

HONORABLE MENTION

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Influential Woman

From a young age, my parents were separated. All I have ever known was going back and forth between houses, being bounced around. While it was confusing beyond belief, it was my reality. Both parents had found significant others at one point or another, they were still young, and that was something I enjoyed. I loved the new attention I received from people stepping into my life. One time, however, meeting someone new completely altered me as a person, but of course, I did not know that yet.

I was only five at the time. I was overjoyed by the fact that my father's new girlfriend, Jen, had made macaroni and cheese and hot dogs special for me. Little did I know, she would impact my life more than anyone I would ever meet. Little did I know, she was not only there to provide me with dinner and a place to stay for that one night, but all that and much more for years to come.

From that day on, Jen accepted me as her own daughter. Whether it was driving me to my baseball games, giving me a band-aid, or punishing me for my wrongdoing, she always managed to follow through, treating me as if I were her own. In later years, she went on to marry my father, promising to forever stay with him, and always stand as a strong mother figure for me.

When I was young, my birth mother had been struggling a great deal, unable to hold a stable job. Jen would always help in times of need, taking me under her wing. Anytime she was able to, she would shower me with the necessary love and affection. She has taught me a lot about myself, as well as the world surrounding me. She was one of the few people who refused to give up on me. She pushed me to be the best I could be. Whether I wanted to be a doctor, astronaut, or even a fashion designer, she encouraged me more than anyone around me had. Rather than simply acknowledging my dreams, she asked of my intentions once I met my goals, as well as the steps I would take to reach them. Jen would push me to have a plan to focus on, and tackle each step one by one, which wound up being one of the most valuable skills I have gained in my lifetime.

Taking on the role of a mother, she not only had to teach me life lessons, but she had to protect me when I couldn't help myself. At age 16, I was diagnosed with a seizure disorder. She helped me recover greatly from the first seizure by staying at home with me and supporting me when all I could do at the time was watch television and rest. However, it was not until the second seizure that I realized she was truly

watching after me. I fell in front of her and she caught me, causing me to hit my head on her chest, rather than the floor. She saved me from dealing with more injuries, resulting in less pain from the overall experience.

Without Jen in my life, I am not sure where I would be. She has helped to raise me from a young age, and has shaped me to be a person that I am proud of. I will always be grateful for her presence in my life.