

TEENTIMES

FOR THE YOUTH, BY THE YOUTH!

DECEMBER 2022

From our family to yours....



*Merry
Christmas*

Times Times collects over 500 items at toy/school supplies drive at Super City

The writers of Teen Times, with the cooperation of the management and staff of Super City store on Bush Road, held a very successful toy and school supplies drive on Saturday, December 10. Over 500 items of toys and school supplies were purchased and then donated by the generous shoppers of Super City.

The toys, blankets, baby products, shoes and other items will be donated to the CIFSEF Foundation for their program, to ensure less-fortunate children and persons have a good Christmas, while the school items will be donated to a school of Teen Times' choice.

The collaboration with CIFSEF was coordinated by Teen Times' Editor Lavisha Dadlani, who thought that CIFSEF's driving through the various districts of St. Maarten to deliver baskets of goods and gifts was a wonderful initiative for the less-fortunate during the holiday season and a worthy cause for her team to be involved with.

According to Teen Times Coordinator Rochelayne Rom-

my-Richardson, the cooperation of Super City and the generosity of shoppers were really an incredible experience. "We approached shoppers as they were entering, explained what our intentions were and they responded with open hearts. We had little kids coming outside with items to place in our

two collection boxes. It was very heart-warming to see and we are so grateful to the public and its overwhelming support and to management of Super City for coming on board with us to put a smile on children's faces this Christmas," she said.

Romy-Richardson said it is always important for Teen Times to give its members opportunities to give back, especially in the season of giving. She said volunteer work and giving back to those, who might not have as much, is "good for the soul" and instills in her young members that "all they need to be is good human beings to make a difference in people's lives – the little things matter to many people."

Teen Times expresses thanks to David Evans for coordinating the event at Super City and to the entire staff of Super City who also contributed by purchasing items and making donations. "They took really good care of us, made and decorated our collection boxes, and made sure we were well treated. They were awesome," she concluded.



Teen Times members sorting some of the many donated items.



Members of Teen Times pose with some of the 500+ items the public donated from shopping in Super City.



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Diwali at St. Dominic High

On November 1, St. Dominic High School, the only International Baccalaureate (IB) school in Sint Maarten, celebrated Diwali as a chance to promote cultural awareness and open mindedness among its varied student body. Cultural diversity is an integral part of the IB program. The different cultures and beliefs are celebrated, valued and respected by all the students. This concept was adopted by the St. Dominic High School to celebrate Diwali on campus.

All of the kids, from first form to IB, dressed up to add vibrancy and help the IB students make this event a success. Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and Newar Buddhists also celebrate Diwali, though each religion honours various historical occurrences and events. Despite this, the holiday symbolizes the same metaphorical triumph of light over darkness, knowledge over ignorance, and good over evil. Therefore, the students made sure to touch upon this important aspect of the festival and bring across the meaning to the rest.



Through dancing performances – the IB year-1 classroom being decorated with rangoli (coloured powder) and LED lights – as well as the sharing of mithais (Indian sweets), the spirit of Diwali was successfully conveyed. IB year-1 students also engaged in lantern-making events to add excitement to the event, as well as spent some of their free time decorating other students' hands with henna (also known as mehndi). The purpose of inviting other students to participate in and witness our celebration was to spread awareness of Diwali and what this holiday

genuinely signifies. Diwali is a significant annual celebration at St. Dominic High School because we get together to celebrate optimism, generosity, and kindness.

On behalf of St. Dominic High School, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to Kam's Foodworld and the other sponsors for their generosity in providing items that helped the class of 2024 organize a wonderful event that everyone enjoyed and got to learn more about.



CAREER AND STUDY FAIR

BY SAGE WILLIAMS

The annual career and study fair was hosted this year on Tuesday, October 18, in the Belair Community Center. St. Maarten's exam and pre-exam classes in secondary and tertiary schools, such as St. Dominic High School and IB, St. Maarten Academy's FAVE and PSVE, Learning Unlimited, Charlotte Brookson Academy and Milton Peter's College, and other neighbouring islands attended and learned from many companies and schools specializing in trades, fields of study, and colleges in the Caribbean Region and Europe.

Organizations present in the career fair included TelEm, NIPA, The Harbor (Coast-guard division), the University of St. Martin, the University of Aruba, the University of Curaçao, Fontys University in the Netherlands, and more organizations covering subjects such as photography and videography, archaeology, and Caribbean history.

The fair opened with a prayer, followed by a motivational speech by St. Maarten's Minister of Education, Culture, Youth, and Sport, Drs. Rodolphe E. Samuel, who addressed



the students before they began exploring the various organizations. Some members of the career and study fair committee were also interviewed and stated: "It is really catered to everyone, not just

those who would like to go to university (abroad), but those who would like to stay in St. Maarten."

Despite St. Maarten being a smaller island than others, this does not mean

we can't have diverse opportunities for the youth of our country. The annual career fair acts as a gateway for students to find the right places to develop themselves locally with St. Maarten's own educational organizations and with partners from bigger places to expand horizons for students. This alone brings hope to St. Maarten as our young people are valued and cultivated into the future leaders of tomorrow.



YES, VAPING IS AN ISSUE ON ST. MAARTEN

This is the fifth article we have published about the dangers of vaping on St. Maarten and we have also issued two very loud public warnings about vaping – both have made the front pages of The Daily Herald. We have even suggested how rules and regulations, along with legislation could look like. We started in 2020, it is now 2022.



Due to there being no sort of implementation of age restrictions to buy e-cigarettes, many young children have also been exposed to them as well. Persons may also use fake identification cards stating that they are 18 years old in order to purchase certain vapes.

Vaping has become increasingly popular glob-

ally and locally due to trends and it being "cool". On St. Maarten, the implementation of age restrictions and proof of physical identification of being over 18 years old should be required to purchase an e-cigarette to reduce the widespread use of vaping on our island. Vaping is an addiction, not a trend.

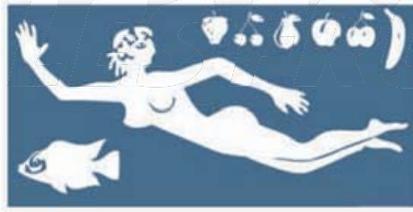
Vape; E-cigarette; Disposable; Juul – no matter what you call it, the effects are absolutely frightful. A vape or electronic cigarette is a device that heats up the liquid to create a vapour you inhale. The liquid delivers nicotine, marijuana, or other drugs to the user. Vaping contains a stimulant called nicotine which causes harm to a developing adolescent brain. It hinders the learning, moods, attention, and impulse control of growing adolescents. Even though vapes appear to

seem as a healthier alternative, there are still many health risks involved. This article is meant to highlight the use of vapes in St. Maarten as the popularity of this seemingly "cool" act is on the rise.

What is really causing the increasing popularity of e-cigarettes on St. Maarten? Social media plays a significant role in the lives of the youth, and there are many young influencers being seen with vapes, cigars, marijuana, etc. There is also increased access to vapes on St. Maarten due to some supermarkets selling them to all customers, regardless of their age.



INTERVIEW WITH



LES FRUITS DE MER

BY LAVISHA DADLANI

History of one's country is vital in creating a bond between the people and their land. In order to make sure this connection is felt, the tales, traditions and historic details must continue to be shared with future generations. Teen Times has taken the initiative of sowing the seed of St. Maarten history into fertile soil – our youth. We strive to have St. Maarten history included as a subject on every school's syllabus, as this will definitely help us to grow into a society that is aware of the struggles and successes that make our land a place we call home.

This interview is meant to shed light on a recent donation to St. Dominic High School, aligning with Teen Times' goal of educating the youth about their homeland. The donation was made by the non-profit organization, Les Fruits de Mer, based in Grand Case, Saint Martin.

1. Tell me a little about yourself and your connection with our island.

I am American and moved to St. Martin in 2009. Since then, I've spent a lot of time studying the wildlife of the island and St. Martin culture and heritage as well. I'm always learning new things about the island and I really enjoy that.

2. What sparked this idea of donating St. Martin history books?

Our association, Les Fruits de Mer, has been creating educational materials about local nature, heritage and culture for almost ten years. The book we donated, thanks to funding from Island Gems, was a book of oral histories. It included interviews with 12 St. Martiners about different aspects of their life and work. For the last few years, we have been donating thousands of books about St. Martin to students and schools on the north side of the island, and we wanted to do it across the whole island – and Island Gems was able to help us start doing that.

3. Why do you think it is necessary that the youth learn about this in school?

Understanding the culture and heritage of the island can help us understand why the island is the way it is today. For people with ancestors from St. Martin, it is a way to understand their own heritage. There are many interesting stories – especially from elders who lived here when the island was much less developed, which was actually not so long ago.

4. What does this book entail?

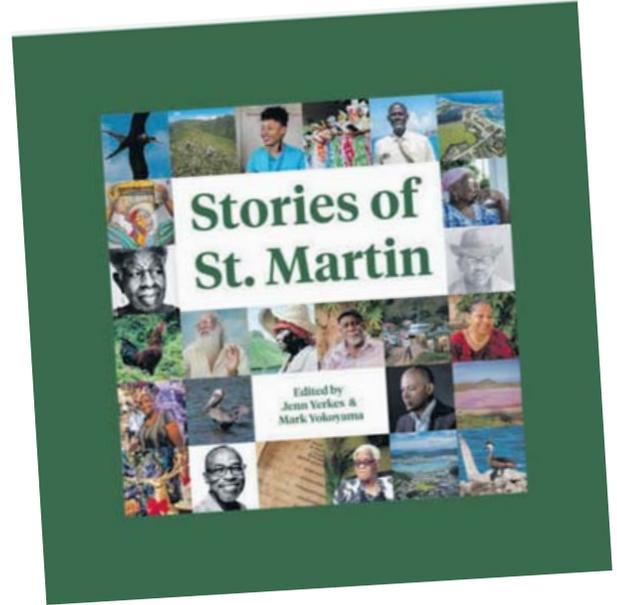
Stories of St. Martin includes interviews with 12 St. Martiners about life, work and traditions. It includes a first-hand description of salt harvesting from a woman who did it, stories about recovering from hurricanes, stories about starting a business, and Christmas traditions like serenading.

5. What would you like to see happen from this donation?

We hope that this book can be integrated into the social studies class so the students are able to learn more about the history of their island. We also hope it is the start of many more donations of books about local subjects. Also, the students reading this book could start doing their own oral history work. They could record interviews with elders or other community members to document St. Martin history and culture.

6. What is your favorite part of St. Martin history?

There are so many interesting parts to St. Martin history. One part that I find really interesting is the middle of the 20th century when people were very resourceful and self-reliant, because the island was much more isolated from the rest of the world. There were also many people working in Aruba at that time, which was really challenging for many families. It became a time of rapid transformation of the island. There are so many interesting stories from this period and there are still a lot of people who can tell us about the struggles and triumphs of this



time.

Their mission being “to promote awareness of ecology, culture and sport through discovery, inspiration, and education” was definitely put into action as they contributed books about Saint Martin’s history. This article is meant to share some insight on the history of our island and the many resources available to us

to help strengthen the bond we have with our homeland because at the end of the day, “A people without knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots.” —Marcus Garvey

For more information, visit Association Les Fruits De Mer's website at <https://www.lesfruitsdemer.com/>.



Feature

The MP and her teens

An in-depth interview with MP Angelique Romou about raising teens

Sometimes, we get so caught up in looking at our officials as just robots who must do our bidding, we tend to forget that they are human beings too. They have families and they do not get a pass as a public official when it comes to family obligations. So we wondered what it was like for a Member of Parliament to juggle his/her work for the country and the challenges of raising teenagers. Most naturally as we often do, we turned to MP Angelique Romou, who is the proud mom of two teenagers.

MP Romou has never turned down a request to be interviewed by *Teen Times* and we were quite happy that she was willing to open up to us for this in-depth and personal interview about her life and that of her teens. As usual, thank you, MP!

1. How challenging is it to raise teens in today's world and lead such a public life?

Well, I would not say that it is challenging to raise teens in today's world – and I say this, because I often refer to this quote from Socrates, who said in circa 470 BC: "The children now love luxury; they have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise. Children are now tyrants, not the servants of their households. They no longer rise when elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up dainties at the table, cross their legs, and tyrannize their teachers."

This quote talks about children way before Christ was even born, and it is something that every generation has said about children, which shows that the behaviour of children/teens today or in any era has



not been different from their predecessors. So I would say that teens have a more difficult time in today's world because the world has changed drastically with so many ills that plague it. Hence, as parents, we must continue to do our best to instill the proper values

and morals in our children so that they can make wise decisions in today's world.

As far as leading a public life, I believe when you decide to take up a position that warrants public service, it is quite important to have that family unit, that village that would assist you with raising your teen; for example, assistance with daily tasks is extremely important. Now everyone, who knows me, knows that I am a fervent believer that a parent should be very much involved in the lives of their children – involved with their school work, involved with their school activities, involved with their extracurricular activities, just involved period. It is very important for parents to strike that balance and find time to support their children and all that they do – and when I say strike that balance, I mean seek and find support where they know they might fall short.

I know it's not easy for everyone, because some may not have parents that are alive; some may not have family members; but that is why you may even seek to have close friends that may be able to assist you, so it is important to strike that balance so that you can give the necessary attention that is needed, and your support unit as well – so being able to have that balance is what I would say makes it less challenging

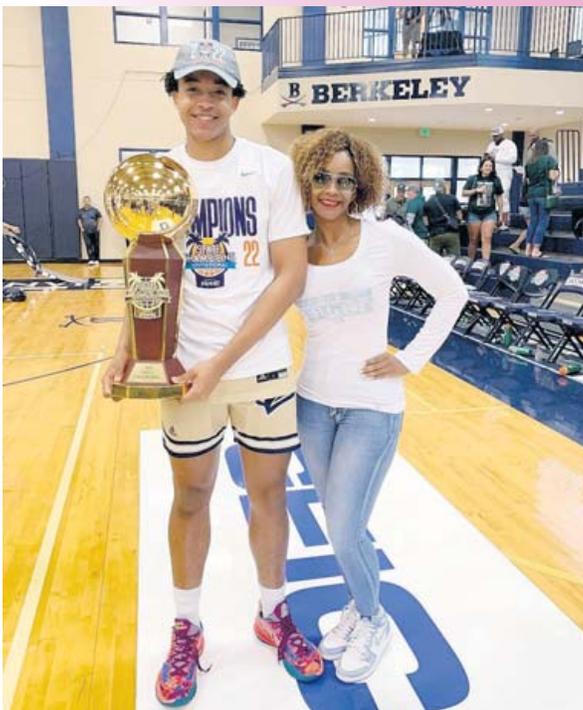
had with your teens about your responsibilities as an MP?

Well from the onset, I have always been very open with my children. They know what my aspirations are and they know where my passions lie, so they know the importance I put into whatever I aspire to accomplish. So in this case, being a Member of Parliament was always an aspiration once I got into the political arena – and with that, you know the responsibilities of a Member of Parliament and the tasks that one would have to undertake in order to execute the responsibilities to the best of one's ability.

This has been shared with my children so they know that the job before me is not an easy one; they know the responsibilities that come with it, so they also know that there will be times when I would want to be present, and I may not be able to, due to a work-obligation; and it is important for them to understand that. That is why having those discussions have always been very important for me – and besides having those discussions, knowing that there is always that safety net for them, in case I cannot be there for them, makes it a bit easier to be able to execute my tasks.

3. Do you think you still manage to get quality time with them?

Yes. I manage to have quality time with my children whenever there is



2. What conversations have you

...continued on pg. 6

free time, especially in the week-ends. I make sure that I schedule time to have lunches, happy hours, dinners, skating, the movies, etc. I always-always make time in my schedule for my children as it is quite important to remember that even though this is a function that I am here to execute to the best of my ability, my children will always remain my priority, because without me in their lives for the love, guidance and the support then they would be left to manage a lot on their own. I could never allow that.

Being an avid family advocate and an educator, I know first-hand the importance of family time and how important spending quality time with your children is. I also make it my business to involve them in whatever activity I am invited to, which allows them to be present. I also include them so they not only get to hear about what I'm doing, but they get to experience certain activities as well, so they are involved and they can see that the work entails more than me being on the floor of Parliament, speaking, amending or making laws; but that also the interaction with your constituents is also necessary on the outside, being there and supporting various activities so that the people can see that you are in tune with what they are doing. So whenever the opportunity arises where I can involve my children in those activities, I do that as well.

4. You have worked with young people for a very long time; do you think this helps with parenting teens?

Yes. I believe working with teenagers has helped me somewhat. As

you know when I started my radio program 11 years ago, most of the members were teenagers. The only younger ones on the radio program at the time were actually my children and one or two other children, who I had in my children's choir, attended as well. So having these teenagers be around me constantly – in my car, in my home and when we would get together every Saturday for lunch – definitely helped me to understand teenagers, their needs, their wants, their emotional side, what triggers them, etc. So having the St. Martin Promoting Young Ambassadors Foundation has helped me tremendously with being able to parent my teenagers as well.

5. We can't imagine you angry, but do you flip out sometimes with them (seeing that teens are experts at challenging parents)?

I wouldn't want to use the word "flip out", but I definitely go in on them when they do not listen and do what I expect them to do. You will always hear me saying this on the radio program when I get an opportunity to discuss how I am as a parent. I am a screamer, so maybe that's the way of me flipping I guess, hahahaha. I scream and I speak very, very loudly and sternly to them when they get on my nerves and do what they're not supposed to do. So in order for them to hear me loud and clear, I scream.

However, I do not think that the screaming works anymore or has worked at all, because now they tell me, "You know you're screaming, Mom; you're sending up your pressure you know you're stress-

ing out, there's no need. You know we understood you." One of the things I have learned about parenting teenagers is that it is very important to continue the dialogue; it is very important to continue talking to them; it is very important to share your experiences and to let them know what you have been through as a teenager so that they see you're not coming from a place of judgment, but you're coming from a place of experience – and that you are trying for them not to make the same mistakes that you made as a teenager.

6. How do you think your children would describe you as a parent?

I think my children would describe me as being a loving, very involved parent – involved in everything that they do: school, extracurricular activities even with their friends. I always want to get to know who their friends are and to actually interact with them. You know my children will tell you that I know their classmates, teammates, dance-mates, and I try to get to know the parents as well, because for me, it's important to know who your children are associated with, in and out of school.

My children will also say that I always speak with them, because communication is very important. We have a good communication; we can talk about everything. They know that they can come to me with anything and I will not judge them; but I will give my advice – and sometimes I may be stern in the way I speak to them; but they know that that is me just coming from a place of love. So they would describe me as being loving and

involved. They know that I am their number one fan, very supportive and that I love them unconditionally.

7. How do you communicate a difficult issue with your teens?

Well, if there's an issue that I believe may be a bit difficult to discuss, or is controversial, I still do it anyway. And if I'm upset, I may come across harsh, because I tend to raise my voice when I become emotional; but they know me, and they know that I'm not doing this out of a place of malice; so I just approach it. I just have the difficult conversations with them because it's important.

Sometimes, we all become emotional, as well; but we have that emotional discussion together, and we come out stronger and better for it. I never shy away from having those discussions with them, because I can tell you I never had any of my parents communicate with me concerning any issues growing up. I figured a lot of things out on my own, so I believe because I chose to have my children – they were planned pregnancies, and in planning my pregnancies, I also chose to be the parent who would be there for my children regardless – having those difficult discussions is just a part of parenting.

They know that regardless of any situation, they can count on me. If they're wrong, I'm going to tell them they're wrong; and I will chastise them. But if they are right, they know I will back them one hundred percent – that's the kind of relationship I have with them.

8. What about having a boyfriend and a girlfriend; have you had to handle this issue yet? Can you tell us about it? And if not, how do you think you would address that with them?

Having a boyfriend/girlfriend situation... well, you know my son who's older is 16, and he has had a girlfriend – and so I did have that discussion with him in terms of knowing what your limitations are; knowing what the do's and don'ts are. I taught him always to remember to treat a young lady with respect. So those are the discussions I have had with him in terms of if you're going to date someone, you respect that person fully; if things are not working out, you address it; and if you feel like you can no longer continue, you deal with it. You don't shy away from dealing with your situations; you basically handle it in a manner where you are very considerate of the other person's feelings, etc.

I believe that it is important to have that boyfriend/girlfriend talk with your children; because if you don't, someone else will – and then they will go behind of your back and still do it. I must say – and I am going to be honest when it come to my girl-child – I am more protective and I think she should wait just as I did – and I smile because I honestly believe that when you're a teenager, you should be a teenager. Be free and just have fun and have friends and enjoy the company of friends and not tie down yourself to a relationship.



However, that may not be realistic – and being a realistic person, I would say if you have to cross that bridge, it is also important to meet the parents. This is important, because everyone must be on the same page and know what is expected and what is not. Teenagers have so many things they have to deal with and peer pressure is one; so it is important to have those discussions with the other parents as well, so that you can be on the same page; because if one parent allows one thing and the other doesn't, this may cause problems you may want to avoid.

9. Do you want what's good for your teens or what's best for them?

This is an interesting question – if I want what's good for them or what's best for them. Well, you know that you have good, better, and best – so, of course, I want what's best for my children. I think all parents who are in their right mind would want what is best for their children. And what is best for your children will differ according to the situation at hand, topics and/or issues; but as parents, you always want what is best for your children.

10. Do you measure your success as a parent by the quality of the relationship; or by how effectively you can control your child?

I measure my success as a parent by the quality of the relationship, because again I talked about it in my previous answers. It is important to have communication with your children; it is important for your children to know who you are, what you stand for and what you stand against. It is extremely important to try and understand who your teens are becoming, in terms of becoming the young adults they are becoming. So it is not about you controlling your child; it's about getting to understand your child, getting to know who your child is, getting to know their likes and their dislikes. Know what their needs are and try to help them to be that better person every single day. So for me, it is quite important for our relationship to be one of quality and not one where I am enforcing control.

11. How do you motivate your teens?

I motivate my teenagers through constant prayer and positive affirmations. I am a firm believer in God and, therefore, I have raised my children with high morals, high standards and godly principles. Now, remember, they are teenagers so, of course, they may not always follow what I teach them; but one thing I know for certain is that they understand what I'm teaching them, because there are times when I may not do something that I taught them to do, they would remind me to practice what I preach. So that makes me feel very happy to know that my teachings are not going unheard; so for me it is important to be that source of inspiration and motivation towards my children.

I quote a lot of positive quotes from *The Bible* as well, and I show them how I have applied them in my life and how they have helped me; and how I have been successful through these applications. I use constant af-



firmations with them, and I ask them to stand in the mirror and repeat affirmations, such as, "I am loved. I am intelligent. I am beautiful/handsome. I am respectful. I am kind", etc. I constantly reinforce the importance of positivity in their lives and I teach them that if someone is in your life and they're being extremely negative, that is not someone you want to be friends with. And if they are around people, who constantly ridicule or belittle others, that is not who you want to be around, because you want to be someone who uplifts others; you want to be someone who encourages others; you want to be that person that when someone is down, you will lift them up.

I constantly motivate them through positivity and, as I mentioned before, by sharing my life experiences with them; showing them that giving up has never been an option, and that perseverance and having strong determination, a strong will to succeed in whatever I do, have propelled me to be where I am today. I have seen my children using these tools, because when my son was up for class president his slogan was FINAO, which means "Failure Is Never An Option". So that shows that my teachings are sown deep within them, and that they actually put them into practice. So my motivation continues to be positivity, positive affirmations and showing them how positivity and strong belief in self will lead to success.

12. Do you believe in the saying that you are responsible to your teen and not for them?

I cannot agree with such a statement that I am I am responsible to my teenagers and not *for* them, because I believe I am responsible for them. I brought them into this world, so automatically I am responsible for them. I nurtured them to be the teenagers that they are so I am responsible for them. I am responsible for the manner in which I raise them, the manner in which I interact with them, the manner in which I teach them principles and morals. I am responsible for my teenagers, but I must also state for the record that I can never be responsible for their actions.

I cannot take full responsibility for their actions, especially if their actions are not in accordance with what I have taught them. I know

I have taught them well, so I am expecting them to make the right choices and decisions. However, nobody's perfect and everybody makes mistakes, and everybody has that point in time when they do something that they know they're not supposed to do, or they do something that might eventually also get them in some kind of issue – so having said that, maybe it's a bit of both.

13. Do you focus more on what your teens are doing or on what they are becoming?

I focus more on who they are becoming, but always remember they are becoming because of what they're doing. I don't know if you understand what I mean by that. By that I mean they are positively busy engaging in activities that are meaningful to them as individual beings; as they are busy doing positive things, it is helping them to grow and is moving them in the direction to becoming who they are supposed to be as young adults. So my focus has always been on who they are becoming as young individuals, observing their positive characteristics which make me proud. It is quite a beautiful thing to see how your children grow up to be teenagers and how they evolve as people and how their character develops. It is even more beautiful to see them developing beautiful characters, exhibiting good behaviour, manners, etc., then you know that you have been doing an excellent job as a parent

14. Do you ask them to make commitments, or do you force them into doing things?

I don't force my children into doing anything they don't want to do. However, I have recommended certain activities for them to participate in, but it's never a pressure. If they don't want to, then they don't have to. I do also instill that if you start something, you will finish it; you will not stop half-way through. I also believe that growing up with me, and seeing all of the different positive causes that I champion, and seeing me put my all into them, and seeing the commitment that I make – that within itself has helped them to realize the importance of commitment and has helped them to see that giving back and charity work are also important. They know the importance of being positively involved,

and being positively involved in the development of your country. I often say you should not complain about issues that are plaguing your community if you sit down and do nothing to contribute positively to making a change. The only way for you to effect positive changes is by doing something about it.

15. Do you worry about them growing up in this scary world?

I do not worry about them growing up in this world; for me the world is not scary. Some humans are scary, their conduct, their disregard for others are what is scary; and how they manipulate situations is what is scary. So I have faith in my teachings, and the applications thereof give me peace of mind; but I am realistic and I know how some people are. So I will continue to rely on my teachings in this world of scary people. Another lesson I teach my children is to never take people at face value, but to always monitor their behaviour, because their actions will always speak louder than their words.

16. When taking decisions as an MP, do you often think about your teens and their future?

As an MP, when taking decisions, I definitely think about the future – but for all teens. The future of all children is important for me. When making decisions as an MP, I cannot only think of my teens, because I often say I live in a society or I am a part of a community of people that forms me. This is a part of who I am, so when I make a decision, I can't make a decision that is only beneficial for me or for those close to me. I have to make decisions that are going to be impactful and that are going to be in the best interest of all the people of Saint Martin. So whenever I make decisions, I think about Saint Martin as the home I have grown up in and that I live in. I also think about the past, so that I do not make the same mistakes. I think about the present – so what can be done right now that can actually be of an impact in the current situation; and I also think about the future, because it's important to realize that whatever decisions we make today will have a lasting impact on tomorrow – and for me, the future is always BRIGHT.

Feature

Team SmartHax – Insight into the Process of the Pitch

BY SAHELI KIRPALANI

On November 20, the first ever National Youth Pitch Competition was held at the Government Building, and it was such an incredible and unforgettable experience and journey.

My name is Saheli Kirpalani, and I am the CEO of the SmartHax Team representing St. Dominic High School in the competition. My amazing team members are Disha Daryani (CMO), Ivan Wu (COO), and Sid-dharth Shroff (CFO). We had the great honour of winning “Crowd Favourite Team” for which we are very grateful, as we could not have done this without the support of our teacher, Ms. Saakshi; our school; our classmates; and our families. It was a once in a lifetime opportunity, and the knowledge and experience we gained were much more priceless than any prize we won.

The journey to creating the pitch began on October 13 during the first session of the NYPC accelerator program, and it did not end until 30 minutes before the competition started. During the first session, Mr. Damien Schmidt, Dr. Ife Badejo, and Minister Ardwell Irion gave us a crash course of the Lean Model Canvas, through which a basic formula for the pitch was created – problem, customer segments, and solution. Therefore, using the new skills and knowledge acquired, my team and I started having regular meetings during school to develop our product idea and determine who exactly our target audience was.

Fortunately, the next session was about market research and the empathy model, which gave us ideas on how to become familiar with our potential customers and improve our business idea. Hence, we spent the next week creating a market research survey consisting of a few questions that helped us determine the features and price range that our potential customers would want, and then we sent the survey out through social media to reach as many people as possible.

As more time went, we were getting closer and closer to the final day, which was quite stressful and



nerve-racking. The following session marked the half-way point of the accelerator program, and we learned about intellectual property rights and how to create videos to market our product. This was the moment during the journey where we realized that there was a lot of work yet to be done,



and that our product could actually be something incredible. We decided to create a prototype of our product, LifeJax, to show how our all-in-one exclusive jacket would come to life.

On November 5, we went to town to look for a jacket that encapsulated our style and design, and we found a really nice navy blue one that we printed our logo on and added an Apple Air Tag to. During that week, we worked extremely hard to finalize the logo and to start working on the presentation for the pitch. We learned so much about entrepreneurship and all the key aspects of starting your own business, but now it was time to start applying these concepts, which was the hard part.

For the following two weeks, we were completely immersed in the world of our business and the competition. We spent hours on

end meeting with each other during school days and on the weekend to finish up our pitch and visual presentation, as well as the prototype. We each focused on doing research based on our respective positions in the business, but then we all came together and gave each other suggestions on how to improve.

Once we finalized the structure of our pitch according to the formula and finished creating a visual presentation, we figured we were ready to start practicing; but I don't think we were completely ready to face the harshness of our jury panel. In the week of November 14 to 18, we started our first practice with an audience in the practice session of the accelerator program. We received some meaningful feedback on rearranging the structure of our pitch, as well as making it more concise to fit within the two minutes given. So, we spent the next two days working on improving our pitch, and our teacher and mentor, Ms. Saakshi, arranged a dry run for us in school with professional judges.

We were extremely nervous because she hadn't informed us who was coming. Nevertheless, we tried our best to pitch our product as if our life depended on it. However, the judges brought up financial and technological aspects that we had never considered before, and we felt as though we were in the line of fire, as if in an actual Shark Tank. The judges, who are professionals in the business world for decades, treated us like equals, which we are very grateful for as we gained so much knowledge from that experience. We received very honest feedback from the panel of judges, and we



realized that this journey was far from over. The clock started ticking with only four days left to the competition.

After the dry run in school, we met that evening to go over and fix our presentation and pitch so that we could be ready for the final practice run on Thursday to close off the accelerator program. We decided to focus on doing more research to get our financials straight, and so we met multiple times that weekend to create a financial document with all the necessary numbers and only keep the important information in the pitch. For me personally, I feel like the last three days leading up to the competition were the most stressful and crucial. There were many times where we felt like giving up, but we knew we had put our whole heart and soul into this journey, and we kept persevering until the end.

We practiced over and over to perfect our confidence, speaking skills, body language, enthusiasm, and knowledge of our business. Even until the very end – five minutes before we left for the competition – we made sure that our financial document was as realistic and authentic as possible. When the moment we had all been anxiously waiting for, finally came, and it was our turn to pitch; we knew all the answers to possible questions inside out; in addition to the financial sheet, we had also created a nice brochure to hand out to the judges; and we believed in our business and product with every bone in our body. We worked incredibly as a team, and we nailed the pitch on the final day. It was such an honour and blessing to hear our team's name called as the “Crowd Favourite” winner.

We are so thankful to the audience for believing in us. I am so extremely grateful for this incredible learning experience, and I am even more grateful that I got to experience it with such an amazing team. There was no way we could have accomplished this achievement without all of our dedication, hard-work, passion and collaboration, as well as the support from our families and school. This journey was absolutely unforgettable, and I know for sure that it was all worth it in the end.



CRYSTAL LOVERS – ENTREPRENEUR!

BY SHILOH WILLIAMS

All upcoming adults want one thing, money. "Any time is a good time to start a company."
—Ron Conway, noted start-up investor, founder of SV Angel.

The world needs new ideas so that it can continue advancing and growing. The best time to start a business is when you're young and full of new ideas. Young people are known to be highly motivated and bursting with innovative ways and products to bring to the market. One of our very own young entrepreneurs has started her business – not solely for the profits, but also to inspire other young teens/adults to chase after their dreams.

Crystal Lovers, run by Joemaya, is a small business currently selling beauty, cosmetic and personal care products. For the most part, Joemaya's business has been a success; but she has also had to overcome some challenges, such as a lack of motivation and doubting her ability to attract enough customers. One

specific struggle she's also had to deal with is her competition. Entrepreneurs in general have a hard time with competition, which also takes a toll on their self-confidence – which is why it takes a strong person to handle all the stress and pressure that come with being boss of your own business.

"In the end, it usually ends up working in my favour," Joemaya says. Joemaya continues to be very hardworking, driven and passionate about her craft. "Do it! Don't wait on friends or loved ones to motivate you. Start your business by using your own motivation. Starting will only result in you moving forward. As a CEO of your own business, you have to be mentally strong and prepared for everything. At times, it can be discouraging when sales are low; but when you succeed and accomplish everything you set out to do, there is no better feeling."

Being a high school student while running your own business can be difficult, but Joemaya is fo-

Crystal Lovers sxm



ABOUT THE OWNER

Hello! I am Joemaya, the owner of Crystal Lovers. I set out to create a business where I could express my own personal style with products and accessories.

I love helping others express their own style & uniqueness. Stand out from the rest and dare to be different! & Always be confident while doing it!

lg : @crystallovers.sxm ☎ : +1721.5234145

cused and keeps the two separate: "School is school and business is business." Being strong-minded and determined helps her maintain a strict schedule, all

while having a correct and positive mind-set. The opportunities are endless when you are driven, determined and motivated to reach your goal!

Body Image and Eating Disorders

BY PAVITRA SACHDEV

It is no surprise that many people suffer from eating disorders. It may be because of overwhelming stress, coming from a poor background, or – the most common case – body image.

Body image is the way a person perceives himself or herself – meaning a combination of the various thoughts and feelings a person has about

their body. These thoughts can range anywhere from being positive to negative, but in most cases tend to lean towards the negative side. Why is this the case? There are many factors that play a role in body image, but the two which are known to affect people the most are others' thoughts on your body and social media.

Influencers, models and many other



people often post images of themselves and their bodies, claiming to be the "ideal body type". Younger people who have access to social media are often deceived by these images, hence many of them try to alter their body type by changing their eating patterns to fit into the unrealistic standards set by these models. In most cases, these changes are not efficient but rather threatening, not to mention the side effects that are associated with them.

It is proven that a person who is not eating the right amount of food required for their age is bound to experience migraines, dizziness or vision problems and so much more.

At times, however, a person may be content with their body, but they are often criticized for feeling that way. It comes off as no surprise that criticism towards people with body types that are classified as "unattractive" has become normalized.

A person should never feel uncomfortable or unworthy because of the body they have. Your body is your temple, learn to love it and cherish it. Putting down people due to the way they look is nothing to be proud of; instead, people should be more encouraged to love themselves.

Solar Energy: Our way forward

BY CHIRAG RAMCHANDANI

Each second, the sun emits enough energy onto the earth to meet the entire human energy requirements for more than two hours. Solar power is an appealing source of energy because it is easily accessible and renewable. As far as the year 2022, Solar energy consumption is expected to account for 60% of the increase in global renewable capacity, eventually, taking the global total to more than 300 gigawatts.

Historically, solar energy harvesting has indeed been costly and inefficient. Even this meagre solar usage is an improvement over a preceding couple of decades, as the volume of energy collected from a solar source globally increased more than 300 times between the years 2000 and 2021. During the past two decades, new technological advances have driven this increasing dependence on solar by reducing cost; and recent advancements in technology promise to amplify this solar usage by further lowering costs and increasing solar panel efficiency.

Let's talk science! Solar energy is defined as solar radiation that can generate heat, cause chemical reactions, or generate electric-

ity. The cumulative quantity of solar energy incidents on Earth far exceeds the world's current and projected energy needs. This immensely refracted source has the potential to fulfil all future energy needs if properly harnessed. Solar energy is expected to become increasingly appealing as a renewable energy source in the twenty-first century due to its infi-

nite supply and non-polluting nature, by way of comparison to the bounded fossil fuels coal, petroleum, and natural gas.

The potential for solar energy is tremendous, as earth receives roughly or possibly more than 200,000 times the world's daily average electric-generating capacity in the form of solar energy every day. Unfortunately, even though solar energy is free, the elevated cost of collecting, converting, and storing it limits its use in many places. Solar radiation can be converted into something like thermal energy (heat) or electrical energy.

But the main question that arouses is how much of this raw solar energy can or is actually extracted? The sun is by far the most significant source of power received by earth; however, its intensity at the earth's surface is quite low. This is primarily due to the massive radial spread of radiant energy from the remote sun. The earth's atmosphere and clouds absorb or scatter up to half of the total percentage of the incoming sunlight, resulting in a minor additional loss. The sunlight that penetrates the earth's atmosphere contains nearly half visible light, 50% infrared radiation, and minute quantities of UV radiation and other sorts of electromagnetic radiation.

Flat-plate collectors and solar panels as well, which are used in solar heating applications, are some of the most common devices used to encapsulate the sun's rays and convert them to thermal energy. Due to the low intensity of solar radiation at the earth's surface, these collectors must be large in size and area. The most common flat-plate collectors are made up of a blackened metal plate encased with one or two sheets of glass and heated by sunlight falling on it. This heat is then transmitted to the carrier fluids, which are air or

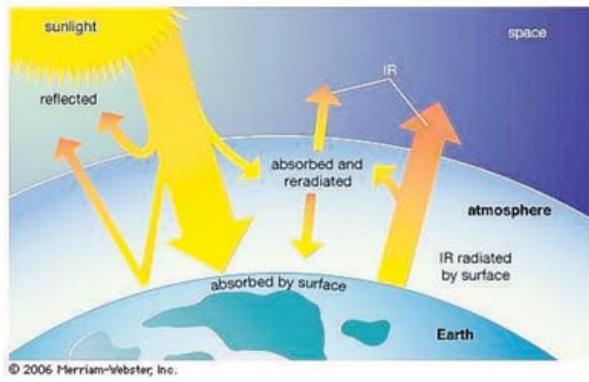
water that flow past the backside of the plate. The heat can be used immediately or transmitted to another form of media for storage. Flat-plate collectors are widely used in solar water heating systems and home heating systems.

The main topic of discussion is how schools can significantly benefit through the implementation and use of solar energy. Many of these include the following:

1. On Sint Maarten, a power outage can easily disrupt a school's normal schedule. Solar radiation can be converted into something like thermal energy (heat) or electrical energy. However, by installing solar panels, schools can avoid this problem because they will no longer be reliant on the grid or even gasoline-powered generators. Whether you choose off-grid or on-grid solar power systems, you will have consistent and dependable power all day.

2. When it comes to maintaining its infrastructure, Sint Maarten's schools are frequently underfunded. Solar panels, on the other hand, can solve a large portion of this problem. Panels from well-known manufacturers are designed to be durable and robust enough to withstand drastic temperature changes, heavy showers, and natural disasters. All that is required is to check on them from time to time and clear away any debris.

Being a Caribbean country that is extremely close to the equator, Sint Maarten's government, its people, and its economy can vastly benefit from solar energy due to its significant abundance and, hence, we the people of Sint Maarten should start to take an initiative to turn towards a much more renewable alternative.



Feature

The Origin of Christmas

BY AVANELL PINK

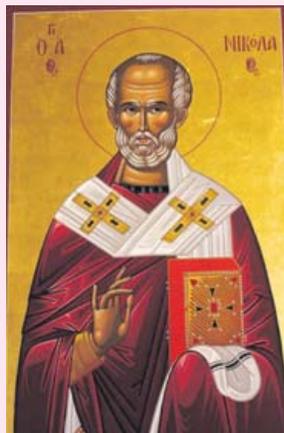
It's that time of year again. All the Christmas delights have arrived with the month of December. The purpose of Christmas is to commemorate the birth of Jesus Christ, who is revered in Christian culture as the Son of God. The Mass of Christ is where the word "Christmas" originates (or Jesus). Christians remember that Jesus died for us and rose from the dead during a Mass ceremony (also known as Communion or Eucharist).

The origins of Christmas stem from both the pagan and Roman cultures. In reality, the Romans observed two festivals in December. The first was Saturnalia, a two-week celebration in honour of their agricultural god Saturn. They celebrated the birth of Mithra, their sun god, on December 25. Both celebrations were raucous, drunken parties. In order to dispel the darkness, the pagan cultures also burned bonfires and candles in December, which also happens to be the month with the darkest days of the year. The Romans included this custom in their own festivities as well. As Christianity spread across Europe, the Christian clergy were not able to curb the pagan customs and celebrations. Since no one knew Jesus' date of birth, they adapted the pagan ritual into a celebration of His birthday.

The pagan tribes decked their homes with greenery as part of the solstice ceremonies in preparation of the approaching spring. Evergreen trees were believed to possess extraordinary abilities since they stayed green even on the darkest and coldest days. During Saturnalia, the Romans also adorned their temples with fir trees and metal shavings. Even the Greeks were known to

decorate trees in memory of their gods. It's interesting to note that the first trees introduced into paganism were hung upside down from the ceiling. The tradition of decorating trees dates back to Northern Europe, where Germanic pagans decked evergreen trees with torches and dried fruit to worship the god Woden. In Germany in the 1500s, the custom was absorbed into the Christian religion. They used candy, lights, and toys to adorn their house trees.

St. Nicholas served as the model for Santa Claus, who surprisingly had Christian roots rather than pagan ones. He was a bishop in the early Christian church and was imprisoned and persecuted for his faith. He was born in southern Turkey in the year 280. He came from an affluent background and was well known for his kindness to the underprivileged. There are several legends about him, but the most well-known one is how he prevented three daughters from being sold into slavery. Their father had no other option because there was no dowry to persuade a man to marry them. They are claimed to have been spared from



their fate when St. Nicholas is said to have thrown riches through an open window into the house. According to legend, gold was found in a sock that was drying by the fire. As a result, kids began hanging stockings next to their fireplaces in the hopes that St. Nicholas would stuff them with gifts.

December 6 was designated St. Nicholas Day in memory of his passing. Over time, Saint Nicholas was incorporated into every European culture. In German and Swiss cultures, the Christkind or Kris Kringle (Christ kid) accompanied St. Nicholas as he distributed gifts to good youngsters. In Sweden, Jultomten was a joyful elf, who delivered gifts in a sleigh pulled by goats. Then there was Pere Noel in France and Father Christmas in England. He was known as Sinter Klaas in the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Lorraine, France, and some regions of Germany. (For the record, Klaas is a contraction of the name Nicholas. This is the origin of the modern day Santa Claus.) *An Account of a Visit from St. Nicholas* was written by Clement Clark Moore in 1822 for his children.

now a household name. It was in it that the notion of Santa Claus as a cheery man soaring through the air on a sleigh became widely accepted. Later, in 1881, a Coke-a-Cola advertising commissioned the artist Thomas Nast to create a drawing of Santa. He designed a chubby Santa Claus who was accompanied by working elves and had a wife named Mrs. Claus. Following this, the cultural representation of Santa as a jolly, obese, white-bearded man dressed in a red suit took hold.

After the civil war, the nation sought means of overcoming division and achieving national unity. President Ulysses S. Grant established it as a federal holiday in 1870. And even if Christmas customs have changed throughout the years, I believe Washington Irving's wish for a shared holiday spirit endures. It has evolved into a season when we send our best wishes to others, give to our preferred causes, and cheerfully exchange gifts. So, wherever you may be, and whatever traditions you follow, we wish you the merriest of Christmases and the happiest of holidays!

"The Night Before Christmas" is



Feature

Caribbean Christmas



BY SHILOH WILLIAMS

Christmas is the most magical time of the year. From the presents to the delicious treats and being surrounded by family and friends, it is the time when everyone has a reason to have a smile on their face and be in good spirits. Every culture celebrates Christmas in a unique way which makes the holiday even more special.



the shops and streets are decorated with vibrant lights and festive Christmas decor. Street vendors sell food like jerk chicken, boiled corn and other delicious dishes. While some people prefer to participate in the nightlife, others choose to go to Midnight mass. Jamaican rum/wine fruitcake is also a tasty dessert that is devoured during Christmastime.

St. Maarten has its own way of celebrating Christmas – the streets are bustling with people, the roads filled with cars and a different Christmas carol is playing in every store you pass. Not to mention the parades, Santa Claus visits, local performances

and coconut bread, which are a staple to our holiday cheer. Fairy lights are hung throughout the island on buildings and even on the coconut trees, making it truly a sight only St. Maarteners are accustomed to seeing.

carols, setting the tone for the evening. Most people also dress up their homes by painting, doing repairs, putting up new curtains and even coloured lights. In Trinidad, Christmas fruitcake is a traditional dessert that is sure to be seen at most dinners during the holiday season.

The holiday season is a special time for everyone. It is filled with happiness and love all while being surrounded by friends and family. Even if our culture celebrates the holiday season differently, we are all overflowing with joy and excitement, which is what makes Christmas such a special time.



Trinidad also has its own set of traditions during Christmastime. Children and adults visit neighbours and gather with friends to share a meal, while the radio plays Christmas

In Jamaica, however, Christmas Eve is a more exciting day for everyone as it is the day of the “Grand Market”. The party happens at night when everyone comes out dressed in their best clothes. The party starts at 6:00pm and doesn’t end until Christmas morning! All



Feature

How Christmas has changed

BY JAHZARA PAYNE

We made it to the last month of the year! For some people, it is their favourite time – and others not so much. Christmas is known to many as the season for giving and spending time with your family and friends, but tough times call for tough choices.

It seems as though the upbeat attitude towards this time of year has started declining. Spending money on knickknacks like trees, lights, ornaments and cookies to ring in the spirit has now been sacrificed by some. This shift in focus makes many feel less in a Christmas mood. But where has this stemmed from?

After Hurricane Irma, pay checks were not the same and some citizens struggled to have a stable home and life for their families. Following this came a time of recovery where some sort of normalcy was restored until the pandemic struck, leaving us feeling trapped yet again. The feelings of depression and demotivation spreading across the island clouded the celebrations of “most won-



derful time of the year”.

Children back then eagerly wrote their wish lists weeks in advance, hoping that Santa would receive them in time. But now, many have fallen under the Christmas blues and have not even thought about gifts. It is sad that the many, who used to decorate their houses, spreading cheer all month long, have restrained themselves from doing so due to either loss of decorations or lack of funds. And let’s not forget about the Christmas parade – which was once the highlight of the holidays for some – being a missing piece to this Christmas season for a few years now could also be the cause for the gloomy mood of citizens.



Nevertheless, there is yet hope for this year to be filled with the Christmas spirit we all know and love. We do not require lights, decor and gifts to restore this season of happiness; rather we need unity, generosity and love to truly revive our holiday cheer.

Christmas Connection

BY ADITI RAJPAL AND DIYA RAJPAL

Christmas is the most awaited time of the year for most. It can also be a very hectic season, but we must be able to make time to stay connected with our partners. The cosy weather creates the perfect romantic setting for couples to be brought closer together. With so many traditions and ways of celebrating the joys of this holiday, let's discuss some must-do activities to make this season a little more magical for you and your special someone.



To help kick-start the beginning of your Christmas celebration, we recommend decorating. As simple as it is, creating unique Christmas tree

ornaments of you and your partner will definitely add a personal touch to your homes. One of the

more classic ways to celebrate together is cuddling up with a cosy blanket and watching your favourite Christmas movies all night long. Starting to get hungry? Another bucket list item for this season would be to bake and decorate delicious Christmas treats together. A mouth-watering cookie is bound to put anyone in the Christmas spirit!

Long distance does make it difficult to celebrate the holidays together, but technology definitely

makes it easier to connect with your significant other regardless of the distance. The options, although limited, shouldn't discourage you. For example, mailing surprise gifts to indulge in the feeling of spending Christmas morning together is sure to bring smiles to both of your faces. Sending little notes and e-cards online is another possibility to keep spirits high throughout the Christmas season. Believe it or not, having a couple's movie night is still definitely possible. With options like "Netflix Party" the opportunity to watch movies together at the same time is not eliminated. This allows you to share all your Christmas favourites with each other, creating a memorable night.

Christmas is the time to create many new memories. It is an opportunity to pause, give love and remain thankful for everything in our lives. Through these endless creative bonding activities, couples are bound to come together and strengthen their relationship, while staying in the Holiday spirit.



Christmas evolution over the years

BY IVAN WU

How does your family celebrate Christmas? Some present-day Christmas customs may include giving and receiving gifts, decorating Christmas trees, having a home cooked family meal, going to church, or even staying up to watch Santa Claus make his way down your chimney. But have you thought about where these traditions evolved from?

Christmas in the medieval times (500-2500) lasted for 12 days and was considered the longest holiday of the year and was felt by wealthy and poor households! The 12 days began on Christmas Eve and lasted till January 6 (Epiphany). During this time, it was very likely to find winter foliage – greenery was therefore collected to create garlands to decorate the home. The Celts heavily valued holly, ivy, and mistletoe, which they used with fertility and protection from evil spirits. Of course, the purpose of Christmas was to commemorate the birth of Jesus, hence everyone was expected to attend church; in certain cases, it was even required.

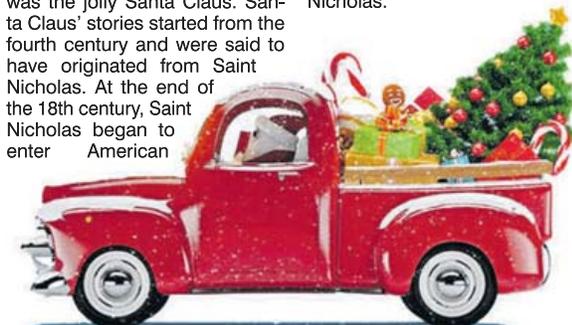
Real effort was made by the nearby churches to offer a ser-

vice honouring Christmas. Candles were lit in the churches, expanded choirs were set up, and gleaming gold altarpieces were displayed. Additionally, the exchange of gifts originated from the gifts that the three wise men presented when visiting baby Jesus in Bethlehem. Gift giving in the medieval times was separated into two kinds: the gifts of the rich, like jewellery; and nicer food for the poor.

As the years went by, certain variations of Christmas like the Elizabethan and Victorian Christmas also heavily influenced the celebrations of today's Christmas. An important figure of Christmas was the jolly Santa Claus. Santa Claus' stories started from the fourth century and were said to have originated from Saint Nicholas. At the end of the 18th century, Saint Nicholas began to enter American



popular culture and the name of Santa Claus originated from Sinterklaas, whose name was a shortened Dutch version of Saint Nicholas.



Furthermore, the Bishop of Myra in Anatolia took great pleasure in giving out presents, such as gold sacks. Since one recipient's gold fell into a sock after being sent through the chimney, the common tradition was thus created. Christmas was originally celebrated by public gatherings, but in the early 19th century, Christmas evolved into prioritizing family celebration indoors.

Traditions have and will keep on growing; but the traditions, that have been observed on Christmas Day for centuries, continue to enchant and spread cheer to people now just as they did in the past.

What price does the environment pay around the holiday season?

BY CHIRAG RAMCHANDANI

We all love the holiday season – everyone but the environment. The holidays have arrived, and you already know what that means! It's time to spread joy, spend time with our loved ones – and generate massive amounts of waste.

Christmas is perhaps the most joyous time of the year for every one of us. However, it is also one of the most wasteful times, with an increase in the number of waste products generated and discarded. Holidays are occasions to enjoy with relatives and friends, which can lead to a lot of waste. During the holiday season, we frequently dine out and attend parties. We can overspend on gifts and frequently send holiday cards to the ones dearest to us.

Christmas has been dubbed “the world’s greatest annual ecological catastrophe”, with each of us contributing significantly to the pollution and waste generated. It is estimated that some families splurge 60 to 70 percent more of their income during the holiday season and produce approximately 30% more household waste. That’s a lot!

Bins replete of holiday wasted food, ribbons and bows, packaging, shopping bags, and wrapping paper add 1 million tons to our landfills each week. As consumers, we are growingly concerned about the impact and sustainability of our actions, and Christmas is no



exception. It may surprise you to learn how much is generated each year during the Christmas season. We throw away an equivalent of 360,000 kilometres of wrapping paper each year – nearly enough to paper our way to the moon.

Although the holiday season brings joy to many people, this also brings a lot more solid and plastic waste to landfills, environmental damage, and additional debt to the average family. Practicing proper disposal of solid waste is even

more important during the holiday season.

1. Although they are lovely and add a festive feel to your home or workplace, one of the issues with real Christmas trees is that statistics show that 250 tonnes of them get disposed of after the holiday when they could have been utilized for compost. A solution to this could be to rent a tree or purchase a usable tree that can be easily stored.

2. Biodegradable paper, hessian, and cloth could be used to wrap presents, reducing the amount of wrapping paper that is currently sent to landfills. The majority of brown paper is recyclable and compostable because it is unbleached. It’s also fun to get creative with packaging by reusing old wrapping paper and gift bags.

Let us keep Christmas the most wonderful time of the year and prevent it from becoming the most wasteful.



Celebrating Christmas Abroad

BY JONATHAN SANG

The following interviews were carried out to determine the differences in how St. Maarten students previously celebrated Christmas while living on island versus how they presently celebrate it while living abroad. Two perspectives are from students living in the Netherlands and three are from Canada.

Student: Sidney

1. Which country are you in at the moment?

I am in The Netherlands.

2. Is Christmas different in the country you're currently in compared to Christmas in St. Maarten? If yes, how is it different?

Yes, here they not only celebrate Christmas, but also Sinterklaas, which I don't fully understand yet. As far as traditions go, I'm not fully sure what they do for Christmas, but I believe it's the same on the day of.

3. Do you celebrate Christmas in a traditional way?

I do.

4. How are the decorations/environment compared to St. Maarten?

It's really the same; but unlike St. Maarten, there are more public

decorations. The amount of decorations in public in St. Maarten has gone down since I was a child; and here they do more like decorating the whole city centre. All of the decorations are traditional, though – trees, lights, etc.

5. How well have you coped with the cold weather?

I've gotten used to it now. I came here in the winter of last year so that helped me understand what it was and not be caught off guard by a gradual decrease in temperature, now I don't get as cold as I used to.

6. What does Christmas mean to you?

Christmas at the core to me is a time to prioritize family, quality time and bonding. You can allow yourself to be immersed in the warmth and jolly mood by finding a way to be around the ones you love; and if you can't, to love yourself and to do what makes you feel like that since most of the year is more geared towards being in the working mode. Find your loved ones, eat, party, enjoy, laugh, etc.

Student: Diya Sachdev

1. Which country are you in at the moment?

I'm in Canada.



2. Is Christmas different in the country you're currently in compared to Christmas in St. Maarten? If yes, how is it different?

The way in which the holiday is celebrated is not very different as compared to St. Maarten.

3. Do you celebrate Christmas in a traditional way?

No I do not.

4. How are the decorations/environment compared to St. Maarten?

Since it is a bigger country, the streets are much more decorative and lively. There are also various season specials in stores and other places – hence getting the perfect gift is much easier.

5. How well have you coped with the cold weather?

It definitely was not easy, but cold eventually grows on you.

6. What does Christmas mean to you?

A festive time where friends and family get together.

Student: Rohan Goswami

1. Which country are you in at the moment?

I am in Toronto, Canada, at the moment!

2. Is Christmas different in the country you're currently in compared to Christmas in St. Maarten? If yes, how is it different?

It is quite different here. To begin, the weather is extremely colder than in St. Maarten. On top of that, there are many more Christmas themed advertisements. Since Toronto is also a metropolitan city, there are a lot more discounts in shopping centres.



Feature

...continued on pg. 16

3. Do you celebrate Christmas in a traditional way?

Well, not really. My family usually buys a tree and decorates it, and even puts gifts underneath it; but we don't really have a Christmas dinner, rather we just go to the beach.

4. How are the decorations/environment compared to St. Maarten?

Decorations here are spectacular. They can't even be compared, simply because this is a bigger country with more resources. The decorations are extremely beautiful everywhere you go. That being said, there is no better decor in my opinion than sunny weather.

5. How well have you coped with the cold weather?

In short, you get used to it. It has been about four months here and I have been cold for about all of the time I've been here. It is progressively getting easier to cope with the cold, but winter gear is so expensive.

6. What does Christmas mean to you?

Christmas is the season that reminds me of giving. Being an Interacter for all of my high school life, I was always busy during the holidays with volunteering and doing some personal donations also. That's something I don't think I ever want to change.

Student: Annalesia Adams

1. Which country are you in at the moment?

I'm currently in Canada.

2. Is Christmas different in the country you're currently in compared to Christmas in St. Maarten? If yes, how is it different?

I'm Guyanese so the meals I usually eat during the holiday are different, including the traditions; and the central part Christianity plays in the holiday is different to how my Canadian friends usually celebrate the holiday.

3. Do you celebrate Christmas in a traditional way?

In St. Maarten, I celebrated Christmas with traditions from both Guyana and St. Maarten. We exchanged gifts in the morning; went to church and had a Christmas lunch that consisted of Johnny cake and pepper pot.

4. How are the decorations/environment compared to St. Maarten?

I would say that while Canada does go all out with their decorations, it doesn't have the same sentimentally as you would find in the Caribbean.

5. How well have you coped with the cold weather?

It was very hard in the beginning, especially since Canada can get so cold; but after a year or so, you get used to it.

6. What does Christmas mean to you?

What Christmas means to me is spending time with my family and just having a good time.



Student: Emily Sang

1. Which country are you in at the moment?

I currently live in Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

2. Is Christmas different in the country you're currently in compared to Christmas in St. Maarten? If yes, how is it different?

Here they also celebrate Sinterklaas at the beginning of December where poems and gifts are exchanged among a group of friends and/or family. It still revolves around the elements of Christmas, such as being together with loved ones and sharing the jolly holiday spirit; however, their "Santa" comes from Spain on a horse!

3. Do you celebrate Christmas in a traditional way?

My family is a mix of Asian and Latino – one culture that heavily celebrates the religious side of Christmas and one not so much. So, at home, we celebrate it with exchanging gifts among the family and either having a grand feast on the 24th or having a brunch on the 25th.

4. How are the decorations/environment compared to St. Maarten?

As I am in the city centre of Amsterdam, there are light decorations everywhere. Many stores have also decorated their interior and there are flower markets that are also selling trees, so you really feel like Christmas is coming! You can't really compare

mas to me – although, I can't really put my finger on it. Perhaps it's the jolly spirit everyone is in during that time of year, and my family coming together.

5. How well have you coped with the cold weather?

Over the years living in the Netherlands, I think I can safely say that I have somehow become more accepting of the cold. I think as well having moved from Scheveningen (which is near the sea, and it rains a lot more and has more wind compared to Amsterdam) it makes the cold more bearable. Also seeing the streets lit up and the city being lively, you sort of forget the cold, and you just simply need to learn how to dress for this weather!

6. What does Christmas mean to you?

Christmas is probably my favourite time of the year, because of the way it brings your family together. Everyone is just in a better mood, you eat good food, you give and receive nice gifts, and spend quality time with loved ones. I also always reflect on the whole year during this time and think to myself about all I am grateful for and my wins. The combination of New Year and Christmas is just a favourite of mine, because it always makes me happy and brings me joy.

In the end, it can be said that various countries as well as cultures celebrate Christmas differently. Some celebrate Christmas traditionally with gift giving, feasting with friends and family and decorating trees, while others celebrate Sinterklaas or their own unique versions of what they believe Christmas entails.



A CHRISTMAS HORROR STORY

BY ANASTASIA ADAMS

Christmas Dinner

It started out as a habit, nibbling on my own skin, chewing at my fingertips which evolved into me gnawing at my clenched palms at night-cannibalizing myself. This earned me several years of therapy and enough Xanax to fill a tub. But, no matter how much my parents tried, it could not be helped – this strange preference. If I did not chew at it, “it” would in turn chew at me more vigorously.

I look back at my years in therapy, it was more intimate than where I am now sitting, grouped with these blundering retards, they lacked decorum; someone was even sitting in the corner of the room, hacked up on drugs, a long string of drool dripping down his shirt. I didn't belong here, I needed treatment, yes, but I didn't belong here.

“Simon?”

I cocked my head looking at Doctor Horace; she was the head of St. Peter's Psychiatric Hospital, she could've been anywhere on the compound but instead she chose to be here, to sit here for an hour every day and queue herself in on the madness.

“Yes, Doctor?”

“The group and I were discussing the concept of regret. Do you feel regret for what you've done?”

The mere mention of my actions had scenes flashing through my mind, and soon the memories began to wash over me, slowly starting to consume me as the grey walls of the hospital began to fade away.

It was December 24th and I too was in the Christmas spirit as I decorated the motel to the brim with festive wreaths, snow globes that went perfectly with the pungent smell of peppermint that engulfed the motel. It was 9:25pm –



35 minutes to closing – I could've closed the doors now, and it wouldn't make any difference, everything else was closed, everyone gone on their Christmas vacations, there wasn't a single soul in sight; the town wouldn't even register as a blimp on Santa's radar. I was about to sign when someone strolled in, a woman limping, covered in snow and shivering as she approached my front desk lugging a large black duffel bag. Her voice was small and quiet as she booked a room for the week.

I watched as she ascended the

staircase and eventually disappeared to the second floor. Just then, “it” started to talk to me, coaxing me to just take a peek – just as a precaution. I tried to talk myself out of it; it was a crime, liable to up to a year in jail. But, how was I supposed to know she wasn't a criminal? Who checks into a motel on Christmas Eve? But, I had to check, just to be sure, just in case.

I locked up, double checked the doors and windows and turned up the festive music to be especially loud before heading to my father's favourite room. It was always locked when I was a child, but when he died and I inherited the place, I decided to put all those fantasies I conjured up as a child to rest.

I entered, taking heed to be as quiet as possible. It wasn't actually a room, more of a long corridor that ran through the entire second floor. It was to serve my father's voyeurism, allowing him to spy on women through the mirrors that acted as a window and door.

I watched as she stripped, first checking for any weapons and soon my eyes drifted down her small stature. She's in her prime,

plump skin full of life. I contemplated how she tasted – her blood was probably sickly sweet. I imagined it running down my face or splattered across my floors, the unspeakable images chiselled away at my control before I finally snapped, I gripped the metal star ornament in my hand and did the unthinkable. I pushed open the mirror-door and crept up on her while her back was turned, I didn't give her time to react before I hit her behind the head once and she fell with a sharp thud. She lay motionless for several seconds, probably from a fractured cranium.

I saw her fingers twitch and swung the ornament repeatedly unconcerned with her screaming, knowing that the breathy voice of George Michael and jingle bells drowned out her screams. I wasn't finished until there was a mush where her head should've been and I knelt down, lifted her limp arm and began to chew at her, stopping ever so often to savour her flavour.

After reliving these glorious moments, I realized that I didn't need to give it that much thought at all. Given the chance, I'd do anything to go back and enjoy my Christmas meal.



Racism – A Dark History, but a Hopeful Future

BY SAHELI KIRPALANI

No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite. – Nelson Mandela

What is the first thought that comes to your mind when you hear the word “racism”? We all have our own definition of the world connected to our own beliefs or experiences, but it is important to understand what racism truly means and where it comes from to understand how to eradicate it. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, racism is a belief that race is a fundamental determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race.

Before the 1500s, the term “race” was rarely used to refer to social groupings that shared a bloodline or other connection. However, as centuries have passed, race is now being utilized as a social construction that either gives or denies privileges. The fallacious notion that “white” people were inherently smarter, more competent, and more human than non-white people spread throughout the world over centuries. This categorization of people served as justification for European colonialism and the subsequent enslavement of Africans.

The social innovations were successful in enslaving the majority of African descendants for generations, impoverishing and marginalizing native people, and unifying the white colonists. Tragically, because racism was at the



root of slavery, American society was shaped from the beginning by beliefs about race and racism. Similar to prior decades, the definition of “white” evolved to encompass a variety of groups of people during the early 20th century, including immigrants from Italy and Eastern Europe. Black people, Native Americans, and other groups would continue to exist outside of the world of whites. Therefore, they would have a harder time getting access to the privileges, opportunities, and rights as white people – for instance the right to vote, an education, citizenship, and a share of the country’s wealth.

White supremacy does not rely on individual prejudice to operate, despite the fact that most people link it with violent organizations like the Ku Klux Klan and neo-Nazis. It is, on the other hand, a universal operating system that persistently disadvantages people of colour by relying on patterns and

practices. It penetrates our cultural and institutional presumptions and assigns value, morality, goodness, and humanity to the white group, while depicting persons of colour as worthless, immoral, terrible, or “undeserving.”

According to the activist Paul Kivel, “Whiteness is a constantly shifting boundary separating those who are entitled to have certain privileges from those whose exploitation and vulnerability to violence is justified by their not being white.” This truly explains the way in which racist beliefs and values have been instilled in systems and institutions for centuries, and it is simply unjustifiable to use one’s power and privilege to prove that one race is superior to another, whether it is in the form of violence, abuse, harassment, humiliation, intimidation, or institutionalized oppression.

There has been a huge gap in who gets to tell their story authentically

and be heard. The education system all over the world has spent so much time focusing on how to teach people of colour about their history and the way in which they were unjustly enslaved by their oppressors, but no one shows much importance to educating white people about their role in the history. We, as a society in this modern culture, have been so focused on trying to treat and cure the symptoms of the problem of “racism”, instead of breaking down the root cause and doing the work to eradicate it. We need to shift the spotlight to actually diving deep into ourselves, to examine our own implicit bias, challenge and question our belief systems, educate ourselves, and do the constant work of becoming a better human being for ourselves and those around us.

Furthermore, the voices of people of colour have been silenced for too long. Whether you live in a small island like St. Maarten or in a large city anywhere else in the world, racism exists. People experience it at schools, at home, with their peers, at the workplace, and even in restaurants. Everyone has their own story and experience. Moreover, everyone has a right to be who they are truthfully. Why do some people in the world exist to take away those rights? Why are some people so blindsided, toxic, greedy, and hateful that they take away the lives of people of colour for simply existing in their own beauty?

I do not have all the answers to these questions, but the one thing I do know is that there is always hope. Even in the darkest times, when the whole world had to bear witness to the murder of George



Floyd and countless others due to police brutality and systemic racism, a wave of hope came through. Understandably, with that hope, rage and despair flooded in. However, the one thing that brought us all together was the fight for justice, and in the words of Cornel West, "Justice is what love looks like in public". And so, the entire world fought. We fought together in unity for the one thing that connects us all, love. Regardless of who you are, your race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or religion, you are a human first, and each and every human is blessed with the incredible gift of experiencing love. That is the invisible string that connects us through all our differences. It runs in each and every one of our veins, and it is our humanity.



Our island, St. Maarten, is known as the "melting pot", which refers to its multicultural society and abundance of diversity. We often forget that our differences are our strength, not our weakness, and they deserve to be celebrated and embraced. No one should have the power to discriminate and take away someone's identity. That is simply inhumane. Unfortunately, people in positions of power often abuse it for their own advantage, and their crimes were finally exposed for the world to see. At that point in time, the cries of all the silenced voices of people and families were finally heard. The world knew there was something that needed to be done – that something in our system needed to change. That was only the beginning of a movement that would last a lifetime. It was a call-to-action for every one of us to open our minds and our hearts and extend compassion to serve justice to all the people who have suffered at the hands of systemic oppression.

In our world today, we have made a lot of progress in battling the effects and causes of racism, and that is beautiful, but it is important to acknowledge that there is a lot of work to be done. However, that starts within each and

every one of us. The people that came before us have dedicated all their lives fighting for a better world for us today, and we will continue to fight with every last ounce of blood within us to arrive at a better world for our future children. No change will happen unless all of us take the initiative to be a part of the solution and do the work.

The only way we can fight this is together. Therefore, as mentioned by Angela Davis, "In a racist society, it is not enough to be non-racist, we must be anti-racist." Hence, I urge you to use your voice as your power to uplift those that have been silenced, educate yourself and those around you, listen to the stories and experiences of others, and stand up for what you believe in. No person is born racist, but one adopts racist beliefs by learning to hate, and in the words of the incredible and inspiring Nelson Mandela, "If they can

learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite."

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Feature

GRETA THUNBERG: AN INSPIRATION FOR THE YOUTH

BY LAVISHA DADLANI

The youth's voices are crucial. Especially when it comes to making decisions that will have an effect on their futures, the younger generations should be involved in the discussion of topics like climate change. One individual, who has made her opinions about climate change known since she was 15, is Greta Thunberg.

This year, Greta Thunberg took the gutsy decision of boycotting the 27th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP27). Her reasons for making such a courageous move will be discussed throughout this article.

Being held this year in Egypt, the annual conference is meant to bring governments together in order to address the climate crisis we are facing. "The [COP events] are mainly used as an opportunity for people in power to get attention, using many different kinds of greenwashing, lying and cheating," Thunberg powerfully stated according to "Middle East Eye". The 19-year-old activist showed her level of maturity by restraining from attending the event not only because of the controversial people, but also due to the location.



Egypt is a country that many overlook, but Greta Thunberg brought to light that the country has been abusing basic human rights. Since current President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi dethroned the country's first actual elected president, Mohamed Morsi, in 2013, Egypt has not had a stable political environment. Currently, an estimated 60,000 political prisoners are held there due to the fact that these people do not share the same political views as the current government.

The abuse of basic human rights stems from the fact that these prisoners are not only unfairly imprisoned, but also denied access to water, food, beds, medication, and many other necessities, not to mention the acts of torture, which are being kept under wraps, that some prisoners are going through.

This situation is undeniably unacceptable on many levels. Not only has Thunberg opened the world's

eyes to these inhumane acts but, she has also made it clear that her platform will only support events that actually intend to make a difference for our planet. Greta Thunberg's big move truly is an embodiment of how the youth should never back down from correcting what is wrong. Instead, we should attack the situation head-on because our views do have a huge impact in the ways that adults think.

Feature



SHEIN AND ETHICS, SHADY MUCH

BY DIYA RAJPAL

You have probably heard of the popular fashion brand Shein, whether through targeted advertisements or promotion emails filling up your spam folder. Shein seemingly appeared out of nowhere and quickly grew to take the number-one place of the bestselling online fashion brand.

Shein was founded in 2008, but gained its momentum in 2017 – and during the COVID-19 pandemic, the company even surpassed Amazon, generating a revenue of US \$15.7 billion. The now well-known Shein fashion brand is known as “ultra-fast fashion”, which is a brand that only operates online, making them much faster than traditional stores.



Shein is still currently on its way to continuous growth, which poses many ethical concerns because of how ultra-fast fashion brands like them operate.

Due to Shein’s lack of transparency, an undercover worker was sent by journalist Iman Amrani into Shein’s factories to find out the truth about the way such a company operates. The ethical concerns include the company’s reported use of forced labour in their factories, as well as not paying their workers a liveable wage. According to “The Cut”, employees allegedly work 18-hour shifts with only one day a month off, but receive a wage of only \$556 – calculated to be less than 1 cent per piece.

Due to Shein’s unethical ways of business, the company is able to offer clothes at extremely competitive prices and attract customers who enjoy the benefits of low cost

products. There have also been concerns about the company’s environmental practices due to the brand’s “test-and-repeat model”. A CBC Marketplace investigation was conducted showing that the company has used toxic chemicals in their production process. According to CBC News, Shein is able to list an upward of 6,000 new products each day on their site, meaning that many clothes end up in landfills if not sold.

The textile industry is responsible for 2-8% of global greenhouse and this poses a great threat to climate change. Shein has also been accused of “counterfeiting” – producing knock-off products of popular brands and selling them at a lower price. While Shein has denied these accusations, the company has not been able to provide concrete evidence to refute them. This has led to some consumers boycotting the company. These brands must take action by investing more in sustainable products and practices to take responsibility and protect our Earth. In another point of view, stricter regulation should also be imposed on ultra-fast fashion brands like Shein, to ensure that labour laws and sustainability quotas are being met.

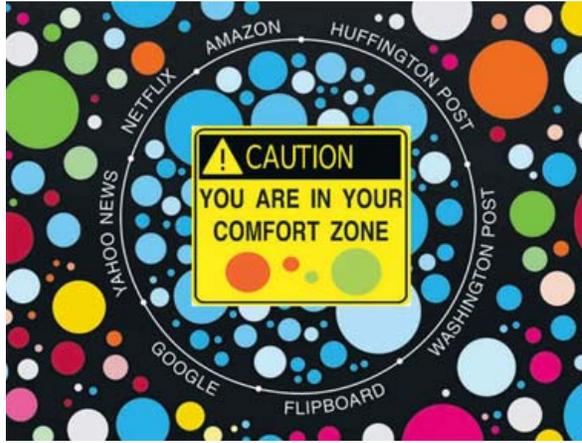


Feature

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT FILTER BUBBLES

BY SAGE WILLIAMS

By now, we all know what the internet is and what it does – from the various opportunities it gives us to meet other people from around the world, to the way it increases our knowledge about anything we want. However, as most of us have grown up with the internet, we can agree that it does have some sticky fingers and knows what we like and who we follow. For example, remember that time you were searching up something that you really wanted – and not long after, an advertisement would show up for the exact thing you had researched? Or even when you watched a video about a certain topic – and suddenly your entire feed was filled with things related to that topic? Coincidence? I think not.



This cycle of the same ideas, content and people is called a filter bubble. Coined by Eli Pariser, this term “filter bubble” is incredibly easy to create and be-

come lost in. The more you're on a social media platform, the more that it gives you content that you would definitely watch. This turns into a familiar cycle of endless

scrolling, watching, refreshing for more content for hours on end, including the amount of time we spend on apps going through the same things repeatedly. Even when you are on social media and surrounded by people, who share your sense of humour, your beliefs and your interests, and you feel content with what you see all the time; when you stop to think about it, you may realize that there is a lack of mental growth and development.

This article is not intended to imply that everyone should quit social media – because we all know that being on social media does have benefits – but we should be aware of when it hinders us from actually living our lives instead of watching others enjoy theirs; and we should be open about how it affects us negatively. It is important to not have this filter bubble cloud your thoughts and the way that you see the world or ignore things that you are not interested in. Being open to other people's opinions and discussing any ideas you don't agree with, without it leading to an argument, is what makes a person mature.



important to not have this filter bubble cloud your thoughts and the way that you see the world or ignore things that you are not interested in. Being open to other people's opinions and discussing any ideas you don't agree with, without it leading to an argument, is what makes a person mature.

Feature

The Coding Corner



Did you know?

The first programmer was the daughter of a mad poet.

Coding and STEM fields may appear to be built for boys, but Ada Lovelace was the first person to write our modern understanding of a program. Ada's mother feared her daughter, Lord Byron's only legitimate daughter, would suffer from the same insanity as her father. To keep the madness at bay for as long as possible, she dedicated her daughter to math and science.

While working with a colleague on the Analytical Engine, a mechanical general-purpose computer, she recognized that the machine could go far beyond simple and pure calculations, publishing the first algorithm designed to be carried out by a machine like this one.

ARTISTS FACING GUN VIOLENCE

BY JAHZARA PAYNE

We've lost a number of artists this year as a result of gun violence. Why is this happening? Why do the rates increase each year? Why are we losing so many people between the ages of 18 and 45? These are questions raised by many and the answers would definitely help calm down the uproar that gun violence brings.

On November 1, tragedy struck on social media when Takeoff, a well-known rapper from the group Migos, was shot and killed. He was hanging out with his uncle and bandmate Quavo when he got caught in crossfire. This demonstrates that even the least problematic artists can die just from being around.

It's sad if we think about the fact that some of the artists, who have died, even had children of their own. Some died doing the things they loved, while others died because their location was posted on social media.

This issue of artists and gun violence started in the 19th century. Scott La Rock, also known as DJ Scott La Rock, was shot and killed at the age of 25; the first musician to experience the cruelty of gun violence. He died on August 27, 1987. Some other well-known artists, who have passed away as a result of gun violence, include Tupac, The Notorious B.I.G., Nipsey Hussle, XXXTentacion, Pop smoke, King Von, PnB Rock and Young Dolph

The use of guns has spread across the world. Some people believe that



having a gun makes them cool, even though they are carrying a weapon that could be used to take away the life of someone else's son, daughter, wife or husband. And the artists, we may listen to every day, also probably have one or more guns of their own.

Knowing that they all passed away in the US, what would happen to those from the Caribbean who aspire to be artists like them? The path taken towards simply following their dreams could end, due to one immature move. Through this article, we wish to spread awareness about this dangerous tragedy that has become increasingly common, so that the youth can understand the importance behind surrounding themselves with the right groups of people.



Feature

FIRST CROSSFIT COMPETITION? CHALLENGE ACCEPTED!

Camilla Blijden recently placed third in the Caribbean CrossFit Throwdown Competition held in Guadeloupe. Her story is very cool because this was her very FIRST Crossfit competition. Amazing! If you know Crossfit, you know it is very intense. So Camilla's achievement as a first-timer is awesome. Let's read about it.

1. Please introduce yourself to us: name, age, education, hobbies.

My name is Camilla Blijden. I am 25 years old. I have a Master's degree in Work and Organizational Psychology. My hobbies include playing video games & Crossfit.

2. When did you first take up Crossfit and what inspired you to do so?

I initially took up the sport in October of 2021 because a close friend of mine asked me to try it out. I was already sportive at the time and attending another gym, but I decided to give it a shot. After about a month or two, I made some friends and found myself wanting to get better. I would go during open hours, to work on my strength and techniques, and even spend hours after class working on movements. Eventually, I was given the opportunity to join the competition team in June and I've been working hard ever since.

3. Would you consider your-



self a sports loving person and have you played team sports?

I love sports! When I was younger, I did swimming, golf, softball, and a little bit of tennis and soccer. I always wanted to keep moving. Before taking up Crossfit, I used to play on a softball team, and even there, I spent extra hours with my coach to work on fielding the ball.

4. Tell us about what Crossfit entails.

Crossfit involves high intensity workouts mixed with functional movements, strength and gymnastics. So there is a lot that goes

into the sport. High-intensity workouts would be running, burpees, jump rope, box jumps, etc. – things that get your heart pumping.

Functional movements are things that we typically do every day – so lifting objects, squatting or jumping. Strength work would be stuff like bench pressing, squatting, even Olympic lifting. Gymnastics would include pull ups, rope climbs, handstand walks, muscle ups, etc. (I know it's a lot!)

A typical class would have a strength portion, technique portion and then the actual workout of the day (WOD). The best part of Crossfit is that although it does consist of a lot of movements, it can be scaled for anyone and it's incredibly fun and rewarding after completing a



workout. I really started at the beginning and was focused on learning movements. Even now, I am still learning.

5. How would you describe your experience at the competition?

My first competition was at the Caribbean Throwdown in Guadeloupe and it was awesome. Despite the language barrier, the Crossfit community was absolutely amazing. Before and after a workout, we'd wish each other good luck and say "great job". Before the start of a workout, I would be filled with nerves. As soon as the clock started, the nerves were gone and it was game time. For the next couple minutes, it was a push. As soon as the workout was done, everyone was on the ground catching their breath (good times).

6. How did you prepare for it; and how long?

I joined the competition team back in June, so I've been training competitively since then. A typical day would include 2/3 strength work, 2 workouts and some accessories. We train that way so that when a competition does pop up, we would be ready. However, a week before this competition, we stopped doing strength (to prevent injuries) and we scaled down our workouts to one a day. This was so our body could "peak" before competition.

7. What about the competition itself, what did that consist of?

So the Caribbean Throwdown was a two-day event and both days had four workouts. My top two favourites were a strength workout and a beach workout. For strength, we had a complex of 1 power clean, 1 hang power clean and 1 push jerk. (These are Olympic lifts.) I managed to lift 135lbs/60kg and came in

second. The beach workout was 20 overhead lunges; 20 burpees over a paddle boat; paddle 400m; and repeat the lunges and burpees. I came in third for that. It's crazy because I didn't have a single event win, but I came in top 5 in the majority of the workouts. I stayed consistent and finished in third.

8. Did you have expectations for yourself to place in your first event?

To be able to qualify to go to Guadeloupe, participants had to complete workouts, record them and post them online. For the qualifiers, I came in eighth place. So going in, I had hoped to finish in the top five.

9. Will you continue with Crossfit?

I will definitely be continuing! I still consider myself new to the sport and I've progressed so much and have much more to achieve. There is a competition in Guyana next year which I am really looking forward to. Hoping for top five!

10. What advice would you give a young person who might want to take up Crossfit?

Young people have such a huge advantage in this sport – it's amazing. You are more mobile, you have the time to get stronger and to build on your conditioning. Like I mentioned, you can start off as a scaled athlete and eventually build yourself up. You will never get bored because there is always something crazy to learn and you would have a strong community backing you up. I hope we get more young folk in The Box (gym) soon (located on Cay Hill near Kooyman)! Check us out at Colosseum SXM on IG or FB.