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# MINDS ABLAZE

*The psychological impacts  
of fire season*

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# VERDE MAGAZINE

October 2021 *Volume 23 Issue 1*



## ON THE COVER

Senior Maia Johnson anxiously looks ahead as a cloud of smoke closes in around her. This photo illustration, shot by photographer Anushe Irani and edited by graphic designer Esther Xu, visualizes the annual helplessness community members feel — as smoke once again seeps into our lives, yet again we are powerless in changing its course. In this issue, we explore the psychological impact of tragedies like this, and the guilt and desensitization that often follows.

### Publication Policy

Verde Magazine, a news and features magazine published by the students in Palo Alto High School's Magazine Journalism class, is a designated open forum for student expression and discussion of issues of concern to its readership. Verde is distributed to its readers and the student body at no cost.

### Letters to the Editors

The staff welcomes letters to the editors but reserves the right to edit all submissions for length, grammar, potential libel, invasion of privacy and obscenity. Send all letters to verde.eics@gmail.com or 50 Embarcadero Rd Palo Alto, CA 94301.

### Advertising

The staff publishes advertisements with signed contracts providing they are not deemed by the staff inappropriate for the magazine's audience. For more information about advertising with Verde, please contact business managers Andrew Xue and Kieran Zajac at verdebusiness5@gmail.com.

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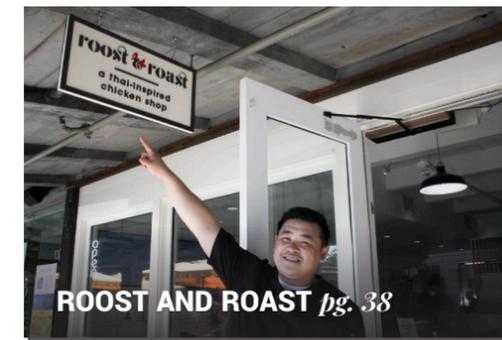
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## FROM THE EDITORS

# RECONCILING A NEW NORMAL

The sky burns orange as the smell of charred wood fills the smoky air. Students cover their eyes as they hurry between classrooms, masks covering their faces and hiding coughs underneath.

As the pandemic gradually flickers out, life is slowly becoming recognizable again. And yet — not quite. The “normalcy” we so desperately want to return to is a world devastated by climate change, political turmoil and war, nothing close to the idyllic paradise many of us dreamed of during the worst months of the pandemic.

In this issue, we explore how these critical issues affect the minds of the members of our community, through a more introspective and psychological lens. While burning forests, endless violence and partisan clashes seem like issues centered far away from Palo Alto High School, their mental effects reach surprisingly far and wide.

With threats of fires persisting in northern California and local anxiety remaining, Profiles Editor Sasha Boudtchenko, News Editor Bella Daly and Multimedia Manager Melody Xu explore the impact of California's wildfires in “Lost in the flames.” Though Palo Alto has been physically unscathed, the pervasive smoke and unending news alerts on social media each fall have made their mark on many local residents' psyches.

The recent withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan also seems like an issue with its epicenter far away. But for Afghan community members, the war and its lasting effects are deeply personal and tied to their identities as Americans. In a poignant letter, staff writer Ines Legrand reflects on her cultural identity as an Afghan American in “A message to mom,” highlighting her internal struggles with her identity as a highly personal war comes to an end halfway across the globe.

Over the summer, many high-profile athletes publicly stepped back from competition due to concerns over their mental wellbeing. Though much of the discussion surrounding the mental toll of competition is focused on professional athletics, right here at Palo Alto High School, student-athletes struggle with the immense pressure of high-level competition as they attempt to pursue athletic excellence, a struggle documented by Perspectives Editor Meena Narayanaswami, Business Manager Andrew Xue and staff writer Miya Whitely in “Athletic adversity.”

But as crises fill our news feeds and our thoughts, a full in-person return to the Verde classroom has been a place for us and our staff to examine the issues pressing society and ourselves — together as a whole staff for the first time in over a year. Lengthy discussions of topics ranging from climate change and COVID-19 policy to bathroom breaks and construction complaints have punctuated our time together as a staff. Our writers' pursuit of the most pressing issues in our local community has allowed us to process the angst and powerlessness felt throughout the student body.

In our May issue, we pondered the state of life after the lockdowns and restrictions characteristic of the past year. As we return to a relative normalcy, the world we are reflecting on today is nothing like that we envisioned just a few months ago. Perhaps life is no longer recognizable, but we can embrace this new world and continue to ignite change through our work, one story at a time.

—PAISLEY, SEBASTIAN, AKHIL, EMILY

# Unsuccessful Monday schedule

INCONVENIENT, UNPRODUCTIVE AND VERY EXHAUSTING

**R**ETURNING TO IN-PERSON school this year has resulted in several major changes, one of the most controversial among students being the new bell schedule.

Before the pandemic, the Palo Alto High School bell schedule consisted of two block-period schedules with “even” days on Tuesdays and Thursdays, “odd” days on Wednesdays

*I think it's also too short of a time to really get into activities.*

— ALEX SALZMANN, teacher

and Fridays, and Mondays alternating each week between “even” and “odd.” Class periods were 90 minutes long and split between the two days. Now the Monday schedule has been amended to include all seven periods in 45-minute blocks. We urge the district to reevaluate the current Monday schedule and revert back to rotating block days.

The shortened periods do not give students adequate time to learn course material thoroughly or engage meaningfully with the curriculum. They also deprive students

of valuable instructional time they could have received with the alternating block day schedule.

“Since the classes are only 45 minutes, it’s not enough to settle in and actually do work, so we only get 20 minutes of work time,” junior Kathleen Lum said. “It also takes away time from the rest of the week because we only get two quality periods for each class.”

Moreover, a new district policy prohibits tests, quizzes and summative assignments from taking place on Mondays in an attempt to reduce student workload over the weekend. However, this well-intentioned ban has only resulted in an overload of work due on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

Additionally, after attending all seven periods and walking across campus from class to class all day, many students feel exhausted.

“I understand why it [the schedule] exists, but I don’t like it,” teacher Alex

Salzmann said. “Because I think it’s a long day for the kids, by the end they’re really tired out. I think it’s also too short of a time to really get into activities.”

According to Palo Alto Unified School District Superintendent Don Austin, the district will not revise the Monday schedule this school year because it would overhaul the schedules of all PAUSD middle and high schools.

“We share staff between schools, so they [middle and high school bell schedules] need to be consistent,” Austin told Verde. “One of the things we really wanted out of the closures was to keep the two high schools on the same schedule. And then there has to be some alignment with our middle schools, because especially at Gunn, they share a lot of staff.”

Although the Monday schedule will remain the same for the rest of this school year, Austin said PAUSD will likely revisit it and make changes next year. We continue to urge the bell schedule committee and PAUSD to reconsider the seven-period Monday schedule and revert back to the alternating block day schedule. v

This year, the bell schedule does not have to change — the attitude of students and teachers does. Students continue to use the same hackneyed complaint that with periods so short, they have time to do nothing.

Students have plenty to use to their advantage, as assignments and assessments cannot be due on Mondays, and should approach the day with a more positive mindset. They have to stay focused and discern their readiness for the week ahead, implementing modifications accordingly.

School hours are the most crucial learning hours in the day and should be used efficiently. So, let’s stop wasting our time complaining and focus on making the most of our academic journey. v

# Allow remote days during wildfires

STATE MUST CERTIFY ONLINE LEARNING FOR EMERGENCIES

**A**S WILDFIRE SEASON returns and air quality fluctuates, the Palo Alto Unified School District announced updated protocols on Aug. 18 that would keep students indoors when Air Quality Index levels pass 150.

According to these protocols, the district will suspend COVID-19 regulations and hold all classes and lunches indoors with windows closed when AQI levels rise above 150 — though contract negotiations between the Palo Alto Educators Associa-

tion and PAUSD indicate that the threshold, per PAUSD’s request, could increase to an AQI of 201.

Regardless of the AQI level, schools will remain open unless the Bay Area Air Quality Management recommends school closure, in which case PAUSD will consider closing schools.

Currently, PAUSD has no viable alternative to canceling school because the State of California does not count online instructional hours toward the required hours per school year.

We urge PAUSD to recommend to the California Department of Education to certify online education as instructional hours in cases of poor air quality.

While outdoor activity during high AQI levels imposes health hazards, disregarding COVID-19 regulations by moving activities indoors also puts students and staff at risk. Indoor activities threaten those who remain unvaccinated, are at an elevated risk or have family members vulnerable to the virus. Furthermore, vaccinated individuals can still be infected with COVID-19 through its variant strains.

Instead of putting students and staff in danger, schools should be prepared to switch to online learning.

According to the Paly Voice, the PAEA is planning on creating built-in “smoke days,” in which schools would close and instead make the days up at the end of the school year — similar to what districts on the East Coast do on “snow days.”

We believe “smoke days” are avoidable. By authorizing online instructional hours, the California Board of Education would allow students to receive COVID-safe, uninterrupted instruction — which was effectively implemented during the pandemic — without extending the school year.

“There is no need to risk major disruptions to the academic calendar and flow of learning,” former Verde Editor-in-Chief Laura Malagrino said.

Malagrino’s college classes were canceled due to Hurricane Ida and have been operating online ever since.

As stated by the San Francisco Chronicle, four million acres of land were burned in 2020 (double the amount burned in 2018), and two million acres have burned so far in 2021. While the coronavirus may no longer be a problem in future years, climate change is bound to worsen causing wildfires to increase. A more permanent solution that addresses everyone’s needs is necessary. v



Art by Palina Kuzmina

## An opposing view on the 7-period Monday schedule

By Carlota Blanco



Photo by Emily Yao

**S**OME STUDENTS WANT a longer brunch period, while others prefer a longer lunch. Some complain of long class periods but lambaste the 45-minute periods on Mondays. Most still covet an early ending time, failing to realize their preferences will never align with those of other students.

The overarching question is: Does the 7-period Monday work?

In truth, I would have been happy with a wide variety of schedules, grateful to return to school after more than a year in quarantine. To have a daily schedule that I can complete in-person is refreshing, along with having healthier relations with teachers, other students, and notably, with the classes themselves.

## Praising ASB, admin for successful campus return

**A**FTER OVER A YEAR of remote learning, students have successfully returned to Palo Alto High School’s campus, much of this due to the hard work of Paly’s Associated Student Body and administration. We commend our student representatives and administrators for ensuring that students are motivated and safe as they navigate the return to in-person school.

Starting in June, ASB held meetings and organized committees to coordinate the first major events of the school year such as orientation, the Second Friday

Dance and a back-to-school spirit rally.

Junior Archie Webber said he believes the representatives planned events that helped students bond and reinvigorate the Paly community.

“The dance was really well organized, and I had a lot of fun there,” Webber said. “It was nice seeing everyone together again.”

We also appreciate the statewide health protocols that the Paly administrators diligently followed when considering the safety of students and staff. Indoor mask mandates have been strictly enforce

— following the California COVID-19 mask protocols — but students are permitted to breathe mask-free outdoors, allowing them to feel comfortable when eating lunch or hanging out around campus.

“We are following the guidelines set by the state and the CDC,” Principal Brent Kline said. “We’re here to provide an educational opportunity.”

We are grateful for the dedication of the Paly administration and student representatives since the beginning of summer, contributing to the outstanding start of the new school year. v

## ASB ANSWERS



Photo: Kennedy Do

WITH SPIRIT COMMISSIONER  
BELLA NGYUEN

**What new activities can we expect during Spirit Week?**

Spirit Week will be full of bonding activities as well as competitions. There will be rallies outside which include classic games [like] Tug of War, Clean the Room and more. Spirit Week dances and float building are also beginning in these upcoming weeks.

**How is ASB planning homecoming?**

Homecoming is close and ASB is working very hard to provide a good time for Paly students. The dance will be located around the Haymarket Theater area with a photo booth, dancing, dessert and more.

**What other activities is ASB thinking of doing in the future?**

ASB is thinking of collaborating with Gunn High School to organize fun, social events such as rallies and dances. Along with that, we are thinking about hosting a Quadchella or Quadside lands event and a Challenge Day for students to emotionally bond.

## HOW ARE YOU ADJUSTING TO IN-PERSON LEARNING?



"I'm making sure to take care of my body and health so I can be awake throughout the day because it takes more energy to be in-person."

– Brigid Baker, senior



"It's been pretty good and it hasn't been a problem socially, and classes are going well and all my teachers are nice."

– Oliver Chancellor, freshman

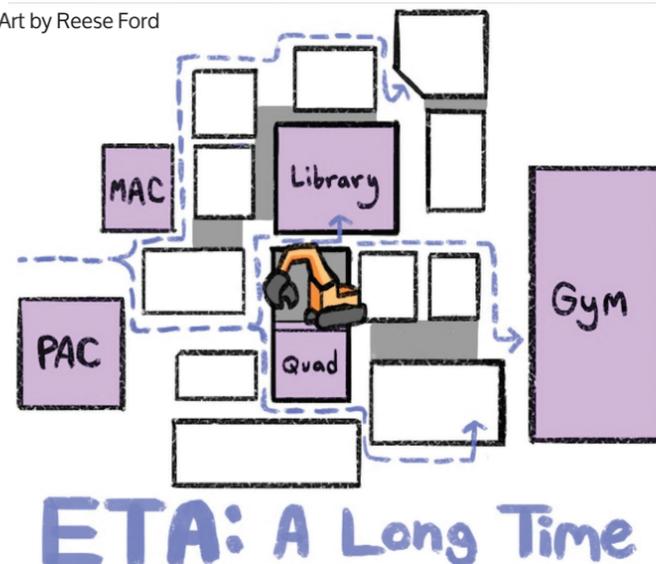


"I've joined a lot more clubs and been a lot more social because we've been in-person and that's definitely been a highlight."

– Payton Anderson, junior

## VERDOODLE: A TREK TO CLASS

Art by Reese Ford



## LOCAL PUMPKIN SPICE LATTE REVIEW

DOUCE FRANCE

5/10



\$4.45

Although served piping hot, this pumpkin spice latte lacked the classic pumpkin taste we crave to warm us up on a brisk fall day.

STARBUCKS

7/10



\$4.75

This seasonal drink had a robust coffee taste with hints of warm pumpkin spice reminiscent of celebratory desserts.

DUNKIN' DONUTS

8/10



\$4.49

Topped with lots of foam, whipped cream and cinnamon, this latte had a strong pumpkin flavor. However, it was very milky and its espresso profile was a bit too light for our liking.

PEET'S COFFEE

6/10



\$4.40

This pumpkin spice latte was topped with pumpkin foam and drizzled with gooey caramel. A sweet milky drink sat beneath this exotic topping, lacking the coffee flavor we expected in a latte.

## VERDE'S FAVORITE HALLOWEEN MOVIES

"Hocus Pocus"

1993

"Coraline"

2009

"Edward Scissorhands"

1990

"The Corpse Bride"

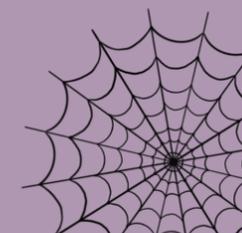
2005

"Ghostbusters"

2016

"Beetlejuice"

1988



## BACK TO SCHOOL PODCASTS

"Anything Goes"

Emma Chamberlain

"The Daily"

The New York Times

"Mood"

Lauren Elizabeth

"Ted Talks Daily"

TED

"Dan Carlin's Hardcore History"

Dan Carlin

"You're Wrong About"

Michael Hobbes and Sarah Marshall



Scan this code to access the full playlist on Spotify!

## PSAT in middle of Spirit Week

The preliminary SAT will be held Wednesday during Spirit Week.

According to Associate Student Body Spirit Commissioner and junior Evie Kramer, the PSAT might make Spirit Week more difficult to enjoy than in years past due to the special schedule on the PSAT day, yet to be decided by administrators.

“Spirit Week is supposed to be a time where the campus can come together,” Kramer said. “Putting big stress-inducing testing right in the middle of a time when we’re supposed to be bonding is unfortunate.”

Junior Calvin Wong said he feels the PSAT could impede on his ability to have fun during Spirit Week and will decrease participation in Spirit Week activities.

“Spirit Week is the best week or one of the best weeks in Paly [Palo Alto High School], so with the PSAT, people are probably not going to try as hard during Spirit Week,” Wong said.

The overlap of these two events can also infringe on students’ abilities to perform on the PSAT, according to Wong.

“I know that the PSAT can help you get things like scholarships for college and trying to focus so hard during a week that you just want to have fun is definitely not the best,” Wong said.

Overall, the PSAT will not drastically change any of ASB’s plans, although Kramer said some minor changes may need to be made.

“We [ASB] will probably have to rearrange rally times,” Kramer said. “But we’re hoping to maintain as many of the activities we can during the day.”

by **JONAS PAO**



**THOUSAND ISLAND THRILL** — Students of the Palo Alto High School Class of ‘21 stand on the bleachers during a 2019 Spirit Week rally on “Thousand Islands” day. After debating the controversy surrounding the theme, the Associate Student Body has decided to modify the theme. “Sometimes we can’t really hold on to what is tradition because it’s not what fits with the world right now,” Board of Education Representative and senior Micaiah Acosta said. Photo: Mike Zhou

## Junior theme sparks debate

**P**ALO ALTO HIGH SCHOOL’S Associated Student Body decided to modify this year’s Spirit Week themes because of concerns relating to cultural appropriation.

The “Thousand Island” theme has become a Spirit Week tradition for students, where they dress in leis, flowered t-shirts and sunglasses to depict islanders or Hawaiian tourists.

“Many of us [Paly students] see the ‘Thousand Islands’ dress-up theme as problematic, and we wanted to change that as ASB, because we feel like that’s the right thing to do,” Junior Class President Ashley Hung said. “But at the same time, we want to continue Paly tradition as much as we can.”

Finding the line between keeping Paly traditions strong and being mindful of cultural appropriation and stereotyping Pacific Islander groups has spurred debate across campus.

“It’s been brought up probably every year for a long time, just by our peers or classmates,” Hung said. “Especially recently with the rise of more social justice

movements ... I think that really pushed us [ASB] compared to previous years to make a change with this, whether that be completely changing it or [re]directing it.”

As a result, ASB took action against the potentially offensive theme this year.

“Rather than completely changing the theme of ‘Thousand Islands’ we’re planning on — as of now — directing the dress-up in a more appropriate direction,” Hung said. “We’re about to make a lookbook for spirit week dress-up days and kind of show what you should be wearing or what you shouldn’t be wearing.”

Board of Education Representative and senior Micaiah Acosta said Paly should switch the theme for Spirit Week and eliminate opportunities for cultural appropriation entirely.

“I know that dressing up in ... tourist-themed beachwear, it’s been long standing at Paly,” Acosta said. “But times have changed, society has changed [and] the norms have changed.”

by **ANNUM HASHMI**  
and **ALLEGRA WEST**

## City libraries plan to increase hours

**T**HE PALO ALTO CITY LIBRARY has expanded the hours of its Mitchell Park and Rinconada branches, as part of its plan to fully reopen libraries.

“It’s a good number of hours per week that we’re adding in this kind of interim period,” Supervising Librarian Marleah Augustine said. “And then we’re hoping to continue expanding as time goes on and everything gets more streamlined with staffing and safety concerns.”

On top of the expansion of hours, the library is also working on filling positions left vacant as a result of the city’s budget cuts at the height of the pandemic last year.

This increase in hours already symbolizes a slow but sure return to normalcy for the library.

“It’s nice to have people back in the

building,” library staff member Kevin Guerato said. “I missed helping people; that’s what I loved about this job.”

Mitchell Park Library will expand its Tuesday-Thursday hours from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. and Friday-Saturday from noon to 6 p.m. Rinconada Library will operate on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Thursdays from 12 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Palo Alto libraries have always served as a place for teens such as Ellen Fletcher Middle School student Mei Elgarrari to “do their homework, have some time to forget stress and be able to read.”

Elgarrari said the upcoming expansion of hours will allow her to visit the library more frequently.

by **MELODY XU**

## University Avenue to stay closed to cars

**P**ALO ALTO CITY COUNCIL voted to keep University Avenue closed to cars until Oct. 15.

The council considered many factors in their decision against reopening the street to cars, such as negative economic effects on businesses, primarily restaurants that operate on the street, COVID-19 safety guidelines and promoting a specific feel of the downtown streets.

Council member Greer Stone is a vocal supporter of maintaining the status quo and said he promotes keeping University Avenue closed to cars indefinitely.

“As far as looking at what our objectives here are, it’s finding that downtown that’s very vibrant and that is a destination for the community as well as outsiders and restaurants and retail,” Stone said.

A large part of what makes the University Avenue closure to cars appealing is the option for outdoor dining. This provides a safer environment for cus-

tomers, as opposed to eating indoors, where the risk of COVID-19 transmission is higher, according to the Center for Disease Control.

The policy is also favored by owners and managers of restaurants along University Avenue, including Local Union 271, a popular farm-to-table restaurant.

“Having University closed has increased business, increased livelihood [and] increased spending,” said the establishment’s Director of Operations, Adam Kerr. “Additionally, the general public has enjoyed it. There’s lots of people out enjoying their weekends.”

Increased pedestrian safety is another positive aspect of the street closure.

“I personally really like it because I can bike everywhere without the fear of getting hit,” Palo Alto High School junior Jonathan Wang said.

by **KIERAN ZAJAC**

## COVID-19 tests on campus

Predicine Labs, a local medical research company, will be offering free weekly COVID-19 testing at Palo Alto High School for students and staff.

The antigen tests were first introduced on Thursday Sept. 2 as a result of a district-driven initiative to provide testing on campus. Roughly 80 students and staff members were tested on the first day, according to Lupe Fuentes, one of Predicine Labs’ medical staff administering tests on campus.

Though testing is free for students and faculty; students’ families must complete a form to be tested.

“Parents will fill out a form with [their child’s] insurance information, their own insurance information, and then the consent,” Fuentes said.

The testing center will be set up on the Quad in between the Tower Building and the Haymarket Theater once a week from 9 a.m. until 30 minutes after dismissal. The tests are conducted by the Predicine Labs staff and a link to the results is supposed to be sent by text 24 to 48 hours after the test is conducted.

Senior Emma Joing was recently tested and received her results within the 48 hour period after her test. Joing said she hopes other students will also take advantage of the free testing being offered.

“I think it’s a really easy way to just, even if you’re vaccinated, to make sure you don’t have COVID,” Joing said.

Testing will be offered weekly for the entirety of the school year.

by **SASHA BOUDTCHENKO**  
with additional reporting by  
**SEBASTIAN BONNARD**

# PAUSD holds off on vaccine mandate

**P**ALO ALTO UNIFIED SCHOOL District will not be mandating any COVID-19 vaccinations, given the district's high vaccination rate for teachers and students, according to Superintendent Don Austin in a recent interview with Verde Magazine.

"It's not a problem that looks like we need to solve," Austin said. "We are at over 95% of our adults at the high school and eligible middle school levels we're in the high 90s. If we were at 50% [vaccinated] I might have a very different answer."

Austin said he would be unwilling to institute a vaccine mandate unless mandated by the state health officials, and would not be the first district to do so.

"If something is important enough for the state to take action on, we will absolutely follow in line, but we're not going to be the first to go into that space," Austin said.

Austin also said the booster shot program being discussed on a national level right now is unlikely to affect whether or not the district mandates vaccines unless the state requires it.

"If they [California Department of Public Health] are going to mandate boosters, then they really need to be responsible for the tracking," Austin said. "School districts are not designed to be hospitals, and we can't keep up with all the changes in rules, the different vaccines, who's required to have a booster, who isn't, how we report that — we are not equipped for that."

Palo Alto school board member Jennifer DiBrienza also said the school board will follow state public health guidance in order

to guide their decisions regarding vaccines. "The school board makes these administrative decisions with advice from the educators and the health experts, and that we leave it up to the health department of the county and the state to make the health decisions," DiBrienza said.

DiBrienza said the high-vaccination rate in Palo Alto negates the need to mandate vaccines, and given the introduction of a booster shot, she would support a booster shot clinic at Palo Alto High School.

"If it becomes available and it's recommended, I'll advocate for our administra-

tion to go ahead and plan a clinic again ... I think that a lot of people will take advantage of it," DiBrienza said. "From what I understand from staff, they were very concerned in the spring about coming back before they were vaccinated, so I think that they'll go for the booster too. I'm not too worried about enforcing it, as it seems like our community is really taking it seriously. Everyone appreciates that we're back to school in-person, and they know that what lets that continue is no outbreaks."

by **ANDY ROBINSON**



**TEACHER TESTING** — History teacher John Bungarden and athletic trainer Justine Longi sit side by side as they prepare to take a free COVID-19 test offered by Predicine Labs on the Palo Alto High School Quad. COVID rates at Paly have stayed low and the school has a 95% vaccination rates for adults in high school and middle school. "If everyone gets vaccinated, it ensures that we're all part of the solution to the pandemic," Phillips said. Photo: Emily Yao

# School board meetings return in-person

**A**FTER 18 MONTHS OF virtual meetings, the Palo Alto Unified School District Board is welcoming in-person attendees again as of last month.

According to Board President Shounak Dharap, the transition to a hybrid-style meeting has been successful thus far and the board is excited to connect with more in-person community viewers and participants in future meetings.

"We have started in-person meetings that are open to the public, so our first

meeting open to the public was two days ago [Sept. 14] and it went very smoothly," Dharap said.

The board aligned its COVID-19 regulations with PAUSD visitor regulations. Meeting attendees are required to show proof of vaccination before entering the board room and must wear a mask indoors.

"We call it a hybrid meeting," Dharap said. "You can come in-person if you can meet the requirements ... or you can participate virtually as we have been doing all

along." To mitigate public comment confusion, the board has implemented a new comment system which allows for both in-person and virtual attendees to share their thoughts in a blended fashion.

"It [the new commenting system] worked great," Dharap said. "We had a couple members of the public show up in-person and it was nice."

by **PAISLEY ANNES**

Text by SASHA BOUDTCHENKO, BELLA DALY and MELODY XU

Art by ESTHER XU

# LOST IN THE FLAMIES

## FIRES' IMPACT ON OUR COMMUNITY'S PSYCHE



**SMOKY SKIES** — The bright orange sun sets over Viking Stadium under a hazy sky. Though hundreds of miles away, the recent Norcal fires have extended their reach to Palo Alto. "The smoke travels so far that everyone is affected by it," junior Finley Craig said. Photo: Emily Yao

**S**ENIOR MAIA JOHNSON recalls how she was sitting at her dining table, scrolling through her phone, when her mom approached her with alarming news — fires in Lake Tahoe were steadily making their way toward her family friend's home.

"It was hard for me to comprehend what was going on, because it hit so close to home," Johnson said. "I was quite taken aback."

Year after year, Palo Alto High School students and staff experience the smoky skies and air quality warnings from fires burning in neighboring regions of the state.

Whether there's smoke in the sky or yet another social media infographic, students are always reminded of the constant stream of ongoing tragedies. Many have found themselves stuck in a frustrating position — feeling the psychological burden of their inability to change the unfortunate situation that seems so close, yet so far.

### Media mess

The great exposure to tragedies through social media leads to questions about the possible long-term impacts on students, especially a buildup of stress and sadness. According to a recent BBC survey of young people worldwide, two-thirds of participants reported experiencing sadness, fear and anxiety concerning the issue of climate change. Additionally, 91.2% of Paly students think abundant exposure to trag-

edies like natural disasters through social media has affected their generation's psyche, according to an opt-in survey by Verde Magazine of 248 Palo Alto High School students conducted Sept. 13 to Sept. 16 via a digital form published on Schoology pages and Verde social media.

**You always hear about natural disasters and natural causes destroying people's lives but now it's people that we know, places that we've been to ... it just hits really close to home."**

— MAIA JOHNSON, senior

From a psychological standpoint, AP Psychology teacher Melinda Mattes said she is unsure how this constant exposure to tragedies will affect teens long-term.

"It [exposure to tragedies] can be motivating," Mattes said. "Or it can be pretty demoralizing, and you can come to just accept that's the way it is."

demoralizing, and you can come to just accept that's the way it is."

According to Mattes, while some may use this exposure to fuel change, others may lack the motivation to create change.

Mattes also expressed concern for how difficult it must be to see the world through the polarity of social media.

"On social media ... everything is very extreme," Mattes said. "And if that's the information you're taking in then you start to view the world that way which I have to imagine can be hard."

However, Mattes said she keeps an

optimistic outlook on this generation's future, comparing it to times before social media use was widespread. She said she hopes students who use social media will be more inclined to advocate for issues such as climate change.

"When I was in high school, we would kind of talk about the environment, but ... it wasn't important because we didn't really see many reasons," Mattes said. "But now, you see reason after reason, day after day."

While more students may be more driven to advocate for climate change solutions in the future, some, such as senior Siddhant Amberkar, are currently figuring out how to live in an age when scrolling past tragic news is a common and daily occurrence.

"In a sense [it's] desensitizing because there's nothing you can do about it," Amberkar said. "So at a point you kinda just have to ignore it and just live on with your life."

**When I was in high school, we would kind of talk about the environment, but ... it wasn't important because we didn't really see many reasons ... But now, you see reason after reason, day after day."**

— MELINDA MATTES, teacher

### Close to home

Despite Palo Alto's physical distance from major wildfires, residents are still impacted by them in various ways. Amberkar hiked in the Big Basin redwoods just two weeks before wildfires burned a considerable portion of them to the ground in 2020.

"That [the Big Basin fires] is pretty devastating especially because these are a lot of the wonders of California ... that are



**RAGING FLAMES** — A blazing Daly City wildfire scorches the surrounding brush. Recent wildfires have caused much anxiety to the members of the local community. "The wildfires are getting worse and they are becoming more frequent," junior Ella Rosenblum said. "I think that is a concern to everyone." Photo: Kyla Schwarzbach

being destroyed from the fires," Amberkar said.

Students like Amberkar have felt trapped while helplessly watching the fires enclose on familiar locations as a constant stream of new reports or fire containment updates crowd their social media feeds, rendering these tragedies inescapable.

"When it happens, you think of what can you do — and it's not like you can stop the fire yourself," Amberkar said.

For junior Finley Craig, this fall's smoky skies were a scary reminder of the protrusive presence of the seemingly distant fires.

"Even though the fire is so far, it feels so close, because the smoke is everywhere," Craig said.

Forest fires have decimated locations more personal to Craig this year than in years prior.

Being the place where her parents first met and got married, Lake Tahoe holds a special significance to Craig and her family.

"When it [the fire] gets closer to Tahoe, it feels close to home," Craig said. "I know all of these forests that, now, my picture of them is different than what they look like because they're now all charred."

Johnson, who regularly takes hiking or skiing trips to Tahoe, now sentimentally watches special childhood locations burn through the photos of the reddened Tahoe skies circulating around social media platforms.

With the quickly changing landscape, Johnson said she is worried about possibly being unable to recognize familiar places she used to love, despite how often she has visited them over the years.

Because of this, Johnson said this year's Tahoe fires have impacted her on a more personal level than fire seasons in years prior.

"You always hear about natural disasters and natural causes destroying people's lives but now it's people that we know, places that we've been to ... it just hits really close to home," Johnson said. v

## STUDENT IMPACTS

Disclaimer: Data presented is from an opt-in survey by Verde Magazine of 248 Palo Alto High School Students conducted from Sept. 13 to Sept. 16, 2021 via a digital form published on Schoology pages and Verde social media. Responses were anonymous and all questions were optional.

**30.2%**

have close friends or family members that have been affected by the wildfires

**91.2%**

think abundant exposure to tragedies through the use of social media has affected the psyche of our generation

# ATHLETIC ADVERSITY

## THE PSYCHOLOGICAL BURDEN OF COMPETITIVE SPORTS

**P**ALO ALTO HIGH SCHOOL junior Lauren Levine spent her last years as a competitive Junior Olympics gymnast dreading practice every week. The hobby she once loved had become a source of anxiety and distress in her life as she was pressured to perform increasingly difficult and dangerous skills.

“I was scared all the time,” Levine said. “It wasn’t just nerves or the adrenaline of doing something I’d never done before, I was really fearful of certain skills that I was doing and it felt like I just had to do it.”

*“I was really fearful of certain skills I was doing and it felt like I just had to do it.”*

— LAUREN LEVINE, junior and gymnast

### Paly perspectives

Former Paly student Moira King believes Biles and Osaka have played a crucial role in raising awareness on the topic of athlete’s wellbeing.

King is currently working with The Hidden Opponent, a non-profit organization dedicated to addressing the student-athlete mental health stigma.

“To be an athlete is as much mental as it is physical,” King said. “You can see it in the Olympics with Simone Biles. ... Her mental space wasn’t there yet and so therefore,

she couldn’t perform.”

King said she believes many athletes like Biles face mental health challenges because society places pressure on them to excel.

“There’s a level of strength that athletes are supposed to have,” King said. “I think that’s kind of being questioned right now. Because what really is strength? Is it pushing yourself to the point where you can barely function anymore? Or is it having a nice balance?”

For many student-athletes, managing high-level competition and high school life in Palo Alto’s competitive academic environment can be a taxing experience — both mentally and physically.

“It [playing sports] can definitely add stress because you have less time to do



school work and you also have to worry about staying healthy,” junior and varsity Paly football player Rocky Leitch said.

The competitive and stressful nature of an athlete’s sport can also detract from their enjoyment of the sport.

Levine competed in Junior Olympics from third to sixth grade, until she switched into Xcel, a less competitive program.

“I really stopped enjoying practice,” Levine said. “I knew that I still loved gymnastics and that I wanted to keep doing it, so I switched.”

Making the switch to the less competitive Xcel was not an easy one due to how she believed her teammates and coaches would react.

“I definitely think taking a step back is so hard for so many people because it’s

not perceived well,” Levine said. “It’s just kind of seen as quitting or you don’t have the mental strength or you’re not strong enough.”

### Expert insight

Coaches and teachers who promote a healthy school-to-sports balance and provide support to their students are a vital factor in limiting students’ mental struggles, according to Adam Saucedo, a mindset coach for both young athletes and professionals.

“It really starts with some coach education, helping them be able to understand how to support their student-athletes,” Saucedo said. “If the coach really makes a point that this is a comfortable, safe space to talk about these things, I think people are getting more willing to share.”

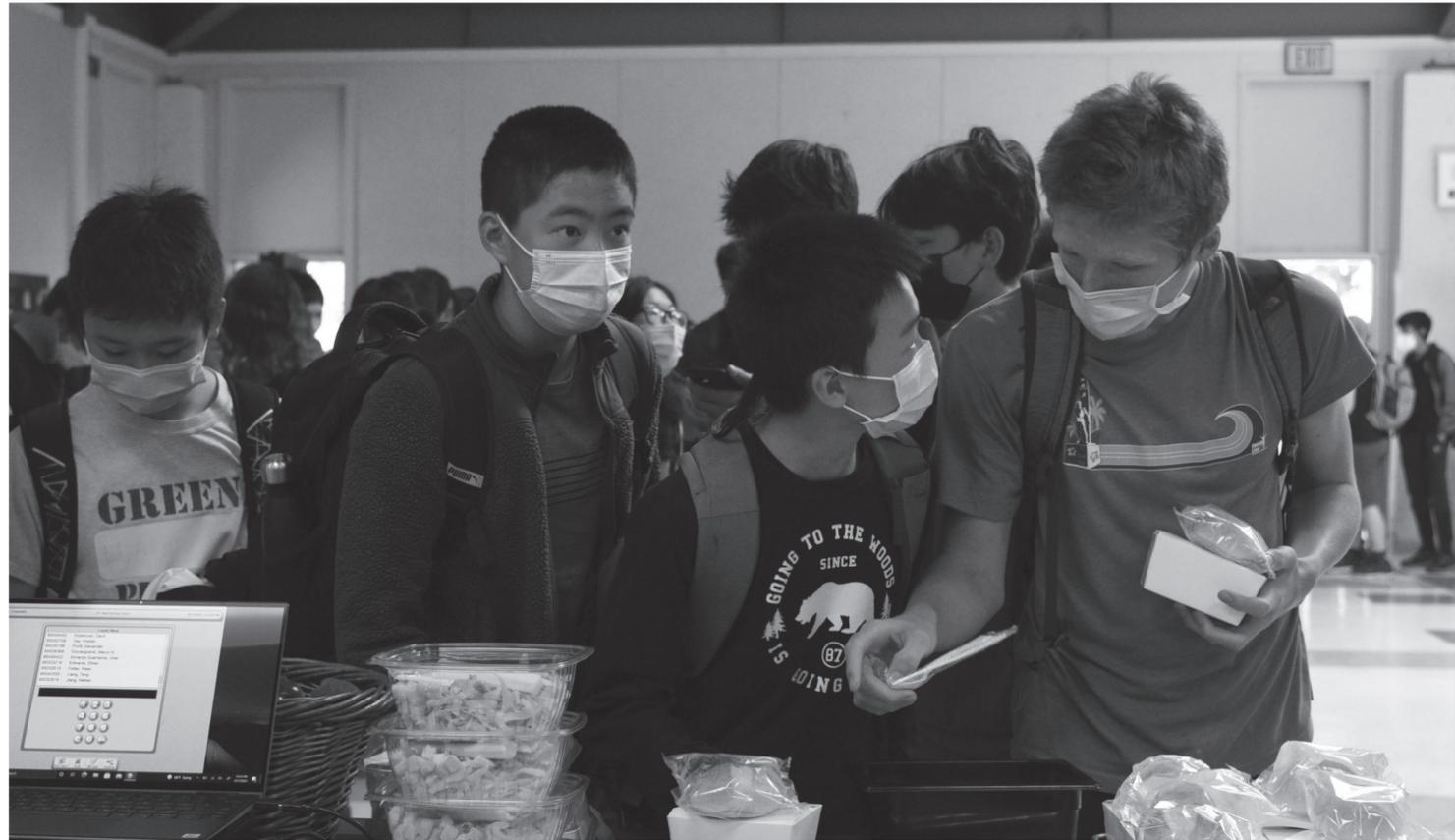
In addition to Saucedo’s thoughts on how to discuss mental health, Stanford Sports Psychiatrist Francesco Dandekar said ensuring that athletes are healthy mentally is crucial for their performance.

“I think if you can frame it [seeking help] in a way that’s not pathologizing, but frame it in a way that’s like, ‘We just want to help you either feel better in your day-to-day life, or run faster, jump higher, perform more consistently or just be happier as a person,’ a lot of times, athletes will have skills that allow them to work on things that will help them get better,” Dandekar said.

According to Saucedo, combating these negative feelings and their accompanying stigmas can start with initiating conversations between coaches and teammates.

**COPING WITH COMPETITION** — Junior Rocky Leitch sprints across Viking Stadium during practice. The art around him represents the stress that athletes experience and the negative impact it has on their performance and health. “The school is doing things to help with mental health, but I feel like it’s not the main priority,” Leitch said. Photo illustration: Emily Yao and MJ Wells

“We have to learn how to be a little bit more supportive, a little bit more kind-hearted with ourselves, making sure that we’re celebrating our wins just as much as we’re evaluating and nitpicking our losses,” Saucedo said. “We want to be able to learn how to take in and really flow with those highs and lows that are inevitable in any sport experience.” v



**LOOKING FOR LUNCH (FAR LEFT)** — Four students receive free lunches at the student center earlier this month. After the Free School Meals For All Act was passed in 2021, Paly's lunch program became wildly popular among students as they returned to school for the new school year. "I like the free lunch policy, but [I would like to see] ... more lines so you can get your food sooner and the food won't run out," freshman Joshua Kao said. Photo: Emily Yao

**PUNCHING IN THE PIN (LEFT)** — A Paly student enters his student identification number while food service staff member Rosa Lopez prepares his lunch. Due to lack of student ID cards at the beginning of the year, the food service staff opted to ask students to enter in their numbers manually for increased efficiency. "A challenge [of budgeting how much food to order] would be having to guess how many kids are going to eat because we have no clue how many we are going to feed," Lopez said. Photo: Emily Yao

Find the free lunch program's menu here: <https://www.pausd.org/school-life/food-services/menu>

# FREE LUNCH FRENZY

## CALIFORNIA'S NEW LUNCH PROGRAM TAKES OFF

Text by **ALEXIS CHIU** and **KIERAN ZAJAC**

**A**S THE LUNCH BELL RINGS classroom doors open and the sound of scuffling students is heard throughout campus. Hungry teens anxiously rush to claim their spot in the quickly forming line outside the Student Center in order to get their coveted free school lunch.

This chaotic scene is the result of the new Free School Meals For All Act of 2021, signed into law by Gov. Gavin Newsom on July 9. This bill enables all 6 million public school students in California to receive two free meals every day. It will ensure that students with food insecurity have access to daily nutritious meals and reduce the stigma surrounding the need for free lunch by improving lunch accessibility.

In addition, the state plans to allocate \$650 million annually starting in the 2022-2023 school year to public schools to continue offering free meals to students.

"PAUSD [Palo Alto Unified School

District] currently receives \$4.31 per lunch and \$2.46 per breakfast for every student from the Federal government," Alva Spence, PAUSD's student nutrition director wrote in an email to Verde. "Food is typically budgeted in the 35 percent range, putting us at approximately \$1.60 for a lunch and 95 cents for a breakfast."

### Food for thought

The new free lunch policy is a substantial shift from previous paid lunch programs in PAUSD schools.

"I went to Greene and I felt like the lunch was always overpriced because it was \$5 for a cheese pizza," freshman Joshua Kao said. "Now we get everything for free, and it saves [me] a lot of money."

While the policy is specifically aimed at helping low-income students who previously may not have been able to afford lunches every day, students of all income levels have been taking advantage of the

*"I appreciate [the lunch] and I think it's a great option for lower-income students and just to everyone."*

— ALEC PROFIT, junior

new provision.

"I appreciate [the lunch] and I think it's a great option for lower-income students and just to everyone," junior Alec Profit said.

### Free for all

Of all of the factors that could compel students to get lunch, one remains paramount: the food is free, motivating them to wait in the lines that often circle the quad.

"Waiting in the line is worth it for the quality and the quantity of the free food," junior Sandhya Krishnan said.

Krishnan said the meals' low prices motivated her to periodically begin eating school lunch this year. According to an anonymous Verde opt-in survey conducted from Sept. 13-16 through a digital form, 70.8% of respondents who have eaten school lunch this year indicated that the lunches being free contributed to their decision to get it.

However, this increased demand has not come without drawbacks. Certain popular lunch options run out within minutes of the start of lunch, according to the Palo Alto High School food service staff. With the quantity of demand constantly fluctu-

ating, it is hard for staff members to predict how many students will opt for free lunch on a given day. Food service staff member Rosa Lopez said she has been trying to adapt to the higher demand for certain food items.

Paly's two food service staff members said they struggle to juggle the time constraints of a 40-minute lunch while serving hundreds of students each day.

"We anticipated the Paly meal participation to double, which it has," Spence wrote. "We are feeding close to 300 per day."

### A plan for the future

As the demand from students for free lunch stabilizes, Spence said the district is working to bring back the number of available choices and increase the speed of service.

However, due to the coronavirus, Lopez said there are many restrictions that prevent them from serving students as

quickly as they did before the pandemic, as well as serving all of the food options previously available.

"Before [the pandemic], we had a bar

*"For the future, something I would hope to see is an option for people who cannot make it in time before the food runs out."*

— SANDHYA KRISHNAN, junior

out there and we used to have more items," Lopez said. "And because of COVID we can't have none of that stuff. Health, safety regulations, we can't do much about them. If we were non-COVID then of course we could try other things that

kids might like in our menus, but because of that [COVID-19] we are limited."

As the food service staff and the district get comfortable and situated with the new lunch program, students are looking forward to improved offerings in the future.

"For the future, something I would hope to see is an option for people who cannot make it in time before the food runs out," Krishnan said. "Whether it be free or not, just something that can satisfy people's hunger like a snack." v

# AFTER THE RECALL

## LOCALS BACK NEWSOM AFTER ELECTION

**WE ARE ENJOYING** an overwhelmingly ‘no’ vote tonight here in the State of California, but ‘no’ is not the only thing that was expressed tonight,” Gov. Gavin Newsom said in his victory speech of the 2021 Gubernatorial recall election. “I want to focus on what we said ‘yes’ to as a state. We said ‘yes’ to science, we said ‘yes’ to vaccines, we said ‘yes’ to ending this pandemic.”

With 62.5% of voters supporting Newsom in the recall, his resounding win, a referendum of sorts instituted through a petition to remove the governor, was a comfort to many Democrats across the state who feared the election of a Republican governor such as Larry Elder.

One of many reassured Democrats is Daniel Garepis-Holland, a junior at Palo Alto High School. For Garepis-Holland, Newsom’s victory establishes that California will continue to have a progressive leader tackling Democratic issues.

“I’m very relieved that it [the recall] didn’t happen,” Garepis-Holland said. “We’re still going to have COVID policies, we’re still going to have funding for health care, we’re still going to have vaccines, we’re still going to fight climate change, we’re still going to have a minimum wage.”

Garepis-Holland’s view is widely reflective of Paly students. According to an anonymous Verde survey of 248 Paly students from Sept. 13 to Sept. 16, 83.1% of students supported Newsom in the recall election.

The recall led Garepis-Holland

to recognize the diverse political viewpoints in the state, especially in the Central Valley. In Fresno County, Newsom lost the recall by less than 2,000 votes out of a population of nearly 1 million people, highlighting how polarizing the recall was in some regions.

“California is known for being a Democratic state, so even the chance [that Newsom could be recalled] was surprising,” Garepis-Holland said. “I think it makes us realize that California’s not a one-sided state. There’s plenty of people who aren’t really on board with the Democratic policy, especially in the Valley and rural California.”

Palo Alto City councilmember Greer Stone said he believes the election results will strengthen Newsom’s base of support because of the larger turnout of

voters against the recall than previously anticipated.

“I would imagine now that Newsom has won the recall ... we are going to see a strong push for recall reform,” Stone said. “One thing that [the recall]

yesterday showed was that Californians were pretty upset about this. I think California Democrats really saw this [recall] as an attempt to assert democracy within the state. That’s one of the reasons why we saw such an impressive turnout.”

Paly senior Mathew Signorello-Katz said he was confused by Newsom’s large electoral victory, given the polling data

going into the election.

“In some ways I was a little bit surprised in terms of how big of a margin his win was because I know that there were some polls that were making it seem as

though it was going to be a pretty tight race in terms of who would win between Newsom and Elder,” Signorello-Katz said. Facing opposition over mask mandates and scandals such as a visit to

the French Laundry restaurant during a period of mandated lockdown, Newsom attempted to distance himself from this criticism by reminding voters of the state’s low COVID-19 cases—relative to its population—and painting his opponents as dangerous and out of touch with the state’s overwhelmingly diverse and Democratic electorate.

San Francisco Chronicle journalist Alexei Koseff, the writer who first reported Newsom’s visit to the French Laundry Restaurant in Napa Valley on Nov. 13, said that Newsom remained popular due to the state’s Democratic lean and tendency to support stricter pandemic measures.

“Democrats ... really stood by Newsom,” Koseff said. “I went to talk to voters in Modesto, I went to talk to voters in the Bay Area, in Sacramento, and I met one Democrat the entire time who said they planned to recall Newsom. Every other [person] planned to vote no, and ... said the reason was because they thought he did a decent job responding to the pandemic. It’s a weird situation where anger over his response to the pandemic fueled this recall, and it also saved him, and it’s a reflection of the polarity that exists in California.” v

**I think California Democrats really saw this as an attempt to assert democracy within the state.”**

— GREER STONE, city councilmember

**I’m very relieved that it [the recall] didn’t happen. We’re still going to have COVID policies.”**

— DANIEL GAREPIS-HOLLAND, junior



## Q&A WITH FRENCH LAUNDRY REPORTER

*Note: Alexei Koseff is a San Francisco Chronicle journalist and Verde Class of 2008 alum. Koseff was the first to report on Newsom’s controversial dinner at the French Laundry restaurant.*

**Q: When you wrote the French Laundry story, did you have any idea of how impactful it would go on to be?**

A: It was not a situation where I instantly had any sense that it would be such a big deal. ... I had to explain to my editor why I thought it was a story. ... I tweeted out the link, and it went insane ... It had hundreds of retweets.

**Q: Do you feel any guilt seeing what was catalyzed by your story?**

A: As a reporter covering the government, accountability is the number one function we can play and I think that’s why this was plain and simple. I can certainly see why people are upset about what the story spiraled into, but I can’t take responsibility for that or feel guilty. ... The reason that this story has so much impact compared to other kinds of scandals is that it crystallized an anger that a lot of people already felt.

**Q: With a 63.6% victory, better than his 2018 result of 61.9%, why do you think that the French Laundry scandal ultimately did not result in a Newsom loss in the recall election?**

A: The French Laundry story happened the same day that a judge granted an extension for these proponents of the recall to get four more months to gather signatures, so it was a perfect storm, where they were able to draft off the anger. ... For my own reporting, what I found was that Democrats who are nearly the majority of the electorate really stood by Newsom because of his response to the pandemic.

Text by AJIN JEONG and JONAS PAO  
Art by ARUNDHATI PARIKH and SOFIA ANTEBI

# A BUMPY ROAD

THREE HUNDRED LAPS,  
75 MILES, 11.5 HOURS AND  
ONE WORLD RECORD

**CONTROLLING THE CAR** — Paly Junior Owen Kuwayti drove the RC car for 11.5 hours during the attempt to win the Guinness World Record. “At one point my vision was wavy from like staring at like the same spot for a while,” Kuwayti said. Photo: Ryan Lee

**E**LEVEN AND A HALF hours. That is how long junior Owen Kuwayti watched his small remote control car circle the Viking Stadium track — all in pursuit of a Guinness World Record.

In December of 2021, Kuwayti compiled a team of five Palo Alto High School juniors to design and build a remote controlled, or RC, car. Their goal: beat the Guinness World Record for the longest distance traveled by an RC car of 66 miles set by the famous battery company Duracell.

“I thought that sounded kind of crazy,” Kuwayti said. “And then the more I thought about it, the more feasible it seemed.”

First, Kuwayti and his team designed the RC car in computer-aided design.

“We were trying to get as much of our car done as we reasonably could before we had to build it,” Kuwayti said. “And that was mainly because we wanted to do fundraising to actually pay for the project. Having a CAD model that was concrete [would have the sponsors] look at it and say ‘there’s a reasonable chance of them actually building this and doing well.’”

However, the sponsorships and donations the team received on GoFundMe fell short of their expectations.

“We had expected to get at least \$2,000 or \$2,500 to make our actual car,” Kuwayti said. “And then having only \$500, it threw us for a loop figuring out what to do.”

Despite these hardships, the team put together a functioning RC car without breaking the bank.

“Even though we didn’t get to make our ideal car, we shifted to doing the minimum that will get this

to work,” Kuwayti said. “From there, we threw the whole design out the window, but we went off of a modified version of a car that I actually already had. It was probably one of the worst cars you could have picked for that role.”

To cut costs, the team resorted to using cheaper materials and makeshift tools, often leading to potential hazards for the car.

“It [the car batteries] blew a hole through the piece of metal we were trying to weld,” Kuwayti said. “So not only was it sketchy, but the welds were not usable because it was so bad.”

Less than a week before the group attempted to beat the world record, the car’s line tracer — a mechanism allowing the car to travel around the track autonomously — stopped functioning, forcing the team to rewire the car and manually drive it with a remote control.

— OWEN KUWAYTI, junior

*“If we had to do it again, there’s so many things we can improve. If we wanted to go further, there’s definitely a path for doing it.”*

“We didn’t know the reliability of rewiring the car to be driven manually, so we were like ‘Hope this works, we’ve put so much effort into it, and if it doesn’t work, that’s what happens,’” Kuwayti said. “In the end, I sat there [the Paly track] for 11 and a half hours driving it.”

After only a couple of laps around the track during the official run, one of the hubs, a mechanism intended to hold the car’s wheels, broke in half.

Luckily, the team was prepared for mishaps like this and quickly replaced the hub with four 3D-printed alternatives they brought to the attempt.

Unfortunately, these replacements also broke within 20 laps, and the team decided to switch out the car’s wheels entirely.

As the team finished the switch, the tool used to take off the wheels, became lodged in the last wheel. At a loss, the team decided to leave the broken tool inside the wheel — the car, with one broken wheel, would have to complete the record attempt in its lopsided state.

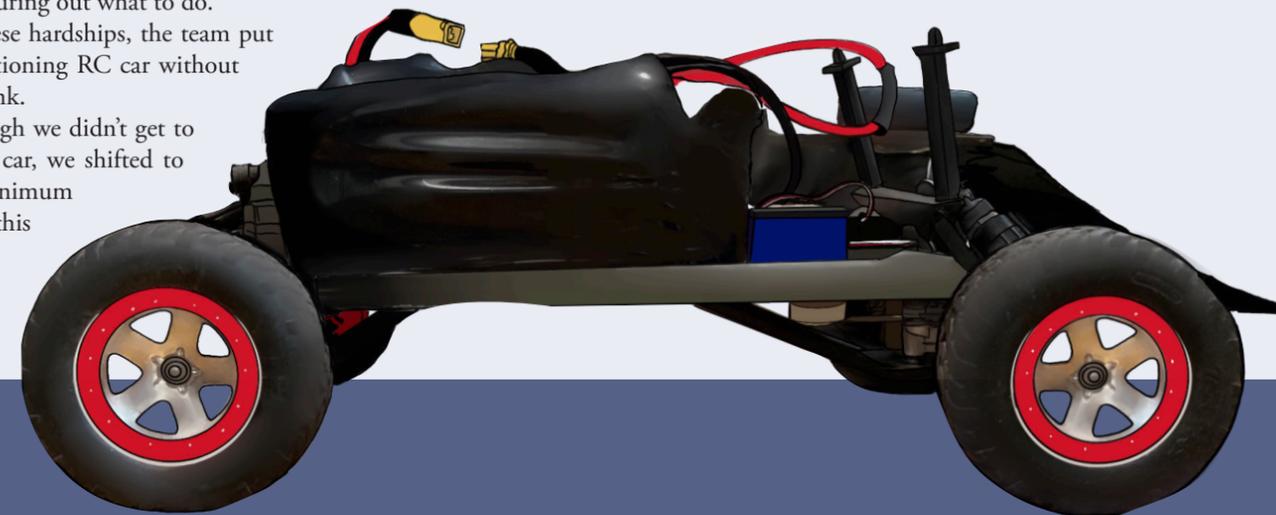
“It was extremely stressful,” Kuwayti said. “We had come all this way just to have this one thing, this one little metal tool break in the wheel. I was just thinking ‘I’m gonna make my best attempt at fixing this. I’m not gonna stress out too much. If there’s no way I fix this or if I break something while I’m doing this, at least I made a good attempt at it.’”

Remarkably, this fix proved to be successful, and the RC car traveled 300 laps — equivalent to 75 miles — around the Paly track, broken wheel and all, beating the previous world record by nine miles.

Having set the record distance, Kuwayti and his team submitted their attempt to the Guinness World Records and are waiting for the final certification of their accomplishment.

Kuwayti said while he is proud of his record, he believes he can expand on and improve on his work in the future.

“If we had to do it again, there’s so many things we can improve,” Kuwayti said. “If we wanted to go further, there’s definitely a path for doing it.” v



Text by GOPALA VARADARAJAN and CARLOTA BLANCO

Photo by EMILY YAO

# “TO BE HONEST,

## PAUSD HIGH SCHOOLERS REFLECT ON NEW REMOTE LEARNING PROGRAM

**JANE LOU, A HIGH SCHOOL** senior in Palo Alto, was afraid she would bring the coronavirus home. So when the Palo Alto Unified School District announced the implementation of a remote learning plan for the 2021-2022 school year, Lou quickly enrolled. Despite her dissatisfaction with the program, the 17-year-old is enjoying a new online community in which she feels she belongs.

Lou, originally a Henry M. Gunn High School student, is one of 137 PAUSD students enrolled in the remote learning program. According to PAUSD Student

Support Coordinator Ana Reyes, the number of online students is heavily skewed towards elementary schoolers, with only 16 PAUSD high school students — six freshmen, three juniors and seven seniors — opting to remain online.

When Gov. Gavin Newsom signed Assembly Bill 130 into law July 9, California school districts were ordered to provide a remote learning option for the upcoming school year. In partnering with Stride — a for-profit company that has sold an online learning program and curriculum to U.S. state and local governments for over 20



**LEAVING REMOTE LEARNING BEHIND** — After switching from the remote learning program to in-person this academic year, Emily Liu reflects on her experience. “I think just overall, the Palo Alto school district structure and the programs are much more beneficial for me,” Liu said. “Being in person ... is pretty different from being online and sitting in your room.”

# I HATE IT”

years — PAUSD remote-learning students can access all their classes through a dashboard, taught by teachers unaffiliated with the Palo Alto Unified School District.

At first, students complained about technological difficulties and missing courses, but according to Lou, the PAUSD remote learning team responded quickly to her emails and addressed her problems.

Reyes said there have been no further significant issues in spite of these initial complications.

“The reason for the rough start was just we had such a short amount of time to get everything in place ... from when AB130

was signed to the first day of school,” Reyes said. “And there were some bumps along the way because of the short timeline.”

Despite her kind classmates, Lou said she has lost contact with many of her in-person friends and finds the program provided by Stride challenging to use, worse than the online learning provided by Gunn which she completed last year.

“To be honest, I hate it,” Lou said. “The UI [user interface] is really old school.”

The curriculum is heavily based on studying online textbooks, Lou said, and the occasional virtual interaction is with students of different grades, most of whom are younger.

Additionally, due to the accumulated screen time of virtual school, Lou’s eyesight has severely worsened.

“My left eye is nearly blind,” Lou said. “I can’t see anything.”

And, like all students who chose remote learning, Lou is prohibited from joining school activities and extracurriculars, ranging from sports to clubs to dances.

“The reason that AB130 was created

was for people who felt like going to school and being at school with everyone else was too risky, [and] was a health risk for either them or their family,” Reyes said. “The question that we would have is why would you feel okay going to a dance with 1,000 people?”

Despite the lack of social opportunities, Lou has found a new community in

*“The first few days were a little rough because the program itself was not how I expected it to be.”*

— EMILY LIU, Gunn High School senior

online school and stays social by making acquaintances through online gaming.

However, once she graduates from high school this school year, Lou wants to return to in-person learning.

“If I am going to college, I won’t do it online,” Lou said. “I would be paying the same tuition as other kids, but they would be on campus and I would be at home. I feel like that’s just a waste of money.”

Emily Liu, another senior from Gunn, also initially chose to pursue remote learning due to COVID-19 safety concerns and to be able to prioritize preparing for college. However, she quickly changed her mind.

“Because COVID is still going on ... I wanted to keep them [my family] safe and keep them protected and try to avoid being in-person around all these people to minimize the risk of contact,” Liu said.

Despite the steps she took in preparation for online classes, Liu decided to switch to in-person school after a week, saying it provided significantly more benefits.

“The first few days were a little bit rough because the program itself was not

how I expected it to be,” Liu said. “It’s super independent, and you do have to be committed and manage your time well.”

Because all assessments and assignments for the upcoming months were already published within the first days of school, Liu struggled to organize and plan her school days.

“Some of the classes already put out content for the entire semester, which I think is a little bit confusing,” Liu said. “You don’t really know how to prioritize your time with so many things to do.”

With no friends or former classmates enrolled, looking at her class list provided little support or assurance; Liu said she felt isolated from the other high schoolers who switched to the Stride program, having no one to help her go through this new experience.

“You’re not necessarily put with PAUSD students,” Liu said. “So that itself kind of felt like I was going to a different school anyway, because you have different teachers and different classmates, and I didn’t get to have any live interactions.”

Liu’s switch back to in-person school has not been uncommon. According to a tweet from PAUSD Superintendent Don Austin, the number of remote learning school students has dropped from 223 to 137 since the start

of the school year.

“I think just overall, the Palo Alto school district structure and the programs are much more beneficial for me,” Liu said. “Being in person, and being around people and in a school atmosphere and in a classroom is pretty different from being online and sitting in your room and being on Zoom.” v

*“You don’t really know how to prioritize your time with so many things to do.”*

— EMILY LIU, Gunn High School senior

# MAGAZINE

Text by KIERAN ZAJAC and YASH SHETTY

## SATIRICAL MAGAZINE'S BRIEF TIME IN THE SPOTLIGHT

**A**FTER A YEAR of preparation, a summer of production and an untraditional distribution on the first day of school, M-Magazine, the product of Palo Alto High School's short-lived Satire Club, is no more.

The staff of M-Mag, formally known as Magazine Magazine, disbanded on Sept. 10 due to controversy surrounding the magazine's production, which overshadowed the light-hearted image the staff attempted to create.

"It didn't really feel worth it anymore to continue doing this [M-Mag] if we were potentially, one, hurting people's feelings and, two, offending the people who taught us how to do journalism," said a member of the magazine's new — and now defunct — leadership team who asked to remain anonymous.

Class of 2021 alumni Siddhartha Sahasrabudde, Ben Stein and Ryan Seto founded the Satire Club at Paly last year, hoping to eventually produce a satire magazine.

"We got the idea during quarantine at the end of our junior year," Sahasrabudde said. "Everything we wrote was in an attempt to find a common denominator of humor for our grade and bring people together and laugh at the same thing."

One of the necessary steps before production was to request funding from Paly's Associated Student Body. Though assailed throughout the magazine — the headline on M's first editor letter reads "ASB is a complete joke" — ASB initially supported M-Mag and provided what ASB's April 27 meeting minutes state was to be "no more than \$800" in addition to publicizing the magazine. However, on Sahasrabudde's LinkedIn page, he claims he "secured \$1600 in funding from [the] student government."

Last year, the founders also recruited Paly history teacher Mary Sano as their club sponsor, leaving her with the impression that they would merely be a club that discussed and read satire. But, without Sano's knowledge or approval, she said, the club leaders produced an issue of M-Mag, releasing it to the public in August on the first day of Paly's 2021-2022 school year.

"Better communication would be good," Sano said. "Just to be given a heads-up about my name being printed [as the magazine's adviser]. It was a surprise to me that someone brought me a copy."

Principal Brent Kline was also unaware of the magazine's production, and learned of it in a similar manner as did Sano.

"I knew absolutely nothing," Kline said. "The magazines arrived without any instructions, just like thrown on the sidewalk."

Paly Journalism adviser Brian Wilson said the M-Mag creators asked the Paly journalism advisers for support in the creation of a satire magazine last semester. However, the advisers uniformly refused to be involved in the effort.

"Satire is really hard to do well," Wilson said. "It was not the actual

*It was not the actual content that warranted dissociation. It's the concept of satire, and the legal implications that come with it."*

— BRIAN WILSON, journalism adviser

content that warranted dissociation. It's the concept of satire, and the legal implications that come with it."

Adviser Rodney Satterthwaite shared similar concerns with Wilson.

"There was a little thing in the back of my mind that oh, a satire club, that could lead to a bunch of things where I have to spend all sorts of time trying to put out fires if people get mad," Satterthwaite said. "Or, if they get sued."

Kline also acknowledged that satire is a difficult category to properly execute, often with many potential risks involved.

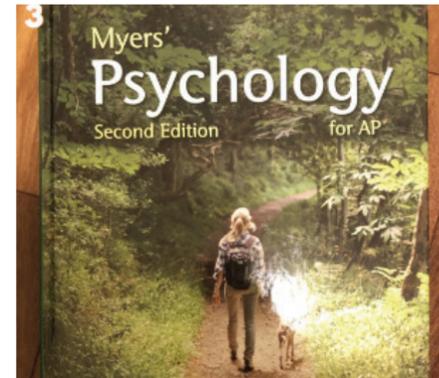
"You need to be exactly clear what this [writing] is about," Kline said. "It's a fine line, satire." v



**FLIPPING THROUGH** — A Paly student reads through one of the few remaining copies of M-Magazine after its discontinuation in early September. "People thought it was funny," founding editor Siddhartha Sahasrabudde said. "They enjoyed it." Photo: Emily Yao



**Record Attendance At Paly Badminton Match, Season Ended 4/23**  
M-Magazine



**AP Psych Student Finally Opens Textbook**  
M-Magazine



**MAC Boosters And Sports Boosters Combine Forces To Form Super Boosters**  
M-Magazine

**ONE-LINERS** — Inside M-Magazine are witty one-liners that poke fun at relatable Paly subjects. "We drew inspiration from satire like The Onion," founding editor Siddhartha Sahasrabudde said. "The Daily Pillage is also listed as inspiration." Photos: M-Mag

*Editors' note: Former Verde Magazine Perspectives Editor and Business Manager Ryan Seto was an M-Magazine editor-in-chief prior to the reporting and publication of this story.*

# Sound of Sunbear

## QUARANTINE BAND UNCOVERS THEIR GROOVE

**P**ALO ALTO HIGH SCHOOL senior Sedona Silva presses play on her thrifted cassette player, and with a soft click, the gloomy garage lights up with the resonant, crackling opening notes to the Talking Heads' "This Must Be the Place." As the music fills the empty space, the five members of Sunbear, a Paly band, set up their instruments, plugging guitars into amplifiers and raising microphone stands. The sound of excited laughter soars over the low drone of their machinery. The energy in the room is unmistakable, and as the members begin to tune their instruments over the hum of the cassette player, the group's chemistry is evident.

Sunbear, an up-and-coming Paly band, is made up of five female seniors:

Vienna Liu, Charlotte Nororian, Hannah Yau, Tara He and Sedona Silva.

### A starting point

After years of playing together informally and joking about starting a band, Sunbear was born in Jan. 2021 when the band members began practicing consistently.

According to Liu, quarantine was the paramount factor in the formation of the band. The combination of extracurricular cancellations and the transition to online school opened up

more free time for the band to practice.

"It [the pandemic] has brought us together," Silva, the band's bass player, said. "We ... [were] allowed to make a little bubble with our band and still practice together."

While isolated at home, each of the band's members developed their individual musical skills. However, they found that playing as a group allowed them to improve these skills at a much faster speed.

"It [the band] helps me progress in my own instrument because I can set

*"It [the band] helps me progress in my own instrument because I can set goals with the other members."*

— CHARLOTTE NORORIAN, senior



**SUNBEAR ON THE STAGE** — One of Sunbear's specialties is their ability to switch between instruments and be flexible with what parts they play during a particular song. According to bassist Sedona Silva, being able to switch parts like this requires time, dedication, and most importantly, practice. "There's more teamwork involved than actual sports," Silva said.



**READY FOR REHEARSAL** — Paly senior Tara He tests out her mic. According to He, Sunbear's chemistry makes their band effective. "We all like each other," He joked.

goals with the other members," Nororian, the band's drummer, said. "That helps me, and it's cool to be able to play with other people."

### Idols and influences

Over the past few months, the band has mainly played a set-list of covers. The band cites many different artists as their musical influences, spanning multiple decades and genres. However, the majority of the music the band plays falls into a blend of alternative rock and indie styles, including an emphasis on sounds from the 1990s.

According to Liu, the first song the band ever played together, "Santeria" by Sublime, has become a "Sunbear Staple" at each of their gigs.

Although covers often showcase the artistic expression of others, the members of Sunbear put their own spin on the songs they perform.

"It's been really cool to work out how and when we're going to end one of our covers," Nororian said. "We'll make different musical endings, and we even added an intro so that it would flow from the last song we played into the next one."

Nororian believes that these musical embellishments enable Sunbear to personalize their songs while still respecting the framework of the originals.

*"Being an all-female band isn't really what defines us."*

— SEDONA SILVA, senior

"Reworking is cool because making those adjustments allows us to be creative within the boundaries of what someone else has made," Nororian said. "It adds our group's own sound to what would otherwise be a copy-and-pasted cover."

While Sunbear has only played covers in the past, the five members are working on writing original music in hopes of performing it soon.

"When we write our own original

music, we're influenced by alt-rock bands like the Strokes," Silva said. "We're also inspired by bands from the 90s and 80s, like the Pixies and the Breeders."

### Just a band

Through being an all-female band, the members of Sunbear say they feel as though they have obtained a unique perspective and additional opportunities in their musical aspirations.

"It has set us apart from other bands, because it's a male-dominated industry," Silva said.

However, Silva says the members of Sunbear do not feel their gender is a central part of the band's identity.

"Being an all-female band isn't really what defines us," Silva said. "I don't want it to be like, oh, like they're a girl band."

The band emphasizes the importance of normalizing being all-female in the music industry instead of over-highlighting it. In the end, Sunbear wants to be known for its creativity and unique sound, regardless of its members' gender.

"We're not a girl band," Liu said. "We're just a band." v



**TUNING UP** — Paly senior Sedona Silva tunes her bass before one of Sunbear's rehearsals. While Sunbear meets every weekend to practice, the rehearsals aren't all business. "We're just having fun," Silva said. "We don't take it too seriously."

Text by ALLEGRA WEST AND AANYA KUMAR

# FRESH FACES ON CAMPUS

## INTRODUCING PALY'S NEW STAFF MEMBERS

**E**VER SINCE SHE WAS YOUNG, Young Ju Lee was fascinated with human interaction. After interning at a middle school during college, Lee discovered that teaching allowed her to continue to explore this interest while also being a fulfilling, impactful career path. Lee, a Palo Alto High School 2016 alumna, is bringing her passion and excitement back to Paly as a new math teacher this year. Lee is one of four new friendly faces to look for on campus this year, along with Roxanne Lanzot, Erik Olah and Kenna Gallagher. v



### Kenna Gallagher

Photography teacher Kenna Gallagher said that she has long been captivated by photography and the joy it provides her with.

"You go back and look at your camera roll and it brings back all the memories ... it's nostalgic," Gallagher said.

Gallagher said she is excited to share her craft with engaging students who seek to learn the fundamentals of the art form and are passionate about learning.

"I just feel like there's a higher value given to education here and the students understand that education is the stepping stone to getting to where you want to go later in life," Gallagher said. "It's nice to see people who value that."

Photography aside, Gallagher hopes in addition to developing meaningful connections with her students, she can emphasize the benefits of approaching life in an untraditional way.

"I know that there's a lot of pressure from family, from parents, from just the community at large on the students here and it's okay not to be perfect," Gallagher said. "I certainly didn't get to where I am by going on the road most traveled ... you don't have to know where you're going when you leave high school and that's okay."

### Erik Olah

New Paly Assistant Principal Erik Olah transitioned from being a science teacher to his new job this year after teaching in the classroom for 13 years. Although teaching has always been a passion of his, Olah said he has wanted to take on a leadership position as an administrator for much of his career.

"Through the years of teaching I kind of took on some leadership roles throughout my time [teaching] and I really enjoyed leading other teachers and leading the education process," Olah said.

Olah said he hopes to help Paly students find their passion and engage with the school community before graduating.

"The connection with the students was always super important to me and now as an administrator," Olah said. "I want every student to be able to pursue whatever interests — Paly's got tons of programs, tons of awesome things that kids can access — and really feel like Paly is the place they can come to [for their interests]."

### Young Ju Lee

Math teacher YJ Lee said she is excited to begin her teaching career at Paly due to her insight into the student experience.

"I thought it would be good to be somewhere where I understand what the culture is like and just how it is to be a student here," Lee said. "It just felt more meaningful to come back to where I started in order to make a change."

Lee said she cultivated her passion for teaching in college while interning at a local middle school.



"I felt very happy with what I was doing [the internship], and I loved just interactions and being able to teach," Lee said.

Lee said she understands the competitive academic culture at Paly from her time as a student, and ensuring her classroom is a safe space for her students is one of her biggest priorities.

"There were times when I just needed someone like a friend or a teacher to tell me that I could do it," Lee said. "I just want to be one of the teachers I needed back then."

### Roxanne Lanzot

Roxanne Lanzot, Paly's newest computer science teacher, wants to empower her students outside the classroom.

After discovering that math is a common subject where women and people of color do not reach a higher level of education, Lanzot felt she should do her part in combatting the issue.

"The reason that I went into teaching is motivated by ... wanting to create opportunities for more students to live out their dreams," Lanzot said. "The reason I [originally] became a math teacher is because ... research showed that math is a gatekeeper subject for specifically people of color and [keeps] women from achieving their dreams."

Lanzot transitioned from teaching math at Abraham Lincoln High School in San Jose, to teaching computer science at Paly, in the hopes of increasing diversity within STEM courses.

"I realized computer science education could be a way to circumvent this idea of math as a gatekeeper subject," Lanzot said. "If I could be an excellent computer science teacher, then I would provide a pathway for more students, specifically females and students of color, to not be held back from their hopes and dreams."



**PHOTO FRENZY (ABOVE LEFT)** — Photo teacher Kenna Gallagher sits in her classroom after her beginning photo class. "I'm super open-minded, I'm willing to take suggestions from students," Gallagher said. Photo: Anushe Irani

**NEW POSITIONS (BELOW LEFT)** — Assistant Principal Erik Olah happily strolls around campus. Olah said he is excited about returning to in-person instruction. "I'm pretty optimistic that we're, that things are going to be fairly much how they were before," Olah said. Photo: Allegra West

**TRIGONOMETRY TEACHING (ABOVE TOP)** — Math teacher Young Ju Lee sits at her desk, grading tests at lunch. "I have loved working with people ever since I was younger ... to learn more about, you know, how do people develop and what makes them tick," Lee said. Photo: Allegra West

**GIRLS WHO CODE (ABOVE BOTTOM)** — Computer science teacher Roxanne Lanzot steps outside her classroom for a breath of fresh air. "I had a realization that computer science and teaching computer science would be a better way to achieve my goals," Lanzot said. Photo: Anushe Irani



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Text by ALEXIS CHIU and ANDREW XUE

Art by DAVID TOMZ

# Moving to Middle College

## PURSUING AN ALTERNATE ACADEMIC PATHWAY

**O**F THE 2,177 STUDENTS currently enrolled at Palo Alto High School, there are several who may never step foot in another class at Paly past their sophomore year. Yet, they still graduate with their class. These students are taking part in an alternate education program known as Middle College.

Because the Middle College program follows the quarter system, with 11 to 12 week periods, students select courses quarterly instead of semesterly.

This quarter, junior Amanda Yun will take an environmental science class, an accompanying lab section and other specialized science classes, many of which are not offered at Paly.

### Middle College mechanics

As Paly students approach junior year, they have the option to apply to Middle College, a program that gives the opportunity to take a majority of college classes while still technically in high school. Students in this program are only required to take two high school level classes; English and history, in small cohorts of 20 people

“I wanted to have more flexibility with my schedule and have the opportunity to take different classes,” Yun said. “Paly has a huge selection of courses for a high school but I wanted to take more specialized classes.”

Similar to college, student’s schedules are dependent on what time the lecture and the lab of the class is — there is no uniform schedule for all students.

“A lot of courses now at Foothill are in person which is a great opportunity to get used to the campus, meet new people and experience how the classes are structured,” senior Ayaka Sonehara said.

During the 2021 fall quarter at Foothill, students can attend select in-person classes as long as they have proof of COVID-19 vaccination.

es now at Foothill are in person which is a great opportunity to get used to the campus, meet new people and experience how the classes are structured,” senior Ayaka Sonehara said.

Why Middle College?  
 For some students, the pandemic made them realize that taking online classes was more efficient and enjoyable. “My sister suggested that if school

is going to stay online, why not just do college courses instead of high school courses,” junior Abdullah Navaid said.

However, senior Fiorella Marich said the appeal of the program stemmed from how she felt it would prepare her for a four-year college in the future.

“I’m first-generation, so I thought it would give me the chance to be more prepared and it would help me so it would be much easier for me when I get into college,” Marich said. “Since my parents didn’t have the chance to [go to college], they can’t help me out, but this will help me transition more smoothly.”

Inversely, senior James Thomas said he was attracted to the program because of its simplified structure.

“Instead of having 13 to 14 different homework assignments over a certain amount of time, you’d have a couple projects and I find this to be a lot more manageable,” Thomas said.

The Middle College program also provides students the opportunity to transfer to some of California’s public universities.

“You get to complete school early and take college level classes instead of APs,” Navaid said.

“You get one year of actual college credits and if you stay one more year, you get enough credits to go to a UC.”

With these benefits in mind, Yun recognizes Middle College may not be

the right move for everyone, but can be a perfect fit for some.

“[Middle College is great for] anyone who’s looking for a change; people who aren’t satisfied with their classes or teaching methods,” Yun said. “Or even anyone looking for something new. This is a great program.”

*“It’s a great opportunity to get used to the campus, meet new people, and experience how the classes are structured.”*

— AYAKA SONEHARA, senior

— AMANDA YUN, junior

Text by **SOFIA ANTEBI** and **BELLA DALY**

# PALY'S MET GALA

## STUDENT ARTISTS TAKE ON AMERICAN FASHION



**L**IHTS FLASH AND shutters click wildly as celebrities walk the stairs of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, showing off extravagant haute couture pieces. The Met Gala is highly regarded as the biggest event in fashion, garnering the attention and attendance of the world's biggest celebrities. Rather than being held on the famed "first Monday of May," the event was held on Sept. 13 due to the pandemic.

This year's theme was "In America: A Lexicon of Fashion," with poet and activist Amanda Gorman, actor Timothee Chalamet, tennis star Naomi Osaka and singer Billie Eilish as co-chairs.

While many people were initially confused about what the American fashion theme entails, celebrities interpreted the theme in innovative ways, such as celebrating individuality, referencing old Hollywood and western aesthetics or making political statements.

Junior Milena Rodriguez said she thinks the theme was a way to promote the often overlooked impact of American designers on the fashion industry.

"I remember when they announced the theme people were really upset because they're like 'America doesn't have fashion,'" Rodriguez said. "I do think people forget that a lot of the creative directors for brands like Louis Vuitton or Gucci are American designers."

Many celebrities chose to embody the style of vintage cinema with their looks. Some, including senior Jasmine Kapadia, were quite disappointed with how this theme was executed.

*There's an element of America that's almost a bit folklore-y sort of shrouded in fantasy.*

— JASMINE KAPADIA, senior

"They sort of took black and white aspects and did their hair and the curls and just left it at that," Kapadia said. "It's the Met Gala, I would have expected them to take it another step further."

The addition of social media influencers such as Emma Chamberlain, Addison Rae and Dixie D'Amelio to the gala's guest list was also controversial.

"I think Anna Wintour [Vogue editor-in-chief who curates the gala's guest list] especially has always been wanting to push internet culture," Kapadia said.

Inspired by this year's Met Gala theme, we asked three Palo Alto High School artists to create a visual foray into their definition of America and American fashion and design their very own hypothetical Met Gala look for Verde.

"The Met Gala every year is always sort of a lesson in how to be extreme and the places that fashion can take us as self-expression," Kapadia said. v

### Jasmine Kapadia: The modern-era cowboy (pictured left)

Senior Jasmine Kapadia said she wanted to explore the theme of Americana and western aesthetics.

Kapadia went for a dramatic silhouette, with a large hat and cowboy-inspired platform boots. Kapadia said she drew inspiration from current trends and modern geometric techniques to make the look eye-catching and memorable.

"For a Met Gala look, you always want to have one thing that people can emulate or that would 'go viral,'" Kapadia said.

Kapadia said she was inspired by the idea of cowboys representing American freedom, and wanted to emulate warm saturated tones as though the viewer is riding off into the sunset.



"The cowboy represents an element of America that's almost a bit sort of folklore-y, sort of shrouded in fantasy," Kapadia said. "It's this idea of freedom and just really not being tied down to anything, so I really wanted to take that and conceptualize it."

### Savannah Voth: An homage to the American imagination (middle)

Senior Savannah Voth said she examined the intersection of traditional and modern fashion, incorporating elements of her own American identity into her designs.

"As I was looking through the exhibition associated with this year's theme, I found myself really inspired by the historical lens and looking at American fashion of the past and how it's evolved and influenced fashion today," Voth said.

Voth said she paid homage to the classic paintings of the American landscape in her creations.

"I also included floral motifs in all of my designs as a nod to the American landscape, which is a major aspect of the American imagination," Voth said. "I based them off of native plants in this area to create that sense of place."

Voth's main inspiration behind her work was dolls her mother made for her when she was Voth's age. Voth's mother immigrated to the United States from Japan at a young age and was often treated as an outsider.

"She made these dolls out of t-shirt fabric and fabric scraps, and essentially reinterpreted traditional American fashion, and made it uniquely her own," Voth said.

Additionally, Voth said she reflected her own Asian-American identity in her designs.

"I wanted to include elements of traditional Asian clothing and design into these outfits ... to explore how different cultural identities all exist and relate to one another and influence one another," Voth said.

### Caroline Zhang: Colorful melting pot (pictured right)

Junior Caroline Zhang said she worked to create a dress that exemplifies

the sociocultural characteristics of America.

Her design consists of a long, flowy dress with vibrant multicolored layers patched together.

"Since the very start of America's founding, it has always been very diverse and multicultural," Zhang said. "I wanted to show all the colors coming together to represent different people coming together and making America what it is today."

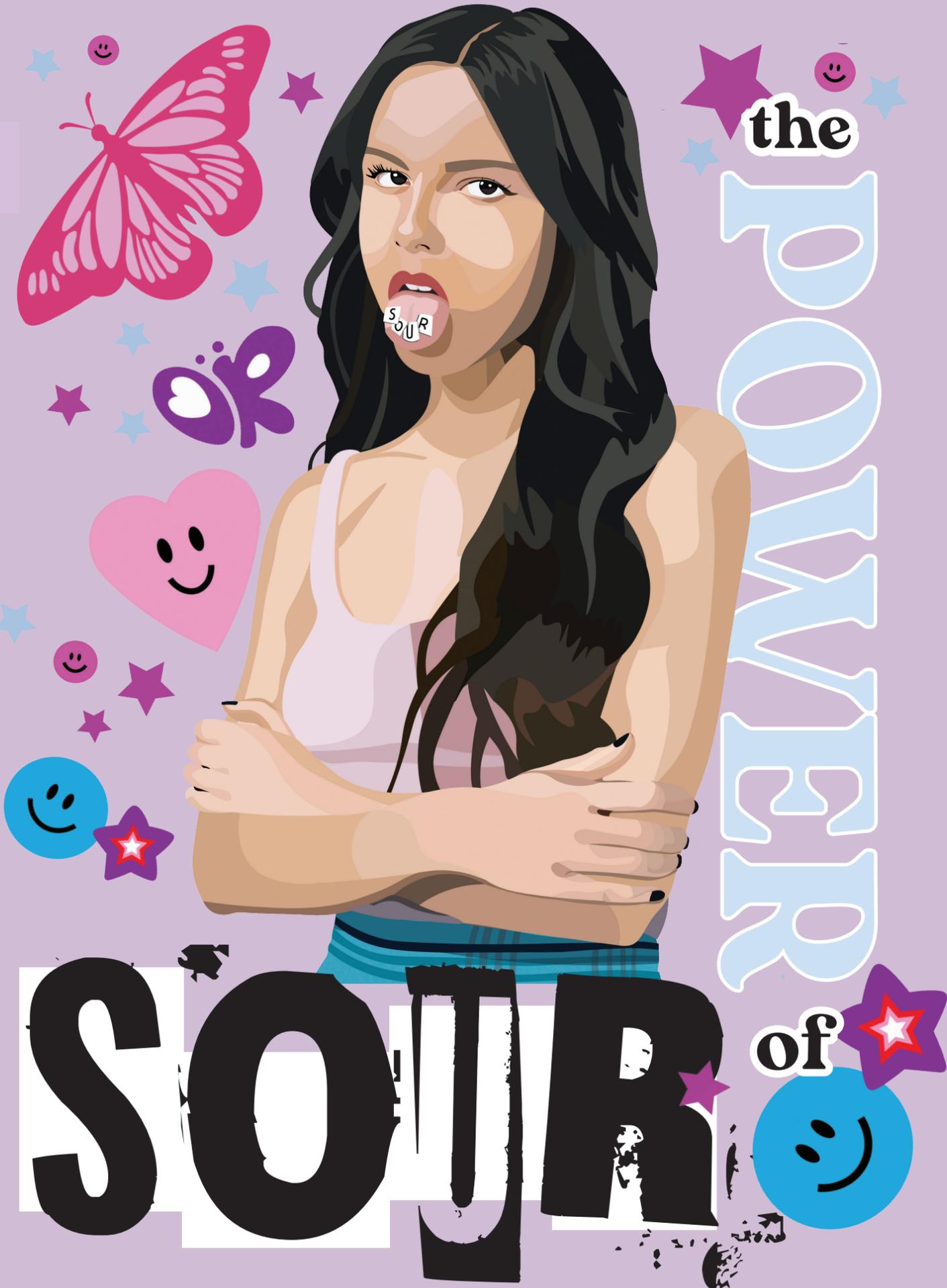
Although she said she values the diversity of the United States, Zhang recognizes the inequalities still present in society today. To illustrate the holes in American

culture, she included cutouts at the top of her dress.

"America still has a lot of difficulties and barriers of equality to overcome between these groups of people," Zhang said. "At the very top of the dress, where there are gaps and holes in it, it shows that there is still more work to be done."

*I found myself really inspired by the historical lens and looking at American fashion of the past and how it's evolved and influenced fashion today.*

— SAVANNAH VOTH, senior



Text by **ANDY ROBINSON** and **DOMINIQUE LASHLEY**

Art by **NAOMI TAN**

# OLIVIA RODRIGO'S RISE TO TEEN STARDOM

**I**T WAS JUST ANOTHER PRESS briefing at the White House. Crowds of reporters huddled around the podium, where Press Secretary Jen Psaki was introducing a special guest. Perhaps one might have expected a medical professional or national security advisor.

But on July 14, onto the podium stepped none other than 18-year-old singer-songwriter Olivia Rodrigo. Invited to promote COVID-19 vaccinations, Rodrigo sat down for a Q&A with Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, and even had a photo op with President Joe Biden.

"I am beyond honored to be here today to help spread the message," Rodrigo said as she spoke to the press.

This curious episode is perhaps the best encapsulation of Rodrigo's recent stardom. A young woman who was largely unknown to the general American public outside of a few shows on Disney Channel now had an album perched atop the Billboard Hot 100. In only a few short months, Rodrigo had established herself as a ubiquitous icon of Gen Z.

## Rodrigo reactions

Rodrigo first broke into mainstream Hollywood on Disney Channel's "Bizaardvark" before landing a role in the Disney+ show "High School Musical: The Musical: The Series." Rodrigo showcased her vocal talents through the show's soundtrack, catching the attention of the nation and many Palo Alto High School students.

"The first time I heard of her was not [through] her music, it was when she was on Disney Channel ... many years

ago," junior Grace He said. "So when I first came across her 'Driver's License' song on YouTube, I was like, 'Oh my God, it's her.'"

In January, the release of the hit single "Driver's License" propelled Rodrigo into the global limelight, racking up 21 million streams within the first three days after its release.

It soon became clear that pop ballads were not the only tunes in Rodrigo's arsenal; the 2021 release of her full-length album "SOUR" featured songs dabbling in alternative, acoustic and rock genres. Teen insecurities, anxieties and, of course, heartbreak, are shamelessly explored by Rodrigo, drawing many fans to the vulnerability and universality of her lyrics.

"I love jamming out to 'SOUR' in the car with my friends and have a lot of happy memories associated with those songs," senior Samantha Yamashita said. "I think it's super cool that knowing her music is a shared experience for a large portion of our generation."

Over the past few months, Rodrigo's influence has expanded beyond the music scene, with her retro-inspired aesthetic becoming an iconic presence in fashion and lifestyle, particularly on social media platforms.

"Her fashion to me is very Y2K, which I know that people really like right now and everyone's saying that [that style of] fashion is coming back," junior Sofia Wong said.

Wong said she believes a considerable amount of Rodrigo's increased influence has come from her songs' popularity on the social media platform TikTok. "People on TikTok, they all

used her songs for a while," He said. "They [TikToks] make small creators become really famous."

Rodrigo has undoubtedly created a unique presence in the current music scene, but many question whether her fame is oversaturating this space.

"I get so many Spotify ads for her, she's just portrayed as the up-and-coming, rising 'it' girl, someone who's just broken into the industry and is new in town," junior Anna Thieman said. "I think they're pushing her image."

## More than just a case of "Deja Vu"?

In many ways, Rodrigo's rise to prominence mimics her Disney-to-pop star predecessors of the early 2000s. Icons such as Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera, Demi Lovato and Miley Cyrus built their careers by supporting — and later subverting — the Disney machine with rebellious songs to wipe away their "good girl" images.

But in the age of the internet, Rodrigo stands out. Fresh off her Disney debut, Rodrigo has no qualms about exploring gritty, uncensored subject matter in her music. Rodrigo (and her producer, Dan Nigro) seem to understand that authenticity in the online era is more appealing to fans than a squeaky-clean image.

Rodrigo isn't an unreachable idol or a teen tragedy; she's just a girl in her bedroom writing songs about how she feels.

Ultimately, many believe that Rodrigo is undoubtedly a talented and influential artist, but it remains to be seen whether she can remain a chart-topper.

"It'll be interesting to see if Olivia Rodrigo can keep up the hype," Thieman said. "Or if she's sort of one of those one-hit wonder people who just release an album, it goes crazy and then dies down, and no one cares about her anymore." v

*It's super cool that knowing her music is a shared experience for a large portion of our generation.*

— SAMANTHA YAMASHITA, senior

*It'll be interesting to see if she can keep up the hype or if she's sort of one of those one-hit wonder people.*

— ANNA THIEMAN, junior

Text by JERRY FANG and ANNUM HASHMI

# Roost & Roast

## LOCAL CHEF RETURNS HOME WITH THAI EATERY

**T**HE WARM AROMA of Thai basil fills the room, accompanied by the lively chatter of staff and the loud crackling of oil. Minimalistic white walls and simple decor contrast with the fiery cooking in Roost and Roast, one of the newest restaurants in the ever-popular Town and Country shopping center.

After an extended stay in Thailand, owner Brandon Poon, a Henry M. Gunn High School alumnus, was inspired by the country's street food and unique flavors, opening Roost and Roast in June. Poon said his mission was to bring the essence of Thai street food to Palo Alto.

"The idea was to bring fried chicken but in the Thai style because ... you can easily find Korean fried chicken, southern fried chicken, chicken karaage, but no one does Thai style fried chicken," Poon said. "We marinate [our chicken] for 24 hours, dredge it, then put it in the fridge for 24 hours. It dries out and then it goes into a wet batter then we fry."

Along with its food, Roost and Roast's location and lack of seating allude to its street food inspiration.

*"I figured it'd be nice to come full circle and serve my community."*

— BRANDON POON, owner

ly's ties to the kitchen eventually motivated him to pursue cooking full time.

"You don't realize how much sacrifice your parents made opening restaurants just to provide for their family — all the long hours — and that's what really brought me back into it [the restaurant industry]," Poon said.

This renewed passion led Poon on a

"The small space, takeout only, resembles that food stall type of atmosphere versus a full restaurant," Poon said.

Poon's passion for quality cooking is in his blood. As a kid, Poon worked in his family's restaurants and learned to cook with a wok at the age of 13. While he said he was not initially passionate about the culinary arts, his love for food grew as he grew older.

Poon said reflecting on his fami-

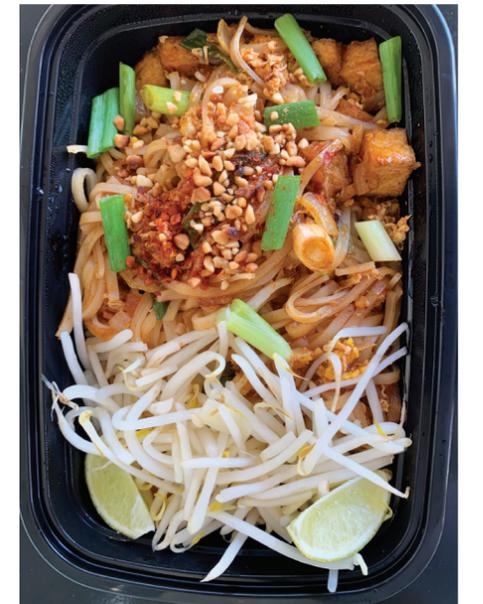
journey through various sectors of the food industry. After attending culinary school, Poon bounced around from working at Michelin-starred restaurants like Madera, to running pop-ups, to doing culinary operations with the 49ers and Giants and eventually owning and operating his own restaurants. After being forced to close one of his longtime restaurants due to the coronavirus pandemic, Poon shifted his focus to opening Roost and Roast.

"[In] the hospitality industry, nothing lasts forever," Poon said. "I figured this is just a starting over again."

This new chapter of Poon's restaurant story brings him back to his roots.

"I've always wanted to open a restaurant in Palo Alto because I grew up here and I figured it'd be nice to come full circle and serve my community," said Poon.

Inspired by his journey through the culinary world and dedication to bringing Thai flavors to Palo Alto, Verde sampled his dishes. v



**HATYAI FRIED CHICKEN (\$14, TOP)** — Served with rice, cucumber slices, a lime wedge, fried basil leaves and sweet and spicy sauce, this colorful dish provided a meaty bite. The fatty and tender meat of the bone-in chicken contrasts the incredibly crispy exterior, which produces a satisfying crunch. Photo: Jerry Fang

**ROTI & CURRY (\$8, BOTTOM LEFT)** — Soft and flaky, these flatbreads were served very hot along with a creamy orange coconut curry. Enjoyed on its own, the roti is delicious with its slightly sweet dough, but when dipped, becomes irresistible. Photo: Jerry Fang

**PAD THAI NOODLES (\$14, BOTTOM RIGHT)** — Adorned with crushed peanuts, scallions, bean sprouts and lime wedges, this dish combines the chewiness from rice noodles with the softness of tofu and bright flavors from a sweet chili sauce. On top, the peanuts and assorted vegetables tie the whole dish together by providing variety to the texture. Photo: Annum Hashmi

**THAI ICED TEA (\$4, DIRECT LEFT)** — A classic Thai beverage, known for its distinctive bright orange hue, this refreshing drink is luscious and creamy — full of flavor from black tea and Asian spices like star anise and cardamom. Photo: Sebastian Bonnard

Text by ANYA MONDRAGON

Art by SARABETH HUANG

# Praise the Lorde

## ALBUM "SOLAR POWER" EXPLORES NEW STYLE

**D**ANCING ON A BEACH IN a flowing yellow skirt, Lorde projects enthusiasm and joy. Behind gold-patterned sunglasses, she basks in the sunlight, singing, "I hate the winter, can't stand the cold." This adjective scene is a powerful moment from her music video for "Solar Power," the title track of her newest album released in August.

Lorde wrote "Royals," her most streamed song on Spotify, when she was 16 years old. On Aug. 20, over seven years after the debut of "Royals," she released "Solar Power," a pivot from the music she has released in the past. This newest album is bright, mellow and less radio-friendly, although her breathy whisper-like singing on the track "Solar Power" can still be found on some stations intended for trendy coffeehouses.

The change in her sound has not gone unnoticed by fans. Junior Jonathan Wang started listening to Lorde around the release of her 2017 album "Melodrama." He would not pick "Solar Power" as his favorite Lorde album and said he believes it is less poignant than the music Lorde released when she was a teenager.

"I feel like 'Melodrama' was the most relatable, even 'Pure Heroine' was more relatable because it was dealing with things like adolescence," Wang said. "[Solar Power] is different. But you know, it's still good."

Sophomore Anna Van Riesen said she

also picked up on the change.

"I think ['Solar Power'] might connect to a different audience [than teenagers], the same audience as before, but now they've grown up," Van Riesen said. "The people who are her age and her first fans when she appeared in 2014 are probably mid-twenties now. She is singing about her life, but she's older than us and has had different life experiences."

With "Solar Power," Lorde succeeds in exploring a range of topics from climate change to summer fun to losing a pet, all to the tune of bright and contemplative music. Her sound has changed since the first album she recorded at sixteen, but her new music stands strong on its own. On "Stoned at the Nail Salon," Lorde sings, "All the music you loved at sixteen, you'll grow out of."

### "Solar Power"

According to Spotify's Storyline feature, Lorde relies more on her backing instruments on this album than ever before. Nowhere is that more clear than on her song "Solar Power."

"We were really lucky to have an incred-

ible drummer work on this album," Lorde wrote. "He [Matt Chamberlain] really brought this album to life."

Many mainstream songs today have extraneous noise that can make it difficult for a casual listener to pick out separate elements, but "Solar Power" begins with Lorde quietly singing and sounds of an acoustic guitar. In the final chorus, Lorde sings the song title with backing vocals from well-known indie artists Phoebe Bridgers and Clairo. Listening to the song evokes imagery of stepping out into the sunlight and slowly warming up to enjoy a summer day.

*"There's still ... dark, or at least intense topics in this album, but it's just a different kind of vibe of music [than her old music]."*

— ANNA VAN RIESEN, sophomore

As the first single released before her album came out, "Solar Power" shocked many fans of Lorde's previous work.

Neither of her first two albums, "Pure Heroine" or "Melodrama," could be described in any given moment as joyful, while "Solar Power" spends considerable time in that realm. But the melancholy of many of Lorde's earlier songs has not been completely left behind.

### "Stoned at the Nail Salon"

Vaguely reminiscent of "Ribs," a

thoughtfully sad song from her first album, "Stoned at the Nail Salon" proves Lorde has not deviated from her brand to the extent that her new music isn't still immediately recognizable. The fear of time passing is a theme present in both songs, written eight years apart. But now Lorde has more perspective, and "Stoned at the Nail Salon" never reaches the emotional lows that "Ribs" did.

"I love this life that I have, the vine hanging over the door," she sings. On this album, Lorde's songs feel more self-assured. For her younger listeners who haven't achieved that peace, it can make her songs slightly less relatable.

"There's still a lot of rather dark, or at least intense topics in this album," Van Riesen said. "But it's just a different kind of vibe of music [than her old music,] it's a little more boring."

### "Fallen Fruit"

A standout from the album, "Fallen Fruit" layers vocals to make a sweet-sounding, vaguely mournful song about our generation's relationship with nature in the light of the climate crisis. As a song by itself, without considering the meaning behind the words, it's a relaxing tune, but the imagery of dancing on fallen fruit gives it a sour taste.

### "Big Star"

Written by Lorde about her dog before he died, "Big Star" is one of the sweetest songs on the album. For anyone familiar with the feeling of loss, the song captures the bittersweet emotions of reminiscing about

the good times while mourning the loss of a loving companion.

"I feel like it's probably the most personal song and I liked the guitar there," Wang said. "It really was a pretty song."

The background music softly reverberates behind her singing, emulating the mellow feeling of being underwater. We really don't deserve the pure hearts of our canine companions and Lorde reflects on this truth in "Big Star."

*"I think ['Solar Power'] might connect to a different audience [than teenagers]."*

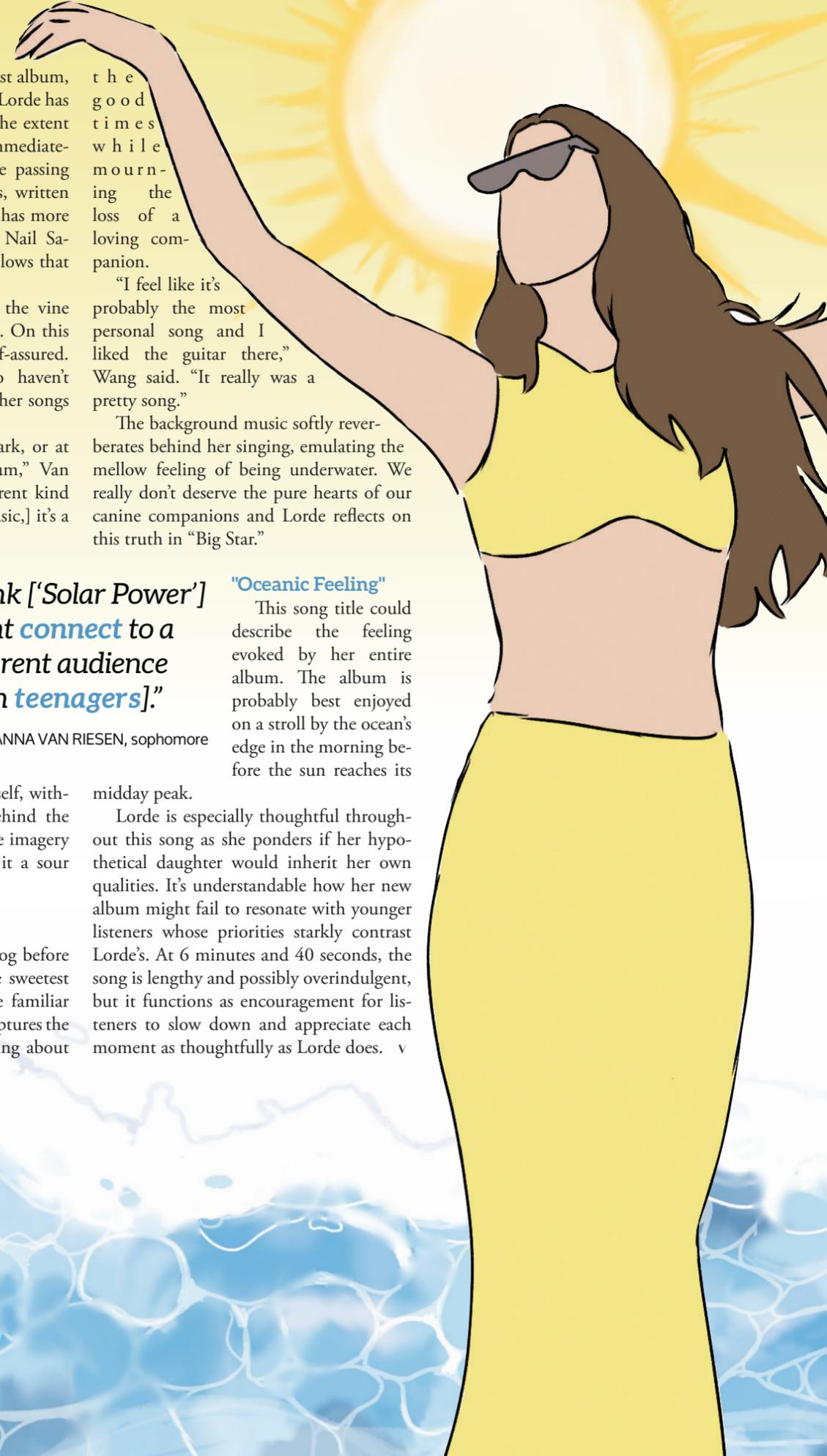
— ANNA VAN RIESEN, sophomore

### "Oceanic Feeling"

This song title could describe the feeling evoked by her entire album. The album is probably best enjoyed on a stroll by the ocean's edge in the morning before the sun reaches its

midday peak.

Lorde is especially thoughtful throughout this song as she ponders if her hypothetical daughter would inherit her own qualities. It's understandable how her new album might fail to resonate with younger listeners whose priorities starkly contrast Lorde's. At 6 minutes and 40 seconds, the song is lengthy and possibly overindulgent, but it functions as encouragement for listeners to slow down and appreciate each moment as thoughtfully as Lorde does. v





**EDWARD THE FRIENDLY TORTOISE** — Born in 2000 and a lover of organic roses, Edward can be seen taking walks around the zoo with his best friend, Zookeeper Lee. “Edward and I met on June 2nd, 2012, and we fell madly in love by the fourth of July,” Lee said.



**JOHN AIKIN** — The Junior Museum and Zoo Project Manager, Aikin stands proudly in front of the JMZ Treehouse, smiling at the camera. “We try to do what we can for every person,” Aikin said.



**TWO LOVEBIRDS** — Perched comfortably at the core of the zoo, these two parrots ruffle their feathers and squawk for all to hear. “Squack squack squack squack,” the parrots said.

Text by ESTHER XU and ASHIMTA RAJMOHAN

Photos by EMILY YAO

# THE JUNIOR MUSEUM AND ZOO REBRANDED

## PREVIEWING LOCAL CHILDREN’S MUSEUM’S HIGHLY ANTICIPATED REOPENING

**T**HE FIRST STEP IS THE most overwhelming.

As you push open the door leading out to the zoo, your ears are filled with the sounds of parrots’ cries and your sight is bombarded with vibrant flora and colorful birds flying through the sky.

You scarcely know where to look first. Should you venture towards the giant treehouse emerging from the center, or the fluffy meerkats to your right?

Yet, as chaotic as it all seems, everything sings in unison — *Welcome to the Junior Museum and Zoo.*

### Touching it up

The newly constructed Junior Museum and Zoo in Rinconada Park is a drastically different structure compared to the tiny elementary school where Josephine O’Hara first founded the JMZ in 1934.

As the first-ever children’s museum west of the Mississippi, the JMZ prides itself as a local leader in children’s science education with a variety of hands-on exhibits and science programs available to the community.

In 2017, a new proposal for the rebranding of the JMZ was recommended by the city’s architectural review board and a fund of \$25 million was raised by the Friends of the Junior Museum and Zoo.

A temporary relocation soon followed

and the rebuilding of the JMZ began in June 2018.

Like many other public institutions and businesses, the COVID-19 pandemic hit the JMZ hard.

As a result of the lack of funding and decreasing budget catalyzed by the pandemic, the Palo Alto City Council proposed an \$18 admission fee, much to the shock and anger of the local community.

The main concern of the staff was the exorbitant admission fee possibly reducing potential visitors who are reluctant to pay the price.

After much debate, the price was set at \$10, low enough to offset concerns regarding affordability issues, yet also high enough to allow the JMZ to accommodate their budget concerns.

“Ticket price is one barrier for people’s visit. But what we know from a lot of research is that it’s not the major barrier,” Aikin said. “It has to do with the value of the attraction to them and what they’re willing to pay for it. So we want people to pay something because we want them to value their experience

enough to be able to pay for it.”

There’s also a discounted admission of \$3 for people receiving social assistance.

The newly rebuilt zoo is filled to the brim with animals and exhibits. Currently, the JMZ houses over 50 species, most recently including flamingos, meerkats and spoonbills. In addition to all the animals, the JMZ is planning to install a California Dinosaur Garden featuring a tree from the cretaceous period, a fossil dig and life-sized reproductions of California dinosaurs.

“Our mission now is to engage a child’s curiosity in science and nature,” Aikin said. “We try to do what we can for every person. ... All of [the JMZ] works to engage

**“Our mission now is to engage a child’s curiosity in science and nature. We try to do what we can for every person.”**

— JOHN AIKIN, JMZ project manager

children in science and nature so that they learn to love animals. They develop empathy, and more importantly, they begin to understand that science is the process by which we use to understand animals, habitats, ecosystems, conservation and climate change.” v

*The JMZ is planning to reopen in Fall 2021*

Text by MERWA MAROF and OLIVIA MILNE

# SPIRIT WEEK GUIDE

WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT THAT MAGICAL WEEK IN OCTOBER

**B**LEACHERS SHAKE viciously beneath hundreds of jumping feet and the sound of cleverly crafted chants filling the air as class representatives race to finish wrapping their vice presidents in toilet paper. These students' joyous cheers and elaborate outfits can mean only one thing at Palo Alto High School — Spirit Week.

This year, Spirit Week will run from Oct. 11 to Oct. 15 with the homecoming dance held on Oct. 16. The week consists of daily dress-up themes for each grade,

competitive spirit rallies during lunch and the homecoming football game and dance over the weekend — the icing on top of an already exciting cake.

As a result of the coronavirus pandemic, Spirit Week was canceled last year. Unfortunately, this means current Paly underclassmen have never experienced the thrill of Spirit Week and current Paly juniors have only had the pleasure of partaking in this event once. If you are searching for inspiration to navigate this lively affair, look no further. v



## Spirited schedule

Art by Blair Migdal

### Freshmen

**Monday:** Construction  
**Tuesday:** Sportswear  
**Wednesday:** Orange  
**Thursday:** Babies  
**Friday:** Green and white



### Sophomores

**Monday:** Red carpet  
**Tuesday:** Ranch  
**Wednesday:** Red  
**Thursday:** Greasers and Teeny-Boppers  
**Friday:** Green and white



### Juniors

**Monday:** Yellow Submarine  
**Tuesday:** TBD  
**Wednesday:** Yellow  
**Thursday:** Occupation day  
**Friday:** Green and white



### Seniors

**Monday:** Y2K  
**Tuesday:** Caesar  
**Wednesday:** Green and white  
**Thursday:** Elderly  
**Friday:** Camouflage



**TUGGING AWAY (TOP)**— Paly sophomores yank their team to victory, defeating the freshmen in a hectic game of tug of war during the 2019 Spirit Week. "I love spirit rallies," Paly senior Natalie Chueh says. "It's so fun to go crazy in the stands cheering for your grade." Photo: Eva Mankos

**REACHING FOR VICTORY (RIGHT)**—Paly junior Julian Galindo races to grab the handle of a ping pong paddle and yell the name of a pop song to win points for his class during the first day of school pep rally. "We will be doing guess that song again," senior Class President Mathew Signorello-Katz said. "we will be putting more effort into that because I don't think there has been in the past." Photo: Emily Yao

**FIERY FRESHMEN (LEFT)**— Paly freshmen Charlotte McIntosh and Mallory Mcnee cheer passionately for their class at the height of a bottle flip competition during the 2019 spirit week. "It [Spirit Week] is a competition between grades in some ways," senior Class President Mathew Signorello-Katz said. "But it's also really a week for the whole school to bond together." Photo: Eva Mankos

# A message to Mom

## REFLECTIONS OF A FIRST-GENERATION AFGHAN AMERICAN

**A**UG. 14 WAS A HAPPY day this year, maybe even a joyous one. I know I didn't spend as much time as I wanted with you, but even the small moments made my sweet sixteen special.

Aug. 15 wasn't so great.

That was the day you told me about the Taliban capturing Kabul and gaining control of Afghanistan. The fall of the capital marked the end of an almost three-decade-long war, with thousands of deaths on every side, a war closely tied to our family's history.

I was aware of our family's immigration story from a very young age. When you told me about Grandma's great uncle, the last king of Afghanistan, and our relation to the Afghan royal family; in my young mind, you made me some kind of distant princess.

I never realized how indulgent of a lifestyle you lived in Afghanistan. I'm in awe of your family's modern 10-bedroom house made of glass, complete with an array of personal nannies; one for each of your siblings.

Khaled Hosseini, the writer of the "Kite Runner", was a family friend and lived in the same neighborhood, a district characterized by extravagant wealth in a country of severe economic inequity.

But out on the streets, you saw the haunting image of the little kids scavenging for crumbs in the gravel in front of bakeries. Even decades later, I felt the intensity in which this affected you.

However, much of the material comfort you enjoyed vanished in 1979 when Russia invaded Afghanistan. Grandma's driver was driving you home from school — bodies litter-

ing the street gutters, blood staining the streets below.

Grandpa, the economic minister of Afghanistan, was arrested, as the threat of his execution loomed over you and your family. That was when you first touched a machine gun and war tanks, as the Russian soldiers continuously patrolled the house to monitor Grandpa. Paralyzed with fear, you and your siblings stayed locked in your glass mansion for the next six months, leaving only when essential.

In February 1980, Grandpa went looking for a birthday cake for your little sister's birthday, searching for three days in the snow-filled streets of Kabul before returning with only a single roht — an Afghan sweet bread resembling a sweetened naan. After years of elaborate birthday cakes and parties with hundreds of guests, a mere sweetbread was quite the shock.

Several months after that, you left Afghanistan in the dead of night, escaping to Germany with fake passports, leaving everything you owned behind. I will always look up to your bravery, perhaps bred by necessity, but bravery nonetheless.

You made your way to the U.S. and started life in a very different, foreign en-

vironment.

After completing public school, you earned a scholarship to the University of California Los Angeles. Throughout college, you worked several jobs. At one point, three simultaneously.

You progressed to graduate school, eventually landing a high-level job at a biotech firm, creating a comfortable life for me and Cam. You built me a life filled to the brim with privilege, with anything that I may desire. But something still feels missing.

Even after facing such adversity, you often communicate to me your deep feelings of guilt for having opportunities others did not receive, for education, for

our new home, for affording food and for hosting big elaborate sweet sixteens.

I feel this guilt of privilege everyday, and yet my relationship with Afghanistan seems poisoned by a different type of guilt.

Within our Afghan family, Cam and

I are the only ones who don't speak Farsi. I only eat manto and kofta matar when I visit the rest of your family — which is hardly a few times a year. And unlike most of them and the Afghan population, I'm not

iban man, his machine gun pointed at a woman in a burqa.

My impressions of Afghanistan have been shaped by the bias of American news coverage, allowing me to only connect with the country through a fragmented and distorted lens.

When you told me about the Afghan national girls soccer team being prohibited from playing, a team that I have cheered on from the sidelines meters away, my heart sank. But I can never seem to feel the deep mourning that you do about such events, creating a disconnect with Afghanistan and that part of our identity. I try to fight this within me, but I can never seem to unite the concepts of Ines and Afghanistan.

But I'll keep trying. Maybe next year, when we're all gathered around the birthday cake, Khala Ameni and Kaka Fahim and you and I, with the flickering candles lighting up the darkened room, I'll sing along to the Khandan Salagare, maybe finally being able to share the words with you.



**SOCCER SNUGGLES (RIGHT)** — My mom and I hug as we watch my brother's soccer practice in 2010. The mother-daughter cuddles were a daily routine for us for many of my younger years.

**PICNIC IN PAMIR (FAR LEFT)** — My grandmother's extended family on an all-day picnic in the Pamir region of Afghanistan in the 1950s. Picnics were a way to enjoy life for the Afghan people.

**SULTAN STUDY (BOTTOM LEFT)** — My great-grandfather, Sultan Omar, poses for a portrait before traveling to India for the royal family. Omar was my grandmother's father and a prominent part of the Afghan royal family.

*My impressions of Afghanistan have been shaped by the bias of American news coverage, allowing me to only connect with the country through a fragmented and distorted lens.*

*Love, Ines*

Text by MELODY XU

Art by MIYA WHITELEY

# WHAT'S IN

# A NAME?

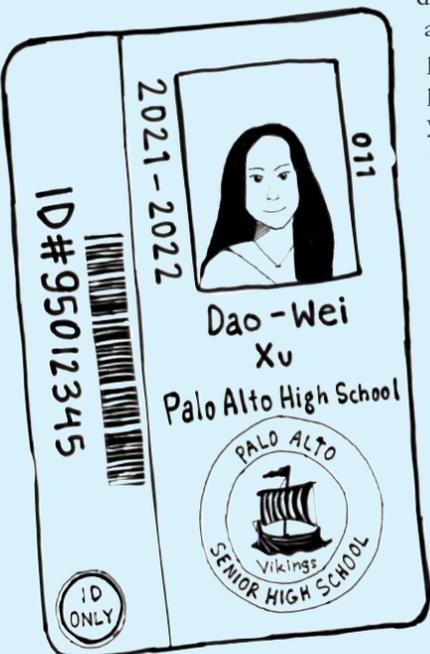
## HOW DO OUR LEGAL NAMES AFFECT OUR CHOSEN IDENTITIES?

**D**AO... WEI? DAO-DASH-WEI?" My third-grade-self had been dreading this moment — a terrifying but familiar one — for the entire week. I knew from experience that the absence of my normal classroom teacher always came with a substitute who had no way of knowing my preferred name.

"Here," I said quietly. With that, it seemed like everyone in the classroom physically turned around, craned their necks and squinted to catch a glimpse of my face for themselves, as third graders would. So with 30 pairs of eyes fixated on me — some curious, some confused and some holding back giggles — I hoped they weren't noticing the tears forming in mine.

My name is Melody Xu, but my birth certificate, passport, debit card, CollegeBoard account, Infinite Campus profile, school ID and practically any place else you might search would tell you I'm a liar. Legally, my name is Dao-Wei Melody Xu, and these documents won't seem to let me forget it.

The minor complications of having "Dao-Wei" as my legal name have followed me to every doctor's office, airport and classroom I've ever stepped foot in. Every year without fail at my annual checkup, the nurse at Kaiser Permanente squints at



their clipboard before calling out "Dao-Wei?" into the waiting room with timid uncertainty. I remember once when I was already running late for an international flight, my tight airport schedule was further delayed by not being able to check in — the airline system's on-screen keyboard simply didn't have a hyphen key. And of course, dozens and dozens of these unpleasant roll call memories have piled up over my years of schooling.

Having grown up in America for most of my life, my Chinese name's permanent attachment to my identity contributed to a festering resentment for the culture and heritage it originates from. I desperately wanted to fit in and feel American, but the whole "Dao-Wei" thing made it pretty hard. It's taken me years to grow beyond this mindset, but even now I can't say I'm fully there yet.

Many of my negative feelings about my name stemmed from social interactions in elementary and middle school. For some reason, the riveting topic of middle names was a lunchtime favorite back then, and my nine or 10-year-old soul would feel utterly crushed at the realization that I'd never have a "pretty" middle name to dramatically reveal like what seemed like all of my friends did (some of my favorite middle names were "Anabel" and "Scarlett").

Of course, I would quickly

remember that I did have a pretty middle name: Melody. It's just that I always thought of it as my first name. Then I would realize if my parents had indeed just swapped the order of "Dao-Wei" and "Melody" on that all-determining birth certificate, my middle name would just be Dao-Wei (and that was still nowhere near "Anabel" or "Scarlett").

It was just so intensely hard to feel different. From the instant I became aware of the option to file a legal name change, my heart was pretty set on making it the first thing I would do upon turning 18. Officially changing "Melody" to my first name on paper would mean I could finally be the person I saw myself as... right?

From the subtle, self-deprecating jokes I crack about this unconventional first name to the bi-annual complaining sessions I have about it with my parents, it might be easy to assume my attitude hasn't changed much since the days of giggling classmates and dreaded lunchtime

conversation topics, but that's not necessarily the case.

"Dao-Wei Xu" is 许道玮 in its original Mandarin form. "许" is my family name, linking me to an entire lineage of relatives. "道" is a generational indicator — a previously determined character shared with all members of my generation on my paternal side. And following tradition, my grandpa was the one who chose "玮" for my name after I was born; this third and final character means "beautiful jade," among other translations.

Whenever I really stop and think about this name's meaning, I am reminded that it functions as my given identity, and that given identities can be separate from chosen identities.

The role I choose for "Dao-Wei" is an anchor, reminding me of where I, and my family, come from.

The role I choose for "Melody" is a representation of where I am now and where I'm going; Melody prints her name on the top right corner of her math tests, and Melody signs the bylines of her articles.

I believe our preferences for our multitudes of identities can evolve over a lifetime without limit. These can include growing out of a childhood nickname overnight and deeming it silly or starting to include your middle initial when filling out forms just for the sake of it; names are just another personal attribute. We have the power to either change them or simply live with them.

I know that having "Dao-Wei" as my legal name could continue to result in the occasional logistical nightmare here and there, but I don't think I'll ever seriously consider changing it.

At least this is how I feel now, at this point in what will probably be a lifelong process of finding my identity. I expect my perspective to continue shifting and growing as I do.

So, what's in a name? Not much, but also absolutely everything.

I think Shakespeare said it best: The name of a thing does not matter as much as the quality of the thing.

My legal name — despite its presence and permanence — doesn't always have to align with my chosen identity. It just makes me, me. v



# Ditching erasers

Text and art by PALINA KUZMINA

## HOW ART HAS HELPED SHAPE MY CHARACTER

**F**OR THE LONGEST TIME, I always felt like a cheat when I called myself an artist. Being detail-oriented by nature, my overbearing perfectionism was one of my biggest setbacks. If a piece didn't immediately look the way I wanted it to, I would become upset with myself and give up. As someone who often enjoys looking at art, I'd find myself inspired to recreate someone's style, only to become disappointed that I couldn't perfectly replicate it.

Last year I became fascinated with the watercolor medium. I loved seeing other artists' work and the different kinds of effects they could produce on their canvases.

Inspired, I found an old watercolor set sitting in my own room and began my work.

My first attempts were frustratingly unsuccessful. Watercolor is a tricky medium, and I couldn't figure out how to layer the paint on the canvas or how much water to use. But with the help of references and lots of trial and error, the paints started to flow together on the canvas, intertwining like a sprouting bouquet. Of course, when I look back at those paintings now, I can spot all the errors I made. But back then, I considered it a huge success and I'm not going to discredit that now.

In the past, I hated the process of watercolor painting for how tedious it was. I didn't like the permanence of every brush stroke; I had to be careful to never make any errors.

But somehow I've learned to find a strange beauty within the process. Mistakes give art authenticity, and sometimes it's better not to erase. If my brush slips, I leave it in, I paint over it, I transform it into something new.

As my dedication to art grew, an element which I started taking more seriously was social media. Throughout my whole journey as an artist, I never placed much importance on the value of marketing my-

self and publicizing my work. But during my path of artistic self-discovery I started to understand the value of doing so. Besides the obvious importance of building a following that can advance one's art career, posting my work gave me a greater sense of accomplishment about my improvements.

When I look through my old pieces I always feel a little bit embarrassed — I always find ways to critique everything I did wrong. But I've learned to convert these feelings of shame into something positive, using them as a tool to know what I should work on more and what I can improve upon. I've realized that messing up is okay, and I don't need to be embarrassed in front of others because of a piece that may have not been so great, because it's just a part of my journey.

I pushed myself to experiment with different styles until I found something that really resonated with me. For the longest time I was on a wild goose chase to find a style which I felt comfortable in, constantly changing and imitating other artists. My art was incohesive — it looked like an amalgamation of different artists and styles all merged together. None of it was really me. I was under such pressure to maintain a cohesive aesthetic and I was always trying to find a style that would look good in my feed, but in turn I was doing the exact opposite.

Over the past year and a half I worked on building my art skills, but something that I didn't realize at the time was that in return it was helping me build my own character. I started understanding the value of mistakes and learned to be proud of my progress at every step of the way. And most importantly, I feel like I built a much deeper relationship with a hobby I never valued as much as I should have. v

*Mistakes give art authenticity, and sometimes it's better not to erase.*

Text by YASH SHETTY

Art by BLAIR MIDGAL

# SIX MAGICAL STRINGS

## DISCOVERING SOLACE THROUGH THE GUITAR

**A**S I PLUCK THE STRINGS of my guitar and slide my left hand up and down its fretboard, the melody emerging begins to resemble the one from the YouTube video playing in front of me. After half an hour, I've reached the point where I am cohesively playing with the man on my screen, and the output is the harmonious sound of two acoustic guitars in tune with each other. The feeling of relaxation that follows after these half-hour sessions is one that I've happily grown accustomed to.

I began to play the guitar right before COVID-19 shut down our lives, and while the pandemic upended my daily routine, a small silver lining of quarantine was having many hours to play my guitar.

Before the pandemic, I didn't take the guitar very seriously and was unwilling to overcome the fairly steep learning curve that comes with the practice of any musical instrument. However, after a couple weeks of boredom during the early stages of quarantine, I decided to give the guitar another shot.

I took lessons to familiarize myself with the basic motions and chords, but stopped after a few months and turned to the internet to further my learning. At first, it was disheartening to spend hours in front of a computer trying to emulate the motions of another player, only to end up no closer to mastering the song than when I started.

However, each new song I studied sparked a cycle of learning, within which I figured out new techniques that ended up aiding me in mastering future songs. After a few months of this, I reached the point where learning new songs was no longer something I dreaded.

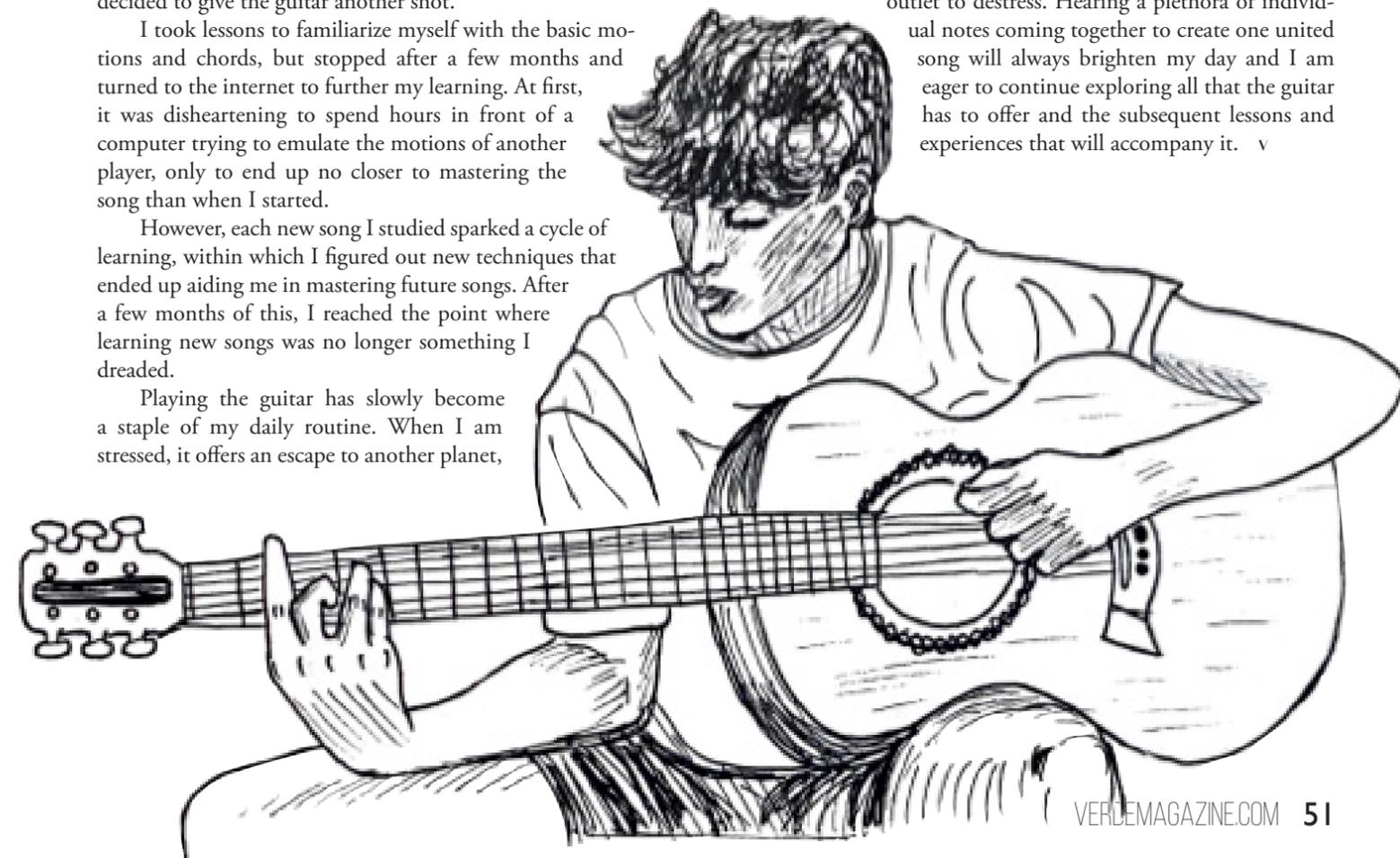
Playing the guitar has slowly become a staple of my daily routine. When I am stressed, it offers an escape to another planet,

where nothing matters except the next note on my screen. When I just want to take a break, songs like "Sugar" by Robin Shulz or "Chanel" by Frank Ocean instantly relieve any worries I may have. When I feel like getting fresh air, I sit on a swing with my dog, and listen as each of my songs slowly dissipate into the wind.

I have had countless days where I enter my front door feeling stressed and mentally drained, and my first thought is always to play the guitar. I change into my pajamas, brush my teeth, pick up my guitar, get into bed and begin to play. Listening to my favorite songs through my guitar alleviates all of the day's stress, and always allows me to sleep peacefully.

With junior year starting to pick up and my work load beginning to intensify, I've been left with far less free time than what I've been accustomed to for the majority of my life. But if anything, playing the guitar will end up making all the work more manageable because it offers me an outlet to destress. Hearing a plethora of individual notes coming together to create one united song will always brighten my day and I am eager to continue exploring all that the guitar has to offer and the subsequent lessons and experiences that will accompany it. v

*While the pandemic upended my daily routine, a small silver lining of quarantine was having many hours to play my guitar.*



# GIRLS CAN CARRY TOO

LIVING AS A GIRL IN THE GAMING WORLD

Text and art by ESTHER XU

**CARRY:** A term generally used in competitive team-based games. The player who does all the work “carries” the team to victory.

A CONFIRMATION PROMPT POPPED UP ON MY monitor screen and I hesitantly hovered my cursor over the “yes” button. *Would changing my gender online and masquerading as a male really change anything?*

Yes, I was fed up with the common remarks regarding my gender. Yes, I simply wanted to game in peace. *But wasn't doing this basically like running away?*

Another notification appeared on my screen, but this time it was a message. I skimmed my eyes over the text and instantly frowned.

Another toxic comment insulting my gender. *No surprise there. Honestly, gaming communities are way beyond help now.* Huffing out a breath, I decisively clicked “yes.”

## Breaking the norm

I see my passion for — or unhealthy obsession with — video games as a special personality trait of mine. Since I was a kid, I've been an ardent supporter of professional esports teams and an avid gamer myself.

My interest in video games was ignited by my dad's purchase of our family's first computer, an Asus laptop (an action he says he will forever regret). And although I call it a computer, the laptop itself was just a giant clunky box with a screen, surviving on barely functioning WiFi.

It only had the power to run one game, “Poptropica,” a basic online role-playing game. But regardless, I was hooked.

I've enthusiastically upgraded my setup since then to handle a much larger variety of games. Over the years, I've found myself jumping between various game genres and styles, ranging from peaceful farms to fierce battle arenas.

Single-player games are fun, but I've found myself enjoying multiplayer games much more.

Unfortunately, this preference also came with a ton of problems. Finding people to play with was incredibly difficult, not only because I was an introvert with few friends, but also because I was a girl.

## Cracking the misconception

These days, finding a girl who plays video games is not uncommon. However, back when I was still in elementary school, it was a rarity. I couldn't find girls who were interested in gaming and my siblings certainly didn't want to entertain me. Even the boys my age wouldn't play with me because of a common misconception — that girls are naturally bad at video games.

*The boys my age wouldn't play with me because of a common misconception — that girls are naturally bad at video games.*

Ugh. Whenever I hear someone say that I have to hold myself back from releasing something between a sigh and a choke of disbelief. Seriously? If girls are naturally bad at video games, are boys naturally bad at makeup?

Every skill is nurtured. People aren't born geniuses. Well, unless you're Jackie Chan, then I'll give you the benefit of doubt.

## Forming the cycle

But as unreasonable as this myth is, I understand where it comes from. The stereotype that girls are bad at video games wasn't fabricated from nothing.

Society tends to view esports as an occupation for men and within the professional gaming leagues, there are rarely female players, if any at all. Almost all professional teams that participate in tournaments not designed specifically for women are made up solely of men. Finding a girl in a professional league is like finding a CD in an electronics store. Practically impossible.

But it's not the so-called “natural” low skill levels of female players that cause their lack of presence at professional levels.

Obviously, girls aren't born naturally bad at video games. But due to pressuring expectations from society and gender stereotypes, many just aren't willing to put the time and effort into improving or even making it to the professional level.

After all, gaming is only for “boys,” and female gaming is stigmatized.

As a result, girls are discouraged from playing, regardless of their interest in games or their potential. Even female streamers who become successful from casual gameplay are commonly criticized for taking advantage of their looks and appearances to gather views and followers.

## Fixing the stigma

Sexism within the gaming community is toxic, discouraging and a form of male chauvinism.

Of course, groups that accept and support female gamers exist, but there are not nearly enough.

Many people online who joke around with gender stereotypes don't even realize what they're doing. To them, it just seems funny. But to the girls and women impacted, it is most definitely not. It is degrading, disrespectful and offensive.

So next time you encounter a girl playing and enjoying a video game, don't mock her for it. She's enjoying being herself and doing what she loves.

And, plus, she just might end up beating you up. Or, if you're lucky, carry you to victory. ♡

Text and art by MIYA WHITELEY

# NATURE VS. NURTURE

## REFLECTING ON THE ELEMENTS OF MY IDENTITY

**P**ICTURES FROM 2007 prove that 2-year-old me really did get up and dance in front of a full audience of spectators during a luau in Hawaii. I distinctly remember walking along the cool stone platform, surrounded by warm fires glowing against the dark evening, but nothing more.

According to my parents, I rose from my seat, walked to the front of the audience and started doing my best to imitate the hula dancers who had just performed. I harbored no timidity nor embarrassment, though I was definitely old enough to feel those emotions.

Despite multiple sources confirming its truth, it's hard for me to believe the 2-year-old girl who stood up on that stage is the same person who can feel her heart beating in her ears every time she raises her hand to ask a question in class.

As a young kid, I was quite extroverted, free of almost all social anxiety. But around age seven, something flipped. Talking to new people started taking more and more courage, speaking in class became nerve-wracking and the thought of being in the spotlight was mortifying.

A women's studies course I took over the summer of 2020 first introduced me to the nature-versus-nurture debate, and my interest in evaluating how my personality and identity has changed was ignited.

According to the Oxford Dictionary, nature refers to genetic or hereditary factors that influence who a person is from physical appearance to personality traits. Nurture refers to

the environmental factors and the life experiences each person has that shape them as an individual.

My drastic change in personality coincided with my family moving to a new city, which would have been an effect of nurture. This package deal of new experiences most likely caused me to become more socially anxious and shy, but it also taught me how to persevere and make new friends.

The classic nature-versus-nurture debate hinges on which affects the human character more, but I believe that everyone is a product of both genetic traits and unique experiences. And in some cases, it can be difficult to differentiate between the two. For example, many of my interests are an al-

most perfect blend of my parents, yet I do not know if I inherited these interests, gravitated toward them because of who I was raised by or if it was purely a coincidence. My dad is a photographer and writer, previously writing for a skateboarding magazine, while my mom majored in psychology during her time in college.

Well, here I am writing about a major debate in the psychology field for my high school magazine.

Identity is a culmination of

personality, appearance, culture, physiological conditions and lived experiences. Each person is a unique blend of these factors and is, in my opinion, shaped by both nature and nurture.

Often, it feels like who I am cannot be changed, because in the moment I cannot imagine a different version of myself, but I know that growth and change is, and always will be, constant. I know that my family, friends and the people surrounding me as I journey through life play a role in determining my identity as well. All of this has left me with immense appreciation for the people living within my sphere — I would not be the same without them.

Who I am today is a completely different version of the outgoing 2-year-old me, and I am still just a shadow of the person I will become. My nature and the nurture I receive will continue to shape my identity. v

*Often, it feels like who I am cannot be changed, because in the moment I cannot imagine a different version of myself.*



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