

# Dear Mama,

As a mother in her early 30s with a now teenager, I can honestly say motherhood has been worth every second. Thinking back to the 18-year-old me who was scared out of her mind to bring a child into this world so young and now celebrating over a decade with someone I raised to the best of my ability is something I am honored to speak about. Finding solitude in my journey has been eye-opening, and on this Mother's Day, I want to share my experience with other moms out there. I know my experience is unique to others, but I pray my voyage of learning and growing as a mother resonates with someone else.

Growing up, I remember not spending much time with my mom because she worked all the time to keep the lights on. We didn't live in the best neighborhood or go to the best schools as my cousins did, but we had what we needed to survive. When I was young, I was happy with no care in the world. Until I got to middle school and wanted everything my friends had around me, and my mom couldn't afford it. I recall a feeling of resentment that hit me during my teenage years. My relationship with my mom slowly began to deteriorate as I blamed her for not being there for me when I felt I needed her the most. My mom was checked out, and I had checked in, doing everything I could possibly do to get her attention, rather it was positive or negative. As we know, when most kids don't feel love at home, they go out and find it, which is what I ventured out to do. At least, I thought I had! I found someone even more broken than me, but he gave me the attention I yearned for the most. Not realizing we were trauma bonding, his attention would quickly turn into a fatal attraction.

I was on a thrill ride of emotions as I sat on my bed in my dorm room during my first year of college, staring at a positive pregnancy test. You read that right. I was pregnant. I was scared to tell my family because though I was 18, I was embarrassed. Just a few months prior, I was celebrating my next step in life, which was a major accomplishment for me since no one under my mother's roof had gone to college. I was the first in my immediate family to do so, so having to tell them I just made myself another statistic was heartbreaking. I hid my pregnancy until I was four months and could no longer hide my growing belly. My family was disappointed, but as they always did, I was embraced and told everything would be okay. I vowed to finish school no matter how hard or long it took me to do so. Now that my deep dark secret was out of the bag, I could focus on trying to embrace my pregnancy.



However, my daughter's father made that hard as his jealousy deepened, as my focus was primarily on my unborn child. He became very controlling and abusive both mentally and physically. I was driven to a sunken place that, at the time, I didn't think I would ever come back from. My lack of a father figure kept him around longer than he needed to be. He pushed me away from my family, and my pregnancy experience was one I preferred not to remember as the thought of it would remind me how sad and alone I felt.

It still never fails to amaze me how much light a baby could bring to someone whose world seemed so dark. My life was changed forever, and everything I did from that moment forward was for my innocent baby girl. I soon adopted my mother's workaholic lifestyle, at times working three jobs just to make ends meet. I quickly understood my mom and the choices she made when I was young. She was only doing her best with what she had and knew how to do. The drive of a mom who thrives on making sure her children are taken care of is unmatched. We can literally conquer the world, and there is nothing that can stop us from doing so. With the match lit behind me, I worked full time while sitting in class during the evenings with my daughter beside me to finish my bachelor's degree. Yes, there were many late nights that shifted a normal child's bedtime from 7 pm to 11 pm, but I did it. I finished four years after I should have, and the time it took didn't take away the feeling of pure joy I experienced after doing so. I decided to go right back, and after two more years of late nights and early mornings, I obtained my master's degree. I had done what most people didn't believe I could do. I beat the odds of what most girls were labeled coming from the neighborhood I came from, and I owed it all to my daughter, who put the battery in my back daily. There was no way I could fail her, and all I needed was her little hand to hold to remind me what I was doing it all for.

My main goal as a parent was to heal my childhood traumas and give my daughter the life I always dreamed of. I remember being told everything I needed to do, in better words, "Everything everyone else did that obviously was law because if it worked for them, then it had to work for me." It didn't take me long to figure out that my path during motherhood was for "ME" to walk daily with the constant ability to find new ways to parent along the way. There were times when the strategies I adopted worked for months, sometimes days, but as she grew, my parenting expanded on what I was willing to do and not do when it came to being the best mom I could possibly be. I'll be honest, there are things I never imagined doing as a parent, but compromising has been a key factor in keeping my ship afloat. There are days when I feel like it's us against the world, and the rest of the week, I may be asking her, "Who are you, darling? Who are you?"



One thing I have embraced is not making her into what I want her to be and allowing her to explore who she is and what makes her happy. Overall, I am glad that I found my independence while having the support from my village to give me their expertise along the way.

We all have a story to tell, and I tell mine with gratitude because everything that was put in my path to keep me from becoming the woman I was inspired to be was stepped over with ease as I learned to let go of all the doubt and jump gracefully over any obstacle thrown my way. Yes, being a single mom was hard and went against my need to have a family with the man who fathered my child. However, my need to have a healthy relationship that didn't leave both my daughter and me traumatized for the rest of our lives was more important. My relationship with my daughter is intentional, and I work hard every day to create a space where she feels loved, supported, and cared for unconditionally. I am far from perfect, but I pray one day, she comes to the realization that I am doing my best no matter how hard things get. I'm learning to parent at my pace and am dedicated to taking it one day at a time while making each day count as I take another step towards healing my childhood traumas and making sure I am the best mom to my daughter that I can possibly be. From one mom to the next, enjoy every moment, take a deep breath, and embrace the good, the bad, and the ugly. You got this; I am rooting for you. 😊

♡  
Dionna

