

Good morning, everyone. Thank you for being here to celebrate the life of dee Clarke. My name is Shoa, and I'm dee's son.

I'd like to start with a quote from the writer Eduardo Galeano.

“When it is genuine, when it is born of the need to speak, no one can stop the human voice. When denied a mouth, it speaks with the hands or the eyes, or the pores, or anything at all. Because every single one of us has something to say to the others, something that deserves to be celebrated or forgiven by others.”

Throughout my mom's life, people, circumstances, entire systems and structures tried to deny her voice, her need to speak. But she would not be denied. At every opportunity and with every fiber of her being, she spoke up for herself and her family, for her community, and for complete strangers.

Most of us here are familiar with her tireless heroics as an advocate, and I'm sure everyone here has experienced first-hand her kindness and generosity. I hope that today we can share our stories, big and small, of how my mom touched our lives.

I have often wondered how my mom became the hero she was. Where did it come from? What was the source of all that love and goodness and determination in her heart? As I reflect on her life, the answer is obvious. It was her children.

Before my mom began advocating for other families, she was an advocate for me and my sisters, and she was insistent on protecting us from the stigmas and injustices of poverty in America.

When I was six years old, we lost our apartment and began staying in a shelter. I was meant to start first grade that fall. Ever resourceful, my

mom decided that we were unrestricted by zip codes, and I should be allowed to attend any school of her choosing. She did her research and ultimately chose to lug us across the Million Dollar Bridge to South Portland. She lied about our address and enrolled me in Brown Elementary, a school that had small class sizes and new Macintosh computers.

After school, she would make up extra homework assignments for me, so that I could get ahead in math and reading. When she found out that I hadn't been included in the accelerated math group, my mom went to the principal and complained until I was finally given a chance to prove that I belonged. Thanks to her, I thrived. When I joined the Cub Scouts but got left out of the "father and son" events, she took it upon herself to change the Cub Scouts, making room for "mothers and sons."

These are just a few personal examples of my mom being my hero. My sisters, Mei Li and Anastacia each have countless more of their own. She filled us with hope and joy. She gave us a love for the arts, and in my case, a love for science, and she nurtured our grandest dreams. She made us believe that we mattered.

But my mom also knew from her own childhood how rapidly things can change. Even when we made it out of the shelter, our lives were on edge. She used every resource available to her, the food pantry, food stamps, section 8. But when you are barely staying afloat, even the smallest wave can drown you. And I think my mom realized that the best way to protect her children from an unjust system was to change the system. She began taking me to meetings of the Maine Coalition for Food Security and the Portland Organization to Win Economic Rights. When I was 12 years old, she brought me along with her to Washington DC to lobby for better funding of critical programs like WIC and SNAP. This was my first glimpse of my mom not just as my own personal hero but as a hero for all kids like me and for all mothers like her.

Over the following decades, she dedicated her life to combatting homelessness and poverty, helping to lead efforts like Homeless Voices for Justice and the Community Wellness program for women. As my sisters and I grew up and moved away, we watched with pride as my mother continued to push the envelope, constantly challenging her community and her own colleagues to do more. Whatever challenge she placed on others, though, she doubly placed on herself.

When she founded Survivor Speak, she stepped forward and bravely shared with the world her story of childhood trauma and sex trafficking. She did so knowing that she was not alone, rightfully advocating that survivors have a leading voice in any movement to end oppression. She shined a light on ugly realities in our world that many would rather not face. But with that same light, she showed us the beauty and the strength of survivors. She showed us what real human compassion looks like, and she reminded us that those most in need of such compassion are often the least likely to receive it. That is exactly why Survivor Speak is needed.

My mother was taken from us far too soon. But in the time she had, she lived a rich and full life as a mother, sister, and aunty, as an advocate, teacher, and friend, as an actor and playwright, as a lover of dancing and as a watcher of birds. Through her work, she changed both lives and laws in the state of Maine. She taught us that you don't need money or titles or degrees to make a difference. All of what she achieved was simply fueled by love. At her core, she loved people.

I believe that we all have the capacity to love one another like my mom loved us. If we can express that love genuinely without fear and without fatigue, then we can live like dee lived, we can speak like dee spoke. We can continue her legacy, as a collective voice for justice. I know that's what she would want.