

West Seattle Herald White Center News

‘Gifted writer’ weighs her career options



Matthew E. Durham

A PLACE TO THINK. Kyra-lin Hom finds the roof of her West Seattle home a good place to find quiet refuge to compose her thoughts before doing her writing.

By Sue Favor

Kyra-lin Hom has always had a thing with words.

The 15-year-old has devoured books and written since she was very young. By the time she was in fourth grade, she had read *The Count of Monte Cristo* three times. In sixth grade, Hom tested at the level of Advanced Placement English.

“Both of my parents read to me a lot when I was younger, and my dad’s a good writer,” she theorized.

But at Garfield High School, where the West Seattle resident is a student, kids aren’t allowed to enroll in advanced placement classes until they are juniors. Last year, Hom was a freshman. So she took standard English classes all year, and did very well.

Then last spring, Hom heard about an opportunity she couldn’t resist: an investigative journalism class was being offered at nearby Nova Alternative High School. It would mean she would have to walk the two blocks to Nova and take the class every day, after school at Garfield was over. Hom enrolled without hesitation.

The end product of the class – Hom’s final project – was the story on domestic violence featured in last week’s *West Seattle Herald* (Sept. 8, 2004). The in-depth piece began with the account of a true incident of domestic violence in King County, and then not only explored the issue but covered the origins of domestic violence and investigated possible solutions. Many readers couldn’t believe the story was written by a high school sophomore.

“It was nice to see Kyra-lin’s story featured so prominently,” said Kathy Schrier, teacher of the investigative journalism class. “She’s such a gifted writer.”

The thoroughness of the piece is something *Herald* Editor Jack Mayne said many older reporters should emulate. Hom said she was just trying to do a good job on the assignment.

“I thought the topic was interesting, and I wanted to find out all I could about it,” she said.

According to Jennifer Cram, Hom’s English teacher at Garfield, this is typical of her.

“Whether she’s writing short stories, papers or an essay, Kyra-lin is very detailed and organized,” Cram said.

Out of all the students she taught last year, Cram considers Hom and another student the best writers in the school.

“She is a gifted writer,” Cram said. “She did all her creative writing with a flair and voice. Kyra-lin has a grace and elegance with words that is unique and distinctive.”

Schrier agreed. Hom and another freshman, West Seattle resident and fellow Garfield student Calla Hummel, were the youngest kids in her class, and each demonstrated a lot of talent. She said Hom and Hummel held their own in a room full of older Nova students.

“They are both amazing young women,” Schrier said.

The class at Nova was a unique opportunity for students, as investigative journalism had not been offered by either Nova or Garfield. Schrier, who has taught newspaper and yearbook in the Seattle School District for years, volunteered to teach the class. Nova administrators let Schrier create the curriculum. The result was a course like no other before it.

“She started out by giving us intro exercises,” Hom said. “We learned how to write single-sentence paragraphs. She kinda threw us into it and as issues came up, she would address them.”

Hom took to the class quickly.

“I’d never done journalism writing before, but I thought it came pretty easy,” she said.

Students lucked out in getting Schrier as an instructor. She taught at Chief Sealth High School through 2000, and has substituted for teachers around the district the last few years as she’s been pursuing a master’s degree. Schrier is also president of the Washington Journalism Education Association, a subsidiary of the Journalism Education Association.

But whether or not investigative journalism will be offered at Nova again this year remains to be seen. Whatever the case, Schrier said she will not be able to teach the class, as she is looking for a full-time teaching job.

In the meantime, Hom is setting her sights on the Garfield Messenger, the school’s award-winning newspaper. She said she missed the deadline for application last year, but Schrier pointed out that the newspaper is an advanced placement class and is not typically open to underclassmen anyway.

“They don’t usually let underclassmen on the staff, which is one of the reasons Kyra-lin took my class,” she said. “It is a great paper that’s won many national awards, and I’m sure Kyra-lin will do well there.”

Hom is eager to become part of the newspaper staff. In the meantime, she enjoys other activities like JV volleyball and martial arts. Yet, despite her writing talent, Hom hasn’t decided on a career just yet.

“I’m thinking of the University of Oregon if I go to journalism school,” she said. “But I’m also considering being a criminal psychologist.”

Tough choice.

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