

The Asian Reporter

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MY TURN

■ Wayne Chan



My grown-up, confounding, exasperating, exhilarating blessing of a son

Our oldest son Tyler headed off to college in September. Maybe I need to provide a little background.

Tyler is indeed our oldest child, but since he is a triplet, he's only older by about three minutes, simply because he emerged first. But whether three minutes or three years ahead, you could still say he was born to be a leader.

Even the doctor remarked that Tyler was the one who got the whole delivery started when he broke his mom's water. Apparently he didn't want to be stuck in there with his brother and sister anymore — he wanted out! I don't know how the doctor determined it was Tyler who broke it — unless there's some in-utero interrogation technique I'm unaware of.

For the past 18 years, his mother and I have raised him the best we could. Over the years, of course, we have wondered what kind of person he would turn out to be and what he would do with his life. I know we probably put a lot of pressure on him to make the most of it. Although some of the pressure undoubtedly comes from being his parents, I'm sure it also has to do with the fact that he and we have dealt daily with his brother and sister's autism diagnosis.

Since the age of two, Tyler's life has been surrounded by a near-constant presence of doctors, special-needs therapists, alternative therapies, and just an overall feeling of organized chaos. Understandably, we, especially his heroic mom, have focused a lot of our attention where it was most needed — on Tyler's brother Ethan and sister Savannah.

With so much effort being spent on Ethan and Savannah, we also wanted to make sure Tyler grew up in an environment that was as "typical" as it could be, so we decided early on we would not let his brother and sister's diagnosis stop us from doing anything, including going on vacations around the world. The first time we took the three of them out to dinner as a family, we brought along a triplet stroller, three baby carriers, a backpack filled with diapers, and enough milk to open a dairy. After fellow diners watched what we did to get through a simple meal, they stood up and applauded our efforts when we prepared to leave.

Then there was the time we decided to take the triplets to the San Diego Zoo to visit the new panda

exhibit. When I pushed the triplet stroller near the panda enclosure, half the people in the panda line left and surrounded us, as apparently we were the more exciting draw.

Looking back at the past few years, as far as I can tell, Tyler has become an average American boy, sometimes irritatingly so.

When he was about six years old and we were in our car on a trip, he looked at me from the back seat and, while I was driving, pointed to the back of my head and said he noticed a gray hair. Since I was still in my 30s then, and didn't appreciate having any gray hair, I asked Tyler to pull it out. He started digging in and suddenly said, "I'm like your personal monkey!" For the record, he ended up pulling out about 10 perfectly black hairs while leaving the solitary gray hair in place.

This is the boy who started playing tennis with me and after a few points, innocently remarked, "You know, you don't have to hit it so soft to me." I told him, "I'm not trying to hit it soft to you!"

Then the next time we played, when I deliberately tried hitting the ball harder, he said, "You know, you're definitely hitting it a little harder to me now." I told him to stop talking.

And the last time we played (and I'm pretty sure it will be the last time), he said, "I want to beat you while you're still young enough to play." Faint praise, indeed.

Still, we've discovered that having him grow up with two special-needs siblings has affected him — and I couldn't be any prouder of him for it.

In high school, Tyler started a club called Best Pals, in which he recruited other students who spent time at lunch with special-needs students and kept them company.

For his senior project, he started a chapter of ACEing Autism, a group of volunteers who teach special-needs kids how to improve their hand/eye coordination by learning tennis.

And in middle school, when he saw a group of bullies towering over a special-needs student during lunch, he stepped in front of the boy, stood up to the bullies, and got them to stop.

As I tucked him into bed every night when he was younger, I always told him, "You're my hero."

Although he's now in college, those same three words continue to run through my mind.

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Wondering what events are going on this week?

Check out The Asian Reporter's Community and A.C.E. Calendar sections, on pages 10 and 11.