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# How Misty made it happen

01:00 AM EDT on Thursday, June 17, 2004

**BY KAREN A. DAVIS**  
Journal Staff Writer

PROVIDENCE -- Misty Delgado has defied odds and statistics that would have painted a gloomy picture of her future.

Born to a mother struggling with drug addiction, by age 15 Misty had taken on such labels as ward of the state, runaway, high school dropout and soon-to-be teenage mother.

She had experienced the sorrow of having friends die at the rate of two or three per year, and had spent eight months living with an older boyfriend whom she thought she loved.

Despite the labels, Misty, now 19, had something that does not factor into statistics: an overpowering will to succeed.

"For me, failure really wasn't an option," said Misty, who received her diploma at the Hope High School graduation ceremony last night.

Instead of becoming a statistic, she decided while she was pregnant that she had to go back to high school because "that's what I was

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supposed to be doing."

She chose to enroll at Hope High School, rather than "take the easy way out" by earning a GED, she said.

"I realized when I had my daughter that nobody was going to support her but me," Misty said in a recent interview. "I wanted to go back to school and do it right."

While the move was right for Misty, it was not easy.

"When I returned to school in September of 2000, I hadn't been to school in over a year," she said. "I was two years older than almost everyone in my classes."

She adjusted to a life that combined the responsibilities of a single mother and a high school student, and left little room for anything else. She also began to think more about her long-term future and setting an example for her daughter, rather than being dependent on others or waiting for her then-boyfriend to make her happy.

Over the last two years, she has matured into a different person than she was when she ran away at 14 from the stable home provided by her aunt and uncle, Marilyn and Danny Lopes.

She now credits the Lopeses and her extended network of cousins for instilling in her the values that enabled her to beat the odds and find her way back to the road to success.

"I knew right from wrong; I just wasn't doing it," she said.

The old Misty didn't listen or take advice because she believed she knew everything and that others could not understand what she was going through.

The Misty of today does not burn bridges and listens to what other people have to say, even if

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she disagrees.

"Even though they may not have been through my exact situation, most people have been through some situation," she says. And she has become the type of person who finds value in past experience and feelings.

Misty, who now lives on her own, says her 3-year-old daughter, Mahogany, has become her No. 1 motivator. But Misty is the first to admit that she made mistakes that caused her to grow up too quickly.

While many teens are concerned only with their own needs, hanging with friends, and the latest fashion and music, Misty's life consists of a routine driven by motherhood.

This school year, which she describes as "a blur," her schedule included getting herself and Mahogany to school and daycare on time; maintaining her jobs at the U.S. Attorney's office and at a retail store; getting her daughter to ballet class in East Providence; and attending twice monthly meetings of the Explorer's Law Enforcement chapter at the city Police Training Academy.

She serves as president of the Student Council and president of Hope High's Leadership Academy.

Next fall, she will take on a new role: Roger Williams University student. She plans to study criminal justice and earn a law degree.

While she is not sure that she will practice law as a career, Misty is determined to counsel youths and be a resource for teens who might be facing the same obstacles that she did.

Having overcome trials, she believes she will be able to reach wayward teens who are yearning for guidance and just need someone to talk to them, tell them to take a deep breath and "chill

out."

Often tapped for advice by her peers, Misty does not bite her tongue when it comes to giving it to teen girls. Her advice remains constant: "He. Doesn't. Love. You." So stay focused on education and making a good life for yourself.

While Misty is somewhat surprised by the attention she has received, others have lauded her accomplishments.

Hope High School principal Nancy Mullen describes her as "an intelligent, very personable young lady" who is not shy about speaking up for what she believes in.

When Mullen interviewed for the principal's job at Hope more than two years ago, she recalls meeting Misty.

Mullen was meeting with a group of students to answer their questions and address their concerns. Misty stood up and told Mullen that she was representing a group of teens who had heard that Mullen was strict in her job as principal of Mount Pleasant High.

"What she was requesting that I bring to her school was structure," Mullen said. "I was dumbfounded by the maturity and by the fact that a kid would ask for me to be strict . . . It was so grown up.

"I just think she's wonderful," Mullen said. "She will make a great advocate because of the passion that she brings" to what she believes in.

In addition to inspiring and advising teens in her family and at school, Misty inspires adults.

Sarah Gleason, director of Reach Out & Read Rhode Island, used to tutor Misty when she attended Holy Name School, and remembers her as "a really smart little girl."

Gleason, who has kept in contact with Misty over the years, said she is "totally impressed with how she managed to get herself back together" after dropping out of the private middle school.

Misty's mother, Felicia Delgado, who is recovering from her addiction, said she is "truly overwhelmed and proud of her. I believe that she has the hand of God over her."

"She beat every one of my expectations, and she's my inspiration, actually," Delgado said.

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