

# Letter to My Parents™ Contest in Hawai'i 2016

**Amanda Herolaga**

Award Recipient in the Category of Bravery

Dear Erwin Amigo,

You sadly missed the biggest milestone of my life, which happened early this month, the closing ceremony of my church retreat at Saint Anthony Retreat Center. I had to share a little note to my parental advisory in front of an audience, but I decided to write to both you and my grandparents. In my letter to you, I wrote:

“Daddy, I understand that I am not the daughter that you wanted, however I still need you. I have been going down the wrong path lately. I am not proud of myself. I forgive you for not being there most of my life, but I am begging you to be here now because I am becoming someone that I do not wish to be. As a father, you love me, however I do not feel protected. A lot of people are hurting me and all I want to do is run to you for comfort.”

You told me that you would be there, so I was excited to see you. The day before I left for the retreat, you were already on your way to Las Vegas. There was no way for me to contact you; phones were not allowed. As I was going through the cleansing process as the retreat, tears would not stop flowing down my cheeks. I really wanted to tell you how it changed my life.

Our relationship is not as healthy as both of us wishes it could be. There was a time when I would question why you abandoned me. Did I not meet your standards of a daughter? A few years after my birth, you had two handsome sons, Aldren and Avery. You left me to assume why you left; my mind was stranded in the darkest places. In my younger years, you would jokingly ask if I had the desire to live with you in Mililani. My heart ached to say yes, instead I mumbled that you were a little too late. If I were to move in with you, I would be sleeping on the living room floor along with my two younger brothers. This would mean that I would be attending Mililani High School instead of Waipahu High School. You were asking me to give up my friends and become a Trojan, however once a marauder, always a marauder.

A father is supposed to love and protect his little girl. I dreamt of the day that I would have the chance to cry on your shoulder. You heard the song Amanda on the radio by Boston. You thought it was lovely name, however it has only become a burden because others view my name as a laughable matter. Do you remember the day that I broke into tears and blamed you for all of my problems? The day I slit my wrists for the first time. Instead of telling me that their opinion did not matter, I wish you had given me a hug and told me that everything was going to be alright. Every girl needs a father.

Other kids are able to have touching parental moments like eating cookies and milk at midnight, playing catch, or talking about love problems. We have both been deprived of these precious moments. I realized that our past is not all rainbows and sunshine, however I am hoping things will change. Maybe we need to spend more than just the major holidays like Thanksgiving and Christmas together? The day that you found the love of your life, you stopped coming around. I would like it to rewind to just the two of us again, a father and his daughter. I want to be able to refer to the good memories. I know you do too.

A few days ago, I was in the emergency because I was in terrible pain. You came right away, although you had work the next morning. The sickness that I currently am still fighting will kill me, if I do not deal with it. It requires me to swallow pills, which I lack skill in. After that day, you are trying your best to support me through this. I know that it is becoming very costly with all my medical issues. Just know that when you are at your lowest. I will be there for you too. No matter what happens to us, you are my father. I love you.

Sincerely,

Your only daughter,

Amanda Herolaga

# Letter to My Parents™ Contest in Hawai'i 2016

**Shyloe Tote**

Award Recipient in the Category of Reflection

Hi Dad,

Things aren't quite as I hoped they would be and I know that we don't really speak to each other, but I want to talk about our relationship as a family. You're the main person I want to talk to because if I talk to any other people, I know they'd blow things out of proportion. Also, when I speak with you, I'm not as afraid to be blunt (at least in writing). I just don't feel things are the way they should be because I know things CAN be better. I know for a fact that there is a lot of room for improvement, and I want to be the one to initiate it.

I don't feel that you would ever understand things the way I see them unless you hear "all" that I have to say first. To be blunt, I hate growing up as "your" daughter. I loathe that so many expect me to do things a certain way and most things are done your way. I know that you just want me to be independent and competent, but most times, they're really hard for me to accept. The choices I make are supposed to be "my" choice, but I always feel so obligated to do the right thing, to at least attempt to be greater than all expectations.

Because of you, Grandma Oma, and the way you both make me see things, there will never be any words to describe the way I feel. But if I had to sum up the way I feel and what I think, the words that come to mind are: disappointed, sociopathic, painful, stoic, and deceitful. I'm reminded of those feelings every time you don't notice the little things. Then I remember you taught me that even the "little things" matter and that people only choose what they want to see. I hate the way I feel about myself because you hurt my feelings a lot. I don't feel like I have a voice anymore. Whenever I try to converse with you (which in my own opinion is very rare) about these kind of things, I end up feeling distraught because I feel put down and my words are stifled down my throat. Every syllable is at the volume of mute and if I'm ever heard, it isn't known until later (when it's all forgotten). My problems are never really solved because I don't bring them up due to the fact I don't feel proud of myself, see my self-importance, or worth anymore.

As a kid, I saw you as the guy who I thought was going help me get through the horrific things, the one to be there for the things that meant most to me. But you didn't... and for the most part you left me on my own to figure things out like everything else I've ever done. For a while, I was thankful that you created my strength that silenced me and drove me to my solitude and isolation. It taught me that my feelings weren't worth anything. I need you to know I try really hard to understand your perspective in all of this. Simultaneously as you do it, I don't think you notice that I ponder... weighing between whether

what I feel and my ambition are more important to you. A lot of the events that you attended feel like blank spaces because you didn't say or do much but watch. It hurts so badly and it makes me want to work even harder hoping that it'll grab your attention. Like when I joined football, I'd never see you at games or even when I tell you that I get awards during assemblies. In all my subtle attempts to build my confidence to tell you face-to-face, it doesn't even move you. It's only when I'm put on a pedestal I feel that you ever seem to look at me. I don't believe any of the words that you say anymore until you live up to it because all the words that you say you'd "try" to keep, feel nothing more than "broken promises" to a high-hoping heart. You always said that you were busy, so I reply with understanding and let it slide, but it doesn't mean that I forget about it or about the way I feel. Especially when you say you'll try to make it happen but end up doing something else like have your friends over.

I honestly don't know how you'll react to this but all I really want is to feel like I don't need to hide who I want to be. I want it without having to listen to anyone criticize me for it. I want to be able to talk to you about anything without feeling anxiety because I feel ashamed of it. I find it hard to trust anyone anymore. All I need you to do is to have the patience for me because I don't want to be pushed. I want to come to you when I'm ready.

I know I owe it to you specifically, for helping me become who I am. I appreciate the things that you do for me like work late hours and buy us most of the things we've ever needed and wanted, I really do. But I don't care about material things, I care about the priceless things. All I need is your time, time to spend, precious time that I don't want to take back because I want us both to keep them, to dwell on and value. I don't care how little it is. Let it be a cruise in Olive, our car, or sitting next to me. Hopefully later, we can sit and talk about this. But for now, please consider what I've said.

I mean every word,

Shyloe

# Letter to My Parents™ Contest in Hawai'i 2016

**Aizea Ranon**

Award Recipient in the Category of Proposal

Dear Mom and Dad,

The pain of our family being torn in two when we packed up our things and left Dad forced courage and strength into Destrie, Saige, Gage, El-j, and me. Traits we had inherited from both of you, and ones we'll always be thankful for. At first, we struggled being, only having one parent to turn to at a time, but eventually we rebuilt ourselves. Through our heartaches and tough moments, I have learned to become resilient, driven, and to apply myself entirely in everything I do. That is why I feel it's necessary now that we have a firm foundation for us to celebrate both the strength we found and the challenges we've overcome to become the happiest, best versions of ourselves despite the circumstances we were given.

The beauty in our family lies in our unbreakable unity. The world can send its worse hardships but none of that can sever the love that exists between us. Our family is separated by households, cities, and even oceans, but the fact that we cannot truly be torn from each other never diminished. In our family, the Bible verse Jeremiah 29:11 is held dear, "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." While others may see this simply as another scripture, it is truly a reflection of us and our bond. This verse has been a part of our family as long as there have been hardships; it has been a shining lighthouse in times when our path was clouded by anger or sadness. A reminder that God gives us no more than we can handle and that his plan is not to forsake us but to make us strong, righteous, and worthy of all the blessings he has in store. A reminder that we have clawed our way out of the rubble of failure, and despite our odds, rebuilt our family into some of the most resilient people the world has to offer. Our lives were filled with painful reminders, like having to split our holidays, weekends, and lives in two, but we remained tethered through blood, blissful memories, and undying love.

In truth, our family was once filled with yelling, fighting, and pain, and after we gathered the courage to leave that kind of toxic environment we had to face the harsh reality that we would never have the "normal" family others took for granted. Those following years were filled with resentment, justifying our anger by blaming your mistakes. But none of that changed the fact that we're family.

Sadly, in this day and age, it wasn't the separation that made us different from so many other families. It was our ability to thrive after the tragedy. My brothers, sisters, and I became the most intelligent, hardworking, kind, and caring people I've ever met. We were forced to grow into adults when we were still young to fill the responsibilities left vacant by an absent

parent at any given time. Giving up parts of our social lives to watch our siblings and getting jobs to pay for ourselves are just some of the countless sacrifices we made. That is what I want to celebrate. The transformation we faced after being faced with an impossible conflict that made us tougher and more appreciative of life.

To commend our strength, I want to introduce a tradition I think we could all agree with. Our family's separation taught me that time with each other is not in our control and we need to take advantage of our blessings while we can. To do this, our family should take time from our busy daily life to really bask in the gift of having each other to come home. I want us to have a designated time to appreciate each other's company. We can't fully appreciate our many blessings from our living room couch or dining room table, so I suggest celebrating adventurously, trying a new experience each month and taking advantage of all that's available to us in this life. I want to explore anything we can imagine.

Through these early years of my life, you both have reminded me that if I push myself and put in hard work now, my future will be full of possibilities. I know now this is true because together we have spent years redefining ourselves and finally the time has come to be proud of what we've done. However, our current happiness is not self-sustaining, we have to continue to nurture it, like a budding flower, to maintain the privilege of witnessing its beauty. How do we keep our success alive? We must savor every moment with each other. As I said, hard work pays off, and the possibilities are endless. We could lounge on the beach, have a picnic in the park, struggle up a hike, or just cook dinner together; what we do isn't important as long as we do it as a family.

The most important lesson I've taken from our past is that things will not always go my way, but that doesn't mean that there isn't something better in store. We lost a part of ourselves the day we separated, but we gained something else. We took a different path from most families; it was rocky and rough but we reached our destination and we can finally live happily. You taught me never to give up, and we never did. We trudged through the heartbreak, rose above the muck, and opened ourselves to new opportunities.

One of the most famous of the ten commandments says, "E ho'ohanohano mai kou makuahine, a me ka makuakāne" – Honor thy mother and father. That is what I intend to do.

Love,

Aizea





2017 Contest Winners From Left to Right: Masar Abdeljawad, Julianne Saladino, Amanda Herolaga, Shyloe Tote, Casey Metrose, Maizie Distad, Hannah Smasne, Timoteo Sumalinog, and Aizea Ranon

# Letter to My Parents™ Contest in Hawai'i 2016

## Organizers:

Kalamansi Books and Things  
Sariling Gawa Youth Council. Inc.  
Reiyukai America

## Award Recipients by Different Categories:

Category "Bravery": Amanda Herolaga  
Category "Reflection": Shyloe Tote  
Category "Proposal": Aizea Ranon

Special Recognition "Spirit of Aloha": Casey Metrose

## Winners/Finalists:

Masar Abdeljawad, Maizie Distad, Julianne Saladino, Hannah Smasne, and Timoteo Sumalinog

## Judges:

Dwayne Manzanillo (Teacher, James Campbell High School)  
Joanne Corpus (Zippy's) and  
Alvin Ishihara (Reiyukai America)

## Sponsors:

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