

Letter to My Parents™ Contest in Hawai'i 2015

Shirell Bell
(Award Recipient in Category of Proposal)

Dear Howie,

Anyone that comes across this letter may question why it is being addressed to you, my sister, and not our parents instead. It takes more than simply just conceiving or even adopting a child, to receive the title of a “parent”. The way I see it, this title is earned. A parent is someone who plays a role in raising a child and grows with a child, for me, that parent is you.

As an adult looking back on my childhood, I realize that we have always had this weird relationship. You had the official title of older sister, yet I always saw you as more of a mom. If there was something that I wanted, it would be “ask your sister”. If I needed something, “go ask your sister.” If I was getting in trouble for something, “wait till your sister gets here and finds out.” As I got older and started high school, the mother daughter relationship we seemed to have going on, slowly shifted to a little sister-big sister type of relationship. I remember confiding in you about my secret boyfriend that I didn’t tell mom or dad about. I could vent to you, cry with you, I could rely on you. On January 12, 2011 I woke up earlier than usual and went to ask Mom if Shannell and I had to go to school or not because of the stormy weather. I never got an answer. After feeling her cold skin when I tried to wake her up, you were the first person I called. And just like that, our relationship had shifted once again.

In the eyes of everyone else around us, you now had this role of being the mother. A role that in my eyes, you had always played. You took Shannell and I in, doing everything and anything necessary to make sure that we would successfully graduate from high school. At times I felt that you were too over protective. As a teenager going through the whole self-centered stage in life, I felt a lot of things. The one feeling I don’t think I took the time to focus on was the feeling of thankfulness. At 15 you had two carseats in your car to chauffeur Shannell and I around in. You used your hard earned money to make sure that we never felt like we had less than the other kids at school. You always kept us in mind. I am thankful that you didn’t leave for the mainland like you had planned. I am truly thankful for your sacrifices.



On November 3rd, 2011, you gave birth to my favorite person in the entire universe, my niece La’Niarose. Nia came into my life during a time where I don’t think I could feel. After mom had passed away, I was left numb, but Nia changed that. As expected, almost 4 years later Nia has become an important part of my life. I love sharing a room with her. I love it when she wakes up in the middle of the night and crawls into my bed for comfort. I love sharing my food with her, even if she’s kinda just helping her self most of the time. I love chaperoning her field trips. I love that I can make her feel the way you make me feel, safe and loved.

People question me about how involved I am in Nia’s life. It seems like they think I’m being forced to help out or I’m sacrificing my social life because it’s what you want me to do. They don’t understand that I do these things because I want to do them. My family will always come first. What good is going out with my friends all the time, without a family to come home to.

“As a family, I want us to dream together and help one another to achieve those dreams. I want to start a tradition of creating vision pages.”

As you already know, I’m a big dreamer. I constantly remind you of how one day I will give you your own compound and we will build our own houses. How I’m going to be Princess Tiana one day and send the whole family to Disney World. How I’m going to be a flight attendant and we will travel the world. How one day, I’ll be right up there with other strong, powerful, and inspirational women, like Oprah. I know that you also had dreams, dreams that were pushed to the side to allow Shannell and I the opportunity to make dreams for ourselves. I understand that sometimes things do happen and our dreams may change or be put on hold for a while.

The one thing that I don't want to see happen, is a pattern of completely ditching dreams to give the younger generation a chance to dream, only for them to do the same thing afterwards. By the time you read this letter, we will have another beautiful addition to our family, baby Myarose. As a family, I want us to dream together and help one another to achieve those dreams. I want to start a tradition of creating vision pages. These vision pages are similar to vision boards, but it will become a scrapbook. Every year, all of us will basically put our dreams out on paper and share those dreams with one another. It would be great especially for Nia and Mya to see how important their dreams are. One day they will see how their dreams changed over the years. I want them to know that their dreams can become reality and the same thing goes for my dreams. Your daughters and I have an important thing in common, we have you as a loving parent.

Thank you Howie, for all that you have done and will continue to do. Your name, Hirell, basically makes up 90% of my name, all you need is an "S" right in front of it. I think it's a little funny because it's a representation of how you much you have impacted my life. I love you.

Your little sister,
Shirell

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Award Recipients by Different Categories:

Category "Bravery": Sheena Juliano

Category "Reflection": Abigail Badua

Category "Proposal": Shirell Bell

Finalists:

Andres, Chimako Anitok, Rosario Joaquin, Headrick Letuli, Angela Lin, Brandon Lorezco, Janica Pascua, and Stephanie Yasay.

Judges:

Maiana Minahal (Kapi'olani Community College),
Mia Porecca (Read 2gether Foundation), and
Dusty Santos (KNDI 1270AM)

Sponsors:

Budget Color Litho., Filipino Association of University Women, BenchPrep, La Raza Unida, and Zippy's.
Special Thanks to KNDI 1270AM.

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Abigail Badua
(Award Recipient in Category of Reflection)

Dear Mama and Papa,

I loved growing up in the Philippines
Mama, Papa, Ate and finally me as Bunso
We were a big happy family
Soon, I had found out that we were moving to the States
I was filled with excitement.
Dreams of living in a mansion
White sand, and even snow

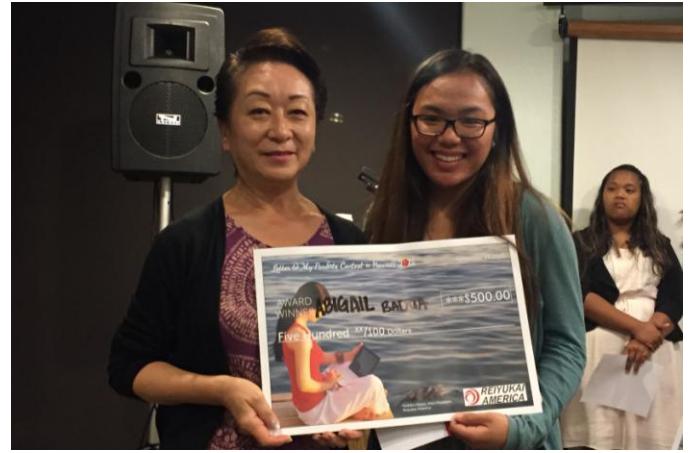
However, I soon also found out that Papa couldn't come with us
Why? I didn't know and that was out my control
It was an adult issue

Life in Hawai'i was not what I imagined
We didn't live in a mansion.
We rented a house in Kalihi where 6 of us shared one bedroom
No friends, no toys, no cable.
And finally, no snow.
This was definitely not paradise

However, through this
You bought taught me how to be strong
A few weeks turned to a few months,
A few months turned to a year
"When will Papa come here to Hawai'i?"
I would ask with agony and anticipation.
Until it became nine years
Nine long years of not being able to live with my dad
Nine long years of being a single mother
Nine long years of being a long distance father
However, those nine years taught me that love has no distance

Pa for those years you spent all alone
Waiting for your petition to the US
Only seeing your family twice a month
Through a lagging computer screen
Only being able to feel and touch us
Through the clothes we had left behind
To the pictures we left for you remembrance

Ma
For those years, you raised us on your own



Working 8 hours a day
7 days a week
No rest, you did it
You did it so that we always had food on the table
So that we had clothes on our back
So that we never felt like there was something that we lacked
Mom, you taught me how to be independent

All those sleepless nights you had spent on us
From staying up till 3 helping me finish a project
To holding me close on nights where I just couldn't fall asleep
I still remember when you took on 3 jobs
The only times I saw you were in the mornings when you would walk us to school
To dinnertimes only to rush out again for your third job
To only feeling the bed creak beside me
As you finally rested your tiny, aching body
As a sign to show me that you were finally home

I hated how I never saw you anymore.
Why does she always leave us?
Does she not love us anymore?
I would ask myself as a child of little understanding
How hard it was to be a single mother

“*Through both of you,
I have learned strength, independence
Beauty in the struggle
And finally LOVE*”

I didn't know how deep in debt we were
Even when Papa came here to Hawaii,
Working everyday was still a must
I didn't know a lot of things so I was mad
I am so sorry for the times I was ungrateful
Ma, the hurt I saw in your eyes when you told me we couldn't afford a vacuum
And out of anger that we couldn't even afford something so simple,

I yelled out, "We have nothing!"
I didn't know that my words was like a stab to your heart

I didn't know that you cried during your lunch breaks
Or that you stayed up late with worrying thoughts of all our bills
Dad I didn't know that despite the smile on your face
Was an aching heart because you weren't there to watch us grow
Or an aching back from painting houses all day
I didn't know any of these because those
Those were the things you both never taught me

You never showed me pain or weakness
You never let me see the tears streaming down your tired faces
You would have a mask of strength and perseverance
Despite wanting to give up so badly

Because of you two I have never felt pain
Despite our financial problems
I have never felt poor because
I knew that deep down I was rich with blessings
Blessings from two wonderful parents that only want the best for their children
Two wonderful parents who always knew what struggle was
And I am beyond grateful that I became one of the two lucky ones chosen to be yours

Through both of you,
I have learned strength, independence
Beauty in the struggle
And finally LOVE
A four-letter word full of sacrifice
Handwork and perseverance
The kind of love that only a parent can give a child

So I thank God for giving me two wonderful blessings
Because of you two
I have grown
Grown with dreams and aspirations that I work hard and go to college
That I get the career of my dreams
So that one day,
I'll be the one making the sacrifices
I'll be the one to give you gifts on Christmas mornings
I'll be the one to give you two the life you never imagined for yourselves
One day, I'll be the one to take care of you two.

Despite all our busy schedules, I will make it a must that at the end of the day,
We are all together at the dinner table.
I promise to understand and see things from your perspectives as parents

To be aware of our financial situation and work to overcome this obstacle
To not get mad so easily
And be patient when things don't come as planned.
And finally, something that has helped all of us endure those years apart,
I promise to pray to God
To guide us as a whole through all our ups and downs.
I love you both so much.

Your loving daughter,
Abigail Joy

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Sheena Juliano
(Award Recipient in Category of Bravery)

Dear Mom and Dad,

For as long as I can remember, you've wanted me to be a Straight-A student. Even back in elementary school when the grades were just listed as MEs and MPs, if I had brought anything else home but those kind of grades, I would have to deal with your disappointment. I never wanted to disappoint you both or let you down, so I always pushed myself towards becoming that Straight A student you've always asked of me to be. In the beginning it wasn't that hard, since you've raised me to work hard and excel so easily. The both of you always guided me towards greatness.

I remember signing up for any drawing contest, any writing contest, every talent show and any activity that would require me to exhibit leadership, involvement, hard work, and most importantly, accomplishment. My favorite part would be looking into the crowd and seeing the both of your smiling faces with your eyes reflecting back how proud you were of me. From then on I told myself I would do anything to keep you guys happy.

But then I grew older, and school got harder. It's sort of like how when you're playing a video game and once you finish one level, you go to the next level and you're being expected to do accomplish more. That was the thing that changed mom and dad; I was being asked to learn more, to know more, to memorize more, to bring more to the table.

Of course, still having the mindset of succeeding, I pushed myself to overcome these new obstacles. I juggled my classes, my papers, my projects, and my life. There were often times when I would get so overwhelmed with trying to keep my grades up that I didn't think I could do it anymore. I wanted to give myself a break. I didn't want to carry the burden of having to be a straight A student anymore. It was draining me. I learned what stress was. I learned what it meant to stay up at night trying to finish something that was due the next morning. I never wanted to let you guys down, so that's why I kept forcing myself to do it. To be the very best I could be. I knew how disappointed you guys would be if I failed. You both expected so much from me.



I was expected to do so much that I would get angry at myself. I would get angry at the two of you. Why were you expecting so much from me? Why were you making me work so hard? Why was it okay for the other kids to get grades other than an A, but not okay with me? I didn't know why me being a straight A student meant so much to you both. It began to feel like that was the only way for me to prove my self worth to you.

I would be so afraid of dropping my grades because I thought the two of you wouldn't love me anymore. I would be afraid that you wouldn't look at me with those same proud eyes. I was constantly fighting a battle within myself: to give myself a break and relieve my stress, or to keep stressing myself out to make the grades for you.

We would argue about keeping my grades up. You would be afraid that my focus was shifting elsewhere. For the longest, maintaining my grades began to feel like an obligation. You didn't understand how hard it was for me to try to give you what you wanted. Did you not care about me?

“I didn't understand it at the time because I was so young and so naive, I didn't realize that you only wanted me to do well because you wanted me to become successful and accomplish more than what you did.”

But you did mom and dad. You did care about me. You cared about me so much. You cared enough to push me. You cared enough to set high goals for me so I'd always set high goals for myself. Mom and Dad, I didn't understand it at the time because I was so young and so naive, I didn't realize that you only wanted me to do well because you wanted me to become successful and accomplish more than what you did. I didn't see the reason behind your actions.

I had a complete paradigm shift once I understood. I was able to tolerate the stress and expectations because after all, you both just want what's best for me. I'm so grateful to have parents like you who push me and expect so much from me because you only want me to achieve great things in the end. And in the end I just want you to know that I love you so much mom and dad.

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