

CHAPTER 1



Starting THE Journey

CHILDREN SHARE STORIES ABOUT THE MOST
IMPORTANT PEOPLE IN THEIR LIVES—THEIR PARENTS

Sharing their stories

We asked a number of individuals (including some who are now adults and may now be parents of a gifted child) to share examples of how their families nurtured and supported their giftedness. Here are some of the stories they shared.

Ulysses's story

“My parents always encouraged me to experience new things and challenge myself. They also taught me how to question things, and through their guidance, I learned how to become an independent thinker. I think understanding and encouragement are the most important qualities that parents of gifted kids can have.”

A shy girl's story

“After kindergarten, my parents put me in the Academic Challenge program for gifted students, despite my teacher's warning that I was too shy. Am I ever grateful that my mom and dad made that choice though! Four years of an extremely challenging school life gave me a head start on skills that I am ever-thankful for.”

Cindy's story

“As my sisters and I became teenagers, my father taught us how to make our own decisions. When faced with a decision, my father would point out the consequences of each of the choices, and suggest the choice that he felt was most appropriate. Then he would leave the decision entirely in our hands.

This approach gave me the tools to look at a situation from all angles and make informed choices for myself even if it meant going against my father's wishes from time to time. All children need guidance to learn how to make educated decisions and to understand that taking time to consider all of the possibilities can save you from painful mistakes.”

Megan's story

“As I look back on my childhood I am constantly amazed at how my parents put up with me. Now that I live away from home I can barely put up with my own insatiable curiosity for everything. ‘I’m bored Mom,’ I used to say, probably twice a day between age 6 and age 12, and quadruple that during the summer. My mother always replied, ‘Well what are you going to do about that?’ I know now that my parents could not have survived if they’d had to occupy my mind all of the time, but learning to occupy myself helped me throughout my schooling and I am an expert at multitasking because of it.

Neither of my parents ever refused to discuss or explain or demonstrate anything I was curious about. I remember hours spent in the garage with my dad changing tires, or when I was very small watching as he changed the oil by hand. Imagine explaining how an engine worked to a four year old! I am now passionate about cars, and shock my male friends all the time with my collection of knowledge on various models, and the mechanics about them.

When I asked my mother to teach me how to sew when I was eight, we picked a project I could do (a patchwork quilt, which is still a popular item with guests to my apartment today) and she patiently sat with me as I learned to work the machine. I know now that it was a very daunting project for her at the time, but today she admires all of the finely tailored clothes I can make myself when I have the time. I thank my parents every day for the exhausting hours they put in answering all my questions, even the ones they really didn't know how to answer, or didn't want to answer.

I think the most valuable thing my parents ever did for me was backing me up. It may sound strange to say that this had a profound effect on my life, but to have reinforcements when I stood up for myself helped me become a stronger person. Development of self-confidence, particularly in academic pursuits, is difficult as a gifted child,

especially since we are often working at different levels than our peers, and often different from our teachers. Over the course of my academic career there have been several times that I have had cause to stand up for myself in a classroom, perhaps over an assignment, a question that the teacher didn't realize could be interpreted in more than one way, or depth that caught a teacher off guard because it was beyond that expected in an assignment or exam. In some cases I was justified, in others perhaps not as much, but having the support of my parents, whenever I needed it, was essential to the growth of my confidence in my abilities. Navigating the world of science at the university level I have run into my share of narrow-mindedness and if I had not been supported as a child, I am fairly confident that I would not have made it to where I am today.”

—Megan Smith 3rd year BSc with Specialization in Biochemistry