

THE **GAVEL**

MAY 2016/VOLUME 52 NO. 4



Han Dang



Jesus
Ruelas

THE PEOPLE ISSUE



Olivia Astorga



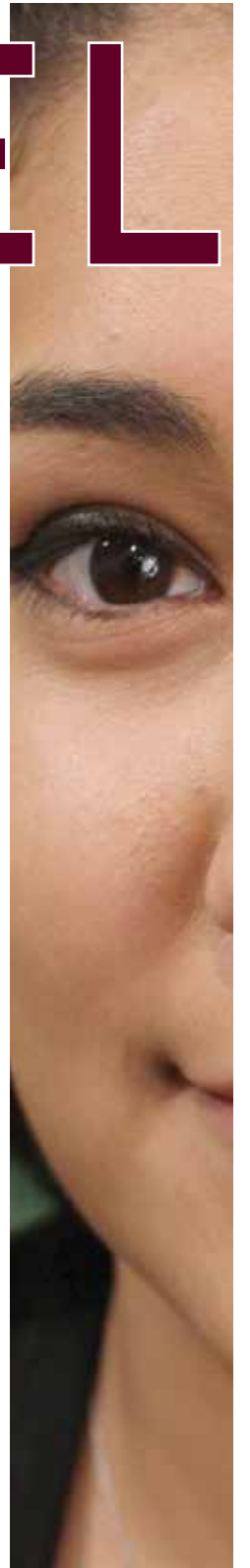
Jordyn Sloan



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Schuessler



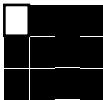
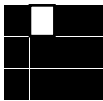
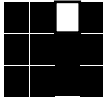
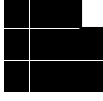

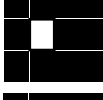
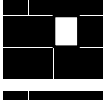


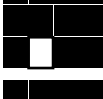
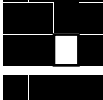
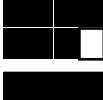
Mr. Lopez



Rachel Freret



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THE PEOPLE ISSUE

There are students from many walks of life that create the culture that makes up this school. Rarely do we delve into the individual lives that are parts of the whole. The people issue is our opportunity to shift the focus from what and who we see as the main characters and setting of what goes on here, to a different set of stars with interesting and sometimes incredible stories.

There are people who influence us, teach us, and inspire us on campus, but those may just be a small handful of friends and family. There are stories that can influence, teach, and inspire us in the strangers we walk by on the way to third period every day, or in the friend of a friend who sits in the back of our math class. Hopefully, the stories of those included in this issue do the work of influencing, teaching, and inspiring our readers.

Each person within this issue has seen struggle and has triumphed in the face of their own individual adversity. Whether it be a death, the fear of an unknown future, or the pressures of taking on responsibility, these people were not a product of their environment, but chose to go beyond.

Relevant to the campus, these challenges and struggles are universally relatable, and through these stories we see living proof that once we put our mind to it, we can overcome.

Readers will notice we chose to use close portraits for the art in this issue, featuring the eyes, smiles, and worry lines on people's faces that also share a story. Additionally, the words and names you see in handwriting belong to the subjects themselves, and many have included a quote or saying that they hold dear.

Please enjoy these up close and personal stories of the living testaments that are stitches in the fabric of our campus. This is the People Issue.

THE GAVEL

This magazine is published twice a semester, along with regular postings on Gavel Online (studentnews.nisd.net/holmes), and daily news via our Facebook page (Holmes/BC News), Twitter, and Instagram (@holmesbcnews) by the journalism department at Holmes/Business Careers High School, as a laboratory project for students in advanced newspaper classes. Its purpose is to provide leadership in news and editorial content, and to create an open forum for student and staff opinion.

Letters to the editor are encouraged, and may be submitted via e-mail to matthew.singleton@nisd.net, or presented in person in room A102d. The staff reserves the right to edit all letters for length and/or appropriate language or libelous content. All letters must be signed. For advertising information or rates, e-mail Matthew Singleton, or call (210) 397-7054.

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Always stay optimistic
and stay involved.
Rachel Frazer

1ST THROUGH THE WORST

CLASS OF 2016 VALEDICTORIAN DETERMINED TO SUCCEED DESPITE PAST HARDSHIPS, OBSTACLES

by Victoria Johnson, Senior Staff Writer

Senior Rachel Frazer may be on top now, but she certainly wasn't given the easiest road on life's journey. She was just shy of ten years old when her parents divorced and her family separated. Frazer's mother took her and her two older siblings and moved to San Antonio, leaving their old lives back in Austin. But even their new beginning came with a rocky start.

For her mother, finding a job with a stable income to support three children was only part of the problem. With no other options, the family was forced to live out of a ramshackle trailer home on a friend's farm. The conditions were rough, with barely a roof over their heads and no running water.

It was love and a new found appreciation for each other that kept the family alive.

"We really learned to take care of each other and we became really close as a family. And we had some fun times too. Me and my brother and sister would play and run around in this cornfield not far from the house. And my mom worried about us not getting smart because we were always playing instead of studying." Frazer said.

Once she'd begun to come to grips with this new life, and after being homeschooled all her life, Frazer faced another hurdle, public school.

"I took my first standardized test, the math TAKS test, and I spent 20 minutes staring at the front page. I didn't know it was a formula sheet, because I had never seen one before. I was freaking out, and my teacher came over and said, 'You just turn the page,'" Frazer said.



Despite the setbacks, Frazer was determined to do her best in school. Teachers and counselors alike all praised Frazer for her hard work and undeterrable spirit, and encouraged her to pursue even higher academic achievements by taking advanced placement courses all through middle and high school. Not being one to back down from a challenge, Frazer accepted, and continues to rise above the crowd. Testing isn't a problem anymore.

"I've definitely come a long way since then, I actually did Academic Decathlon this year, which is nothing but testing." Frazer said.

Frazer had been told all her life that the most important thing was to go to college and make lots of money in order to succeed and be happy. Her freshman year made her question this belief, which had become a kind of mantra she lived by. A values assessment she took asked questions like; "If you could choose to get a promotion at the expense of someone else losing their job, would you do it?" the results of the assessment challenged her.

"I answered something like, of course I would, whatever it takes to get to the top," Frazer said.

When she received her results, she was shocked to find out that her character was someone strong, independent, power-driven, and was only motivated by money. At the bottom of the list of motivations were happiness and finding the beauty in life.

"I thought to myself, 'This isn't me, is it? I want to be happy too.' It was an epiphany for me, like I really need to do some soul-searching

and find out who I really am. I want to help people and be a good person," Frazer said.

Continuing to work in the community and organize graffiti clean ups with the Interact Club and ROTC, Frazer has found something to truly believe in. She credits most of her success to the love and support of her family, the same family she went through so many struggles with early in life, like going out for ice cream with her mom when she gets straight A's, and having a shoulder to cry on when she doesn't get straight A's.

"My brother and sister make fun of me. They call me a nerd because I'm always studying. But it's okay because I am a nerd and I like it. That's who I am and I'm proud of it," Frazer said.

Becoming the valedictorian of the class of 2016 was not an easy task. But no one could have done it as elegantly as Frazer. After graduation, Frazer plans to continue her education in Boston at Wellesley University. Frazer is ready to succeed no matter what comes her way.

"I kind of have mixed feeling about going to college so far away from home because it is so far. Like it's scary being someplace new where I don't know anyone, but it's new and exciting and I still have to figure all this stuff out on my own without my family or friends. But at the same time I'm so excited too, because I'm finally leaving home and I get to go out on this big adventure all by myself and make new friends. And that's a little scary too," Frazer said.

MAN OF THE HOUSE



Family
is the
only thing
that matters

Jesus
Ruelas

JESUS RUELAS LEARNS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF HELPING TAKE CARE OF HIS FAMILY AT A YOUNG AGE

by Keren Cumpian, Staff Writer

Teenagers seek a role model to guide them through their life, especially throughout high school years when students have to make some of the most important decisions of their life. Naturally, parents are the role models for many children. But what happens when that parent and role model passes away, and a student has to step up in their role instead? What happens when worries about school and getting good grades take a back seat to how to care for your family? This is the situation Junior Jesus Ruelas found himself in. When he was eight years old, his dad passed away, and the younger Ruelas had to mature a little bit faster than the average kid.

The challenges of losing a father and a husband hit the Ruelas family quickly. Many of their possessions were taken away because they no longer had enough money with just a single income. This led the family to move back to their native Mexico, where their extended family was there to help them get back on their feet. When the opportunity came for Ruelas to come back to San Antonio, it wasn't the same. His mom worked long hours, and Ruelas had to take care of his sister by himself.

"No one took care of me [while my mom was working], I had to take care of myself and my sister. When we got home from school, since I

had a key I had a way to get into the house and I would lock the whole thing [doors and windows] because I was scared. I was nine years old," Ruelas said.

One of his lowest points came from being alone. Having to take care of his sister brought bigger responsibility into his life. Helping his mom out meant that he had to miss out on a lot of things throughout his childhood, even playing with his friends.

"Sometimes I couldn't take it. It was a lot of pressure," Ruelas said.

The transition from being a kid, to acting like a man at a young age was not easy. Changing his behavior and thinking like an adult was difficult. Adults would not take him seriously when he tried to step up. Now at age 17, he has realized what a man of the house does, and every day he learns something new about it.

"To be the man of the house just means that I am the one that has to be in front of everything, face everything first, and make sure that everyone behind me is okay," Ruelas said.

When he hit the age to be able to obtain a job, he jumped at the chance. He not only wanted to help his mom pay some of the bills, but he wanted to be able to buy things for himself. Taking on responsibilities

helped him become the person that he is today.

"I had to grow up really fast. In a way it helped me. It's sad, but it did. If my dad wouldn't have passed away, I would have never become the man that I am today," Ruelas said.

Everything that he does from getting good grades to working is for his family, he does because he wants the best for his family, and he's willing to work hard for it.

"I don't regret anything I have done because everything I do is for my family. My family is my motivation. I have to get good grades so that I am able to take care of them and to give them what we missed out on when we went through that dark time," Ruelas said.

He is a leader in his home, and he would like for others to get something from that too. To the many kids going through the same situation as Ruelas, helping take care of their families he has important advice.

"Don't give up. You can always find things you can learn because, who knows, you might need it one day. Take care of your family because that's the only thing that matters."

NO BOUNDARIES

Don't let your past or current circumstances determine your future. Mr. Lopez

LOPEZ CROSSES BORDERS FOR A BETTER LIFE

by Amber Villanueva, Senior Staff Writer

When we look at people we never think of what they've gone through in their lifetime. It's only when we get to know the person when we find out more about them, leading us to understand them more.

Math teacher Rodolfo Lopez is a person that when people look at him, they only see the outer surface. On the surface he's just another teacher; an adult with authority and lesson plans in students lives. Many don't see the difficulties he's been through in his lifetime. When he was a child, Lopez continuously had to cross the border from Mexico and the United States in order for him to attend school there because his parents didn't believe it was suitable for him to go to school in Mexico.

As the alarm rings Lopez wakes up to get ready for school in the United States.

"We had to wake up every morning at 4:30 to cross the bridge into the United States, and it was a process," Lopez said.

It was not only a struggle for him but for his parents as well. His parents were teachers in Mexico so they would have to drop Lopez off

and go back to their jobs. Crossing the border every day was a hassle for them but it was for his education.

"We would be wearing our school uniform while going through checkpoints," Lopez said.

From time to time they would have to move because of their income situation, when money was tight. "We lived in very odd places sometimes, but it taught me to appreciate what I have. We lived a very humble life," Lopez said.

From first grade one, he was taught to make sacrifices. Since his parents were making sacrifices Lopez decided he couldn't just sit around and do nothing. Because of this, he wanted to show his parents that he could become something great, and he did. Lopez continued the routine and graduated from UT Austin to become a teacher like his parents.

He kept a mindset developed from these hardships throughout his whole life and it got him where he is today. From this whole experience, he learned that "you have to make the best with what you have."



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DOING IT Write

STAFF BEHIND GAVEL ONLINE

by Alondra Martinez, Copy Editor

Along with contributions to this publication, these staff members work and contribute to the Gavel Online (studentnews.nisd.net/holmes) reporting on the latest news for students and the community.



Lizbeth Perez
Gavel Online Editor

"When I first got in journalism, I didn't imagine that it would matter much to me, but as the year progressed, it made me realize that journalism is all I want to do as a career."



Stormy Rice
Staff Reporter/Writer

"Journalism has made me really realize the type of person I want to become and the career choice I want to aim for. My love and knowledge of journalism has grown and I can't wait to continue my love next year."



Alexa Gonzalez
Social Media Editor

"I love informing the whole school using technology. It opened my eyes as to how important technology is. It makes things ten times easier."



Madeline Sierra
News Desk Editor

"My favorite thing about journalism is that we get to create articles from scratch from the ideas and events that are happening around Holmes and in the community. I love being able to be creative and figure out ways to express and inform people around the campus."



Bryanna Ramirez
Staff Artist/Designer

"Journalism is a good experience that I'm glad I got to be a part of in high school. It makes me feel like I'm actually a part of something great. It is an amazing thing to be a part of."



Christian Williams
Senior Staff Writer

"I've enjoyed writing articles for our school's paper and online news page. Being a part of journalism, I've also enjoyed the interactions I've had with other students and staff members. I have learned to become more confident in my writing abilities. I have fond memories of my experience in journalism and will take a lot of what I have learned and gained outside of school."

Home Sweet

HOLMES

DESPITE ODDS, STUDENTS MAKE A NEW HOME AT HOLMES

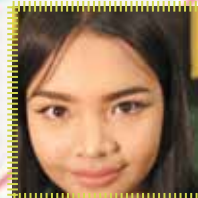
by Alondra Martinez, Copy Editor

This issue is about highlighting people on campus whose stories have reached our hearts. There is a group of students on campus who have background stories like few others. They come from all over the world and have faced poverty, crime, persecution and other living conditions that have pushed their families to look for a better life. In doing so, they are working to create a new home in this community.

Coming here was a new experience and challenge for some of these students, and some have never had most of the things that others on campus take for granted, like running water, electricity and accessible technology. For some, their first experience with a computer was in a Holmes High School computer lab.

Whether they've been here for two years or six months, these students have been learning English and even Spanish in order to communicate with their peers and get their education. Their willingness to learn and study has driven them on their search for a better life. After college, most of the students have shared that they want to get jobs that save and change lives, such as being a doctor in their homeland or becoming a teacher.

For this article, students in Veronica Parras' ESL classes learned a little about journalism and how to interview and write someone else's story. Each student had a partner and interviewed them, then wrote a news story about their life. The process helped them learn more about each other and how to write better in English. With their permission, excerpts from their stories appear here. Keep connected with @holmesbcnews and the Gavel Online (studentnews.nisd.net/holmes) for more of their stories coming soon.



Nyrmala Nurislam
Johor Bahru, Malaysia

One of Mel's goals in the United States is to study and graduate to become a doctor and after that return to her country to help people who need medical help. Her family had to move to America for a better life now. She is now living here with her father and stepmother and her real mother is in Malaysia.

written by Bayron Alfaro



Freddy Muhumure
Kigali Rwanda

Freddy says that the government is not very good; they kill innocent people instead of the criminals. What he misses from Rwanda is his animals that he used to take care of, mostly cows and goats. He came to the United States on an airplane. The government paid for his tickets because he was a refugee. When he turns eighteen, he wants to pay back the government for everything they've given him.

written by Adair Nunez



Abi Oviedo
Choluteca Honduras

Abi had never seen her mother, except through photographs, and when she spoke with her on the phone. One of the reasons that she came to the United States is that in her country there was a lot crime. Abi told me that one day when she was leaving from school, two shoplifters pointed a gun at her head. She was so scared, but the guys only took her phone.

written by Jocelyne Rodriguez



Rand Alsaberi
Baghdad, Iraq

During the war in Syria, Rand didn't go to school for two years. Her father didn't allow her to go to school because there were a lot of bombs near her school. In 2009, when she was just nine years old, a terrible thing happened to her again -- the second war in her life. In her experience, she saw a lot of people being killed and a lot of places have been destroyed by bombs. She hopes to get a peaceful life with her family and that there is no more war in the world.

written by Siau Yeat Im



Jackson Dufumukiza
Congo

"In my country, there are no apartments. You have your own house and you don't pay bills because there is no electricity. Our life is difficult. People who live in my country and come here, face difficulties because it's different. In my country, I never used a computer. It was the first time I used a computer [when I came here]."

as told to Alondra Martinez



Esperance Nyabikiza
Congo

"When you go get water, it's not good to go by yourself. You have to go with your brother or sister. There are bad people. They can kill you. It would take two hours to go there and back. When you go to wash your clothes, it would take like six or seven [hours], because there aren't machines. I miss my friends. When I finish [school], I want to be an ESL teacher. I want to help other students like me."

as told to Alondra Martinez



Manoj Majhi
Nepal

Manoj came to United State from Nepal. He once lived in a refugee camp in a poor country. His home was a shelter made out of bamboo and plastic. He lived with his parents, his four older sisters, and a little brother.

written by Siau R. Im



Rashidah
Kluang Johor Malaysia

"I was born in Malaysia, but my parents are from Yemen. In Yemen, there were a lot of problems. They killed Muslims and life was not good, so my parents went to Malaysia. I miss Malaysia, but fortunately, I came here and I'm going to study. In Malaysia, because my parents are from Yemen, I can't study, graduate or become a doctor."

as told to Alondra Martinez



Paw Ku
Maha Thailand

During the daytime was the only time that Paw Ku was able to go to school. She had to do a lot of activities by moonlight, like homework. The big deal was how to find water. She had to walk twelve miles to the tank to get water because it was very far from where she used to live.

written by Moises Zakayo



Siau Yeat Im (yester)
From Malaysia 马来西亚

Sian Yeat Im moved to the United States in 2015. She came with her parents, but they went back to Malaysia because they didn't have immigration papers and her dad had a job there. Now, she is living with her sister and grandparents. She speaks: English, Chinese, Hokkien, Cantonese, Malay and a little bit of Korean. She is interested in learning first aid because she wants to be a nurse in the future.

written by Rand Asaberi



Sadako Ogata
Rwanda Central Africa

Before she was born, Sadako's parents fled from Congo to a refugee camp in Rwanda. She was one of the first babies to be born in that refugee camp. She was named Sadako after Sadako Ogata who was a leader of UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency. After high school, she wants to continue studying to achieve her goals by going to college and pursuing a career in nursing.

written by Iris Alvarez



Han Dang
"Beyond your comfort zone
is where your life begins"
- unknown

LAND OF THE BRAVE

DANG MAKES BIG MOVE FROM VIETNAM, SHOWS BRAVERY TO FACE FAMILY AND CULTURAL CHALLENGES

by Victoria Falcon, Design Editor

She is at the airport and she can't stop crying. It sinks in that she must leave behind one home she has spent the entirety of her life in, because in a little more than a day, she must call a new place her home. Her best friend won't stop holding her hand so she can board the plane. Once her friend finally does let go, she takes her flight across the world. Upon arriving, she hears nothing but indistinguishable voices and sounds that she can't understand. The panic, fear, and anxiety swell up inside of her. She takes a step back in this tough moment and realizes she must be brave in order to do what is best for her family and her own future. She must be brave in order to let go.

This bravery is something senior Han Dang has become well acquainted with. Moving here from her home country of Vietnam, and transitioning into American life her sophomore year, along with what came afterwards were all situations that required Dang to have much courage.

Coming to a new country where people do not speak your native language or don't understand your upbringing was difficult for Dang.

"I got to learn English when I was in my country, but the hardest part was whether I was brave enough to try to talk to people in English," Dang said.

When she first moved here, patience was a virtue Dang had to keep in mind when speaking in English.

"I used to have a lot of thoughts running through my head in Vietnamese, and it's hard to translate all of that to English," Dang said.

Moreover, certain notions circulate about how America treats outsiders and Dang was prepared for the worst of it.

"I heard a lot about discrimination and racism from back in the past, but I don't see it here, especially at Holmes High School," Dang said.

Dang found that people at Holmes are very friendly and talked to her first. She realized that it was okay to be herself and allowed herself to be brave.



"I don't feel like I'm being judged by all the people, so I put myself out there and share my story. I'm even doing an interview with you," Dang said.

Dang knows there are still issues with her communication skills and broken English, but she brushes it off and faces it head on, confident that she will continue to improve.

"I'm not worried about my language because I'm still young and I can learn more. I'm still learning right now, but I think I'm not going to stop trying. I'm going to try harder so that barrier becomes smaller and smaller, and it's going to disappear," she said.

Dang is ranked 23 in her class and this number in itself proves how hard she worked in the face of adversity for her own success. Dang credits one program in particular for assistance in her academic achievements: AVID, and her teacher Monica Yzaguirre.

"AVID helped me a lot, especially Mrs. Y. When we did the shaving cream activity she wrote on my paper 'diligent' and she said my hard work will pay off. I really took that quote and just kept doing what she said," Dang said.

Although Dang has faced much trouble with letting go of her country, the move, the language barrier, and the pressure of academia, she believes her most strenuous problems come from her family and their hesitance about Dang going off to college on her own after high school.

"My struggle was when I had to talk to my family about going to college. Like my whole entire family. We have a big family. It was hard for me to try to convince them that I am capable of doing things," Dang said.

Dang's family found it hard to accept her dreams in fear for her safety, and what they believed she was made of. Dang explains that they may just have underestimated her, yet she is determined to reveal

her truth.

"I felt it was unfair at first and I thought, 'maybe they're right,' but later on, because of what I'm doing in AVID, I got accepted into college. I may not have proved it to them yet, but I'm doing it now. I am a semi-finalist for scholarships, and with all the things I have accomplished I feel like they are wrong because I can do better. That's how I'm trying to prove to them that I am brave, and that I'm confident enough to go beyond," Dang said.

In her post-secondary education, Dang plans to study to become a surgeon. One of Dang's long-term goals is to return to her country to provide better medical care in Vietnam.

"They didn't provide good medical care and it touched me. At first I was angry, and now I want to help them. I want to change the medical services of my country. I don't like to see people struggle," Dang said.

What Dang witnessed in the hospitals in her country was unforgivable to her, and she is choosing to have the heart and will to change it.

"I heard nurses yell at patients a lot and it made me mad, health providers are supposed to be caring and give all they have got," Dang said.

Unconditional care and kindness are qualities rooted deep within Dang. She believes it is right to only offer up a helpful hand.

"I love giving my best and being nice, and it doesn't matter if they are going to give back to you because you help and feel good about it. I feel good about everything I do," Dang said.

Dang gave herself permission to leave her comfort zone in order to do what was best for her in the outcome of her life. Her story is full of many other little stories that construct the powerful person that stands tall. Every day, she fights to be a person in this world that others may lack the ability to be. She is proud to display her bravery. Dang shares her story confidently because she wants all to understand her journey.

"I want everyone to know how hard I worked to get to my success," Dang said.

Beaming with CONFIDENCE



don't be afraid to be different,
like I know that's cliché but it really
does relieve stress and will make you
much happier, I guarantee it.
Jordyn Sloan



LEFT: Sloan's Instagram post was her way of sharing her story. She had the caption saved in her notes, and decided she should post it one day along with the photo.

FIRST-PLACE GYMNAST SLOAN OPENS UP ABOUT LIFE STRUGGLE IN ORDER TO FIND TRUE HAPPINESS

by Janelle Martinez, Senior Staff Writer

The gymnast took a step onto the first place podium for State in Dallas, TX. She looked around and thought to herself "wow, I've made it this far." Those who saw that gymnast, saw a winner, but also only saw what she allowed them to see. They couldn't see her struggles. That girl was senior Jordyn Sloan, and her journey to the winner's stand started when she was one and a half years old.

What most people watching her at the podium didn't know about Sloan is that she was struggling with something she couldn't control or change. She was born without toes, and had complications with that. After one particular surgery she had, Sloan did something she had always been thinking about doing but never actually done. She posted a picture on Instagram of herself in a gymnastics pose along with a paragraph about her secret she had always feared people would find out.

"I've always had that paragraph saved in my notes because I know I wanted to do it. When I finally did it, I just never deleted it and I don't regret it," Sloan said. After having self doubt about when was the right time to come out and tell people, if she should even tell people, she made the bold move.

The thing that encouraged her more were the reactions to the post from her friends.

"I expected people to support me, and especially my closest friends. A lot of people commented saying 'good job' and 'I'm so proud of you'. Their reactions made me think that maybe I could have posted it sooner. All the supportive comments made me feel a lot better," Sloan said.

"Before opening up to people I would always feel scared, but after I would feel relieved, like 'oh okay that's out of the way'," Sloan said.

Her greatest struggle was finally being open about her challenges.

"The anxiety I would feel from it made me keep it a secret. It's not normal, like it's not natural. Not everybody is like me so, it's like weird or different trying to explain to them over and over and over everything that happened. It's just scary," Sloan said.

Her greatest struggle was finally being open about her challenges.

Just a couple words of encouragement went a long way in making her feel better about herself. The success she's found in gymnastics has given her the confidence to express herself. She felt proud of herself standing on that first place podium knowing she had done things some people would think were impossible, just because her body is a little different from most people's. Even through the anxiety and negative thinking, she has gone far in something she enjoys, and learned that there are things about ourselves that can't be changed and can only be embraced if we allow ourselves.

"Don't be afraid about being open about something like that, because it's not that big of a deal. It's something you can't do much about, so just don't try to hide it. It's pointless," Sloan said.

If you just forget about the opinions of others and do what you love, you will be able to do great things. Sloan continues working on becoming more confident and hopes to inspire others who don't think of themselves as "normal."

"I learned it isn't all that bad. Sure there are going to be days where I'm going to hate it and there are moments when I wish I was 'normal', but oh well. It's okay to be different," Sloan said.

INDEPENDENT. WOMAN.



Don't let anyone tell you you're not capable of doing anything because you can do anything!
Olivia Astorga

ASTORGA'S PURSUIT OF THE NAVY, FAMILY HARDSHIPS GIVE MOTIVATION FOR FINDING INDEPENDENCE

by Alicia Yanez, Co-Editor

Hardships in life can mean one of two things. You can let them get to you and control you, or use them to your advantage, build off them and let them motivate you. For many, these things make them the person they are. For senior Olivia Astorga, her family hardships and her pursuit to join the Navy have contributed to making her the person she is today.

"[Joining] the Navy definitely motivated me more not only to prosper within school but as well to push myself. Outside of school, it's just getting away from household problems and distracting myself and being able to succeed in something else that has helped me succeed in other things. It makes it a lot easier to get through," Astorga said.

For many, family is all they have, and when they must worry about family along with their future, it can lead to them wanting bigger things and pushing themselves to accomplish

bigger goals.

"I wanted to give myself a good career and good schooling to serve my country and show respect to the people who served before, and establish my independence for myself," Astorga said.

Not everything comes easy in life, and pushing through the difficult moments give meaning and perspective to Astorga. And while family usually is the solid ground you can stand on, for Astorga, this hasn't always been true.

"I have different family issues that go on, things that are a bit rough at my house. I needed to go somewhere I knew that I would be stable, and somewhere that would help me be successful. Joining the military would be a good option for me," Astorga said.

Even with the hardships, Astorga's family have found ways to support her, and just want to see her succeed.

"My mom was very supportive, and 100 percent behind me. The rest of my family I had to convince and help them understand why I wanted to go, and let them understand what I wanted to do in my future. Now they are also 100 percent by me and supportive," Astorga said.

Astorga excels in her school work which is paving the way for her future in the military, but she's best known on campus for her work as one of the band drum majors, and she wants to possibly pursue that in the military as well.

"I know there is a Navy band, and we always joke around inside the Navy office and talk about how I will be the drum major for the Navy band as well. I guess we will see what happens, because I will be asked and I do play saxophone, so it should work out," Astorga said.

Hardships have not been permanent

roadblocks for Astorga's future and she is an example of someone who hasn't let hardships control or hold her back. She inspires and leaves a good impression on her peers as well.

"Olivia is a very strong-headed person. She is going to succeed in anything she puts her mind to, and she is very dedicated. If there is ever an obstacle, she will find a way to take it down and get through it," senior Celeste Ramirez said.

Overcoming hardships to reach her goals has helped give Astorga perspective, and she has good advice for her peers.

"People who struggle the most become successful in life. You may not know their story, but if you just push yourself to be the best you can, you are pretty much capable of anything," Astorga said.

SPORTS SHORTS

from the Gavel News Desk

NEWS BRIEFS

The last sports playing in the Spring worked their way to exceptional results, with baseball winning a district championship, and softball extending their streak of playoff appearances to five in a row. Track and field athletes advanced and won several post-season honors.



Photo by Brittany Volz

BASEBALL

District Champs, Advance to round three in playoffs After securing the first district championship in 20 years, varsity baseball beat Corpus Christi Ray in the first round after a walk-off grand slam by senior first baseman Aaron Arealos, and swept Churchill in round two to advance to the elite eight in region four. Also, senior Tyler Dick was named the district MVP.



Photo by Alexis Trevino

SOFTBALL

3rd in District, Made playoffs for 5th year in a row The varsity softball team continued their streak, making the playoffs for the 5th year in a row with a record of 14-4. The team was defeated by Corpus Christi Carroll in the first round, but had seven all-district players and freshman Julissa Alicea was named district newcomer of the year.



Photo by Joseph Vasquez

TRACK & FIELD

Seven athletes placed in district and advanced Skye Knight (800m) and Sergio Estrada (200m) advanced to area, while Michael Melchore (400m), Jackie Ramos (2 mile), Joel Ortiz (110m hurdles), Tori Perkins (shot put), and Ireneta Warlo (800m) advanced all the way to regionals.



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12 GAVEL



GRIEVE WELL

OPINION: RECOGNIZE UNHEALTHY FORMS OF GRIEF, WORK THROUGH THE GRIEVING PROCESS
 Personal Opinion Column by Victoria Falcon, Design Editor

In this issue of The Gavel, the people we have chosen to focus on have all suffered through some form of grief. No matter the dark circumstance that put hurt on their shoulders, we find the familiarity with hurt universal. As we and those around us experience grief, many for the first time, it is important that we recognize the difference between a healthy and unhealthy process of grieving so we may take care of ourselves better, and also learn how to be sensitive and care for others during their rough moments as well.

The popular description of how people grieve, the Kubler-Ross model, says we go through phases: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and finally acceptance. Although not everyone deals with grief in the exact order of the Kubler-Ross model, (we may skip a few stages or add in some stages of our own), it is vital that we fine tune the way we process and truly understand what is detrimental to our well-being and how to safely deal with grief.

One thing I strongly believe is that most people in the world are grieving, but may never know it, partially because of the denial to admit it, but mostly because it is hard to identify at times. Instead, some turn to substance abuse and other unhealthy ways of grieving. If you find you are becoming dependent on any substance, it is important that it is brought to the attention of a helpful party. If you know someone who is having such issues it is within the person's best health and interest to attempt breaking this habit. To be caring and empathetic to their state but also be unwavering in your attempts to help.

A less evident way of grieving could be remaining stagnant on certain stages of the grieving process, or getting stuck. Camping out on any of the five stages of grieving is harmful, and leaves no room for growth. For instance, those who stay stuck in denial will fail to live in real time and never be able to feel or open up to what is going on deep down inside of themselves. Additionally, those who stay angry will forever live with a guard up, fearful that most of those around them are out to get them or will cause further pain.

There are also some people who skip all of the hurt, and rush straight ahead to acceptance. This is harmful because this such person has failed to recognize the emotions within and in reality has made no peace with themselves or the situation. It is a fake acceptance that will block out what really needs to be felt, which will continuously grow and weigh heavy on one's conscience.

Losing someone isn't the only cause of grief. I believe a lot of people

have these qualities and hardly ever recognize it is because they are hurting or have been hurt. The excuse is usually "I am just this way." While this may be true, it doesn't mean you shouldn't look into ways to work through what you're feeling or understand it. These are wounds that can be worked past when treated with proper care. Giving yourself enough time to work on yourself is huge. You must not try to speed up the process or become upset and annoyed at your emotions and actions at each stage.

Forgive yourself for wrong choices made because of your emotions, and remind yourself you are human and you must leave room for those mistakes. Do not dwell on what is done, and give yourself a break, because the more you tell yourself it isn't okay, the further you will get from being okay. Don't be afraid of what you feel, and tell yourself that your feelings are valid. No matter how intense or crazy you feel, don't feel wrong for being vulnerable.

We are used to pushing back what we feel for the sake of making others more comfortable, but if you really want to take care of yourself to the fullest extent, you must have conviction in what you feel. If you don't express what you feel, you will be committing a disservice to yourself. Being conscious to your feelings and knowing what the root of their cause is, is a very significant step to recovery. Once you notice how they work you have more control over when they happen and how they go down. The minute you have control, the closer you are to true peace or acceptance with the situation.

Peace will never be what you think it is. It isn't a tranquil space where you rid yourself of all the hurt and don't think back on it. Peace is seeing where you are, and realizing you have grown, and are striving to be better. Peace is crying when you feel like it, and immediately forgiving yourself for your humanity. Peace is having really messy breakdowns every so often and being able to say, "it's been awhile since one of those," and realizing your good days will balance your bad.

Peace is every day taking care of yourself, and asking yourself, "what do I need?" so in return you can ask others the same and are able to efficiently help them be human too. We should live by the mantra that we must treat others as if they are grieving or have seen grief because no one's life is perfect. This allows us to leave space for them to have mistakes and messups, and because of this we can treat them with compassion and an open-heart, so that when we need this same space, they will grant it to us as well.

Life LESSONS

*Can't wait to see you again, my friend.
 - Begley*



*Mr. Benitez, it's been a while without you being here, I miss my favorite math teacher... You were a big impact in my life you helped me when nobody did, you especially helped me pass my Algebra I Staar. You were a great instructor as you were a friend, thank you for everything you did for me and I will soon see you.
 much love,
 -Daniel Tobias*

LOSING BELOVED TEACHER AND COWORKER BENITEZ BRINGS REFLECTION, MEMORIES, AND A LIFELONG IMPACT TO THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

by Amanda Rocha, Co-Editor

It's midway through the week and geometry class is first thing in the morning. A student sits in a desk, not really sure how their day is going to go and they feel like the week couldn't be going by any slower, when all of a sudden, the teacher walks in with a box of donuts for the entire class. Instantaneously, the mood has changed due to that generous act of a teacher who cares, and the student, knows for a fact it's going to be a darn good day.

This is the kind of teacher that Arturo Benitez was, and his presence is missed greatly by those who he taught and worked with, after he lost his battle with cancer just before school started this year. He was always lifting up the spirits of others and trying to make everyone's day worthwhile, while trying to live his own life to the fullest. Unknowingly, he left an incredible impact on those he interacted with. According to many of his former students Benitez was a wonderful mentor as well as teacher, always giving his time for the benefit of others.

"Mr. Benitez was a really good motivation to me. It's embarrassing to say, but I had to take my Algebra STARR eleven times, and the eleventh time I finally passed because of Mr. Benitez. He always helped me out in math, knowing I struggled. He would break things down so that I could understand," senior Daniel Tobias said.

Not only did Benitez offer a great learning environment within the classroom but he also offered one in which students could feel comfortable in knowing that it wouldn't always be an "all work, no play" kind of

environment.

"We used to always clown on each other. Last year I had some friends in a class with him and we would always mess around and get in trouble. When I got in trouble he would send me to the corner in time out and he would make me stay there the whole class period," Tobias said.

Although Benitez spent a lot of time in the classroom with students, he was also able to form great relationships with some of the teachers he worked with on a day to day basis. Matthew Ortiz, a teacher he began working with at Roosevelt High School and who later transferred alongside him to Holmes, was one of the people with whom Benitez spent a great deal of time. The friendship began as one in the professional environment, which later progressed into a brotherhood.

"We would bike in the mornings, shower in the coach's office, and then be at school by eight o'clock. We did that for months. And then when the summer came, we kept doing it, and in the summer time we would have lunch. We would go hiking or for a bike ride, and I guess it started there," Ortiz said.

As time progressed, the friendship only grew stronger and Ortiz was inspired by Benitez's kind heart and thoughtful ways. For Ortiz, Benitez was that one person in his life that could get through to him when he knew he wasn't being the best version of himself.

"Benitez made me more aware of people and all aspects of them, from what they're thinking about, emotional feelings, stress levels, and things

like that. I am able to listen in a room and know what's bothering different people. It's made me more aware and to avoid saying things that are going to hurt people or put me in a bad position. Really, it was just awareness that he truly taught me," Ortiz said.

Another one of Benitez's colleagues, college algebra teacher Denise Begley, was also impacted by Benitez and his humorous and adventurous ways.

"We were more than just colleagues. We would take my children to go hiking at McAllister Park, or talk on the phone about the day's events, or just do what friends do, hang out and talk," Begley said.

After Benitez's passing, because he had been so great with Begley's kids, an odd, yet satisfying experience happened. On the same night Benitez passed away, Begley's son had just turned one and was barely beginning to make hand gestures of any meaning. As Begley prayed that night, after being in much pain from the news, she was shocked with what her son did.

"As I'm sitting there, I'm crying and praying in my head, not even out loud, for Benitez to just give me a sign, and my son just lifted his head and started waving his hand to my left. I just started laughing. It was crazy. My whole life I have questioned whether or not there is an afterlife, and from that moment on, I have believed that there is definitely something after this," Begley said.



Yeren Cumpian
 Staff Writer/Literary Critic

■ "I'm changing my name to da Byres because I'm an independent woman who don't need a man" - Amanda Byres



Clarissa Silva
 Photo Editor

■ Who do you look up to? ■ Career Choice?
 My sister, Cassandra A special education teacher

■ "Make a plan. Set a goal. Work toward it. But every now and then, look around around drink it in, because this is it, it might all be gone tomorrow." - Grey's



Amber Villanueva
 Senior Staff Writer

■ Who do you look up to? ■ Career Choice?
 My aunt criminology and psychology.

■ "If people say you can't pursue what you want to pursue, prove them wrong. But don't just do it for them, do it for yourself. We all have perseverance. When doing things, it just takes the right mindset."



Janelle Martinez
 Senior Staff Writer

■ Who do you look up to? ■ Career Choice?
 My mother, of course.

■ "Surround yourself with people who have dreams, desire and ambition. They'll help you push in a few years when I know for sure, for and realize your own."



Victoria Johnson
 Senior Staff Writer

■ Who do you look up to? ■ Career Choice?
 Most of my English teachers Pet grooming

■ "I'd rather ask for forgiveness than permission." - Crowley, *Supernatural*



Alondra Martinez
 Copy Editor

■ Who do you look up to? ■ Career Choice?
 I look up to my mom. Journalist, Chemistry or Pediatrics

■ [sees girl reading *The Catcher in the Rye*] "Ah, I love that book. The way he just [clenches fist] catches all that frickin' eye." @davidrhughes

THE GAVEL GALLS

Meet the women behind the award-winning Gavel Magazine



Tori Falcon
 Design Editor

■ Who do you look up to? ■ Career Choice?
 Amy Poehler and Tina Fey, but I want to be a journalist :-)

■ "I'm not convinced I know how to read, I've just memorized a lot of words." - Nick (*New Girl*)



Amanda Rocha
 Co-Editor

■ Who do you look up to? ■ Career Choice?
 Rihanna, because she puts in work. A career in the field of social work.

■ "There's no such thing as a life that's better than yours."



Alicia Yanze
 Co-Editor

■ Who do you look up to? ■ Career Choice?
 My mom Journalist or a teacher

■ "If everything was perfect, you would never learn and you would never grow."
 - Beyoncé