

The Students' Story... Two Views

For Dana It's Books, Boredom, Bells and a Bus Ride Home

The No. 2 bus winds its way over the boulevards and side streets of Culver City with the best figure and legs in Hamilton High's senior class riding in back, exhausted.

For Dana Robinson (not her real name), holder of both those titles with the plastic trophies to prove it, it is the fourth bus ride of the day—2,012 down, 100 more to go.

During her last class, with Woodrow Wilson making the world safe for democracy, Prohibition ushering in the appearance of organized crime in America and the Japanese developing reasons for bombing Pearl Harbor, she was hardly able to keep her eyes open.

She stretches out across two seats in the rear of the empty bus to rest.

She is of medium height with golden brown hair and skin and a smooth, shiny complexion reminiscent of the girls who smile from the covers of Glamour magazine.

Somehow 'Untuned'

It was Monday, and she said she felt somehow "untuned."

She leaned against the bus window and watched the familiar landscape through a window across the aisle.

Somewhere, in the maze of courses she didn't want to take, lectures she didn't want to hear and books she didn't want to read, she had lost her enthusiasm for school.

It had been replaced by a calm, seemingly imperturbable expression her classmates have termed "mystery" and rewarded with an additional plastic trophy.

There was a time when she had competed for grades and the attention of teachers.

She was one of the few black students at Playa del Rey Elementary School and "I was always competing, always raising my hand for the right answer to get patted on the head by the teacher," she recalled.

"I was brainwashed into thinking whitey was my friend—I didn't really distinguish between blacks and whites."

Then, Complications

At Marina Junior High School, life became more complicated.

There were more blacks. And there was the drug scene to be reckoned with.

Her attitude toward people in general—especially whitey—became more skeptical.

"Everybody is not out there trying to get me, but everybody's not out there trying to help me, either," she now says.

Grades, classes and teacher's approval have fallen so far down on her list of priorities that her new attitude is, "If I can't con my teacher, then I just do enough to get by."

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CAUGHT NAPPING- Boredom is a common complaint in the Hamilton High classroom routine.

DANA

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Perhaps if life hadn't interfered with schoolwork, "I probably would have gotten into the routine of school and continued on, but I don't know. I am not unhappy with the way I turned out."

As far as school is concerned, her only goal is to collect her diploma this month. To her, it is just one of those things society and parents have come to expect.

Dana is one of about 400 blacks who do not live in the Hamilton attendance area but go to the school on transfer permit.

She lives with her parents, a younger brother and four dogs in a small house on an integrated block in Culver City.

She is shy and soft-spoken, friendly and amazingly frank—a combination in an attractive teen-ager that leads many to mistakenly assume she is snobbish and conceited.

Trouble as a Freshman

Dana started high school at Venice, but she had trouble there with other girls who, she says, were jealous of her boyfriend. She decided it was too much to handle at 14 so she transferred to Hamilton, where her sister had graduated.

Dana is sensitive and bright but, in the euphemistic phrases of a counselor, "she is not realizing her potential."

There is pressure from home for grades and college, but her grades are average and she's not sure about college.

She is toying with the idea of going to South Carolina after graduation to live with a 70-year-old uncle who runs a farm there and think about what she will do with her life.

She begins this day with a toaster waffle and milk at 6:45 a.m. She grabs her books and is out of the house by 7 a.m.

By 8 a.m. she is walking into her second-year Spanish class.

"This," Dana says, "is really a boring class."

The first of the day's incessant bells signals the start of the period. The teacher moved from her desk to a student desk in the middle of the class.

After the class makes a few unsuccessful attempts at simple conversation in Spanish, one student confesses there is a biology test today and several of the class members have not studied their Spanish lesson.

The teacher leads the class to safer ground in the textbook for questions and answers. Things go better, but the answers still come with difficulty.

For the final 15 minutes, the students are allowed to take refuge in a written exercise.

The bell rings.

A short trip to her locker to put her books away, a brief discussion with a girlfriend in the hall, then Dana heads across campus to the girl's gym and archery.

After exchanging her jeans, tank top, jacket and 4-inch platform shoes for gym clothes and helping her teacher set up the equipment for the class, Dana spends about a half-hour shooting five, color-coded arrows at a target, walking the distance to retrieve them, then returning to the line to shoot them again.

The bell rings and it's back to the locker room to change her clothes, back to her locker to get her books, then 13 minutes of nutrition

An Orange and Peanuts

Nutrition is an orange and some dry roasted peanuts.

The bell rings and its off to "Man and His Environment."

The teacher is the most unorthodox member of the faculty and it is the only class she looks forward to.

"It's not a matter that I like or dislike him," she says. "He always talks about something I can relate to. I listen to what he says and make up my own mind."

"I have been working hard for the past few weeks reading up on how to tell you where it's at—what's going to happen," says the slim, bearded

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STUDENT

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man from his orange rocking chair near the front of the class.

"You are going to learn so much, it's going to blow your mind," he says, patting a stack of manila folders he has prepared for each member of the class.

"I have collected some material for you—graph, diagrams and color—three colors," he says, holding up three fingers. Then he launches into a discussion of pollution patterns in Western, Socialist and developing nations.

The discussion is lively and Dana sits in the back of the room taking it in.

The bell rings.

Seven minutes later she is in her next class, "U.S. Government." The teacher is older and more traditional in his approach.

All semester he has been teaching his students about the strengths and weaknesses of the American system of government. With the present turn of national events, it has become increasingly difficult to talk about the system's strengths.

Back to the Text

"It's hard for you to understand how I can stand here and talk about honesty and integrity," he concedes, winding up a brief discussion of the Watergate affair. "But I believe in the government, and I think there are some honest people in there if you just look for them."

The attempt made, he returns to the safety of the text and instructs the class to read the chapter on the Presidency and answer the questions.

Dana opens her book to the chapter and works silently for the rest of the period until the bell rings. It's lunch time.

Leaving campus for lunch is one of the few privileges enjoyed by Hamilton seniors. Dana uses it for a cigaret and a trip to the local liquor store where she picks up a lunch of strawberry soda and pistachio nuts.

Back on the lunch quad she sits alone and eats, watching her fellow students pass by.

What she sees are people doing things they don't want to do or things she believes aren't worth doing.

"The only reason black students come here is because their parents make them. They come here and talk about who they are messing with and joke about what they are doing," she says.

"The Cheviot Hills people—all they think about is money, money, money—they are so materialistic. I am not off into money right now.

"I think this country is going to have to go Socialist because things can't keep going on this way—that's why I want to get away."

Another bell and it's the last class to be hurdled before the trip home.

The teacher tries to make the problems of the post-World War I nations and their leaders human by taking the class on short side trips into interesting little anecdotes.

But her students stare back at her with blank faces.

'Just Take a Look'

"It would be nice if you just took a look at your book" she says finally.

The bell rings and the day is over.

"The minute I started hearing her voice, I just couldn't keep my eyes open," says Dana as she leaves the classroom.

On the walk south to the bus stop she says, "It's not that I'm lazy, it's just that I lack motivation. If I don't do it I know I am not going to get a very good grade, but then I say, 'I don't want to do it.'"

"Just the fact that I don't know where I am going, at points makes me so depressed I feel like going away so no one will bother me."

The bus pulls up. She boards it and makes herself as comfortable as possible until she can get home and take a nap.