

Howdy! My name is Xochitl and I am currently a graduate student at Texas A&M University pursuing a Master of Education in Agriculture Education. Throughout my entire college career, including the application process, I have been extremely blessed to have a myriad of people who love and support me, but none have been as constant and ever-present as Renee Sullins and Tapestry of Hope.

My senior year in high school was a very high stress time for me. As a first generation college student, and coming from a low-income background, I had nobody around home that could help me navigate the seemingly complicated process of applying to universities. I was on my own. However, a student at my high school, who knew it was my dream to attend Texas A&M, told me of an Aggie who was helping other students at a high school near ours, and invited me to join her one day after school. Little did I know that this meeting would change my life and give me a cherished friend.

I met Renee Sullins after school at Milby High School, in a meeting for her "Carpe Diem" Club. During this meeting, students talked about a college camp they had recently attended thanks to the help of Mrs. Sullins, and what they learned. I was immediately intrigued. She was helping so many students who were just like me! After meeting with her, I knew she was a person I could trust, and began attending her after school meetings as often as I could. During these meetings, I had someone who could answer my endless questions, edit my essays for college and scholarship applications, review my FAFSA with me, and make sure that I had everything set and on track on this road to college. Not only were these meetings places to work, there were times where we could share our successes and what we were looking forward to as well. They were a safe place where high school students on the verge of going out into the "real world" could share their experiences, something that is so important to keep our confidence up during a time that can seem daunting.

After graduation, I thought the help from Mrs. Sullins would end. After all, she had helped get me into college, what else was there for her to help with? I could never have been more wrong, and I am glad I was. During the summer, she made sure we were preparing ourselves to move out, by reminding us of little things to buy and pack, things I never would have even thought of. She also approached me about the opportunity to attend Fish Camp, a four-day retreat for incoming Aggie freshmen to get together and meet others in a fun-filled environment. I had heard of Fish Camp, and knew I wanted to attend, but was unsure of how I was going to pay the fee, as finances were still tight in our home. It was then Mrs. Sullins offered to pay for Fish Camp through Tapestry of Hope. I was elated! As it is known around Texas A&M, Fish Camp is an Aggie's first tradition, and I was going to be a part of it.

Her help still did not stop there. Tapestry of Hope went on to pay for a PO Box for both my freshman and sophomore years, something I did not even realize would be a necessity. Her care did not just include financial help. She made sure we all felt comfortable in this new college world, from sending Valentines cards to care packages. Not only that, but throughout Mrs. Sullins' visits to campus, especially during my freshman year, I felt my connection to my school strengthen, and my homesickness lessen. Over the past four years, Mrs. Sullins has opened up both her

heart and her home to me, and has counseled me on everything from heartache to my faith in God. Her love and support has been instrumental to my success, as I know I can always turn to her for anything, whether it be questions about the college or professional worlds, a prayer, or words of encouragement.

On the night I graduated in 2014, with a Bachelor of Science in Animal Science, the first in my family to ever graduate from college, Mrs. Sullins shared some words with me that I will never forget: "This is yours. This education is YOURS. Nobody can take this away from you." To this day, these words bring tears to my eyes. Thanks to Mrs. Sullins and Tapestry of Hope, I am an educated Latina woman in the STEM field, pursuing a higher degree, something statistics said would never happen.

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