

To Whom It May Concern:

The purpose of this letter is to gain recognition for my mother, Jacqueline Marie Bell, a single mother of seven children, who has endured the responsibilities of working full time, raising seven children on her own, getting five of those children into accredited four-year universities, thus far: all while simultaneously finishing school and receiving a college degree of her own. In December 2010, my mother completed her undergrad coursework to receive her Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from Indiana University. There is no adequate amount of words that can begin to describe the struggles and obstacles that my mother has had to overcome in order to accomplish what she has in her life. She is frequently urged to write a book on her life, which she undoubtedly plans to do in her lifetime. I am writing this letter to show my appreciation for a hero who motivates me and everyone who hears her life experiences about how she has spearheaded our family; thus, people immediately become touched and encouraged by such an inspiring testimony.

From birth, my mother's life has been marked by tragic and disturbing life events that often result in detrimental outcomes, when one's life has a history of failures, dysfunctions and disappointments; while lacking positive guidance. She and her eight siblings were abandoned at birth by their mother; consequently, my mother was raised in foster care and institutions without any connection to her siblings or family, yet she kept together and raised all seven of her own children; on her own. Anyone who has had to deal with such harsh emotional, psychological and physical circumstances, with an unstable family structure, faces serious difficulties throughout their life as a result. However, just like my mother's enduring spirit, her circumstances has also provided a culmination of life events that would shape her character, provide her with perseverance, and create the drive and determination that she would use to overcome our condition and achieve a better life, despite her surroundings and what she had been exposed to in her upbringing.

The majority of mine and my siblings' lives were spent in Savannah, GA, after the decision to move from my mother's hometown of Indianapolis, IN, with her then husband, my dad, when I was a toddler. Growing up in Savannah, we were surrounded by the typical conditions associated with impoverished environments. Though my mom tried to shield us from the violence that is ever present in inner-city neighborhoods; violence was the norm and seemed synonymous with poverty, therefore hard to escape. I vividly remember the apartment complex that we lived in during my elementary school days; particularly the scene of a shooting which resulted in a bullet-riddled Laundromat located just yards from my school bus stop. An even earlier memory is the period that our family was homeless and had not gotten this apartment, or any housing for that matter. Though I was very young, not quite understanding our condition, the reiterative story-telling from my mother: the unforgettable feeling of hunger: and the reminiscent visions of walking everywhere in the city as a young child, won't allow me to overlook the physical and emotional impact of this situation, nor omit this part of our lives from my memory. Not many people understand the pain one feels when hearing your mom quote, "searching the ground for change to buy food, and crying not because I'm hungry, but because my kids are crying from being hungry." We were extremely susceptible to the ill effects of our surroundings, just as other impoverished families who fall victim or become complacent in that type of environment. Consequently, my mother had a different plan than the one society had outlined for us. She was determined to achieve a goal that permeates every facet of her life: and that her children would receive the same or better quality of education as do more privileged children: also, that we would overcome the stereotypes and discriminative practices endured by families such as ours.

In an effort to ensure that we obtain a quality education in a better school system than the location we lived in, my mom pursued schools with advanced educational opportunities located in better neighborhoods; in many cases, on opposite ends of the city. As a result of displaying interest in these advanced educational programs, opportunity presented itself, and we capitalized by passing admission exams, resulting in each of her children being accepted into gifted programs as early as elementary school. One example that signifies her limitless vision for us, involves me: I recall her enrolling me into Duke University's Talent Identification Program (TIP) during 7th Grade. This program required me to score at the 95th percentile or higher on a grade-level standardized achievement test to qualify, and it allowed me to take the college SAT exam during middle school for greater insight into my academic abilities; in order to analyze my ranking among other gifted students. She also sacrificed to create 'a way out of no way' when describing her push to get all six of her children, during that time, into private school, where she felt we would benefit personally and educationally. When told there was no way she could do it, or no way to afford private school tuition for that many children while earning minimum wage, my mother's desire for her children to receive quality education was triumphant over the doubt and criticisms; as a result, she sought and attained scholarships for each of us.

A few years later, right before my sophomore year in high school, my mom made the very difficult and questionable decision at the time, to move from Savannah, GA back to her home-state of Indiana, in the midst of the educational sacrifices and opportunities she had garnered. Although she and our dad had been divorced for years, the psychological, physical and emotional abuse that she endured during the marriage, had not ended; only compounding the pressures associated with raising a family alone, overcoming domestic abuse, lacking a strong support system, and overcoming a history of abuse and failures. She felt that the decision to move back to Indiana, while distancing herself from the volatility of our dad, was the best choice. Indiana provided the emotional and physical support of relatives, while making it easier to achieve the end result that she envisioned for us; therefore, she decided to move to Richmond, IN, a small town one hour east of her hometown of Indianapolis, IN. Although we remained an hour away from the closest relative, we were now much closer than Savannah, while providing a smaller city setting that alleviated some of the larger city challenges of having to raise children as a single parent, living below the poverty level.

Thus far, four of us children have finished high school at the only high school in the city, Richmond High School; and one of us finished at a two-year boarding honors high school at Indiana Academy for Science, Mathematics, and Humanities (IA), located on the college campus of Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana. IA consists of 300 students (150 juniors and 150 seniors) selected from gifted and talented applicants from across the state of Indiana. At this school, students such as my sister had the opportunity to take advanced, college-level courses in addition to the state-mandated public school curriculum. Students were provided educational opportunities appropriate to the ability of gifted students, while challenging these gifted students to reach their full potential, as well as the development needed to prepare for college. Another example of my mom's sacrifices involves my next oldest sibling experiencing a dream come true for a future graphic design major. My mom applied for her to attend a summer program at Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) located in Providence, Rhode Island. RISD, which is consistently ranked as the number one fine arts college in the U.S., offers six week pre-college programs during the summer to high school juniors and seniors. Students live on campus and take college courses for a comprehensive introduction to the college art school experience. In order to provide this experience for my sister, my mom had to take off work multiple days to make the fourteen hour road trip from Richmond to Rhode Island.

My mother also performed many unconventional methods to help instill critical qualities in us that would subconsciously affect our thoughts, attitudes, and actions, thus shaping our vision for the future. I will never forget the impact of a meaningful event in my life that occurred in my early middle school years, when my mom invited me to a program hosted at the city's historically black college, Savannah State University where she was a student. The program, named Black Executive Exchange Program (BEEP), boasted the nation's top African-American corporate entrepreneurs, and community leaders to the campus to exhibit minorities in critical positions of leadership, also to speak on career development issues for the encouragement of aspiring African American professionals. These executives, known as "BEEPers," had no idea the level of inspiration and motivation that they were providing to a then adolescent kid. I didn't realize it then, but what my mom did, by picking me up from school and bringing me to school with her that day, was plant a seed, by showing me where I could see myself in the future and the opportunities present if I matched action with the vision of being a successful African American professional. She has taken all of us siblings to similar events throughout our lives, but this occasion stuck out to me and created the spark that has pushed me all the way to starting my first career job at a public accounting firm this coming fall. My mom has also done small things with a positive impact, such as taking us to work with her when she worked at the Georgia Department of Transportation, to converse with college educated engineers while learning about engineering, what their jobs entail, as well as seeking educational advice and motivation from their experiences. Other important actions my mom has taken, is to associate us in every facet of our lives outside of school, with influential and positive role models, such as successful parents on our sports teams, positive employees and parents she knew from our daycare, and other motivated individuals and friends whom she networked with. My mother was relentless in her mission and would not accept anything less than excellence from us. Her unyielding actions, unmatched initiative, and immeasurable sacrifices placed us onto a path that would eventually lead all of us towards a college education, graduate college and pursue graduate studies and/or professional careers.

Throughout my entire life, not only has my mother sacrificed to provide all that she has for her children, but she did this while pursuing her own education to better herself, working tirelessly job after job with hopes of advancing at each stage and becoming successful. However, she has consistently faced the challenges of struggling to achieve this vision. Although the knowledge she has gained through these experiences are immeasurable, the many years of education she has attained means little when she has not yet finished and 'officially' attained the degree that signifies completion. In other words, the fact that she was an Accounting/Computer Science double major whose intermediate skills in accounting and computers, along with the ability to write ten computer languages is irrelevant, because at each job she has to prove herself and sometimes to no avail, which promotes frustration associated with any path that is centered on advancement. Lack of compensation from this situation forced my mom to utilize other avenues of employment in order to pay bills, provide for her children (college visits, books, etc.), and cover other obligations. So keeping in pattern with her strength of mind and character, she then became an independent sales representative for Avon Products Inc. Considering she only made a little over \$9,000 a year from her regular job and actually made more money selling Avon products, the decision to simultaneously work on the side for Avon, along with her job was beneficial. She frequently describes this outcome as testimony to her belief that between faith and drive, help would come from somewhere to make certain she would be able to cover bills that otherwise would not have been paid by one job alone.

My mom, Jacqueline Marie Bell, is a testament to anyone who aspires to achieve any goals in life and garner success from the drive to prevail despite the odds. Just a few years ago, my mother was denied

further federal financial aid because of the length of time it has taken her to complete her education. Yet, she did not give up when presented with a major obstacle blocking her goal and dream. What she did was something that she has always done: kept her faith and continued to fight for what she desired until her most recent educational achievement. Now she awaits the celebration of this accomplishment with her commencement ceremony in May '2011, along with two additional graduations: mine from graduate school and my sister's from undergrad at University of St. Francis-Ft. Wayne. Additionally, she has moved on to an even higher plateau with greater goals she expects to reach in her education and life by starting graduate coursework to pursue a Master's degree, and simultaneously studying to sit for the CPA exam. My mother is a true hero with a story that could empower not only women, but all people dealing with adversity and obstacles. Hence, I believe her story should be shared and heard by the world.



Sincerely,

Eric Antonio Bell

<http://www.Bell-AmazonStore.com/Family.htm>