Seeking An Education in Sierra Leone

By Alice Hamblett
Special To The Talon

“A different education” is what my parents refer to my recent trip to the West African nation of Sierra Leone as, justifying a two-week absence from this, my junior year at Barrington High School. Having returned from traveling, I could not agree more; I left the familiar behind and had the experience of a lifetime.

The premise for travel first begins with my dad, Topher: a Peace Corps volunteer in 1985, he fell in love with Sierra Leone and formed bonds with many people who live there.

In 1991, several years after my father left, a violent civil war broke out that lasted until 2002. The Revolutionary United Front—commonly referred to as the rebels—and the Civil Defense Forces fought for eleven years, both committing unimaginable atrocities and destruction, spilling the blood of thousands of innocent civilians. If you have read A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier by Ishmael Beah, you know what I am talking about.

Since his initial return in 2002, post conflict, my father has been making yearly trips to Sierra Leone in order to do field work for the non-profit organization he created, the Foundation for West Africa. My dad’s organization promotes independent radio in West Africa.

This year, with the help of persistence and a little bit of begging, I had the privilege of accompanying him.

Radio is one of the few methods of mass communication in Sierra Leone, Page 5

A Sierra Leonean girl selling blankets on a beach in Freetown, the West African nation's capital city. Behind her, a fisherman pull nets in from the Atlantic Ocean. (Photo by Alice Hamblett)

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Don’t Be A Twit

Twitter. It’s the next biggest social media craze to overtake Barrington High School. Like it’s predecessor, Facebook, it has crept into our lives and threatens to overtake all of our time and energy.

How can this be? Twitter is even better for our attention-loving, self-centered population because it is based solely on conversation and letting other people look at and observe what you want to say. It is a place where opinions run rampant and the conversation literally never ends. What’s the big deal? It sounds like just another high school hallway to us.

The problem is, just like Facebook, Twitter is going to become the next big excuse for kids not doing schoolwork—at home or at school.

It can be seen the night before, say, a big senior project deadline that students are clearly paying more attention to their Twitter accounts than their research paper. Various posts lamenting the formatting, the extensive time used, and the emnity towards the project as a whole overflow the newsfeed. Instead of complaining about it on Twitter why don’t these students simply complete the task?

In addition, students use Twitter as a way to make themselves seem better than other students. The whole idea of tweeting about what you’re doing, thinking, other element that is making our world more technological and less real. The point is that, since 2000, the American political scene since 1945 has been run by a military-industrial and political train wreck that this country is still swimming around in my mind. The problem is, just like Facebook, Twitter is going to become the next big excuse for kids not doing schoolwork—at home or at school.

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On The Campaign Trail

An intrepid reporter channels Hunter S. Thompson

By Harrison Connery

Talon Staff

The first political memory I have still swimming around in my mind reaches all the way back to the Al Gore—George W. Bush election. I was sitting in the living room of our boarding house apartment in Silver Lake, Providence, on the eve of the election. I remember looking up at my dad and asking him who we wanted to win and why.

“Gore,” answered my father, “because it’ll make my job easier.”

And that was as complicated as the political arena was for me for the next two years, until September 11, 2001.

On that crisp, clear morning, we were all ushered down into our first grade classrooms, looking out at the blue skies, our faces still red and sweaty from the ultra-competitive recess games we had invented for ourselves, when our teacher sat down and slowly explained that someone had flown two planes into the World Trade Center Towers in New York City.

And then I watched through the front door asking me to help him fight off that bugger Osama bin Laden, and his legions of minions. The military industrial complex industry lost its shiny sheen of glamour, and slowly explained that someone had flown two planes into the World Trade Center Towers in New York City.

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Sixty years ago we were reigning world champs, and now this Alaskan beauty queen that said things that could be directly quoted on the front page of the Boston Globe for the very real chance of becoming our first female president after smothering McCain with a pillow on the night of his inauguration? Enough.

Let’s turn our attention to our current predicament.

After sixteen years of this and with a good knowledge of the political train wreck that this country has been since FDR, I can say two things about Ron Paul, third place finisher in the Iowa Republican caucus and second place finisher in the New Hampshire Republican primary, with relative confidence: first, he’s a wonderfully terrifying affront to everything the Republicans have worked for since Reagan. Secondly, he’s the strongest story to flop onto the American political scene since Hunter S. Thompson met Big Ed Musky all the way back in the early ‘70s.

So, it legitimately stunned me when I finally found myself in an American high school in which no one else seemed to know the whole story or even half of it.

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Fad or Fiction? Barrington_TwitterProblems

By Jessica Yutangco
Talon Staff

Tweeting is not just for birds anymore, Twitter has been transforming the world, helping its 175 million users to share daily events in their lives. However, it has also been a center of drama at Barrington High School.

Twitter is the latest social media website to gain fame as it enables people to connect with friends via tweets—no more than 140-character long messages that are the foundation of the network. People can post their status, obtain information about celebrities or simply listen on the multiple public streams that continuously take place. It also allows businesses to talk with customers in real-time.

At BHS, students are finding this website to be just as addictive as Facebook—the initial social media trend that began in 2004; just two years before its newest rival.

Senior Kristina Waters gushes, “I love Twitter! I tweet all the time… If something comes into my head, I can just type it!” It is true that Twitter is a convenient, online place where teenagers can stay up-to-date on international news, blogs and their friends’ social lives. The main difference between this website and Facebook is that Twitter primarily consists of streaming conversations as a way to obtain information. Facebook is used more socially, as a place where people can post pictures, comments, and videos in addition to status updates.

Lately, however, Twitter has been a source of controversy at BHS. Not only is it yet another website that students are spending hours of their already limited time on, but also “Why would I ever want to pay another student to write my paper when I could just pay my teach for the A?”

Recent “tweet” by BarringtonGirlProbs

Senior Morgan Johnston said, “I can be negative as far as being linked to cyber bullying.” There has been a recent incident on Twitter in which an anonymous account was created under the username “Barrington_GP,” a.k.a. Barrington Girl Problems. This unnamed tweeter has been posting brazen comments (see box) about what he or she finds to be negative about the town and school in addition to sarcastic remarks about his or her own life. While this person is not directly targeting any one person or group, he or she is negatively portraying Barrington, contributing to the stereotypes that surround the town. Although this user has intrigued BHS students, he or she has also called the practice of tweeting into question. “I don’t think it’s a positive form of social media because it seems like it fosters almost a narcissistic type of personality,” said senior Michaela Carroll, who feels that many users, such as Barrington_GP, post irrelevant messages that may reveal too much information about their personal lives or character.

Nevertheless, if used for business and political purposes, Twitter can be an extremely useful outlet with which to unite people and communities. “[Twitter] is an excellent way to communicate [with customers because] businesses gain instant access to their target market,” said business teacher Mrs. Kellie Polando.

Whether students use Twitter for discovering news, marketing purposes or just staying in touch with friends, this website has made an impact on the BHS community. But at what cost and to whom? Or, as Barrington_GP might ask: “Is it bad?”

A Selection of Recent Tweets by @Barrington_GP

On my 5th episode of Keeping Up With the Kardashians… I need to 1. Find my melatonin and 2. Still not start my essay #BarringtonGirlProbs (5 November)

If you plan on eating stuf #BarringtonGirlProbs (5 December)

Why would I ever want to pay another student to write my paper when I could just pay my teach for the A? #BarringtonGirlProbs (7 December)

If you plan on eating stuf this dinner… I need to 1. Find my melatonin and 2. Still not start my essay #BarringtonGirlProbs (7 December)

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#BarringtonGirlProblems

Campaign Trail

he can win in the day and age of the candidate? Does he really believe that his skinny frame and thinning hair make him a serious contender for the job? And he was taking him-
Smoking At The Courts: Is It A Crime?

By Brad Guay
Talon Staff

Each day, both before and after school, a group of roughly a dozen Barrington High School students gathers near the school tennis courts to light up cigarettes. It’s an ongoing problem, and most people are aware of it, yet nothing is being done about it.

“Why right in front of the school?” asked senior Ashley Daughtery. “It’s just dumb.”

Indeed, smoking a cigarette in front of the school is not only looked down upon by many, but it is also illegal.

“If they’re not on our property, there’s not a lot we can do,” said Mr. Hurley.

According to Principal Mr. Joseph Hurley, the tennis courts and adjacent fields are owned by the school district. Numerous signs posted around the building also make it very clear that BHS is a “Tobacco Free School.”

Therefore, students who wish to light up should stay away from school grounds to avoid possible repercussions.

One sophomore, who admitted to joining the group by the tennis courts, insisted there was no harm in what he and his friends do. “It’s just cigarettes,” he said.

Another student admitted to smoking but said he follows the rules and agrees with Daughtery.

“I don’t smoke on school grounds because that’s stupid. You could get expelled,” she said.

While this could be the case, and there are definitely grounds for administration to take disciplinary action, the school has been put into a tough spot by the students who frequent that spot.

“If they’re not on our property, there’s not a lot we can do,” said Mr. Hurley.

Mr. Hurley added that in the past, when the students have been driven off school grounds and into the nearby fields and woods, the school has gotten numerous complaints from neighbors.

However, by remaining on school property, the students are both breaking the law and school rules.

According to Thrive, Rhode Island’s Coordinated School Health Program, the law is clear:

“The smoking or use of any substance or item which contains tobacco including but not limited to cigarettes, cigars, pipes, or other smoking tobacco, or the use of snuff or smokeless tobacco or having in one’s possession a lighted cigarette, cigar, pipe, or other substance or item containing tobacco is prohibited . . .

On all school properties and school grounds, including but not limited to classroom buildings, administration buildings, other buildings regulated by the school district, playgrounds, athletic facilities, athletic grounds, locker rooms, buses, other school vehicles, parking lots, and any other outside areas within twenty-five (25) feet of any school building.”

As for a solution to this:

“We’re currently working with the police department, and the students do have a chance of being suspend- ed,” said Mr. Hurley.

However, one thing that Mr. Hurley is pleased with is the fact that the interior of the building is now entirely smoke free.

This is a big change from just a few years ago, when school bathrooms, particularly the ones in the history hallway, were safe havens for student smokers.

The inside of the school building would reek of tobacco daily, creating an environment that was not only unpleasant, but also very unhealthy for students and faculty.

“I don’t care if they smoke – they’re just choosing a bad habit for themselves,” said sophomore Haley Ryan.

Campaign Trail

Republican ticket in 2012? Impos- sible. Nobody in American politics has been that brazenly cocky since President Richard Nixon dragged the Oval Office down into a quagmire of petty crime and thuggery—and that only cost him his mental health and the prestige of the entire country!

He had to be warned! But how? How could I get in touch with him as soon as possible? I leapt up and reached for my iphone, knocking it off the table in my haste. I picked it up and held it to my face, frantically dialing the number to the Paul campaign. The phone rang and the robotic voice coming through the phone hit with such monumental force that I nearly fell over backwards. I was calling to save his career and he had the audacity to relegate me to a robot?

I was stuck. There was noth- ing I could do. I would have to sit in my living room over the next few months and watch as the scandal unfolded in front of my eyes. There wouldn’t be much news at first— it would take time for the story to leak out, slowly making its way thousands of miles from here to the nearest city of relevance. And then there would be whispers across cubicle dividers . . . and then rumors over the Associated Press wire, and then . . .

That would be the end of Ron Paul: one quick mention in the Providence Journal and the story would be all over the television news. He would go down in flames on the six a.m. news that rings in the day for so many suburban homes.

At this point of my fantasy, I was a muddle of jangled nerves, slouched down in the corner of my living room, whispering consolations to myself when a sick, twisted idea came into my head: I could still beat the story out! I just had to drive to the Paul campaign headquarters in South Carolina. Yes, it was all coming to me now. I would walk in holding the paper above my head, out of breath and on the verge of collapse, announc- ing the terrifying possibility of a campaign meltdown to a crowd of gawking onlookers.

I couldn’t make this trip alone though. I needed help, a side- kick, to handle the maps and drive at night. I needed the Badger.

“Badger,” I yelled into my phone, “get up! We’re going to South Carolina!”

“…what?”

“You heard me you lunatic! Pack your bags.”

“…What? Wait, its one in
the morning you freak!” he shouted. He was starting to wake up now. “If you think I’m going to let you drag me through something like Kansas City again—”

I said South Carolina. Listen to me, you rabid badger. I need you to focus. You’re the one who wants stories for college, remember? You should have broken your ankles hopping on the train tracks,” I growled into the transmitter.

“Why are we going to South Carolina? I mean you. Why are you going to South Carolina?”

“You’re scared. You need to warn Ron Paul about the Internet! It’s a secret’s out!” Badger… he used to be thick-skinned but it seems his tone has changed. “I want to go around accusing people of being gynecologists willy-nilly! You need to take precautions! I would know, I go to Harvard,” he spluttered into the phone in a mad rage of sleep deprivation and anger.

“Shut up, twerp,” I snapped back, “I know what I did.”

“Wait,” he said, his tone implying that my fortunes with him were about to turn sour again. “Why do you even care about any of this? You’re a liberal!”

“Because! His foreign policy is my foreign policy! I came up with that years ago! Plus, if he doesn’t get the nomination then it goes to Santorum or Romney. Do you really want to be bowing down to Chief Emperor Santorum this time next year?”

“That’ll never happen. Who made you the expert anyways?”

“Check and mate. Stay there and make some sense out of Iowa and New Hampshire.”

“About one hour, why?”

“Did you just tell me to…”

“Shut up, twerp. We’re getting seriously frustrated with the political storm with no light at the end of the tunnel, even with a sane president in of—”

I was cut off by the sound of the dial tone or Romney. Do you really want to be bowing down to Chief Emperor Santorum this time next year? Or to to translate what other kids said if you didn’t know as much English. Regardless of the eight-year age difference, I trust her judgment.

Regardless of the eight-year age difference, I trust her judgment. I always felt as if I knew another sister. Her NAME was Jami. She instructed us on how to carry water (and told me not to spill it) and make some sense out of Iowa and New Hampshire. “Did you just tell me to…”

I was cut off by the sound of the dial tone. Drats… it seems my fate has been sealed. I need to get in the Peace Corps, a medical clinic that he helped to fund, a school for the blind, homes of friends, and even a beach. We travelled from Freetown, the capital city, up to the northern and eastern more rural areas. On average, we probably spent two to three days in each town.

While in Sierra Leone, I saw blatant evidence of the war. Battered cement skeletons of blown out houses line country roads. Bullet holes are visible in the sides of building walls, and war graffiti scars the sides of homes in villages and towns. The most profound and heartbreaking scene was a particular bombed out building in Kailahun, the town that was home to both the beginning and the very end of the war.

There, I stood in the doorway of what was used as a human slaughterhouse by soldiers. I looked at the blood spattered on the walls, and a shock ran through my system when I grasped how real the war truly was. Our friend Umaru stepped inside the room and looked around, it was familiar to him, as he passed by it on a daily basis during the war. “You can still smell the blood” he remarked.

The building, though gruesome, is kept as a reminder of the atrocities that took place, in hopes that history will not repeat itself. Standing in that room probably one of the most intense experiences that I have ever had. That building and the devastation that is still part of the country’s landscape are things that I think about on a frequent basis. The effects of the war are evidently not forgotten.

However, the spirit of Sierra Leone greatly outweighs this tragedy. It is easy to view the country as a war torn disaster area, but beneath the skin of a brutal history lays the incredible spirit of those who lived through it—one that changed me and would change anyone who experienced it.

The education I received in Sierra Leone was primarily in humanity. That is, how people treat other people. While the war did turn brothers against brothers, and neighbors against neighbors, I have never met more caring, more welcoming, or more resilient individuals.

No matter how many films I watched, pictures I saw, or stories I heard nothing could prepare me for the friendliness of Sierra Leoneans.

The first night we arrived in Freetown, I’ll admit I was scared to be in such a new and different place. However, as soon as people we met found out that it was my first time in the country, they would immediately say, “You are welcome to Sierra Leone.”

Unfortunately, I didn’t have my mom with me on the trip, but I always felt as if I had surrogate mothers when I was in Africa. Nothing could compare to meeting my father’s best friend from his Peace Corps stay, who I have spoken to on the phone and seen pictures of all my life. When I stepped out of the car and into her home, we greeted each other like we had known one another for our entire lives, and with a huge hug. Words cannot express how it felt to finally meet her. Gbessay brought me around and introduced me to all of her friends in the market, showed me the way they cook in Sierra Leone, and always made sure I had a smile on my face. Jabi, Jami, and Ibrahim, were always around at Gbessay’s house. While only Jami lives there, all of them are related. They became like siblings to me, and after the first night we met, were completely uninhibited.

The three of them were not afraid to tell me what to do, especially Jami. She instructed me on how to carry water (and told me not to spill it) and make some sense out of Iowa and New Hampshire. “Did you just tell me to…”

I was cut off by the sound of the dial tone. Drats… it seems my fate has been decided for me. While the country has seen a calm period of about thirty years, we are now in the thick of another political storm with no light at the end of the tunnel, even with a sane president in office. The Democrats have worn out the blind trust granted to them when President Obama took office, mostly because of the National Defense Authorization Act, which
Winter Sports Update

By Tim Scott
Talon Staff

Even though it’s January now, Barrington High School sports are in full swing, with dominant performances across the board. For example, both track teams look to maintain their dominance that they have built over the years. Also, the girls basketball team has played very well, and is currently maintaining their top ranking in Division I. This is a snapshot of how each team has performed so far this season.

Boys Basketball

The boys basketball team has gotten off to a solid start. At the halfway point of the season, the team has a 7-6 record, with an impressive 5-3 mark in Division II.

After ending 2011 with a 4-4 record, the team has played a challenging, but rewarding, schedule against the top teams in Division II. The team has had wins against Lincoln, an upset win over Shea, and a overpowering win over Scituate. However, the team had tough losses against North Providence and Tolman.

Individually, the team has been led by junior captain Ben Engvall, who is among the top scorers in Division II, averaging 20.9 points per game. Right behind him is freshman sensation Corey Daugherty, who averages 9.3 points per game.

Coming up, the Eagles play matchups against Cumberland, Pana-ganset, and Charho, coached by Barrington gym teacher Corey Downey. After that, they play tough games against Westerly and West Warwick.

Girls Basketball

In an attempt to avenge last year’s devastating semifinal loss to Westerly, the Lady Eagles have played really well. After losing All-State players Kelly Mannix and Catherine Mathews, the younger Eagles have gone 8-3 this season, with a 6-2 record in the Eccleston Division, the younger Eagles have played really well in Division I. Playing in the Eccleston Division, the team has opened up to a 4-5 start, with a 4-4 mark in Division I.

Ethan Studley (Sr.) leads the team in scoring with 8 points (6 goals, 2 assists). Collin Fay (Sr.) is right behind with 7 points (6 points, 1 assist), and Joey Lombardi has added four points. In the goal, Drew Galbraith (Jr.) and Chris Calitri (Sr.) split the time, making key saves along the way.

After losing the J.P. Medeiros Memorial Cup, against Mount Hope, the team looks to bounce back against the defending Division I champs, Mount St. Charles.

Girls Ice Hockey

The girls’ hockey team has opened the season very strongly, winning two of their first three games. They have beaten the Narragansett/North and South Kingstown Co-Op and North Smithfield in impressive fashion.

For example, Meghan Miller, who averages 11.6 points per game, has been the team’s leading scorer. The team also features Elizabeth Felag (Jr.), Caroline Huang (Jr.), Yvonne Liu (Jr.), Rachel Nassau (Fr.), Aly Personness (So.), Alex Portugal (Jr.), Magda Rainey (So.), Maxine Rastnick (Fr.), Sarah Schryver (Jr.), and Michaela Swift (Sr.).

Boys Ice Hockey

So far, the boy’s hockey team has played very well in Division I. Playing in the Eccleston Division, the team has opened up to a 4-5 start, with a 4-4 mark in Division I.

The team is led in scoring by Ethan Studley (Sr.), who has 8 points (6 goals, 2 assists). Collin Fay (Sr.) is right behind with 7 points (6 points, 1 assist), and Joey Lombardi has added four points. In the goal, Drew Galbraith (Jr.) and Chris Calitri (Sr.) split the time, making key saves along the way.

After losing the J.P. Medeiros Memorial Cup, against Mount Hope, the team looks to bounce back against the defending Division I champs, Mount St. Charles.

Indoor Track

The boys indoor track team did well in their first meet, edging out Moses Brown and East Providence. The girls’ team also did well in their meet at Classical and Bay View.

Swimming

The boys swimming team did very well in their first meet of the year, edging out East Greenwich, 54 to 32. They have won other matches, putting them among the top teams in the state. Nick Tonselli (Sr.), Andres Solanot (Jr.), Zachary Herchen (Jr.), JJ Strong (Sr.), Zeke DeWitt (Sr.), and Owen Bellamy (Sr.) won in their events. In addition, the girls’ team edged out East Greenwich, 49-43.

Maggie DeSisto (Sr.), Olivia August (Jr.), Haley LaMontagne (So.), Haley Ryan (So.), Allison Suriani (Jr.), and Emma Gurchiek (Fr.) won their events.

Winter Sports Update

Maggie O’Hayer battles a Lincoln double- team but the Lady Eagles suffered a rare loss to the visiting Lions. (Photo from Mike Repo/Barrington Times)

Shenille Teixeira and her teammates are among the top teams in the first indoor track coaches poll of the winter. (Photo by Mike Repo/Barrington Times)
Her Name Was Lola, She Was A Hit!

By Carolyn Fales
Talon Staff

“You’re all in for a very exciting evening” announced senior director Nick Holmes in his British accent. And did he ever tell the truth.

Barrington High School Stagemasters presented Copacabana last month and it was brilliant.

The minute the curtains opened the audience was bombarded with sensory overload that included vivid colors, upbeat music, and the overwhelming feeling of hard work by a dedicated cast and crew.

As the catchy music of Barry Manilow flooded the auditorium, a story of a young girl’s journey for success began. Lola, played by sophomore Emily Meredith, immediately grabbed at the hearts of the small town kid in all of us.

As Meredith launched into “Just Arrived,” an immediate smile was spread across the entire audience. Her controlled yet emotion-filled voice certainly was a standout in the show.

The most impressive aspect of the show, however, was the vast cast and crew.

Most notably, Molly Millard, president of Stagemasters, played Gladys, the main Cigarette Girl at the Copacabana nightclub in Havana, Cuba. Millard has shown considerable growth in her career on the auditorium stage. She practically stole the show with the musical number “Copa Girl.” She has a clear passion for performing as she perfected the witty yet serious role of Gladys.

Another senior, Bobby Robertson, who played Stephen, fit perfectly with Meredith’s Lola. Robertson has always been a star in Stagemaster’s productions, but his performance in this show, in particular, demonstrated the culmination of his talents.

And who could possibly forget senior Stephanie Cohn, the vivacious and energetic ball of Spanish fire who played Conchita. Her attitude and flare rivaled that of Modern Family’s Sofia Vergara. She commanded the stage and made sure no one forgot that she was the original Havana girl.

Besides the obvious talent on display in the musical, the amazing costumes and brilliant scenery also wowed the audience. And the backstage and tech crew also made the show run almost flawlessly. At the end of the show the audience gave the cast and crew a well-deserved standing ovation.

Quite simply, Holmes, with the obvious help of advisor and English teacher Stephanie Spizzano, put together an unforgettable show.

It should be mentioned that Holmes has been accepted to Emerson College in Boston to pursue his acting career. Just as Lola became a star at the Copacabana so also are the members of stage masters going on to make BHS proud.

Sleeping Beauty will be the next Stagemaster’s production. Though not a musical, it will offer another opportunity for the talented members of the troupe to shine.

An Education

I water near the market, Jami and I noticed a couple of girls glancing in our direction curiously.

“You look at them, they look at you,” she told me. “They look at you and you look at them.”

I still wonder as to whether or not she was justifying our interest, but something about her statement seemed to encompass a whole lot about coming from one culture into another. She suggested that it was acceptable to be curious.

In Sierra Leone, I learned how to say things in Krio, which is a fairly universal language in the country. But it was a learning process.

During our stay in the town of Kabala, where my dad had funded a medical facility called the Na Sarah Clinic, I spent some time one afternoon with a group of young boys learning how to say phrases in Krio. The group ranged in age from about eight to eighteen, but all were open to trying what I was doing wrong and what I should say right which obviously led to some laughable moments.

Out of shyness, I wasn’t replying to their questions quite loud enough.

“What do you want to be?”

Sorie, the eldest of all the kids, asked me.

I told him that I wanted to be from page 5 an art teacher.

“As do teachers have soft voices?” he retorted, half serious, half kidding.

Despite this slightly embarrassing moment, I definitely admire their outgoingness and attempt to help me be involved more in their culture, especially because it was only minutes after we met when my lessons began.

America and Sierra Leone are extremely different in that things move at a much slower pace there. Everything sort of falls into place, even if people aren’t always on time for meetings or if it takes twice as long to get places because of the roads.

In a country where things are a little bit discombobulated, the spirit possessed by Sierra Leonians has a tendency to drive things to work out.

At 10 o’clock one evening, our jeep became stuck in a swampy road in a neighborhood we didn’t quite know. Before my dad and I knew it, fifteen people were helping to push the vehicle out of the mud.

That is resilience and compassion.

I have never met children like those in Sierra Leone. Upon our arrival at the village of Kpandu where my dad resided during his Peace Corps time, I immediately made friends…with a four year old.

My friend’s name is Momi. Momi is not a talker and totes a wooden baby doll around in one hand, but in the other she held mine for nearly four hours as we went around the village.

“You want to take her with you?” Momi’s father asked. I smiled and nodded jokingly. It wasn’t an offer, no, but it was an understanding of how much I adored his daughter.

Being separated from Momi at the end of the day was heartbreaking and also an eye-opener. Kids like her reminded me that the bonds forged between friends are unbreakable.

Sierra Leone is a nation that possesses a great amount of spirit and soul, but unfortunately an equally great amount of poverty. There is an evident unequal distribution of wealth that plagues the country, much of it corrupt.

Driving through Freetown, the capital city, people asking for food and money as well street vendors line the sides of the roads. Families are struggling to make ends meet, and often have to make the decision to have their children work in lieu of school in order to feed everyone.

Seeing young children working reminded me of how lucky we are as high school students in America. I feel so fortunate to have the opportunity of college and to be in our small town with prospects ahead. I also feel lucky to have met those who have managed to stay optimistic despite their struggles. I have experienced a change in perspective.

I’ve also realized that there is so much more out there to see in the world, and so many different ways of life and cultures. Begging my father to go to Sierra Leone was one of the best decisions I ever made, and has also left me with the desire to return and even to see more of the world.

Homework completed, jet lagged, and culture shocked, I returned to school. As I go through normal day to day once again, I realize that I have taken away a new perspective. I have a great desire to share the courage and optimism that the inspiring people I met showed me.

Sierra Leonians taught me firsthand what it truly means to be forgiving, compassionate, and resilient. These are perhaps the most important lessons that I will ever learn. And I have seen the results in action: unimaginable hope in a struggling country.

My Sierra Leonian education did not teach me lessons in history, math, English, or science, but it is my firm belief the lessons I learned will assist me in passing the tests in life that are most important.
New Pass System Raises Hygiene Concerns

By Brad Guay
Talon Staff

It is a topic of contentious debate among Barrington High School students: the new wooden pass system launched two weeks ago.

After the roll-out one afternoon earlier this month, student reactions have ranged from calm to downright angry.

“It’s a good idea, but it was presented like a punishment,” said junior Megan Duffy. “It just seems like they don’t trust us.”

Many BHS students share Duffy’s opinion, particularly upper-classmen, who have been gotten used to years of being able to freely roam the hallways without any need for a pass.

The new system follows months of strict enforcement of hallway passes, which stemmed from the lighting of a trash fire late last year in the boys bathroom in the 100 hallway.

Prior to that incident, passes were required, technically, but the rule often went unenforced.

According to Principal Mr. Joseph Hurley, the passes have largely accomplished their goal.

“We’ve seen fewer students in the hallways, and the ones are out now have a pass,” he said.

Mr. Hurley also added that he believes student and teacher reaction has been largely positive. He also said that, in hindsight, he believes only one pass per room would be necessary as it would further reduce the number of students in the hallway. Teachers are also still able write paper passes if necessary.

Responding to student complaints of too few bathrooms being available, administrators did unlock several restrooms which have been closed for years.

The reaction to this move has been largely positive; however, students have now raised concerns about the passes traveling to the bathrooms on a regular basis.

“They seem unsanitary,” said Senior Renee Martel. “I don’t think they can be easily cleaned.” Martel believes that the passes should have been plastic, making them easier to sanitize.

However, according to Mr. Hurley, hygiene was considered when the passes were created. “After the passes were painted, they were coated with a glossy sealant,” he said.

This glossy sealant is intended to make the passes cleanable, possibly with sanitizing wipes.

The new passes were made by the art department, they feature different colors which represent the different wings of the school. They are wooden covered with a sealant and then painted the color that their room number corresponds to. They are carried with the plastic bracelet.

The application of the sealant to the wooden passes was also more cost-effective for the school than having dozens of plastic passes created.

He also added that future passes could contain more of the sealant, making them even easier to sanitize. These and other changes could be implemented in the future.

While the pass system may require some small revisions over the coming months and years, one thing is clear: like it or not, the passes are here to stay.

Pictured is a color-coded BHS map which shows the regions that each pass is accepted in.