



1 in 7 children between the ages of 10 and 18 will run away from their homes

# “Get out of my house.”

by Christine Chang

Five words were all it took.

## “Get out of my house.”

And out the door he ran, through the dark of night, down streets, across parks, into friends' homes. He spent the next several weeks sleeping on other people's couches, Regnart Elementary's roof, and anywhere else that offered him space. Some mornings he lay alone on park benches. But no one went looking for him.

He was on his own.

For most of the summer between freshman and sophomore year, junior Kevin Chen lived the life of a suburban nomad, spending his days in several homes around Cupertino. After clashing with his dad repeatedly since middle school, Chen was accustomed to petty disputes that eventually expanded into incessant arguing. But as tempers flared and tensions between father and son grew increasingly volatile that summer, he became exasperated with the situation. When he could stand it no longer, Chen took his father's words literally and simply left the house.

“He always thinks he's like king, he's always right, and [I] have to listen to everything he says,” Chen said. “But it's not fair, because when [I] say my part of the case, he doesn't listen.”

And more often than not, that is precisely what drives kids out of their homes in a state of madness—parents who turn the other way when it comes to hearing what their kids have to say.

Whether it is grades, friends, or just small things, Student Advocate Richard Prinz maintains that parent-child problems usually arise not from specific issues, but from detrimental or ineffective habits of communication.

### feel like running away?

Make responsible decisions, stay safe, and seek help before making a choice—contact the following people specializing in runaway-type situations.

Talk to MVHS student advocate **Richard Prinz** in room D204.  
To report abuse or seek runaway-related emotional or legal advice, call the **Child Protective Services** at **(800) 856-5553**.

**CHILD CRISIS HOTLINE**  
**(415) 970-3800**

“When teenagers fight with their parents, it's usually practices that are at fault, rather than people—certain cultural upbringings,” Prinz said.

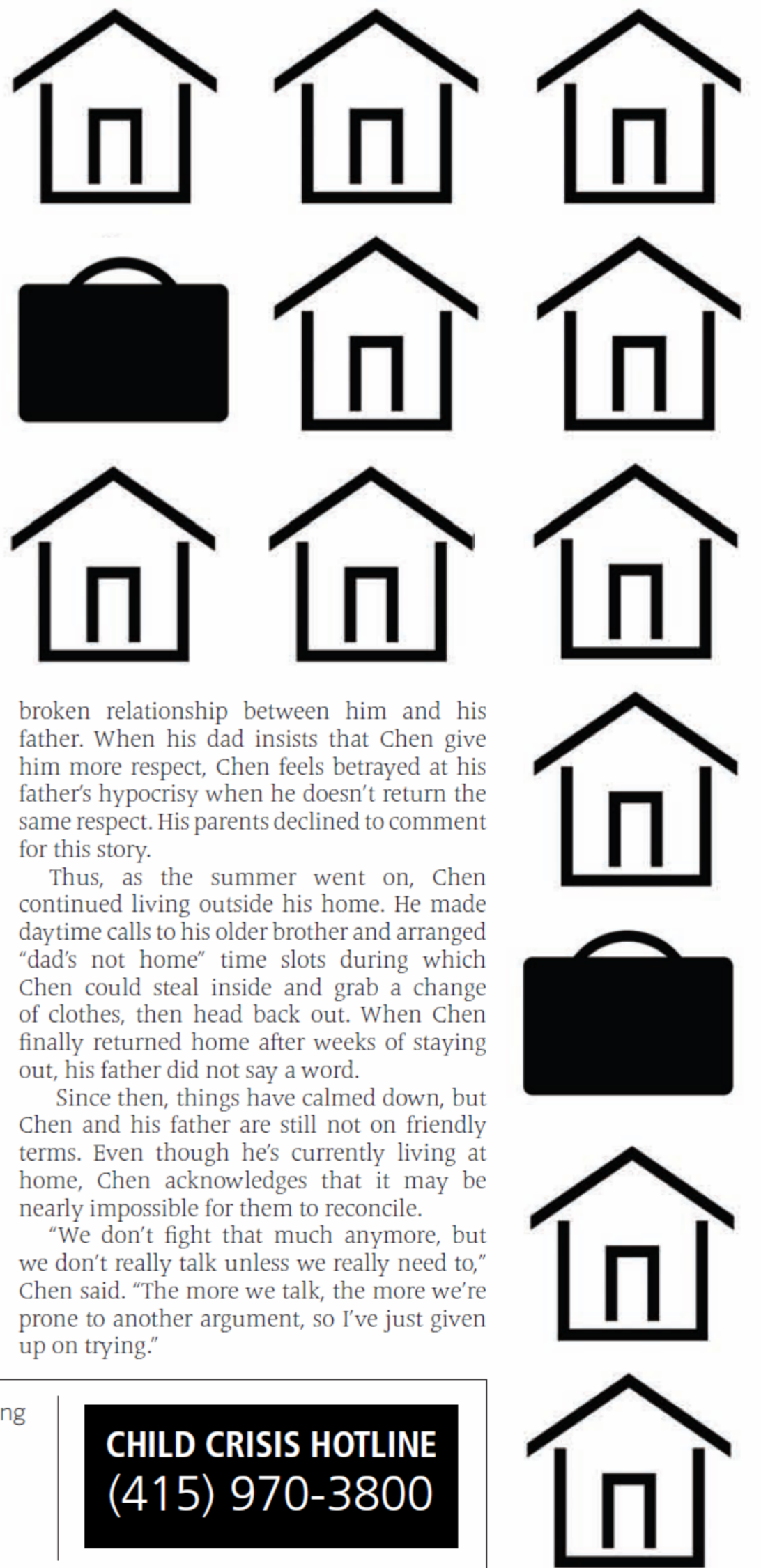
He encourages families shattered by conflicts to resolve and rebuild relationships through counseling, since it is one of the most supportive means of teaching parents sensible ways to deal with disagreements. Counseling helps prevent fighting between parents and children from getting to a point where the student feels physically or emotionally abused in their own home.

“I've often heard the saying that in America kids get grounded and sent to their room, while in Asia it's just like, ‘get out of the house,’” Prinz said. “Although I don't completely agree with that, I have to say, in some cultures it's pretty interesting what's okay to practice, what's considered the norm.”

Though other cultures may differ, American society has long been one to advocate liberal self-expression, and students know that. Since elementary school, many of students have been brought up with the concept that opinions do matter, that people should be open with our ideas, that freedom of speech is the law. So when those rights are violated, students often feel compelled to speak up.

“Whatever the issue, it often seems to be a power struggle, a style of interacting that happens when someone doesn't feel respected,” Prinz said. “Usually teens just want to be allowed to have a voice in their lives.”

With Chen, respect and grades are some of the biggest factors that contribute to the



broken relationship between him and his father. When his dad insists that Chen give him more respect, Chen feels betrayed at his father's hypocrisy when he doesn't return the same respect. His parents declined to comment for this story.

Thus, as the summer went on, Chen continued living outside his home. He made daytime calls to his older brother and arranged “dad's not home” time slots during which Chen could steal inside and grab a change of clothes, then head back out. When Chen finally returned home after weeks of staying out, his father did not say a word.

Since then, things have calmed down, but Chen and his father are still not on friendly terms. Even though he's currently living at home, Chen acknowledges that it may be nearly impossible for them to reconcile.

“We don't fight that much anymore, but we don't really talk unless we really need to,” Chen said. “The more we talk, the more we're prone to another argument, so I've just given up on trying.”

