

Oh, the sweet spell of achievement

The words loaded slowly, letter by letter, backward. Sam Regalado couldn't bear to watch, so he draped a shirt over the computer monitor while the dial-up slowly brought the news into his Meadowview home.

"All day, I'd been telling myself, 'If I didn't get in, I didn't get in,'" he says now, remembering that evening in late March.

He'd already been accepted to six universities, including UC Davis, and that was huge.

"UC Davis was my Stanford," says Regalado, 18. "It was my Harvard and Yale combined. I knew I'd go to Davis if Berkeley didn't work out."

Up came the letters, backward: "I...L...E...U...M...A...S..."

"I'm thinking I'm not getting



**ANITA
CREAMER**

in, and they're really sticking it in my face," he says.

And then he peeked at the screen again and saw "Congratulations, Samuel!" His mother broke down in tears, and he fell to the floor in disbelief. At the end of June, he enrolls in Berkeley's Summer Bridge program, and in August, he begins his freshman year there.

The odds were stacked against him.

It's a quiet morning on the Oak Park campus of Christian Brothers High School, which

Regalado attended on scholarship. He graduated in May with a 4.17 grade-point average. More than 20 relatives traveled from as far away as Wisconsin to watch him cross the stage in Memorial Auditorium.

"They cheered for him," says Kristen McCarthy, the school's communications director.

"They definitely did."

"In my family, having a high school diploma is huge," says Regalado. "My sister was the first female."

That's Sylvia, now 22, a Christian Brothers alumna who's on the cusp of graduating from Davis with a psychology degree.

"And I'm the first male," he says.

A third sibling, 11-year-old
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He wants to give back

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Selena, is still at home.

"There isn't a father figure in my family for her," says Regalado. "I try my best to be there for her and let her know what's right. I feel that's my duty. I have to guide her."

When Sam was 7, his father died of a drug overdose. The family was left shattered, struggling along below the poverty line. But from the beginning, his mother, Bernadette Sandoval, who works as a medical assistant, insisted that education was the key to her children's future.

"I'm trying to make sure they're on the right road," she says.

She moved the family from a small Oak Park apartment to Meadowview so she could send them to school in the Pocket. Good thing: When Sam left the first grade in Oak Park, he says, he still didn't know his ABCs.

Regalado entered high school as part of the 11-month Students Achieving Greater Educational Success (SAGES) program for struggling freshmen, and he left after taking honors courses as well as community college classes in pre-calculus.

There's a maturity about him, a seriousness, a sense of gratitude. Because he's had to work hard, he doesn't take what he has for granted.

"I realize how blessed and lucky I've been to attend this school," he says. "I could easily have slipped through the cracks. My father did. Numerous relatives. I'm living in Meadowview. I see the surroundings here in Oak Park. I know what that's about."

He's lived in two worlds. Kids

tian Brothers, he says. And lots of his Christian Brothers classmates wouldn't dream of spending time in Meadowview.

Now he's caught between the past and the future, too. Scholarships and grants will pay for much of his education. Donors from Christian Brothers are paying for a laptop.

Sam Regalado thinks he'd like to be a doctor. He's also interested in politics, because he wants to give back.

"I have something to do," he says. "I can't just say I feel bad for people who are low-income, because I'm part of that."

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