



- ◆ FEATURES
- ◆ RED ALL OVER
- ◆ FARM REPORT
- ◆ News
- ◆ Sports
- ◆ PLANET CARDINAL
- ◆ CLASS NOTES
- ◆ SHOWCASE
- ◆ DEPARTMENTS
- ◆ CLASSIFIEDS
- ◆ CONTACT US
- ◆ ADVERTISE
- ◆ MAKE A GIFT
- ◆ BACK ISSUES

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SPOTLIGHT: JEREMY IVERSEN

The Spy Semester



SENIORITIS: Iversen impersonated a student in Southern California.

Courtesy Jeremy Iversen

BACK CB9 FALL, Jeremy Iversen was a bored Stanford senior looking for something to do. He and some buddies dressed in green and left campus to cheer on neighboring Palo Alto High School in the "Little Big Game" between Palo Alto and Gunn high schools. When one of his friends approached some students, Iversen wondered if anyone thought the Stanford guys were high schoolers.

"These are my bros," Iversen remembers his friend saying. "They're going to transfer to Paly and they're worried that they won't have any friends here." Moments later, three high school cheerleaders were asking Iversen if he was excited about enrolling in their school.

That year, Iversen, a product of Phillips Exeter Academy, pitched an idea to the *Stanford Daily*: he would attend the public high school for two weeks and write about high school life. "The *Daily* said that we couldn't use the publication's name when trying to get into the school," Iversen says. "I had no credibility so I gave up." But only for a while.

A year later, Iversen was back at it. He had written a novel called *rush* for Simon & Schuster, and he next proposed a nonfiction book about being an undercover high school student. Aware that Cameron Crowe had done the same thing a quarter century ago for *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, Iversen notes that he wanted to explore the next generation. "These were the children of those children," he says, and lived in a "completely new universe."

No publisher would sign on to the project without proof that a school was going to let the 23-year-old through the door, so Iversen went from principal to principal, dressed in a suit and sporting a Stanford University folder full of papers and graphs, in an attempt to convince a school his plan had sociological merit. Thirty schools rejected him before one said yes. He enrolled as "Jeremy Hughes" and called the school "Mirador High" in his ensuing book, *High School Confidential: Secrets of an Undercover Student* (Atria).

Iversen abided by two rules: he would initiate no illegal activity and he would not have intimate contact with any student. He changed names and mixed up anecdotes to disguise the identity of the school's denizens, and he describes his book as "a true story, within limits." Student journalists at Claremont High School identified Mirador as their school when Iversen started to promote his project. A Claremont classmate, now one of Iversen's friends, was surprised, but accepting, when he learned of the undercover act. "I just thought he was another precocious teenager."

Not everyone was so understanding. Parents and teachers were shocked that the school admitted Iversen and let him write the project for personal gain, according to *The Wolfpacket*, Claremont's student newspaper.

But Iversen says most of the responses he has received have been positive. He's now working to make a movie from the book with himself in a lead role.

—BRIAN EULE, '01

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