My maternal grandmother, Joyce Ann Harris, is the wind beneath my wings. I'm very inspired by the life that she has lived. Her experiences and pearls of wisdom have helped me build my confidence. Her influence has been a guiding light that I look to, whenever I am working toward achieving important goals. She is both a mentor and an inspiration, because she has been an awesome daughter, sister, mother, and grandmother. She has shown courage in times of difficulty, love and understanding, when it was most needed, and a strong commitment to both community and family as the foundation for her life.

Oprah Winfrey once said, "How you spend your time defines who you are." My grandmother, or "Grammy," as she is lovingly called, has spent her 79 years on earth being a wonderful role model, teacher, community servant, and the heart of our family. I've watched her forge relationships and connect people to resources that help them to be successful in achieving their goals. She has done the same for me, from ensuring that I received well-rounded education, to making sure that I've understood the importance of church and community.

My grandmother came from humble beginnings. She was one of thirteen children, who grew up in rural Virginia, during the Jim Crow era. My grammy was the first in her family to go to college. Thus, setting an example for her siblings and others in her small hometown. She experienced awful racism and poverty, but was still able to prevail. As a teenager, she worked in tobacco fields to earn money, not only to pay for college, but also help support her family. Her extreme determination to get a college education influenced me to attend and do well at Hampton University where I'm a junior, Communicative Sciences and Disorders major.

It's also the little things that my Grammy does that helps to build my confidence and set me up for success. For example, she always tells me, "Leila, most people just put on their clothes. I want you to get dressed!" This means that she wants me to always be prepared and think about how I carry myself, when I go out into the world. I must set myself apart from others and be my best self.

My Grammy was an elementary school teacher for over 40 years, and retired in 2014. She's very remarkable and surprisingly active for her age. She walks three miles most days, continues to substitute teach, sings on the church choir, and volunteers in our community. She also earned a certification in Library science, when not many African American's were entering this field. So, she has definitely placed the bar high for setting and achieving life goals for not only me, but all of my family. She has proven to us all and constantly tells me, that if she can do it, I can too. Whenever faced with a challenge, I often find myself wondering WWGD, "What would Grammy Do?" and then I do it.