

Dear Mom and Dad,

As I read the *Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan, I couldn't help but think about our family and the cultural and generational gap between us. The novel touched on many themes and experiences that resonated with me, particularly sacrifices and maturity. These themes have made me reflect on my journey toward adulthood and sparked my thinking about how to better understand and bridge the gap between us.

One concept from the book that stood out to me was the symbol of the Joy Luck Club itself, which represented the goals and achievements that came from the sacrifices and struggles of immigrant parents. Each family came from a different background and faced their own challenges. One fled from China during Japan's invasion in WWII, others escaped from poverty and abusive relationships. However, they could never truly leave their past behind, and the club was founded as a safe place to share these stories and build new lives. They found their homes in San Francisco, adopting a new American way of life but never forgetting their sacrifices.

Reading Tan's words made me realize how much you have given up for our family. My American-born Taiwanese father grew up in Huntsville, Alabama, in the deep South of the United States. A place where you might only find two Asian families in the entire town meant he never had the environment to connect with its culture. My mother traveled from Mainland China to America to further her education. She came with little knowledge of American customs and struggled to overcome the steep language barrier. She had to compensate for these disadvantages with hard work, grasping every opportunity. I can't even begin to imagine how hard that must have been, and I thank you for that sacrifice. I realized that the book and our family aren't so different; in the end, you both built a path to where we are now, overcoming so much along the way.

Growing up in America as a child of Chinese descent, I have always felt a sense of internal duality. On one hand, I am proud of my heritage and the traditional values you have passed down, like hard work and respect. On the other hand, I have struggled with doing things my own way and feeling like I fit in. I know you have always wanted the best for me, and I appreciate your efforts to guide me in the right direction. But sometimes, I feel pulled in different directions, not knowing whether I work hard or live up to expectations enough, which is difficult while learning to create my own path. I love Chinese culture and its richness in my life, but I also want to fit in and feel like I belong in the American atmosphere I've been immersed in since birth.

I struggle the most with balancing my activities, sometimes unsure if it's a true passion or something that's expected of me. When I feel lost in decisions and finding the right thing to do, I reflect on your lessons about the importance of hard work, respect, and kindness, and I am thankful for that. Over the years, I've realized that this isn't just an obstacle; it's an opportunity to meld your experiences and learn from them. There's a lot to gain from having a mixture of backgrounds to help me grow, like a plant getting nutrition from well-balanced soil. I love cheering on American football, and I'm a master on a barbeque grill, and I love to learn about the U.S. government and democracy. I also celebrate Chinese holidays, live with traditional virtues in mind, and appreciate ancient literature and arts. The combination of your cultures in my upbringing have helped bring my true identity forward.

I am thankful that you allowed me to experiment with and find my own passions but also guided me in the right direction when needed. I never felt pressured to become a generational music talent or Washingtonian's next top doctor; instead, you believed in me to know where I wanted to go. I never felt like I wasn't as good as the child of your friend or not smart enough to

do something. You taught me to take my own path and proved the power of doing things firsthand.

From the time I was in my mom's womb, I've been a worldwide traveler, and my most fond memories are when I got to go with you to see relatives. Experiencing my culture firsthand in the places you grew up in felt like a home away from home. I immediately felt so immersed and that I truly belonged. I was hungry to learn more about the places you went, your grandparents' stories, the places you traveled, and what you saw, experienced, tasted, and learned. But I think the value of traveling applies to more than just familiar places. I've learned so much about other cultures through traveling and seeing the diversity of our planet. Visiting the world is not an opportunity many have, so I want to make the most of it. Traveling has given me the attitude to try different things and take that with me wherever I go.

I love that you love me for who I am and have always supported my interests - from hockey to golf to piano. Even if I didn't continue some of them, I'm glad you gave me the opportunity to learn from them. Learning to skate challenged me to believe in myself and be resilient in learning. Golf taught me to be technical and patient. Karate taught me the art of respect and discipline. Piano, which I continued the longest, helped me connect with the musical side of myself and practice diligence over spontaneity. And after all that, I can glide on the ice, hit shots at TopGolf, and perform a couple of my favorite classical pieces. I owe these lessons to you, and I cherish them even more, knowing you didn't get the opportunities you worked so hard to provide me with.

I have no regrets that I'm not a musical star or traveling on the PGA tour, but when it boils down to one thing I did through and through, it was Chinese school. A lesson I've learned from you is to keep things practical and realistic. Though I didn't always enjoy sacrificing two

hours every Saturday afternoon, Chinese school was an invaluable experience. I've learned that the power of language is not to be underestimated, and it's difficult too. Most of all, my years at a Chinese school laid the foundation for my ability to navigate and feel connected to both cultures. Knowing your stories motivates me more than ever to bridge the ideological and understanding gaps between cultures, and apply those lessons to the real world.

I'm already taking the first steps. I've sharpened my business and computer science skills to support local, mission-driven companies and nonprofits. I hope by equipping them with the correct tools of our time, like social media and digital marketing, we can work through cultural and language barriers and support these missions on a greater scale. I'm a firm believer in the diversity of ideas as a way to bring us together, and what better way than having a global mindset towards other cultures and languages?

My other dream is to inspire more of the next generation to be entrepreneurs, especially those of Chinese descent like me. I believe that any passion has the potential to become a successful business, and taking that first step has helped me develop so many of my technical and interpersonal skills. Over quarantine, my friend and I interviewed many successful entrepreneurs to learn from them and combine and publish their lessons in a book. I particularly resonated with the ideas I heard from Chinese American entrepreneurs, many of which involved breaking through barriers and straying away from the status quo. The culmination of different perspectives has provided me with the greatest knowledge I have today, and it's also the viewpoint I want to have on learning. My greatest hope is to share and inspire others to take their own paths and contribute toward this common goal.

My life is like a Joy Luck Club. Even though the stories and journeys of the people around me are different, we are here and must value our time together. Most of all, it reminded

me of the importance of cross-cultural communication and understanding. I hope we can continue to have open and honest communication and support each other as we navigate the coming years. We will always have our differences, but we can overcome any obstacle with love and understanding.

Thank you again for everything you have done for me. I love you.

Jason Liaw