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Roger Williams University School of Law

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Newsroom

Mom at 16, law degree at 26

The Providence Journal's Ed Fitzpatrick tells the story of Misty Delgado '11, who beat incredible odds to earn her J.D. from RWU Law -- plus a Masters in Criminal Justice.

From the Providence Journal: "[Mom at 16, law degree at 26](#)" by Edward Fitzpatrick



BRISTOL, R.I., May 29, 2011: Misty Grace

Delgado '11 is the only one who ever received the full \$25.

Over the years, **Assistant U.S. Attorney Richard W. Rose** has spoken to some 25,000 students, urging them to avoid guns and gangs as part of the Street Smarts program. He gives a pop quiz during each presentation, offering \$5 per correct answer. He asks, for example, who is the governor? Who is the superintendent of schools? Also, what is fratricide? (Answer: the act of killing one's own brother or sister.)

Rose said Delgado is the only student who has ever answered all the questions without assistance. She did it in 2003, when she was a junior at Hope High School. And she used that money to buy diapers for her daughter, who was downstairs at the school's daycare when Rose spoke to her class.

This month, Delgado received something even more valuable. The 26-year-old Providence resident — who began bouncing around foster homes and group homes at age 4, whose mother struggled with drug addiction and worked as a prostitute, whose father cycled in and out of prison, facing charges up to and including murder — walked across the stage at Roger Williams University to accept her law degree. Rose, her mentor, was there to present it to her.

At this time of the year, the air is filled with platitudes as graduation speakers quote dead poets and utter clichés about going forth and spreading your wings. This year, perhaps the most genuine, practical, inspirational message comes not from one of those esteemed speakers but from one of the many graduates beneath the mortarboards.

“You don’t have to be from some upscale neighborhood with money and a perfect life to get where you want to go,” Delgado said. “You just have to be motivated.”

What would she say to students facing the problems she faced — poverty, family chaos, teenage pregnancy? “Just know that it gets better,” she said. “For me it was always: Failure is not an option.”

Delgado said she made it with the support of friends and family, including her grandfather, aunt and uncle. She made it by harnessing the negative energy of those who wanted her to fail, setting out to prove them wrong. She made it by working two or three jobs at a time, even when she was in school.

Rose said Delgado is responsible for her own success. He quoted from a song by the band America: “Oz never did give nothing to the Tin Man that he didn’t, didn’t already have.” He said, “That sums up Misty. It’s always been inside of her. It just needed to be nurtured.”

When Rose came to Hope, Delgado saw in him what she wanted to be. And he saw in her some of the same struggles, plus some of the same determination, he’d had growing up.

“We had both been in foster homes,” Rose said. “We were both a little rough around the edges sometimes.”

Rose lived in the Manton Avenue projects, met his father for the first time when he was 7, and spent five years at the former St. Aloysius orphanage in Smithfield. He dropped out of high school and joined the Marines before going on to the Community College of Rhode Island, Rhode Island College and Northeastern University law school.

Delgado dropped out of school at 14. She said she passed the test to get into Classical High School but couldn’t go there because she had no permanent address. After being out of school for two years, she went to Hope and wound up near the top of her class, serving as class president her junior and senior years.

Rose said that when he spoke at Hope, Delgado stood out as being “on point with all the questions” and “feisty.”

Delgado said she approached Rose after his presentation and asked if there were any internships available at the U.S. Attorney's Office. "I always knew I was going to be a lawyer," she said.

Rose said he gave her his card and suggested she e-mail him. "I do that frequently, and most don't follow up," he said. Delgado followed up, and soon she was a receptionist at the U.S. Attorney's Office in downtown Providence.

In 2004, Delgado graduated from Hope. **In 2008, she graduated from Roger Williams University with a bachelor's degree in criminal justice. On May 20, she received both a law degree and master's degree in criminal justice from Roger Williams University. School officials allowed her to receive her diploma from Rose.**

Delgado is now studying for the bar exam and looking for a job as a lawyer. (She can be reached through the law school.) She said she's interested in being a prosecutor or public defender, and she'd love to handle a case alongside Rose some day.

"I wouldn't want to be the one who faces her in court because she is not going to be easily intimidated," Rose said. "When you raise your child on your own from 16, this part is a piece of cake."

Delgado is also interested in representing youths in state care or the justice system, and she'd like to start a group home for pregnant teens and teenage mothers.

She now works in a group home in Warwick, bringing her share of "been there, done that" wisdom to the task. On Thursday, she braided the hair of a resident who was going to his senior prom. When he asked if he had to pay her, she said, "No. You go have fun, but don't get anybody pregnant."

Delgado is already advising her 10-year-old daughter, Mahogany Braxton, to steer clear of drama in school. She noted a recent dispute over a boyfriend led to a fight that killed a 17-year-old in the Camp Street neighborhood where she grew up. She said she's seen boyfriend/girlfriend disputes and East Side/West Side feuds soak up energy, diverting people from making the most of their lives. "Stay focused on school," she said. "Stay focused on tomorrow."

During Street Smarts presentations, Rose now cites Delgado as a role model, and he recently returned to Hope with her. She told the students: I sat in your seats. I was exactly where you are right now, and now I'm here. You can do it. They can take everything from you: your freedom, your home, your family. But they can't take your education from you. They can't take your knowledge.

For full story, click [here](#).

