

Overcoming Adversity: How one women went from almost homeless to making six figures

"At the end of the day, if you want it, you gotta go out and get it"

Struggle is an essential part of life. Everyone goes through it, some more or less than others. Often when we struggle we look to something or someone to inspire or motivate us to keep going. For me, that inspiration would be my mother, Tina Byers. She was someone who could be described as struggling more than others, growing up in a broken family with barely enough money to keep the lights on. Despite this, she managed to rise above it all and happily supports her family with more than enough.

Tina's story begins with her own mother's story, Margaret Dimassimo. Growing up on a farm as the 4th daughter of Italian Immigrants, she never was given a lot of opportunities, especially since her parents believed women didn't need to go to college. In order to get out of the house, she married young and had two daughters. "It was an unhappy marriage," said Tina. "Her husband, my father, was abusive and an alcoholic. Throughout the first eleven years of my life, there was a lot of violence in the house and a lot of unhappiness."

After being in and out of the house for several years, eventually they split for good, left with nothing but a mayo jar of dollar bills. While their mother worked to pay the bills and fight for child support, Tina and her sister Julie had to buckle down and help where they could.

"When she got divorced, she couldn't open a credit card, she couldn't get a job, and she couldn't get child support," said Tina. "In the seventies, there were no child enforcement agencies to help women who were divorced and trying to enforce child support awards. You had to hire a lawyer, and if you couldn't afford to hire a lawyer then you were kinda out of luck."

It took five months to get ownership of the house, leaving the family to stay in a small apartment in the next town over in the meantime. When their school district caught wind, they attempted to force out Tina and her sister, but through generous support and a few favors, they were able to stay and finish.

"[My mother] believed strongly in education, and really pushed my sister and I to do well academically to have a life she wasn't able to have," said Tina. "She didn't want us to go through those sorts of hardships, and my sister and I learned our lesson without even being told."

Before the enactment of Title IV-D to the social security act in 1976, child support was almost nonexistent. The government would instead expect and make efforts for the parents to provide, pocketing the support payments to reimburse the federal assistance a family would receive under the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program.



Education became the major focus for Tina and her sister, but with a child support system that was still fairly new and frankly didn't work, they would have to turn to other means to pay their tuition.

"I always say my sister and I were the financial aid poster children," said Tina. "We had grants, scholarships, loans, and work study jobs. I would work a study job and also work a second job. I didn't have a meal plan after freshman year, so I just paid for food myself the cheapest way possible."

Cut to present day, Tina now works as an Attorney for a large law firm in Philadelphia. Long gone are the days of having nothing, as she supports her family from a nice house in the New Jersey suburbs. Justina Byers serves as an example of the American Dream, a mindset that with enough hard work and effort you could go from having nothing to having so much you don't know what to do. Many in the modern era often criticize the American Dream for being unrealistic, and whether you believe that or not, Tina proves it is still possible.