

# Feature Profile

Neima Abdulahi

Carpe Diem, Decatur High School



"I got an older brother (far right), and an older sister (center). We all just try to be strong for one another. My father's not in my life and my mother's gone," junior Temeni Brewster said.

## Fate becomes family

*Brothers find hope after losing mother*

BY NEIMA ABDULAH  
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She never showed any signs of giving up," junior Temeni Brewster said.

He visited Grady Hospital's 32nd floor three days a week for two years. Going up the elevator, down the long hallway, and past many doors led to his mother's restless figure.

He recalls watching her "in bed, not able to talk, not able to speak, not able to make signs. And I couldn't sit there and watch her suffer like that. She had always told me never to let her suffer."

"Soon as I walked in the hospital, I go in there, kiss her on her forehead and said I had to go. I couldn't really see her like that," Brewster's brother, senior Sam Wright, said.

Their mother became weaker with every visit. "I talked to her and she was just moving her eyes. We had a connection where I could just... I could know how she was feeling that day," Brewster said.

On Mar. 28, 2007, doctors pronounced Carolyn Brewster, age 39, dead. "It felt like life wasn't worth living after that point," Wright said.

"It was just so sudden," Brewster said. That Wednesday afternoon is still fresh in his memory. Alone at home, the phone rang. A

woman's voice was on the other line. "She was like, 'Can I speak to the oldest or the eldest at the house?' And I was the only one there, and she said, 'Well, your mother had just passed.'" He was motionless. Still today, "it hurts a lot," he said.

Her physical form is now gone, but Carolyn's impact has yet to fade. "I think about her everyday. I have dreams about her every night that she will come back, and we'll be together again," Wright said.

The brothers share that dream. "It's not as easy as most people would think it would be when you lose a parent. It's really hard to overcome the obstacles," Brewster said.

"I still wake up in the morning and [think], 'Is she really gone?' I never thought it could happen to me, until it happened. I know life is no joke. It'll take away anybody," Wright said.

Brewster says he would make the ultimate sacrifice. "I'd trade places with her any day," he said.

Losing her left a void in their hearts. "Growing up with a single parent, I think it would have been better having a father figure," Brewster said. "It would have created more structure in my life."

After Carolyn's death, Wright said, "We ain't got nobody there for us."

Brewster knows they'll have to move on. "It's time to grow up and change," he said. "Every day, people gonna die. That's just part of life."

In accepting death, the brothers have learned to tame tough times. "I seen a lot of things that most people wouldn't probably see at my age. It just made me grow up faster," Brewster said.

Growing up, both brothers divided their time between family and athletics. If they weren't home, then they were on a football field or basketball court. And four years ago, at the Boys and Girls Club in Oakhurst, Brewster and Wright encountered someone who would change their lives.

"[The Boys and Girls Club] asked if I could coach their 13- to 14-year-old basketball team, and I've never coached a basketball team or had any intention of coaching. It wasn't something I sought out, it was just something that happened," Coach Dennis Headings said. For Brewster and Wright, the decision would forever link their lives together.

"He walked into the gym while I was playing basketball," Brewster recalls. Their two different backgrounds, racially and economically, did not alter the connection that developed over the next four years. "It was just a quick bond. He tried his best to relate to me. It was like he understood what I was trying to do, coming up from having nothing," Brewster said.

And when worse came to worst, the coach would play a new position in the boys' lives – a provider. "When my mama was in the hospital, he helped us with getting food, taking her to the hospital and back to the house. He was always there, no matter what," Wright said.

"[Carolyn] was extremely appreciative of everything that I was doing for them," Headings said.

After their mother passed, Headings assumed an even larger role in the boys' lives – guardian. He'd comfort the boys with words of fatherly affection, something Brewster and Wright had never before experienced. "I'm still gonna be here, so don't worry about that. I'll be here with you no matter, through thick and thin," Headings recalls telling them.

After some soul-searching, Headings made a decision to have the boys move in with him. "They knew after the passing that they still had somebody that they could go to help take care of them. At the end of the day, they knew that they weren't alone," Headings said.

The adjustment was no easy transition for Brewster. "[Before], I had my mom there to tell me, 'Okay, this is what you need to do. Do this and do that,' and I would listen. And then once my mom left it was hard to say, 'Okay, I need to listen to this person.' Sometimes I felt like, 'Why should I listen to him?'" he said.

This initial resistance soon faded. "Temeni views me as his father. We have a very strong bond," Headings said. "It's a lifelong bond."

"After my mama's death he was there to comfort me, he made sure I had everything I needed. He keeps me out of a lot of trouble.

### Judge's Comments:

**\* This story is a twist on a profile. Rather than one person's story, it tells how the death of a mother creates a new family. The story is, essentially, a multi-faceted profile. And it just keeps drawing the reader in, giving nuggets of info throughout to keep readers intrigued until the end.**

# Feature Story

Maggie Breen

Carpe Diem, Decatur High School

## Graphic novels draw readers in

BY MAGGIE BREEN  
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Comic book. These are words seldom associated with the literary. Indeed, they're likeliest to conjure visions of a semi-literate eight year old clutching superhero tales in his grubby hands.

It's a stigma that originated early in comics' history, as Chris Parizo, who studied comic books extensively at Georgia State University, explains. "The comic book came into vogue shortly after World War II," he said. "The world was looking for clear good and evil . . . [and] after Pearl Harbor, a lot of young Americans were seeking heroes. So [they] embraced the comic book."

But authority figures weren't so fond of the simplistic superhero stories. "Libraries and school systems considered [comic books] political propaganda, or even pornography," Parizo said, "and these kids, [who] had grown up thinking that comic books were the greatest things on the planet, were going into schools and having their teachers throw their books away, saying, 'This is garbage, this is crap.' Their definition of literature was rejected."

"The backlash was that they decided as they grew up to make comic books an accepted part of literature."

By most measures, they've succeeded.

Where heat-vision and spandex once dominated the comic form, modern writers tackle a broader range of subject matter. There are comic versions of Shakespeare's plays and of Kafka's short stories. There are comic memoirs. There are even mainstream comic success stories – Art Spiegelman won a 1992 Pulitzer Prize Special Award for his comic memoir, "Maus: A Survivor's Tale," about his father's experiences as a Holocaust survivor.

Of course, superheroes live on, but gone are the simplistic stories that mid-century schoolteachers loved to hate. In their place are such subtle works as Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons's "Watchmen," which considers how caped crusaders would fare in the real world.

Even more mainstream comics nowadays strive

to portray real-world complexity. "Comics have gotten darker," junior Carol Lai, a long-time comic book reader, said. "They aren't just simple stories where the hero is always worshiped. Captain America was assassinated by regular people because he decided to fight for what he thought was right, and they didn't agree with him. Daredevil . . . has lapses in judgement, and you actually feel angry with him and don't think of him as a hero. You have the same complexity in a comic book as in a normal book."

And comic books now share space with "normal books" in libraries all over the world. Even our school library boasts a relatively new and exceptionally popular graphic novel shelf. "I see kids checking out [graphic novels] that have never checked out books before," media clerk Susan Riley said.

It's indisputable – the graphic novel is a part of modern literature. And this growing literary form is most popular with young readers. Why?

"The number of images that flash today in a typical action movie is considerably more than when I was growing up," Decatur instructional coordinator Cynde Snider said. "And the ability to process those images so rapidly has actually resulted in a physiological change in [kids' eyes]."

What does that have to do with comics? "Graphic novels work on several levels," Parizo said. "You have the information that you read, but on top of that there are images. If your brain is wired to play Nintendo, while listening to music, while talking on the phone and doing your

homework . . . graphic novels work that way. As technology delivers more information at a faster pace, the graphic novel will [become] the primary source of literature, the same way [that] plays, during the Elizabethan period, overshadowed literature."

Whether graphic novels will replace traditional novels is debatable. But the marriage of words and pictures certainly resonates with information age adolescents.

Senior Alexander Zakel is one such. At first, he primarily read "things like Superman and Batman. Superheroes with names that end in 'man,'" Zakel said. "I got started reading graphic novels, or things beyond standard beat-'em-up comics, with this comic, 'Johnny the Homicidal Maniac,' and another, 'Squee.' Just kind of goofy stuff. Then, I read some interviews with Alan Moore, and he seemed pretty cool, so I read 'V for Vendetta,' and I liked that, so I read 'Watchmen.' It was downhill from there. Or uphill, I guess.

"Personally, I enjoy them more than books, but I don't think they're superior. I don't think they're inferior. It's just a different medium, and I like it more. I'm a visual person."

Senior Taylor Cross is another graphic novel lover, but he prefers a specific sort of comic to the kind that Zakel reads – it's called manga. "Manga is basically any comic book made in Japan," Cross said. "I really like the detail and the wackiness [on] each page, and the plethora of emotions [in] each story. The pictures can leave you dying laughing, or even crying if you care enough. The stories are more interesting to me than anything I've read in an English book. I think that American comics mostly try too hard to draw characters that look [like] real human beings – I always feel like I'm reading something from the 1950s. Manga is always paying attention to modern fads. [Also,]

I like fantasy stuff more than any other genre, and mostly every manga has something that seems impossible."



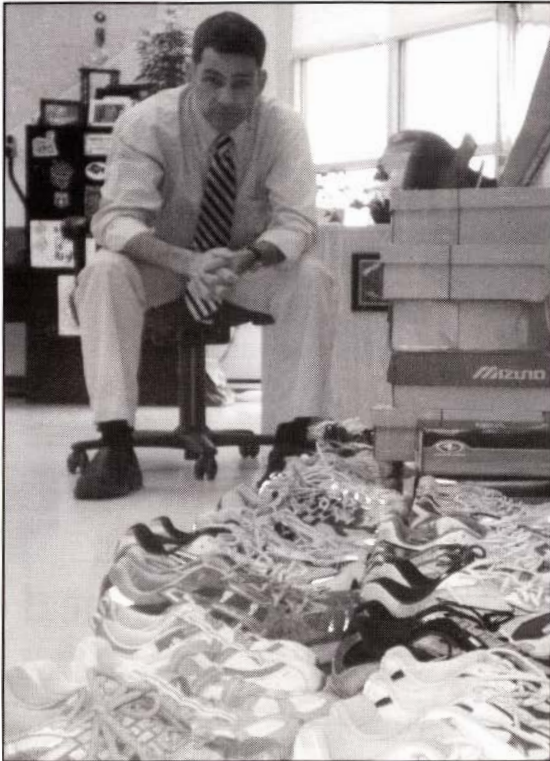
### Judge's Comments:

\* The story thoroughly covers the draw of this literary form. It offers numerous viewpoints and is illustrated with vivid examples, explaining the genre and its fans' opinions to readers. This piece serves as a fine example of how you can make a topic interesting to anyone through use of active language and explanations.

# Headline Writing

Staff

The Prowler, Starr's Mill High School



JILL SHRUM/ Staff

## Students donate from the 'sole'

By Sydney Herwig '10  
STAFF WRITER

This past summer, history teacher, Mike Raymer, read an article in the magazine "Runner's World" about how kids in Kenya love to run but don't have shoes.

The article included information about how anyone could help by donating shoes to an orphanage, the Tumaini Children's Home, in Nyeri, Kenya.

If you were to go somewhere, one of the first things you would look for would probably be shoes.

Chances are you probably have more than one pair of shoes. We normally tend to take that for granted.

Many children in Kenya have no shoes. Raymer decided to try to make a difference in these kids' lives.

This fall he told his students about his idea to collect shoes to send to these young runners.

One of Raymer's students shared this information with

his mom Ann Collins, who is a teacher at Rising Starr Middle.

Together, they decided to get their students involved.

Sophomore Layne Hatcher is always getting compliments on her shoes that always match her outfits.

"Some students even brought in brand new shoes," said Raymer, who piled them along the front of his classroom.

The shoes were all different colors and brands. There were Nike, Adidas, Converse, and Puma.

Raymer thought his students might collect around 100 pairs of shoes. When his room started filling up with all the shoes he realized that the students had gone above what he had expected.

When it was time to ship them off, he had at least 200.

"I'm really happy at the response we got, I didn't think people would be as involved."

Hopefully now some of the kids in Nyeri, Kenya will know what it feels like to own a pair of shoes for the first time.

"Normally once the kids get the shoes they even sleep in them, they treat the shoes with a lot of care," Raymer said.

He mailed them to Kenya two weeks ago.

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**"I'm really happy at the response we got."**

~ Michael Raymer

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She heard about the shoe drive through her brother who has Collins as his teacher, and she decided that the least she could do was donate a pair of tennis shoes.

"I thought it sounded like a really good cause, and I had a pair of shoes that were practically new that I knew I would never be wearing, I figured I'd donate them," Hatcher said.

### Judge's Comments:

\* Three very clever headlines that played on words but still conveyed the stories they described.

# House Editorials

John Morgan and Anna Rose Gayble  
Carpe Diem, Decatur High School

*Staff Editorial*

## Freshmen, administration can still learn from “Experience”

THE MAJORITY OPINION OF THE EDITORIAL BOARD

**F**luctuating graduation rates. Inconsistent extracurricular involvement. Segregated social groups. An achievement gap – “two schools under one roof.” Last year’s revamped administration realized these words should not apply to a school in the top five percent nationwide. Their mission, they determined, must begin with the freshmen.

Building off a proactive, nip-it-in-the-bud approach, Decatur combined its motivations into the Freshmen Experience. With nearly 20 openings for teachers this year, the administration jumped on the opportunity to hire freshmen-specific staff for a freshmen-specific program. These teachers, specialized in working with Decatur’s newest students, could devote more energy to counseling and mentoring rather than one-dimensional teaching. The program’s planners were also drawn to building class unity through a bonding experience, somewhat removed from the rest of the school.

Unfortunately, this school-induced bonding feels more like bondage to many freshmen. While the administration’s motives and ideas were unquestionably noble, the implementation has stretched their limits. With only one shared elective period each semester, this year’s freshmen lose out on many of the opportunities to get to know upperclassmen, as these slots usually fill with band or the required health class. Worsening the sense of isolation, freshmen have their own lunch period and share only one hall change with older students. These scheduling decisions, seemingly insignificant on paper, have in practice suppressed the freshmen’s social energy.

Fortunately for the freshmen, the adults in charge of their situation actually care about them. The administration continues to emphasize

the whole person over numbers. With these motives in mind, the freshmen need to respond by addressing the administrators directly rather than incessantly griping about the program.

Though on some days the program seems unlikely to stay the course, it is still salvageable and, yes, may even work to everyone’s advantage. Through positive, constructive dialogue, both parties can work out the kinks one by one. The administration is already listening to the freshmen’s cries of captivity, responding with a reconsideration of the isolating bell schedule.

In the meantime, the freshmen have plenty to brag about. The school lucked out with its chosen guinea pig, as the freshmen are an unusually active bunch. Their involvement is particularly noticeable on Friday nights, which showcase 30 plus freshmen in the band, five on the drill team and 20 under football helmets, including several starters. Some of the Student Government Association’s most active leaders hail from the Class of 2011. Freshmen

ISS referrals have dropped significantly, to only 15 percent of the total versus the typical 50 percent or more.

Without a Freshmen Experience, this year’s seniors managed to bond like no other in recent years. But the journey wasn’t always success and glory. Decatur’s rates and percents aren’t just numbers – they’re real people. By constantly reiterating a human focus – an emphasis on real people – Decatur’s administration can avoid floating in the clouds of academic idealism. Freshmen, even if removed from everyone else, can use the senior’s example as motivation and inspiration. This can be their first high school lesson learned. ■

*See related story, p. 16*

*Unfortunately, this school-induced bonding feels more like bondage to many freshmen.*

### Judge’s Comments:

**\* The editorials in this entry reflected both a deep knowledge of their subject matter and a real engagement with the school community -- prerequisites for writing effective editorials. There were some nice turns of phrase in the editorials, such as -- “unfortunately, this school-induced bonding feels more like bondage to many freshmen.” Also, for the most part, the editorials manage to avoid the stilted language that can infect opinion writing.**