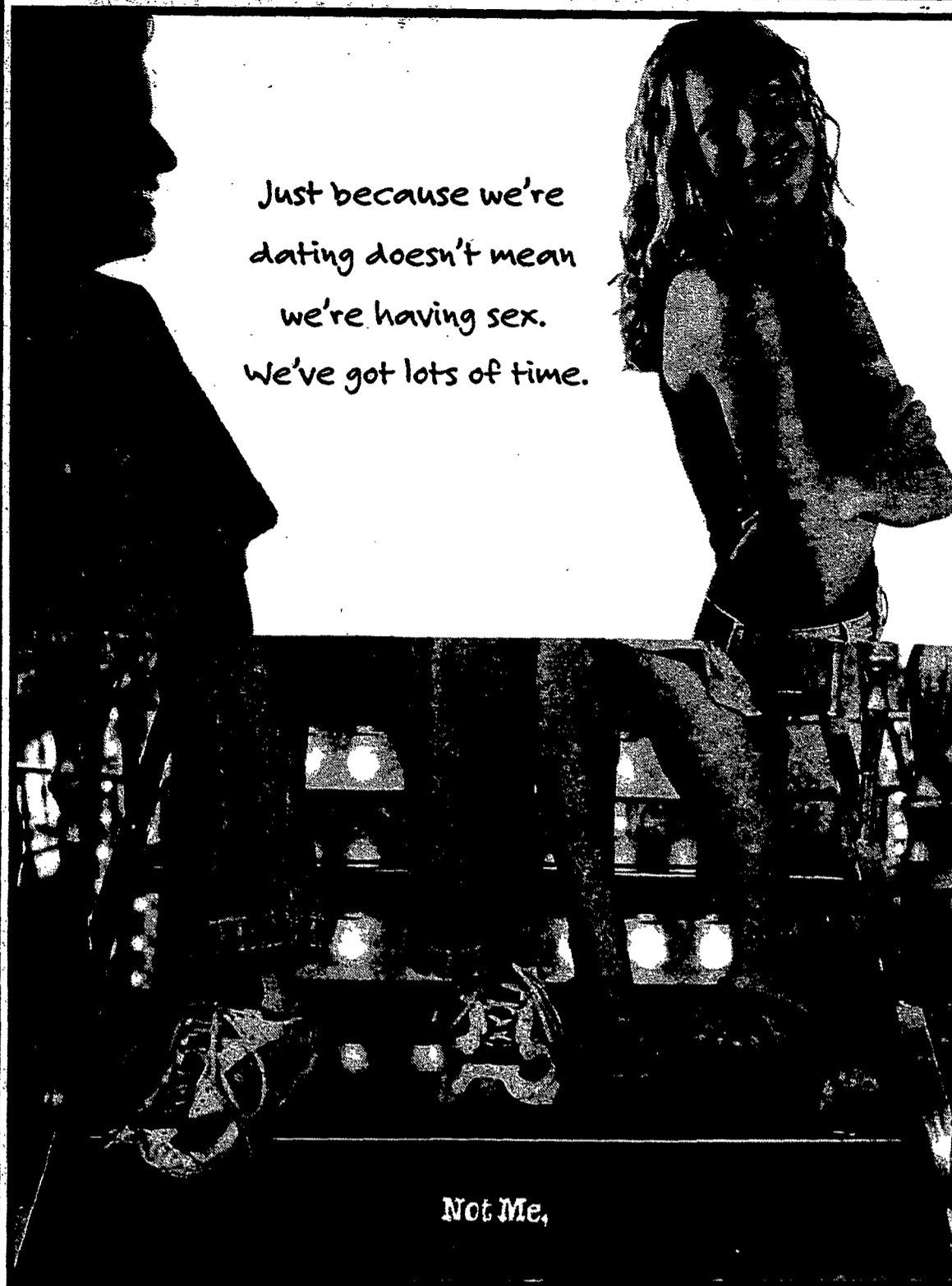


NOT ME, NOT NOW

STORY BY
MIKE LATONA



Just because we're
dating doesn't mean
we're having sex.
We've got lots of time.

Not Me,

Richie Randall, left, and McKenzie Miller can be seen on posters in schools, doctors' offices and libraries in the Rochester area as part of the "Not Me, Not Now" campaign.

Not Richie, not now

A message of sexual abstinence may not set well with all teenagers. Then again, Richie Randall didn't join the "Not Me, Not Now" media campaign simply to become popular.

"I knew I'd get people saying stuff. I guess you'd say I knew the risk going in," said Richie, 17, a parishioner at St. Christopher in North Chili. "But I believe in it; it wasn't hard. If one person decides not to (have sex) now, it's worth it."

As it's turned out, Richie has gotten quite a favorable reaction to his appearance in television ads, on posters and on the "Not Me, Not Now" Web site www.notmenotnow.org. Although some of Richie's peers have mildly poked fun at him in a group setting, he noted that

"when you're alone with them they're like, 'It's really cool you can do that.'"

Begun in 1994, "Not Me, Not Now" is a state-funded, Monroe County program that advocates sexual abstinence among teens. Richie's involvement with the campaign began last spring when he tried out for a new series of TV commercials. The selection process began with hundreds of teens and involved several auditions.

While Richie was excited about the prospect of being on TV, he also said he was attracted to "Not Me, Not Now" because he'd be "standing for something good." He learned that his convictions made a big difference in being chosen because part of the selection process was based on candidates' responses to questions about sexual abstinence. "You could tell some people were trying too hard to tell them what they wanted to hear," Richie said.

After learning that he'd made the final cut, Richie spent two days last summer taping the TV commercial at Minerva Deland School in Fairport. The ad depicts "Tommy," played by Richie, and a girl he's just beginning to date. He tells a friend "Dating does not mean having sex" and then informs the new girlfriend — played by McKenzie Miller, 15, of Penfield — that he doesn't plan to pressure her. "Thanks for being so cool about this," she says. "Sure, no problem," he replies as the commercial ends.

Later in the summer, Richie and McKenzie reconvened at a studio for a picture to be used for the upper portion of the poster shown on this page. Then it was off to the Mall at Greece Ridge Center to shoot the bottom part (they're sitting on the steps of the mall's carousel).

The commercial and poster were released during the fall. The ads appear periodically on Rochester-area television

stations, and the posters are displayed in such public settings as schools, doctors' offices and libraries. One poster is even on a classroom wall at Churchville-Chili High School, where Richie is a senior.

"It's funny — it's like, 'Wow, that's me!'" he said.

Richie's affiliation with "Not Me, Not Now" has continued through his recent involvement in a workshop that offered parents tips on discussing sex with their teens. Richie portrayed a teen whose father (played by Dr. Dennis Boike, co-facilitator of the workshop series) catches him reading a pornographic magazine. The skit demonstrated how parents should calmly discuss such situations with their children rather than lash out at them.

Richie is a senior class officer at Churchville-Chili. He ran on the Saints' 2001 Section 5 champion boys' cross-country team. At St. Christopher, he is an active youth-group member and received a diocesan Hands of Christ award last fall. The honor recognizes high-school seniors for outstanding contributions to their church, parish and/or community.

Richie acknowledged that he enjoys dating and has "been in situations where I could have had sex, but I didn't." He said he strives to live out the ideals of "Not Me, Not Now" so he can be a role model for his friends and, especially, for his two younger brothers.

Practically speaking, Richie said it's good to abstain from sex due to "all the consequences that could occur from just one moment." Also factoring heavily in his stance is adherence to Catholic teaching that sexual intercourse is a gift for married couples only.

"It's something that does influence me. I think I am pretty strong in my faith," he said.

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