

Me @ 13

Poetry Is What I Love

"... See, in my school I'm not now popular, but people know me for who I am - not for who I want to be. I try to keep everything equal by standing up for the geeks. I'm not saying I never made fun of anyone, but I try to keep everything equal just like Martin Luther King Jr. did. I even want to be a middle school teacher because the kids are not yet stubborn like high school students, and a teacher can still teach them what's right and what's wrong"

Duresny Nemorín, Miami, Florida

Me @ 13
Got to Be Bad to Be cool

"... Being 13 is very hard at school. I have to be bad to be considered cool. I sometimes do things that aren't good. I have talked back to my teachers and been disrespectful to them. I do want to be good, but it's just too hard. Since I've been in junior high, I have been to four different schools. Some schools really tried to help me, but I had been suspended so many times they just kick me out. I go to a school now that I like, and I'm really trying to do better. It's still hard because I don't know anybody. I want to go back to my old schools so I can see my friends."

Joseph Charles, Los Angeles, California

Me @ 13
My Life as a F.A.T. Girl
(fabulously active teenager)

"... Many people view school as a cruel, dark place where the teachers are out to get you - its sole purpose is to make your life a living hell. In some ways, that's true. There are certainly too many cruel people and comments that follow me around. With all the teasing, I often turned to my favorite class, English, taught by the amazing Joel Ronkin. That was the one place at school where I could express myself, through writing."

Rose Buchberg, Los Angeles, California

Me @ 13

Not a Minute to Spare

"... One of my greatest struggles is trying to find time to spend with my family and friends on top of all of my activities. I hate that something has to be sacrificed. For me, that thing is my friends. At times my friends get angry with me because I can never hang out with them. This annoys me because I don't think they know how much I really want to but I can't because of my time constraints. I wish they knew that I miss them. I also long for the nights when I used to relax with my family. Now I come home from meets and practices to eat and finish homework. Many times I am exhausted. It may sound as though there must be something or someone making me live my life in this manner. Well, there is: me. I choose to spend my time this way, even though it may mean less time for friends, family and relaxing. Call me crazy, but the reason for my overscheduled life style is the love I have for all of my chosen activities. Just like with my schooling, I have long-term goals for the sports with which I am involved. These goals drive me to keep up the hard work. I enjoy what I do and am not planning to stop anytime soon."

Katherine Rack, Oak Park, Illinois

Me @ 13

Why I Don't Go on Dates

"... One thing that seems to set me the farthest apart is that my culture and religion do not accept the American concept of dating. Any teenager living in America knows how big an emphasis is placed on having boyfriends or girlfriends, both in society and in the media... I'm occasionally asked why I don't date or whether my culture accepts only arranged marriages. I reply by explaining my personal view, which is the dating couples act in ways that only married couples should. The kind of relationship they share should exist only where there is a commitment, or else the relationship is meaningless... At this stage of my life, the last thing someone wants is to stand out as different. But belonging in isn't easy in my case. In my religion, it's mandatory to pray five times a day, including one time that happens to be during school hours. When I'm out with my friends playing sports or hanging out, I sometimes have to go aside and do my prayers. My friends know what I'm doing, but, it does not make it any less awkward. I really stand out during the month of Ramadan, when I have to fast, not eating or drinking during the daylight hours."

Armaan Rowther, Irvine, California