

Family

The definition of family has been varied over the years. For a long time, the definition of a family entailed the presence of parents, their children and both of them living in the same homestead. That is, a family was defined as a group of persons consisting of parents and their children, all living in the same homestead.

However, many people found this to be too narrow. Therefore, it is not uncommon for people to call all persons that they share the same heritage (lineage) with as part of the families. In the recent past, there are certain communities that have extended this concept of family to include other members of that community despite the fact that they not be necessarily be having any blood relations. In spite of the changing descriptions of the term, there is no doubt that all of them imply brotherliness, especially among the family members. More often than not, people will be influenced in their lives more by their families, or its lack thereof. Depending on the circumstances, this influence can either be constructive or otherwise. This paper analyses the experiences of two women who were torn between their families' demands and personal fulfillment. Despite this conflict of interest, it is clear that both of them have the best interests at heart. This is what family is all about; having the best intentions for all family members.

Two kinds by Amy Tan

This story highlights the (fractious) relationship between two family members: a daughter (Jing- mei) and her mother. There is no doubt that the two of them had Jing- mei's interest at heart. However, the conflict arose due to their differing opinion on success. The mother clearly wanted her daughter to be famous. On the other hand, the daughter just wanted to be well, Jing- mei, herself. The author writes of two songs that were played by the daughter that perhaps summarized the whole situation. 'Pleading Child' was faster, aggressive and perhaps illustrated the mother. On the other hand, 'Perfectly Contented' was slower, happier and demonstrated Jing- mei's mood; she was simply contented being herself. However, her mother demanded more from her daughter. As a result, she tried to make, almost forced, her to become talented (35). Therefore, she tried every trick to make her talented and thus famous.

After almost being pushed over the edge by her very demanding mother, Jing- mei decided that enough was enough. She wanted, not to be someone else, but just herself. She started to snap back at her mother (pg. 41). This stance became a catalyst for a never ending fight between mother and daughter. Farther and farther away they drifted from each other as time went by. It was only after they realized that their object of contention, the piano, so much the root of their troubles, was also the only solution that their relationship started to mend.

Not so long, Jing- mei's mother passed on. Her daughter is compelled to go back to the piano. She instinctively played 'Pleading Child' which had caused so much tension in her life. Afterwards, she played, with great satisfaction, 'Perfectly Contented'. She played them a few more times and only came to the realization: '...they were two halves of the same song' (pg. 42). This simply means that although her and her mother were 'supposedly apart', they actually shared a very strong bond; a bond that made them whole. Jing- mei was determined to remain just the way she was (she was satisfied this way). Her mother, on the other hand, just like her song, 'pleaded with her child' to cooperate and thus be famous. Despite the fact that the two disagreed, at the end of the day they form a really beautiful song, bond. This is what a family set up is all about.

The Good Daughter by Caroline Hwang

In this story, the author talks of her visit to a dry cleaning store only to find a fellow Korean there. Since she was also Korean (her parents were), she decides to imitate a Korean salute she had learnt from her parents, hoping that she'd get a discount. The woman asked her her name. On replying 'Hwang', the woman was startled; she had expected the author to reply in Korean semantics 'Fhuang'. She even laughed at her for not knowing her heritage. On arrival at home, the author confronts her parents why they had never corrected her. Her mother sees no big deal in her not knowing how to pronounce her name. 'So what if you can't pronounce your name? You're American.'

The author then goes ahead to explain her predicament. Her parents had come to America some three decades ago, only two years before she was born. They did their utmost in encouraging her that America presented her with an opportunity to fulfill all her wildest dreams. She had to be assimilated

to the American system at the expense of her Korean roots. They had not even bothered to teach her to pronounce her name! She had obeyed all along, even their suggestion that she pursue law while she wanted to be a writer. The author went to pursue a Ph.D in English literature but she eventually dropped out because of a lack of passion. Her parents were disappointed but not devastated since they had not approved in the first place. On the contrary, the author was devastated.

The author has reached a stage where she plans to settle down in marriage. The tricky part is that her parents expect her to marry a Korean. After so many years trying to Americanize her, they expect her to go back to her Korean roots. The author is clearly undecided on what she should do. Despite claiming that she is living a paradox, she cannot help but realize that her parents wanted the best for her. This is the reason why they came to America in the first place: to give endless opportunities so that she can fulfill her dreams in life.

Conclusion

The family set up plays an important role in the shaping up the lives of people. Although there may be squabbles in any family, there's no denying the fact that each member has the best of interests at heart. However, just like Jing-mei, people should not realize this fact when it's too late.

Works Cited

- Hwang, Caroline. *The Good Daughter*
- Tan, Amy. *Two kinds*