

## **“Your Children Are Not Your Children”**

I was talking to a retired engineer who was one of my father’s friends; he immigrated to the US about 30 years ago with his family.

He is more than 80 years old and living with his wife who is experiencing declining health.

They have three adult children who have become professionally successful in the medical and science fields. Their daughter lives close by, and their two sons live in other states.

He broke down into tears when he told me that his out-of-state children seldom visit or call them, and their daughter will occasionally drop in or call only when it benefits her.

As an example; when there is something wrong with one of the daughter’s homes she would call her father to fix the problem, which is free labor for the daughter.

When she needs her mom to cook her favorable traditional food, she would call and set a specific time to pick up the dish and leave soon after.

“I don’t mind helping my daughter as I always did, but I thought my daughter should understand how increasingly difficult it is for her mom to cook now. “ He told me, “She should be the one to cook and take care of us instead of vice versa.”

Except for giving him my cell phone number and letting him know that I am available whenever he or his wife may need my help, I really don’t know what I can say or do to better his and his wife’s situation.

His story has triggered a flashback of similar traumatic ones I heard from other parents who immigrated to the US as a trailblazer, lived tireless lives of sacrifice to open up every opportunity to their children whom are expected not only to become high-achieving professionals, but also take good care of their parents when they are old and sick.

This is the typical set of traditional values which has been retained generation after generation, but is giving in to the inevitable family decline that is impacting our immigrant families.

“Your children are not your children”, these were the words he concluded with as he ended his sad story.

It strikes my heart every now and then until I encountered the poem, “On Children” written by Kahlil Gibran, a Lebanese artist, philosopher and writer who immigrated with his parents to Boston in 1895:

*Your children are not your children.  
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.  
They come through you but not from you,  
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you*

Recently I find myself revisiting this poem from the perspective of a mother with two children who are becoming adults and growing significantly in their education and potentially promising careers.

That first line evokes a visceral response in me. Like most of the traditional Chinese parents, I have raised, taught, and cared about my children with the strict method I carried from my parents following my biological, emotional, and spiritual instincts.

Besides love, I tried to give them my thoughts which a lot of time are not appreciated as much as I expected, and I started to feel upset.

It took me years to realize and understand that my children have developed their own identities growing up in this country; they have their own parts to play in this world, and destinies to fulfill in their lives.

I open my heart and allow myself to be soothed with the rest of the poem:

*You may give them your love but not your thoughts,  
For they have their own thoughts.  
You may house their bodies but not their souls,  
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow.*

I don't agree with the way the children of my neighbor treat their parents, but I feel more and more comfortable following the poem which is full of lyrical outpourings and expressions of deep religious and mystical nature which leads to my new way of thinking:

We are the means by which our children came into the world; we didn't design nor own them, a force greater than ourselves brings them to this world.

Since we don't own them, we should not place on them any unrealistic expectations which may leave us feeling disappointed.