

Family of the Year Essay Recipient Winner: Jimena Rivera

As a University student, I have had the opportunity to meet many students who have inspiring stories of how they have been able to overcome life's circumstances and attend a higher education institution. While they have faced hardships I have not, I also have an inspiring story that deserves recognition: that of my parents, Marbelia and Ricardo. My family should be titled Family of the Year because my parents have sacrificially dedicated themselves to ensuring my and my sister's education since our infancy.

From childhood, my parents have dedicated themselves to Mariana, my sister, and me. When we reached the age to be placed in kindergarten, my mom, who was in a high position at her job, decided to leave her job so she could be home instead. She always saw us off and was punctual to pick us up. Once kindergarten was over, she and my dad made the big decision to enroll us in a school in the United States. They obtained passports with student visas for us and crossed the border two times a day, five days of the week so that we could receive an education in the U.S. That was supposed to be only for a year, but they felt that the sacrifice they were making was worth it, that we were worth it. So, we both have studied in the United States since then.

Every school year, my parents backed me in my studies and extracurricular activities, and this was especially true in high school. I was blessed to be very involved in my school my latter years of high school when I was in multiple clubs including the National Honor Society. I also served as vice president and president of student council. My parents would sacrifice their schedule to allow me to meet mine. They would pick up my sister after school and wait for me to finish my meetings and activities, and they would also willingly drive me to any place I needed to be. Once, my school had a festival, and I had to stay to clean up at the end of it. It was taking longer than expected so my dad, who had been waiting for me, joined me in finishing up all the cleaning.

Another way my parents were a big help to me, especially my mom, was in finding my career path. Since junior year in high school, they asked me what I would like to study. They were patient with my indecisiveness, and when they saw I really was struggling to decide, they took me to various people who administered vocational placement tests. When I showed interest in the social work career, my mom contacted various social workers and set up interviews for me to meet them and hear about their jobs. Once I had chosen social work, my parents encouraged me to find the right university, even if it meant one that was far away from them. However, I decided to stay at the University of Texas at Brownsville, now the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, and they supported my decision and have been ever since.

My life as a university student has been possible due to my parents. They have paid for my education without regret, understanding that financial aid is not available for me. They have shown interest in my classes, asking how I like them and what I learn, but above all, they have provided me with much-needed support and encouragement when I have been stressed. In days when I have broken down in tears, my mom has been at my side, hugging me and making me a treat such as my favorite food. Math has never been my strong point, so when my dad saw I was struggling with Physics homework, he asked me for my book so that he could help me even though he had not touched the subject in many years. My mom revised my Spanish essays and did not just edit, she sat with me and explained grammar usage in Spanish writing. Both my parents have stayed up with me through some of my all-nighters, and on days when I

do not have school, they have allowed me to sleep in even though they have taught my sister and me to be early risers.

My parents' unconditional support has contributed to me not just getting through my semesters but doing well in them, and for this, they should be recognized as Family of the Year. They have celebrated my successes which I dedicate to them such as Dean's list for every semester, acceptance into the Honors College, completion of a 31-page paper, and my first employments in the University. Of course, no family is perfect, and mine is not without its flaws and arguments, but my parents have set the example of hardworking and loving parents. They encourage me to pursue a Master's once I complete my Bachelor's degree, and I will, with the hope that I can continue to honor their sacrifice and dedication.