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## Exchange Student from Spain Explores Life in Lafayette

By Andrea A. Firth



Jessica Pallares (right) with Margot and Terry Camp Photo Andrea Firth

Jessica Pallares describes her first day at Acalanes High School as a "little scary." This is not an unusual reaction for a new student in a large high school, but the transition was even more challenging for 17 year-old Jessica who had just arrived from Spain as an exchange student through the Rotary International Program. "I had to color code my schedule and follow a map to find my classes," she explains. However in just three months, Jessica has found her way. Her English vocabulary has grown exponentially, and she converses comfortably about her life in Lafayette with her hosts Terry and Margot Camp.

forts and lookouts and boasts the oldest active lighthouse in the world.

"She was the only teenager who showed up every day, early on time," notes Terry. Jessica had dreams of traveling to the United States from a young age. As the Camp and Pallares families became friends, the opportunity for an exchange seemed like a natural fit.

"I really like Lafayette, it's a really good city. It's one of the best," states Jessica. However, she admits to missing some things. "I miss my mom's cooking." To which Margot, her host mother, teasingly responds, "Ouch." But Jessica is quick to rectify the situation reassuring Margot that she is a great cook and explaining that what she misses are some of the traditional Spanish foods such as tortilla Espanola, an omelette made with potatoes, and empanadas, pastry stuffed with meat, chicken or fish.

"School is really different

here," says Jessica. "Acalanes is probably three or four times larger than my school in Spain. We spend all day in the same classroom with the same students." She finds that the larger setting and movement around campus provides many more opportunities to meet a variety of young people. When asked about the differences in freedoms allowed teens in Spain versus the United States, Jessica says, "Kids in the U.S. can drive at 16 years old. This changes your life. The driving age in Spain is 18. But in other ways it is more strict."

She keeps busy after school with practice for the Junior Varsity Girls Basketball Team. Although she has yet to see much court time, she enjoys being part of the team and is looking forward to improving her play. In addition, Jessica is participating in a seasonal play at the Camp's church in Walnut Creek. She has traveled to Mount Shasta with the Camps and has plans to visit Lake Tahoe. She will also travel with other exchange students from around the world on a Rotary-sponsored trip called the Western Safari that will take her to Los Angeles, Las Vegas, parts of Arizona, and Disneyland.

When she returns to Spain next fall, Jessica will complete her senior year of high school and plans to go on to college to possibly study interior design or architecture. However, she hopes to return to northern California and may consider attending school here. That sounds just fine to the Camps, "Having Jessica here is the most awesome experience we've ever had."

## Family Forum

### Who's In Charge? (Part 1)

By Margie Ryerson, MFT

"Jason, you need to go put your toys away now, okay? Megan, we're leaving now for your piano lesson, okay? Derek, I want you to stop screaming now, okay?"

What's wrong with this picture? Who is really in charge here? Something is off track if we need to ask for our kids' consent when we're directing them to follow our instructions.

In dog training, we want to ensure that we are the "alpha," and we issue commands in a strong, calm tone of voice. We don't wait to see whether or not our dog feels like cooperating; we are firmly in control. Not to put our kids into the same category as our pets exactly, but there is a lesson to be learned here. In the case of both our dogs and our children, we are trying to raise well-disciplined, respectful, and cooperative members of the household.

From a young age, children are well aware of their power within the family. Parents need to walk a fine line between being compassionate and caring, yet insisting on certain behavioral requirements. It isn't easy.

One sign that your emotions instead of your reason may be guiding you is if you engage in lengthy discussions with your child when he challenges your decisions. A little participation is fine, so that your child has a chance to feel heard. You may even decide to accommodate some of his wishes. But if you want him to take you seriously, it is important to minimize words and maximize action.

Children often complain that their parents lecture them repeatedly. As we all know, they tune us out after a while. Along with excessive lecturing, some parents issue two or three or more warnings and then fail to deliver consequences. Or they yell out of frustration when their wishes are disregarded.

For your family's peaceful functioning, and also to help train your child to respect all authority - including teachers, coaches, and other adults - it is essential to instill a cooperative attitude as early as possible. Despite their loud protests, children feel most secure when they have limits and consequences.

Taking control in a benevo-



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lent, but firm manner involves advance planning. The benevolent part is important so that your children will see that you discipline them reluctantly. They need to realize that their behavior forces you to take action. In this way, you are not an ogre (well . . . maybe a little bit), but they are ultimately responsible for their choices and the subsequent consequences.

Just as we engage in financial planning, home remodeling planning, and vacation planning, we need to do advance behavioral planning for our children. We can't all be "Father or Mother Knows Best" and figure things out on the spur of the moment. In my next column I will present one approach to positive discipline that I use with families.

## Gold Award Winners

By Cathy Tyson

Three Moraga best friends recently worked together on a community service project for which they received the Girl Scout Gold Award. Kimberly Scherr, Caitlin Haley and Rachael Shapiro have known each other since kindergarten, and are now all seniors at Campolindo High School.

"We were trying to help families that are less privileged. We cleaned up, painted and furnished a room for a single mom and her two kids at the Elizabeth House," said Scherr.

The Elizabeth is a transitional residence for single women and women with children who have experienced homelessness, violence, addiction or poverty. What's unique about the house is that its goal is to support women and their children as they transition to self-sufficiency. Their Parenting Group, Homework Club, plus job search help provide the tools for their residents to get back on their feet.

A fair amount of planning, and at least 65 leadership hours must be spent on the project itself. The girls had a timeline and a project proposal that needed to be approved by



From left, Caitlin Haley, anonymous recipient, Rachael Shapiro, Kimberly Scherr Photo provided

the Girl Scout Council.

"We were there almost every day after school," said Scherr. "She was really excited. The woman had been homeless and was struggling to keep custody of her kids. It was definitely really rewarding. It was way more work than we thought. It's amazing to see how much three average teenagers can accomplish."

They plan to help two more families at Elizabeth House in the New Year. The girls had asked their parents to save old furniture, and used some of their cookie sale money for paint, and sent out a donation letter to friends and

family.

Haley agrees, "It was really fulfilling and fun moving everything in. The lady was so nice and so supportive. I would love to do it again."

"The most striking thing, was that we asked her what she needed, and she was so excited to get even the littlest thing," noted Shapiro.

Shapiro will be attending Northwestern in the fall; Scherr has heard back from a couple of schools, but is waiting with Haley until the spring for the final word on the balance of their applications.

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