

# YAJAYRA CRUZ

## EAST HIGH SENIOR SAYS GOODBYE TO HIGH SCHOOL

Grow up. Those are words high school seniors often hear those words when they are on their way to adulthood. What happens if you were forced to grow up at a very young age. Or that you had to take on roles that some people wouldn't take at that age. Senior Yajayra Cruz experienced tragedies that has shaped her into who she is by making her into the strong individual she is.

Cruz grew up in a very close family with her parents and two younger siblings. She was always seen as a role model for them and often took care of them. In 2013, her father was involved in an

accident causing him to be paralyzed. He traveled back to Mexico and had to stay there to receive medical care, leaving Cruz with just her mother and siblings.

"My life flashed before my eyes and I had to step up and be a mom to two kids because of my dad having an accident. Since that day, my life never was the same happy, joyful family. Even (with how) the circumstances were, we tried our best being happy," Cruz said.

Cruz had to mature at a young age, helping her mother out by taking on the role of taking care of her siblings. Her main priority was family.

"We've always been close, we've been through a lot together and always managed to keep our heads up. My parents always taught me to look out for others and take care of my siblings. They are my life to this day, I would do anything to see them happy or I'd do anything so they won't go through pain," Cruz said.

Cruz's junior year was one of her toughest years. Cruz lost her mother that year affecting her drastically.

"I was at the point of dropping out 'cause I had no hope in myself at all from losing my mother since she was my biggest supporter in anything I ever did. It was hard getting back on my two feet and walking back to school knowing I had to try my best even though deep down I was broken," Cruz said.

Cruz suffered emotionally and mentally. On top of that she had to take care of both her siblings and basically took on the role of a mother.

"It was a very emotional roller coaster for me. There were days that I thought it wasn't for me, that I wasn't going to be able to accomplish much but thanks to many people, staff and friends, I was able to push and keep going," Cruz said.

Cruz made sure to not only

care for her siblings but to also keep up with her studies. She had a lot of help from her friends and teachers.

"During the time she was dealing with her mother's illness, she had to step up and be her mom's caretaker, 'mom' to her siblings and try to continue to be a student. She had tough days, but she never gave in. She has goals for herself and although it could take her time to get there, she can do anything she puts her mind to. I cannot wait to see where life takes her," Central campus teacher Jennifer Eppert said.

Because of help from loved ones, she made sure to value her education and try her best for her mother.

"I saw no hope or point of graduating since my mother wouldn't be there but I got the idea of knowing I was going to do it for her. That's all she wanted for me," Cruz said.

Once senior year came, Cruz realized that one thing she regrets is that she wasn't as involved with school as she would have liked to be. For her first three years she was part of cheerleading and then joined track the past year.

"Don't doubt yourself if you want to join anything like a club, just join it. It's only four years and you're never going to go back," Cruz said.

In the fall, Cruz will be attending DMACC to become a registered nurse. She hopes later she can transfer to Grandview. Cruz is also looking into getting her real estate license this summer.

"When my dad was in a coma, I saw how much they helped him. It made me want to do it even more. When I would go with my mom to her chemo it gave me more hope of actually becoming someone in the medical career. Health class at central tracks the past year. Health class at different facilities and I hope one day I'll become a nurse," Cruz said.

With everything Cruz has gone through, she is excited to make her family and close ones proud of the direction she is choosing for her future.

"She had made me realize that strength comes in a variety of packages; she might look small, but she is fierce, determined and has strength that is admirable," Eppert said.



Page Editor/F.Centeno  
Photo/L.Flores  
Story/F.Centeno