

As a Metco student, she went the distance for her education

► SUMNER

Continued from Page D1

as one of her school's few black students.

"A lot of people aren't able to straddle two, three cultures at a time. Since I started out earlier it was ingrained in my natural behavior," she says. "The idea that you can't do something just because you're black doesn't make sense to me. If something hasn't been done, I try to put it on my to-do list."

Although Sumner spent her entire academic life in Metco, the realization of how this set her apart from her friends in Boston came gradually. The teenager's family moved to Brockton her senior year, but while she was in school they had lived in Roxbury, Dorchester, Jamaica Plain, and Roslindale. Initially she thought all her peers took long bus rides to get to school outside the city. By junior high she got more involved in extracurricular activities (including starting a step team at Weston) and started to see differences between herself and some of the kids around her.

"I noticed there was a certain degree of separation that did happen as I grew up. I had a lot more resources and opportunities than my friends who weren't in Metco," she says. "Once I got older I really clinged more to my Metco friends than my other friends."

Some of Sumner's classmates assumed that because she came from Boston, she lived in a ghetto on welfare or that her mother was a single parent who had gotten pregnant as a teenager. Nothing could be further from the truth. Sumner credits her family, and her faith, for keeping her on track. She



GLOBE PHOTO/ERIK JACOBS

"A lot of people aren't able to straddle two, three cultures at a time," says Kandice Sumner, who has done just that most of her life.

considers her mother her best friend and says her father is her hero. Katani and Chris Sumner raised Kandice, the eldest of three girls, to believe she could do anything she set her mind to.

Chris Sumner, executive director of the Ten Point Coalition, says choosing Metco over Boston public schools was an easy decision. "For my child, there wasn't going to be a compromise. I wanted to

give her every opportunity," he says. "Kandice has always been a kid that aggressively accepts challenges. We knew we had the infrastructure to balance the trials and tribulations she would go through culturally and the sacrifices she had to make."

Katani Sumner knows about those challenges firsthand. Her father, slain civil rights activist Carnell Eaton, cofounded a program

in Boston that was a precursor to Metco, and Katani was a part of the first group of black students bused from Boston to the suburbs. (A few years later, mandatory busing within Boston became a flashpoint for racial tensions in the city.) As graduation neared, a counselor told Katani she'd never get into Brown University. But she did, and became the first in her family to graduate from college.

Then she went on to earn a master's in education from Harvard.

Katani, a literacy specialist at Peirce Elementary School in Newton, says her Metco experience allowed her to help make things smoother for her daughter than they were for her. Katani didn't suffer any physical violence, but the transition was often rough.

"We were among the first brown children to be bused to Lex-

ington, and I think there was a lot of shock initially," she says. "There were many bumps and bruises. I knew if it weren't for certain people who had intervened along the way, I don't know what might have happened to me."

As her time in Weston drew to a close, Kandice dealt with a different kind of uncertainty: where to apply to college. She was torn between Brown, in part to prove she could get in, and Spelman College, which would allow her to be at an all-black school for the first time in her life. She applied to both and was accepted at Spelman, a women's college in Atlanta.

Sumner has just finished her first year there. She plans to major in English and hopes to get a job that allows her to work with children, perhaps as a teacher. This summer she's working with at-risk teens at the Boston Urban Youth Foundation.

"Spelman and Brown really represented two different aspects of myself, and it was a question of which aspect do I want to dedicate myself to for the next four years," she says. She jokingly adds that she could transfer out of Spelman next year since she's already achieved one of her main goals in going there.

"I've gotten exactly what I needed: to see black people succeed in life and do great things."

"Far From Home" will be shown at the Museum of Fine Arts tonight at 8. For more information, call 617-369-3306 or go to www.mfa.org. On Aug. 21, it will screen at 1 p.m. at the Raytheon Amphitheater at Northeastern University. Visit www.roxburyfilmfestival.org.