

The topic of parenting may be an unusual topic for a seventeen-year-old rising high school senior male; however, recently, this has been a common topic in my household. I hear my parents, specifically my mother, ask her friends and family members whether she has “done a good job.” It appears that there is some self-doubt that comes with this job of parenting. Now that I am about to go off to college the question of whether and how my parents raised me comes up often. Coupled with this, there has been a preponderance of inquiry about what I am going to do in the future. The topic of college and what I will be doing with the rest of my life has been everywhere. From my parents to relatives, near and far, and even the local dry cleaner, the questions of my plans and who I will become never-ending. Many ask the question of “Where did the time go?” and the reverie “I remember when you were just a baby” is front and center. In some ways, the message is clear that my parents have done their job and now it is time for me to move on.

These questions are now on my mind. I remember, or at least I think so, my first days at The Prairie School. I was scared and young, but at the end of the day, I would see my parents. Now with college approaching, my parents of course will be there, but now I am more aware that I am the product of their parenting. I now see them a little differently because I am seventeen and someday soon, I will be off on my own. Who are these people? How did they decide to have me, and what were the choices they made in rearing me? Now I find myself thinking about

those things I never really thought about. When looking at my Capstone project it became clear.

The Capstone, defined as an architectural term, is the final block of the construction process.

Does this not define our senior year? Are we our parents' "capstones" or are we our own? As I head down the hallways of my senior year, I do see myself, this final year, as a "capstone." It all makes sense. I am the piece on top of the pyramid. I am my parents' last block in their project, or am I? Am I my *own* Capstone? Therefore, I've decided I would like to take a closer look at parenting as part of my topic and project.

In thinking of this project, I started brainstorming about these melancholy, bittersweet days ahead, and I reflected on my own parenting as well as that of friends and classmates. Oddly, my thoughts reflected back to one of my mother's book club events. The best part of these gatherings for my father and I were the scented cupcakes and cinnamon rolls. Most of these book club gatherings came and went; however, the one that stuck out was this book about a "tiger mom." I remembered many days of discussion regarding this controversial book and the many varied opinions. This club meeting started out normal, but ended with a bang. My mother said everyone had an opinion on parenting and even some of the ladies left our home upset with others. I thought about this book most recently and I decided to pick it up for a quick read. Being a guy and all I thought it was a book about over-indulgent mothers, maybe a little motherly for my taste. I know I am being a little sexist, so sorry. (-:.... But as I read, I began to

see highlights of my beginnings, my middle, and now my journey out of the hallways of the Prairie School. How did my parents do it? What is parenting? Can anyone do it? As I read I began to see culture, my extended family, my grandparents, my teachers, all the people in my life that have made me who I am. Does it take a village like so many have said? According to the author, Amy Chua, in many ways, it does. Much of the *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* is centered on artistic and scholarly pursuits, the quest for perfection, archaic discipline, and the choice of parenting offered by eastern and western cultures is front and center. Discussions on self-esteem, nurturing behaviors and creating self-assured, confident and successful children fill the pages. Ms. Chua's book is full of innuendos of private music lessons, picking the best schools, the right neighborhood, even the right mate as she explored this topic. What little I do know about Ms. Amy Chua; is that she is a person who started out in the Midwest, was born in Champaign, Illinois, and spent part of her early childhood in Lafayette, Indiana. While in the Midwest, she was a member of the girl scouts, attended public school, and learned to roller-skate. Her Midwestern roots came as a surprise, because of her east coast flair and personality. However, as you read her book, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, you will see glimmers of her Midwestern values, which in many ways may provide her a safety net when exploring how she parents. This definitely would be something worth discussing with her. Did her Midwestern experiences, although brief, provide any influence on her parenting? Throughout

the book she often makes comparisons of eastern versus western parenting styles to emphasize her opinions about child rearing. In high school she moved out West when her father accepted an academic position at the University of California, Berkeley. It was there, due much to her father's position, she was able to travel the world. Of course, it was her early childhood upbringing of hard work and study that landed her at Harvard University where she eventually received her law degree. She admits freely in this book that within the nucleus of her own family, education was most important, and that her parents were strict disciplinarians that raised her with much Chinese cultural influence. She and her sisters grew up being drilled in math and science, and music lessons were a must. The expectation was for her to receive A's on her report card, anything less was unacceptable. However, she tells these stories with pride. No self-doubt or low self-esteem observed. It appeared that she took pride in her upbringing and this is witnessed in her own parenting styles. This again is another topic I would love to explore with Ms. Chua. How much influence did her own eastern culture and upbringing play in the role of her own parenting?

As with most thought provoking questions I began to brainstorm which led me to a perfect forerunner on the topic in the form of Dr. Benjamin Spock. Who else without a question is considered a leading authority on parenting? Of course, it is a coincidence that he is now deceased. Now I began to see the value of this question. This famous American pediatrician

whose book, *Baby and Child Care*, which was published in 1946, is considered one of the best-selling nonfiction books on parenting and child care of all time. To many, especially post-war baby boomers, consider Dr. Spock the father of parenting. Spock's book was filled with practical advice on how to care for children from cradle to youth. His book became the child-rearing Bible of the baby boomer period. Spock was one of the first physicians to study the psychological effects of parenting. He painstakingly researched to understand children's needs within the dynamics of a family. His ideas about child care had a long lasting influence over several generations of parents.

However, he, like Amy Chua, sparked great controversy regarding discipline. Even today, with the very mention of his name, you may receive outrage on his ideas about spanking and physical punishment. His core message was revolutionary. He is quoted for his statement of, "Don't be afraid to trust your own common sense." He insisted that parents should show love and affection to their children rather than constant strict discipline. The questions I would have for Dr. Spock would be endless. However, more than anything, I would love to be on the sidelines of a conversation between Dr. Spock and Amy Chua. Would they agree or would sparks fly in the room? I am of the belief that they would have a mutual respect for each other and who knows, they could co-author the next best-selling book on parenting.

The next person on my list may or may not be surprising to most. To many, she was one of the world's living Saints, due to her care of the poor, and her special relationship with children. Of course, I am speaking of Mother Teresa. Mother Teresa has often been described as the mother of the world. When her name is searched, she is on the list of the most famous mothers in the world. She was raised as a Roman Catholic and decided to devote her life to God at a young age. She joined the sisters of Loreto at the age of eighteen; she became a missionary in India. While in India, she took her first vows as a nun and took the name Teresa. She would go on to teach for many years in India, and would eventually become the head mistress at a school in Calcutta. She devoted her life to serving the poor, in particular, protecting children. Mother Teresa created an outdoor school for destitute children of Calcutta and focused on returning dignity to their lives. Teaching without the proper equipment, she made use of what was available, often writing in the dirt. She was driven to make children of the poor, literate. She worked to teach basic hygiene, self-care, and would then go into the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic. As she grew to know the children, she also began interacting with their parents, teaching them the basic skills of parenting. Her philosophy was that you may live in a hut, but you can provide your children with solid education and love, which is the basic foundation of parenting. With her teachings and philosophy, came more recognition for her work. She became known as the little woman with the powerful determination and drive on the crowded streets of

Calcutta. She became the role model for the world with her charitable work and self-effacing disposition. She always wanted nothing in return. Despite never having children of her own, she taught the world that motherhood did not always require giving birth. I wonder how Mother Teresa would view the status of children in 2015. Many countries today including America have children living at or below the poverty line. With all of today's technological advances, innovations, and educational opportunities why are many children still suffering?

My great-grandfather, Winchester Davis, would also be a great forerunner on the topic of parenting. He is the person that I would most want to interview and speak with. His life as a husband, father, and high school music teacher is worth examining. My great-grandfather, Winchester Davis grew up, worked, and raised his family in the rural south. He and my great-grandmother had a total of twelve children. Life in the south during this period of the early 1900s was difficult for many African Americans; despite this, he was determined to provide his family economic stability and education. At this time in the south it was still very difficult for many blacks to attend school. Many children had to work or simply were not allowed to attend local schools. My great-grandparents were Catholic; they worked with the local priest and nuns to gain admittance for their children to attend Catholic school. My great-grandfather worked several jobs to provide them with this private education.

As one could imagine raising twelve children would be a difficult challenge. However, I have been told by members of my family that my great-grandparents attributed their parental success to their commitment to education, a strong work ethic, mixed with a simple dose of discipline. My great-grandfather was a firm believer in balance. However, after raising his own children, he went back to school and became a music teacher. He was known for his love of music, which led to his work as a band leader and participation in a traveling jazz band. This love and passion for music was demonstrated in his home and passed down to his children. I believe music for him was a place of solace, it provided balance. This love for music would be an added skill for his children, and was important in his parenting. In many ways he had much in common with Tiger mom, Amy Chua. He was a great believer of love, faith, education and of course music. I believe he would have admired Amy Chua on many levels, but may not have agreed with many of her practices. This is something I would have loved to explore with him. He was a strong advocate for spanking and on some occasions used this practice. Again it was the south, and for many in this region it was just a part of life. This is something I would love to discuss with him now.

With regards to parenting, I would look no further than my own family, by speaking to my Grandmothers as well. It is fair to say that both women would enjoy hearing this. They have a vital stake in this topic because not only did they parent my parents, but indeed they have

helped to parent and guide their grandchildren as well. They both have a wealth of knowledge about parenting due to their overall age, experience, and wisdom. This is a natural occurrence that is often not explored. Our elders are often pillars in the community, statesman and role models within their families. They are often looked upon for guidance from each preceding generation and they are most effective in helping those of the present. My grandmothers have raised and parented a total of five children between them; all are college graduates with professional careers. By the American standard they are successful adults. My grandmothers often speak of the discipline, hard work, and the cultural values practiced in their homes. Elders in many societies and cultures play a crucial role in the upbringing of generations of children in their immediate and not so immediate families. Far too often they are a resource that is ignored. However, this has been changing in recent years. Why is that you may ask? That is exactly what I will be exploring. In the book, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mom*, we see Amy Chua's, reflection of her own upbringing and how this has influenced her own style of parenting.

The third and final person I would like to have a conversation with regarding parenting would be Adrian Peterson, current celebrity and NFL running back for the Minnesota Vikings. As most of you are aware, Mr. Peterson had a run-in with the law last year when he was indicted on a felony charge of injury to a child. He apparently used a tree branch, better known as a “switch”, to whip his four-year-old son leaving marks and bruises. Most people would think he

would be the last person anyone would want to speak with on the subject of parenting. Actually, the opposite is quite true. After his indictment period and arrest Adrian Peterson was quite vocal about his use of spanking as a disciplinary method. He spoke of his own experience with spankings that he received from his parents, specifically his dad. Peterson is quoted as saying, “I have always believed that the way my parents disciplined me has a great deal to do with the success I have enjoyed as a man.” Friends and family members of Peterson implied that corporal punishment is accepted and expected in many families across the region, specifically Texas. This created a national debate about corporal punishment versus child abuse.

Adrian Peterson’s defense from the beginning was that he felt he did nothing wrong. According to Peterson he truly loves his son and wanted to teach him lessons of right from wrong. He stated there was no harm intended. He felt guilt about the act of the physicality of what he did, but used how he was raised and brought up in Texas. Again, Peterson credited the spankings he received as a child as saving him and helping him to become a great football player. In the end, Adrian Peterson was sentenced to pay a four-thousand dollar fine, court costs, and eighty hours of community service, thus, avoiding jail time. Peterson also agreed to see a psychiatrist to help him make better decisions regarding discipline. My questions would tend to focus on what Peterson learned. In working with a psychiatrist, does he now believe the spankings he used as a disciplinary method were appropriate and effective? Does he have any

regrets? Most of all, I would want to know how he now views the spankings he received as a child, does he still believe they made him into the man he is today? What a question...

My hope as you go on this journey with me is to learn about parenting. What is considered good and what is considered bad parenting--or is there such a thing? What are parenting styles, authoritarian vs. authoritative, liberal vs. conservative? We will learn together. What is the best parenting? Does it have a beginning or does it ever end? How are geographic locations, gender, culture, and liberal versus conservative variables to be considered? We will explore. From Amy Chua to Dr. Spock and others we will dissect parenting and how children and teens grow into adulthood. From our grandparents to celebrities, everyone has an opinion on parenting, and what really works. In the end, we will talk to our own Prairie parents and teachers to explore this topic and see if they feel they have done a good job. Were there mistakes, as Amy Chua admits? Are we the people they expected us to be? We will explore and learn!