

Lifecycles

Lessons from my grandma

By Elizabeth Jones
EPA Today Intern

My name is Elizabeth Jones and my life's story has not really been like that of other teens. First off, I live with my grandma, Mary Harris, and my four younger siblings, Jessica, Shadie, Kenneth, and Destiny. I'm the third oldest out of seven kids. Growing up with a big family has been kind of tough. We all have to try to work around each other's schedules just to meet each other's needs.

Since I can remember my grandma has basically taken care of all of my brothers and sisters. To me, she should be here writing about

herself. She took care of her five children and now she's taking on the responsibility of taking care of seven more, even though she could be on a cruise ship somewhere.

My grandma has been a big part of everything that goes on in my life and also in my siblings' life. She's the reason I love school. Every morning as I'm getting ready to walk out the door to go wait on the school bus, she tells me, "Without an education, you won't make it far in this world."

Education is the key to success. So when I'm sitting in class, I have to think about if I want "out" then I'm going to have to make the commitment of being all that



Elizabeth Jones

I can be. That means I have to strive for the best and prove that what America thinks about me is wrong. In America, for a black woman, some people look at the statistics and say that I will never amount to anything but a "baby momma," that I will be on welfare and have a low wage job.

Well I am not planning to be another statistic. During my freshman year of high school about 6 girls of color dropped out and I was thinking what are they going to do when they want a job and why isn't anyone trying to help them succeed.

That's when I really realized that I wanted to be a child psychologist. I want to explore children's opinions about the world, by looking at how they feel about the decisions that the adults around them make for them. But before I get all jolly about being a psychologist, I have to finish what I have in front of me. I have to get through high school and then step into a more "free"

environment, where I can make decisions for myself and try to make it by myself.

At the end of the day, it all depends on who wants it the most. It has nothing to do with race. The poorest kid could have this dream, but if he is not willing to put in the time to get there, then his dream will fade away. Everybody has a dream. It's just a matter of putting in the time to get there!

"All great achievements require time."

- Maya Angelou

Elizabeth Jones is a junior at East Palo Alto Academy High School.

The road less traveled

By Jessica Weiss
EPA Today Contributor



Jessica Weiss

12-year-old Tula lives in the remote yet bustling village of Gao, a sprawling pile of mud houses banked along the glittering blue waters of the Niger River in Mali's western lunar landscape. She's one of 7 children living in this busy, little-known port town with their mother, grandmother, two uncles and occasional visiting cats bootstrapping from the street corner trash piles and local benevolence. Tula's days are simple and routine. She wakes at dawn, starts a fire for the morning's meal, feeds the family goat, and proceeds to a full day of doing what most Malian women spend their entire lives at -- preparing and cooking meals. After a daily breakfast of rice and meat in onion or groundnut (peanut) sauce, Tula will sit for most of the day with her brothers and sis-

ters inside a tent of woven straw mats, escaping the brutal heat of the sun to sort stones from sacks of rice, pound millet and de-pod herbs, and gossip about family affairs. In the afternoon, while her dad and uncle lounge inside their larger, mud house next door, smoking cigarettes, drinking tea, and listening to scratchy African reggae tapes, Tula will ride the neighbor's donkey to town to fetch dinner supplies from the market -- dried fish, boullion cubes, a few potatoes. She returns straightaway to start dinner for the evening, which is served first to the men who sit in plastic chairs, then later to the women who sit separately on a mat near the cooking fire. She's in bed by 10 o'clock after finishing the day's wash and sweeping the dirt floors clean of insects and stray debris to spread out a large plastic mat, which will be her and her siblings' bed for the night. This is all she knows and all she'll ever know; this is Tula's life, until she is married through pre-arranged terms, at which point she'll move to her husband's compound and resume many of the same duties, her own children taking on the more menial tasks.

If the monotonous, unescapable life of chores is difficult for Tula, it's impossible to tell. Tula is the happiest, most sprightly pre-teen I have ever encountered. Clad in bright African prints, hair braided on one side and bushy on the other, puffing out into a kind of side pony Afro, Tula flutters around the



compound like a chickadee, grinning at everything, chirping "Ca Va!" everytime a tourist or neighbor passes by, bursting spontaneously into cartwheels, handstands, and when her school friends drop by for a visit, into Africa's version of patty cake. Thinking of my mopey, skulking teenage years -- I was a faux pink fur rebel and total spoiled brat without a cause -- I'm completely fascinated by Tula's ineffable and indefatigable smile and harmonious attitude toward her

assigned social role that would have many a Western woman burning her aprons and bras alike. Tula's seeming nonchalance at going about her daily tasks, however oppressive and patriarchal they may be by the modern book, is more or less reflective of most African women I've met to date; they are poor, work extremely hard, live hand-to-mouth, and appear to be as happy as the Dalai Llama himself.

Yet even Tula has it relatively well off, compared to her neighbors who pile into makeshift huts of rice sacks and reed mats throughout the spacious, littered streets of Gao and its tiny surrounding villages. Her uncle Camille, a trilingual and independent tour guide, is able to afford the family such luxuries as battery-powered lamps, a radio, two mopeds, and a small house consisting of two rooms and about 1,000 mud/dung bricks, costing \$.80 each. Compared to the hand-to-mouth majority of Malians who bring in, on average, a whopping \$400 per capita each year, Tula's family stands among the tiny minority of a "middle class" in one of the world's poorest countries. The secret to their success? Mali's booming

tourist industry, now complete with charter flights directly from Paris or Marseilles to more popular destinations like Tombouctou, Dogon Country, and even the lesser known Gao. Camille works only during the busy season -- as most guides do -- hanging around the busy central hub of Mopti from November to February, hawking for tourists. I met Camille in Tombouctou following the Festival Au Desert. After a few colorful descriptions of his "laid back, non-touristy" hometown, he had us packed into an SUV with him that very day, headed toward Gao with a French social worker who brought troubled teens on nomadic excursions in Mali, a Russian and a German tourist, and a turban-clad Tuareg who would drive us there by sunset.

Jessica Weiss worked at Start Up and left her position with the organization to travel the world. You can track her travels by reading her blog at <http://www.travelblog.org/Bloggers/Kelebek/>

or log onto www.mytb.org/kelebek

Africa's Legacy in Mexico: What Is a Mexican?

By Miriam Jiménez Román
EPA Today Contributors



Miriam Jiménez Román

Black people in Mexico? The looks of amazement and disbelief on the faces of first-time viewers of Tony Gleaton's photographs are eloquent testimony to the significance of these images. Particularly to those who have little or no knowledge about societies beyond the borders of the United States, these photographs are a revelation. They force us to rethink many of our preconceptions not only about our southern neighbor but more generally about issues such as race, ethnicity, culture, and national identity.

Not long ago, on a hot and humid July day, I rode with friends to the town of Yanga, in the state of Veracruz on Mexico's gulf coast. In recent years, Yanga has received considerable attention as one of the Americas' earliest "maroon communities": set-

tlements founded by fugitive slaves. Originally known as San Lorenzo de los Negros, in 1932 the town was renamed for its founder, a rebellious Muslim man from what is now Nigeria. In 1609, after resisting recapture for 38 years, Yanga negotiated with the Spaniards to establish a free black community.

Today a recently erected statue of Yanga stands on the outskirts of the town, more a testimony to the persistence of a few Mexican anthropologists who "re-discovered" the place than to the historical memory of its founders' descendants. For as I strolled through the area and talked to the residents, and saw the evidence of an African past in their faces, I discovered that they have little more than amused curiosity about the outsiders who express interest in that past. Yanga's people have quite simply been living their lives as they always have, making the adjustments necessary in a changing world and giving little thought to an aspect of their history for which they are now being celebrated.

The story of Yanga and his followers is remarkable for being so typical: The town's relative isolation is the reason for its founding and for its continued existence as a predominantly black enclave. Fugitive slave communities were commonly established in difficult-to-reach areas in order to secure their inhabitants from recapture.

But their physical isolation has also led to their being ignored. Particularly since the Revolution (1910-29), the Yangas of Mexico--most found dispersed throughout the states of Veracruz on the gulf coast and Oaxaca and Guerrero south of Acapulco--have been out of sight and out of mind, generally considered unworthy of any special attention.^(1,2) Mexico's African presence has been relegated to an obscured slave past, pushed aside in the interest of a national identity based on a mixture of indigenous and European cultural *mestizaje*. In practice, this ideology of "racial democracy" favors the European presence; too often the nation's glorious indigenous past is reduced to

folklore and ceremonial showcasing. But the handling of the African "third root" is even more dismissive. For all intents and purposes the biological, cultural, and material contributions of more than 200,000⁽³⁾ Africans and their descendants to the formation of Mexican society do not figure in the equation at all. Because they live as their neighbors live, carry out the same work, eat the same foods, and make the same music, it is assumed that blacks have assimilated into "Mexican" society. The truth of the matter is, they are Mexican society. The histori-



"Virgin of the Canes,"
Corralero, Oaxaca, Mexico, 1987

cal record offers compelling

evidence that Africans and their descendants contributed enormously to the very formation of Mexican culture.

When Yanga and his followers founded their settlement, the population of Mexico City consisted of approximately 36,000 Africans, 116,000 persons of African ancestry, and only 14,000⁽⁴⁾ Europeans. Escaped slaves added to the overwhelming numbers in the cities, establishing communities in Oaxaca as early as 1523. Beyond their physical presence, Africans and their descendants interacted with indigenous and European peoples in forging nearly every aspect of society. Indeed, the states of Guerrero and Morelos bear the names of two men of African ancestry, heroes of the war of independence that made possible the founding of the republic of Mexico in 1821.

It is within this context that we must view Tony Gleaton's photographs. The people in

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More in common than you think



Alisa Valdes-Rodriguez

Just got back to the hotel to find hundreds of loving, supportive notes from people all over the world. And five nasty ones. Being me, I focused on the nasty ones. Wondered "How can people be so stupid?"

I'll post the most disturbing of them here, with my response.

Bill Jackson wrote:

I saw you tonight on CNN (Anderson Cooper's show). I am a Black woman and let me tell you, don't you dare compare these illegal alien protests to our Civil Rights movement in the 1960's. You understand me bitch???

You Mexicans are just users of the American system - just a bunch of lawbreakers. Go back to Mexico.

Benita Jackson

replied:

Benita,
Thanks for writing.

I am not Mexican. I am Cuban American, and my Cuban ancestors were African slaves and their white slaveowners. Part of my quibble with the way the U.S. media have handled the immigration debate has been the sloppy interchange of words like "Mexican," "illegal," "Latino," and "Hispanic." You appear to have fallen for the bait.

Ninety-five percent of the African slave trade took place in Latin America. There are huge Black populations in Latin America, including in Mexico. Most of Cuba is Black. Same for Puerto Rico. Five of every six people in the Dominican Republic are black. Many of the words in Cuban Spanish are borrow-words from Yoruba and Bantu, West African languages. Roberto Clemente, the great Puerto Rican baseball star, was black.

In addition, most people in Mexico are *Mestizo* (Native American and European mix) or Native American. This means the "brown" indigenous faces you see coming from Mexico belong to a people long enslaved by Europeans, and particularly

(at least in Mexico) by the Spanish. In the US, white colonists used Native Americans (the same Native Americans you see coming from Mexico) as slave labor and literally worked them to extinction. The dead Indians were replaced with slave labor from Africa. In Mexico, more Native Americans survived, but at least 6000 Africans came to Mexico on slave ships anyhow. Both Indians and Africans were enslaved by the Spaniards in Mexico. (And most of the rest of Latin America.)

The Mexicans you hate? Many of the indigenous people of Mexico live in slavery TODAY. One of the biggest reasons they want to leave Mexico, as you might imagine. You have much more in common historically than you think.

Furthermore, the first African slave rebellion in the Americas was led by a woman in Cuba. Her name was Carlota. She was a slave from Africa who died fighting for her freedom at the Triumverate Mill in Matanzas, Cuba.

The history of the Americas is the same, be it in the North or the South. The same sad story. In the US imperialist colonization and genocide and slavery were done in

English. In the two dozen nations of Latin America it was done in Spanish and French. All the Europeans who came to the Americas enslaved and killed millions upon millions of Native Americans, then brought slaves from Africa to replace them when they died. To stand here saying "our fight is better than yours" is the saddest, most ignorant thing you could do.

You are directing your well-founded anger at the wrong people, Benita. And specifically, at the wrong person. My Cuban father was dedicated to the Yoruba God Obatala when he was born; Obatala is one of the 400 Gods in the Nigerian Yoruba Pantheon. He taught me that to be Cuban is to be African. The clave rhythm of salsa music comes from West Africa. The word "banana" came to English from Spanish, and to Spanish from Yoruba, an African language. Etc.

There is nothing the mainstream media and white power elite of America would like more than to divide and conquer through misinformation. Don't believe the hype.

Please read what I've written carefully, and research in yourself. Take a look at my blog, and see for yourself that many Latinos ARE BLACK,

including Mariah Carey, whose Black father was from Venezuela, and Usher, who is a Black Panamanian. Also Alfonso Riberio, the costar of the Fresh Prince of Bel Air - he's a black Dominican. Ditto for Zoe Saldana. Christina Milian is a black Cuban. There are many black people living in the Veracruz region of Mexico.

Mexicans, like Americans, come in all colors. It is the shared history of imperialism, colonialism, slavery and the continuing effects of it all that we should ALL be focused on.

I wish you peace and strength, and understanding.
Alisa

This article comes from Alisa Valdes-Rodriguez' blog posted on April 11, 2006. To see the site, go to http://www.alisavaldesrodriguez.com/_vti_bin/shtml.dll/intouch.htm and look in her blog archive for the entry.

See more news and information at
www.epatoday.org.

Black History Month Has Special Meaning

By Crispin Rendon
EPA Today Contributor

February is Black History Month, an annual celebration. Many Mexican Americans have African roots. I read that before and thought "Okay but certainly not me. I have some color but that surely comes from my Native American ancestors."

Well you can imagine how surprised

I was when I discovered my fifth great grandfather's marriage record. Francisco Sanchez, mulato esclavo, married Maria Josepha de Escobar, mulata libre, in November 1723. He was a widow. His first wife Anna de Vega was a mulata libre. It is estimated that the slave trade brought as many as 200,000 Africans to Mexico before it was abolished there in 1829. Francisco and Maria Josepha are two of my 128 fifth great grandparents.

I know I am less than 1% African American. That does not take away the fact that my ancestor lived in slavery. So every February I remember my ancestors and slavery. I remember the wrongs we are capable of and how sweet FREEDOM is.

I would like to share the following report followed by the marriage record image, transcript and translation.



The picture above shows Crispin Rendon as he appeared when he was an elementary school student.

See his article at <http://www.somosprimos.com>

Descendants of
Francisco Javier SANCHEZ and Anna VEGA and Maria Josefa ESCOBAR

1. Francisco Javier1 SANCHEZ He married (1) Anna VEGA.; (2) on 28 Nov 1723 in Parras de la Fuente, Coahuila, Mexico Maria Josefa ESCOBAR, daughter of Ramon ESCOBAR and Hilaria Jesus HERNANDEZ.

Children of Francisco Javier SANCHEZ and Anna VEGA were as follows:

2 i Marcos2 SANCHEZ, christened 3 May 1710 in Parras de la Fuente, Coahuila, Mexico. He married on 9 Jan 1730 in Parras de la Fuente, Coahuila, Mexico Maria Hilaria GARCIA, daughter of Salvador GARCIA and Juana Maria.

+ 3 ii Ignacia2 SANCHEZ. She married Diego Enriquez PEREZ.

+ 4 iii Feliciano2 SANCHEZ, christened 25 Mar 1712 in Parras de la Fuente, Coahuila, Mexico. He married Pasquala GARZA.

5 iv Maria De La O2 SANCHEZ, christened 29 Dec 1718 in Parras de la Fuente, Coahuila, Mexico.

6 v Cayetano2 SANCHEZ, christened 15 Aug 1723 in Parras de la Fuente, Coahuila, Mexico.

7 vi Juana Cayetana2 SANCHEZ, christened 16 Aug 1723 in Parras de la Fuente, Coahuila, Mexico.

Children of Francisco Javier SANCHEZ and Maria Josefa ESCOBAR were as follows:

8 i Maria Santos2 SANCHEZ, christened 9 Nov 1724 in Parras de la Fuente, Coahuila, Mexico. She married (1) on 20 Apr 1742 in Parras de la Fuente, Coahuila, Mexico Pablo SOTO, son of Esteban SOTO and Michaela COSA; (2) on 6 Feb 1746 in Parras de la Fuente, Coahuila, Mexico Juan Estanislao PEREZ.

+ 9 ii Antonio Francisco Xavier2 SANCHEZ, christened 23 Jan 1729 in Parras de la Fuente, Coahuila, Mexico. He married Maria Dolores PENA.

+ 10 iii Manuel Silvestre2 SANCHEZ, christened 9 Jan 1731 in Parras de la Fuente, Coahuila, Mexico. He married Maria Eugenia CUELLAR.

11 iv Francisca Xavier2 SANCHEZ, christened 9 Mar 1733 in Parras de la Fuente, Coahuila, Mexico.

Africa's Legacy in Mexico

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these images, ignored in the past, now run the risk of being exoticized, of being brought forward to applaud their "Africanness" while ignoring their "Mexicanness." The faces of these children and grandmothers should remind us of the generations that preceded them. But we must not relegate them to history. As always, they remain active participants in their world. To understand the implications of the people of Yanga--and of Cuajinicuilapa, El Ciruelo, Corralero, and other like communities--we must go beyond physical appearance, cease determining the extent of Africa's influence simply by how much one "looks" African, and go forward to critically examine what indeed is Mexico and who are the Mexicans.

So, yes, there are black people in Mexico. We may marvel at these relatively isolated communities that can still be found along the Pacific

and gulf coasts. But of greater significance is recognizing the myriad forms that mark the African presence in Mexican culture, past and present, many of which remain to be discovered by people such as Tony Gleaton and ourselves and certainly by the Mexican people.

Notes:

1. There are notable exceptions to this lack of attention. The anthropologist Gonzalo Aguirre Beltran's seminal works ("La Poblacion Negra de Mexico, 1519-1810." Mexico: Ediciones Fuente Cultural, 1946; and "Cuijla: Esbozo Etnografico de un Pueblo Negro." Veracruz, Mexico: Universidad Veracruzana, 1989) remain among the most important on the subject. Doubtless influenced by the interest in Africans and their descendants in other parts of the world, during the past decade a small but significant group of Mexican

intellectuals have begun focusing on black Mexicans.

2. It is true that the state of Veracruz (and especially the port city of the same name) is generally recognized as having "black" people. In fact, there is a widespread tendency to identify all Mexicans who have distinctively "black" features as coming from Veracruz. In addition to its relatively well-known history as a major slave port, Veracruz received significant numbers of descendants of Africa from Haiti and Cuba during the latter nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

3. It is impossible to arrive at precise figures on the volume of enslaved Africans brought to Mexico or the rest of the Americas. Hungry for slaves and eager to avoid payment of duties, traders and buyers often resorted to smuggling. The 200,000 figure is generally recognized as a conservative estimate.

4. The source of these fig-



Photo courtesy of Somos Primos

ures is the census of 1646 of Mexico City, as reported by Gonzalo Aguirre Beltran in "La Poblacion Negra de Mexico" (p. 237). These approximate figures include as persons of African ancestry only those designated as "Afroestizos," in accordance with the caste-system definitions at the time. The census indicates that there were also more than a million indigenous peoples. In fact, such precise definitions were almost impossible to make, and it is highly probable that the categories "Euromestizos" and "Indomestizos" also included persons of African descent.

Miriam Jiménez Román, Puerto Rico-born and Harlem-bred, is a long-time student of diasporic communities in the Americas, focusing on people of African descent. She has taught courses on race, ethnicity, and gender at Binghamton, Brown and Columbia Universities.

She was the managing editor and editor of CENTRO: Journal of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies. For over a decade, she researched and curated exhibitions at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, where she also served as the Assistant Director of the Scholars-in-Residence Program.

Currently she is director of the afrolatin@forum, a research and resource center based in New York City.

This article can be seen at <http://www.smithsonianeducation.org/migrations/start.html>

Cómo evitar la ejecución hipotecaria

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antes de tarjetas de crédito y otras deudas "sin garantía".

8. Use sus recursos.

¿Tiene recursos tales como, un segundo automóvil, joyas, una póliza de seguro de vida y pensión que pueda vender para ayudar a rehabilitar su préstamo? ¿Puede alguien en su hogar conseguir un trabajo suplementario para tener ingresos extra? Aunque estos esfuerzos no aumenten considerablemente su dinero

efectivo disponible o sus ingresos, manifiestan a su prestamista que usted está dispuesto a hacer sacrificios para no perder su vivienda.

9. Evite compañías de prevención de desalojo.

No necesita pagar nada para recibir ayuda de prevención de desalojo o ejecución. Más bien, use ese dinero para pagar la hipoteca. Muchas empresas que operan para obtener beneficios se pon-

drán en contacto, prometiéndole negociar por usted con su agencia crediticia. Mientras que estos muy bien pueden ser negocios legítimos, le cobrarán cuotas bastante altas (a menudo el monto del pago hipotecario de dos o tres meses) por información y servicios que su agencia crediticia o un asesor de vivienda aprobado por HUD le facilitará gratuitamente con tan sólo comuni-

carse con ellos.

10. ¡Tenga cuidado con los timos de recuperación de ejecuciones!

Si una empresa clama que ellos pueden detener la ejecución inmediatamente con sólo usted firmar un documento asignándoles a actuar en su nombre, muy bien puede estar firmando el título de su propiedad y convirtiéndose en un arrendatario de su propia casa! No firme

ningún documento legal sin antes leer y comprender en su totalidad todos los términos, y buscar asesoramiento profesional de un abogado, un agente de bienes raíces confiable, o un asesor de vivienda aprobado por HUD

<http://espanol.hud.gov/foreclosure/index.cfm?&lang=es>

EPA youth get free dictionaries

By Loretta Green
EPA Today Contributor

Energized by the theme, "Today a reader, tomorrow a leader," members of the Links Inc, recently (Nov. 21) converged on schools in the Ravenswood district and gave out free dictionaries to third graders at five elementary schools.

Some 35 members of the Peninsula Bay Chapter of Links and a few spouses collaborated with the California Dictionary Project which was organized in 2002 to address literacy. During the past five years, the organization has distributed 83,000 free dictionaries to Bay Area Public Schools.

Links chapter president, Marthelia Hargrove, of Sunnyvale, contacted the

Dictionary Project and asked it to supply dictionaries for Ravenswood District students.

Students feel even more valued and supported in their effort to learn when they receive attention from people outside the school community, said Hargrove, a retired educator and former principal of Costano School.

The Links is a nonprofit community service organization with chapters all over the U.S. as well as a few foreign countries.

Link member Irene Utley, of San Jose, once taught at Costano, was one of several retired teachers in the Links who briefed their fellow club members on how to instruct the third graders on the proper use of dictionaries.. She said the students at Green

Oaks School, where she took dictionaries, were excited to have someone come, but they also had been well-prepared by their teacher on dictionary use.

"Many kids would never be able to have a dictionary in their home if someone didn't give them one," Utley said. "And they are really nice dictionaries and very updated and current. I know that people do have computers and can look up a lot of information, but I still think it's good to have a dictionary in the house."

Inside the classrooms, students whooped with joy when they learned that each would receive a free dictionary. Then they enthusiastically participated in an exercise where a student would say a word and everyone would

rush to find it in their dictionary.

Organizers hope that the students also will share the dictionaries with siblings at home and even their parents in order to improve the entire family's vocabulary,"

"As a former educator of high school students, I realize the importance of a child being able to read well," said Links member Sara Boyd, of Palo Alto, who arranged the logistics and is a retired administrator from Menlo-Atherton High School. "And having an extensive vocabulary will help produce the leaders of tomorrow that we need to make sure that this country becomes all it can be."

The Links group was greeted by Ravenswood school superintendent Maria De

LaVega, as well as principals representing the five schools they visited which included Belle Haven, Costano, Flood, Willow Oaks and Green Oaks.

A letter of thanks sent to the Peninsula Bay Links from De LaVega and Ruth Woods, Director of Student Services/Auxiliary Programs said in part, "Without your contributions, a lot of our students would not have the tools needed to complete homework assignments."

"The assistance of citizens like you has enabled this school district to accomplish far more than it otherwise could.

Loretta Green is a well-known Bay Area journalist who is now retired.

Project Read in Menlo Park

By Betty Meissner
EPA Today Contributor

Lucia grew up in a traditional Mexican family living in a small town. She didn't have the opportunity to further her education and thus stayed in the small town until she married. Her husband had emigrated with his family to the US as a young boy and received most of his education in the US. After they got married and he brought his new young bride back to America, not only was Lucia unable to speak English in her new homeland, she also felt lonely being far away from her family. But as time went on, she got various jobs and gradually learned some English. One of her early dreams was for her and her husband to live independently from his family. In order to bring this about, Lucia worked several

jobs, took care of others' children on weekends, and saved. Eventually they got a place of their own, and Lucia focussed on raising her three children. A priest was very influential in her life and advised her about her kids and doing things right. She instilled in her children the value of education and assured that they did well in school. In June, 2007, she and her family were proud to attend her twin sons' graduation from the University of California, Santa Barbara. Her daughter is following in her brothers' footsteps, currently studying at UC Santa Barbara.

Raul Gonzalez was a young man without a father figure because his father was away at his shop in the larger Mexican city. As a result, Raul became close to his uncle, who accepted the young man and treated him as an adult. Because he

had wanderlust and wanted to try new things, Raul was eager to explore beyond his home environment. He therefore embarked on more than a decade of travel, living and sporadically working in Chile, Peru, and Brazil, eventually coming to the United States. With limited English skills, however, it was difficult to get along.

What unites these two diverse individuals is Project Read, the Menlo Park literacy program. Through Project Read, Lucia and Raul have not only improved their English skills, but they have blossomed as model Learners. Their enthusiasm and drive landed them slots in an elite 6-month leadership program where they learned new skills to serve Project Read and their community.

Raul continues lessons with his Tutor, but he has also become a Tutor for two

Learners. He has developed and improved his artistic skills as a balloon artist and caricaturist and demonstrates these skills both professionally and pro bono. Whenever there is a call for volunteers, he is eager and willing to share his time and talents to help make things happen.

Lucia also continues her Project Read lessons and has become a passionate advocate for literacy, on several occasions speaking on behalf of Project Read before City Council. She helped organize the Project Read fund-raiser, and volunteered at numerous community activities such as Connoisseur's Marketplace and Kepler's gift wrapping. She is studying for her real estate license and looks forward to helping people with limited English proficiency negotiate the home-buying process so they too can real-

ize that American dream as she and her family did last year when they moved into a lovely brand-new home.

Project Read is first and foremost a literacy program, but far beyond that, it has been empowering individuals to improve their lives and their families' lives. The benefits to these people and to society are immeasurable.

For more information regarding become a Tutor or Learner, please contact the Project Read office, Menlo Park Public Library 800 Alma Street, Menlo Park, CA 94025 Phone (650) 330-2525 Fax (650) 326-7030 Mon - Wednesday 2-7 pm, Thursday, 2-6 pm

Betty Meissner has been and East Palo Alto contributor since the paper's founding in 2006.

School district

Vega said that the district has retained teachers for the last two years. "The staff is staying longer because the district has become a better place in which to work."

She said that test scores are improving and there is a strategic plan in place to improve conditions even more.

In her words, the recent negative characterization of conditions in the district is

such an "unfortunate misrepresentation" that the county education team which recently visited the district will go back to the county office and have serious discussions about the district's recent ranking.

While some have described possible state intervention within the district as a negative thing, de la Vega said, "We're looking forward to increasing our collab-

oration with those assigned to the district to work with us. It is our hope that this collaboration will bring more money."

The Ravenswood School District Board President Chester Palesoo agrees with de la Vega. "I know we still have work to do for improvement," he said, "but our community is unlike any other community in San Mateo County, and our school dis-

trict is moving towards a positive direction."

Palesoo decried all of the negative press about the district and is disappointed that more positive things about the district from all of the recent findings were not mentioned. In fact, he said, "The Ravenswood School District should be labeled as a 'progressive school district' within the PI standardized category due to positive activities

reflected in the CPM report and aligned with NCLB [No Child Left Behind] stipulations!"

The community will hear more from the school district's point of view when Maria de la Vega writes a soon-to-be-released letter to the community.

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Syphilis Awareness Campaign: Confronting Health Disparities in EPA

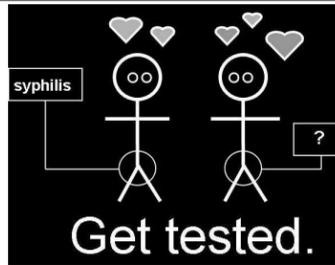
By Dr. Blake Charlton and Terri Lopez

If learning that a certain infectious disease is roughly ten times more likely to appear in East Palo Alto than the rest of San Mateo County doesn't surprise you, then learning that this disease is completely curable should.

Even though syphilis, a sexually transmitted infection can be identified by a simple test and cured with a simple course of drugs, it remains sadly common in our communities. Doctors and public health officials are still piecing together exactly why EPA has a disproportionate number of the county's cases; however, they are completely

certain how the disease can be eliminated. For this reason, increasing syphilis awareness is the goal of a growing coalition of community activists--including this newspaper, the Free at Last program, the San Mateo County Health Department, and a group of Stanford medical students.

Again, there are steps that can reduce the rate of syphilis infection. The first step is prevention: education, barrier-use (condoms), risk reduction (i.e. reducing number of sexual partners and sexual encounters under the influence), and/or abstinence. Even though awareness of these precautions might be



high throughout the city, they are worth emphasizing.

The second step involves increasing the community awareness of syphilis. This disease, has often been called "the great imitator" because so many of the signs and symptoms are indistinguishable from those of other diseases. Syphilis can be difficult to diagnose because many who are infected may

not show symptoms.

There are several medical facilities in San Mateo County that provide accessible STD services. Ravenswood Clinic provides testing for syphilis and other diseases for those without health insurance or with Medicare/Medi-Cal. Walk-ins are not available, however appointments can be made by calling 650-330-7400 or by visiting www.ravenswoodfhc.org.

Low cost STD testing is also available at San Mateo County Health Department drop-in STD clinic and on the Mobile Clinic. Information about hours and location can be found at:

www.smhealth.org/std or by

calling (650) 573-2346.

In conclusion, though all city residents would benefit from this information, those at highest risk (i.e. homeless, substance users) of contracting syphilis and whom would greatly benefit from prevention techniques are difficult to reach.

This article marks the first step of a still-forming campaign that is looking for more community partners to help get the word out onto the street. It is our hope that the campaign culminates in a health fair later this spring.

Those interested in joining or advising the campaign should contact San Mateo County Health Department at (650) 573-2346.

Web-based bi-lingual activity guide coming soon

By Maria Perez and Shannon Pekary
EPA Today Contributors

A group of community members have form an organization entitled EPA PARRC - East Palo Alto Park And Rec Resident's Committee for the purpose of assisting the Community Service Department. EPA PARRC's first project is the creation of a web-based activity guide.

Marcia Perez, chairwoman of the Communications committee and president of Babe Ruth Baseball, said, "All of

the other cities on the Peninsula have an activity guide so that their community members can see what youth activities, sports and fitness, senior classes and other programs are offered. East Palo does not. It is time to get plugged into our community."

The project came about because of frustrations expressed by many organizations that serve East Palo Alto. Shannon Pekary, Executive Director of the Ravenswood Youth Athletic Association, and Chairman of EPA PARRC, said, "I have

met with so many leaders of local organizations who have said that one of their major difficulties is communicating with the community. Cultural, language, and technological barriers make it much more difficult than in surrounding communities. In addition, the city of EPA has not funded the Community Services department at a level where they can solve the problem without help."

EPA PARRC's activity guide will be a unique first step into creating a source of communication that people can depend on

for information.

It will contain both an online and printed component. Providers of services to the community will log on to a Web site and list all of their activities and events. This information will be displayed to the public in a variety of ways that will include lists of organizations serving the community, upcoming activities and events by interest and age group, and a community calendar. While the Web site is currently being created by volunteers, EPA PARRC hopes to secure funding from the city

to maintain the site and create a printed version for distribution to the community.

There will be a presentation of the web-application at the March 18 City Council meeting and we are encouraging people to attend.

EPA PARRC is looking for service providers of youth activities, senior programs or any other type of community organization to join its pilot program. If you are interested in this community-based project please contact Shannon Pekary (650) 248-0488 or Marcia Perez (415) 297-6009.

Remembering

hymn Amazing Grace and Father Lawrence Goode, the pastor of St. Francis of Assisi, which is located at 1425 Bay Road, gave the invocation and welcoming remarks.

Then eight community speakers talked about the candle or the reflection of the four themes: memory, courage, love and hope. The presenters included: Pam Watt, Jeanno Williams, Rosario Baldera, Marina Latu, Bianca Amezoua, Akala Francis, Delores Avelar and Nola Palefau.

Latu ended her remarks by

saying, "East Palo Alto, I am so proud of you. So proud of the courage that you have as a community to create a memorial event in remembrance of the victims of violence and the courage we have to remember, grieve and unite tonight. Our struggle is to create things as they should be - safe and healthy. This action is what breeds confidence and courage. I read somewhere that 'Courage doesn't always roar.' Sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day saying, 'I will try again

tomorrow.' And so I echo once more the words of Cornel West, "You must have courage every day."

After the community speakers, there was a section called Youth Speak, in which Mele' Teu spoke on remembering, Shakara Haynes spoke on grieving and Marco Aguilfera spoke on uniting. The most somber part of the service was the reading of the names of the victims and the lighting of the candles. Kelley Boulton gave the call to action afterwards and the Tongan Christian Assembly

of God Choir sang at the end of the service. A live band played during the reception which followed the service.

For Pam Reliford, the event this year was the most memorable. "I was pleased more this year than last year," she said, "because we had so many more youth participating to put on the event as well as coming as guests this year. We also had Parole Re-entry program volunteers as helpers with the dinner portion that followed the ceremony which was just as awesome. They were wonderful.

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Pastor Harris brought over 7 to help set up the after ceremony dinner as well as serve. Mayor Foster achieved her dream of having this be more a youth led event and next year it should prove to be even more of a youth service affair." Reliford said.

Reliford added, "Though I know the community needs to heal with the slaying of those here at home we also need to be sure not to forget to acknowledge anyone of our EPA soldiers who may have been killed while serving in the Iraq War as well."

Ball players wanted

not getting out on the playing field and getting the physical activity they need.

You are welcome to contact us or come to a practice. Practice started on Tuesday, March 4 at Costano from 5:30 to 6:30, and will be held every Tuesday and Thursday at this time, and Saturdays from 10:00 - 12 noon. The first season games start May 1 and continue until June 30.

The Babe Ruth league is for

the older children and is extremely important for us to keep alive. This is the age when most teen boys begin to seek out less healthy life style choices and reach the fork in the road to either stay in school and make something out of their lives or take the less fortunate path of self destruction. The Babe Ruth team helps teens stay focused, motivated and plugged in to their community

and connected to their peers in a healthy and productive manner. Kids are taught baseball skills, the importance of working hard as a team and how to give of themselves. The coaches are mentors that drill into the kids the great need for education and excellence in their personal lives.

Because a portion of the team members cannot pay the registration fees. We

raise the money through donations for scholarships. We are in constant need of many basic items and any help would be incredibly appreciate

Many thanks to the owners of PAL Market located at 2384 Cooley Avenue (at University) for their generous donation of uniforms for the 2007 season and their exceptional donation given this Spring for some new equip-

ment. Without their support, the East Palo Alto Babe Ruth Team might not have been possible.

For more info contact Coach Luna at (650) 799-3085 or the team Manager, Marcia Perez, at (415) 297-6009. We welcome Head Coach Roy Guerra, who has deep roots in East Palo Alto and has played semi-pro baseball. He is a welcomed addition to East Palo Alto Babe Ruth Baseball team.

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Classified Advertising

Collective Roots

an East Palo Alto Nonprofit Organization, is hiring a Farmers' Market Organizer. We seek a highly organized, self-motivated individual to work in the city of East Palo Alto and serve as the first Market Organizer for the East Palo Alto Community Farmers' Market. This is a temporary position which will culminate in the market's opening. If adequate funding becomes available, we will give strong preferential consideration to the current market organizer as a potential candidate to fill a longer-term Market Manager position. To apply, please review the full job description available at www.collectiveroots.org/employment_opportunities. Then please submit a resume with cover letter (Word or PDF documents only) via email to: wolfram@collectiveroots.org. Please type "Farmers' Market Organizer Position" in the email subject line.

NO PHONE CALLS PLEASE.

Kitty's Cleaners

Monday through Saturday
From 8:00 am to 6:30 pm



Mr. & Mrs. A. Gamblin
We own & operate our Plant

910 Newbridge St.
East Palo Alto CA. 94303

Telephone
(650) 326-8271

East Palo Alto Today is seeking Sales Associates

If interested call (650) 327-5846, ext.311

We are one

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reprint their articles.

Knowing about one's heritage can be an eye opening experience. We hope as you read their works you will see that we are not just related, we are one people in so many ways.

We hope to bring you similar articles involving

Pacific Islanders and other ethnic groups within the community in upcoming issues.

If you have personal stories like the ones being featured in this issue, please feel free to share them with us.

East Palo Alto Sanitary District

Cured-in-Place Pipe Rehabilitation Project

SECTION A1 - NOTICE REQUESTING BIDS

EAST PALO ALTO SANITARY DISTRICT
Cured-in-Place Pipe Rehabilitation Project

Sealed proposals for the Cured-in-Place Pipe Project, East Palo Alto will be received at the East Palo Alto Sanitary District, 901 Weeks Street, East Palo Alto, California 94303 until 2:00 PM on Wednesday, March 12, 2008 at which time they will be publicly opened and read. Bids shall be labeled "East Palo Alto Sanitary District, Proposal for "CURED-IN-PLACE PIPE REHABILITATION PROJECT, EAST PALO ALTO."

The Work will include the furnishing of all labor, materials and equipment, and other appurtenances for rehabilitation of a sanitary sewer mains by open trench point repairs, cured-in-place pipe method and manhole rehabilitation, as indicated on the project plans.

The contract documents may be inspected at the office of the East Palo Alto Sanitary District; San Francisco Builders Exchange, 850 So. Van Ness Avenue, San Francisco, California 94110; Peninsula Builders Exchange, 735 Industrial Road, Suite 100, San Carlos, California 94070; Santa Clara Builders Exchange, 400 Reed Street, Santa Clara, California 95050; Builders Exchange of Alameda, 3055 Alvarado Street, San Leandro, California 94577; Construction Bidboard Incorporated, Attn: Michael Schafer, 4420 Hotel Circle South, Suite 215, San Diego, California 92108; McGraw-Hill Construction Dodge, 11875 Dublin Blvd., Suite A118, Dublin, California 94568; and, Contra Costa Builders Exchange, 2440 Stanwell Drive, Concord, California 94520.

Copies of the Contract Documents may be obtained at the office of the East Palo Alto Sanitary District upon payment of a check or money order in the amount of \$30.00 for each set. The check or money order must be issued to the East Palo Alto Sanitary District. All payments are nonrefundable. The Sanitary District is open Monday through Thursday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

A pre-bid meeting will be held at 10:00 am on Wednesday, February 27, 2008 at the office of the East Palo Alto Sanitary District.

Each bid proposal shall be accompanied by a certified or cashier's check or a proposal guaranty bond payable to the order of the East Palo Alto Sanitary District in an amount not less than ten percent (10%) of the amount of the bid as a guaranty that the bidder will execute the contract if it be awarded to him in conformity with the proposal. The successful bidder will be required to furnish a performance bond in an amount not less than one hundred percent (100%) of the contract price and a labor and material bond in an amount equal to one hundred percent (100%) of the contract price.

The District ("Owner") reserves the right to reject any or all bids and to determine which proposal is, in the judgment of the District, the lowest responsible bid of a responsible bidder or group of bidders and which proposal should be accepted in the best interest of the District. The District also reserves the right to waive any informalities in any proposal or bid.

Bid proposals received after the time announced for the opening will not be considered. No bidder may withdraw his proposal after the time announced for the opening, or before award and execution of the contract, unless the award is delayed for a period exceeding forty-five (45) days.

Pursuant to the provisions of Public Contract Code Section 22300, and upon the request and at the expense of the Contractor, securities equivalent to the amount withheld by the District to insure performance under the Contract may be deposited with the District, or with a state or federally chartered bank as escrow agent who shall deliver such securities to the Contractor upon satisfactory completion of the contract. Only those securities listed in Government Code Section 16430 or other securities approved by the District are eligible for deposit. The deposit of securities with an escrow agent or the District shall be made in the form and on such terms and conditions as the District may require to protect the interest of the District in the event of the Contractor's default. The Contractor shall be the beneficial owner of any securities that are deposited and shall receive any interest thereon.

Pertaining to Sections 1770, 1773, and 1773.1 of the California Labor Code the successful bidder shall pay not less than the prevailing rate of per diem wages as determined by the Director of the California Department of Industrial Relations. Copies of such prevailing rates are on file at the District office of the East Palo Alto Sanitary District and which copies shall be made available to any interested party on request. The successful bidder shall post a copy of such determinations at each job site.

In accordance with the provisions of California Public Contract Code Section 3300, the District has determined that the Contractor shall possess a valid Class A License or a combination of the Class C licenses indicated in Article B8.01-License Requirements, at the time that the contract is awarded. Failure to possess the specified license(s) shall render the bid as non-responsive and shall act as a bar to award of the contract to any bidder not possessing said license(s) at the time of award.

Contractor's attention is directed to Section B8.18, Small Business and Subcontracting Participation Goal, which grants the Contractor a credit for using a Small Business Contractor, as defined in the section.

East Palo Alto Sanitary District
Board of Directors
San Mateo County, California

/s/ Leroy Hawkins

Dated: 1/18/08

Community Calendar

Grand Opening of the the Community Trust Credit Union of East Palo Alto

Saturday, March 15 from 12 noon to 2:30 p.m. at its offices at 1836 Bay Road, Suite B in East Palo Alto on

YUCA Gala - Operation People Power: Mission Possible

Saturday, March 15, 2008 at Costaño Elementary School in East Palo Alto. Being held to "honor the generations of families who have grown up fighting for environmental

justice in our community of East Palo Alto and the tribal nation of the Akimel O'Otham" For more information, contact the YUCA office at (650)322-9165

Bike to Work Day, Thursday, May 15, marks the Bay Area's 14th annual Bike to Work Day, a celebration that promotes bicycling as a healthy, fun and viable form of transportation. For more information, contact Peninsula Traffic Congestion Relief Alliance, 1150 Bayhill Dr., Ste. 107, San Bruno, CA

94066, 650-588-8170, alliance@commute.org, www.commute.org

Beat One
Date: Tuesday, March 18th, 2008
Time: 6:30pm - 8pm
Location: Community Church in the Fellowship Hall at 2201 University Avenue

Beat Three
Date: Thursday, March 13th, 2008
Time: 6:30pm - 8pm
Location: Palo Mobile Estates (1885 E Bayshore Road)

Guest Speaker: Michelle Roman, Preparedness Specialist from the American Red Cross

Beat Four
Date: Thursday, March 20th, 2008
Time: 7:30pm - 9pm
Location: Community Room at City Hall (2415 University Avenue)

PEACE RALLY AND CONCERT IN DOWNTOWN PALO ALTO
SATURDAY, MARCH 15, 12:00 noon
King Plaza (Palo Alto City

Hall), 250 Hamilton Avenue, Palo Alto
To Mark the Fifth Anniversary of a "War that Should Never Have Happened"

PEACE RALLY: Out Now! ~ PEACE CONCERT: Rock Out!
Rally at 12:00 noon ~ Concert with Kenny Neal at 1:00 p.m. For more information contact the Peninsula Peace and Justice Center www.PeaceandJustice.org ~ 650-326-8837 ~ ppjc@peaceandjustice.org

A pressing need

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merely the proper application of the current ordinances.

We are paying the City of Berkeley a sum of \$15,000 to provide some enlightenment on how best to address the situation, but we appear to have within our midst folks who can read a ruling and determine the proper course of action. I hope that the folks from Berkeley come to the same conclusion and have the credibility to get our city staff and rent stabilization board to act accordingly.

One of the primary requirements of this action is

to provide the rent stabilization board with a city staff member with some clout. Considering that about a third of the citizen's are renters, it is appropriate that their be a director of rental housing, and not merely a clerk reporting to a director of housing who is currently incentivized only to build more houses, not address issues about the existing rental units.

This has apparently been the case for the past ten years or so, and needs to be addressed immediately. There is currently an opening on the staff for a rent stabilization administrator. The person hired

should be both qualified and placed at the right level to be able to properly look out for the interests of that third of our population.

This director of rental housing should address the rent "crisis" and then move on to a number of other issues that our landlords have shirked over the past several years. I'm looking forward to some really creative solutions to the "rent crisis" that will provide the basis for a standard living that makes East Palo Alto the envy of renters everywhere.

Local television shows at the Media Center

Black Solutions



Tiombe Jama

Examining ways to help eliminate violence in the East Palo Alto Black Community.

Sat, Mar 8th 11:00am	30	Mon, Mar 17th 8:00 pm	30
Mon, Mar 10th 8:00pm	30	Mon, Mar 17th 10:30 pm	30
Mon, Mar 10th 10:30pm	30	Tue, Mar 18th 4:00 am	30
Tue, Mar 11th 4:00am	30	Tue, Mar 18th 6:30 am	30
Tue, Mar 11th 6:30am	30	Tue, Mar 18th 12:00 pm	30
Tue, Mar 11th 12:00pm	30	Tue, Mar 18th 2:30 pm	30
Tue, Mar 11th 2:30pm	30	Fri, Mar 21st 6:00 am	30
Thu, Mar 13th 10:00pm	30	Fri, Mar 21st 2:00 pm	30
Fri, Mar 14th 8:00am	30		

Talking with Henrietta



Delorme McKee-Stovall, Henrietta J. Burroughs and Patrice O'Neill

Delorme McKee-Stovall, Patrice O'Neill and Henrietta J. Burroughs discuss how we can all work together to confront hidden bias in our communities. Their discussion follows the local workshop which focused on the same topic. This show runs from Sunday, March 16 to Sunday, March 30. The days and time are shown to the right.

The current edition of Talking with Henrietta which discusses "Not in Our Town" can be seen on Fridays @ noon, Saturdays @ 1:30 p.m., Sundays @ 5 p.m., Mondays @ 8 a.m. and Thursdays @ 8 p.m. on Channel 27 locally.

This show can also be seen at the Media Center's website at the above days and times. The web site can be found at: www.communitymedia-center.net.

New Voices for Youth Student Programs

This youth series appears on Channel 28 as follows:

- Mondays 11:30 a.m. / 7:00 p.m.
- Tuesdays 3:00 a.m. / 11:00 a.m.
- Wednesdays 10:30 a.m. / 11:00 p.m.
- Saturdays 7:00 p.m.
- Sundays 3:00 a.m. / 7:30 p.m.

For more information, contact Becky Sanders, 650-494-8686.

To see a more complete viewing schedule, visit the Media Center website,

<http://www.communitymedia-center.net/>, and search, "New Voices for Youth."

The East Palo Alto Rent Increase Issue



Find out about the sudden and extraordinary rent increase facing over 1,000 tenants in the city of East Palo Alto. -

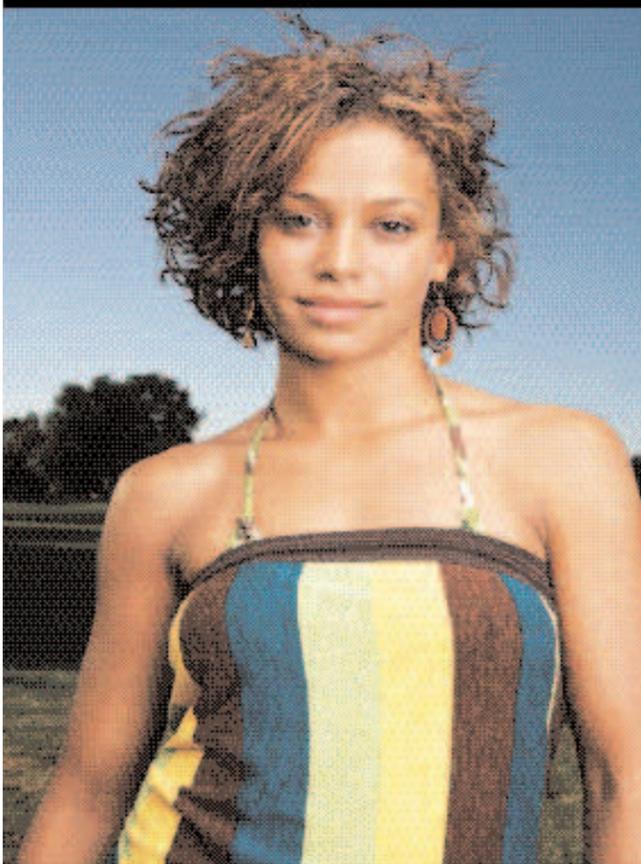
Channel 27: Mar. 16 at 7:30 p.m., Mar. 18 at 5 p.m., Mar. 20 at 7:30 p.m.; Channel 28: Mar. 15 at 2:30 p.m., Mar. 22 at 2:30 p.m.

WE TAKE RISKS...



Taking risks is not always a bad thing!
You can take risks everyday by:

- *Choosing to talk to your sex partner honestly about sex.
- *Using condoms every time you have sex.
- *Choosing to abstain from sex and drugs.
- *Getting tested for HIV and other STDs.
- *Taking charge of your body and health!



HIV Infection:

- Is the **LEADING** cause of death among African American women between 25-34 years old and the **FOURTH** leading cause of death among African American women ages 45-54.
- In the United States, women make up 25% of new HIV infections and of those new infections, **81%** are among **women of color**.
- The rate of AIDS diagnosis for African American women is approximately **24 times** the rate for white women.

For information about HIV&AIDS and where to get tested, call the San Mateo County Health Department:
650-573-2346

'Cause we're ALL That!