

As a Latina I hold a triple minority status: I am a woman; member of an ethnic minority; and am in a low socio-economic status group. Many students found within any of these groups are often underrepresented in honors and advanced placement programs. The under-representation of underserved students in these college preparatory initiatives leads to limited opportunities for higher education and advanced degrees. According to the statistics, the probability of graduating high school, let alone going to college, was not very likely in my case. Both Renee Dormois-Sullins and Tapestry of Hope helped me get into and through college. This organization has had a great impact on my educational attainment through quality mentoring experiences and exceptional leadership programs.

I met Mrs. Sullins towards the end of my Senior year at Charles H. Milby High School. That day, she was filling in as a substitute for our Statistics teacher. I remember her walking into class with a binder full of information about every university and junior college you could possibly imagine. In school, I ranked among the top ten percent of my graduating class, yet, no one at Milby encouraged me to look at or research any colleges. I did not receive the support I needed from my college counselor at school and I now cringe at the thought of not having met Renee when I did. My plans completely changed after meeting my soon-to-be mentor. At the time, I had decided that I was going to stay in Houston and apply to a community college close to home. However, after spending time with Renee she encouraged me to look at four year institutions in other cities. Unfortunately, I had missed the deadline for admissions applications to many of the schools I was interested in. She looked through her college binder until she found some schools whose deadlines I had not missed and gave me her contact information. She told me to contact her as soon as I found a university on the list that caught my interest. Renee hit the mark; my present Alma Mater Southwestern University was on that list.

I contacted her the next day to let her know that I was interested in applying to Southwestern University (SU). Southwestern University is a small private Liberal Arts institution that was ranked one of the top ten colleges in the state of Texas in 2014 and it is also the first institution of higher learning in Texas, chartered in 1840. I told her that I thought the campus was beautiful and the teacher-student ratio in classes was just what I was looking for. Renee explained to me that she had lived in Georgetown in the past and how her parents and grandparents had ties to the school and the town. I was excited to learn more about Southwestern, but my excitement was put on hold once Mrs. Sullins made it known that the application deadline was due that same evening. She spent well over two hours on the phone with me; coaching me on how to fill out the FAFSA and college application step by step. Tapestry of Hope also helped me waive the application fees that I could not afford to pay for on my own. I managed to complete the entire application process by the next morning. It was an intensely stressful experience, but one that was also very fulfilling.

After getting over the initial shock of receiving an acceptance letter from Southwestern weeks later, Mrs. Sullins was sure to examine my Financial Aid package as soon as I received it and thought she could help me obtain more financial assistance from SU. As a member of a low socio-economic group, there was no way I could afford to attend a private institution without economic help. We set up an appointment to tour the campus and to speak with the Associate Director of Financial Aid. Renee personally drove me to Georgetown, Texas on the Spring of 2010. We did not have the opportunity to speak to the Asst. Director that day, but we did have the honor of meeting and speaking to THE Director of Financial Assistance! I was incredibly nervous, but Mrs. Sullins took the lead and acted as an advocate on my behalf. Mr. Gaeta encouraged me to appeal my Financial Aid package in order to amend my current reward. Renee was there to guide me every step of the way. She helped me write and edit my appeal letter and with her guidance I was able to acquire the financial assistance (approximately \$117,000 in total; over four years) I needed to attend SU.

At this point, Renee had taken me under her wing and had extended her friendship to my entire family. Not only was she my mentor, but she also became a dear friend and like a second mother figure to me. Her support did not stop once I was admitted to Southwestern. Mrs. Sullins continued to shower me with guidance and support all through my academic career at SU. The Summer before I moved into my freshman dorm, Renee provided me with bed sheets and a comforter that had been donated to her by a good friend. She bought some knick-knacks for my room (i.e a cork board, picture board, towels, among other things) in order to make it feel more like home. I would receive care-packages and greeting cards from Mrs. Sullins on my birthday or important holidays. When I was homesick or not feeling well, she was just a phone call away. I especially received help from her towards the end of my freshman year when I suffered the sudden loss of someone dear to me. I considered dropping out of SU and returning back home, but Mrs. Sullins urged me to reconsider. I decided to stay in school and finally graduated from Southwestern University on May 10, 2014. I am the first in my family to graduate from college. Tapestry of Hope helped me accomplish what I once thought could never happen. I am the exemplification of a young Latina woman rising above the barriers and disadvantages pre-assigned to me even before I was born. My parents are migrant workers with minimal education and my goal was to make them proud of my achievements. Tapestry of Hope made it possible for me to do exactly that. Renee was there to celebrate my accomplishment with me on that day as well. I can honestly say that I would not have gotten through college without her full support and the support of incredible organizations like Tapestry of Hope.

As a mentor Mr. Sullins has taught me many life lessons throughout our friendship.

Rule #1: You will not obtain what you seek, if you do not ask!

Before I met Renee, I lacked self-confidence. I was a very introverted individual, but while working with Renee I learned that sometimes you have to “take the bull by the horns” and do things that are out of your comfort zone. Renee Sullins helped me realize that my voice matters and what I have to contribute to the world as a member of society is important. I was a very pessimistic young woman before I met Renee, but she was there to empower me and encourage me to stand up for myself and what I believe in. She taught me to believe in my dreams. With the help of Mrs. Sullins and Tapestry of Hope, I have developed many useful life skills that have proven to be beneficial both in my academic and professional careers. Mrs. Sullins has shared with me and many resources that are applicable to the career world. I have learned the importance of networking and how to manage my personal brand. She has also edited my resumes, written recommendation letters, and given me tips and pointers for important interviews. I have learned crucial leadership skills thanks to Tapestry of Hope. Following graduation, I was accepted as a corps member and ELA coordinator at City Year- San Antonio. City Year is an education-focused, nonprofit organization that partners with public schools to provide full-time targeted intervention for students most at risk of dropping out. Corps members serve as tutors, mentors and role models in schools to help students stay on track - and get back on track - to graduate. I have had the opportunity to meet many affluent and influential people through City Year and other internships. My relationship with Renee and my association with Tapestry of Hope have definitely influenced my decision to work with at-risk and underserved youth. My next goal is to obtain my Master’s degrees in Social Work and Counseling Psychology.

Renee Dormois-Sullins is one of a kind. I was fortunate enough to have a mentor of her caliber to guide me through the broken educational pipeline. Mrs. Sullins took time out of her life in order to selflessly meet my needs. She believed in me when I did not believe in myself. I advise you to support organizations like Tapestry of Hope that offer underprivileged students the promise of not just an education, but a high quality and equal education. This organization fuels the flame of idealism in our youth and advocates for those who are often disregarded and cast aside. Tapestry of Hope gives us that; hope for a better future.