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## Local Teens Celebrate Book Launch and Literacy Philanthropy

By *Sophie Braccini*



Teens volunteering at Be the Star You Are!  
(L to R): Rachel Glass, Elyse Kolnowski, Dani Wong, Gaby Gryko Photo Sophie Braccini

September 13 is the official launch of the book *Be the Star You Are! For Teens*, written by teens, for teens. This book is a sequel to Cynthia Brian's *Be the Star You Are!*, published five years ago, that celebrates life through real stories of people who make a difference in a variety of ways. The new book contains 38 contributions, 30 of them written by teenagers. The party to be held on September 13 in Moraga will commemorate ten years of literacy philanthropy by the non-profit organization *Be the Star You Are*.

When she started to volunteer at *Be the Star you Are* three years ago, Jacqueline Tao, a junior at Campolindo High School, didn't know that it would lead her to be a published author. When Brian got the idea of doing a teen version of her own book, she started a writing competition and asked her volunteers if they wanted to participate. "I wrote a text called the Gift of Simplicity," said Tao, "it was inspired by a visit I made to Tibet where I observed how very little materialistic things children needed there to be happy."

Each youth contribution is different and reflects on their

experience. Dana Wong wrote the Gift of Faith, inspired by the tragedy that hit her family when her father had a stroke. "I am very close to my father, I have a lot of respect for him," says the Campolindo Senior, "writing about his ordeal helped me voice my emotions." Wong and her family are very proud that she is now a published author. "It is very empowering to see that other people are interested in what you have to say," she adds.

Other contributions include the Gift of Daring by Rachel Glass, a junior at Las Lomas, and the Gift of Charity by Elyse Kolnowski, a senior at Carondelet High School in Concord.

Not all the contributors to the book are actively involved with the charity. Contributions came to Brian from all over the United States and the world. "They are all so different," says Brian, "they are unique and all bring a different piece of inspiration and hope."

Writers or not, all the members of *Be the Star You Are* are actively preparing for the party. All of the leaders but two are teen volunteers. "That's how they learn," says Brian, "we want to grow people and we let them make mistakes."

Gaby Gryco has been with the group for almost a year. She started while at Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School and is already co-chair of the book review team. For the celebration, she sells ad space on the program, calling businesses or visiting them. "I get pretty good response," she says.

The team is expecting 400-500 people to show up for the book-launch/anniversary dance party. Four different bands will play; food, drinks and mocktails will be served. Twelve of the thirty teen authors will be there to sign the book's first release. There will be a raffle and a silent auction; all proceeds (including present and future book sales) will entirely benefit the charity.

The event is on August 13, from 4:00- 9:00 p.m. at the Holy Trinity Cultural Center, 1700 School Street in Moraga. Tickets are \$13 in advance, \$20 at the door for standing/dancing (VIP tables for 10 \$713). Pre-buy the book and a party ticket for \$27.

For tickets and details go to: <http://www.bethestaryouare.org/10thAnniv.html>.

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