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**Her formula for success: believe:[1,2,3 Edition]**

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**Full Text** (730 words)

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It's Friday. Date night -- party time for most young people Amanda Austin's age.

But after school, Amanda, now a senior at San Diego High, will be on her way to work. And after that, there's an all-nighter to pull at home on a project for this year's countywide science fair.

There's also that test in class on Monday. She's got to make sure she's ready for that; doesn't want anything to knock her off course for another overall 4.0 accumulative grade point average.

Her thoughts, her actions on this day in early spring are typical for Amanda, a 17-year-old who, upon graduating from elementary school, went seeking a good science-minded junior high to attend.

It wasn't that she'd fallen in love with the subject.

It was that her elementary school never even had a science program and Amanda just wanted to be in a place where she could see if she was up to the challenge.

Since the seventh grade, she's either won or placed in a dozen or more science- and/or math-related annual competitions, including the prestigious Greater San Diego Science & Engineering Fair.

She won the coveted Kiwanis New Zealand Trip Sweepstakes Award at this year's fair.

Come Thursday, she'll be heading for a nearly three-week visit in the islands, where she'll discuss her project on the implications of Alzheimer's disease.

And Amanda spent her fourth summer training in a lab at UCSD School of Medicine. This stint, in which she worked in gene and cell research, was covered by the first National Institute of Health grant that the school has ever awarded to a high school student from a "minority group." UCSD officials are looking into extending her award into next summer.

Amanda is president of her senior class.

And sometimes friends feel compelled to just say, "Amanda, lighten up."

She knows why.

There's a hard-driver's edge to her that, despite her obvious popularity, doesn't always immediately win hearts.

"I've got an attitude," she says. "I feel this way, I'll run over you. The world is in competition out there and I'll do my best to win."

Much of the hard drive comes from bucking up against harsh reality.

Black and from a part of town to the southeast traditionally known for its economic struggles and with two parents, Michael and Melanie Austin, who are not scientists, Amanda isn't supposed to do what she does.

According to surveys and statistics, kids of color don't generally gravitate toward science and/or math. Blacks, in particular, are disproportionately underrepresented in both fields.

But Amanda shatters the profile and, at the same time, recognizes an obligation to be an example and guide for other youngsters who look like her.

That, she also knows, requires hard work and due diligence.

Long ago, she learned that behind the smiles and good intentions of the world, there are people scrutinizing you, judging you, forming opinions based on what you look like; where you live.

The lesson never came so clear as it did one day during an advanced biology class in her sophomore year.

A classmate, a wealthy young lady, with parents well-connected to the field of science, was planning to conduct an experiment in a common Dixie Cup.

Amanda suggested that the proper way to go about it would be in the sterile, controlled environment of a petri dish.

The young lady became indignant and sneered, as Amanda recalls: "Oh, how do you know that? What's your name? And where do you come from?"

"I knew what she was getting at," says Amanda. "That kind of stuff happens. But I don't let it bother me." She just lets it further motivate her.

And yet the Austin hard edge seems to melt as she talks more about her perceived place in the master plan. She wants to be a dentist because she sees, in the profession, a lot of potential for community involvement. Especially for a kid from around the way.

"Hey, I'm like the (grass roots) people out there -- I didn't have all the advantages," Amanda says. "And when they see me as a dentist, they'll be able to identify with me."

"And they'll know that they can do it, too."

**[Illustration]**

1 PIC; Caption: Amanda Austin finds time for fun and counts Michelangelo and Donatelo, her two pet African Spur-thighed tortoises, as among her best chums.; Credit: Peggy Peattie / Union-Tribune

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