

Jerzey Sheppard - Age 18

Parents - Brad and Leslie Hamilton

Name of Your Dance Studio

Dance Works

To whom it may concern, my name is Jerzey Sheppard and I am 18 years old and a senior at Davenport Central High School. I started dancing when I was four and I have been with Dance Works since the age of six. I have two younger sisters who are both in dance, Grace who is 13, and Joon who is six. I have always been touched and inspired by the dancers who have completed this essay throughout my years of competing at Tribute. I would always say year after year that I would write my own tribute to my parents the next competition season. I am now coming to realize and accept that I don't have a "next season" and this is my last chance to share all the sacrifices that my parents make and how much they mean to me. I am very thankful that even with the various changes to the competition, the Tribute essay is still something being honored, even if we cannot have the usual award ceremonies.

My parents' names are Brad and Leslie Hamilton. There are many reasons why I want to write this, but it is also very hard for me because my parents are not the type of people that would want anyone to feel bad for them. They are the reason I am who I am today and have influenced me beyond words. They are pure examples of selfless and loving human beings. I want more than anything for my parents to feel appreciated and recognized for the things they do for our family, and I'm happy I still have the chance to write this.

At a competition before the end of my freshman year, my dances were invited to compete in Nashville that summer. A couple days before we were supposed to leave for the trip my stepdad, Brad, had an emergency doctor's appointment. He was told that both of his kidneys were at about twelve percent function. Brad was at stage 5 of kidney failure, which is considered a critical condition. He would need to start dialysis immediately and have many tests done to start the process of being placed on the transplant list. It was a scary time for my family. My mom and Brad had a lot on their plates, but as children we would have never known... They didn't cancel our trip and instead kept the news from my sisters and I so we could have fun and I could compete without feeling worried. They acted like nothing was wrong and they hadn't just received huge life changing news. We had the best time and felt so close as a family. The thing is - it's always said that parents should do anything for their children, show selfless love, and through this act my parents showed me this is true.

Once our trip was over the news was brought to our immediate family. It hit us really hard. The daily five A.M. dialysis appointments were not only taking a toll on Brad physically, but also mentally. He was becoming sick to the point of not being able to go to work and it was impacting us financially. My mom runs a small daycare in our home, but at the time it wasn't the main source of income. I was ready to give up some of my activities to help them out financially, but my parents wouldn't let me. They always found a way to cover everything. Brad went through two years of this never-ending cycle of having the early morning dialysis, followed by work, finding time to sleep, and still trying to actively be a part of our family. Earlier this year we got great news! He was finally able to start doing in-home dialysis. He would be able to do it on his own time and eventually created a better sleeping pattern, which helped his health in multiple ways. However, dialysis requires a nurse, which my mom is not. In order to help Brad, she attended a two weeklong training class where she learned all the steps to hook and unhook Brad from the dialysis machine. She did this all during a pandemic, while still running her daycare. My mom always wanted to be a nurse, now she's sticking someone with needles, checking their blood pressure, drawing blood, monitoring a machine, etc, same thing, right? Remember, she's doing all of this while also taking care of me and my sisters. She has never asked us to slow down or give up anything and neither has Brad. I know things are not easy, but my parents make them seem like they are. It's not how she wanted things to be, but you would never know how much it takes out of her; again an act of selfless love.

My mom is the most self-sacrificing person I know and puts everyone before herself. Brad has been the only father figure I've had in my life, and he means a lot to me. . We definitely butt heads, but it's only because we are so similar. I want to thank my parents for everything they have done for me, especially all the little things like hiding in their room after working all day because they have three daughters taking up the whole house on zoom dance classes. Or taking me and my sisters to dance even when they didn't feel good themselves or taking off of work just to make sure that they never missed a performance, or (my personal favorite) driving back home to grab a hair piece that I forgot. I want them to know that nothing goes unnoticed. I have the utmost respect for them as individuals and as my parents. They have been through so much and have overcome it each time. I love them more than anything and am so blessed to have such amazing people as parents.