



Dad's response to daughter's letter ☺

We too cannot imagine she is already almost 20 years old and studying overseas on Uncle Sam's terms! We are grateful for her gratefulness! ☺

Suan Ai used to take my appointment book and filled in the children's activities in school, be it sports meet or special events. I was annoyed initially as I found it intrusive and disrespectful but eventually understood, accepted and appreciated her idea - that a family member is actually more important than any customer I have! At the same time, she does not expect me to always be there but when I can, she is grateful. Looking back, that probably played a part for Samantha to have the impression that we were there for her. There were indeed a few occasions when she was disappointed with some competitive events and she did cry on mummy's shoulder - and we could never have planned for that, except to be with her whenever we could. It is a privilege to be there!

Occasionally, I would fetch her home from school after her evening CCA (most of the time, our kids take public transportation once they hit upper primary or lower secondary). I did not realize the drive home at times became a dumping session for her - where she just unloads. I concluded that such occasional fetching / pampering helps build bonding. Even Suan Ai confirmed that at times when she took the bus home with her for events I cannot go, the time was therapeutic and the bonding that took place cannot be replaced.

We have been strict and we know that. Though we did try and let go as she grew up. Many times she realized that we are different as a family and only after a long time, she realized the strictness helped saved her from many influences that may not be as desirable. We struggled too - we simple dislike being called 'dated' and old-fashioned. Yet, traditions has its value, conservatism has its protective part to play. It is a tension we must admit that we held on to. We need the courage as parents to hold the line, not to give in, to persevere if we think it is right when the rest of the world say go ahead. Though the manner in which we do it matters - probably not head on but looking for 'distractions', meaningful activities that will replace their time and energy and learn with the family through teachable moments.

Now that she is there and missing home this first month or so, we are also learning to let go. As parents, we are concerned but we also believe the best learning takes place when she applies what we have taught her, nagged her with, what she has caught over the years. Peers and media influences will always be strong and our prayer is that she will remember what is right and not what feels right when making decisions. Yet we know, being human ourselves, we tend to like to do things we feel good about though it does not always work well that way! She will likely understand that when she has her own family. Yet, we are comforted that at least now, she knows she cannot completely understand our hearts as parents. It is funny how children can still feel loved after all that nagging and discipline or even punishment - there is something mysterious about that. In fact, up to a point, they draw family members together, rather than drive them apart!

Are there things we could do better? Sure.

- React less and respond more - even today, that is something so difficult to do. Only when we are not pressed for time will we have the posture to listen first and respond appropriately.
- More house hold chores - these necessary chores actually help train the skills needed for a family. Being parents, we too 'pamper' her and end up doing too much for her (we feel that way but she probably think otherwise!). Now that she is overseas, she is picking these up, especially cooking ☺. Looking forward to her cooking one day.
- More ball games. Our kids were engaged in swimming as an outdoor activity when they were very young. Perhaps more ball games would have helped add to more fun moments we can have as a family, especially when they are teens!

It is a privilege to be a parent, an opportunity to be a steward for a gift that is bestowed to us. In a way, we are close custodians as we will release them eventually to be on their own. As they mature to be adults, we hope to have a good relationship and journey as fellow adults and parents together. What a joy it is thinking back! May she learn and grow not just academically but emotionally and spiritually to be a lady fulfilling God's destiny in her life time here.