

Carter Amundson

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Uncle Joe: The Man Who Stepped Up and Never Let Me Quit

Mark Twain said, "It's not the size of the dog in the fight; it's the size of the fight in the dog." My name is Carter Amundson, and I've lived that truth much of my life. I was born and raised in Ketchikan, Alaska. Life hasn't always been easy. My mom struggled with drug addiction, was frequently incarcerated, and abandoned me and my brothers. I never knew my father and the man who adopted me was absent and has since died. My grandparents raised me until they retired to Washington when I was 13.

The summer of 2020 was brutal. The pandemic hit, my five-year-old cousin Jaxson died, school was difficult, and the life I knew was gone. That's when my Uncle Joe stepped in and became my legal guardian.

He didn't have to take me in. He was going through the worst time in his life, grieving the loss of his son. But he did it anyway. He gave me a home and stuck with me through some of my most challenging years. Neither of us had planned for this. I was figuring out where I fit in a new home with new rules. He set boundaries, and I tested them. That first year and a half was tough, and we didn't always understand each other.

Before moving in with him, I didn't care much about school. My mom and grandparents never pushed academics, and my grades showed it. I failed the seventh grade, COVID hit, and online learning was tough. But Uncle Joe changed that fast. He had high expectations about my grades. I'd lose privileges like my iPhone, gaming, or time with friends if my grades were bad. I

got stuck with a flip phone more than once, which was awful. His consequences sucked, but they worked.

He didn't just make demands. He got involved. He went to the school, met with teachers, and helped me get into after-school support. He found a great tutor who worked with me through eighth, ninth, and tenth grades. I spent many late nights studying, doing homework, and trying to catch up in math, science, and English. There were days I wanted to quit. I felt like I'd never catch up or figure it out. But Uncle Joe kept pushing me, telling me I was capable, until I started to believe it.

It took three years, but things changed. My grades got better. I started feeling proud of my work. By junior year, I had a 2.8 GPA and solid study habits. I wasn't falling behind, and for the first time, I could picture finishing high school.

Outside of school, I worked with Uncle Joe in construction on weekends. As a kid, I loved building cities and houses in Minecraft and Roblox video games, but I'd never considered it a future. Uncle Joe showed me how to use tools and build things. He let me try, corrected me without making me feel dumb, and taught me that mistakes are part of learning. The more I learned, the more confident I became, not just in construction but in myself. He made it clear that quitting wasn't an option.

That's when I realized I wanted to study architecture. I liked creativity and building. Uncle Joe's encouragement helped me take something I loved and make it a goal. I've been accepted to the College of Southern Idaho to study architecture this fall. I'll be the first in my family to graduate high school and attend college, and that wouldn't have happened without Uncle Joe in my corner.

He showed up during the hardest time of his life to help me through mine when no one else did. He never let me give up on myself. He gave me a home, rules, and a shot at something better. He didn't have to do any of it, but he did. He didn't just change my life; he gave me one.

My Uncle Joe has been the biggest influence in my life—hands down. He's been my role model, teacher, friend, and the closest thing to a father I've ever had. He showed me what hard work, discipline, and belief can do. He also taught me the value of education. I don't know where I'd be without him, but I know I wouldn't be the person I am today.