself on a safe, smartly acquired apartment.

Welcome home.

# Trade your Lemon for sublime

By Adrienne Sabo



## How to score the best auto deal, for female consumers

**M**y eyes sparkled with wonderment. A wide grin suddenly glossed over my face. I even felt a little bit tingly. Standing in the loud auto shop of the Boardman Toyota store, the expression on my face must've said it all.

I was getting a new car.

After months of begging and pleading to get rid of my lemon, a 1988 bright red Toyota Tercel, I finally had a reason to upgrade. The young mechanic at the dealership told me that if I kept driving the car, the wheel brace would fall off and cause a major accident. He didn't know it, but he had just given me leverage over my parents in the fight to

get rid of the Tercel.

I thought a new car would be the start of a new life, but it only brought on two months of torture. My pain and suffering came in the form of a creature wearing polyester pants. This creature gave me a firm handshake with one hand, and took a drag of his cigarette from the other. His sweet-talking was almost as slick as his greasy hair. He was your classic used car salesman.

I was beginning to wonder if the Tercel wasn't so bad.

Car shopping is rough, and as a young woman it can be even worse.

Women make up 46 percent of new car purchases and influence more than 80 percent

of vehicle sales, according to a study by CNW Marketing Research.

And an annual study by a New Jersey car dealer found that the number one complaint of female car buyers was the slow and painful process of buying a car. The second largest complaint was untrustworthy sales people.

Who could blame these women? With the stigmas and downright horrific experiences, the outlook isn't so good.

Joann Helperin understood my pain. She is a senior features editor for Edmunds.com, an automotive consumer Web site that provides insight into the automotive industry and market.

She said the number one complaint from women when car

shopping is feeling like they are not treated with respect by the sales person.

Helperin's heard it all, with stories ranging from a sales person calling one woman "little lady" to another ignoring all car details except the color of the car.

There are steps to take when faced with adversity. The first one is to come armed.

Research is a crucial weapon for any woman to keep in her arsenal when shopping for a car.

I did my research online and pinpointed my price range. I needed a new car between \$7,000 and \$9,000 to keep my monthly payments hovering around \$115 a month. More on this mistake later.

Of course my dad would be cosigning. I was 19 and working part-time in a tutor center on campus; I couldn't afford much more. Since I "abandoned" the car my parents purchased, I was on my own when it came to the payment. I checked every dealer's Web site between Youngstown and Akron.

Helperin suggests doing most of the researching the same way: online.

When car shopping, knowledge is definitely power. Find out what type of car will fit your price range and what features are must-haves. It is easier to find out what you need rather than weeding through what you don't want.

Research car companies, read through reviews from consumers and narrow your search to car model and price range. Also, if you have a car to trade in, look up exactly what price you should be getting for that vehicle and use it to your advantage. Rather than trading an old car in, Helperin suggests selling it separately because it will yield a higher return.

My first few trips to the lot were painful. I either ventured alone or with one of my friends. I couldn't get anyone to take me seriously. I knew my price, I knew the type of car, and I even knew what little of a trade in value I had. Still no luck.

After a few weeks of disappointment and stress from the little lemon that couldn't, I came armed with a new weapon: my father. This brings us to another major mistake and rule

number two.

Advice differs on whether or not to bring someone along when looking at cars. Friends, boyfriends and parents can be helpful, but these people can also hurt the buyer in the end.

Helperin suggests going it alone. A woman needs to have the guts to go by herself. Sales people will ignore a woman who shops with someone else, especially a male.

When I walked onto the lot for the first time with my dad I was finally getting someone to at least notice us and take us seriously. At least I thought it was "us."

The dealers would talk to my dad and direct most of the questions toward him, when in fact I was the one who did all the research. I was the one who knew what I wanted, and I was the one who was paying for the car.

Helperin recounted a similar story where a woman went car shopping with her husband. The car was specifically for her, but the car sales person only paid attention to the husband.

Going alone will keep the attention on the buyer and the buyer's needs.

I landed on a cranberry-colored 2001 Ford Focus with average mileage and a clean Carfax Report. I was ecstatic. Another mistake.

A major no-no in bartering is showing emotion when talking numbers. I was beaming ear to ear. We haggled back and forth for about an hour. I was set on my price, even though I desperately

wanted that car. The dealer and I finally agreed on my payment plan and a date to come pick up the car.

This, also, was a major mistake for my venture. When talking about negotiating a price, never speak in terms of monthly payments. Monthly payments can be for leasing or buying the car. Helperin said that most car sales people will automatically ask what type of monthly payment the buyer wants. If the sales person does that, run. And run fast.

She suggests looking at the deal in its entirety. Leases and financing payments will have front and back end prices that are not always evident. Be aware of exactly what the deal entails.

When leasing a car, a buyer is making monthly payments for a set amount of time. The buyer never truly owns the car, and once the period is over, the car is returned to a dealership with the option to continue payments until the car is paid off.

There are several options when buying the car. The buyer can either pay in full or make monthly payments. Those payments are based off the price of the car plus the financing. Financing consists of the annual percentage rate tacked on to the price of the car from the loan company. Can you detect the confusion?

My dad picked the car up while I was at work, signed all the papers and the car was mine, for an extra \$15 per month I don't remember agreeing on. The car salesman upped the

price of my monthly payments when I wasn't around to sign the papers. He probably thought he was slick, but he didn't know the woman who raised me.

That little liar brought on another chapter in this saga. Managers from every department in the dealership were involved. Over the phone and through conference calls, we had to renegotiate the terms and conditions of my payment — all while I was trying to tutor someone on the key to delivering an effective persuasive speech.

The phone call from my dad was a sign that I should've walked away and onto a different car dealer's lot. Or run, as Helperin would suggest.

Helperin said the best practice is to walk away from any deal that makes you feel uncomfortable. On a scale of one to ten, my comfort level was somewhere around negative five.

The best piece of advice is to understand exactly what the papers say. If the paper work is confusing, then ask as many questions as it takes to understand. The other choice is to walk away. If the dealer can't give a buyer enough respect to explain every detail in that paper, then that person does not deserve the business.

Finally, after dozens of trips to the lots, enough handshakes to last me a lifetime and a jar full of tears from feeling taken advantage of, the car was mine.

And then I was promptly mailed two payment booklets. That bad taste is permanently lingering in my mouth.

Don't forget to check these things off your to-do list when car shopping...

*Beatrix*

## Car Lot Checklist

- |                        |                       |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Walk-around inspection | Storage space         |
| Appearance             | Test-drive            |
| Exterior finish        | Handling              |
| Comfort                | Visibility in mirrors |
| Legroom                | Quietness             |
| Stereo                 | Braking               |
| Controls               | Acceleration          |

*This issue is sponsored by  
the Student Government Association  
of Youngstown State University*



Your  
**Success**  
Is Our  
**Story**

[www.yasu.edu](http://www.yasu.edu)



**Youngstown**  
STATE UNIVERSITY

*This issue is sponsored by  
the Student Government Association  
of Youngstown State University*



Your  
**Success**  
Is Our  
**Story**

[www.yasu.edu](http://www.yasu.edu)



**Youngstown**  
STATE UNIVERSITY