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Mandy Ratliff

00;00;00;00 - 00;00;26;16

-Equality for GS presents: Student Narratives.

-My name is Mandy Ratliff and my daughter goes to Columbia. Her name's Charissa. I can refer to her as Charissa, I guess.

-Can you describe to me a little bit where you grew up and where you ended up raising your daughter?

-I grew up in the Tri-Cities and I graduated from high school in 1990. And then just about the time I was actually pregnant with my daughter when we actually made the move up to Spokane. My grandparents were up here. And then actually she was about six weeks old when we moved in here. So that's what brought us to Spokane. And then I just, we just stayed there because my kids started school there.

00;00;53;15 - 00;01;25;19

- So did you attend college yourself?

-No, only classes, like I would say, for up to maybe a year, but just odds and ends and some computer classes and some general studies classes. No certificates or anything.

-How did you feel about college growing up? Like when you were in high school?

00;01;25;21 - 00;01;52;22

I never had a bad feeling about it, but I think I think probably no money to go, you know? Really. Back then.

-And how did you feel about your daughter potentially attending college as she grew up? What was the attitude like about that?

-Yeah, I was praying to God that she did want to go to college, that all my girls would want to go. So yeah, that was always even though she didn't see it and she knew that I was in college, educated, she knew that was very, very important. So through the years I tried to make it important.

-What was the like, not just your attitude about college, but sort of like the greater community where your daughter or your daughters went to high school. What was the attitude like that a lot of people go to college there? Was it expected for people to go to college?

00;02;14;27 - 00;02;48;16

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-Well, to be honest, we're from a college town. And so it's just a local like a state college. And so, well, money would definitely be an issue. And so, you know, when you are lower income, a lot of times you can get like a two year community college or something, you know, paid for and that the expectations to get through the other, you know, you'd be likely to be able to do something like that. But much more than that. And you're either going to have a lot of loans or maybe if you're an excellent, excellent student and you can get some help that way. But money is definitely a huge barrier. I would say.

00;03;31;20 - 00;04;12;06

-And how did you feel when Charissa was admitted to General Studies at Columbia? I'm sorry, with a little choked up, because I was very, very proud of her. So if you want to know a little bit of the background on that, it was kind of a last minute thing on the whole Columbia University deal because she was actually attending a community college here in Spokane. And she just thought, you know, she was excelling and that she just wanted more. She wanted more. And so I don't know how she managed it, but one way or another, that girl managed to get herself to where she is today. But you could imagine that would have been nice if I could have paid for it. You know, as your parent.

-When she was first admitted, did you have any initial concerns about the financial aspect?

00;04;40;27 - 00;05;06;27

-When she first mentioned, I was thinking, how is she ever going to make this happen? And so I got online and tried to look at the website and such. And I, I had even thought that she was going to be able to possibly get some financial aid because the things that I had read on the website I had talked about for low income type people that didn't have much money, but it turns out when she got there, that didn't work out that way. So. But there is some confusion, I think. And I'm and to be honest, I'm not exactly sure what what happened there.

-And how would you say attending Columbia has impacted your daughter in terms of the financial situation or any other sort of struggles that she's had at that time due to attending Columbia? Oh, boy. It's just financially it's just so it's been so hard from minute one. You know, I'm just so proud of her to try to you know, to try to figure this out. But I'll tell you what. I mean, just like this last year, she's just it just seems like she's sick all the time. And I know it's because she's burning the candle at both ends. She she's worried about groceries. I mean, just the basic necessities, you know? And then every time it comes around that Columbia, you know, I don't know if it's once a year or twice a year what it is, but, you know, and they have no expectations or like a new contract to sign or whatever. And then all of a sudden she has to come up with a big horrendous chunk of money. And I never have that chance of money either to give her.

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-And how would you say that seeing her struggle in this way has affected you? How does it make you feel to see her go through all of this?

00;06;50;14 - 00;07;14;11

Well, I'm sad that it has to be so hard, obviously. But I just seeing her perseverance and, you know, I'm just so proud of her. I am just so proud of her. And I just I guess she just got accepted to the master's program that she had applied for. And so there'll be one more year, too. But even that, like, that's not now we got to worry about that year too. So we will have one more year to figure it out. But you know, but I say we but it's really her. She's the one taking on the debt. You know, all this debt. And I worry about that, too. When she, when she gets out. But it's you know, it's a lot of debt to start paying back.

-And how like you worry about your daughter but like has this had impacts on you, on like your stress level? I've cried and cried. I don't let her know that, though. I've cried and cried. I've cried many nights, many tears over all of her situations. It just seems like when she went to New York, it was just it's been one thing after another. And so, yeah, that does affect me and it saddens me. But she's lifting herself up and she's working hard for it.

00;08;06;15 - 00;08;37;24

-You briefly mentioned when Charissa graduates after she does like her Master's and everything with debt. So do you think that attending Columbia will be worth it for her financially?

-Well, I'm not really sure, because until I see- She would know probably much better what she can come out. You know, I'm from the other side of the United States and like the cost of living is just completely different here, you know? And so but I believe the reason she's trying to push on is, of course, this extra year is so that she can try to bring that income up just a little bit more. So that because I know she is scared, I know she's got to be scared to face payments as the second they start up. So my hope is that she just graduated from an Ivy League school. My, it shouldn't be a problem. I mean, honestly, that's the way I would have thought my whole life that that shouldn't be a problem. Now you're. you- you know, you got an Ivy League education. You should you know, I would think that you should be able to go out and make a good living. I don't understand why. I don't understand why there- why there isn't more. And at least in her particular program at Columbia, why there isn't more financial aid or help to someone like her. Apparently, you can go into Columbia as a perfect high school student or whatever. And then like, you know, she struggled in high school, so she went in this other route. And it's like I have watched her work, her rear. I mean, work, work, work, work, work to get herself where she's at. And it just seems like this is just pure- kind of a big slap in the face, to be honest. You know, when she can't get the financial aid, you know, it just doesn't seem to be there. Like I already have seen news articles and such where other big universities are doing full financial aid. And it sure would be nice to have something like that incorporated, you know, even at the more elite

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university level, because you shouldn't have to be rich to go there. Just smart and a hard worker.

-Yeah, and Charissa's was very smart and very hard working.

00;10;39;27 - 00;11;02;08

-Yes, she is. She is a winner, that girl. And she can't touch anything without just being a blessing. Really. I'm really proud of her. For more information about equality for jobs, you can find us on Instagram at [Equality.for.GS](#) and you can email us at EqualityforGS@gmail.com.