School for Scandal

June 1, 2002 By Suzy Martin

Christina Hernandez says that she was shocked by opposition to the op-ed she penned for a special “prom” issue of *Pep o’ Plant*, the student newspaper of Plant High School in Tampa, Florida. “I never said, ’Distribute condoms at prom.’ I said that they should be available.... and if you need one, you can take one,” said the 18-year-old senior, smoothly stressing that she would prefer her classmates take Plant’s sex-ed abstinence vow. David Webb, the paper’s advisor, had signed off on the piece. But Principal Eric Bergholm balked, stopping the presses for three days to ponder reprinting the pages sans the “Face It: Sex Happens” op-ed and an accompanying survey of four students and the school security officer. (Yep, the kids were pro condom, but the cop voted nay.)

In the end, freedom of the press won out at Plant High, allowing Hernandez to escape the fate of nearby Blake High’s 2001 valedictorian, Lissette Stanley, who was 86’d from her commencement speech as punishment for her safe-sex activism. “Stanley defied her principal’s directions by surreptitiously slipping condoms into the prom gift bags along with the photo album and candle,” said school-district rep Mark Hart. “She engaged in civil disobedience.” No Thoreau, Hernandez graduates from Plant this month with the farewell wish that by September the administration will make condoms available through a nurse. Fat chance, says Hart. “We don’t feel it should appear that we’re promoting premarital or teenage sex.... This is a relatively conservative community.”

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