

BOHEMIAN

NORTH BAY

BRIEFS

SPEAKING OUT

The carefully chosen words of Santa Rosa resident Elvia Bautista will be broadcast nationwide on Monday, May 8, on National Public Radio's Morning Edition. Bautista's heartfelt essay about putting flowers on the grave of her brother and others killed by gang violence was chosen out of more than 11,000 submissions to the syndicate's newly revamped essay segment, "This I Believe." Bautista, 22, wants people to understand that her brother Rogelio—just 16 when he died on Dec. 31, 2004—was more than a headline, just as all the young people felled by gang violence are much more than the political and media sound bites that mark their passing. "When my brother died, all of the [newspaper headlines] were, 'Gang Member Killed on New Year's Eve.' Then they would go into details about how he was killed, and that kind of stuff," Bautista says. "They are just kids. They are teenagers who end up making those choices. I was a teenager. I made bad choices. As I look back, I think I would never have done it." A few months after his death, Bautista heard "Our Name Is Rogelio Bautista" on KRCB 98.3-FM radio's Voice of Youth program. Created by four 14-year-olds who knew Rogelio as a cousin and a friend, this broadcast told of his life and death in his own words, without the usual spin given by politicians or the press. Deeply touched, Bautista called Voice director Tatiana Harrison, which led to her own involvement with the program, creating a series of stories on the impact of gang violence. "There's not enough people like Elvia being asked how does it feel, what is it like," Harrison says. Initially broadcast in the 1950s, "This I Believe" invites people to share brief essays describing the core values guiding their lives. Bautista crafted a poignant essay which begins, "I believe that everyone deserves flowers on their grave." She talks of her brother as one of the "boys who loved blue," and of a friend's late boyfriend as one of the rivals, "boys who loved red." Bautista is not content to let her brother's death go unremarked. "There are so many kids his age who have died for the same reason, and they just don't mention them or they kind of forget them," she says. "Even my parents say, 'Don't talk about him, just let him rest.' I don't want him to be just one more kid who was killed. I want people to know he wasn't just the outline that the news put on him or that he made the choice to be. I want them to know that he was my brother, he was a son, he was an uncle, he was a friend."

—Brief by Patricia Lynn Henley