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Rachel Emma Silverman: Juggling, Laissez-Faire Style

Using a four-foot fairy floor puzzle as bait, I was able to sneak my iPad from 5-year-old Nikki for a few minutes last Saturday, then I couldn't put it down. A recent *Wall Street Journal* essay, "Why Chinese Mothers are Superior," was at once compelling and alarming and downright mesmerizing. In it, Yale law professor Amy Chua espouses her – and what she says is her culture's – method of child-rearing. Her two daughters were never allowed to "attend a sleepover, have a play date, be in a school play ... watch TV or play computer games, chose their own extracurricular activities, get any grade less than an A, play any instrument other than piano or violin," and much, much more.

I wasn't the only one struck by the piece, excerpted from Chua's new book, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* (Penguin Press). At press time, there were more than 5,500 comments posted on WSJ.com, and the story was still the most widely read and shared. (The second most popular story, a front-page piece covering President Obama's impassioned speech on the Arizona shootings, garnered 600 comments.)

That's when Rachel Emma Silverman, mother of two, posted her piece, "In Defense of Laissez-Faire Parenting" on The Juggle, WSJ.com's work-and-family blog, which she writes and co-edits. "Call me the anti-Chua," she writes, while telling of her own very laid-back upbringing featuring unlimited TV, plenty of unstructured time with friends, school plays and no academic pressure (but note, all three siblings are Harvard or Yale grads). And she and her husband intend to follow this example.

Her caveat? "Our sons are little, so potty training is about as tough as it's gotten!"

We caught up with Silverman, a WSJ business reporter since 1998, while she juggled caring for Sam, 3, and Ethan, almost 1, with her blog duties and her upcoming book – a business tome on ... tax.

What was the reaction to your laissez-faire parenting post?

I'm surprised at how many readers agreed with Amy's piece. A lot of people thought U.S. parents are too soft, and we shouldn't have laid-back parenting. While I'm not advocating that every parent plop their kids in front of the TV, my parents raised us with a lot of freedom and trust. I like to think we turned out fine by external markers of success – good colleges and jobs – and that we are happy and well adjusted. You don't need to be a super disciplinarian and make your kids practice violin 20 hours a day. There are other routes to Harvard. Overall, the general reaction among readers was that so much depends on the kids, which I agree with. I'm hoping that my kids respond to treats and bribery rather than my berating them!

Amy Chua answered readers' questions this week. What did you think?

I thought her responses were reflective of her book as a whole. She is a lot less draconian in her memoir, especially by the end! Some of our Juggle commenters have accused her of 'backpedalling' in her Q&A, but I disagree – in her memoir (as opposed to the excerpt), she actually comes across as loving and sane, though a strict disciplinarian.

Tell us about The Juggle.

The blog was started in 2007 by a colleague. I now co-write it with Sue Shellenbarger, and we have a bunch of other contributors. Along with more personal pieces, we write a lot of news and serious policy posts on work and family issues. And we have a very passionate and dedicated readership community – many of whom become friends online and even offline!

Contact The Juggle at thejuggle@wsj.com or on Facebook and Twitter. ♦

Chat Room columnist Vivien Santana Hughes is a former *L.A. Parent* editor and the mother of three – two sons in college and (surprise!) a five-year-old daughter. She lives with her family in La Cañada-Flintridge.



Mother-of-two Rachel Emma Silverman, co-editor of *The Wall Street Journal's* work-and-family blog, *The Juggle*, counters author Amy Chua's extreme-discipline parenting style with a laissez-faire approach.