

# Letter to My Parents™ Contest in Hawai'i 2018

## Madison Directo

Award Recipient in the Category of Bravery

To my loving parents,

Let me begin by expressing my gratitude toward you both. I know I do not show it enough, but I am so blessed to have a disciplined father and a hardworking mother to look up to. You two help me grow and have instilled in me values and principles that define me. I am sorry for complaining about your strictness and your scrupule—I realize now I am grateful for all of it.

It is crazy to think there was a time not too long ago when all the scoldings and rules were beyond my understanding, a time when I would cry and scream in my pillow, asking myself why I was grounded or why I could not go to my friend's house. Silly trifles now, in my juvenile years, I simply could not understand why my parents were so "mean." Whatever words I said before, whatever curses—all the rolling eyes and slammed doors—I cannot take them back, but I truly am sorry. After all this time, I finally understand.

I understand we live in a cruel world. The streets are dark, and curiosity lurks in the human mind. You were only protecting your children from an unforgiving world blanketed in the unknown. But now I am here to address something you may not know, something like a secret. You both have been protecting me from the outside world all my life, but there is an enemy living among us, in our own household. Is this conflict only in my mind, or is this conflict truly living in the both of you?

Allow me to explain—this may not yet make sense. I mean, how could it? You two, my parents, could not have possibly been an issue in my life! That is impossible! These perfect people could not possibly do harm in their own child's life. But again, allow me to explain. What you both did and continue to do, you do not do on purpose.

Allow me to give you a background from my perspective. I am a daughter of two parents, two Christian parents with values and a foundation upon God; two people who believe in the same things, who lead others to believe in the same things, who lead their children to believe in the same things—two people who talk a lot about the truth. And this all sounds good, really a blessing. But as I got older, as I matured, I was able to see things for myself—I was able to see two Christian parents who are leaders for God and who give sound advice, but have forgotten what it means to live for God. This troubles me and has been troubling me for years now. I always try to talk myself out of my assumptions—surely my parents are strong spiritually! They are wise and mature and zealous! But when my eyes see things and my ears hear things, not even my own mind can deny the facts. As you two have been training me to

live a life for God, I can see that you two are struggling. And when you struggle, I struggle, too.

I remember many instances to reinforce the fact that I am not making this up in my head. I remember when my father would have fits of rage. He would target both animate and inanimate objects. I remember him throwing things in anger, shouting threats and madness. When I was younger, he would tell me and my siblings he loved us and that he was angry because of his deep love for us. But as of recently, I cannot shake the feeling that his anger is not coming out of love anymore. I love you dad. I really do. But I hate the nights I have cried, fallen asleep to the sound of your rage. And mom, I remember you shutting me out, focusing on other things, when you would no longer talk to me. I still felt love and support...but it was quieter than it used to be.

Most of all, I remember the both of you. Together. Solely together. Together in faith, in spirit—but now together in utter spiritual decay. I still listen to complaining, lots of complaining; complaining about work, about school, and the people you know. And you have taught me to complain, too. And I relive the days of you two on the phone talking to other people, critiquing them, being their rock, sharing in openness and telling them how they should change...only to be doing the opposite. My mind can't help but use the word hypocrite. It is painful every time I think about it, but is it possible that my parents are hypocrites? I do not want to believe it.

This may sound bitter, raw and truly out of line—and maybe it is. But all I can say is that this is because I love you both. I look up to you. I respect you. But for a second, forget I am your child, forget I am your daughter of 17 years. Now I am your sister, your sister in Christ—a fellow believer who cares about her brother and sister. This is even deeper love than that of a child to their parents because this love has been made whole through God. So as a sister, as imperfect, flawed and sinful as the two of you, I want you to know that I look to you as examples...as warriors. And whatever you want me to do, I hope you are doing it, too, because I have been watching—I continue to watch each and every day. I pray you move forward and continue to direct and guide others, but I most of all pray you both take your own advice to heart.

I love you both as my parents and siblings in Christ.

# Letter to My Parents™ Contest in Hawai'i 2018

**Alyssa Ramiro Cortez**

Award Recipient in the Category of Reflection

**D**ear Mommy,

I rarely call you Mommy now, but it doesn't mean that I love you less. In fact, I love you even more. As I became more involved in high school in hopes of making you and Dad proud, my grades sky-rocketed, but our time spent together as a family became scarce.

You faced your fears to provide a comfortable life for me and manong (older brother), and for that, I am immensely grateful. In 1992, you experienced your first plane ride with sheer anxiety before living in Hawai'i. I cannot imagine how fearful you must have been to arrive in a foreign country with little knowledge of English and few means of making a living. Despite all the uncertainties you had, you defied the odds, toiled as a nurse aid, raised a family with Dad, and reaped the benefits of immigrating to America. Now, you manage your own care home business with grit and humility. If Superwoman were real, you would be living proof.

For every superhero, with great power comes great responsibility. We become so immersed in our day-to-day activities that we seldom find time to truly appreciate each other. You have to face the difficulties of running a residential care home, tackling medical responsibilities, attending a number of doctor appointments for three of your clients, undertaking household chores, feeding seven mouths (eleven if you include the dogs), paying the bills, and fabricating the time to de-stress at home. Meanwhile, I arrive at home almost every day past 7 PM exhausted from school, color guard practices, and study sessions, usually eating dinner straightaway before completing homework and knocking out on my bed.

In many ways, we are similar: stubborn, workaholics, emotional, and caring for massive and minute things. In spite of our many disagreements, I thank God that you and I are two birds of the same feather. With you, I do not have to carry the hardships of life by myself because I have you to lessen the burden. It is your resilience that I find the motivation to continue morphing into a better person.

Do you remember the summer of 2017? I ventured into Japan alone while you and Dad vacationed in California. My one-month stay in Japan was an eye-opening milestone that challenged me to embrace newfound maturity. Although my experiences were exciting and eventful, I left out one thing. I was lonely. In a little room amidst the commotion of Kyoto, Japan, I sobbed quietly. I dreamed for many years to finally travel to Japan, yet I yearned for you to ask me where I was, who I was with, and when was the last time I ate. I was homesick not of the blue house I grew up in but the home within the warm em-

brace of you and Dad. Whether I am two feet away from you or over four thousand miles from you, my love for you transcends any distance.

Thank you for allowing me to achieve what my heart sought for the most—to explore Japan. You must have felt so worried to let your 16-year-old daughter travel to a foreign country by herself. I could even recall asking you if I could study outside of Hawai'i for college, and you sat on my bed with tears forming. You did not want me to leave you, and suddenly, I did not want to leave you, too.

In attempts to restore our faulty relationship from its rubble and ruins, I propose this: rather than finding time for each other, we need to make time for each other. I am sure you agree that heartfelt conversations between mother and daughter could strengthen our bond. Communication is key; let us invest some time and effort into sharing our perspectives and finding commonality. Let's talk about all the serious aspects of life: resolving arguments, college plans, career paths, love, and faith. Moreover, let's not forget our small-talks about how our days went, what our plans are for the week, and the well-favored, "What's for dinner?" We are both so absorbed in our responsibilities that we hardly ever eat dinner together. Although hard work is essential in obtaining success, I urge that we set a time to put our work aside and eat more dinners together, go on more hikes, watch more movies, and have mother-daughter days together during the weekends. I also ask earnestly to learn more about my Filipino roots through you. I am willing to learn how to cook Filipino dishes like your popular pancit palabok (noodle dish) and chicken adobo, but mine would not be half as great as yours.

Mommy, I cannot promise you that I will always be with you in person, but I do know that I will forever love and care for you just as you bestowed your love and care upon me. We are both growing older, but let's rewind time. Just as a baby sits in her mother's womb listening to the calming lullaby of her mother's heartbeat, let's build a bridge of connection, not only as mother and daughter but also as best friends. My biggest regrets are the opportunities I missed to convey my love and appreciation for you. Each time I passed my curfew, on days I refused to hike with you just to sleep in, those moments we argued over petty and insignificant issues, and when I uttered words of angst and resentment, I failed to portray the values of kindness, compassion, respect, and responsibility you instilled in me. For these, I am sorry. In moments of conviction and reflection, I yearn for a better relationship with you. Let us give ourselves that chance. Mahal na mahal kita (I love you very much).

With love and appreciation, Alyssa Cortez

# Letter to My Parents™ Contest in Hawai'i 2018

**Gisella Kahapea**

Award Recipient in the Category of Proposal

Hey Mark,

Let's rewind time, shall we?

You met me at my worst. No, really, I was terrible. I first met you when I was nine years old, lucky you, huh? I never paid that much attention to you when I first met you, but that quickly changed when I kept seeing you. Like, all the time. It's like you started dating my mom or something. ... Wait! You were! Okay, I knew I wasn't the most observant and I know I'm still not, but man, was I that dense? After the fifth time you picked me up from my grandparents' I finally asked, "Hey, are they dating?" When it was official that you were dating, it became clear to me that you might probably be like everyone else my mom dated. Someone who would be there for a moment, then quickly replaced. But, you stayed way longer than I thought you would.

When you bought a house for us to live together, I was shocked. We really were about to start a family. No more of those days where we're cramped in my mother's Chinatown apartment, or having dinners in your Saint Louis complex. Remember when I mention that I was at my worst when you first met me? Yeah, scratch that, when I moved in with you that was my worst. I was the stereotypical teenager, hating everything and everyone, especially the guy who was trying to be my dad. And unfortunately, that was you. I treated you terribly. I didn't even accept the bacon that you offered me! Who does that?!

I wouldn't have thought that you would have been the one to stay instead of my mom. Crazy, huh? A life with her boyfriend and her daughter, in their semi-new house, with the intent of starting a family and new career. But with all that she had going on for her, she decided to pack up and leave? What a horrible thing she could've done to her daughter! But, wait? What happened to her boyfriend? My mother didn't just leave me, she left you as well. You took care of me when she failed to and you didn't have to at all. You were there for me in that time that she was detached from us both mentally and physically, and I can't think of why? I'm not your kid. I'm the kid of the lady that left you for someone else. Why would anyone want to keep me? I question this every day as it has been almost three years since the day she left and you're still here.

You and my mother were supposed to start a family, get me to college, eventually spend your life together, but that didn't happen. Her absence wasn't the greatest and I know it still hurts. It hurts me as well, but it pains me even more when I'm compared to her at my worst. There are times when we have our falling outs. I show a side of me that's exactly like

hers, but sometimes I can't help it. Whenever either of us bring up the topic of my mother, it always ends badly for us. She brings out the bad in both of us, but I want to change that. Instead of having the feeling of anger take over, I want us to think more positively. I'm not saying we should talk to her and amend things because I know that will never happen, but we can change our mindsets. When you first met me, I had the manners of a toddler. You taught me how to change that real quick. Those manners were exactly like my mother's. If we could fix those bad traits, why can't we fix the ones where my mother and I are similar? Instead of using her personality in comparison to mine as an insult, can we change those into lessons instead? You tell me all the time that I have some of my mother's worst traits, but never how to change it. Rather than insulting, tell me how to improve. Tell me how to be different. If you helped me improve my table manners, we could also improve my personality. I can't change the fact that sometimes I act like my mom, but we can make sure I'm not exactly like her.

I may have lost my mother, but I gained so much more. You gave me everything. You've given me family friends who treat me like one of their own, skills and life lessons I probably would've never learned, and you gave me you. You were literally quite forced to drop your life and raise a kid as a single parent, and that's no easy task. Especially a moody teen; they're the worst! Yet, you're here. I can't help but feel guilty every day because of this. Your life revolves around mine. Every little schedule change that happens on my part, affects the entirety of yours, and yet you still do it. You eat Zippy's due to my long color guard practices, and you hate Zippy's! You do everything for me. You love me. I never thought I could ever get this close to someone my mom has dated, but then you came around, and I thank God every day for the fact that you did.

You are the best thing that has happened to my life, and I thank you. I thank you so much. I love you, dad.

Gisella



### 2018 Contest Winners

Front Row From Left to Right: Alofaaga Siaopo Tumanuvao, Makenna Riye Yoshinobu, Rana Stephanie Ballesteros Mejes, Madison Directo, and Kristina Lerin Linares,

Second Row From Left to Right: Gisella Kahapea, Vianca-Mae C de Guzman, Alyssa Ramiro Cortez, Marc Mercado, and Rachele Agustin.

## Letter to My Parents™ Contest in Hawai'i 2018

### Organizers:

Kalamansi Books and Things  
Filipino Association of University Women (FAUW)  
Reiyukai America

### Award Recipients by Categories:

Category "Bravery": Madison Directo  
Category "Reflection": Alyssa Ramiro Cortez  
Category "Proposal": Gisella Kahapea

### Winners/Finalists:

Rachele Agustin, Vianca-Mae C de Guzman, Kristina Lerin Linares, Rana Stephanie Ballesteros Mejes, Marc Mercado, Alofaaga Siaopo Tumanuvao, and Makenna Riye Yoshinobu.

### Judges:

Araceli C. Jimeno  
Book Editor of the award-winning book; an anthology of letters and art work made by children of overseas Filipino workers  
Dr. Richard Kebo  
Chairman, State Commission on Fatherhood at the Department of Human Services  
Martha Nakajima  
Retired Diplomat with the United States Foreign Service specialized in economics and trade

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### MC:

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### Photograph:

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