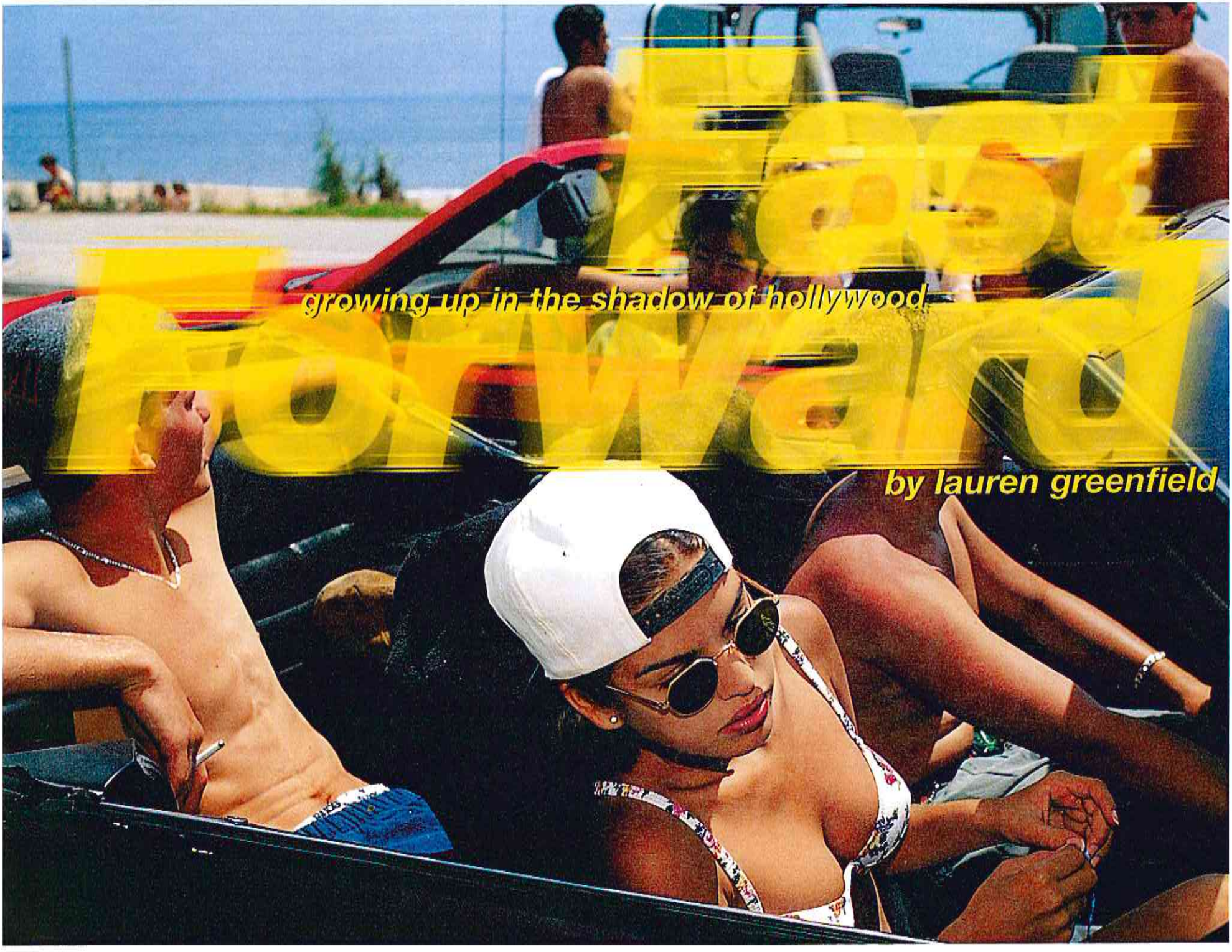

Fast Forward
growing up in the shadow of hollywood
by lauren greenfield

Los Angeles is where I grew up and formed many of my ideas about myself and the world. As a documentarian often focused on other societies, I wanted to turn my attention to a subject of more immediate personal relevance. Previously I had photographed cultures, from French aristocrats to Mayan Indians, where gaining access to a closed world was a feat in itself. By exploring my own culture, I could begin with a level of access and understanding impossible elsewhere after the most extensive research and field-work. Since I first left Los Angeles to go away to college, my most vivid memories of the city have revolved around high school. When I moved back to Los Angeles as an adult and as a photographer, I returned to the evocative site of a formative time of my life. *Fast Forward* is the result of my ensuing four-year journey into the world of L.A. youth.

I began this journey in the place most familiar to me, my own high school. Crossroads, a private college-preparatory school on the west side of Los Angeles, was a natural jumping-off point. Personal memories served as an inspiration and rudimentary road map which I detailed, altered, and expanded with the help of the people I met and photographed. From the beginning, I taped interviews with my subjects. Directly and indirectly, they told me what to photograph and what was important. Their candid and perceptive words educated me about their experience and guided me through confusing territory. By the end of the project, I had traveled through worlds I could have never imagined.

My journey was a serendipitous and associative one. I began by following my intuition, which I supplemented with more traditional journalistic research as I progressed. A common theme that kept me focused throughout was the sense of an early loss of innocence. I observed this in many forms, and the young people underlined it again and again in their interviews. As one teenager said, "You grow up really fast when you grow up in L.A. It seems like everyone is in a rush to be an adult. It's not cool to be a kid."

Los Angeles is a unique city to grow up in: as the center of the entertainment industry, it generates much of the popular culture so integral to teenage life around the world. Like young people everywhere, L.A.'s teens are greatly influenced by the television and films they watch, the magazines they read, and the music they listen to. If anything, Hollywood's proximity amplifies its import and influence. At the same time, the experience of L.A. teens has inspired many popular media products, such as the television series *Beverly Hills 90210*, the movies *Clueless* and *South Central*, and countless music videos. Through their influence on mainstream media, L.A. teens help create the trends and attitudes that reverberate among international youth. The relationship between Hollywood and the teens growing up in its shadow epitomizes the modern dialectic between kids and media, reality and fantasy.

Since I began my work in a private school on L.A.'s Westside, the subjects of my early photographs were often

affluent. Although Crossroads has a diverse student body because of a generous scholarship program, there are nevertheless many students whose parents work in the entertainment industry. I was intrigued by the Hollywood-influenced culture that all the students seemed to share, regardless of their families' economic circumstances. The material concerns of the children were striking from the beginning. Early on in the project, three seventh-grade boys asked me what I was doing. "A project about growing up in L.A.," I told them. One boy shot back, "If you are doing a story about growing up in L.A., you have to show money. That's what it's all about." He and two friends then held up bills for me to photograph. It wasn't until I looked at the processed film that I realized that the thirteen-year-olds were waving $100 bills.

Although I remembered the importance of cars and clothes, and, by extension, money, from my own high school experience, I also noticed a new phenomenon. In the years since I graduated from high school, MTV had become a major cultural force ushering in the rise of "gangsta" rap and hip-hop culture. In music, fashion, attitude and language, its influence was apparent and widespread. The gang as a new type of family, the desire to be "hard," the extravagant materialism expressed in hip-hop culture—all had an appeal that seemed to cross socioeconomic divisions. Kids from all sides of the tracks idealized the images of gangsta rap and mimicked those that were missing in their own lives. Affluent kids dressed and talked like gangsters; inner-city kids simulated the trappings of wealth.

Although trends come and go, especially among teenagers, I was intrigued by the role of the media as a homogenizing force. Against the foil of obvious material and cultural differences, I began to explore the ways in which young people from diverse backgrounds are similarly influenced by a popular culture they share.

As a collection of suburbs connected by freeways, Los Angeles is a city where residents can live most of their lives in virtually homogeneous enclaves. Having grown up on the Westside, the first time I went to South Central was as a photographer covering my first news story for *Newsweek*—the 1992 riots. After the civil disturbances, many adults in Los Angeles spoke of an increased awareness of neighboring communities, a sort of awakening. In an opinion piece in the *Los Angeles Times*, writer Richard Rodriguez said that Los Angeles had lost its suburban innocence and that a new city was forming. "People in Los Angeles are preoccupied with one another, cannot forget one another." He concluded that it was "better not to like one another than not to know the stranger exists."

The children I photographed were already preoccupied with one another and never had "suburban innocence." In many ways, they are more connected to each other's experience than are their adult counterparts. They have spent less time with their parents than children of previous generations and have been increasingly socialized by the media and

by each other. They are members of a new kind of community. Theirs is not a traditional one in the sense of shared geography or social institutions, but a community in the sense of Marshall McCluhan's "global village," a community of shared influences that create shared values.

Within the context of this new community, the project evolved organically, expanding from the affluent Crossroads community to the worlds of East L.A. and South Central. Students from the private schools introduced me to each other and to the world of tagger crews, party crews, and gangsters. Beverly Hills introduced me to East L.A. My television introduced me to hip-hop culture and gangsta rap. A struggling rapper brought me to the wealth of suburban Calabasas. South Central and East L.A. turned me on to the latest fashions. The fashion magazines showed me the images of beauty to which children aspire. I didn't know how all the pieces would fit together, but I let one subject transport me to the next.

As my work progressed, I also sought out subjects that I thought might illuminate the nature of Hollywood's reach. I photographed public school students from Hollywood High who traveled long distances from the suburbs and inner city to pursue show business dreams at a magnet school for the performing arts. They showed me the powerful allure of the Hollywood dream, as well as the dramatic contrast between the run-down neighborhood that is the geographical Hollywood and the mythic "Hollywood" associated with the entertainment industry (much of which is now located in more upscale parts of L.A.) I photographed children who were already stars and children working hard to make it in "the business."

A striking commonality throughout was the importance of image and celebrity. As innocuously as throwing the most extravagant party or creating an individual style, as gravely as killing a member of another gang, L.A.'s kids are engaged in the age-old Hollywood pursuit of making a name for themselves. The quest for notoriety has become a rite of passage. At a time of life when young people struggle to form their identities, that struggle is raised to new heights in the context of Los Angeles and Hollywood. Whether it is the desire to be an adult when one is a child, to be a gangster when one is privileged, to be famous when one is unknown, or to look like a model when one does not, young people are preoccupied with becoming other than they are. Los Angeles, in her traditional role as the city of dreams, has bequeathed the quest for the dream to her children. The self-consciousness that underlies their aspirations inevitably costs them their innocence.

The photographs and interviews in this book are the result of a dance between myself, my subjects, and their realities as I have seen them. All has been filtered though my own perception, informed by observation, research, and personal experience. I spent as much time as

possible with my subjects, and many of the situations in the book are ones that I saw repeated in various forms on different occasions. Sometimes, my photographs and interviews are from the same day. In other cases, the interviews took place weeks or months after the picture was taken. As the photographs reflect my perceptions, I hope the interviews allow the children to speak for themselves. They too express subjective interpretations, which must be kept in mind when it comes to their comments on parents, teachers, and other adults or children.

This work in no way aims to present a definitive picture either of growing up in L.A. or of any particular individual. Although my journey involved a great deal of wandering in which I photographed a wide variety of situations, the final work as it appears in this book is narrowly focused on the way that Hollywood values play themselves out within the rituals and daily life of young people. As a consequence, many aspects of the subjects' full and diverse lives are not included in this work. The pictures are not intended as portraits and do not attempt to portray the "essence" of individual subjects. Rather, I have tried to make pictures that reveal an element of our culture as it manifests itself in the lives of children. If readers sense a critical perspective in my pictures, it is a criticism of the culture and its values, not of the children or parents who adapt to it. More than anything else, my perspective was influenced by my subjects' views of their own worlds.

For the children and families I photographed and interviewed, I have only the deepest gratitude. They gave me the greatest gift by letting me into their lives and educating me about their experience. They candidly told me their stories and allowed the ordinary rituals of their lives to unfold in front of my camera. Hopefully, we can all learn from their generosity, as I have. They have helped me to better understand myself and to grow up in the process as well. In many ways, this project was my own coming of age.

I am especially grateful to one child in particular, Ennis Beley, who was a beautiful photographer in his own right. He befriended me shortly after I had begun this project, when he was only twelve years old. While he was rarely the subject of my photography, as a friend and as an advisor he taught me much about the experience of growing up in Los Angeles. He was killed in a brutal gang murder just before his sixteenth birthday and just as I was finishing this book. In his life and in his death, Ennis made me understand what a delicate and fleeting privilege childhood is. I cannot think of growing up in L.A. without thinking of him.

I dedicate this book to his memory, and to my parents, to whom I owe everything.

—LAUREN GREENFIELD

Phoebe, 3, at the VIP opening of Barneys department store, *Beverly Hills*

Skyler 7, in his parents' dressing room, *Malibu*

My mom says my life is like the story *Eloise*. It's about a little girl, just like me, who lives in a big hotel and is very good friends with all the staff. I am good friends with a lot of staff.

When you come to the door of the hotel, there are, like, eighty people welcoming you and talking to you. Every time you pass by one of the staff, they go, "Good day." It's part of their job to say that.

When my friend sleeps over, we wake up at seven and go to the pool and splash around, because everybody here wakes up at twelve and has breakfast at three. They are sleepyheads.

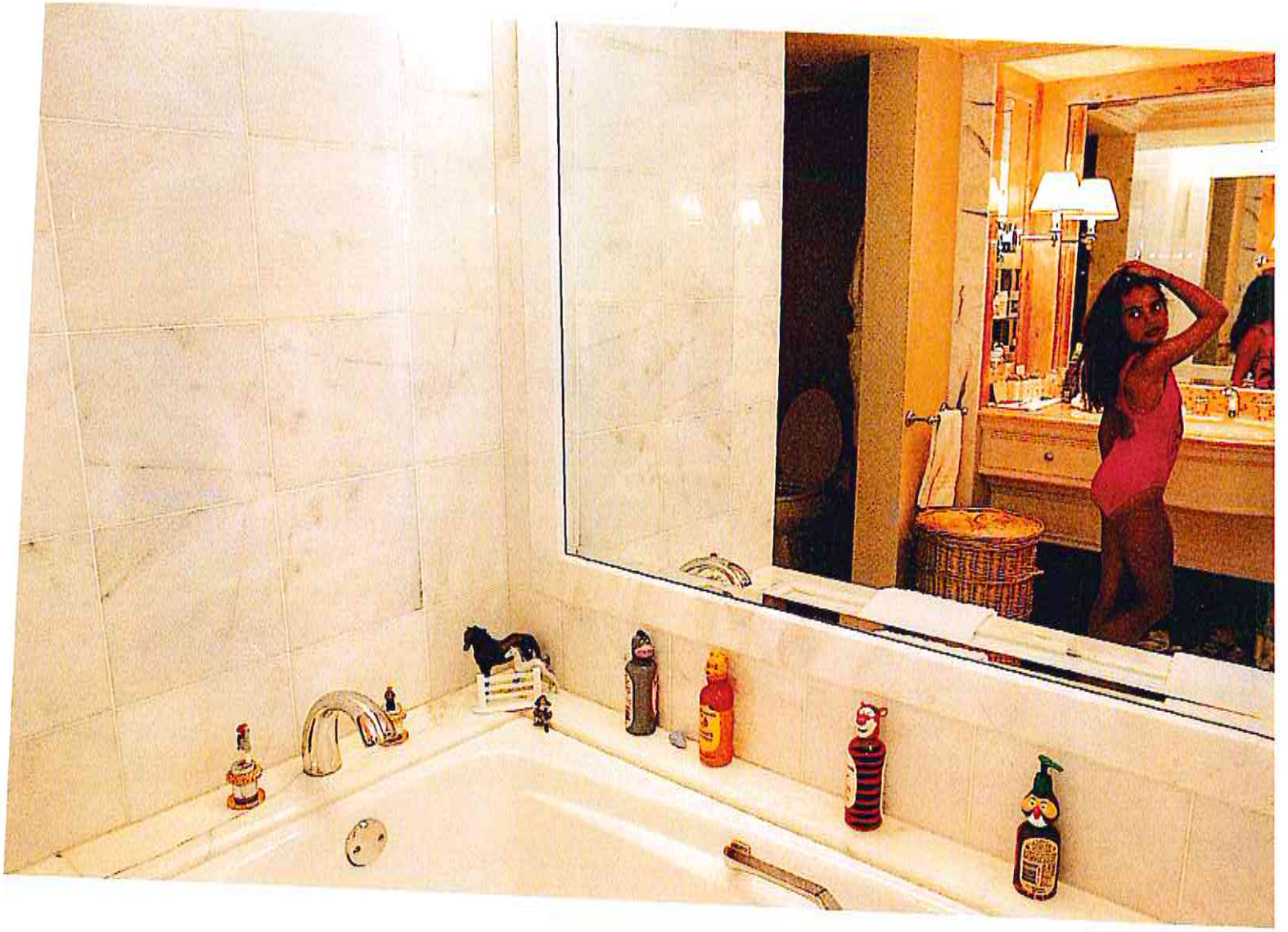
I can do more things here, like jump on my bed. It's kind of weird, though. You make a mess and when you go back to clean it up, people have already come and cleaned it. Every second they are cleaning your room.

My nanny, Yolanda, is almost like our family. She plays with us. Gladys and Marcella are our housekeepers, and Renee—he kind of, like, washes the cars and stuff like that. And since we moved into the hotel, my mom didn't want to lose them and give away their jobs, so now they are with us at the hotel, and it's kind of fun for us all.

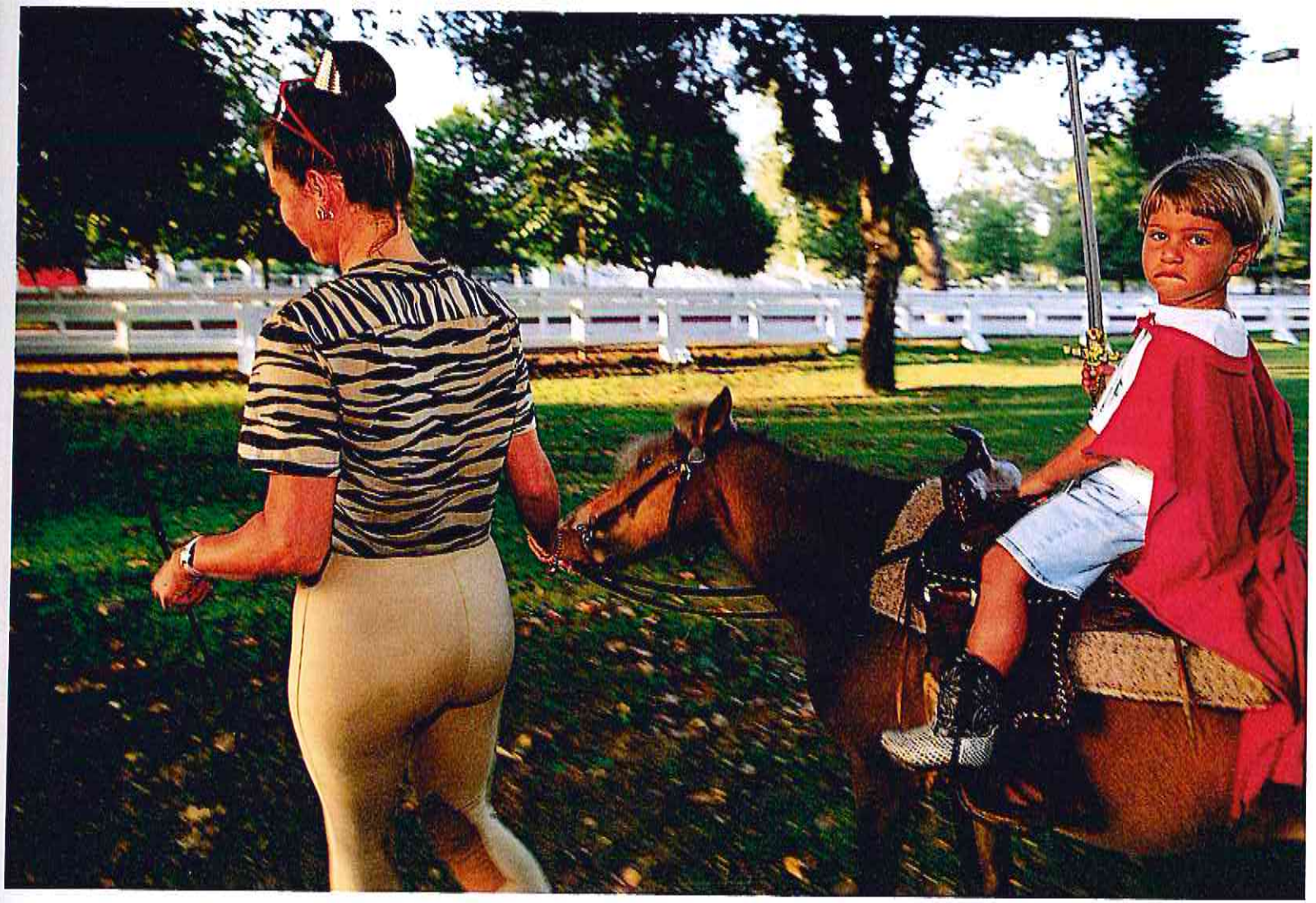
In the bathroom, there are mirrors everywhere, just like I love. It's kind of fun, because I can spend five hours looking at myself in the mirror and doing my hair and posing for myself. I want to be a model for magazines and videos and TV shows and stuff.

Today I wanted to know what it was like to shave, so my mom got me a razor and shaving cream and I shaved my legs, and I love it because it feels like baby skin. Everybody I know shaves their legs, and I think it's about time I shave mine.

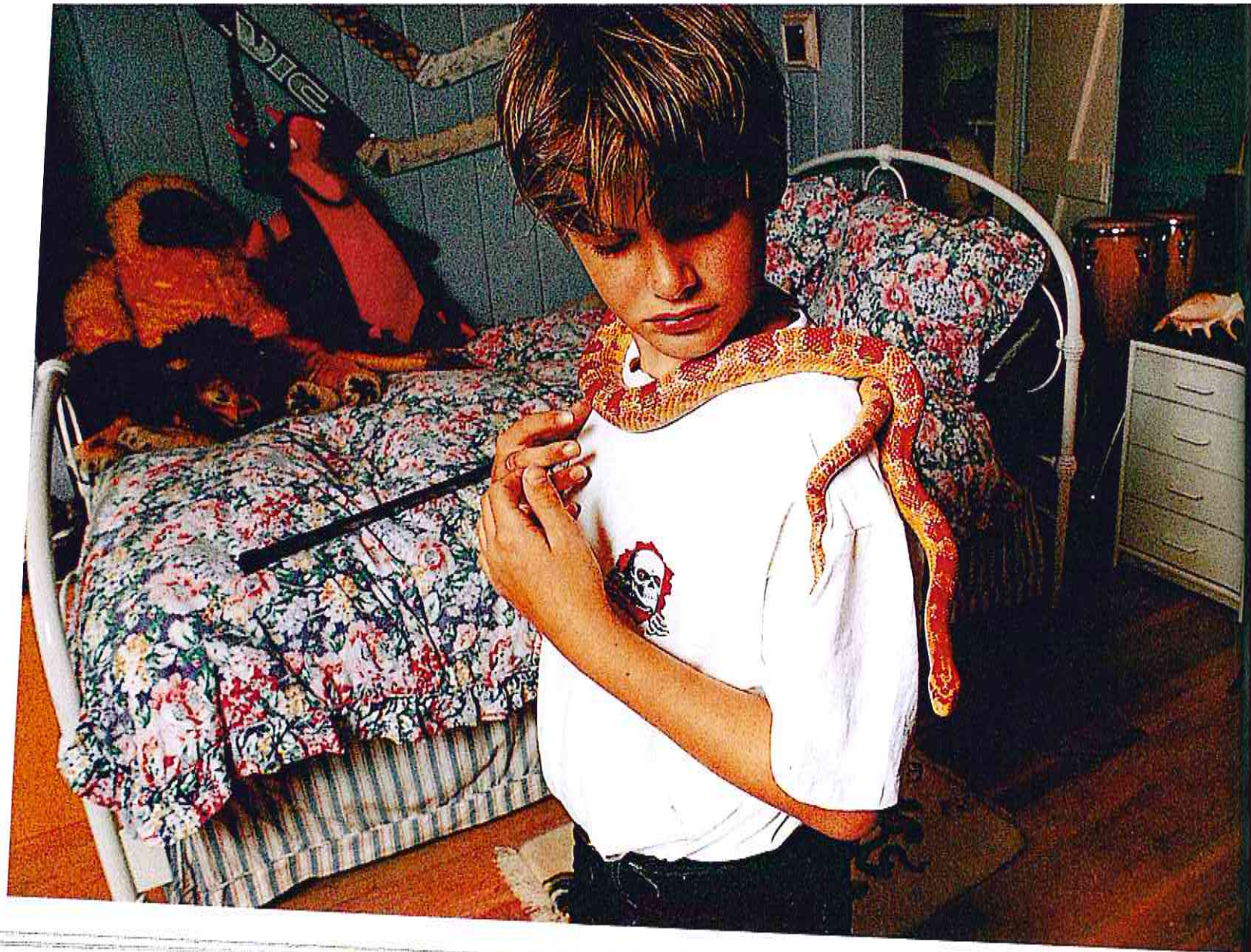
Emily, 10, at the Peninsula Hotel, where she lived with her family for several months, *Beverly Hills*



Emily in her bathroom in the Presidential Suite of the Peninsula Hotel, *Beverly Hills*



Emily's brother Trent, 3, with his pony, Pee-Wee, and trainer, Melanie, *Griffith Park*



Matthew and Joshua's Mother

We have an iguana that Matthew acquired when he was five. The iguana is about three feet long and recently was ill and had to go to the iguana doctor, and it cost twelve hundred dollars because she had to have sonograms and an ultrasound. And here is this terrible question: Do you let the animal die and tell the child that the animal died? Or do you pay twelve hundred dollars for an iguana? What do you do? You don't have that problem in Dubuque. So that is a Los Angeles thing.

We have a bichon frise, and we have a beagle—so that's two dogs. We have two cats that live outdoors because Josh is allergic to cats. We have a corn snake. We had two boa constrictors that we got when they were baby boas, but they were always getting out of their tank, and when they were about eight feet long, one of them wrapped itself around the treadmill and my husband turned the treadmill on and it got flattened.

We have rats that live outside in the rat cage, and during the day, they jump through the trees and at night they go back into their cages. We have a saltwater aquarium. Joshua has two geckos and we have two Dwarfed Dragons or Bearded Dragons, or something, I'm not sure. We have saltwater fish and freshwater fish. We've had albino water dogs. We've had blue South African lobsters. We've had tarantulas. We've had any number of reptiles that have met their demise in one way or another. We had an octopus that died because the tank overheated one summer night. His name was Slimer and Joshua wrote a book about him.

I think you can get out of balance in L.A. unless you are careful. People's relationship to animals and to nature helps them be more balanced as people. This is the reason I have all the wildlife.

I am a little excessive, but I can't help it. The one thing I've tried to give my kids that I didn't have, that I wish that I had had, is the opportunity to travel to exotic places and do exotic things, like go to Alaska fishing, or go to the Okavango Delta—to explore the world.

L.A. is very stressful. At 4:31 in the morning, your whole house starts to shake, and you think it's going to fall in, and you think you're going to die. Then you have the fires, and you have the floods, and you have the riots. Then you have serious, scary drive-by shootings in Westwood, or random violence. Fires, floods, earthquakes, riots. Oh, yes, and then we have O.J. Simpson doing the run on the freeway in his Bronco, and the helicopters. Matthew drives by the bodies on his way to school. We don't need to go to the movies. We live in a movie.

I made a conscious decision not to have a full-time career. I can be home when my children get home from school. I can have breakfast with them in the morning. Somebody told me once that children of affluent people

Matthew, 11, in his bedroom with his albino snake, *Bel-Air*

who don't spend time with their children are just as lonely and just as depressed and have just as great a sense of alienation as poor children who live in South Central.

A lot of people here have a sense of entitlement. People in the business want the best table. They don't want to wait in line. I'm Mr. So-and-so. I want it now, now, now. And I don't think that's the right way to raise children. When Josh was about six or seven, I picked him up from school and we were going to the airport, and he got very upset. He said, "We can't go to the airport like this." And I said, "What do you mean?" And he said, "Well, where is the limo?" Joshua didn't remember ever going to the airport not in a limo. That was when I realized my children had to know that there were other ways, including the bus, to get to the airport. That is when I made a conscious decision to make sure that they really understood that some of the places we go and some of the things we do are a great privilege. And that we are very lucky that we have the privilege, and that we're not entitled to it.

Their dad is very successful. He was the sixty-seventh most important person in Hollywood according to *Premiere* magazine. He's worked very hard. And they know that he was poor. And they know that he grew up in the Bronx. And they know that his dad was a taxi driver. They know the reality. They don't think it came easily.

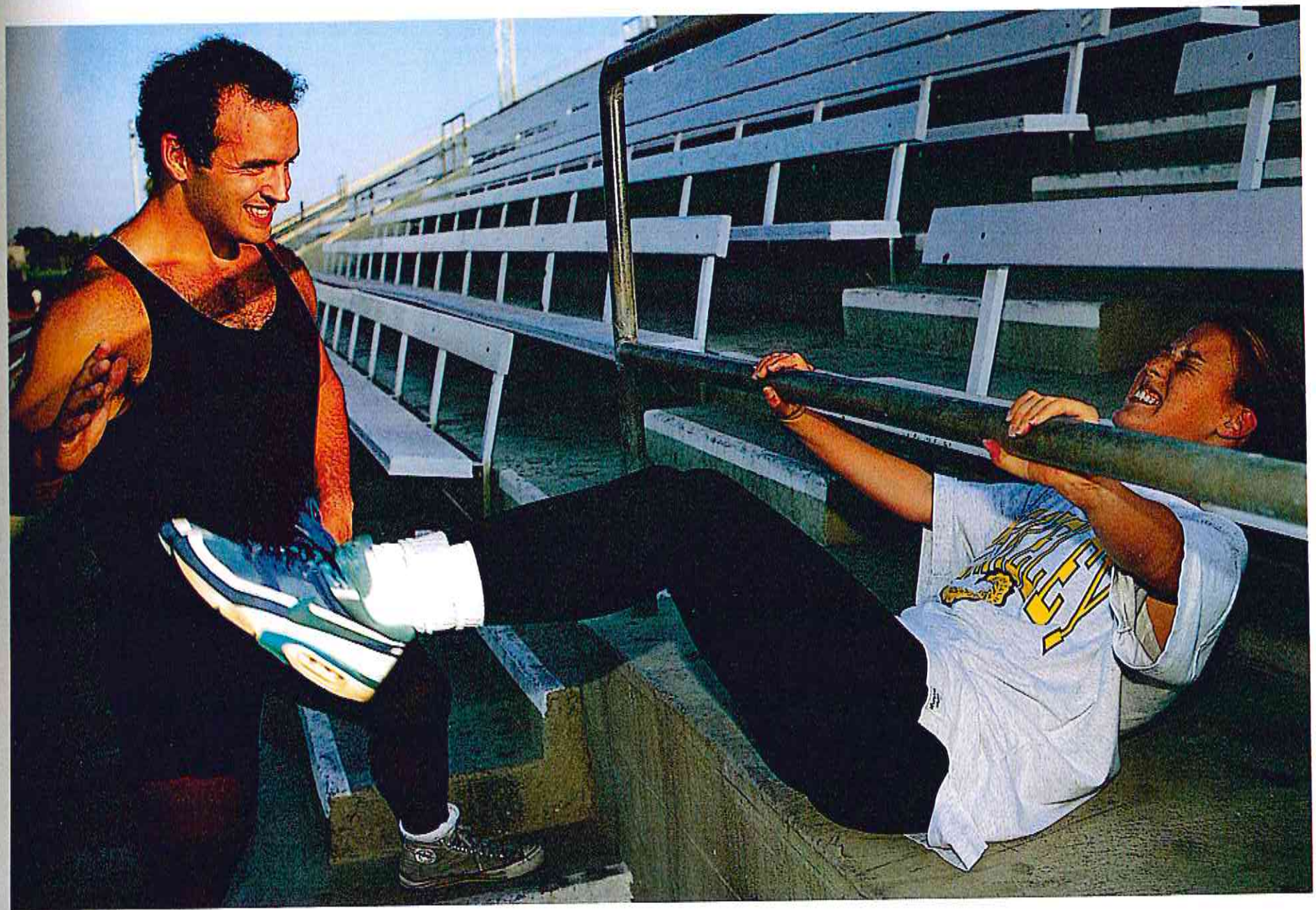
Their father said he wanted Josh to come in and run his business. And Josh said, "You know, Dad, I really think that what you have to do to make as much money as you do would not be worth it for me, because I would like to be with my children and my family and friends more than make that much money." I think Joshua will probably end up living someplace like an island in the Caribbean. Someplace peaceful and calm. He loved the Okavango. He cried when he left. He was sad for days. He loved the peacefulness and the wildness and the cleanness. One of the things Joshua said about the Okavango was, "I don't know how I'm ever going to be able to come back here, because when I grow up, I won't have that kind of money." And I said, "Well, you'll just come back. You'll just come back as a poor person instead of a rich person."

Matthew's iguana and stuffed animals, *Bel-Air*

Sophie, 6 weeks, in her living room, *Hollywood Hills*

Jenna with her doll and her father in the family room, *Encino*

Ashleigh, 13, with her friend and parents, *Santa Monica*



Alison, 13, at the track with her personal trainer, *Santa Monica*

I have a trainer, I have a counselor, I have a nutritionist, I have a singing coach. And I think that's it. Oh, yeah, I have a driver, too.

Everything kind of works together, because by eating right, getting all my feelings out, and literally working my butt off, it makes me feel a lot better about myself. I am getting thinner, and guys are looking at me more now. And my singing teacher told me that my singing has gotten a lot better. So I guess everything goes hand in hand.

A lot of the parents of the kids in my grade don't care about their kids. They just let their kids roam free in the city—left with nannies or drivers. I feel sorry for them, because I don't think they will ever really have a relationship with their parents. I think all of the kids from my school are like that, basically, because their parents work a lot of the time. They don't get attention from their parents, so they don't know what is right or wrong. So I am really appreciative of my parents. I'm thankful I don't have a nanny.

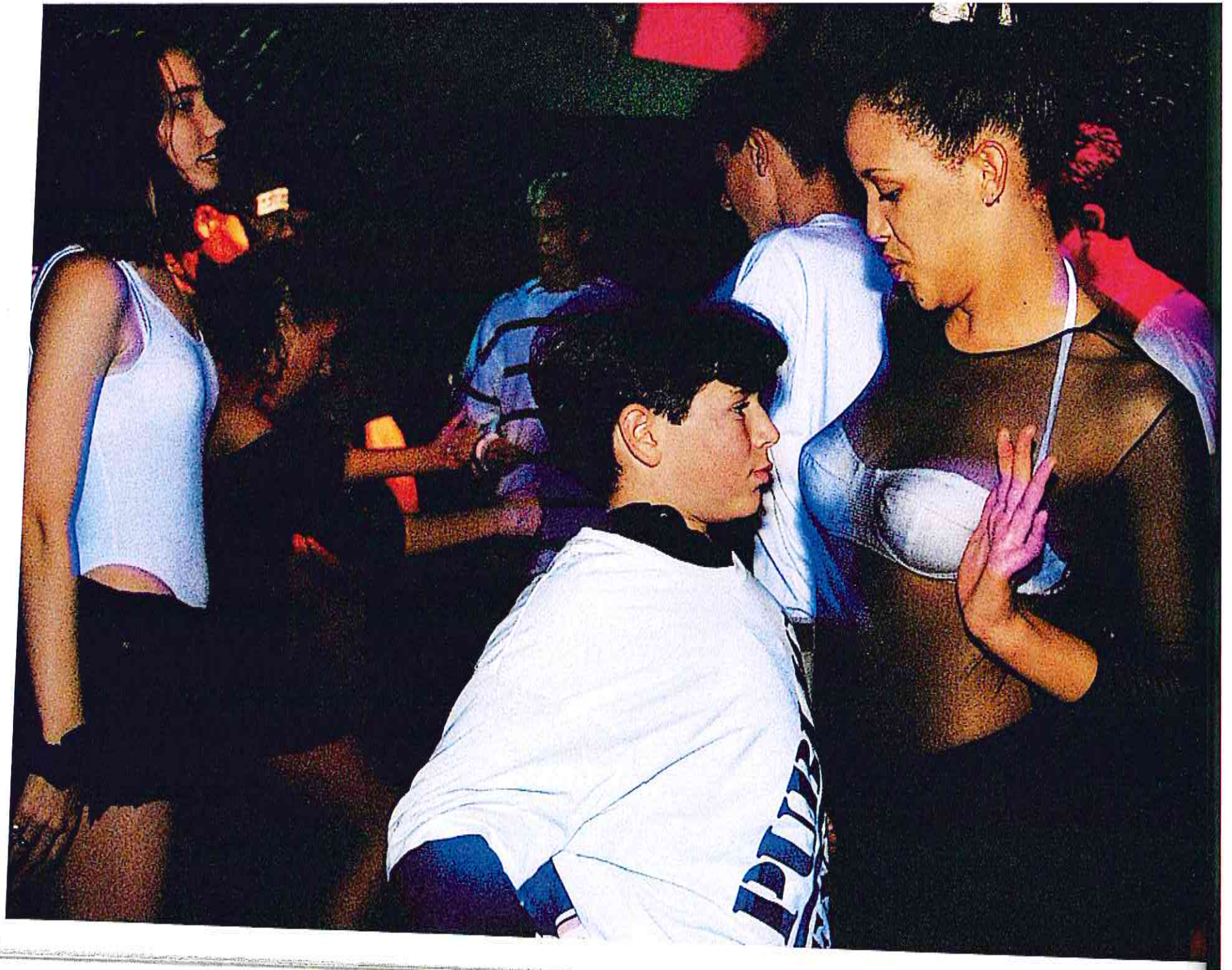
I have friends in the tenth grade that have their own apartment in Beverly Hills. One of the kids goes to Beverly High. His parents moved from L.A., and he still wanted to go to Beverly, so his parents got him an apartment. It is cool. I mean, I would love to have it, trust me; I would not pass up the chance or anything, but....

Kids today grow up faster than kids when my parents were young. I look at my parents' yearbook pictures and people look their age. Now kids look older than they are. I don't think it is their clothes. Maybe it's the fact that kids now have freedom. Their faces just look older.

Everyone has sex early. A lot of the girls in my grade are not virgins. They are just going around screwing people they don't really know that well. I mean, a couple girls in my class and I had a debate one time, and I said, "I think you should wait at least six months until you start getting really involved with someone." And they said, "No, I think you should wait a month and a half." These people are crazy. At thirteen years old, I don't think you are emotionally prepared. It will affect them in the long run. I have this vision of them coming back to our twenty-year reunion and people saying, you know, "That's the girl. She's the slut." Because people will always remember.

I heard a story about a girl at my school. She really wanted to lose her virginity, so she went and had sex with this guy. This is a true story. Five minutes into the sex, she got on the phone, and she called her friend, and she told her friend that she lost it.

In eighth grade you learn so much more than you knew in seventh grade.



The bar mitzvah scene is really glamorous. Everyone tries to compete for the nicest bar mitzvah. It just so happens I had a great bar mitzvah. I mean, for kids that can't afford it or are not as fortunate, I guess they are shit out of luck without a paddle. Shit out of luck. People usually spend between fifteen grand—fifteen being the lowest, really low—to ninety grand. I had a glassblower and carnival games, lots of them. I had a sweatshirt maker, a make-your-own video game. I had dancers. I had a steel drum band during the appetizers. I had fake stuffed lions and parrots. I felt really good after the bar mitzvah, and I was getting a lot of play with girls.

Everyone thinks Hollywood is so glamorous and not dangerous, but I have news for you. It is really dangerous and scary growing up in L.A.—all the riots and gangs. You do not know if you are going to be shot. There was a shooting down the street—and I live in an upper-class neighborhood. It's scary.

The glamorous Hollywood, the TV and movie industry—it affects kids. Who I know, who you know, how rich you are, what your dad does, what your mom does, does he work, does she work, what you have, what I have, what movies he has produced, what movie he is producing.

Money affects kids in many ways. I mean, it's ruined a lot of kids I know. And not to brag—I feel it has ruined me. Expensive watches, expensive glasses, shoes, knives, dresses. Wearing a Rolex watch to school, wearing a very expensive bracelet. Or just buying a two-hundred-dollar pair of shoes or a two-hundred-dollar jacket or Doc Martens. I mean, I know a person who has a soccer field and an indoor basketball court.

Some things are necessities. The necessities you need in L.A. are a lot different than the average little town in the U.S. Different shoes. Different pairs of sixty-dollar jeans. Not a Disneyland T-shirt or whatever. You need Stüssy or Jive. It's just crazy.

My parents know that money ruins kids, so they try to help. I go to camp in Michigan, and the kids there are so different that it is just sad. They are not really nerds. They are nice. If you have a problem, they will talk to you. If you are talking to another guy, they won't call you fags. I mean, they are down-to-earth.

The first year I went there, it was weird. I was really different from them. And then I slowly changed. I learned how to be calm. You don't have to be going to a preview or going to this or that benefit. Life is supposed to be calm.

My parents went through a divorce. A lot of kids go through that. It's a lot of L.A.—you know, courts, custody, divorce. I mean, it is sad, the percentage. For every two marriages, one of the marriages is going to break up. For every marriage that breaks up, half of those are going to have kids involved. It is just so sad that it has to happen that way. I was in an English class, and there were twenty-two kids. Twenty-one out of twenty-two kids' parents were divorced—ninety-five percent of the kids of that class.

I don't think it's good for a child to grow up in L.A. Education stinks in L.A. The kids stink. The kids are conceited. Not that I am not, partially. L.A. is not a good environment for kids or anyone. I hate how we have homeless people starving on the streets. I'm in a house with two VCRs and cable. I mean, if we could just substitute one of the VCRs and give to those people—it would make such a difference in our world.

Adam, 13, and a go-go dancer at a bar mitzvah party at the Whisky A Go Go nightclub, *Hollywood*

Ari, 13, in his bedroom with his mother, *Encino*

I put a picture of the *Playboy* Playmate Stephanie on my wall because I think she's hot. The Barbie Twins are pretty good-looking, also. My mom got the pictures for me, actually. She knows I like that. When we moved in, my room was pretty dull. She wanted me to decorate it.

We had this subscription to *Playboy* and we had like a million of them. You can send in an application for *Playboy* and they just give it to you. They really don't check you up. Me and my brother did this when he was about twelve and I was nine.

We had the Playboy channel from when I was like six to when I was about ten. That was pretty fun. We would lock our door and nobody would come in. We watched it every night.

The girls in my grade are like the girls in *Clueless*. A lot of girls see that movie and are trying to be like that, like "whatever." They are taking a lot of those lines and putting them into their vocabulary and trying to be like Alicia Silverstone. I have no clue where they shop, but every day, they come to school in a different outfit. They spend a shitload of money.

The girls try to be sexy, you know, by wearing the short skirts, the short tops, you know—makeup. And why? To look good and impress the guys, I guess. I think a lot of them think if they're not sexy, then they won't be popular. And that sometimes is true, because most of the popular girls are hot—really pretty—at our school. They keep skinny. If you're not thin, then you're stupid or ugly or not even worth looking at, you know.

But it depends. Some kids who are not attractive but who have a good personality, they'll be, you know, popular just like any other kid. But a lot of the kids who aren't just won't be popular. And if you're a good-looking girl or guy, then you'll probably almost for sure be one of the more popular people.

Every party is a make-out party. We don't have parties for dancing. It's just a total make-out party to see who can go further. There are people in the closet doing stuff. Everywhere you look, there will be people doing stuff. At the end of the party, the guy who did it will go up to his best friend and tell him and then that best friend will go tell, you know, the whole school. And it will get around probably by the end of the week. It makes the guy's ego go up. There are girls that are, like, down to that. You know, they do that just to be popular. And then there are girls who do it because they actually like the guys they are doing it with.

A lot of my friends [in the eighth grade] have had sex from peer pressure. If you had sex, other kids say, "Wow, I admire you." You just try to have sex early to be cool, I guess.


19
20 cm

Lindsey

I wanted to get my nose done since I was twelve. Once I started junior high, my appearance started to bother me and my nose seemed extremely apparent. I felt self-conscious in class. I didn't like people looking at me from the side. I used to avoid profile conversations, and I hated classrooms, because people could see you from profile. My self-esteem really went down by the time I was in high school.

My friends started getting plastic surgery during my freshman year of high school. By the time I was a senior, I had friends who had everything from nose jobs to breast enlargements to breast reductions and liposuction. I don't even know how many friends have done things. Out of my ten close friends, I think six of us got something done.

When all my friends were getting their noses done, we could tell what doctor their nose was done by. And with friends that would get awful nose jobs in high school, we would make jokes like, "Oh, no, now so-and-so's going to have the same nose." None of my friends knew who my doctor was because they used Valley doctors, which I guess was good, because then I didn't have the same nose as all my friends.

We thought that it would be simply removing the bump, but then my doctor found out there was no cartilage in the tip of my nose, so he had to do that, and my nose was too long, so he had to shorten it, and my nose was too wide, so we had to thin it. So there was a lot more than I had planned on.

It's changed the way I feel about myself. I'm not in the mirror every day checking out my nose. It just interfered with my face. I mean, I was carrying it around with me everywhere I went. When I'd meet people, it was just nose. Now I don't even think about it anymore. I'm very comfortable with the fact that I got it done.

I'd get a breast reduction if it wasn't so painful. I joke about having a breast reduction, but I'd never go through with it. Last time I saw my doctor, I talked to him about it, and he told me that it would be an awful experience, especially for someone my age. He told me that the scars would be horrible, that the pain is excruciating, and that it's the bloodiest surgery there is. He said that I wouldn't be able to breast-feed, and that basically once I was pregnant and had a child I'd have to redo my breasts anyway, because they would end up looking like raisins from the skin being stretched out, because it's pulled so tight. I joke about it all the time. I mean, I tell all my friends, "I want a breast reduction." I tell my boyfriend, "I want a breast reduction." But I would never do it.

Appearance in high school was huge for me. I was always conscious of my weight. Always conscious. I didn't have a weight problem per se, but I was definitely always aware of it. I was a cheerleader when I was a sophomore, so it was important. I mean, who wanted a fat ass hanging

Lindsey, 18, after her nose-job surgery. A nurse holds a photograph of Lindsey's pre-operation nose, *West Hollywood*