

We Are the Titans

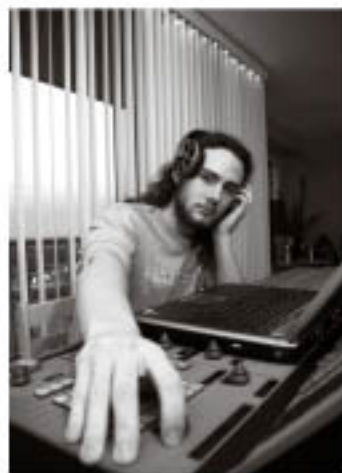
A Profile of Diversity at One American High School



Taki Sidley, Editor

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Brittany Ninman was adopted at the age of 10 months by her single mother, Carolyn. Five years later, Carolyn adopted Brittany's sister, Brooke, and one year after that they welcomed Marcus into the family. Adoption may not be that uncommon, but Brittany's situation is a bit unique. Brittany and her two siblings are African American; Carolyn is Caucasian. This hasn't affected Brittany's relationship with her mom. "I'm black, she's white. It's all the same. To me, she's just my mom."



Leslie (left) and Mimi Aucedo (right) are as close as sisters could be. Leslie, a senior, is very protective of her younger sister, particularly because Mimi is mentally retarded. Often, when one sibling has a disability and the other doesn't, they grow farther apart, particularly when they reach high school. Leslie was determined not to let that happen. These sisters maintain their strong bond despite their differences.



Identical twins Giordano and Giuliani Hardy-Gerena have similar, though ultimately divergent passions. While both are members of the Washington Metropolitan Youth Orchestra, Giordano plays the flute, while Giuliani's instrument of choice is the violin. In addition to his orchestral commitments, Giordano plays in T.C. Williams' Marching Band and mentors younger musicians through a program called Band Buddies.

Both Giordano and Giuliani are also serious about their academics. Both are members of the French Honor Society, and Giuliani is a member of the Math Honor Society and the National Society of High School Scholars.



Malalay Maiwand (left) and Rosa Khan (right) met six months ago at T.C., though their families hail from neighboring countries half way around the world. Malalay's family is originally from Afghanistan; Rosa's is from Pakistan.

At T.C., Malalay chooses to wear a *hijab*, the traditional Muslim head scarf, while Rosa wears hers primarily at prayer. "It is Muslim custom to cover a woman's hair and body," says Malalay. "Young women cannot be forced to wear a *hijab*, though some families frown upon not doing so. Females themselves decide when they should start to wear it. Most girls make the decision when they become women."



Shartis Wright was living with her boyfriend in Florida when she found out she was pregnant. She had some tough choices to make. Not only did she have to decide what to do about the pregnancy, her mother was moving to Virginia. Shartis' mother persuaded her to keep the baby and come with her to Alexandria.

Shartis now balances going to school with a twenty-five hour a week job at WestStar Mortgage. On top of this, there is the discomfort of being seven months pregnant. But it's all worth it. Shartis is financially independent. Her insurance pays for her hospital bills. She even has a plan for after graduation. She's going to the University Miami where she plans to study actuarial science. While she's in college, her daughter, Sjamaile, will live with the child's father, Jamaile. Jamaile, who has a house and owns his own business, supports Shartis' determination to get a degree.

Although there are tough times, like when she realizes the huge responsibility she's taken on, or when she meets people and they judge her based solely on her large belly, Shartis is able to shrug it off. She has the support of her family. Though initially disappointed, they have realized that having a baby is not the end of the world. Others, however, have not been so forgiving.

"Almost everyone I come in contact with judges me on first sight. It's as if they look at my stomach before they look at me."



Amy Milyko was baptized into the Episcopalian church at the age of seven, but soon began to have second thoughts. By the time she turned nine she had taken an interest in tarot and soon became interested in Paganism in general. As she learned more about the religion, its belief in the dual (male/female) nature of god, the importance it attributes to nature, and its adherence to the doctrine of reincarnation, she realized it was perfect for her.

Amy uses runes and tarot cards to gain glimpses into the future. As much as she loves her religion, she says it's challenging sometimes when people look at her strangely thinking she's performing some kind of devil worship.

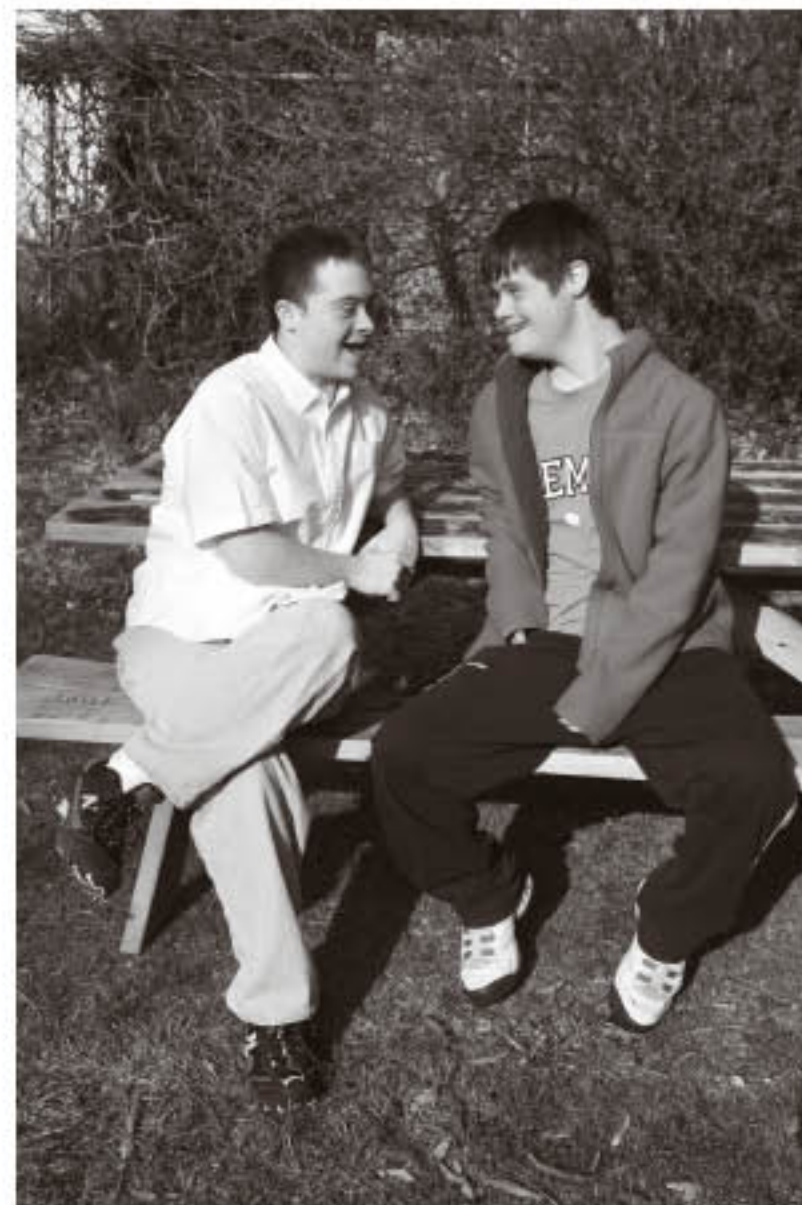


Meheret Haile was born in Ethiopia. Her family emigrated when she was 14.

"The dress I'm wearing is a traditional one, the kind we wear at holiday times and during Sunday church. The traditional dresses are made up of three parts: *kamis* – the woven cotton dress; *meknat* – the sash worn round the waist; and *netela* – the large cloak worn over the other two pieces. On the dress I am wearing, there are gold crosses which represent our faith. I am a member of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church."



Marquis Harris and Austin Toner grew up on opposite sides of Alexandria, but they come together twice a week for classes at Yang's Tae Kwon Do Academy. Marquis is a black belt, first degree; Austin a black belt, second degree. And while they sometimes find themselves on opposite sides of the sparring mat, they are more likely to be helping each other learn a new technique.



Ryan Bailey and Max Douglas have been friends for most of their lives. They have often gone to the same school and been enrolled in the same Special Education classes. Their parents encouraged them to form a friendship because Ryan and Max both have Down's Syndrome and they felt they would be good influences on each other. However, this doesn't stop them from competing with each other when they go bowling or are vying for the attention of a pretty girl. But no matter what, it's likely these two young men will be friends for life.