

**M**idway into his freshman year at Vallejo High School in 2019, Victor Paredes's mom pulled him out, fearing for his safety after learning he had joined a gang. "My mom wanted me to go to school there so I could be with my sisters," Victor explains. "I learned that the girls had it easy. The boys were given the hard part. I fought a lot; there was pressure to choose an affiliation." After taking him out of Vallejo, Victor's mom enrolled him at Hanna Center High School.

Four years later, Victor is a recent 'Super Senior' graduate, earning his high school diploma in December 2022. "I'm sad to leave on a lot of levels," he says. "The kids here felt like the brothers I never had. But I know they can take care of themselves. We've grown up together; I love them to death." One of Victor's favorite parts of being at Hanna was following some of his passions. He had trained in multiple martial arts since he was young and had some boxing experience, but it wasn't until he arrived at Hanna that he started to seriously pursue it. A staff member designed a weekly program that led the students through training, ending with an opportunity for them to spar together. Unfortunately, the pandemic shut the program down, but



Victor stuck with the sport on his own time and is interested in possibly pursuing it as a career. He also has options to join his dad in construction and his uncle in landscaping; barber school is another possibility.

Victor inherited his dad's natural ability to work well with children. "He was the oldest of seven and was really like the third parent to his siblings," Victor says. He also learned from his dad that whenever he felt like giving up, if he came back, he was "that much stronger." Before his dad received a work permit, he did

odd jobs to support the family. Victor contributed financially at a young age when he took up painting custom designs on sneakers. "I was artistic, and my mom encouraged me to paint," he says. "I started painting on my friend's shoes and soon people were paying me for it." One of Victor's happiest memories is from 2010 when his father kicked the winning goal in a local soccer league championship. "My whole family was there," he says. "I remember his team carried him on their shoulders. Someone tossed him the Mexican flag, and he started waving it."

When looking at photos from his short stint at Vallejo High, Victor comments on the big difference he sees in himself. "I was wearing all one color, doing a lot of dumb stuff," he describes. "Hanna woke me up. I evolved from a lowlife to someone who wants to be somebody." He adds that the people who worked there truly cared about him. "The staff members and faculty—many were role models who helped me find myself," he says. "They made my life worth living. I didn't know what I was worth until I got there."



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