

## Recognizing our silver stars

By Yohani Ortiz, Cadet –

Today is a special day, where we pause to honor the impact each of you have made in our lives. Every Herald of Grace has parents or spiritual parents who have guided us on this journey called life. This afternoon I honor my parents as my Silver Star recipients for their inspiration and influence in my life.

Proverbs 31:25-26 reads, *She is clothed in strength and dignity, and she laughs without fear of the future. When she speaks, her words are wise, and she gives instructions with kindness* (NLT). These verses describe the noble character of the woman I have the privilege to call mom.

My mother has been the sweetest gift from God. Throughout my life she has been an example of determination, love, compassion, and strength. Growing up I recall watching her work, love people, serve, sacrifice, and I would say to myself, "I cannot wait to be like her when I grow up!" Your ministry has inspired me to become an officer who works hard, reaches to make a difference, and perseveres to share the love of Christ to the world. Mom, it is thanks to your guidance, love, and care that I have found my purpose. From birth you have taught me to fear the Lord, to love others, servanthood, discipline, work ethic, laughter and to reach for the stars. All these are tools that have helped me in my journey to officership. Words cannot describe how influential you have been. Your life reflects a life of love for ministry, strength and dignity. In your eyes I see how much you believe in me, even when I doubt myself. Your lips speak words of encouragement, wisdom, kindness, love and direction. Your ears listen to the voice of my heart. Your shoulders have been slept and wept on as you carried my burdens. Your arms are filled with unlimited hugs, and your heart overflows with unconditional love.

You truly are the perfect blend of a mother and a loyal friend.

Likewise, my father has also been influential in my life. His wise words have guided me through each milestone of my life journey. His words are filled with gentleness and knowledge. It was his words that confirmed my calling to officership. The night God used to speak to me through my father's words he shared.

"Daughter, I want to tell you, that if one day comes and I am no longer in this world, that you remember that sovereignty and justice for the poor is not a gift. If not to fight with them as did Jesus

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Christ when he died on the cross of Calvary, but with intelligence, commitment, sacrifice, willingness and above all honesty. But I'm also glad to have you, to know that you will be the continuity of my existence, the source of my inspiration, my improvement and my commitment to those who suffer from hunger, misery and pain."

You see these words were written in a letter nearly 24 years ago when I was born. He was overwhelmed with joy to be a father, that we expressed himself in the only way he knew best, and that is through writing. Unknowingly, several months later he would pass away in a car accident. His influence in my life has been through this old yellow piece of paper. Through this letter I have met him and filled gaps; I have been guided, received advice, received my calling, and most importantly I have felt loved. God has used this letter to bring me to where I am today.

Each Heralds of Grace has stories to share of how significant each of you has been to us. A 22-month journey is nearly coming to an end. On behalf of the Heralds of Grace I would like to recognize each officer, parent, spiritual parent, and mentor for your support, prayers, encouragement, care packages, cards, advice, and love as you have walked us through our journey here at the College for Officer Training. Proverbs 22:6 reads *Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it* (ESV). Each cadet present is a representation of your investment, wisdom, training, rebuking, and teachings. You have helped us begin this journey and today we celebrate together the fruits of your labor.

Through each act of love you have helped in our development as cadets and as messengers of the grace that was so freely given to us. Because of your investment in our lives we will soon be ordained and commissioned as Blood and Fire officers of The Salvation Army. We will commission as officers who save souls, grow saints, and meet human needs without discrimination. We appreciate and value your leadership and mentorship. Words cannot express our gratitude for being major contributors behind our success and achievements. We truly thank God for using you to speak and invest into our lives.