**Why I love my strict Chinese mom**

[**The teenager at the center of NYC’s hottest controversy speaks out in defense of her mother**](http://www.nypost.com/p/entertainment/why_love_my_strict_chinese_mom_uUvfmLcA5eteY0u2KXt7hM)

By SOPHIA CHUA-RUBENFELD

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Dear Tiger Mom,

You’ve been criticized a lot since you published your memoir, “Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother.” One problem is that some people don’t get your humor. They think you’re serious about all this, and they assume Lulu and I are oppressed by our evil mother. That is so not true. Every other Thursday, you take off our chains and let us play math games in the basement.

But for real, it’s not their fault. No outsider can know what our family is really like. They don’t hear us cracking up over each other’s jokes. They don’t see us eating our hamburgers with fried rice. They don’t know how much fun we have when the six of us — dogs included — squeeze into one bed and argue about what movies to download from Netflix.

I admit it: Having you as a mother was no tea party. There were some play dates I wish I’d gone to and some piano camps I wish I’d skipped. But now that I’m 18 and about to leave the tiger den, I’m glad you and Daddy raised me the way you did. Here’s why.

A lot of people have accused you of producing robot kids who can’t think for themselves. Well, that’s funny, because I think those people are . . . oh well, it doesn’t matter. At any rate, I was thinking about this, and I came to the opposite conclusion: I think your strict parenting forced me to be more independent. Early on, I decided to be an easy child to raise. Maybe I got it from Daddy — he taught me not to care what people think and to make my own choices — but I also decided to be who I want to be. I didn’t rebel, but I didn’t suffer all the slings and arrows of a Tiger Mom, either. I pretty much do my own thing these days — like building greenhouses downtown, blasting Daft Punk in the car with Lulu and forcing my boyfriend to watch “Lord of the Rings” with me over and over — as long as I get my piano done first.

Everybody’s talking about the birthday cards we once made for you, which you rejected because they weren’t good enough. Funny how some people are convinced that Lulu and I are scarred for life. Maybe if I had poured my heart into it, I would have been upset. But let’s face it: The card was feeble, and I was busted. It took me 30 seconds; I didn’t even sharpen the pencil. That’s why, when you rejected it, I didn’t feel you were rejecting me. If I actually tried my best at something, you’d never throw it back in my face.

I remember walking on stage for a piano competition. I was so nervous, and you whispered, “Soso, you worked as hard as you could. It doesn’t matter how you do.”



Lulu Chua-Rubenfeld

18-year-old Sophia Chua-Rubenfeld says her mother’s “tough love” parenting methods raised her to be an independent thinker who makes the most of new opportunities.

Everybody seems to think art is spontaneous. But Tiger Mom, you taught me that even creativity takes effort. I guess I was a little different from other kids in grade school, but who says that’s a bad thing? Maybe I was just lucky to have nice friends. They used to put notes in my backpack that said “Good luck at the competition tomorrow! You’ll be great!” They came to my piano recitals — mostly for the dumplings you made afterward — and I started crying when I heard them yelling “bravo!” at Carnegie Hall.

When I got to high school, you realized it was time to let me grow up a little. All the girls started wearing makeup in ninth grade. I walked to CVS to buy some and taught myself how to use it. It wasn’t a big deal. You were surprised when I came down to dinner wearing eyeliner, but you didn’t mind. You let me have that rite of passage.

Another criticism I keep hearing is that you’re somehow promoting tunnel vision, but you and Daddy taught me to pursue knowledge for its own sake. In junior year, I signed myself up for a military-history elective (yes, you let me take lots of classes besides math and physics). One of our assignments was to interview someone who had experienced war. I knew I could get a good grade interviewing my grandparents, whose childhood stories about World War II I’d heard a thousand times. I mentioned it to you, and you said, “Sophia, this is an opportunity to learn something new. You’re taking the easy way out.” You were right, Tiger Mom. In the end, I interviewed a terrifying Israeli paratrooper whose story changed my outlook on life. I owe that experience to you.

There’s one more thing: I think the desire to live a meaningful life is universal. To some people, it’s working toward a goal. To others, it’s enjoying every minute of every day. So what does it really mean to live life to the fullest? Maybe striving to win a Nobel Prize and going skydiving are just two sides of the same coin. To me, it’s not about achievement or self-gratification. It’s about knowing that you’ve pushed yourself, body and mind, to the limits of your own potential. You feel it when you’re sprinting, and when the piano piece you’ve practiced for hours finally comes to life beneath your fingertips. You feel it when you encounter a life-changing idea, and when you do something on your own that you never thought you could. If I died tomorrow, I would die feeling I’ve lived my whole life at 110 percent.

And for that, Tiger Mom, thank you.

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