I have been around the Aggie family for about four years now. I have witnessed families raise future generations as they teach their children the War Hymn before the alphabet. I have seen fourth and fifth generations take pictures together as they watch the youngest finally earn her ring. These Aggies not only raise future Aggies, but they also adopt and teach. I fall into the latter category. Though I have not attended Texas A&M officially, I consider myself to be an adopted Aggie. I have learned a few things here and there, but the most important value I have realized is that the Aggies are not former Aggies at all. Former students always remain part of something bigger – the Aggie Family. We all know that every great story starts this way and following tradition, “I’ve got a little story for ya, Ags.”

Due to family hardships in my life, I never expected myself to go to college. No one in my family had ever graduated from college; and, because money has always been so tight, I was raised with the understanding that my sister was smarter than me and needed to go to college. As a family we would focus and help send her to college so she could make something of herself. Because of this and my mother needing my help tending to my grandfather who was slowly dying from Parkinson’s disease, I never really looked into colleges. I had accepted my fate—that I would never obtain a Bachelor’s degree.

The first time I set foot in Aggieland was for a first date with a person who is now my fiancé. It was on this date that I fell head over heels for Texas A&M. Looking back, she knew that I had never gotten a chance to explore colleges. So, she gave me the best gift anyone has ever given me, a personalized tour of Texas A&M’s campus and a spark of hope that even I could go to college. She took me up and down the streets of the campus explaining every building, every statue and every tradition as we passed it. I was blown away by the history and the traditions that appeared to be oozing from every corner on the campus! Not only were the traditions so refreshing – countering the instability in my family life – but, hearing an individual express such passion and respect for a university was something of which I had never heard. As we continued through the date, meeting Sully, the Century Tree, Kyle and the others I just kept falling more and more in love with this university.

When our date ended at the Bonfire memorial, I was nervous because with the unrivaled greatness that this university seemed to offer, there was this tragic accident in its history. But for the first time, I heard the story of Bonfire from the Aggie family.

I shook as she spoke of hearing the crack that resonated across the city limits. I stood speechless as she spoke of hearing the crash when it fell. I got choked up as she remembered the smell in the air and the blackness that the sky held. But what rings truer today than it ever did was that her story continued. She spoke of how through the night more and more Aggies came to the stack. They did not come to watch and see what was going on, but rather because their family members were still missing. Almost as soon as the structure collapsed, the students, professors, athletic teams, townspeople and bonfire crews organized themselves and began to lift each individual log to search for those lost. Against one of the most natural reactions to flee from harm, the Aggie family came together and persistently fought for those who needed them. This is not the first time the Aggie family has done this and it will not be the last. This is very evident as the 12th man still stands tall for their fighting farmers at every game.

She continued on in her story showing me the Aggie family went one step farther and constructed a memorial site where the stack fell to honor the 12 students who were lost that night. She explained to me the circle and how it showed the unity in these individual’s deaths. She showed me how each pillar, though all looked the same, were each unique to the individual who passed away. The bonfire memorial was constructed so beautifully, to represent not only the deaths of those lost that night, but of the amazing strength the Aggie family showed by coming together and helping each other. This Ags, was the moment I fell in love with the university.

As stated, my family life has been hard but the one thing my family has done is stick together. Through good and bad we have always been there for each other. This is what a family does and how a family survives.

That date was when I learned I was an Aggie; I had always been an Aggie. It was because of that date that I fell in love with the best family any university has to offer. This is why I want to graduate from Texas A&M with my Bachelor’s. It is not to begin a job in the workforce, but rather to be a part of the Aggie Family–to be there for them through good and bad, as they have been there for me, an adopted Aggie, through these past four years.