

Don't ban hugs, embrace them



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There will be no more “extreme” hugging at Oak Park’s Percy Julian Middle School.

Principal Victoria Sharts told WBBM-Channel 2 that the “hug lines” clogging the hallways were making students late for class and that the rampant hugging is “more appropriate for airports or for family reunions than passing and seeing each other every few minutes in the halls.”

I see what they’re doing. Young people must be denied *something*, so that they can acquire enough angst and acne to graduate to full-fledged teenhood. You’ve got to admire their originality. At my school, they banned makeup (which led to



Ashley (left) and Mary-Kate Olsen keep close to one another in 2004. The twins are known for hugging, among other things. | JENNIFER GRAYLOCK~AP

smuggled pearly blue eye shadow). Other institutions banned Judy Blume books (which led to frank knowledge).

School makes hugging headlines

Of course, I would have assumed that the school was banning hugs on the basis that they are the gateway drug to heavy petting, and much worse.

Wrong! Apparently the real dan-

ger of hugs is that they lead to . . . problems with punctuality. So Percy Julian Middle School is even teaching *me* something, at my advanced age.

It’s hard to say if they’re enjoying the publicity. Before all this hug hubbub, Googling the school would merely bring up the description of a science experiment involving an Idaho potato, a red potato and an onion. Now the school represents a

crippling step backward for the touchy-feely movement.

And of all the ironies: Percy Julian himself, who died in 1975, was a man famous for his chemistry.

To be fair, all of my current information about kids today comes from the new CW show “Gossip Girl,” which is about a group of disolute Manhattan teens who drink martinis and wear fearsomely expensive trousers. If the principal of Percy Julian Middle School were to watch just one episode, she would be grateful that all her students are doing are hugging.

And hey, I’m not much of a hugger, having only recently tentatively mastered the “A-frame” hug (shoulders touching, but the rest of the body so distant from the huggee that it resembles an “A,” accompanied by an awkward back pat). When I was in school, a hug meant you were going to Homecoming together.

Now a hug just means “Hello!” And occasionally, a hug will make headlines. When Larry Birkhead hugged Howard K. Stern outside the courtroom of the Anna Nicole

Smith custody trial, it signaled a new policy of detente. When Elton John recently hugged Madonna (after calling her a lip-syncher in 2004 and saying, “That’s me off her f----- Christmas card list but do I give a toss?”), celebrity Web sites paid heed.

It’s here to stay

Today, a hug seals the deal. Jeremy Piven famously pioneered the power hug on HBO’s “Entourage,” when he commanded a reluctant Irishman to “Hug it out, bitch.” Finally, manly men were given permission to embrace! If the Louisiana Purchase were negotiated today, Thomas Jefferson would probably make it official with a combination chest-bump/fist-pound.

Hugs are here to stay. Athletes hug. President Bush hugs. When the Olsen twins can’t be hugging, they’re clinging to each other’s hands.

If kids don’t learn to hug in school, they are not going to be well-equipped for the real world. So I have just one thing to say about Percy Julian’s principal:

Somebody needs a hug.

THE HISPANIC EXPERIENCE: PART TWO

About this series: Every September and October, America celebrates the culture of U.S. residents from Spanish-speaking countries during Hispanic Heritage Month. But the

fastest-growing ethnic group in the United States isn’t just streaming in from other countries — one out of every two people added to the United States last year were Hispanic — some estimate

that as many as 60 percent of them were born here, and their stories celebrate a different sort of cultural awareness.

Sun-Times columnist Esther J. Cepeda talks to four people — a young mother, a

high school student, a college kid, and a young couple — who are Americans first but live a Hispanic experience. They show us a small part of what it’s like to be Hispanic today.

Playing rugby in a soccer world, teen pursues American dream

BY ESTHER J. CEPEDA

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Jose Jurado is the black sheep. Here’s a kid who didn’t get the memo: “Mexican kids play soccer.”

Jose is a rugby player. Just one of the all-Hispanic, 51-man, Cicero-based Mustangs rugby team — an oddity on Chicago’s rugby club scene.

“I’d never heard of rugby. I saw it and thought it was lacrosse or something,” said Jose, 17, a senior at Morton East High School in Cicero. The high school’s head football coach, Aaron Sweeney, got him and his friends hooked on the bone-crushing action — rugby evolved from “futbol,” then spawned American football — and the camaraderie.

“Almost all the other teams are all-white, and they do treat us differently. They say, ‘What are these Mexican guys doing here playing rugby?’” Jose said. “Once they see us play, see what we’re all about, it

all changes, they respect us, and it doesn’t matter what heritage — white, black, Hispanic.”

Jose was born in Mexico, then moved with his family to Bridgeport when he was just 4. He became a naturalized U.S. citizen along with his mom, dad, and two sisters in 1994, then relocated to Cicero. And though his sport is European, Jose considers himself an American who believes in his Mexican heritage.

“I tend to be more Americanized. Mexican families pride themselves in ‘family comes first,’ but that can set you back,” Jose said. “If that’s true, then I won’t be able to go to college.” He is carrying a 4.0 GPA but says he could be doing better since he’s in Advanced Placement classes.

“Once I told my parents I wanted to go out of state [for college], they freaked out, but I said, ‘Hey, it’s my choice, my life.’ Sooner or later, I have to pay for my own family.

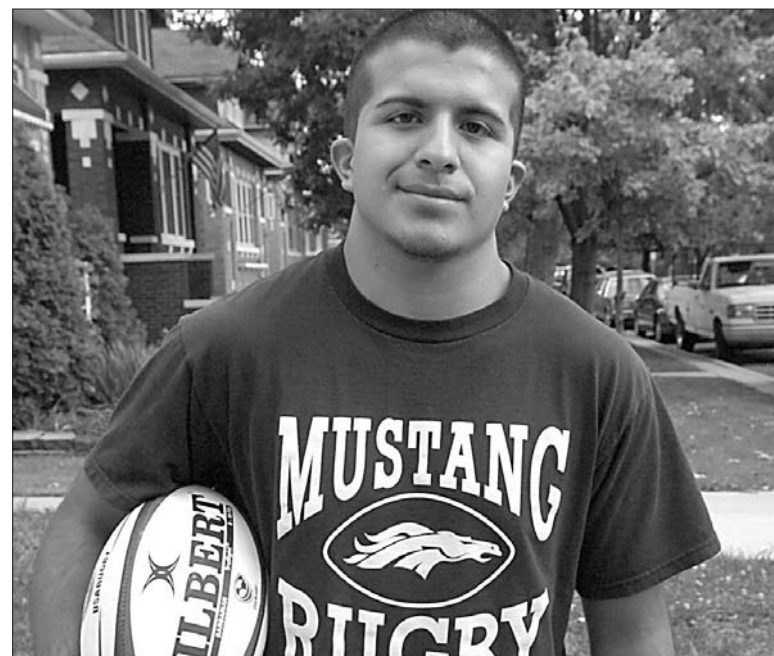
“I told them I’m going, and you can’t do anything to keep me back.

I’m going to live the American dream. They’re still pulling that ‘family comes first,’ ‘Mexican heritage’ stuff, but it’s not sticking to me that much. It’s my choice.”

Jose thinks his parents will get used to the idea — “They’re still debating, but when the time comes, hopefully they’ll understand my choice.” But his is not an unusual story. Most second-generation Hispanic kids straddle two worlds: one full of opportunity and one full of responsibility to get to work to help family here, and back home, thrive.

Of course, there are the fun parts, too. “I like it especially during Christmas, we celebrate in huge gatherings — I feel Hispanic being with family I don’t even know!”

Jose may also break with tradition in his love life, he says. “My parents have said, ‘I forbid you to go out with a white girl or a black girl’ — a common sentiment among many new immigrants — “I say, ‘Yeah, mom, I’ll go out with whoever I want.’ I don’t care what the color



Jose Jurado, a senior at Morton East High School and member of the Cicero-based Mustangs, holds a rugby ball last week. | AL PODGORSKI~SUN-TIMES

of their skin is . . . as long as they have good morals and attitudes.”

Jose’s parents, like all parents, will adapt. Till then, they’re working on preserving his heritage.

“I’m the heretic of the family — all my cousins and uncles play soccer. When we get together, they tell

me ‘You suck.’ They make me be goalie because I don’t know how to play.

“That’s OK, I’m just myself, I’ve created my identity. This is who I am. I don’t care whether you call me Hispanic, Mexican or American, I just am who I am.”