

THE TATTOO

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Join in, but be yourself

By MOLLY HORAN
The Tattoo

"Get involved!" said the counselors.
"Get involved!" said my parents.

"Get involved," said the public service announcement in the middle of my favorite TV show, proving to me that there was no escaping participation.

So entering high school, I took in my options. Desks with colorful construction paper signs lined the hallways of my school on the night of freshman orientation.

Join a sports team! Hmmm... I can't run, have no hand-eye coordination and although it's yet to be scientifically proven, basketballs seem to be magnetically attracted to my head. Sports were not an option.

Picture yourself in the outdoors club! Good at following directions, I attempted to picture myself in outdoors club maneuvering my way down a rock-filled river. However what I actually pictured were the last few scenes of *The River Wild*. Outdoors club was not for me.

Have an adventure in ski club! I tried to snowboard once. I'm just glad the tree was there to stop me from hitting that rock. No more racing down frozen mountains for me.

Finally I ended up at a table devoted to drama club. This option seemed the least dangerous, so I signed the list, confident that I had gotten involved! Now after my first year in the school drama program, I realized it is more dangerous than ski and outdoors club, but it was definitely the right choice.

So I guess they were all right. Getting involved is a good idea, and if there isn't a club you see yourself in, you can always start one. New clubs this year include the history club and head-bangers anonymous. These clubs prove that there is something for everyone, while the students who are active members of both prove there are still some teens who refuse to be labeled or grouped. Yay individuality!

Insider's Guide to High School

It's *The Tattoo's* annual back-to-school advice from teens who've been there and done that, so relax. This page is the second installment of this year's series. We'll have the third next week, but if you don't want to miss anything, check out our website at www.ReadTheTattoo.com for more worthy coping tips.

My love: reading

By MICHEL LEE
The Tattoo

Yesterday, I attended a matinee at a theatre in Villette, France. After enjoying a fantastic operatic performance, I journeyed to China in less than three and a half minutes and stood in the court of a wealthy businessman. I had just witnessed the birth of a First Lady when my mom knocked on the door and asked me to go to sleep.

No, contrary to what my friends say, my brain is still intact. I have full control of my faculties and I know how to read. Read? Yes, that's what I was doing last night!

One of the most important things you can do in high school is read. Of course, reading is mandatory. You'll probably get your share of 20-pound history textbooks and dusty copies of Dickens and Shakespeare.

Plowing through a volume on the Cold War is one thing, but recreational reading is another, and definitely not as intimidating.

Recreational reading will

not only expand your horizons and allow you to explore your interests, but it will also help you unconsciously improve your grammar, diction, vocabulary, and comprehension skills.

Trust me, you'll put those skills to good use during your high school career in English, history, science and maybe even math class.

They'll also come in handy when standardized testing and college application time rolls around.

Reading gets you places. If you just happened to be deprived of the joys of "Reading Rainbow" as a child, you can still discover the magic of books. Read what you like - magazines, science fiction, thrillers, autobiographies, even the encyclopedia, if that's what interests you.

Gradually, you'll find your niche in the world of literature. You'll come to enjoy reading if you make it enjoyable for yourself in the first place. You never know, you might even win a round-trip to medieval England or a time-machine adventure to the year 2097!

Make the most of junior year

By AMY GORDON
The Tattoo

Did you let your early high school years slip through your fingers? It's not too late to turn it all around. Junior year in high school can change the outcome of the rest of your life.

For most kids coming into high school these days, education isn't the main concern. Freshmen in high school tend to devote their time to social interaction and popularity. Who can blame them? Status is what makes the world.

What these freshmen don't realize is that high school is meant for preparation. For four

years, kids are given the opportunity to prepare themselves for what will come ahead: college, careers, and life.

It is not uncommon for smart kids to bomb their freshman year in high school. They focus too much on what clothes they are wearing and what they can do next weekend and too little on their education. Sophomore year can easily follow a similar pattern.

For those who let their first two years in high school go, there is still hope. If you know that college is right for you, keep this in mind: junior year is when it really matters.

Colleges love improvement.

If your transcript shows that you had consistent Bs and Cs both freshmen and sophomore year but strong As and high Bs junior year, they can see that you've realized what is important. By noting such improvement, colleges can see that you can actively turn your bad grades around and work to keep them strong.

This is your final impression. When you send your transcript to your dream college, your junior year is the last set of grades they will see. This is your last chance to impress them. The strong grades you hold in your junior year will be likely to shadow over your bad

grades, turning them into a thing of the past.

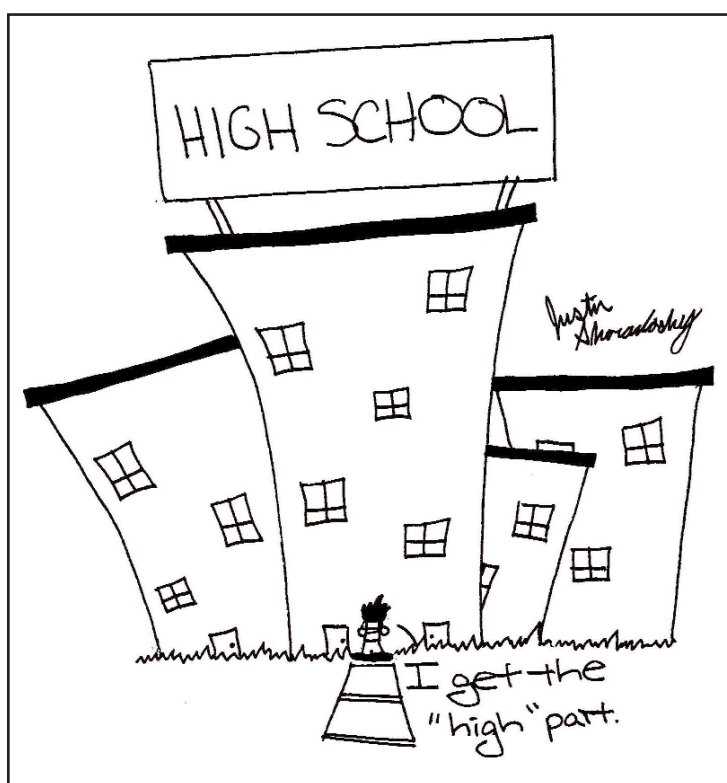
Study hard for the SATs. If your GPA isn't impressive, make up for it with awesome SAT scores. Take SAT classes. Buy a review book. If you have any spare time, open the book and take a practice test. If standardized tests aren't your thing, explore some extracurricular activities. Join a sports team or try writing for the school newspaper. There are options.

So if you are sitting at home dreading this time of the year again, shake it off. You can change it all in one year. Just remember: *this is your last chance*. Make it count!

One teen's story of Hurricane Katrina

Don't miss the extraordinary 'Hurricane Journal' kept by 17-year-old Samantha Perez on *The Tattoo's* website. In a vivid, heartbreaking account, Perez details her flight from her home near New Orleans - a home that Hurricane Katrina wiped out hours later.

It's an amazing, ongoing look at a teen whose life was ripped apart by the storm's fury. For an intensely personal story - and one that is exclusive to *The Tattoo* - check the website at www.ReadTheTattoo.com, and come back for updates.



Justin Skaradosky / The Tattoo

Don't abuse your freedom

By MARESSA ZAHRA
The Tattoo

The countdown that counts has just started. It's back to school time, unfortunately, for most of us.

Let me be honest, gearing up for school ain't my most favorite hobby, and probably not yours either, but it's still important in order to get through your freshman year.

I can even hear you ask, "What the heck does she mean with gearing up?"

Well, I can reassure you that my version is not your parents' one, if that's any comfort. Yes, yes, no studying and you gear up just the same, maybe better.

I mean something that no amount of endless studying without ambition can ever reach. It's about achieving a mindset where you ask yourself where you want to stand in the next few years.

Do you wanna repeat? Do you wanna get straight As? Whichever one you choose, think up an action plan. Believe me, high school has so many traps - too much freedom - that you'll need one.

Speaking of freedom, beware! Between high school and your previous life there's a gap of world-shattering proportions. You'll have the freedom of not attending classes. You might just be able to skip homework so easily you'll gasp. Your teacher might not even learn your name for two years.

At high school everyone will just worry about himself - most teachers and counselors are there for the pay, and you must get into college someday, so you better think about your marks.

That said, it follows that you can't be a baby. Anyways, you're not supposed to be. Babies don't go to high school. So, for your sake, don't allow

yourself to be one.

Missing classes and not doing your work is the conventional recipe for falling behind. And you don't want your friends graduating while you study makeup lessons, do you?

Graduation may seem light years away, but these years fly so fast you won't see them, and you won't even realize it until they're past and buried.

But let's not beat around the bush! You want to miss classes because that's just so mighty cool. You'll enter into that cool clique. That popular person will start to notice you, yes *you*, and perhaps you've been uncool and unpopular for so long! You may even get that date you dreamed of for years.

Sure, it will get you instant popularity and other trivial rewards. But don't fret so much over it. Popular people change at a faster pace than Colin Farrell's girlfriends.

Popular one day, zombie the next, that's the rule of the day at most high schools. Though of course, it never hurts to be popular one of those days... but don't inflate your head, I've warned you. It's okay, don't strangle me for nagging!

Just bear with me a bit more; I've got a confession to make that will make all this come to some sense. I know what it feels like to want to act cool, but the feeling of remaining behind just isn't worth it.

I've been through it, and believe me, getting out of that kind of a mess takes a hell of a lot longer than it did to get into it.

You'll attend high school just once in your life. I hope that alone inspires you to use your time well and make the cut to college successfully.

There, I've told you. My conscience is clear now. Good luck.

Being the same is oh, so lame

By LIANE HARDER
The Tattoo

"Stand Out to Fit In" was the title of last year's yearbook at my high school in Michigan. As much as us journalism kids hate the yearbook kids, I have to admit it was sort of a good theme.

Although standing out won't exactly help you fit in, who wants to fit in, anyway? The point of high school is to prepare you for the future. If your goal is to be successful, you need to stand out. Otherwise, you'll just end up in a cubicle somewhere, just like all the other "cool kids."

It's such a shame to spend 40 bucks on a shirt, if 12 of your closest friends already have it. Why not save half of that, buy a shirt you really like, and start a new trend? Because fitting in is a waste of money, if you ask me.

Shopping at a thrift store will not only save you money, but you can find some really cool stuff hidden at The Salvation Army.

Besides being a waste of your hard-earned cash, fitting in is boring. When all of your friends are clones, you don't get much variety in conversations, and your friends all want to do the same things. The parties all start to look the same after one semester, too.

Fitting in is generally lame. If you want to be a cool kid without sarcastic quotation marks around it, you have to stand out.

Take it from someone who has tried it, and hated it: fitting in is no fun. Just be yourself, and high school will be the time of your life.

high school life and even when you pursue a job.

Extracurricular activities help you develop leadership. Most of these actions will put you in situations in which you will be forced to make decisions. Soon you'll find out that the pressure of extracurricular activities is beneficial to build your character and will affect the way you approach school and personal issues.

Also, you will soon learn organizational skills. For example, you might be asked to run a school event. Maybe you can finally employ your math talents and become a treasurer. Enjoy yourself writing or drawing cartoons for the school paper. You will surely find a use for your talent in the vast list of extracurricular activities. No talent? It's never too late to master one.

Another worthy - and probably the most important - reason to engage in some extracurricular activity is that your participation looks absolutely good on your college applications.

Generally, admission officers think that people with this kind of work on

their resume are responsible and can manage to maintain a long-term commitment by consent.

So if you are at least considering going to college, you should definitely join the chess club, become part of the student paper, work your way into the school government or simply involve yourself in any organization at your high school.

But don't go all the way off the curriculum. A common mistake people make is to join every possible school activity there is. If you enjoy it and can do it, ignore this and keep it up!

There is nothing wrong whatsoever with being a multitasking young person. However, if you notice your grades going down, or you realize that you haven't been attending the school paper meetings because it clashes with the day you are supposed to be helping the elderly after band practice, you better scale back a bit.

It is important for you to focus on what fits you. You can't be interested in everything. Narrow your choices by making a list of potential activities

and putting the ones that best fit your interests at the top.

Then again, you shouldn't completely limit yourself to the familiar. Try something new. Ask yourself if you want to be a support person in some group. If your GPA allows it, you might as well use it to your advantage and join the Honor Society.

Even if you are just looking to spend your spare time wisely, I'm sure you'll find something in store for you. But remember, start with simple roles and work your way up the pyramid.

Don't expect to become school president or captain of the football team in the first few weeks. Being a member is a good start and it often gives you a better and more relaxed perspective - without the responsibility and leadership required of a president.

Another benefit of extracurricular activities is that they usually are your social outlet. It's good to interact with your peers, but it's even easier to interact with those who share your interests. You never know who might be your future employer.

In high school it might not matter if you're a loner, but in the real world, you need to eat and for that you need a job. It would be foolish not to recognize that acquaintances can be helpful in that field.

If all the college crap and social interaction don't sound convincing enough, one of the obvious reasons to join extracurricular activities is that they give you something better to do than sleeping or staring at the ceiling.

You have enough time right now. Use it wisely. Later in life you will probably be bound to a job or marriage. Have fun. Start building a network of people. It's through experience that you really learn. Books won't teach you how to interact with the "real deal."

Drench yourself with the healthy stress extracurricular activities bring. Whether you want to make your college application more appealing or your personal life more exciting, there is always a good reason to get off the curriculum.

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The best teen journalism in the world. For questions, comments or to join, contact advisors Steve Collins and Jackie Majerus at (860)523-9632.