

Young, Dumb and in Love

Ever since I was a little girl my parents have always instilled in me the importance of pursuing an education and to be independent. Their fear for me was that I would get involved in a relationship and put that as my first priority. They would constantly remind me over and over how crucial it was that I finish my schooling and establish a career for myself before anything else. When I was in middle school and high school, my parents were a little bit stricter with me and limited me on going out with my friends. Growing up, I would wonder why they were so obsessed with this idea of independence and keeping me in their sight for as long as they could. As I got old enough to understand, my mom and dad sat me down and explained why they treated me the way they did. After they told me, everything finally started to make sense and come into perspective.

To understand their story, some background information about my family is necessary to note. I come from a small family of four; my dad (39 years old), my mom (36 years old), me (19 years old) and my little sister (14 years old). Both of my parents are Hispanic and come from larger families. My mom is one of eight siblings and my dad is one of six siblings. During that era, it was very common to see a family of eight or ten, unlike today's age where the common number of kids per family are two to four children. Having that many kids was obviously very expensive so both parents needed to work full-time, if not more, just to make ends meet. Therefore, it was a lot more difficult to give the necessary attention to each child, making it easier for them to get away with certain things.

With that said, their story begins in the mid-90s aka their high school years. My mom was a sophomore and my dad was a senior at the time. They originally met through mutual friends and their love story took off from there. One day at school, it was raining and my mom

was waiting in line to get lunch. My dad happened to see her standing by herself with no umbrella and saw it as his opportunity to “make a move”. So he went up to her and offered to share his umbrella. My mom thought it was one of the most thoughtful gestures ever, and they ended up talking more and hanging out more. They quickly became inseparable and began dating. However, my dad being 18 and my mom being 15, he felt as though she was too young for him, so he figured that it would be in both of their best interests to break things off. Then, a year later, my mom contacted my dad again and they ended up back together for a second time. At this point my mom was finishing up her junior year and was sixteen years old and my dad had been out of high school for two years by now and was twenty years old. They were together for a few months and everything was great; they were both happy and in love. Until something extremely unexpected happened; my mom found out that she was pregnant. Both of my parents were terrified; my mom was still a minor at the time and my dad was well over eighteen, and on top of that, they were both young and unable to support a child at this stage of their life. They knew that everything was going to change for them; their futures were going to have to be put on hold and now their whole life was going to be dedicated to this baby. No matter how scared they were, they knew they had to come clean and tell their parents at some point. My mom’s family and my dad’s family had two different reactions. My mom’s parents were extremely angry and disappointed in her and my grandma told my mom to get her stuff and get out. My dad’s parents on the other hand were divorced and since my dad was living with his mom, she was the first one that he told. To his surprise, she was extremely happy and gave both my mom and dad a hug. And when my mom explained that her parents kicked her out and she had nowhere to stay, my grandma took my mom in with open arms. This was probably the best case scenario that could have possibly happen for them. Now that they were living together, it made it easier to figure out

how they were going to raise me. My dad already had a minimum wage job at the time but it wasn't enough to support my mom and me. So a few months after my mom got pregnant, he got the opportunity to work in a machine shop as a machinist where his pay was double what he was getting at his first job. After I was born, my mom was a stay-at-home mom for a few years, and then landed a job at a grocery store. Now that they had two incomes contributing to baby expenses and bills, everything was starting to look up. Even though they had plenty of offers from relatives and friends for financial help, they didn't want to take it. My parents did not like asking or accepting money from people, they knew it was their responsibility so they did what they had to do to make sure there was food on the table and the bills were paid. They pushed through the hard times and always found a way to make it work. All my parents wanted was for me to have a good life and they did everything in their power to make sure that happened.

As a product of a teen pregnancy, I understand the stereotypes and labels that it comes with. Breaking the ongoing chain of these awful statistics of teen pregnancy has ultimately been my number goal/challenge in life. Ever since I can remember, my parents have always told me that they want better for me and have emphasized the importance of getting a good education. So it's been quite an interesting journey trying to make sure I live up to that expectation. But with my parents' support, I know I can do anything I set my mind to.

Fast forward to today, I graduated high school with honors and am currently in my second year of college in hopes of pursuing a career in psychology. I'm so thankful to have such amazing parents who believe in me and my capabilities. "No sacrifice equals no reward" is what my dad always tells me; which is what motivates me to never give up no matter how many curve balls life may throw my way. My parents are truly my inspirations.