

THE TATTOO

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High school years are finally here

By ZACH BROKENROPE
The Tattoo

In less than a week, I will once again enter the brick walls of Aurora High School, for the very first time as a student, as the scourge of all upperclassmen. Yes, I, Zach Brokenrope, will be a freshman, or frosh, as we are so lovingly called.

So, you may ask, am I nervous about this upcoming year as I'm told I'm supposed to be?

No, not really.

In Aurora, Nebraska, the grades are generally integrated since there is only one complex that houses the elementary, middle and high school.

As a result, you become friends gradually with everyone who's anywhere near you in grade.

In fact, some of my best friends are seniors or juniors — something that should never happen, according to Hollywood and teen magazines.

Another reason for my non-apprehension about the prospect of high school is that Aurora Middle School and Aurora High School are only separated by a 10-foot narrow road where the buses drive through.

In middle school, you even have classes in the high school, such as band and chorus.

So now that you've got the answer to the most important question about being a freshman in Aurora, I'm going to move on.

In Nebraska, the week before means one thing: school shopping.

It's that dreaded week of searching for school supplies and going to the mall with a handful of money trying to find "something nice," like your parents told you.

However, finding that "something nice" tends to be

harder than you think.

The first hurdle you must pass in searching for your wardrobe is the dress code of your school, which here is strict, tighter than a corset (anyone else see "Pirates of the Caribbean?")

the freshman diaries

that are available (no Abercrombie & Fitch for us).

Okay, if you pass that first hurdle there's one more: your parents.

If you buy something black then they might think you're Gothic and send you to a counselor — and who wants that just because of some clothes?

That's what I have for now.

As this year continues, though, I hope to tell you everything. These are my confessions.

So automatically that takes out most of the screen print t-shirts



Ron Haden / The Tattoo

Incoming freshmen at Aurora High School, Aurora, Neb., pose in celebration on their last day of eighth grade in May. In the back row are, from left, Anna Cepek, Allen Fruit, Zach Brokenrope, Jake Vaught, Erik Swazo, Betsy Shaw and Andy Hohweiler. In the center row are, from left, Levi Anderson, Hannah Johnson, Brooke Oswald, Meredith Edwards, Kristina Flores, Micheal Luna, Nick Schrunck and Chris McDonald. In the front are, from left, Janny Joo, Justine Newquist, and John Sysshouvan.

Find your own path

By STEFAN KOSKI
The Tattoo

At the beginning of the school year, it's only appropriate to take pity on the new incoming freshman, inexperienced, ill-prepared and hopelessly innocent — cannon fodder, if you will.

Sure, some freshmen are going to be excited about starting high school.

Some might even be under the impression that these next four years are going to be the fabled "glory days of youth."

For some, they might well turn out that way.

For the rest, certainly for most of the normal people out there, this just might be an all-expense-paid ticket to the fiery torments of Hades.

So if you are a freshman, what do you do?

Well, like in all disaster situations, the key thing to remember is to remain calm.

Upperclassmen can smell fear, and will react accordingly.

Keep cool, don't panic, and above all, don't freak out.

Venting your fear, anger or insanity might feel better in the short term, but in the long run you'll probably regret it.

Scratch that — you'll definitely regret it.

Next, from a social standpoint, do not try to stand out.

All your life you've been told to be yourself. Now I'm telling you that you should do that only to a certain extent.

Don't open yourself to ridicule or do something stupid that will make you a target for derision.

Trust me, you're going to have plenty of opportunities to screw up in public. There's no need to start right from the beginning.

Eventually, you're bound to find some people that you click with, but don't be stressed out if it doesn't happen right away.

For all of your academic-related paranoias, I'd advise you to just relax.

Grades are important, but they're not a life and death struggle.

If you fail a test or something, life will go on. It's when you fail four or five in a row that you need to start being concerned.

Do a sport or join a club, but only the ones that you really want to try.

Never do anything simply because it'll look good on a college resume.

A lot of things will. It doesn't hurt to start thinking about college, but it's no big deal if you're a little lost when it comes to future careers. Most kids are.

Cafeteria food? Hell, if you're brave and you've got health insurance, go for it.

I've never touched the stuff. Just because chicken nuggets have white meat doesn't mean it came from a chicken. (Rats have white meat too, y'know.)

And when it comes to your "extracurricular" activities, try not to sink yourself too deep.

I've known a lot of freshmen who kick off their high school lifestyle at full force and live to regret it.

There's only one thing that can prepare you for high school: experience. And, kid, there's only one way to get that.

Some adults don't want me to tell you this, but if you're going to be drinking at a party, make sure it's with a group of friends that you trust.

You want to be in good hands so that if, for some reason, you go too far, you'll have people that'll be able to help you.

I'd also suggest that you stay away from weed and cigarettes, but ultimately, it's your life.

You're the one that's going to decide what the next four years (and beyond) are going to be like for you.

I've met people who've done both, and they're not really any happier because of it.

I'm sure you've still got a lot of questions, but in all honesty, there's only one thing that can prepare you for high school: experience.

And, kid, there's only one way to get that.

I'll just end by saying, "Good luck, freshman."

You're going to need it.

Remember to keep calm, keep cool, and, lastly, when you're lost on that first day, don't ask people like me for directions.

It only gives me a chance to use one of my favorite lines: "Excuse me, do you know where Room 124 is?"

"Yeah, it's right after Room 123 and right before Room 125. It's got a door and everything. You can't miss it."

My freshman love affair with the Wall

By MINHA LEE
The Tattoo

Freshman year of high school is a time that will bring back many memories to each and every one of us.

Some will smile when they are reminded of their first year. Some will complain, some will suddenly get silent, and some will shrug like it was no big deal.

But one thing is for certain: it transforms every single one of us, even to the point where our high school experiences dictate what kind of a person we will end up being.

For me, freshmen year was a series of changes.

After one trimester at Roseville Area High School in Minnesota, my family decided to move to a different city. So I had to go to Prior Lake High School just when things were starting to get into routine at Roseville.

I got to be the nervous freshman twice in the same year.

On my first day at Roseville, I was like many other freshmen. I got lost, I mostly didn't get to see my friends due to different schedules, and my slight fear of the upperclassmen made me walk down the hallway with my new best friend, the Wall.

But I realized that everyone was just as nervous as I was, and my first day of school was over soon before I could analyze the whole situation.

As the days passed, things gradually got better.

I had made some new friends and the Wall and I were seen together only in crowded hallways.

My daily routine happily changed to fit my new high school life.

The only thing that remained unhappily unchanged was myself.

It is hard to shed other people's perception of you when you have been in that mold for some time. Often you even get so comfortable in that mold that you don't know how to come out of it, or you don't have the willpower to change other's perceptions of who you are.

So until you are confident enough to

In middle school, I had been known as the smart, geeky kid who asked a lot of odd questions. I also didn't have much confidence.

show the world who you really want to be, you get stuck in that perception, in that mold, until the end of your high school days.

That is one of the biggest mistakes that sometimes goes unnoticed, and it is a mistake that I almost made.

In middle school, I had been known as the smart, geeky kid who asked a lot of odd questions. I also didn't have much confidence.

In high school, I wanted to change that. I didn't mind the odd question part, since I was curious by nature, but I felt a need to become more confident to do all the things that I always wanted to do.

And I wanted to do so many things.

I wanted join the art club, debate, speech, yearbook, soccer and more. Most importantly, I wanted to meet new people and make new friends without being insecure about myself.

But I was afraid of rejection and my mind was filled with "what if...s." I was afraid of what people around me would think.

Nonetheless, I broke that cycle of negative thoughts and decided to try debate. There, my confidence level slowly started to rise. I gradually stopped caring about what other people would think of me.

When I started my new school in January, my newfound confidence started to bloom. This time I actually started practicing the art of small talk with people that I'd never met. I joined new activities. I didn't need the Wall's faithful friendship and to my own surprise I made new friends fast.

I don't mean to say that everything is perfect.

My confidence level still drops to near zero when I fall in the middle of the crowded hallway and I still feel insecure when I know that a bunch of girls that I don't know are talking about me.

What took me the longest time to learn about situations like these is that they will only become a big deal if you treat them like a big deal.

What you do and experience in high school will affect you for a long time.

The best way to change other people's perception of who you are is to give them something to remember.

You don't get a second chance to relive your freshmen year, so don't let other people decide who you are or who you should be.

And if all else fails, the Wall will always be by your side.

Teens from across the globe meet in *The Tattoo*

It doesn't matter where in the world you are — if you are a teenager, *The Tattoo* is for you.

Written by teens from across the globe, the award-winning stories in *The Tattoo* offer something for everyone.

This edition marks the third installment of the 2004 *Insider's Guide to High School*, which aims to help all those incoming freshmen get a clue. It's stuffed with solid advice from the voices of experience, the teens who most recently walked the halls of their high schools for the first time. As upperclassmen, they now know the drill and are good enough to pass along some words of wisdom in a straightforward way to those who need it most.

Beyond the award-winning *Insider's Guide*, *The Tattoo* offers news and views on most everything of interest to teens and the people who care about them.

The Tattoo is currently in recruitment mode, looking for young writers, photographers and cartoonists from Bristol to Bangkok. We are not affiliated with any school and welcome all teens. The group is free to join and meets weekly.

Tattoo members have had all kinds of interesting experiences, from covering the X Trials and interviewing extreme athletes to petting penguins and talking to politicians.

Our writers tackle tough topics like teen pregnancy and suicide, school violence, war and tor-

ture. They also write about movies, books, music, skateparks and a lot of other stuff. If you haven't seen our website, check it out at www.ReadTheTattoo.com.

Tattoo members have won a slew of awards and some college scholarships, too. There's no better way to learn the journalism trade — or just gain confidence, writing and interviewing skills — than by being part of *The Tattoo*.

The group is run by volunteer advisors Jackie Majerus and Steve Collins, who spend their days as news reporters for *The Bristol Press*.

To alert readers of upcoming pages, we maintain a confidential email list. If you would like to be notified of future issues — look for our next one in mid-September — send us an email and we will add your name to the list. If you or someone you know might be interested in joining this dynamic group, call the advisors at 523-9632 or drop them an email at thetattoo@gmail.com.

You won't know until you try, and it might just change your life.

In the photo at right, *Tattoo* staff writer Kaishi Lee sits in the second row from the top, at the far left. She's with her senior class from Temasek Junior College in Singapore. They will graduate in the spring.

Photo courtesy Kaishi Lee



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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 523-9632.