

SPECIAL EDITION: THROUGH THEIR EYES

Anika Warriar: South Asian Actor on the Rise

From American High School Performing Arts to Bigger Things

Jessica Le
Staff Writer

“Whether I should see you in a Shakespearean role or in a modern, classic, or whatever, a young South Asian girl can play all kinds of roles. It doesn’t have to be a nerdy teenager. You can be a lawyer or a judge. You’re on stage,” says Ranjita Chakravarty, actress on Netflix’s hit series *Never Have I Ever*, to Anika Warriar.

Throughout her life, Warriar has kept her passion for theater a secret. As Charlotte Lucas in American High School’s adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* in 2021, Warriar’s first encounter into the spotlight among her peers has set her up for a newfound direction into the theater scene.

“I started with an Indian classical dance form called Bharatanatyam,” says Warriar. “I got into theater in fifth grade. Three or four

years after I started, I saw a Facebook advertisement for a production, and then I started doing one every year. Then, I did school productions in Thornton Junior High. For college, I had other choices, but I checked out UCLA’s program and their curriculum for acting was really good. And I was like, I gotta give it a try and so I just applied.”

A recent admit into the University of California, Los Angeles’ School of Theater, Film, and Television (UCLA TFT), Warriar has found a drive for

continuing her passion past high school.

“I don’t think I would have chosen theater if it were not for the support around me. I feel like a lot of the courses at American are catered towards people who only wanted to go into STEM, so for me, I felt like I needed to suppress my interest so that I could do the traditional way of going through school and doing STEM courses,” Warriar mentions.

“I felt I had to keep theater a secret because the arts is not a very common career

to choose, especially for South Asians. But if you’re really passionate about something, I feel like you should go and do it. You shouldn’t limit yourself to just what’s within the circle—you should try to expand. I think this idea has pushed me to work harder and enter the performing arts because it’s not often the easiest choice to make.”

Warriar cites Mr. Raghu Warriar, her father, as a beam of support for her.

“It has been a journey of discovery for Anika. Her eyes light up when on stage, be it performing classical dance or vocal music,” says Mr. Warriar. “She experimented with theater in elementary school and enjoyed every bit of it. She was able to seamlessly take on many nuances like incorporating the English accent in *Pride and Prejudice* or playing an innocent child in *The Parting* that depicted the pain of the partition of the Indian subcontinent.”

In addition, Mr. Warriar supports her decision to study

theater at UCLA.

“Her perspectives around growing as an artist and as a person by learning and collaborating with the best in the craft have been compelling and helped us appreciate her career choice. The impact of plays with socially relevant themes in creating conversation, community, and change in societal norms was instrumental in her choice in choosing performing arts as her major. Aside from this, she thrives on the opportunity to communicate and engage with an audience when performing on stage. Her growing interest in the performing arts has continuously strengthened our faith in her choice,” he reflects.

Warriar describes theater as meaning more than just being on the stage.

“It’s another form of expression. I think it’s really empowering to just be on a stage and act. The audience is always reassuring. You are

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Anika Warriar (12), performing an Indian classical dance called Bharatanatyam.

Don’t Be Fooled, He’s No Bathroom Barber

From cutting hair at school to gaining loyal customers, what can Jerry Tieu not do?

Ella Yam
Staff Writer

Whether it’s an entry-level position or starting their own business, everybody starts somewhere in their career. For senior Jerry Tieu, he is making a name for himself with his hair-cutting skills at school. Jerry cuts hair in the school bathroom, at his home set up, out on the football fields, and even in the gym. Gaining loyal customers one by one, his business grew from his friends to people around school. One of Jerry’s customers, Zubair Sharifi (12) says, “He’s the first barber who cuts hair in this school and I think he’s the best in the market. I appreciate that, and I go to him because he gives the best cuts.”

“I wanted to expand my name and put myself out there, so I started cutting hair for people at school. And that’s when the word spread out and people knew about me,” Jerry remarks.

Starting out, his first customer was his friend Alex Torres (12). Having first met in architecture, they’ve been friends ever since.

Torres mentions how he found out about Jerry’s hair cutting hobby. “He told me that he was starting to cut hair. He suggested that I get a haircut from him

and I was his first customer,” says Torres.

Jerry uses social media to promote his services and it spreads through word of mouth. “I use Babyliss clippers and some senior clippers. My

first customer was Alex, and then word of mouth helped me get more customers. I also post my haircuts on my Instagram page which helps me get more clients,” Jerry mentions. He says, “My Instagram handle is @jk3blendz_ which stands for my initials and my favorite number, three.”

With a focus on taper fades, Jerry has built up a loyal customer base, charging \$10 per haircut. “For now, my customers are mostly friends and people I know, like Alex, but I’m always getting new customers,” he states. After wit-

nessing Jerry do his haircuts at school, one of his new customers, Dylan Stock (12) mentions the time he got a cut from Tieu, “He blessed me up once. Bro had the touch of GOD.” Another one of Jerry’s friends, Noah Alcantara (12), explains how he found out about his haircuts. “I saw him on Instagram and he was telling me about it along with plenty of people during class. For me, he cut my hair in his crib. But he’s got many people in the bathroom and on the football field,” says Alcantara. “I had trust in him because I’ve seen his work before and he gave me a buzz cut. Which is something that requires a lot of trust, because it’s not just a

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Jerry cuts hair for his customer Johnathan Tuagalu at school (12) PC: Jerry Tieu

Inside the Mind of a Young Musician

Joshua Suvatne’s Journey to Becoming a Live Artist

Sierra Dellenbaugh
Staff Writer

Most of you have probably seen Joshua (Josh) Suvatne (11) on campus at some point this year, even if you have no idea who he is. You know, the guy with the big hair who’s always carrying a guitar? Now you know who I’m talking about. He tends to be a little bit everywhere all at once, talking to friends, or helping out with events, but always with his bass guitar on his back.

It all started in his childhood: “My dad was a big Green Day fan and still is,” Suvatne recalls. “[My brother and I] kind of grew up listening to [them] in the car. ... He’s been playing guitar since he was my age, but he wasn’t *invested* invested

in it; it was just like a side thing. So we had a guitar in the house before I got into it.”

Suvatne was also heavily inspired by one of his best friends, Jack Couthren (11): “[It] was something that started after quarantine. Jack plays [electric] guitar and then I got into playing my acoustic at home, [but I thought] I should get an electric guitar. ... One day we went over to Allegro Music, I tried some guitars, got a Fender in my hands, and said ‘Hey Dad, can we get something like this?’ And he was like ‘Oh yeah, let’s get it right now.’ [So] my guitar[s] of choice have been Fender for the last year. I just like the prestige and their classic look. [They’re] like the *original*.”

About six months later, however, he found a

new calling: bass guitar. “Polyphia is one of my favorite bands and they have very nice sounding bass, so I wanted to be able to play stuff like that. I play [bass] more ‘cause every band needs a bassist.”

After just a year, Suvatne has progressed abnormally quickly with this new hobby: “I spend so much time [practicing]. I spend at least a couple of hours each day. I played a lot of video games before [guitar], like a lot. [More] hours have been spent on guitar now and I think it’s a better hobby.” His friends are amazed as well: “It kind of baffles me seeing how good he is at guitar,” says Allysa Romero (10). “He can just listen to a song and learn it by ear.”

Over time, he has grown strong and confident enough to perform

for crowds. His most recent performance was for American High’s Battle of the Bands during Springfest, where he played for the junior band and featured in Uptown Funk for the freshmen. But he has bigger things cooking.

A new punk rock band has formed, and new songs are in progress. Reckless Comfort was founded by Couthren, Edward Lim (11), Connor Curry (11), and Suvatne. Couthren describes how the idea was born: “Well I guess it started a long time ago as a joke with two or three completely different friends. Then Josh and I kinda stuck with the idea when he got more into guitar.” He describes how the band is progressing so far: “[Practices] go pretty okay; we just kinda show each other anything we have come up with and

try to add to [what we have]. Still working out some early band growing pains!”

Music is a huge part of Suvatne’s life, and there is no doubt he will continue to love it for years to come: “I hope to actually pursue it in some way [in the future]. I want to do small gigs and actually get money through playing guitar, but I’m not hoping for sold out stadiums or anything like that. But if it does happen, I won’t be upset.” But as for today, you can find him playing around campus: in Mr. Elam’s flex, during lunch, or just whenever he has free time, and perhaps give Reckless Comfort a follow on Instagram (@reckless_comfort1), because much more is coming.



Suvatne jamming out after school waiting for the opening night of AHS’s musical; “He almost always has his guitar and shows such visible dedication to the art he takes pride in” (Schmoyer).

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Fight or Flight

Senior Mitali Sarnobat's perspective on the "art" of fighting

Vaishnavi Kurupath
Staff Writer

"Fight or flight." Our body's natural response to danger. Fighting is ingrained within our human experience, an integral component of our biology. Our perception of it is often negative. Fighting is always violent and derogatory; we may see it as the root of destruction and chaos.

One senior at American High, Mitali Sarnobat, sees it differently. "I've always been fighting, if that makes sense," she says.

"Starting in middle school, I did boxing for a year or two. A year after [that], I started wrestling, and then I did mock trial. So I did start them at different stages in my life, but I did them all this year. I think that really helped bring forth the ways that they're similar to me," she continues.

"Right now, I'm coaching boxing and training myself. I just came out of my mock trial seasons and my wrestling seasons, both of which I'm still involved in to some extent. The way that they've always connected has been that it feels like a fight [to me]. Every time you're in a courtroom, you go through objections for mock trials, where one person issues some kind of sharp retort and you have to be able to be faster [with your response]. That's the exact same thing as it is in boxing and wrestling."

However, Sarnobat doesn't look down upon her "fighting," as many would. "[Being in mock trial] feels very similar to me as throwing the perfect straight. It comes down to

just being quicker and more aware of the situation. You have to be a bit more calculated. I really enjoy the way that [my activities] show that there are more positive aspects to fighting than just aggression. Wrestling is very complimentary, because it's all about discipline. You know, it's not just a release of violence. And I think I've appreciated finding the intersection of all of that."

The "art" of fighting is something Sarnobat has grown to love and master in her own ways, and she notices that people may perceive her differently for this.

"I always thought people perceive me as a little bit aggressive and intense. I don't think that aligns with my personality," she says. "It might align with my mentality, but that's different from my personality. I think a lot of people get those two conflated."

"Once people get to know me, I'm a bit more relaxed as a person, especially towards other people. I think a lot of people get mixed up when you do a sport like wrestling or boxing," she continues. "I never view it as 'me in opposition to anybody.' I think it's always been me against myself, wanting to do better [and] leave better than I came in."

Others around her notice this stark contrast between her initial demeanor and true personality.

"At first, I found her really intimidating and scary," says Sage Gebrekidan, a freshman on the Mock Trial team. "Now, I see her as someone who still has that intimidating factor when needed, but she's also really sweet and someone you can always go to [for help]."

Another mock trial mem-



Pictured on the far left of the bottom row, Mitali Sarnobat poses for a picture with the AHS Girls' Wrestling Team. When talking about her final performance on the team, she remarks, "I think [there is] something that people get mixed up about wrestling and fighting. It's not about cruelty. We can wrestle and then, at the end of it, still be friends or still be a family."

ber, sophomore Mai Presser, chimes in. "I thought she was very powerful and confident, and I appreciated that. She's done so much. So I was a little bit intimidated by how successful she was. As I've gotten to know her, she's actually very caring," she says.

"I don't think that [Mitali is necessarily misunderstood]; I think Mitali always makes herself clear, and her attitude just represents what she feels," says her brother Atharva Sarnobat.

"I think people confuse the intensity that I have towards myself with the way that I feel about the world, which isn't necessarily the case," says Sarnobat.

It turns out Sarnobat feels strongly about the world around her. "I feel things in a heightened sense. I've always struggled with my mental health, and part of that is panic attacks," she says. "So it kind of is very weird [when] everything feels intense to me in life."

This appears to be the root of Sarnobat's attraction to "fighting."

"I think there have been many moments in my life where, due to my own mental health, I have felt very weak and out of control. And I do have clinical depression. So it's not something that I can necessarily control," she says. "Things like panic attacks, you can't stop them and it almost feels like you've lost control of your body. But if you do a sport, like wrestling, a contact sport, or boxing, or even mock trial, where you just have to keep your composure even when you're under pressure, you realize that you're capable of more than you think. And I think that has really really

helped me get through some stuff."

A sense of control is what Sarnobat searches for in her various activities. Fighting transforms from an art to a tool she can use to meet her needs.

"If I'm wrestling or if I'm boxing, I'm choosing to put myself in that situation. I'm in control of it. I'm not in control of what triggers I see laying on the road. And I can't control the adrenaline rush that will come at that moment," she says. "But if I put myself in a situation like wrestling or boxing where it's controlled, I think I'm certainly more comfortable with that environment. I think a lot of what I do is done in the hopes of regaining control over aspects of my life that I feel somewhat powerless over."

This quest for control is transformative, specifically in her presence on the wrestling team.

"As a freshman, she had a very high kinesthetic intelligence, where people would say she's just a natural. At the time, she was fairly aggressive as well," says wrestling coach Mr. McCloy.

Mr. McCloy describes how Mitali's break for those two years did put her at a disadvantage in terms of readiness for the upcoming seasons. "Now with the gap in time from sophomore-junior year, she did miss out. She made that choice, and I think she realized that was not the right choice," he says.

However, in senior year, Sarnobat gained that extra motivation to catch up.

"The last three weeks of her season were the most dedicated, compelling efforts I've seen from her. She did not lose any matches until we got

to the section tournament, which is post-league. She went undefeated through league," says Mr. McCloy.

Sarnobat is not immune to periods of doubt or demotivation; however, leaning into the art of fighting helped bring her up.

"I don't have any alternative other than just going in and completing it. Let's take wrestling: if you were on the mat, I cannot imagine standing up and walking off the mat without having finished. You have to get through it. It's not something that you can just step away from because you decide you're scared," says Sarnobat.

"Same thing if you're in the ring. If you're doing a round and you're sparring, you can't really tell somebody, 'Okay, okay, stop. I'm scared.' They're two minute rounds, but I remember I've had some awful two minute rounds where I'm just getting the sh*t beat out of me. And I can't stop them. So, I have to figure out how [I am] going to react. They're not going to stop, but I can move. I have two good legs. I have hands that I can use to protect myself. You learn how to adapt [in fighting]. And I think that's generally how life is. If you take mental health, for example, I don't have an easy way out; so I have to learn how to get through it. And I think doing things like wrestling and boxing and even mock trial, where you can't just walk out because [you're] stressed, shows you that you will get through things."

Sarnobat plans to continue her activities in college, as she talks about joining the Boxing Club at her college and getting involved with Mock Trial. Most importantly, she is ready to take the lessons she's learned throughout high school to the world beyond American. "I'm realizing that I have accomplished things that I deserve to be proud of," she says. "Dealing with everything that I've gone through [is a big thing]. I will continue to do that for the rest of my life."

As far as she knows it, fighting will always be a part of Sarnobat's life. But she's not losing anytime soon.



Pictured on the far left, Mitali Sarnobat spars with a friend at her local martial arts center. When talking about what the sport gives her, she remarks, "Boxing helps things seem a lot better than they feel outside of the ring."

The Time In Between

Stitch by stitch, Isabelle Chung-Hall (12) gets the job done—and builds her future along the way

Vincent Nghiem
Staff Writer

At the age of three, she lodged a Polly Pocket rubber shoe up her nose. She had to take a trip to the emergency room and get surgery. So begins the wonderful life of Isabelle Chung-Hall (12).

These days, she's not shoving Polly Pockets up her nose, but life is no less exciting for Isabelle. She works on a variety of art in her free time—"I like to keep my hands moving or something going on when I have to think about it. If I'm not, I'm just laying in bed, which is really pathetic when it's hours on end"—and today, it's a design for c/o 2023 council. Swooping her Apple Pencil back and forth on her iPad Pro,

yare (12), one of Isabelle's closest childhood friends, reminisces. Kylie, Isabelle's older sister, also recalls a particular memory: "I used to dress her up in my mom's clothes, and we would put on fashion shows for my parents."

Nowadays, though, it's more common to see Isabelle off the runway than on it, but she makes her presence known nonetheless. In fact, you've probably seen Isabelle's crocheted pieces on display at this year's Fine Arts Fair. "I was trying to make a consistent color scheme for all of the things," recalls Isabelle, "so I tried to keep it green, cream, greyish, some brown."

From that extravagant night, perhaps you remember Isabelle's messenger bag—"I decided to change

from humble, tear-jerking beginnings—literally. "The first night I tried to crochet, I stayed up until six in the morning, and I had to leave for something at eight in the morning," Isabelle laughs. "I called my friend and started crying to her 'cause I was really frustrated."

Crocheting is just the latest artistic undertaking that Isabelle has explored. "With crocheting it's really repetitive," Isabelle reveals. "Muscle memory. I just sit there and literally disassociate while doing the same movement with my hands over and over again. It's very peaceful. I don't have to think about it." Always creative, she has been making art for as long as she can remember, and she follows a signature freestyle approach. "I kinda just do my own thing for the most part. I just use sketches mostly. I'll look up something on Google and I'll take little bits of things that I find," Isabelle says. Her inspirations? Quite eclectic. "Flyers from other schools or other clubs or people. Yoshitomo Nara. The SFMOMA cat lady."

She puts her creativity on display at campus as part of ASB, where, as the head of the publicity committee, she makes a variety of visual pieces, ranging from sprawling backdrops to digital graphics.

"She's actually really, really awesome. She's really creative and comes up with a lot of good ideas," Roman Young (11), another member of the publicity committee, says confidently. Agyare, who is also a Leadership student, attests to Isabelle's awesomeness: "She's always the person who will wait for you while you tie your shoe, which is great. Someone who I can rely on. Also really funny!" As Agyare speaks, Isabelle waves her arms in a spaghetti-like fashion behind her.

Creativity is spontaneous for Isabelle. "My side projects just come and go," she explains. "I'll get a lot of motivation, paint six things, and then I'll drop it because either I don't have time or I get bored. I've switched between a bunch of art mediums before." But when she gets working, she gets into it: "I usually sit on my floor and play a YouTube video and I'm not even paying attention to whatever's playing. I just do

my lil' thing."

Isabelle will take her "lil' thing" to greater heights in college. "I plan on majoring in advertising with a minor in graphic design at San Jose State," she says, a twinkle in her eye. "I want to be on some sort of design team."

The thought of growing up, however, is daunting for Isabelle, and adulthood has naturally spurred both anxiety and pensiveness within her. "I have a lot of feelings about turning 18. I was literally a loser for the first few years [of high school]," Isabelle laughs. "Feeling like I don't know what is gonna happen next is making me really anxious and makes me not ready. It's a really awkward time."

Through her passions, however, art has kept her grounded and determined in this tu-

Kylie is as proud of Isabelle as her sister is thankful for her. "It has been so fulfilling seeing Isabelle do something she is passionate in. I was able to attend the Fine Arts Fair and watch her designs be showcased. That was such a proud big sister moment for me," she gushes. "Her confidence has grown so much in the work she produces."

We're outside now. The sky is clear, the sunlight sharp and warm. "I used to journal a lot about how I felt," Isabelle discloses. "I don't like to talk to people about how I feel. I don't like to write down my feelings because I feel like it's cringe." She can't help but laugh a little at herself. "That's so embarrassing to say! But when I read back my diary, I think, *Ew, what the freak am I saying?! But if*



Still wearing face paint from Lip Dub, Isabelle Chung-Hall stands at this year's Springfest Night Market.

white curves and loops begin to adorn the screen.

I hand her a greasy Mcdonalds hashbrown (artists need sustenance). "Thank you so much for the hashbrown!" She dabs. It's the seventeenth time she's dabbled since we've first spoken.

As if nothing happened, she returns to her work. "Art is more of an individual thing for me," she says, munching on the hashbrown. "I don't usually do stuff with other people, but if it's giving ideas, then it's a good thing to have others around you so you can bounce around each other. But ultimately, it's up to one person."

Isabelle's creative endeavors have indeed been largely an individual pursuit. "My parents didn't really sign me up for anything. Me, myself, and I, as corny as it is," she laughs. But Isabelle has always had a unique knack for self-expression.

"We used to draw on the blacktop together," Alisa Ag-

up the material because most were made with thinner acrylic yarn but I made hers with blanket yarn"—worn by Kiarra Bautista (11). Bautista is an avid fan of Isabelle's work. "Her add-on bag was incredible and was so fitting for the outfit I wore for her that night," Bautista says enthusiastically.

Or the shrug—"a half-sweater and the sleeves"—she crocheted for Agyare, who vouches that "it was a cute outfit." Surprisingly, Isabelle's dazzling exhibitions at the Fine Arts Fair were a culmination of only a couple months of experience. "I started crocheting during the end of last year during winter break because I was really bored and I wanted to make some new clothes," Isabelle explains. "I spend too much money, and I figured if I just buy a couple balls of yarn, I could make six shirts out of that."

And there she began,



(From left) Bautista, Agyare, Isabelle, and Winnie Ho (12), each donning shiny Doc Martens and one of Isabelle's crocheted pieces, pose on the runway at this year's Fine Arts Fair.

multuous transition between youth and adulthood. "Since [first beginning], I've created many articles of clothing such as hats and warmers and tops and sweaters—fun little things," says Isabelle. Setting down her roots deep into her creative aspirations, Isabelle has found something truly for her.

Isabelle has received unending guidance from one of the most important adults in her life: her sister Kylie. The head of a design team named Her Campus at SJSU, Kylie has been an invaluable source of inspiration and encouragement for Isabelle and her future career. "She's my closest friend," Isabelle explains earnestly. "If I had the choice of reaching out to my friends to hang out, I would still choose my sister. You know when you sit in silence with even your best friends? I don't feel that with her basically. She knows everything about me."

I put it [my feelings] into art they're [the audience] not gonna know about the personal meaning I put in."

She looks on, and her thoughts inevitably drift to the future. "It's not like I don't want to go to college—I want that independence, I wanna do something with my life. But it's the unknown part. It's like, 'what do I do with myself?'"

But it already seems that Isabelle has found that something, that special thing, to do—and it feels just right for her.

"Now, our age gap feels smaller as we are entering a similar stage in life being college students," Kylie reflects. "I think that makes it feel like she just grew up overnight. In a way she kind of did—this year was pivotal for her. She should be so proud of what she has accomplished. It makes me happy watching Isabelle find herself."

The Art of Purposeful Accidents

When it comes to the uncertain future, Savvy Giang (12) finds it best to just go with the flow

Alfred Ukudeev-Freeman
Staff Writer

High school's over for many this year. And so ensues a terrible dread, an inevitability many underclassmen fail to consider. Then the time comes and they're spit out into a world of grand independence! So—is it liberating? Terrifying? Confusing? I don't know the full extent of it; I'm only a junior and the prospects seem to scare me.

However, online portrayals of "independence" offer a different perspective, painting college days as "aesthetically-pleasing" with visits to coffee shops and dual-study days with friends. Not to speak for the future, but the actual sense of it is much more

ONLINE PORTRAYALS OF "INDEPENDENCE" OFFER A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE, PAINTING COLLEGE DAYS AS "AESTHETICALLY-PLEASING"

complicated. A mess of the good and bad. And the ugly.

In the midst of all the chaos, Savvy Giang (12) wants to be a kind of big brother for others around him caught in that same anxious feeling.

"Someone they could look up to and feel a guiding hand," he says.

But Savvy doesn't know what exactly he wants to be. In the past, his accounts wore online trends and gloaty posts that didn't feel authentic to his true character. One post features Savvy with a face full of makeup, showing off his appearance while mouthing words to a trendy song. The video itself garnered millions of views and thousands of comments obsessing over his appearance.

Take one comment

where a user writes "I WOULD DIE FOR YOU" and you'll find the rest say similar, over-exaggerated reactions.

"But I didn't like that," Savvy says. "It's all based on videos that don't even show the real me. Ever since then, I've wanted to show a 'realer' side. One with personality, you know?"

Friends of Savvy are quite familiar with his "realer" side. "Savvy spends a

IN THE MIDST OF ALL THE CHAOS, SAVVY GIANG WANTS TO BE A KIND OF BIG BROTHER FOR OTHERS AROUND HIM.

"We're study partners," says Nicole Ventura (12). "AP Gov."

"Late night study boba talks," Savvy adds.

"We never studied," she says, laughing.

But now Savvy is eighteen and he stands at that level of uncertainty. Whether that's college or career paths, what serves him best is merely an idea.

"I feel like I have a good balance of spontaneous decisions and a single set path," says Savvy. "I have an idea where I wanna go, but I never expected to be where I'm at today."

One of these spontaneous decisions led him to a spot on the cheerleading team, something he initially picked up in the eighth grade.

"They came with packets and stuff, and I was like,

'Oh, I'll try it out. The worst the can happen is that I quit after one year.'"

Being the only boy, he found himself at the center of attention (although he was very reluctant to admit it), and, combined with a heavy load of practice and hard work, became the team captain. "The first male flier in our area, too," he says. "It was a big moment for me."

At the end of the day, it's the fear of not doing enough that worries Savvy, the thought of going through life without trying everything he's wanted.

"This year, I feel like Savvy's been reaching out more," says Ventura. "He's been really open to new things and just, like, really resilient."

Although with age

comes the anxiety of the future, so does maturity. As Savvy grows older, he's tapped more into his adventurous side, being more willing to step past boundaries and live in new environments.

After high school, Savvy plans on attending the University of San Francisco and majoring in marketing, specifically picking the university because of its blending of rich culture and the wild city, all of which provide a real education. "I think it has a better learning environment for me. There's a lot of things you can stumble upon and not knowing makes it exciting."

Indeed, Savvy is already proving to be a natural at these chance encounters. One look at his Instagram or TikTok profile now reveals an adventurous and busy teenager navigating the twists and turns of his daily life, talking about makeup routines and giving brief looks into his own city ventures (Tokyo, San Francisco, San Diego). And now armed with a new hand-held camera, Savvy has his own unique way to keep his life on record—and this time around, it's on his own terms.

"I'm here because I chose to be here," Savvy says confidently. "And I like what I do, because I chose to do so."



scary amount of money on trinkets," says Winnie Ho (12), a good friend of his. "And he's a bad driver..."

"Yeah, one time he accidentally ran three lights on our way to San Francisco," laughs another friend, Isabelle Chung-Hall (12). Savvy insists it was a misunderstanding, but this is clearly no laughing matter... "I mean, he's really chill—you can't really hate him."

His friends find that his most redeeming quality is his positive attitude, but they all admit he can dawdle on distractions.



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A Stone's Throw Away

How Weilan Howell's spring pastime may have opened the door to a blossoming career

Surya Chelliah
Staff Writer

The buzzer sounds, the action stops, and the stadium lights up with the audience's cheers, signifying the end of a game. Players are showered with adulation as fans line up to get memorabilia signed or to purchase uniforms. But one member of the team is met with far less regard from the fans, with little to no paraphernalia of their likeness sold. No matter the sport, this team member has an instrumental role in

victory, one that doesn't even play during the game: the coach. Plotting plays, giving advice, and training players, they change the course of the game from off the field. The coach of a team is an invaluable asset, but what happens when that asset is absent?

Weilan Howell (12) answered that question when he stepped up as the acting coach of American High's throwing team after

the departure of the previous coach, Coach Pepper, at the beginning of this year's throwing season. Getting to that position was no easy feat, though, and Howell, like everyone else, had to start somewhere.

Howell began his journey at the age of four, having a "strong sense of fairness about him," as his father says, leading him into tee-ball and eventually to baseball.

"I've always just been a bigger guy, so [sports] have been a thing I've done from a very young age,"

Howell notes.

Howell's father continues, "He got into flag football in junior high with a great coach, and when he got to high school the one thing he knew he wanted to do was play football. Living in the Mission area, though, Mission San Jose doesn't have a football team, so we moved him to American [High] where his mom worked as a teacher and he eventually joined and played on the football team for four years."

Although Howell's passion for foot-

ball brought him to American High, in his freshman year he found himself trying out for track & field during the offseason. "My friend Toby recruited me to the throwing team when the football season was over. And throwing, it's just so unique; it's one of the only sports [where] you could see a 300-pound, 6'7" guy moving smoothly. To my mind, that was beautiful," remarks Howell.

As a thrower, Howell found his motivation in the

independence of the sport, "there's nobody relying on you or nobody for you to rely on during meets. It's just you. We had a lot of time to mess around and have fun because of that. Practices were more relaxed, but everyone knew they were responsible for themselves; our two rules are 1: Don't die and 2: Don't kill anybody."

The careless bliss of throwing couldn't last forever, though, and after Coach Pepper's departure from the throwing team after Howell's junior



Howell helps fellow varsity shot put thrower Kaitlyn Fong (12) adjust her form. A keen eye is a necessary asset for a throwing coach, as every step in the throwing motion should be planned. Even the smallest errors in form heavily impact the potential of the throw.

year, someone had to fill the coach position.

“Weilan was one of the strongest throwers we’ve had in a while,” said Distance Coach Ramirez, “[Add] his [three-year] experience to that and him guiding a lot of the newcomers, it’s no surprise he stepped up to the plate.”

Kaitlyn Fong (12), a first-year thrower, reminisces on not only Howell’s ability as a thrower but as an acting coach too, stating, “He knows how to point out where someone is going wrong in their technique, and he can be a caring teammate when he wants to be. There was once an invitational meet where he sat behind the throwing ring with his little lawn chair as all of us threw.

He would critique our technique and praise it at the same time, always encouraging us to do better on the next one; him being there—for all of us—it really showed his dedication.”

Howell’s knack for coaching and throwing is not innate, though; multi-sports coach Anthony Rivera regularly has sessions with Howell and his teammates, emphasizing the need for a technical understanding of the sport, detailing, “You have to have a good eye for the body in space, especially for throwing. It’s not in many sports you’re planning every movement to structure a catch or throw—you have to understand progressions and techniques. A lot



of my throwers end up having to [assist coaches] for their school, so building structure in my throwers is even more important because it’s important to me, as a coach, that they bring what they’ve learned back to their schools.”

He elaborates, “And they’re not just helping others, de-

constructing a throw can help them figure out what they’re doing wrong—using it as a way to gain perspective.”

And as per Coach Rivera’s intentions, Weilan gained perspective, not on his throwing skills, but his future, “I’ve left football behind more or less; I feel like throwing has become my main sport,” Howell notes, his passion for the sport emboldened by viewing it from the angles of both acting coach and player.

“I’d like to throw in college if that’s possible. I’ve already sent out a letter to the Sacramento State University’s throwing coach. I’ve also been thinking about returning to American [High] as a coach after I graduate. It’s the sys-

tem I’ve always known, and I want to give back.”

Howell continues, “I know others might want to move on once they’re done with high school, enter a new stage of their life and all, but the transition from Mission San Jose to American—leaving all my friends and connections behind—was an entirely fresh start for me. I still like being childish when I can when there’s someone mature in the room, but I know I have to [be] mature when it’s needed. Throwing helped me find a balance there.”



Howell prepares to throw a discus. Scoring first place in four of his six last throwing events, practicing and honing his form is integral to the performance of him and his team.

Anika Warriar: South Asian Actor on the Rise Cont.

able to communicate with an audience and have them see through your lens. With theater, it depends on the person as different people will communicate things differently. It's not limited to just one way of expressing something. People have different ways of expressing different characters."

Annitha Krishnan, a close friend of Warriar's, has watched some of Warriar's performances.

"I love how the audience can see Anika's passion for theater through her performance. From changing the tone of her voice to her body language, she embodies her character in so many ways. It's clear that Anika is very observant and strategic on how she portrays her characters. Anika shares with the audience how her character truly feels which helps the audience appreciate her nuanced character."

Alongside Chakravarty, Warriar had also worked with co-actor Diya Dipak on *The Parting*.

"I would describe Anika's acting as very sincere," Dipak recounts. "She puts her heart into every character that she plays and she takes feedback very well so it's a delight to watch her on stage."

As a South Asian actor,

Warriar hopes to explore her culture as she dives into acting.

"I haven't figured out exactly what the South Asian experience is for it to be highlighted. I feel that shows like *Never Have I Ever* touched upon it, but I still don't know exactly what it is. With Bollywood movies, that's the only representation of South Asian people in movies. A lot of characters in most TV shows are made fun of or are ridiculed for having an accent or having that sort of culture. Breaking the stereotype is what I hope to see with more South Asian representation, as well as changing the narrative."

Chakravarty, who played the grandmother on *Never Have I Ever* and has become a mentor for Warriar, agrees.

"We have an Asian diaspora and it's good to see people who look like us represented on the screen as everyday, ordinary human beings—not necessarily as a stereotype but just like a regular family. It is nice to have our stories on screen," she adds.

"I think I would love to explore acting in film," Warriar mentions. "I would love to play a role that is adapted for a South Asian from a story that already exists. I think this is a great way of highlighting how one experience can be seen through different perspectives."

These adaptations should ideally say something about the culture of the community."

Rachana Aithal is a current student in UCLA TFT who graduated American in 2022.

"I've found a great community of POC and particularly South Asian filmmakers here, both within UCLA and outside of it. There's a strong sense of kinship and support between everyone, and these relationships have created great spaces to learn and collaborate," she remarks. "Take advantage of every opportunity possible! And go into your first year with the mentality to learn as much as you can, especially about the entertainment industry."

"I hope that working with different kinds of people will help me see different perspectives," says Warriar. "I hope to bring more authenticity, and I hope to highlight the South



Ranjita Chakravarty (left) with Anika Warriar (right) in *The Parting*.

Asian experience as an Indian person. A certain narrative is created when South Asians only play geeky characters, and it's really hard to break out of that tradition. I hope to be a part of projects that create social commentary surrounding certain experiences."

Chakravarty hopes the best for Warriar as she begins her journey at UCLA.

"There's so much theater to do. It doesn't matter what you're doing—you can transform yourself into that character. It's a very big thing for all actors to not only be authentic, but be truthful. Because if you don't, you don't bring honesty to your character. You have to really look at the character and figure out what the character is thinking."

"Being on stage is just one, but preparing for it is a great thing and then also figuring

out what happens behind the scenes. I hope that when you go to UCLA, you will be able to do a variety of roles and all kinds of roles—positive roles, negative roles. Even if you are a villain, how do you play a villain? You have to find some redeeming qualities in the villain and like the character so that you can get into it."

Chakravarty also

hopes that Warriar's audience will be inspired by her.

"I'm really happy that you're going for performing arts because it's not very common in our community. Hopefully, people will get inspired by the choice that you've made, that you don't necessarily always have to do computer science or engineering or pre-med and that you can actually go into the performing arts and make a career out of that and be happy. I'm hoping that people just get to see you in different roles and get inspired by that."

In addition, Mr. Warriar advises his daughter to be bold.

"Express yourself! Take the bull by the horns and make use of this unique opportunity!"

Warriar's final words to any other student considering acting:

"Don't have your blinders on and only focus on whatever everyone else is doing because it stops you from pursuing it more. [Theater] is a profession that teaches you how to communicate effectively and requires a lot of discipline that forces you to be able to think on your feet. You should be proud of yourself going into it. That's the biggest message."

Don't Be Fooled, He's No Bathroom Barber Cont.

small haircut. But I feel like he did a really good job" he further states.

Jerry's journey began with his mother's botched haircuts when he was younger. "My mom used to cut my hair when I was a kid so I grew up with bad haircuts. So I learned how to cut it myself and also my little brother's hair. My mom was a barber, so that's where my interest in cutting hair sparked," he states.

Justin Tieu (7), Jerry's younger brother who goes to Thornton Junior High, admires his brother's passion. "I think Jerry's haircutting business is really good. I get free haircuts all the time and whenever I want. Overall, the fact that he cuts his friends' hair and does haircuts at school, is a good business idea because he's gained so many customers" says Justin.

Justin adds, "Before my cuts were terrible but after my brother started cutting my hair, I got a lot of girls."

Jerry has had some mishaps along the way, but he's learned from them. "In 2021, my cousin was my first-ever cut, and I messed up his

hair badly. Like it was bad. It was like one side was up here and the other right here. But it humbled me and made me realize that damn I suck," Jerry admits. Although he's made some mistakes, he says that he improved his skills by practicing and watching videos, "I later improved by looking at my old cuts and trying to fix it. I also watched YouTube videos about cutting hair and I also improved with that."

Despite some setbacks, Jerry is determined to pursue a career in barbering. "I want to own my own barber shop in the future. For now, I'm trying to get my name out there and improve my skills but by college I want to upgrade my home setup before moving into a shop," Jerry says.

"He's really good at what he does. I always leave his chair feeling fresh and confident," Torres comments.

He's a student and a barber, but does he balance his job and his schoolwork? "I manage my time by doing my homework later in the evening and cutting hair right after school. This way, I can fit in two or three haircuts that day," he says.

Jerry continues, "During

school when I do my cuts, it's usually during my third period, which is team sports. And we just go in the bathroom and just cut their hair and just leave."

Stock, who is also from his team sports class mentions the time he saw Jerry doing his cuts, "We were on the football field in third period team sports, when a crowd started attracting around the bench on the sideline, I walked over and saw Jerry with a golden razor and determination in his eyes to bless up [classmate] Constantino." Stock adds that the coach from team sports complimented him on the time he got a cut from Jerry. He says, "Jerry blessed me up so good that even Coach Bisch complimented me."

It may sound crazy to do haircuts at school, but Jerry asserts that he has not gotten in trouble for doing it. "I haven't gotten in trouble. I've been caught cutting hair in the bathroom by supervisors, but they just told me to clean it up and get out of there and leave," he says. Jerry's longtime friend Dwight Payuran (11) comments about his experience getting a haircut at school. "I

got the cut in the big gym, on the bleachers. And I've also gotten one in the bathroom. It's pretty cool getting a cut at school. It's not messy and very easy."

An expert barber by the name of Dom (@fadeswithdom) who works in the city of Rancho Cucamonga, California has some advice for Jerry and for other aspiring barbers out there. "It's great that Jerry is trying to become a barber. If I had to give some advice on becoming a barber, getting into barbering is a scary adventure but the easiest thing to do when you start is to quit. If every barber went the easy way out when they started then we wouldn't have any barbers. You have to put in the work and trust the process."

While Jerry's mom, Ms. Tieu, is supportive of his aspirations, she also reminds him to focus on school. Ms. Tieu states, "I'm proud of my son for pursuing his passion for hair cutting, but I want to make sure he's also focused on his education. However, seeing him work hard and improve his skills through practice shows his dedication to this craft. I support him and will continue to encourage him

to find a balance between his passion and his studies."

According to Jerry's culinary teacher, Chef Dennis, his passion for barbering is unmistakable, and he encourages him to pursue it wholeheartedly. Chef Dennis says, "Jerry is a good student. I think being a barber is a good aspiration to have. Many people find their passion young so if that's what his passion is then he should chase them."

For those interested in pursuing a career in barbering, Jerry offers some guidance.

He says, "My advice for someone starting out being a barber is to start right now. Everyone starts somewhere like I even started somewhere, and I'm still achieving more as I go. And just keep going, because people are always going to tell you that your cuts are bad or people will always hate on your cuts and tell you not to do it but you have to believe in yourself."

Which leads to the question, would you get a cut from Jerry?

Portrait of a Young Author

Inside the mind of a budding writer and exploring her creative process

Ananya Balaji
Staff Writer

A magical wizarding world. Unicorns and mythical beasts. Alternate realities underwater or in the underworld. Most of us don't spend much time in these places, but Jessica Li (11) doesn't just spend time in them: she creates these worlds.

"I like writing fictional things. Creative writing and fantasy. And that's what I like to read. I like to write what I read."

Her framing of her writing endeavors is rather humble. Jessica is among the few high schoolers out there who can boast a published fantasy novel. Azutan, her book, chronicles a cold, ruthless teenage-girl turned ruler of her country as she navigates the complicated world of diplomacy, friends, and herself.

Li describes her early beginnings as a writer leading up to Azutan, saying "I think I started writing when I was really young. And it was really bad, but it was just a pastime. And every grade, I would fill up a notebook...That was kind of the process and then later in eighth grade, we had an assignment in class to write a short story. And then I just decided to turn that into my eighth grade writing project. I tried to polish it, and eventually I got to the point of having a full-length novel that I could actually publish."

Li's mother adds on about Jessica's early beginnings. She describes with a soft, joking glare, "I remember she always [sat] anywhere reading or writing, instead of exercising," then adding on, "She started reading Harry Potter in second, and she admired the writing of the books she read, like Percy Jackson. She also talks a lot about what she thinks is good [about] the writing of her favorite books while we walk the dog, and I can feel her passion in writing."

Now, she has been able to connect her interests in writing to school more by taking the infamous AP Language and Composition course offered at American. "Specifically, I actually re-



*Li puts pen to paper, writing out her next masterful, fictional writing creation.
(PC: Ananya Balaji)*

ally liked doing the blogs [in APENG] because it gives you an opportunity to frequently write for an audience... Thinking about how an audience is going to experience your writing has been a useful exercise for my writing outside school as well."

Li opens up about what the writing process typically looks like for her, describing "Usually I just get ideas, and I just really want to write about them. I'll be like 'Ooh, that [idea] would be so fun.'" She details some of her influences, saying "I'll get inspiration from the books that I read. And then also the stuff that happens to me, the things that are kind of interesting, I'll kind of put a fantasy twist on it. I usually like to think about what I want my characters to look like, and especially what they will sound like, because I like writing dialogue...Yeah, then I just open up a Google Doc,

and we ball."

Her imagination and insight as a writer extends to her time spent even when she's not writing. "I daydream a lot. It's gotten me into trouble, like, several times. I just like thinking about things. I'm almost an overthinker. I also just kind of imagine stories for people. When I see someone I'm like, oh, I kind of assume things, and it kind of spirals. I don't know if that makes sense, but I just like to pick up random things. And it helps create imaginary scenarios." Her friend, Dhara Patel (11) also describes signs of her as a writer in daily life, saying "

Her reader, close friend, and illustrator of her book cover, Andrea Zhang (11), provides commentary on how this process is reflected in Azutan. "I really like how the three main characters are all women, and it felt really empowering to read the in-

teractions between them...I also really enjoyed her writing style, which is very engaging. She tends to focus on the emotions of the characters, which I really liked. The ending is also pretty up to interpretation and open-ended."

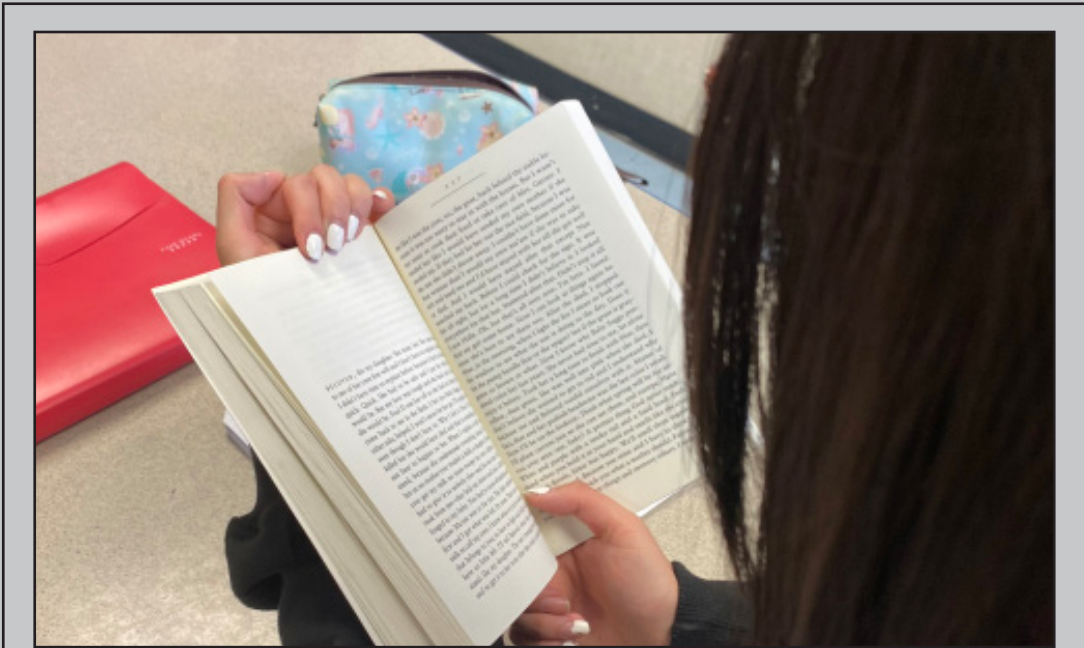
The approach Li takes to her writing also has to do with the audience she aims to write for in the future: children. She explains, "I watch children's shows. I like She-Ra, I like The Owl House, I like Avatar. I like them in general...If you look in a lot of young adult or adult shows though, they have a lot of dark themes, they have a lot of heavy topics. They try to turn it and almost romanticize it as much as possible, and they just do things with it that I dislike because it's so dramatic. And it doesn't get to the point. But with children's shows, it's generally very simple. It's understand-

able for kids. Like with homophobia for example, they make it very clear, because kids are old enough to understand these things. And I really appreciate the respect that [children's media creators] have for their audience."

The concept of trust in one's audience is something Li has been exploring more as a writer too with how she handles more difficult themes. "Lately, I've been reading more books where the author places more trust in the reader, because I feel like we're so used to it, especially young adult stuff, they just spoon feed everything to you. They spoon feed you the themes, the plot, the plot twists...And specifically the themes, especially when they're trying to educate you on a topic. I'm going to use the homophobia and transphobia example because I read a lot about that. They have such shallow ways of educating the reader. It's just like, 'oh my god, you should use the correct pronouns'...I think, at this point, if you're not gonna put any effort into showing how impactful, how much of a problem this actually is, then you shouldn't even portray it because then you don't have the right voice to say anything about this."

This depth of analysis of what she consumes is something noticeable, especially to those close to Jessica. Her mom describes, "She thinks in her own way, her own angle. And she thinks in depth [about] what she reads, so she has her own views on the books and the things happening around her." In her mom's words, Jessica is "creative, dedicated, and self-motivated." Her friends agree too; Patel describes, "She's very organized and good at time-management. She makes time for her personal projects so she can do the things she's passionate about, like writing."

All in all, the question on all our minds is, "What will Jessica write next?" Time will only tell, but it's safe to say this is just the beginning for one very interesting writer with equally interesting future stories in store.



*Li reads Beloved by Toni Morrison in preparation for her APENG class, which she has found enriching to her as a writer outside the class.
(PC: Ananya Balaji)*

Overcoming The Overwhelming

How Aunyah Campbell has learned to emerge stronger

Caleb Santos
Staff Writer

Aunyah Campbell (12), despite her young age, has had a rollercoaster of a life. Born in St. Louis, Missouri, where Aunyah says she “stayed for nine years,” her home life was difficult. She says, “My grandmother had full custody over me because my parents couldn’t take care of me. My dad would visit, but my mom wasn’t really in the picture.”

She didn’t get to meet her mother until she was around nine years old. “That’s when I moved to Illinois with my dad. He let me see my mother during that time, but my mom got mad that I would be dropped off at her house late even though she was supposed to be the one picking me up. She’d get mad at me when I’d show up, and one day I told my dad about it. When my dad confronted her about it, they fought, and that was the last weekend I’ve been there.”

On top of her struggles with her parents in Illinois, Aunyah lost contact with her grandmother when she moved in with her dad. Aunyah explains that “it was because they were mad at each other, and it was very, very heartbreaking.”

While her relationships with her family posed a great struggle, Aunyah’s financial situation arguably posed an even greater struggle. Aunyah explains that “it was financially difficult because my dad injured his back while we were living in Illinois, and he was out of work for a long time. We had to rely on the government, and we would go to food banks. There were numerous times we didn’t have enough money to pay the electricity bill, so we would have no electricity for weeks at a time.” At no point in the interview did Aunyah blame these circumstances, especially her lack of electricity and food at times, for impacting her academics.

Aunyah’s financial situation generally only got worse before it improved. The next two states she

moved to were Kentucky and New York, respectively. She was homeless both times.

Aunyah explains that “When we got to Kentucky, we stayed in hotels until my dad could move us into a shelter.” In the midst of her struggles, Aunyah’s time in Kentucky came with two fortunate things. After about a year, Aunyah says, “My dad got back on his feet, and we actually moved into an apartment, so that was really nice.” Even more impactful for Aunyah, at around the same time, she met one of her closest friends to date. “Tay was my first friend in Kentucky, and she was someone I could talk to about anything.”

Tayani Stuart explains that there was a long process to break through Aunyah’s surface. “She was literally a mute,” Stuart says, “she’ll just stare at you.” It took about a week for Stuart and Aunyah to be more comfortable with each other. Stuart says, “Once I got to understand what she was going through and her past, I didn’t judge her after that.”

“Tay helped me a lot as my first close friend,” Aunyah says. Stuart believes she “helped Aunyah out of her shell. She went to New York midway through eighth grade so we didn’t go to high school together. We still had a good connection. She started to open up more in New York and had more friends, and I felt relieved that she wasn’t just by herself.”

“I think I’ve helped her deal with her negativity so she could be positive,” Stuart says. “Now she can move forward and overcome her past.”

Out of the friends that Aunyah made in New York, she says, “I am closest to Lena.” Selena Owens and Aunyah met during the slayer part of eighth grade. “She was pretty shy when I met her,” Selena says, “but after she got comfortable with me and Rojay, she started to show her crazier side.”

Although Aunyah went to a different high school than Selena, she says, “I got much closer to her after eighth grade.”

Selena says, “I hung out with her a lot during the summer before 9th grade. And even when we were in different schools, Rojay and I would visit her after school.”

Throughout their time in

New York, Aunyah and Selena trusted each other with more of their problems. But Selena says, “She’s used to facing a lot of issues in her life. She presented herself as a rather quiet person who was friendly, but there’s a lot more than that.”

Aunyah revealed that “they didn’t know I was homeless until Rojay saw me walking home and went into the shelter.” Though Aunyah has opened herself up to Tayani and to Selena to some extent, she says she would “prefer to keep my personal problems to myself still.”

Nevertheless, Aunyah’s relationship with Selena solidified the changes that Stuart brought to her life. Being less shy and more emotionally open, Aunyah formed close connections with people wherever she went. More importantly, she kept those connections. In a life of instability, she found stability in her relationships with those who care about her.

“She wants to be successful,” Stuart says. “She doesn’t want to get stuck in the cycle her family is in.” Selena feels similarly, saying, “Aunyah is motivated and self-driven and independent. She can take care of herself and knows what she wants.”

The first thing Aunyah worked on when moving forward in California was establishing her strong relationship with her grandparents. She says, “technically, my grandpa is my auntie’s dad, and my Nana is his wife he married after having my auntie. I’m not related to Nana, but we don’t do that step thing around here. We’re family.”

While Aunyah’s lack of guidance throughout her life has led to her resilient and independent nature, the support she receives from her family in California provides her with what she needs to utilize her growth to overcome her past. Aunyah says, “My Nana is definitely a mother figure for me. She is probably the closest person to a mother I’ve had in my life. She’s pushed me to do so many things that I didn’t even know I could do.”

Playing a different role to Aunyah’s Nana, Aunyah says her grandpa “is all about me being independent.”

Whereas Aunyah’s Nana provided guidance in refin-

ing her character, Aunyah’s grandpa guided her into adulthood.

“I definitely feel like I’m more independent thanks to him,” Aunyah says. “He taught me how to drive, he took me to get my California ID when I first arrived, he pushed me to work. He just helped me become a more mature person overall.”

But it wasn’t just her home life that changed. Aunyah came to California more extroverted than ever. While quiet in class, Aunyah is no longer reluctant to imitate new relationships.

Jocelyn Tamboura, one of Aunyah’s closest friends, had a different experience than her previous friends.

“I saw Aunyah at spirit week,” Jocelyn says, “and we were both black, so I thought, why not introduce myself.”

“Me and Jocelyn clicked instantly,” Aunyah says. “We had anatomy together and got to know each other. When she introduced me to her friend Jazzy, we became a trio.”

Aunyah’s friendship with Jocelyn isn’t just important because they’re close. It’s important because Jocelyn helped Aunyah move forward in her life by working towards common goals and accomplishments.

“We joined the BSU together and became upper-classmen representatives,” Aunyah explains. “I think Aunyah developed a lot of her leadership skills under the guidance of her Nana,” Jocelyn says. “We helped her Nana campaign for city council, and during my time knowing her, her Nana has always shown to be a great role model for Aunyah.”

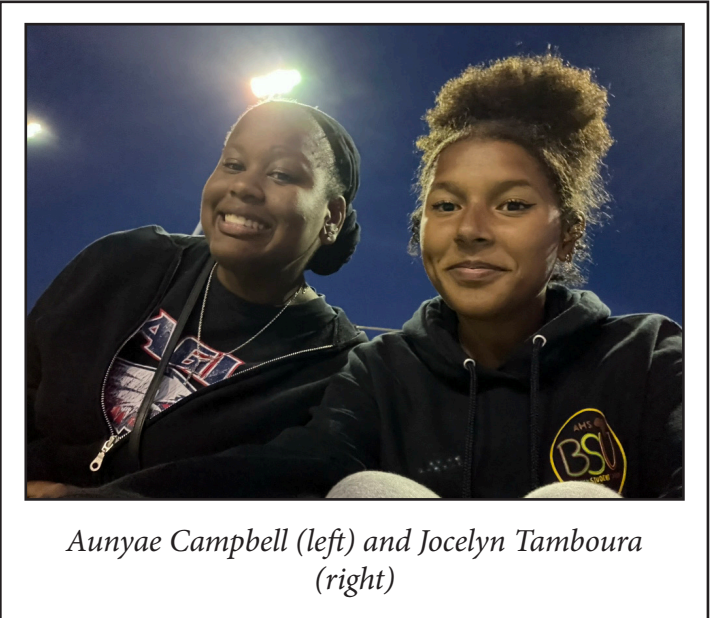
“My Nana got me connected with the African

American Cultural Society and helped me present, and they helped fund the art showcase for the BSU,” Aunyah says. “I think we did a great job. Even the mayor was in attendance.”

With a great role model like her Nana that pushes her to become a better person, it’s only fitting that Aunyah did the same. Jocelyn says, “Aunyah has really helped me improve. She pushed me to challenge myself and take AP classes when I didn’t think I could. We run a club together, another thing I didn’t expect from myself.”

With the right environment in California, Aunyah fully capitalizes on her opportunities to prove to herself that she can overcome her past misfortunes, create a new life for herself, and ultimately make a difference.

Aunyah says, “My overall goal is to become a teacher. When my life was tough, and we were constantly moving from place to place, shelter to hotel to shelter, there were some teachers who helped me in uncertain times. There were times I thought I would graduate because I would spend such little time in the same school. But luckily, there were teachers who helped me catch up, and others who knew my situation were so nice to me. I hope that I can be that teacher for someone else. I want to help kids who find themselves in situations similar to mine and maybe send them on a path that would help them improve their lives. That is how I want to overcome, and that is how I want to break the cycle.”



Aunyah Campbell (left) and Jocelyn Tamboura (right)



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Just for Kicks!

Eat. Sleep. Karate. Repeat. Diving into Sienna Yung's karate career and exploring her life at home.

Siena Encarnacion
Staff Writer

The mats are set. The whistle is blown. You look up from your feet and notice a towering figure looming over you—a grim contrast to the friendly atmosphere fostered within this gymnasium moments before. But this doesn't scare you; after all, you only have one thing on your mind—a wish for the taste of victory. After competing nationally since she was eleven years old, renowned karate athlete Sienna Yung (11) is all too familiar with the dire stakes that come with these competitions. For her, these bustling tournaments are an opportunity to prove that she has what it takes to seize the gold.

“Karate is more than just a sport to me. It’s an essential part of my life. It’s what defines me,” Yung says.

Yung first picked up this hobby when she was five years old—her parents had enrolled her in a local summer course. Unbeknownst to her, karate soon blossomed into a passion that would take her across the world and back.

Yung recalls her overseas competitions, her most recent ones being in Turkey and Czechoslovakia. “[It] is definitely pleasant, and I would say [its also] really welcoming and cheerful. During [the] World Series, all different countries [were] there, and then we got an opening ceremony—[it was nice to] be at this event and get to meet new people from different countries who also have other similar interests with me.”

She notes, “Karate is a sport that emphasizes respect and friendship. Even though you might hurt someone during training, [they won’t] say, ‘Oh, I gotta hit you back.’ You gotta respect each other and know that you’re just helping each other to get better.”

“I’m not an Olympic medalists or anything, so I don’t expect myself to win every single time,” she adds with a laugh. “But yeah, I feel like competing nationally really [is] an eye opening experience.”

As per all athletes, the road to the podium is long and filled with regrets and challenges.

Yung reminisces about her loss at her recent tournament, saying “I lost because I was so tiny—[my] opponent just pushed me around. So my goal is to get stronger before the next [tournament,] so I won’t get pushed around like that.”

“I’m scared that I’m always gonna get beat up,” she adds. “It gives me anxiety every time before tournaments.”

And aside from the struggles Yung faces physically, there still remain mental barriers she must overcome.

“I think that Sienna’s biggest challenge is working as a team,” says her friend and fellow teammate Sophia Venzon. “She’s a very solo player, so communication and teamwork [don’t] naturally come to her.”

Even so, Venzon continues, Yung has adjusted well to life in a team building setting. “She’s doing a much better job of trusting the coaches; you can see the bond building!”

“While Sienna and I aren’t particularly close yet, I’m really glad I made the first step. Operation Make Sienna [The] Bestest of Friends is still [under] way, but she has no choice in the matter and no way to resist my friendship!” she concludes.

Yung names her most adamant supporters, unsurprisingly, her friends and family.

“I’m grateful that my parents are still really supportive even though we don’t see each other every day,” she remarks. “My mom [tries] to call and text me every day and tries to solve my problems even though she may not fully understand them. [For instance,] even though Uber to karate is super expensive,

she knows that is the only hobby that I [enjoy.] So she still tries to do everything that she could to allow me to do my best and improve in karate.”

“I’m also [glad] for [my] friends in school because they helped me adapt and fit in really quickly. After the first few days [at American], I was super confused. I [didn’t] know what the schedule [was, or] where to go from my classes. But then, my friends showed me around and it really [helped me] get adapted to this environment.”

As an immigrant from Hong Kong and a new student at American, Yung faced some difficulties adjusting to life in a new school environment. She recalls her purpose for moving to California.

“Alright, it [wasn’t] my decision, but I was not against it,” Yung sheepishly admits. “My parents always wanted me to go to college in the US—I was born here and then I went back to Hong Kong. The point of [moving] to Hong Kong is because they want[ed] me to be close to them. [I’d] grow up in the US with my relatives, but then once I’m old enough [and] they think that I’m independent [and can] take care of myself, [they’ll decide] a good timing and [I’ll go back and] get used to the culture.”

Moving to the US was also motivated by her karate.

“[I hoped to] find more opportunities [here], because, in Hong Kong, it’s so tiny; there [aren’t many opportunities.] In America there [were] so many new opponents, and immediately I [knew] that I [was] not the strongest one. There’s definitely a chance for improvement,” she remarks.

Nevertheless, there still remains a wistful longing for her old home.

“I definitely missed my friends in Hong Kong,” Yung expresses. “And in terms of karate, Hong Kong [felt] better because I started karate

[there.] All my coaches and my friends are in Hong Kong. They know me the best. [Also, commuting] takes me a lot of time, and my coaches don’t know me that well, so it may be hard for them to teach me new skills.”

Nonetheless, “I don’t want to leave California since this is where I’ve spent most of my time; all my relatives are here, and then I’m hoping to major in psychology—I want to be a psychiatrist.”

“Psychology feels so relatable compared to science or language,” Yung continues. “Once you learn a concept that sticks in your mind and think about [using it] in your daily life, you can observe how these principles may apply to others, or how your thinking process might relate to stuff that [you’ve learned]. I feel like it’s easy to understand, so you [think it’s] useful. And maybe [it] can help you prevent biased thinking. [For example,] when you apply these principles, you could think, ‘Oh, yeah, this is a bias. I should prevent that. [Let’s be] more rational.’”

Her love for psychology has manifested itself in countless forms, whether this be through grueling nights spent studying for the AP exam, or her creative usage of psychological terms to poke fun at her friends.

“I’ve taken a public exam and I got the highest score for psychology in Hong Kong, which I’m super proud of—I spent a lot of time on that,” she adds. “We had a

two-month study break for the exam, so I really worked hard. I’m glad that my hard work paid off.”

Beyond Yung’s academic achievements, in the end, Yung concludes, moving to the US provided her with the freedom to grow and mature away from her immediate family.

“I’m proud that I learned how to cook, because in Hong Kong I [didn’t know how] to cook for myself. Even though I’m still not super good, at least I improved a bit.”

“What have I cooked? I learned how to cook rice.” Yung boasts, akin to a child eager to show off her newfound talents. “I did not know how to cook rice in Hong Kong. I [also] learned how to pack my own lunch. In general, I feel like after coming here I’ve [become] more independent.”

And though learning cooking rice and packing your own lunch may seem to be the start of the basics, for Yung, this may signify a new chapter in her life—a pathway towards a bright future.

As Yung says, “I feel like I have changed so much. Doing karate has made me more resilient, [and] being resilient not only applies to karate, but in school as well. And the attitudes and skill karate taught me not only applies to karate, but also to life itself.”



Sienna Yung (11) (left) is depicted in the midst of a heated spar against her opponent.
PC: Dave Beal

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