

I am Not "Her"

by TATIANA MAYS



"A Dark Alley" by Kurayba is licensed under [CC BY-SA 2.0](#).

Inspired by how Janice has to navigate her parents' expectations of her, [Goodman Youth Arts Council](#) member Tatiana Mays reflects on one aspect of growing up under her mother's roof.

I remember the day my sister left. I remember seeing people in and out of our house helping her pack up her stuff. I remember staring at her while she looked back at me with no remorse. Ever since that day, my mom and our household has never been the same. Unlike my sister, I am very hardworking and I do not believe in giving

up on something I know is for me.

Growing up, I always knew that I could be whatever I wanted to be if I put my mind to it. Even though I didn't have a lot of "say so" around the house, I still managed to do what I loved. My sister was a very closed off person and liked to read books all day long, and I was a very energetic and lively person that wanted to play and be around her 24/7. At the time, I was 9 and she was 16. Due to our huge age difference, I knew she never would want to do anything I wanted to do. Although, when she did make

time for me, we made some of the best memories and had some of the best laughs ever together.

I would have never dreamed of the day my sister's slack off in life would impact my future. Ever since she left, I haven't been the best child to my mom, and I feel like everything I do is not enough. I don't always have the best attitude towards her, and I always have to catch myself because it makes me feel like my sister. Arguing with a Black mom is never the best thing to do because it always ends in a traumatic way. My

mom always says to me "If you wanna, go there are two doors. Pick one", and I cry myself to sleep some nights thinking she might put me out of one.

Through it all, I still manage to go to school, work a job, and make time for what I want and love to do in my life. Which is something called "balance" that my sister never had. She quit everything she started, which is something I used to do in elementary. This led my mom to stop putting me in activities. I figured as I grew older I would grow out of it and find my niche.

Without my sister being around I was basically considered the only child in the house, and it led to me being spoiled. Although my mom and family spoiled me it was well deserved, and I have more than enough accomplishments to say so. Being the only child in the house is never a lonely experience for me. I started to find my niche and do things I love, which were performing arts. I love being on stage and in front of a camera.

Unlike my sister and my mom's bond, as I grew older my mom and I got very close. She supports me through everything I do and she is always there to give me advice on what's right and what's wrong. Even if that means she has to be an overprotective parent. Everyone in my family says

I am this special child, and they will do everything in their power to protect me. In many ways it puts pressure on me because it makes me feel like I have no choice but to be successful.

In no shape or form am I saying I am a perfect child. I make mistakes everyday. Now that I am older, I have learned many experiences that I will take away from having had to navigate complex family life. For instance, when I decide to have a child, I will never put pressure on them and I will hear them out at all costs. I will let them make decisions for themselves and will try to instill in them to never go back and forth with someone you raised. I understand that there will always be two sides to a story because my sister will forever be living proof of that.

On the other hand, I will continue to make myself proud and finish the rest of my years of college without distractions. Although my transition from high school to college was smooth, my mom was very skeptical about taking out loans and stuff of that nature because of my sister. To this day, I am against taking out loans for college. I made a promise to myself that I would never take out a loan, no matter how bad they stress me to do so. I will continue to do as many scholarships and stay on track with my grades as much as possible.

Overall, I am at the point of my life where I am happy

and I am stable. I am doing what I love and everything I dream to do with my mom right by my side. In the end, throughout everything I did in my life thus far, I always made an impact, and I want to continue to do so. Being an inspiration to people and seeing them smile from the little things always warms my heart. Continuing this journey of success takes focus, determination, hard work, and pride in not only yourself, but your work too.

Prompts for further discussion & reflection

1. What family expectations do you think about when you read or watch *the ripple, the wave that carried me home*?
2. How do you live up to or choose to work against what others believe you should or shouldn't do?