

# Friends of St. Lawrence Watts Youth Center



## In Their Own Words

by Ana Cuellar

“Lista”, I sighed as we loaded the last suitcase onto the truck. It was the evening of Sunday, August 30th, 2009, a cool summer night in LA—what I would later come to appreciate as a warm night on the East Coast. I took one last look around me before jumping into the truck. Past the Wadsworth Ave street sign and the latest graffiti addition of the Backstreet Crips on our neighbor’s block fence, a pair of sneakers hung from the telephone line. “Ya es hora”, my mother called from inside the truck. And before I knew it, we had passed Nickerson Gardens and were speeding down the 105 West, leaving behind us the barking of stray dogs and the buzz of the ghetto bird. We were headed toward LAX. Final destination—Providence, Rhode Island.

A year and a half later, the nervousness of my first journey to Brown University has melted away. The private Ivy League university on College Hill has become more than a mere collection of Georgian style buildings gathered around lush greens; I have come to know it as a place that has challenged me academically, emotionally, spiritually, socially, and financially and has thereby guided me toward becoming the person I am meant to become. At Brown, I have developed many interests, and while I have yet to declare a concentration, I am seriously considering Brown’s Public Policy and American Institutions concentration, focusing specifically on education reform. I serve the Brown community as a Campus Center Information Specialist at the Stephen Robert Center, a Presidential Host for President Ruth Simmons, a Meiklejohn Peer Advisor for first-year students, Secretary for Machado Spanish House, a member of the First Gen group, and a member of a forum called \$ocial Classmates that brings Brown

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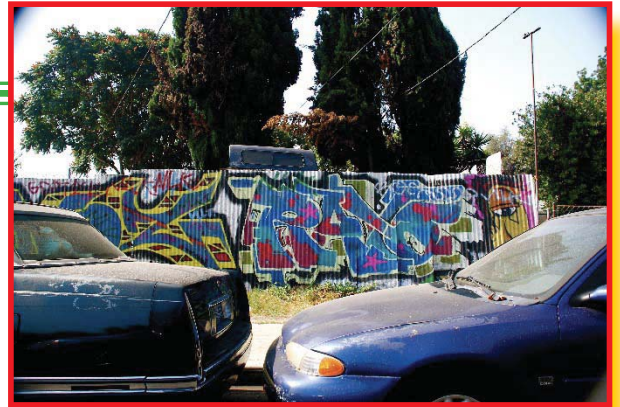
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students together to discuss class-related issues.

Brown has been a great fit for me, and I am enjoying it very much. But the opportunities I have had at Brown would not be available to me without the support and encouragement of so many individuals. The financial support I received from the Friends of St. Lawrence, in particular, helped to set the stage for what would later be a very satisfying and enriching college career. Without the help of the Friends of St. Lawrence, I would not have had the opportunity to pursue a Catholic education at St. Lawrence Brindisi School and thereafter at Notre Dame Academy, for paying full tuition at such schools was impossible for our family of five children. Yet it was at these Catholic schools that I found the attention and challenging environment I needed to excel academically and ultimately attend and succeed at an Ivy League institution.

When people ask me what has sparked my interest in education reform and public policy, I think back to those days spent studying times tables and grammar inside the little red brick building that is St. Lawrence. I was lucky to have the support of the Friends of St. Lawrence to make my academic endeavors possible. But without their help, I may have been yet another victim of the public school system, lost amidst thousands of students in an environment that often does not foster aca-



ademic success and college enrollment. I strongly believe that the opportunity to excel academically should not be limited to a select few. Through my story, I hope to highlight the importance of continuing to create opportunities like the ones I had for our youth, and thereby paving the way for their successful futures.

For more on Ana's journey check out "From Watts to the Ivy League", by R. W. Dellinger in the September 10, 2010 issue of *The Tidings*: <http://www.the-tidings.com/2010/091010/ana.htm>

*Friends* is very proud of Ana and all our scholarship students. We believe all students should have the chance to succeed regardless of where they live. Without these scholarships, students in the Watts area may be forced to attend one of the worst gang infested middle schools and high schools in the country. A 2005 Loyola Marymount University survey of 200 Los Angeles inter-city catholic schools found that 97.5% of students graduated from high school on time and continued on to college.

Thanks to our generous donors *Friends* has awarded over \$600,000 in grade school and high school scholarships since 2005. These scholarships give the students the gift of learning in a safe and nurturing environment where they are enriched and encourage to excel.

