

Kind, gentle parenting works too



**WARREN
BINFORD**

Commentary

Amy Chua, a Harvard-educated Yale law professor, recently ignited a firestorm on the mama-circuit when excerpts from her book, "Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother" were published in the Wall Street Journal. Her memoir provides an unvarnished accounting of the brutal methods of parenting that Ms. Chua inherited from her Asian immigrant parents to secure entry into the Ivy League and other societal indications of superior achievement.

In Ms. Chua's own parenting endeavor, she became a "Tiger Mother" obsessed with ensuring that her own two daughters would become a piano virtuoso and a star violinist. While her eldest daughter did, in fact, perform at Carnegie Hall at 14 years of age, the tactics used in the process, appear to be near-abusive, at least through the lens of modern American parenting.

For example, in one parenting experience with her youngest daughter, Ms. Chua threatened to give her daughter's beloved dollhouse to the Salvation Army "piece by piece" if she did not master a particular arrangement before her music lesson the next day. She then worked with her daughter straight through dinnertime and refused to allow her daughter to get up to get a drink or even go to the bathroom until her daughter finally mastered the difficult piece later that night. In the end, the daughter was pleased with the achievement and wanted to play the piece again and again.

In other examples, Ms. Chua's daughters were not allowed to attend sleepovers, have playdates, get anything less than an 'A,' or be in a school play. They also were not allowed to watch TV or play computer games (of course, many of us would agree with those restrictions). Nor were they allowed to choose their own extracurricular activities.

Ms. Chua called her eldest daughter "garbage" at one point, just as her own father had once described her. She told her youngest daughter on another occasion to stop being



Online

For a link to Amy Chua's essay in the Wall Street Journal, see this commentary at [Statesman Journal.com/Opinion](http://StatesmanJournal.com/Opinion).

lazy, cowardly, self-indulgent and pathetic. When her husband urged her to stop insulting their daughter, Ms. Chua denied that she was being insulting; she was "motivating" her. No wonder she describes her home at times as a war zone.

Does it really take this level of dominance, verbal abuse and hyper-parenting to get into the Ivy League? Of course not, and should that really be the goal of parents? Isn't it enough to raise our children to be happy, healthy, hardworking and kind individuals?

Like Ms. Chua, I, too, got into the Holy Grail of the Ivy League, but I never played Carnegie Hall. In fact, when I begged and pleaded and finally persuaded my own mother to register me for a guitar class through the local parks and recreation program in Van Nuys, I was unable to play, let alone master. "Mr. Bojangles." Nonetheless, my mother let me eat dinner, drink water and go to the bathroom, indulgent parent that she was, and Harvard thought I was swell enough to let in anyway.

Sure, there were some "Tiger Mother" moments in my childhood. My father expected all of us to get good grades and spanked us if we lied, stole, or smoked (of course, this was in the '70s before spanking became grounds for protective custody). He even once kicked me out of his car at night next to a cemetery because I was being

disrespectful, but at least he came back after driving around the block (not that I readily got in; I was a teenager after all, and a stubborn one at that).

I, in turn, occasionally find my inner "Tiger Mother" unleashed, especially on the sidelines of a soccer game when in between sips of my latte, I yell at my 7-year-old to "run faster," "play harder" and "get the ball."

Just the other night at Toys R Us, I growled at one of my cubs to "stop acting like a spoiled brat" when she threw a tantrum because I refused to buy her a \$160 "Calico Critters" play house. She, of course, cried and I, in a very tame moment, wondered if I could have handled the situation better.

Several years ago, I even took mother-daughter violin lessons with our eldest in an effort to unveil her inner Itzhak, but unlike Ms. Chua, I did not have the resolve to force a preschooler to practice several hours a day when she was much more interested in going to the park and having playdates. I guess it is not surprising that to this day, neither of us can play much more than "Three Blind Mice" (and poorly at that), let alone perform in Carnegie Hall.

Oh well. If keeping my inner tiger tame prevents my children from becoming virtuosos and getting into the Ivy League, I somehow suspect that they will be fine with that. I know that I certainly will.

Warren Binford, like Ms. Chua, is a Harvard-educated law professor with two daughters; however, Ms. Binford's daughters attend sleepovers, have playdates and perform in school plays. They may or may not get into the Ivy League. Binford is an assistant professor of law at Willamette University, Salem. She can be reached at wbinford@willamette.edu.