

Growing and Succeeding Without a Spotlight



Emily Lee
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Author Emily Lee and some of her JV teammates sit together at BJ's Restaurant for their tennis banquet. [Source: Sunny Hills High School Tennis]

Beads of sweat trickle down the player's face as they toss the ball in the air. The audience watches intently, their fingers gripping the fence and their faces burning with anticipation. The athlete strikes the ball and aces; the crowd erupts in cheers.

That is what many think of when they imagine themselves representing their school as a student athlete. What they do not picture is a junior lacing up their shoes for a quiet junior varsity match

on courts where only a handful of people watch. However, that is the reality many juniors, including myself, experience on school sports teams. We are still developing, still waiting, and often wrestling with emotions that are rarely acknowledged.

Personally, being a junior on the JV tennis team was initially a source of embarrassment and frustration. With consistent practices, weekly lessons, and years of dedication, I fully believed that

the varsity title was in close reach. I even postponed my vacation to South Korea so that I would not miss the tennis camp and tryouts. After two months of waiting patiently, but also anxiously, it was revealed that most of my peers advanced to varsity, while I was one of the few juniors returning to JV. At that moment, I felt like all of the hard work and effort that I had put into this sport was meaningless. During those times, I was plagued with embarrassment that all of my junior friends moved on without me, and I carried those feelings of shame with me to my first few weeks of the tennis season.

In addition to embarrassment, JV juniors struggle with motivation and being seen. Tennis is both mental and physical, but when the varsity team gets priority courts and more team-bonding activities, while the coach does not even watch JV play, it is difficult to stay optimistic. There were many times when I wished my coach would notice my improvement, or simply a good serve or hit. It was in these moments that I questioned whether it was worth it to keep trying. Therefore, I can attest that it can often feel like JV solely exists in the background of the program, overshadowed by more skilled players, varsity tournaments, and championship victories.

However, beneath this frustration, being a junior on JV offers un-

expected strengths. As one of the older players, I naturally stepped into a leadership role, explaining routines, encouraging others, and calming nervous freshmen. They looked up to me not because I was the strongest player, but because I understood the nerves of first matches as well as the disappointment of tough losses. I eventually became a source of reassurance for them.

I also realized that JV gives space to develop my talents without the intense pressure varsity players face. I had room to adjust my game, test strategies, and make mistakes without feeling like the entire program was watching. Most importantly, my commitment to the sport became more genuine. Even without crowds or a spotlight, I still chose to show up to practices and matches because I truly cared about the team over a title. This mindset has undoubtedly shaped my resilience and humility, qualities that I now recognize as part of my character today.

Being a junior on the JV tennis team has not always been a smooth journey; it has challenged my confidence, tested my motivation, and pushed me to redefine success. Ultimately, it has taught me that the value of a student athlete is not determined by whether they are on JV or varsity, but rather how the player plays, who they become, and what they choose to take away from their experiences.

A New Genesis — Amen to “I”



Eliud Lee
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“In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit — Amen,” declares Rev. Yoon, brows furrowed, and hands lifted high before the heavens. It is the last benediction of the year. As he blesses the congregation, the final service of 2025 at Evergreen Hill Church comes to a close.

Christianity has always lingered across the stages of my life. Since infancy, that fair-skinned man with long, dark hair has been familiar to my gaze. Crosses, portraits of Jesus, and other Christian decor would lie atop any shelf my mother could reach, being scattered throughout our small apartment. I vividly remember buttoning cold jeans on Sunday mornings, braving the overly stiff denim to wear my best for church, where, with familiar faces, I would lose all track of time for some three and a half hours. Indeed, inheriting my faith from my parents had given me much to be thankful for: I had a tight-knit community, a sense of virtue, and was spared from existential worry. Yet, an anchor though it was, it



A white cross is visible from an empty passenger seat, the window left slightly raised — a quiet intersection between religious faith and nascent autonomy. [Source: Author, Eliud Lee]

would soon prove to be a burden.

Until my teenage years, my faith remained unquestioned. My beliefs were given, not shaped; my values were printed, not written; my self was “he,” not “I.” Not once in my childhood had I endeavored to truly reflect on the self, nor had I any care to sculpt it with my own chisel, with reason and volition. Thus, for twelve years, I

was ensconced in the passenger seat of my own life — inert before the force that had always steered the wheel.

Then came the summer of 8th grade.

In the wake of graduation, the friction between what “is” and what is “yet to be” had finally dawned upon me in its full paradoxical force — empowering, yet

harrowing. And before that abyss, I stood in limbo, one foot in and one foot out, still too afraid to answer the important question: Who is Eliud?

So for a large part of my summer, I read. From theological treatises to Nietzsche’s Thus Spoke Zarathustra, I sought to learn the many philosophies. Not to merely understand them, but to acknowledge their presence, if there were any, within me: to confront Christianity, honestly and unapologetically. For the first time, my hand was on the steering wheel — and my grip was tight.

Through reason and ventures to the self, discovering for the first time the profundity of autonomy, I had strayed far from home: no longer was I bound by the shackles of religion. But if there is any truth in the remark, religion was never home. My humanity was.

Christianity, seen thus, remains a volatile yet central facet of my identity. It continues to linger in my mind, ever resisting the winds of change. Even so, I declare this boldly: I am no longer “he”;

Youth Voices in School Policy: The Advisory Committee



Evalyn Yu
Grade 10
Palos Verdes High School

Every month, the Principal’s Advisory Committee (PAC) at Palos Verdes High School (PVHS) meets directly with school administrators to share student insights and influence campus policies. The PAC features students from all grade levels and backgrounds. Members are selected based on a detailed application and teacher recommendation. The result is a diverse group of student-athletes, artists, and leaders who represent the student body. “I’m involved with a wide variety of activities at school, and I have the perspective coming from both [my] engineering and artistic sides. I hope to be able to contribute and help make PV High a better experience for like-minded people,” PAC member Ananya Balaji said.

In previous years, members of the PAC provided input on accelerated class opportunities and policies regarding AI usage and phone bans. The PAC also offers feedback on school projects. Last year, they encouraged the creation of student facilities such as “King’s Corner” — the student lounge — and “The Cove” — a recreational area with foosball and ping pong tables. Many PAC members find meaning

in giving back to their community. According to PAC member Annalia Henderson, “PAC is a way I can directly contribute to more positive change at PV High. My goal is to advocate for my peers and help ensure PVHS feels like home for everyone. I hope to be able to witness the changes we discuss go into action for future students to benefit from even after I graduate.”

At my first meeting as a new member of the PAC, I was excited but unsure what to expect because it was my first time working closely with school officials. However, my nerves immediately disappeared upon walking into the room. I was greeted warmly by the principal and encouraged to play icebreakers with fellow PAC members. Next, our principal gave us an overview of the school-wide goals our committee was working towards. These included promoting student-to-student kindness as well as identifying and helping those in need of extra support. My favorite part of the meeting was analyzing our students’ responses on the California Healthy Kids Survey. We analyzed patterns in student mental



Members of the Principal’s Advisory Committee gather to share their opinions on school policies at Palos Verdes High School. [Source: Author, Evalyn Yu]

health, school connectedness, and overall satisfaction and compared responses across grade levels. Afterward, we discussed which areas we felt still needed the most growth, with the majority agreeing on school connectedness.

As we shared our ideas out loud, I was struck by how eagerly and responsively the administrators accepted our feedback. When students brought up the

lack of second-semester events, they immediately asked us what they could plan to boost student engagement. By the end of the meeting, we were brainstorming the logistics of holding more sports events and a second club rush. When the bell rang to go to class, I left with a new sense of confidence, knowing that student voices would not go unheard at my school.

Student Reporter

Yeoksam Love Daycare Center Brings Joy to Seniors



Soomin Ryu
Grade 10
Seoul International School



The seniors at the Yeoksam Love Daycare Center are about to eat their delicious lunch provided by the center. [Source: Author, Soomin Ryu]

In December, I had the opportunity to volunteer at an elderly nursing home, Yeoksam Love Daycare Center, located in Gangnam, Seoul. Volunteer activities included serving food, cleaning the building, and interacting with the elders. I became curious about all the hard work of the employees and the comfort and relaxation of the seniors. What influenced

the employees of Yeoksam Love Daycare Center to start an elderly daycare center, and what motivated them to help seniors? I was given the gracious opportunity to interview the CEO of the company about the origins of this center and what he strives to do. Can I ask your name? "Jang Tae Gyeong" What is your job, and what do

you do that impacts senior citizens? "I am the CEO / Chairman of a daycare center for elders. I think as the CEO, from day to night, we take care of them very well in a safe manner." What do the seniors here usually do every day? "Our cars pick up the seniors. Usually, they arrive at different times, but they come around 7:30 AM. We also pick seniors later for the 9:30 AM arrival. The seniors come to the center around 10 AM to exercise to warm up their bodies, followed by activities of recreation. After a short rest, they eat lunch, sleep, and watch TV. From 2 PM, the seniors begin the second half of the program, consisting of singing and exercises. Then they eat snacks, rest, sing, and go bowling or do other engaging activities. To those who eat dinner, we provide food after these activities, and to those who don't, we take them home. The latest the seniors stay until is around 7 PM, so in total they stay for around 8-10 hours." What is one good thing about

working here? "First, our center helps seniors remain engaged. We have the satisfaction of helping retired senior citizens, and more than anything, seniors who can't help themselves. And most of the seniors have family members. Helping a family as well as a parent, and caring for them as if they were my family members, gives me great satisfaction. As for the workers, we can learn a lot about elders by taking care of them, and I think that's really helpful." The CEO of Yeoksam Love Daycare Center, Jang Tae Gyeong, has a clear vision to help the seniors in Korea when no one else can. By stepping in, he and his company have helped countless senior citizens for decades by providing food, activities, support, and, most importantly, a home. His center currently serves over 50 adults daily, receiving the care that he and his crew believe they deserve. A senior daycare center as productive and caring as Yeoksam Love Daycare Center is a great option and place for senior citizens of Seoul to rely on.

Student Reporter

Volunteers Power Daily Care at Local Hospital



Evan Song
Grade 10
Aliso Niguel High School

From guiding visitors to supporting patients, volunteers at hospitals play an essential role behind the scenes. At Mission Hospital, the Auxiliary of Mission Hospital, a nonprofit organization, plays a vital role in supporting patients, visitors, and staff through its volunteer program. The program is open to adults and high school students. Volunteers typically commit to weekly shifts, allowing them to balance other responsibilities while gaining consistent experience. This program is a popular volunteering option for many high school students, especially those interested in a career in medicine. This is an opportunity that allows students to gain real-world experience outside of the classroom. The program offers a variety of positions throughout the hospital, including the Emergency Department, Surgical Services, Towers (Reception), the Gift Shop, and Central Supply, among others. New volunteers are often assigned to the Gift Shop or Towers positions. The Gift Shop volunteers supervise and maintain a retail position within the hospital's shops, while the Towers, or Reception, volunteers serve as the face of the hospital. They specialize in guest and visitor assistance. They are responsible for helping patients and visitors find their destinations



At Mission Hospital, students and adults alike can volunteer their time, something that volunteers find has helped them grow immensely as a person. [Source: Author, Evan Song]

within the hospital, answering questions, providing directions and general hospital information, and safely escorting patients and visitors to their appointments or discharge locations. These two positions allow students to better understand hospital operations while developing communication

and interpersonal skills. As volunteers gain experience, they may be offered positions with greater responsibility, such as within the Emergency Department. According to hospital staff, the program offers valuable support within the hospital in situations where staffing shortages can im-

pact operations. Time-consuming activities can prevent medical professionals from focusing on specialized patient care. As a result, the presence of additional volunteers is valuable to the hospital's overall function. Having served as a Towers volunteer for over a year, I have had a meaningful and positive experience. Each shift allows me to meet new people and hear unique stories. Being able to support patients and visitors has been both humbling and rewarding, and it has strengthened my interest in healthcare. New volunteers are always welcome. Students and adults interested in volunteering can find application information on Mission Hospital's website. Following the completion of the application, qualified applicants are invited for a short, casual interview. By supporting hospital staff and improving patient experiences, volunteers play a vital role in strengthening the local community. I encourage students interested in healthcare, community service, or personal growth to consider volunteering at Mission Hospital or a hospital near them. Programs like these are a valuable opportunity for students and adults alike to gain insight into the healthcare field while giving back to the community.

Student Reporter

The Duty of An Outstanding Wildlife Leader



Heeyoung Kim
Grade 10
Dublin High School

Behind the exhibits at Lindsay Wildlife Experience, outstanding wildlife leaders play an essential role in caring for animals and educating the community. For volunteers, each day involves teamwork, responsibility, and hands-on learning that supports both animal welfare and conservation. A typical shift often begins in the kitchen, where wildlife leaders prepare carefully balanced meals for the animals. For guinea pigs, this means avoiding citrus fruits, like lemons and oranges, and chard, which can cause bladder stones. Their diet includes timothy hay, guinea pig pellets, and vegetables. Each guinea pig receives 25-30 grams per meal, and together shares about 60 grams of timothy hay daily. Preparing these meals helps ensure that the animals stay healthy and receive proper nutrition. Wildlife leaders divide responsibilities, taking turns feeding while others build enrichment activities. Enrichment is also an important part of animal care because it keeps animals mentally and physically stimulated. Two recently rescued rats, Pearla and Suzie, show how enrichment improves quality of life. Pearla, named after the hole in

her ear, enjoys climbing through a large tube that stretches across the exhibit, using ropes inside to explore her space. Suzie prefers resting in her hammock. These enrichment tools allow animals to express natural behaviors such as climbing and hiding. One of the most important duties of an outstanding wildlife leader is connecting education to everyday life. Leaders encourage visitors to consider simple actions they can take, such as protecting habitats, reducing waste, and assisting injured individuals by contacting professionals. Each week, new animals arrive at Lindsay Wildlife, creating new learning opportunities. Wildlife leaders are trained to talk with visitors about insects, native species, and conservation efforts. During educational programs, leaders address common myths through "Fact versus Fiction" discussions, correcting misconceptions about wildlife and explaining how animals contribute to the ecosystem. Recently, Charlie Kim and his team presented on Madagascar hissing cockroaches, explaining how they are often misunderstood as dangerous when actually they are harmless. By correcting misinformation, wildlife leaders help people understand that all animals play an important role



Charlie Kim stands next to his senior Outstanding Wildlife Leader on the right and his partner on the left, teaching the audience about the Madagascar cockroaches [Source: Author, Heeyoung Kim]

in the ecosystem and encourage recycling, conserving water, reducing pesticide use, and picking up trash. Wildlife leaders also present animals to visitors safely and educationally. During programs, members such as myself assist staff with larger animals such as Fire, a red-tailed hawk, and Buvo, a rescued Great Horned Owl. We help prepare their food and ensure visitors, especially younger children, do not touch animals

unless asked to by a staff member. Visitors normally are not allowed to touch the animals to prevent stress to them and the spread of disease, protecting wildlife and the public. Through teamwork, education, and animal care, outstanding wildlife leaders help Lindsay Wildlife Experience fulfill its mission of protecting wildlife and strengthening the relationship between people and the environment.