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MY TURN

■ Wayne Chan



Dramatic reading of an uneventful life

Another year is in the books. It's my 21st year of being a parent. I'm still not sure how good I am at this whole "dad" thing.

The problem is, I know how I feel about my parents. I miss them every single day. I miss my dad's goofy jokes. I miss how my mom would remind me to wear a jacket in 83° weather. I miss how they made me feel, no matter what was happening in our lives. I always felt secure. My parents were always there. They always kept me safe.

I had, I must admit, an idyllic childhood. I experienced the same issues of any other middle-class teenager, which was really peanuts compared to what both my parents endured growing up.

Individually, both my mom and dad escaped from China when the Japanese invaded during World War II. As a boy, my father witnessed countless tragedies during the war — killings, betrayals, you name it. He survived it and became a decent and honorable man, and a successful businessman to boot. Same with mom. She escaped to Taiwan with her family, came to the U.S., and ended up managing the library of a major university.

I didn't really get to hear many stories of my parent's struggle. My father was hesitant to talk about it, but when he did, he didn't have to make his memories seem larger than life. When a story starts with, "I could see some of the Japanese soldiers carrying bayonets," it's about as much drama that's needed.

Having grown up hearing some of these stories, it taught me the value of perseverance. If my parents could make it through such a chaotic childhood, what excuse did I have? The least I could do is work hard, give my best, and set an example for my kids.

I really feel I should do more than just set a good example for my kids, though. I'd love to share some incredibly traumatic life story with my children that keeps them on the straight and narrow. And if I don't have a ready-made story to do that, I suppose I just have to overhype some of the problems I did face.

Let's see.
Son, I remember it like it was yesterday. It was dark, rainy, and cold. It seemed far more frigid than the 67° I saw on my iPhone's weather app. The thought kept running through my mind — get home, you just need to make it home. I longed for the warmth and security of my wife's tender embrace. Would I make it home that night? I tried my best to steer clear of any negative thoughts. Stay strong.

The problem was that I had left my keys in the car, and even though I had my phone, I didn't want to call the Auto Club because I'd forgotten to pay my membership dues the week before.

I looked around frantically, hoping to spot a police officer, anyone who could help, but all I saw were parking lot attendants, and they were busy directing cars out of the parkade after the Neil Diamond concert. If I'd left the concert just a few minutes early, maybe before Neil finished singing his encore of "Forever in Blue Jeans," perhaps I could have caught someone's attention to get help. Maybe. Just maybe. Right at that moment — maybe was a lonely word.

What do you mean my story is ridiculous!?! Fine. I have a better story with boatloads of drama. I once spilled a bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken as I was handing it over to my dad.

You may not think that's very dramatic either, but you don't know how much my dad loved KFC.

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