

My Mother's Daughter

I am my mother's daughter.

These words define me, illuminate the divine within me, shape me and have brought my ancestors on my journey. She was born within the box that every society built on oppression creates: poverty, illiteracy, patronage, division and fear.

But my mother refused to be confined by those around her. She escaped from that box and brought me with her. She refused to limit her dreams and aspirations. She refused to settle for what was offered.



I am my mother's daughter, brought to a cold, harsh land as a babe to live the dream she could not. To open the doors that were closed to her. To live outside the box. "You can do whatever you want here," she told me. "Your dreams cannot be stolen from you. Your father and I left the box on the tiny island nation so you could fly free." Yes, you can be a fundraiser. Yes, even a CEO.

I am my mother's daughter. Education is the key, hard work the amplifier, opportunity the fuel. But wait, where are the others of my kind who have escaped the box? Am I alone? Surely, there are others who walk this path in support of a cause greater than themselves. Surely, I am not alone. Surely, it is expected that we are woven into the landscape of philanthropy in this new world. It would be cruel to invite us in and then lock us out.

I am my mother's daughter. "Yes, my dear, you are alone. There is only one seat at the table, for now," she said. "You are the only one with hair, hue and history that are different. You must be brave and go first. Someone must be first."



As a fundraiser, I have followed my passions and pushed through barriers, like my mother told me I would have to. I have been underestimated and dismissed. But I do not let the opinions of others drown out the pride of my mother and the ancestors who endured so much to get me to this place, giving me the ability to teach and mentor others.

I am my mother's daughter. I sidestep those who are blinded to the true potential of inclusion. I have learned from those who are willing to teach, because I believe wisdom, like gold, comes in many brilliant shades. I will never forget those who helped

and supported me and opened airways for me to breathe when the walls were closing in.

I am my mother's daughter, and I will not be confined. Like all those who have taken part in a long race, I have wounds that need to heal. The race was a marathon that took its toll, leaving invisible scars that need to be healed. There's the scar of representing all and not daring to fail. The scar of needing to be successful regardless of the obstacles. The scar from those who believe I am unique because they are unaware of all those like me who are still invisible. The scar of being the only one in a sea of a thousand faces.



I am my mother's daughter, and I will always face my fears and live outside the box. I have found others like me, and we have begun to heal together, grow together, creating a community of wisdom that we share and pass down. Together, we share the wisdom of our ancestors and help each other heal. We find strength in our struggle to be seen and heard.

I am my mother's daughter. These words define me, and I am no longer alone.



Jennifer Bernard is a Certified Fund Raising Executive and has held senior leadership positions within a variety of institutions across the charitable and nonprofit landscape including the Ontario Science Centre, Royal Conservatory of Music, Trillium Health Partners and McMaster Children's Hospital. Jennifer is currently the president & CEO of Women's College Hospital

Foundation, one of Canada's oldest and most iconic healthcare institutions. Throughout her career Jennifer has led a number of high performing teams and worked with volunteers to raise more than \$100 million in the non-for-profit sector.

Jennifer is an active public speaker and passionate volunteer. She supports a variety of nonprofit boards and organizations, including the Toronto Chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals which supports and advocates on behalf of those within the philanthropic profession that are dedicated to building a better, more equitable world. In 2018, Jennifer was recognized as one the 25 most influential women in Canada by Women of Influence, joining a list of trailblazing women who have had significant impact on Canadian society.