

# Honoring LAETICIA CERDAS

BY NEHA DOPPALAPUDI | PHOTOGRAPHY BY JIM PRISCHING

## Her Way Forward

**A**LTHOUGH IT IS IMPOSSIBLE to encapsulate a personality in a single word, 'determined' might be the one for Laeticia Cerdas. Or she might be better defined by a sustained five o'clock wake-up time, a rigorous near-daily workout routine, commendable academic success, and a chic put-together look that rarely falters.

Movement has always been a part of Laeticia's life. She was born in Quebec, Canada. At four years old, she moved to a village in England. She then moved to Belgium, then to the U.S. state of Georgia, and, most recently, to the Barrington

area. Although adapting to a new culture and establishing oneself socially is difficult, she enjoys the opportunity to encounter a variety of people and perspectives. She especially appreciates the liberty of redefining oneself. "You're never stuck in a certain ideal or in a past version of yourself," she said.

The move from Belgium to Georgia was one of the most challenging. Prior to the move, French had been her primary language. In Georgia, while Laeticia could mostly understand what people were telling her, she remained four years behind others in English reading. "I arrived in fifth grade when most kids were reading 'Harry Potter'. I was at the 'Amelia Bedelia' level," she said.

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Due to a lack of external assistance, yet exuding a persevering spirit, Laeticia taught herself how to read. She graduated from the English learning program in one year. “Nothing gets me angrier than not understanding something. I was mad that these kids were using vocabulary that I didn’t get,” she said. By the time Laeticia was in middle school, she was placed in an advanced English class.

More so than motivation, Laeticia believes her tendency to work hard is something of a habit. “Other people describe me as hardworking but, do I see myself [as hardworking]? Not really. It’s just my every day,” she said.

Laeticia does not fear change, a sentiment she attributes to the regularity with which she experiences it and to her mother, who encourages her to view change as an inevitable good. “There’s a certain thrill to change once you’ve done it, and you’ve appreciated it,” she said.

#### HERE ARE SOME WORDS THAT OTHERS SHARED ABOUT **LAETICIA CERDAS**

#### **Ria Patel, FRIEND, FELLOW STUDENT AT BHS**

Laeticia is one of the most hardworking and inspiring people I know, and her dedication towards her goals motivates me to go the extra mile to reach mine. Throughout cross country and track, I see Laeticia as a model of the kind of progress I want to make, and the commitment and enthusiasm she brings to practice every day encourages me to put my best self out there. I see her hard work pay off in track and cross country and in her journalism successes as well.

In addition, Laeticia is fun to be around. She is super caring and has a unique sense of humor. I’ve had weeks where I felt overwhelmed and stressed with the demands of school, sports, and outside commitments. Having Laeticia just listen to my problems and cheer me up with her easy-going personality and spirited jokes helped me get through my hardest days. I loved my freshman year because I had Laeticia as a great role model, and an amazing friend to look up to.

#### **Laura Minerva, JOURNALISM ADVISOR**

Laeticia is a force! She’s smart, organized, and a natural leader. She makes those around her better and she strives for excellence. Laeticia joined journalism in the middle of the semester during virtual learning, yet she instantly made an impression. She quickly went from “newcomer” to the editor-in-chief, and I couldn’t ask for a better leader. I believe that the best high school journalists are curious and reliable. Laeticia is both, in spades. After moving frequently and living in different countries, Laeticia brings a unique perspective to our community. Her experiences add to the learning environment at BHS because she’s always willing to share. What sets her apart is that she is also willing to listen.

#### **Stephanie Pohlman, TEACHER**

Laeticia Cerdas is the full package as both a student and as a person. She is charming, hardworking, and humble. I was struck by Laeticia during a conversation



we had while riding into Chicago for an Interrelated Arts field trip. During our conversation, she talked fondly about moving a number of times throughout her life. Many young people could find changing towns, and all that comes with it, to be an overwhelming challenge to embrace, but this was not the case for Laeticia. The opportunity to experience life in different cities served to incite an unexpected love of travel. She came to value learning from the new people she met and adopted an open mind when it came to understanding differences in the way people live. Through calling many places “home,” she has been able to gain an outlook on life that most people do not acquire in a lifetime. Through her need to adapt to new environments, she has become someone who is secure in her own personality, knows what her values are, and she has a perspective about life beyond her years. In Interrelated Arts, she stood out as someone who spoke with assurance and made sophisticated and enriching daily contributions to class. She applied her valuable experiences from time spent in various cities to the historical study of art and literature with a distinctive voice. Laeticia’s experiences are what make her unique as well as a valuable member of the Barrington community. I admire her continued desire to make connections with those around her and her ability to embrace change with a positive outlook. Laeticia Cerdas is not just a beautiful face, she is an ambitious young student and has a genuine heart.






## LAETICIA CERDAS IN HER OWN WORDS

**Favorite place you have lived?** For me they're all steppingstones where I've met valuable people. When you move to a new place there's a honeymoon period where it's just perfect in comparison to the last one, but as the years go on, you start seeing the negatives and you get to a point where you crave the feeling of moving again. My favorite has always been my now. **How many languages can you speak?** Three! French is my mother tongue and was my primary language until I was 10 years old. My dad spoke to me in Spanish, so I've understood it, but since I never lived in a Spanish-speaking country, it's been my weakest one. I initially learned English when I was 4 and was thrown into British kindergarten, where I didn't speak a word for six weeks and then randomly started speaking perfectly with the regional accent (the kid brain is crazy). **Favorite beauty product?** The Clarins waterline pencil. I've been using it since freshman year and have tried other ones, but always come back to my first. **Favorite place to shop?** I love shopping online, but usually don't end up buying anything. I most often shop at Marshall's. In Georgia, the nearest mall was 45 minutes away, so the Marshall's in the strip mall was our best

option. My sister, my mom, my grandma, and I have all bought way too much at Marshall's. **Favorite book?** This is a hard question because in hindsight, some of my favorite books ever might not be so good, but my middle school self was in love with them. "The Hunger Games" series was what started my love for reading on another level. It was my first peek into fantasy/dystopian. I read "Divergent" after that and have struggled to read a contemporary since then because of how much I loved it. **Favorite subject in school?** I would say history. English is way up there, too. It's always felt like a story being told to me and I love world history where I get to learn about different cultures. I like how it isn't an applicable concept like math or science. History doesn't change, so if you have the facts down then you're set. Anyone in my family can tell you I love dropping random history facts and "did you knows". **Least favorite subject in school?** Math. In elementary school, I was always the last one to finish my math tests. I rarely felt like I was younger than my peers, but with math I usually did. I'm not a logical thinker either, so I wouldn't look back at the logistics of my answer and always end up making careless mistakes. **Favorite kind of workout?** I love long bike rides or runs at a medium intensity level. Interval training, while I know is necessary, really isn't as enjoyable to me because I can't think for as long since I'm focusing on speed. I would say my ideal workout day would be some resistance training in the morning and a long run in the afternoon where I can just completely immerse myself in my own thoughts. **Favorite way to have coffee?** Hot with oat milk in the morning, iced in the afternoon (if I have one, which is becoming a bad habit of mine). Not too much milk, though, and I still like it bitter. I'm not a sweet drink person.

**What is on your bucket list?** I want to run a half marathon one day. Bleach my hair. Take more photos. Take my mom and grandma on a huge shopping spree when I can. Zipline again (probably my most fun experience ever). Get good at rollerblading. Live on an island or near a beach. Become a polyglot. Live in a French-speaking country again. Hike a mountain. **If you could have one superpower, what would it be?** To speak every language. Imagine how many people I could talk to. That would be so cool. If you had asked me this two years ago, I would've told you shapeshifting or speaking to animals. **What is your personal motto?** Everything happens for a reason. That hard time in my life happened when it did because I had support from my family at that time and learned to deal with it. Imagine if it had happened when I was alone in college. We almost moved to Texas and Massachusetts and California but none of those happened because that's not what was planned for us and that's OK. I'm viewing college admissions the same way. **Advice for others dealing with change.** Don't look back. You're in a new chapter in your life. Are you really going to go back and read the same page you just finished because you're scared of what might happen? No, of course not. It might be uncomfortable at first, but you'll see the story doesn't end when the chapter does. Just keep on looking forward and embrace change. 

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*Neha Doppalapudi will be a junior at Barrington High School in the fall. She is part of the high school's student-run newspaper, The RoundUp. This summer she is looking forward to hanging out with friends and family, reading murder mystery novels, and spending time outside.*