



## Single Parent Scholarship Recipient receives HEROES Award

By Amanda Condon

Walt Disney stated, *"All of our dreams can come true if we have the courage to pursue them."* I dream about completing my degree debt-free and raising my children in a healthy, violence-free environment. I've had the dream of helping people long before I knew where my talents could make the most impact. Those dreams started to be realized when I side-stepped my fear and uncertainty and enrolled in community college in 2014.

The first scholarship I received came from the Single Parent Scholarship Fund of Miller & Bowie Counties. I used it to survive the first semester of college, and it has continued to be one of the most vital assets in my academic journey. Beyond the money, the Single Parent Scholarship also helped me develop professionally and challenge all doubts I had about my potential. That confidence has prompted me to apply for other scholarships, which resulted in getting the most surprising phone call last week.

Some time ago I applied for a HEROES award from the popular home fragrance company Pink Zebra. I hoped their award would help me pay for unmet childcare expense I couldn't afford while I attended classes. The application process was simple and a decision was expected 4-6 weeks later. Surprisingly, a couple of weeks after I applied, I received an award letter for \$450 – enough to pay for childcare for the next year of college. A weight lifted off my shoulders knowing that I could afford safe and adequate childcare and focus on completing my degree.

The blessings did not stop there.

About two weeks later, I received a call from the HEROES program. As the representative and I discussed HEROES in further detail, I shared my experience with the ASPSF and my student support group, the Scholarship Hot Spot. We discussed my visions and plans for helping students and advocating for single mothers going to school across Southwest Arkansas. I was surprised when the representative revealed that Pink Zebra founder Kelly Gaines was also on the call.

As Kelly began talking with me, I found her to be so easy to talk to, like we knew one another our entire lives. She was so passionate about the lives of single mothers like myself. She seemed to understand my challenges and made me feel as if my community service could change the world.

She and I shared a moment on that phone call that I will remember for the rest of my life. We were just two women sharing our experiences and vision. We were like-minded in our goals to promote social well-being and help single mothers realize their dreams of getting an education.

As the call was nearing its end, the two women announced that I was their August scholarship winner. I couldn't believe it! I was weeping from Kelly's inspirational words. She saw my vision, and she understood the impact it has had in my life. Their recognition was empowering – to know that they chose me out of the hundreds of deserving applicants.

And things just kept getting better. Just when I thought the news couldn't possibly get any better, Kelly extended an invitation for my children and I to attend the 2017 Pink Zebra annual conference next summer in Orlando, Florida. For once, my children could travel with me instead of staying behind. Of course I accepted!

As if that wasn't enough, Kelly offered to send my little family to Disney World for the day. I had to sit down as soon as I heard her words. Disney World: a place I have always dreamed of going and what a dream come true for my children!

I believe this dream only became a reality because of the sacrifices I have made for my family's future. I have told my children since the first day of my college journey that one day they would see the results of my dedication. Though we have low income and I can't give scholarships to others, I freely offer my knowledge and experience to other students so they too can afford an education and hopefully inspire them that ***it can be done***. And I involve my children in my volunteer service to teach them how small acts of kindness can have such an enormous impact on the lives of others.

With the support of Pink Zebra and the Arkansas Single Parent Scholarship Fund, my family is able to live a well-balanced life while I pursue an education. The time and effort of the leaders of those two organizations has helped give my children opportunities that will shape them into becoming the next generation's change agents. My thanks to all of you for your personal sacrifice and continued passion for supporting education.