



Andra Kovacs

II REASONS

Reason six

It's a relaxing feeling to appreciate the exquisiteness that hides in even the simplest things. That's why when Michelle Maasz (12) and I came to realize our "Michandra moments," I took it to heart.

Michandra moments are those times when we find ourselves saying things that can just as easily be the other's words. It's those moments that make us more connected than ever.

Everyone has their own version of Michandra moments, whether they decide to call it by a terribly cheesy name or not.

It's the times when you seem to click so naturally with the other person, when you feel like your emotions match up perfectly and you're shocked by how genuinely you understand one another.

I've learned that those are some of the most powerful moments in life.

It wasn't until recently that it became clear how numb I had become to the beauty of understanding. Dealing with issues that I believed no one could ever comprehend proved how important being understood is to me.

And for anyone who has not had their own version of a Michandra moment, it's hard to describe how accepted the connection makes you feel.

Michelle and I discovered this shared connection when I had become frustrated with the feeling that it was impossible for anyone to understand my issues because I found them impossible to put into words.

I don't mean slamming the door after a fight with mom and thinking "she'll never understand."

I mean the feeling of complete frustration after putting in every effort to verbalize your emotions.

But Michelle and our Michandra moments helped me to recognize that I really was understood and how vital that feeling of acceptance is—something I had forgotten the importance of, or maybe never even knew.

Finding something relatable between friends or even just random people is something simple that happens every day, yet can mean a lifetime when you realize the significance of feeling understood.

Every day you make a connection with people, whether it's getting the same answer on a homework problem or dealing with similar relationship problems. These connections are essential to understanding others and being understood.

And I had severely taken this for granted.

Having the feeling that you've been figured out, that someone knows what you're going through, is one of the most comforting feelings in the world.

Everyone needs their own Michandra moments to feel accepted and to fully accept themselves.

That's why now, with every little connection I make, I feel a deep-rooted respect for it and for the inferred compassion it carries.

Most people can think of at least one in their life that they tried desperately to explain their feelings, only to get them out of their system. While in some cases that can be refreshing, hearing time and time again an almost meaningless "I'm so sorry," makes it clear to me that empathy is a thousand times more powerful than sympathy.

Making realizations like these helped me to feel the appreciation for my Michandra moments. It was times like these that helped me learn how oblivious I had become to one of the most important pieces of life—being understood.

A Spark of Creativity

Hinton designs MySpace layouts for local bands



Photo by Anna Buckley
Photo Illustration by George Jeng

Maddie Hinton (10) sits on her bed, creating a MySpace layout for one of the many bands that she works with. Hinton taught herself how to decipher computer codes so that she could alter layouts on the social networking site to use her newfound knowledge to help local bands promote themselves.

Anna Buckley
STAFF WRITER

Maddie Hinton (10) stared at the chaos of letters, numbers and brackets in front of her, trying to make sense of it all. She'd been looking at the same code for a day now, trying to understand how the intricately meshed words and letters created a layout for MySpace. Hinton continued to stare at the code. She moved around different pieces and words within the code to see what they did, like changing the font color and the background image of the page.

"I literally sat and stared at the code for a couple of days," Hinton said. "I started to notice patterns in it. There are actually real words in them and I took the words and realized which word did what."

Hinton eventually taught herself how to code, which puts together all the different elements of a MySpace page, such as a profile picture, the "About Me" section and other aspects of MySpace, so that they appear in one unified layout.

"Trial and error was the main thing," Hinton said. "No one taught me, I taught myself."

Hinton first questioned how websites and MySpace layouts were created two years ago, which sparked her to discover the answer and to create her own layouts.

"I was just really fascinated by all websites in general," she said. "I would wonder how they were made, how the images all showed up exactly where they were supposed to be and who created them."

After learning how to create layouts, Hinton decided to create her own website to display her unique designs.

But as Hinton became busier with school and sports, she was unable to spend her time working on her site. Hinton ended her website last January, about a year after beginning, but after taking a break from creating layouts, Hinton still wanted to continue her work, but in a different way then before.

"I started creating layouts for music artists when I began realizing that I didn't want my layout site anymore," she said. "I was really sad because I knew that I wanted people to use and see my artwork but I didn't want to be tied down to a layout site."

One day, a month after ending her website, Hinton came across a local band from Poway called The Raparrees. She decided to message them asking if she could make a layout for their MySpace music page.

"I just loved how complex [the band] looked," Hinton said. "I made my first layout for them and [I'm] not going to lie, it was pretty horrible. At the same time I was ecstatic because I just thought it was so cool. It was after that I realized I wanted to do more."

After creating the layout for The Raparrees, Hinton began messaging local bands and asking whether they would like her to design a layout for them, free of charge. Hinton soon made a deal with a band called Play the Fox.

The planning process for Play the Fox

began the same as any other layout she designs for artists. Hinton has a series of questions for the artists including what color scheme they want, what style they like, any specific graphics or images they want on the page, what to put in the content and any links to other MySpace profiles they like so she can get a feel for what they want.

Then Hinton begins with a sketch of the basic layout and sends it to the band or music artist for the OK.

If they her design, she then creates the layout for the page on Photoshop, and then codes it to be placed on their profile. But sometimes, pleasing the music artist can be tricky.

"Some of the artists I've worked with have been really rude and arrogant and expect me to create something they like without [telling me] any information," she said. "It's really hard to work with people like that because I feel like I'm not being given proper respect."

But with Play the Fox, Hinton was able to create a layout that both she and the band were happy with.

"Although that layout isn't my best and it's pretty basic, the most has come from it and it gave me the best feeling overall," she said. "Play the Fox was so warm and appreciative, and they loved it so much. It made me feel great."

Soon after creating the layout for Play the Fox, the band posted a blog thanking Hinton.

"From that I got probably 20 messages

from other artists asking if I could make them one or just complimenting me on my work," Hinton said.

After such an accomplishment, Hinton was inspired to continue her designs for music artists.

"After that one I [knew] I wanted to do this forever," Hinton said. "I felt really accomplished. It made me feel like I had done something really good for somebody and I got to do what I wanted to do at the same time."

Soon after creating the Play the Fox layout, Hinton decided to begin charging for her service due to issues with other clients.

"A lot of agreements I made ended up falling through, or I would work really hard on something and then the artist would take it down," Hinton said. "It was really aggravating so I decided that I had to start charging money for my layouts. A regular html layout is \$25 but a DIV overlay is \$40."

Hinton is now in the process of creating two more layouts for two bands and plans to continue designing because it's her passion.

"Being able to have a creative outlet like this is really what contains the most meaning for me," she said. "I love being able to do something that is challenging, but also that I'm passionate about. Working for artists is just an added plus. I would do this no matter what. Although I design for other people, the only person I'm really designing for is myself."



Dominic Lucisano

Kelsi Stone (11) stunts with Brenna Lundberg (12), Samantha Kerstner (11) and Sam Haws (11), while Ellie Bostron (12) performs a dance in front of the group.

Taking cheer to new heights, five girls form small competitive team

Nicole Kush
FEATURES EDITOR

The music started and Kelsi Stone (11) shot up head-first 12 feet into the air. For a few seconds she defied gravity and completed a toe touch before she landed back into her teammates' arms.

But just as soon as she fell into their grips, they drove her back up for yet another trick where she pulled her leg to her head.

The series of complicated stunts continued for a minute, with no breaks in between. Finally, the girls of cheer's competitive single stunt group finished their routine, exhausted and fatigued.

This year, competitive cheer decided to try something different. Instead of 30 girls performing a routine full of organized formations like in years past, this team is made up of only five girls who continually stunt.

Because only a few girls were interested in trying out for the competitive cheer squad, the cheer coaches decided it was time for the change. They created an elite stunt group with five girls, Stone, Sam Haws (11), Brenna Lundberg (12), Ellie Bostron (12) and Samantha Kerstner (11), all of whom wanted to pursue competitive cheer.

"Competitive cheer is something different and exciting that we can do," Haws said. "Competing is very rewarding and when

we knew that a full competition team wasn't going to work, we wanted to still show our dedication by forming this 'miniature' team."

When the team had its first practice in December, Haws said she didn't realize how difficult it could be working with this new, smaller team.

"We have a lot more practices than regular cheer because

competitive cheer is harder and you have to be more focused as a team," Haws said. "But only having one stunt group with five girls creates an even bigger challenge because we have to keep our endurance up in order to stick the entire routine. There are no breaks in between for dances or cheers like what larger competition teams have. We constantly use all our energy to lift [Stone] and if one person is off then it affects everyone. It's a team effort and we have to work as one."

Once the team had the final routine down, the members competed at their first competition last Sunday at Great Oaks High School in Temecula.

When the girls first arrived at the competition, they said it felt as they had at all the previous

ones they had attended as a larger team in the past. Just as before, they stretched, warmed up and tried to fight away the nerves.

But as soon as the girls stepped onto the mat and stood in front of the crowd, Stone said that competing as a single stunt group was an entirely different experience.

"The first thing I noticed was that it was really quiet," Stone

said. "Usually lots of girls would be rallying onto the mat, but with only five of us yelling, it felt strange."

Then, when they began stunting and Stone stood above her teammates with her leg pulled to her head, she noticed that all eyes were on her.

There were no other girls for the audience to watch and for the time being, the crowd and the judges stayed transfixed on Stone, critiquing her every move.

"I was more nervous at this competition because I couldn't depend on other groups to be hitting their stunts because at regular competitions there are more groups that could get points," Stone said. "Everything was focused on us. There was a lot more pressure on all of us to work as a

team and build up the stunts. We had to depend on each other and there wasn't a whole other group of girls the judges could judge."

The first part of the routine went off without a hitch, but when it came time for Stone's scale, where she pulls her leg behind her head, her leg collapsed.

"The nerves finally got the best of me," Stone said. "I was frustrated because I knew we could have done so well, but the nerves from knowing we were the only girls out on the floor overcame me."

After her fall the girls continued to hit every stunt, smiles and all, pretending that nothing had happened.

Then, once they had performed, their coach had them do the same stunt that had failed on the side of the mat.

"She wanted to show us that we could do it," Stone said. "She showed us that we were a strong team. It helped us as a team and I think now we will be able to compete at the next competition more confidently and do better."

The girls still went on to win first at the competition because they had no other teams in their category, but said that they know they can improve on their skills as a cohesive unit.

"Practicing as a smaller team helps us become better cheerleaders all-around," Haws said. "With this team we have to take time to build a strong bond."

"It's a team effort and we have to work as one."
-Sam Haws (11)