



Context of Offended

By Marcus Lander (October 2021)

As mentioned in my explanation of the context of the poem “Heritage” my second daughter was very precocious. My wife and I felt we had been entrusted with a very special gift and we were proud parents. We were determined that our daughter’s potential should not be allowed to go to waste. We began training her at home from before she was two, by which time she had mastered five alphabets, as well as her two-times table among other things. By the time she started primary school she already knew all her tables up to 12, and had completed the mathematics syllabus for several years above her age group. Her reading level was excellent and even when reading material with unfamiliar terminology and subject matter, she always seemed able to use the correct intonation.

When she started her reception year however there seemed to be a reluctance to allow her to progress to more advanced material, or to recognise her attainment level. Feeling a bit short-changed by the school who had previously assured us that they took the needs of gifted children very seriously, we continued to push our daughter at home. However I think that at times we may have been a bit too pushy, and the things we were teaching her were clearly not of any use to her at school and may have made her feel like a bit of a freak.

My wife being from an Asian background was something of a tiger mum and this trait may have been compounded by the fact that growing up as a Chinese Christian citizen in her home country of Indonesia, there was a constant battle against discrimination both religious and ethnic, as she was part of a minority in both cases, and persecution was an ever present threat.

Consequently I think between the two of us we were sometimes a bit hard on our daughter growing up believing that she needed to excel in order to be able to hold her own in a hostile world. Our intentions were good, but somewhere along the line the parent-child relationship began to deteriorate and rather than feeling encouraged and motivated by her achievements and academic level relative to her peers, our daughter become depressed and demotivated.

How much of this would have manifested itself naturally as a combination of personality and teenage trauma, besides the disruption caused by the emergence of coronavirus, not to mention starting a new secondary school, and being separated from all her former classmates (as she alone in her year group was to go there), it is difficult to determine, however somewhere along the way, problems began to emerge that started to affect our daughter’s psychological well-being.

In such cases I think that parents have a responsibility to take a long hard look at themselves and try to assess whether they have inadvertently contributed in some way. Doing so may be uncomfortable, as it is difficult to accept that we may have been guilty of hurting those we love, especially a child, however I think that in this case I have to hold my hand up and say that perhaps I have got things wrong, and I need to learn how to be a more sympathetic and understanding parent.