



2017 Letter to My Parents™
Contest in Chicago



Mashawnie Marsaw Japan Trip Award Recipient

Dear Mommy,

I miss you. It's funny, I figured I'd said all I needed to you. But now that you're gone I have so much more I want to say. That last time you went to the hospital, I feared you wouldn't come back. You did, and I was so happy. But then two weeks passed, and so did you. I remember the night before, when you looked at me out of the corner of your eye but said not a word, and I figured you were just tired so I just said goodnight, not realizing that there would be no 'good morning'.

I remember the panic that gripped my heart when my niece ran into my room with tears rolling down her face and said, "Shawnie, Grandma not waking up." I don't think I've ever jumped out of the bed faster in my life. I remember the waiting room and the constant thought of "this doesn't feel real, this can't be real" and then the doctors told us your heart had stopped, they said they would do all they could. This happened twice before it was really over.



My mind wanted you to stay, but my heart knew it was your time, and my soul screamed for Him to have His way. And when the doctor came back, I knew. My tears were stilted and few, but when I walked out of the waiting room for air I suddenly felt as if the whole world had just crashed upon my chest. I couldn't breathe, until I screamed out my frustration,

and even as I crumbled, my soul thanked the Lord for having his way. I couldn't bear the thought of you in a hospital bed being the last thing I saw. I was hurt, angry but most of all I was broken.

“For all my bravado, I am my mother’s daughter, even when I didn’t want to be. But I’d be proud to be half the women you were.”

I felt like I had lost a fraction of me when we buried you. I realized that there wouldn't be any more calls while I was in class to see if I would be home for dinner. No more arguments where neither of us would win. No more 3 am messages. No more laughs, no more hugs, no more anything because we'd buried you in the ground and this time you really weren't coming back. I miss you, I don't feel like I'm doing this adult thing correct and I need you to come and fix it, fix me. I wasn't ready. I knew the day would come but still I wasn't prepared and I just want you back but I know that's not possible. I'm not ok and I never will be again.

I still see your smile, hear your laugh. I still find it weird that the woman who chose me, who adopted me, is no longer here. I feel like you've been with me forever, always telling me when I was wrong, and patting me on the back when I was right. I still remember the first time I called you mom. We were sitting at the kitchen table, eating... I don't remember much but I do remember when I uttered the word for the first time, I was so frightened, I knew you were grandma then but you were the one who did the mommy things. I recall how you so calmly said 'you can call me mommy if you'd like.' That was the beginning of us.

Throughout the years I know I was a pain. I was defiant, outspoken, too sassy for anybody (thanks to you), and full of know it all tendencies. I showed you all of that, because that was who you were to me, so tiny, yet so fierce. I never held

back because neither did you, and we used to clash because of it. Through you, I found a respect for all opinions and I learned to look at things from a different perspective, never just my own. I respected you for the way you dealt with things, quietly but confidently.

You never let anyone get the last word, which is probably why our arguments never settled. I didn't realize how similar we were until my godmother said and I quote 'That's Minnie all up in her,' her response to me telling a girl off. That phrase made me look at myself, and I knew that she was right. We were more similar than different. You always said I wasn't loving or tender. Well I learned from the best. I learned to not allow my feelings to be seen or my tears to be heard. I remember only one time when I saw your pain, even though your tears were silent. I never found out why you were crying, or what had occurred for that dam to be broken, but I understood.

I apologize for having never truly showed you that I loved you, but I did. You were the woman who changed my life. You saved me. Even if you thought different, I want to tell you now that you raised me right. I may be sharp tongued and callous, imposing even to some, but I've given advice that has probably saved lives, held hands that have been scorched by destruction.

I have been and am for others what you were for me, a light in the darkness, a mother to the motherless. For all my bravado, I am my mother's daughter, even when I didn't want to be. But I'd be proud to be half the woman you were. You raised me up hot tempered, wild, caring, brutally honest, and most of all loving, so that I could stand on mountains. I'll take to the grave all the lessons you taught and the fights you fought. I want you to know that you taught me right. You were the best thing to happen to me. I am grateful for your life, and the sacrifices you made for me, I love you, and I know you're still watching over my shoulder.

Until we meet again,

Shawnie



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Reiyukai Active Care Team

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Special Thanks to
Levar Stepney (MC) and
Hideaki Obara (Photo)

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Nawar Mendez Japan Trip Award Recipient

Dear First Love,

I have trusted and loved you since you first held me in your arms. Thank you for protecting me when I couldn't protect myself. From changing my diapers to, putting lotion on me every time I got out of the shower. As I grew older, you did everything to make my childhood the best. You always took me to the beach, pools and the park.

You actually played with me. I love that you let me be who I was. You let me grow into who I am. I go excited every Christmas because, I knew I was going to get new Bratz dolls and wrestlers. When you would let me go and play outside, there would always be a home cooked meal waiting for me.

Although my childhood was great, through my years of adolescence, things were not as great. The relationship between you and I has always been great. It's my relationship with whomever you are when you are drunk. You are not the same person. That other person I am also grateful for. That mean person made me strong and independent. I could no longer rely on you to take me to things that I now was responsible for.



I had to learn how to travel the city on my own in seventh grade. I realized I could no longer count on your empty promises. When you hit rock bottom, I did not want to watch

but I had to. I could not leave you alone. Although all you wanted was to be alone and not socialize with my sister and I.

I wondered what was wrong with you. You never came out of your room anymore. Now that I am older, I no longer wonder. I understand. I understand what you were going through. You were hurt. Someone hurt my mother.

“You know me for who I am. I want to thank you for never trying to make me into someone I wasn't, let me grow into my own person. Thank you for being my first teacher.”

You know as a kid, you think your parents are invincible, well, that's what I thought at least. As I have grown older, I have realized that we are way more alike than I thought. It was just hard seeing that coming from the woman who always taught me to not let things discourage me. Seeing you hurt more than I about my health, killed me. Although I am the one going through it, I knew I saw you hurt, I had to stay strong for you. Having to sign you into the hospital because you were too drunk to sign in for yourself. That hurt, but I stood strong. All the times you kicked me out when you were drunk. I had to remain strong.

I'm sorry for the trouble I have caused you. All the times you picked me up from school for fighting. I'm sorry. I'm sorry my temper gets out of control and I have broken things. All these things stressed you. Although I may have stressed you, you always managed to protect me. You stood in the middle of someone who was trying to harm me. You were broken when I opened up about being touched as a child. You were broken because you did everything in your power to keep me safe. You are my best friend. We tell each other everything and anything, and I want us to continue to do so. You have seen me hurt. I have also seen you broken. Whenever I see you down, it makes me cry.

You know me for who I am. I want to thank you for never trying to make me into someone I wasn't, let me grow into my own person. Thank you for being my first teacher. Although I may not have listened to some of the things you taught me, I eventually learned on my own. I love you, mom.

Sincerely,
Nawar



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2017 Letter to My Parents™
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Elvis Aguilera \$300 Prize

Dear Madre Mias,

Momma, I am really thankful for having two mothers in my life. Your partner, Pacheco, is someone I really love and look up to, taking my father's place when he left me at two years old.

The both of you have meant a lot to me in my nineteen years of life. I know the tough love you gave me was for me to learn from and stay off the streets. You both have always supported me through the positive and negative events in my life.

I know, I started gangbanging very young, but even through all the trouble I caused, you still stood by my side. Through the tough time I had while incarcerated, doing five years, you showed me tough love. A lesson I learned by not having communication with you for three years.



Pacheco and you always came up with creative ways to punish us; book reports, writing our multiplications, and writing sentences. I don't regret any of the decisions I have made, but I love the way that, through positive or negative times, you continued to stay by my side. Those punishments made us learn how to read and write even though we were still on the streets.

Since being out of prison for a while, I have been in and out of the neighborhood, but most importantly, I have become drug free for a year and went back to school. I love the way you both still help me out as I get older.

When I was depressed and wouldn't eat, you still made sure I had food. Every day you help me little by little by talking with me.

As you know mom, the death of my friend brought me back to my darkest days. The phone call I made to you while I screamed, "They shot us, they shot us," I know hurt you because my best friend and I got shot, killing my best friend. You supported me through it all and I love you for that. You both helped me not make stupid decisions or get revenge. When I was depressed and wouldn't eat, you still made sure I had food. Every day you help me little by little by talking with me. I love you both with a passion, and I am happy to say my lesbian mothers are the best. I know I am not perfect, but I am doing my best.

A family tradition I would like to start, is having our brother, aunt, and grandma around more to hangout and catch up with life instead of fighting and arguing over things. This would look like all of our family all together laughing and having a great time. I am blessed to say, "Momma's, you both went to hell and back with me, but I am thankful for you guys. I love you!"

Sincerely,
Elvis Aguilera



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