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Running for the Best Cause: Gratitude

Born in the Bronx, Stephanie Frias knows what a tough neighborhood looks like. That's why she's keen on remembering her roots and finding ways to give back: "My dream is for everyone to remember the need to be thankful. Sometimes we forget the people who made us become who we are."

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**Tell us a little about yourself.
Where are you from, and what do
you do for work?**

My name is Stephanie Frias. I am a proud New Yorker. I was born and raised in the Bronx, New York, and am currently working at Brilla Public Charter Schools in the Bronx, doing Community Outreach and Student Recruitment. I am grateful to have this time to give back to my community. Before this, I was a program coordinator at IESE Business School, working at the New York campus in Manhattan. I also spent a year teaching in South Korea, where I helped train Korean and other foreign teachers. Additionally, I worked in operations for MAC Cosmetics, also in New York City.

For the past year, you have been training to run the New York City Marathon to fundraise for the South Bronx Educational

Foundation (SBEF), which supports the Rosedale Center for girls and the Crotona Center for boys. Can you comment both on how you decided to run and why you wanted to support this foundation specifically?

Five years ago, I went to see the New York City Marathon. It was genuinely inspiring, especially seeing the runners at mile 16. They were so exhausted at this point, but they kept on running! It was then that I realized that an alumna of Rosedale should run the race as well, as a way of motivating current Rosedale girls. The following year, a Rosedale alumna did run, but she decided to opt out this year. So I decided to run. Training this year, I realized that the real motive goes beyond setting an example. It's about giving back to SBEF: fundraising for them and never forgetting the good it has done for me as a woman today.

**How did you discover Rosedale/
SBEF? How long have you known
about it, and what have you taken
away from your experience there?**

I discovered Rosedale through my mother. She wanted me to attend a program in which I could grow in character, nurture a spirit of service, and have fun activities to do after school. She found Rosedale by word of mouth. Throughout the years, I came to love Rosedale. I did most of the activities from the third grade up to high school. It included tutoring, voice lessons, cooking, arts and crafts, and classes about character development. These character development classes would also help us see that Catholic teaching hit close to home. For example, in covering charity, we discussed the importance of supporting our parents with chores. Lastly, I did the job training program in high school through which I learned essential skills for

my professional work. I did different internships covering law, real estate, and horticulture.

Regarding education in the United States, there are a lot of differences based on geography, context, resources available, etc. In places where resources are scarce, what do you consider to be the most important element for educators to keep in mind?

I think the most crucial element is character development. An educator can help a child achieve all the brilliance in the entire universe, but if they do not guide that child to possess good virtues such as joy and courage, then I genuinely believe it will hold the child back, since they will never learn how to use their academic achievement to actually serve their community and the rest of the world.

Saint Josemaria spoke about educational initiatives that would "train people in personal freedom and in personal responsibility." Could you comment on this vision?

Saint Josemaria wanted everyone to be aware of the good that there is in the world and to understand it. In this way, we can know how to choose it and express it to others. Rosedale does just that through their initiatives in helping girls with their homework after school. Rosedale also helps students grow in their creative elements, whether it's through field trips, arts and craft classes, private voice lessons. As the girls become women, it even helps them to find jobs that are dignified. Every person should enjoy dignified work.

What are your dreams for the future, both personally and for society at large? What would you

like to see change (if anything), and in what areas specifically?

My dream is for everyone to remember the need to give back and to be thankful. Sometimes we forget where we came from, and the people who made us become who we are.

The New York City Marathon will take place on November 3rd.

Unfortunately, due to injury, you will have to sit out the race. Do you think you'll try again next year?

Yes, I plan to run the NYC marathon in 2020! I deferred my entry to next year because I do not want to give up or give in. I want to show that giving back is all worth it, even if it means a struggle sometimes. Next time, I will take everything I learned from this training experience, especially a deepened sense of gratitude for the small things in life (like being able to run!) Honestly, I've disliked the whole training process: it's been

pretty sacrificial. I always think of that Jim Gaffigan joke: "When did marathon runners confuse 'I can't breathe' with joy?!" Although I think I will continue to make fun of runners (including myself), I also believe I will grow in appreciation for the discipline and hard work it requires. By the way, I still need to fundraise for this year, so I appreciate any donations.

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