

My name is Madeleine Oudowu Odutayo. I was born in Houston, Texas, to two Nigerian immigrant parents. My mother came to the US by herself in 1985, when she was only fifteen years old. My father came to the US in 1988 [last sentence repeated] at twenty-seven years old. They met in PG County, Maryland in 1989. Soon, they got married and had twins, my brother and sister, in 1996.

In 1997, my parents, brother, and sister, moved to Houston, Texas. I was later born there in 2000. My parents always wanted a better life for me and my siblings and always taught us how important our education was. They knew that we would be exposed to better opportunities living in America than in Nigeria. We were a happy family living in Houston until 2004. In December of 2004, my father was deported. I was only four years old at the time, so I did not understand what was going on. I just knew that my father was gone. It was just the four of us, so we became really close.

I remember writing letters to my dad and putting them in the mailbox, hoping that somehow, it would get to him in Nigeria. My mother was raising three kids on her own, so times got hard, but even when we were struggling, I didn't know. My mother worked two jobs, day and night, to provide for me and my siblings. She was also in school and I'm proud to say in January, my mother will be graduating with her masters's degree in nursing.

My father was deported in December of 2004. He did not come back until December 16th, 2015, eleven years. Through everything, my family made it, and I'm thankful for them every single day.