

Teen Writes

Reasoning: The joy and angst of taking the dreaded SAT

By Alexandra Reinecke

In the car, it smelled like the new paint on the pencils. James Taylor warbled. I jiggled my leg. The oatmeal colored Birkenstocks my friend called ‘those weird 70s shoes’ and whose presence prompted my father’s casual inquiry as to the state of my spiritual enlightenment—Jesus shoes, he taunted amicably, with the tone betraying the syllables—shook with my anxiety.

As my father drove I looked at the collection on my lap—a new pack of Ticonderoga pencils, an M&M spangled bag of trail mix, an oversized Starbucks drink too large for the cup holder in my father’s BMW and too small to squelch my nerves. The thought of something carried-over from a CNN documentary whose name I had long since forgotten: the same candies that studded my break-time snack had been manufactured specifically to resist against such clamminess of hands like mine.

As I joined the groups clustered around the testing center I felt a simultaneous camaraderie and competition with the other test-takers. A girl from my Pre-Calculus class—large brown eyes, general meekness, a Patagonia fleece the color of Ocean Spray cranberries—small-talked me as I flipped through the packet of SAT grammar rules I’d drawn up that fall. Don’t COLONize without a complete phrase, it told me; when in doubt,

punctuate with a comma.

We were assembled in a hall of lockers but were soon herded out, directed by adults drunk on the borrowed authority lent them by their stopwatches. As I returned to the realm of the pale mustard tile I thought momentarily of the cows we used to visit such a long time back, great black cows with marble eyes and orange ear tags the shape of houses. Policy, they said. Procedure. My fellow test-takers murmured expletives as they shuffled out of the building, some seeking refuge under the outside overhands, others the menial heat provided in the bathroom.

Beside me an Asian father sang the quadratic formula to his daughter; a group of boys jostled each other, repeating a name to whose fame or notoriety I was unfamiliar. Taking up a place beside the faded mustard-tiled wall, I noticed how little squares devoid of tile sat lonely, the concrete like gaps of missing teeth. I scrutinized those around me. The white ‘Y’ leading ‘Yale’ on a T-shirt reminded me of a martini glass holding a honey-hued curl; Cal’s buttercup script colonized T-shirts, both long-sleeved and short, sweatshirts with bears and without. As I analyzed my fellow test-takers I wondered whether they were similarly analyzing me. What impression did they gather from my newly cut hair pulled back into its chestnut

ponytail? What from the ‘P’ on my chest? Did they see what I had in my mirror’s reflection that morning: a loose mouth, a weak nose, a determination in the eyes which atoned those other pieces, which gave reasonable claim to use of such a letter?

The room was cold, a deliberate precaution, the proctor informed us, against sleepiness. It was upon finding the abundance of life colonizing the walls—a pensive Martin Luther King Jr. poster, drawings of animals with the Spanish words for them beneath, a case filled with age-creaked Dia de Los Muertos chrysanthemums, handwritten notes affirming the character of the teacher whose instruction this space was usually privy—that the frank impersonality of the test became clear: how the answers were automated so that you had no increased likelihood of guessing correctly if you guessed C, that the essays were graded with numbers and not feeling.

When the test began, I bubbled answers in sets of eleven the way my prep-book had instructed me, reasoning the answers first, vehemently crossing out those which were wrong, and stringing the circled correct ones in the answer sheet in an almost methodic manner, like stringing letters for forming words, names, in friendship bracelets or going along a rosary’s motion. I was trium-

phant when I corrected where I’d first chosen the option whose modifying phrase meant a Chinese New Year dragon’s teeth had walked down a Chinatown street and snatched a bit of festival paper instead of that that dragon had walked and then snatched the paper with its teeth; I wrote an imagery-heavy essay in which I described the silver of NASA’s rockets as being robbed of stream-trout’s scales.

When it was over we filed out of the classrooms, the hallway, the school; the purple fleece I had stood beside earlier now appeared magenta in the sun. I returned to my father’s car where I was subjected to tacit encouragement and more James Taylor. I returned to our house, to the butter-bourbon wood block of our kitchen island. I returned to catch up with CNN, to dress for the march that night, a fight more important than that arbitrated by the College Board and its bubbles, the testing center with its pale-yellow walls and college-sweatshirt-wearing students. I watched the other marchers in the street, and I did not try to reason with them. I watched the other marches with a rage in my chest stronger than that towards reading-section reasoning questions, or sums asked the no-calculator math section, or the lack of help given the guess of the letter ‘C,’ all of which, by comparison, were problems to which my attention was little matter.

Assistance League of Diablo Valley’s R.E.A.D. Program Thrives

Submitted by Betty Miller



Standing from left, Assistance League of Diablo Valley Corporate Partners Committee Chairman Linda Mercer and R.E.A.D. Co-Chairmen Meredith Kingsly-Brochier and Gen Camera welcome Fehr & Peers Corporate Partners employee volunteers Ryan McClain and Chelsea Caldetera’s help in placing an I LOVE TO READ! sticker in hundreds of donated books.

One of Assistance League of Diablo Valley’s hands-on philanthropic programs is R.E.A.D., an acronym for read, enrich, achieve and discover. Since 2003, the R.E.A.D. co-chairmen and committee members have taken great care in selecting books that they currently read in 13 schools and 48 classrooms each year. One of the most important themes they have focused on in the past six years concerns events that are relevant to the San Francisco Bay Area.

“Rosie Revere, Engineer,” written by Andrea Beaty, captures the pride American women felt when taking over the jobs vacated by men who fought for the United States of America during World War II. “Pop’s

Bridge,” written by Eve Bunting, relates the construction of the “impossible bridge,” the Golden Gate Bridge. “Too Tall Foyle Finds his Game,” written by Golden State Warrior Adonal Foyle and Shiyana Valentine Williams, describes how an athlete finds a venue for his height, while “The Night Before Baseball at the Park by the Bay,” written by David Schnell, depicts a young boy’s dream of playing for the San Francisco Giants at AT&T Park.

To learn about all of the philanthropic programs that are primarily funded by the Assistance League Way Side Inn Thrift Shop in Lafayette, please visit this website: diablovalley.assistanceleague.org.

Tim Rojas is Moraga’s Employee of the Month

Submitted by Kevin Reneau



From left: Wendy Scheck, Mark Bellingham, Tito Rojas and Kevin Reneau Photo A. Scheck

Tito Rojas, a long-time painter and shift supervisor at Mark Bellingham Painting, has been named the Moraga Employee of the Month for February.

Rojas has been working on local homes for the past 12 years and is recognized as a skilled painting technician.

“Tito is a skilled craftsman,” said Mark Bellingham. “He’s worked here for 12 years and not only produces superior work, but

also approaches every job with enthusiasm and superior work ethic. We are most fortunate to have him in our company.

In winning the award, the Moraga Rotary and Chamber of Commerce will award Rojas a gift card to Safeway as well as a gift card to Peninni’s in Moraga. Rojas was presented with his award and gifts at a recent Moraga Rotary meeting at Saint Mary’s College.

Silver Award

Submitted by Mabel Vo



From left: Girl Scouts Mabel Vo and Megan Crane Stanley Middle School students stand by one of their Silver Award projects at the downtown Lafayette Plaza.

Mabel Vo and Megan Crane recently completed their Girl Scout Silver Award project.

For their project the two eighth-graders did a pilot program for recycling bins at the downtown Lafayette plaza with the permis-

sion of Joan Bruzzone. Leading up to the project they held an education booth collecting signatures at 2016 Earth Day, attended numerous events on pollution to learn more on the topic and collected data on the trash collected during their pilot program.

In Memory

V. Eugene Garbarino

November 13, 1926 - March 28, 2017



Bay Area resident, Dr. Victor Eugene Garbarino, 90, died peacefully on March 28, 2017 at his home in Orinda, California.

After serving in the Army during WWII, he came home and put himself through University of Michigan’s dental school and began his practice in Orinda. He married his wife of 60 years, Joan Garbarino, and raised a family of six children: Paul, Tim, Claude, Alexa, Ann, and Thad. He was a beloved husband, a devoted father, and a kind and generous friend to everyone who knew him. Quick to laugh with an adventurous soul, ‘Gene’ was a student of life with a boundless interest in the world around him, a true gentleman from the Greatest Generation.

A celebration of his life will be held privately. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made in Gene’s name to Las Trampas, Inc. PO Box 515, Lafayette, CA 94549 or made on line at <http://lastrampas.org/donate/>.