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Alterity Submission
Sophia Stone

My Mother and Passport

When I started to plot out what I would write about for this first submission, I immediately thought about the wonderful places my passport has brought me and the degree to which I have handled the important document throughout the years. I was afforded the immense privilege to be able to travel internationally growing up. I explored England and Italy before high school with my brothers, parents and grandfather—My mother taking it upon herself to methodically plan out each day, hour and minute with fun, not-to-miss activities and tightly hold on to our passports out of fear we would lose them. In high school, I earned my spot in a few competitive boats that traveled to Canada for summer rowing races. These trips were filled with sweet memories of racing hard, eating homemade ice cream at a local sunflower farm and visiting Niagara Falls. Then, I was responsible for my own passport—a big step up from in my mother’s hands. In sophomore year of college, I traveled to Rome for an Italian language intensive program. This trip both molded and shaped me into the confident woman I am today. Here, I was bestowed all responsibility for my travel (passport ownership included) and well-being abroad.

All these things are wonderful and represent a perfect coming-of-age story (to the degree to which I was given more and more responsibility to take care of my passport), however, don’t think truly capture an experience or a story with my small international book of travel. For that, I have to introduce you all to my mother.

My mother is my total hero now in truly every way—but, she wasn't always. I know that sounds a mix of both clichéd and confusing, so allow me to explain further. My “momma” is a powerful anesthesiologist in the Boston area who (at least by the time I came around—for reference, I am the youngest by 7 years) prioritized breadwinning and excelling in the operating room over childcare. Much of my day-to-day care was taken care of by my beloved nanny, Miss Judy, but given this fact, my mother was largely absent from my childhood. And growing up, I really resented her for this. I turned to my father for pretty much everything. A lot definitely changed when I began high school and throughout my college experience as I started to realize how important it was that my mother (not the traditional father figure) carried and supported the family financially with poise and elegance. In my recent adulthood, she has imparted on me the importance of always stepping up, demanding more and never shying away from a challenge or a threat. She always reminds me of the time she sued her hospital in an unequal pay dispute. She won this battle and then became the respected voice of the people—the president of the doctors association or the liaison between the administration and the physicians. In short, while I wish I had my mother around more growing up (and will make it my mission to be a stable maternal figure for my own children), I am grateful I have had such a model of poise, strength and perseverance, as well. And while we certainly do not have the traditional bonded mother-daughter relationship, key moments bring us together like this one particular memory I am going to share. Central to the story: my passport.

Admittedly, I was a little upset when my dad told me he couldn't drive me to the airport for the flight to Italy. My mom is always late, hates going to/being in airports, and is objectively a terrible driver. So, my already stressed, sleep-deprived and nervous self dreaded thinking that

my mother, who would be lecturing me in the car about safety abroad and drilling me because I'd over-packed (which I had), was going to send me off for three months. I couldn't be more grateful for her, however, when in a panicked state getting out of the car, I left my small traveling wallet (containing my flight information and passport) in the front seat of her car. After a swift goodbye, tight hug and collection of my bags, I was in the airport and my mom was seemingly off. After waiting in line for 20 minutes, I approached the AerLingus counter to begin my journey, only to find out that I was missing all my forms of identification, and that sweet, navy pamphlet that allows us to get in and out of countries. My heart raced as I frantically pulled out my phone to five missed calls from my mother. She had discovered my epic blunder before I did. Tears welled up in my eyes as the woman behind the desk began to run out of patience for my lost paperwork and overweight bag, but before anything could happen a hand reached for my shoulder. "Here is her passport..." My mom handed my documentation to the woman behind the desk, "Soph, it's okay. We can do this together. Give me some stuff that you won't need, we can reorganize it quickly." My mom, putting her invisible and rarely present maternal hat on, jumped into action pulling out things I didn't need while fronting questions from the AerLingus staff. After securing my bag on the plane, we walked to security lines together. Before she left, she squared me up and gave me a proper hug. It was really one of the sweetest moments I've shared with her to day and something I will probably never forget. She assured me that I, in fact, could do this—uproot my life, navigate the new, juggle two cultures and accept rapid change. I'm grateful for that my passport brought my mother and me together in such an integral and special moment.

