

#1 Thing That Changed My Story

My parents are strong, hard-assed, progressive, grounded, open minded, happy, successful, educated, modest individuals. If they were not as they are, I would not be me. They are the number one thing that changed my story.

Twenty-two, alone in Texas, raising my son without child support or the helping hand of the ex-husband or in-laws, I went to work. Mom and Dad resided a state over in New Mexico, but they said I could do it. I had no choice but to, so I did. In the beginning, only because they thought I could, so I did. Not because I have ever believed in myself. They made it seem like there was zero failure in me, so of course I could do it. But then, somehow, I did. I worked hard in Texas for two years, then after being allowed to move home, I drove myself and my son to New Mexico.

I moved into my own place. Moving back into mom and dad's house was certainly not an option. Mom and Dad told me to find a place I could afford, and I did. Of course I wanted to move back in with them, who wouldn't. But standing on my own was something I had to master. So I did. Again, not because I believed in myself. They did all the believing in me, for me.

My next goal was to go back to school. I didn't have the option to go on campus and work at night. My folks were determined to support me into being an independent mother. They pushed me to search for a program that would fit my schedule, not the other way around. I love them for that!

The attorney I was working for, a Harvard graduate, told me about University of Phoenix and how I could do it! And somehow, I did. He was supportive and I met with the school to see if they could work with me. Without the flexibility of University of Phoenix, I would have never kept at it. But I did. I worked full time as a paralegal, took at least twelve credits every semester, including summer semester. After two short years, I graduated with my Associates of Arts in Criminal Justice. I did!

I heard of Arizona State University's online program and how they were looking to help non-traditional students much like University of Phoenix, so I transferred. Dad said he wanted to go to ASU when he was younger. Going to a "regular school" was more acceptable in the eyes of others. Being accepted by others sure helps when you find it hard to accept your own life's circumstances. But somehow, I did. Plus, now there were football games my son and I could drive to! And we did!

Another two years flew by, and I graduated with my Bachelors of Science in Criminal Justice and Criminology. I slept but five hours a night on average for those four years. I had no time for a social life, but mom and dad kept saying I could do it. And I did! I didn't think I would ever make it, but their support pushed me on. My son was in sports and excelling in school, so I was happy.

I know I had it in me to complete one more degree program. I signed up for a Masters also with Arizona State University. I was determined to complete it before I turned 30. And I

did! You can guess who were my biggest fans, mom and dad! I graduated in August of 2017 with a 3.64 GPA and a Masters of Public Safety Leadership and Administration at the age of 29. I was a divorced, single mother, sustained constant full time employment and had somehow earned three degrees. I did! I now hold a supervisor position at work and have doubled my income in these past five years while I was in school. I still can't believe it sometimes. Wearing that master's hood at graduation was my proudest moment. Not for me, believing in myself is still a challenge, but for my son. He will look back at those photographs and know that he can achieve a masters too!

With no other parents, in no other universities, could this all have been possible. The drive my parents had their entire lives, was birthed into me. The tenacious actions and perseverance within their own stories, was read by me as mandatory. They are me. I am them. What better way to support your children then to believe every step of the way that they can achieve whatever they set their mind to. And I did! They believed it in to fruition. They believed in me. That is a gift. My story wouldn't be the same without them.