

The True Measure of Successful Parenting

By Kevin Zhu

What is the Holy Grail of parenting? Is it helping our kids win prestigious awards and get into the best schools? Is it making sure that they can explore their own interests, enjoy their childhoods, and grow up to be happy people? Or is it raising them to be diligent go-getters who don't expect anything to be handed to them? Susan Tatsui-D'Arcy's *Our Entitled Children: An American Tiger Mom's Story* is about one mother's quest to accomplish all three.

Tatsui-D'Arcy defines herself as an American Tiger Mom, a more palatable middle ground between the typical Tiger Mom's remorseless ferocity and the Helicopter Mom's weak-willed permissiveness. Like many Asian parents, she taught her kids basic math and language skills at a very early age, and was determined to nurture that precocity all through their lives with things like math packets and afterschool enrichment programs. But unlike most parents of any type, she went so far as to start her own private academy for her daughters, whom she admits did not always appreciate their very demanding and time-consuming curriculum. However, Amy Chua fans everywhere would be aghast to find out that Tatsui-D'Arcy also provided a summer musical theater program for her students, wholeheartedly supported her daughters' love of dance, and perhaps most disappointingly, never called them "garbage."

Instead, she sought to set her own standard for active, and some might say extreme, parenting. After painting a historical and sociological overview of her book's main quarry, entitlement, Tatsui-D'Arcy delves into her own background to explain the twin tenets of her parenting philosophy: train your children to be self-sufficient, and prepare them to head out into the world when they're eighteen. Sounds good in theory, but in practice, how many parents teach their middle-school children to run their own businesses, have them explore 16 different internships over the course of four years, or get them a \$35,000 grant for hydrogen fuel cell research? To help her daughters Nicole and Jaclyn get into the colleges of their dreams – Stanford and Claremont McKenna respectively – this particular supermom did all that and more. And it worked.

Her results are undeniable, but more importantly, she achieved them in a way that American parents can actually learn from, rather than be appalled at. In a culture that's obsessed with "taking it day by day" and "living in the moment," her focus on readying her kids for life by age eighteen is an inspiring example of the kind of forethought that our myopic society needs more of. How much would our educational outcomes improve if, rather than reacting to every disciplinary crisis and bad report card as they come up, more parents concentrated on constructing a long-term strategy to endow their kids with the character and skills they need to thrive on their own? Sure, it would help if we had a sensible curriculum, or for that matter, one-on-one classes for every child. But in the absence of a miraculous cure for our ailing educational system, the best thing we can do for our children is to instill within them the competence and confidence to take control of their own lives as adults.