



inspired by an accident

Christine Jen

I am writing this article because my mother hurt her hand. She hurt her hand while using a toothbrush to scrub our shower on second floor. When the accident first happened, I didn't think much. I thought her hand would heal sooner or later, but it didn't. Today, her tendons are still swollen and painful which means she wouldn't be able to do all the housework like before for us, six children in total — cooking, cleaning, shopping, etc. Therefore, I'm writing for her because she cannot hold a pen.

After my mother's accident, I had to quit my part-time job so I could provide more help for her at home. Before I left my job, though, I'll never forget what my coworker Barbara said to me, "Remember, family always comes first." I had not thought about my family in such lucid terms before.

Somehow in the thick of college, my vision for life had gotten a little clouded...

Although I was born an American, I was always an 'Asian' at heart. I wanted to be smart, excel in academics, and go on to study in a famous school, preferably one of the Ivies. Thus, it was with

some disappointment that I found myself commuting to a nobody-knows-where state university near my home. I was on full scholarship and getting straight A's, but I felt a little frustrated. I felt I could have done better.

The experience of staying at home during my first few college semesters, however, started some changes in me. After the excitement of papers and exams and things like that subsided, I began to think about what life really meant to me. Okay, I told myself, I know I can do well in school when I work hard, but is there something more to life than this? This question reasserted itself after my mother's accident. It was then that I remembered something my mother often told me: it is more important to be a person than to excel in academics.

What does it mean, to be a person? My mother learned it the long way. The academic pressures my mother experienced as a child were intense. Brought up in Taiwan, she had to conform strictly to academic standards or be deemed a social misfit. To score high on an exam alongside other bright students sometimes seemed impossible for her. Fortunately, my mother survived pretty well. She attended the top girls' high school and went on to one of the most prestigious universities in Taiwan.



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However, whenever she tells me stories about her past, my mother's words are often tinged with regret. Although she experienced academic success, her relationship with her own mother was stormy. My grandmother wanted my mother to stay close to home and help out in the house—to put family first. Sound familiar? My mother, on the other hand, wanted to be independent. They have now been reconciled, after many years, but still my mother wishes she lived her life differently back then. If she had learned to be 'a person' earlier, she might have avoided family problems and learned lessons about life that she must learn now.

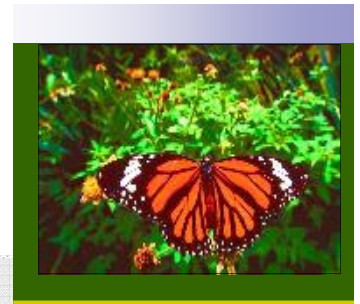
After marriage, my mother could have done many things. She could have entered the work force, climbing the social ladder to better positions. She could have gone back to school for graduate study. Instead, she put family first. God's calling was for her to stay at home to raise us, and she obeyed. It wasn't easy, but she eventually pulled us out of private school and began homeschooling us as well. She wanted to train us to be men and women of character and purpose who would one day serve both God and man.

To be a person, to put family first, is a lesson I thought I had learned during my years of homeschooling. Now I realize I am just beginning to learn it. Once my mother lost the use of her hand, I saw in a new light how much she had sacrificed through the years for me and for family. I evaluated myself and saw how much I had placed myself first. College, after all, is an inherently self-centered environment. Everything revolves around my education, my interests, me. I think it is time to turn that around.

As a high school senior, I couldn't understand why my mother tirelessly encouraged me to stay close to home by commuting to a

local university. But as a college sophomore, now I know she was trying to teach me that life is more than school. Life is more than a good job and a good salary. Life is all about relationships with family, community, and God. It is about serving people around us and giving back to people as they have given to me. It is about being a person, determining my values and convictions, developing virtues such as responsibility and diligence, and living it all out. Most importantly, life is about love, selflessness, and sacrifice.

As I write this, I know in my heart I do want to live such a life! My mother has lived it and blessed me with it. I want to live it and bless those who come into my life as well. Such a life can only be lived, however, by knowing God and His purpose for my life. After all, God's Son Jesus was the One who completed the greatest, most perfect act of selfless sacrifice—the act of giving up His life for the sins of mankind. He put us above Himself, and when I think about that, I am inspired to do the same.



Biographical Note

Elizabeth and Joseph Jen live in Bloomfield, NJ, where they homeschool their children: Michael (17), Jeremy (15), Stephanie (13), Joshua (8), and Caleb (6). Their eldest child Christina (19) is a college sophomore, majoring in English at Montclair State University. The Jen children study school subjects at home such as grammar, literature, math, history, and science. Through the years, they have also developed many extracurricular interests. The Jen children enjoy playing musical instruments and perform as a string quartet in weddings and nursing homes. The Jen children also participate with other homeschoolers in Bible quizzing competitions, writing clubs, debate tournaments, and choir. They love socializing with homeschooled friends, sharing experiences together as siblings, and just learning in life! Most importantly, they love God and wish to serve Him as a family.