Natural Growth, A Method for Child Rearing: A Response to Annette Lareau’s *Unequal Childhoods* with my own childhood.

Every parent’s dream to have their child grows up well and healthy, ready for society. Parents raise its child with great difficulty. Especially when there can be other factors that contributes in raising children. Children born into working class and lower class families have it tougher than other children with intuitional advantages. Lareau says:

> They do not seem to view children’s leisure time as their responsibility; nor did they see themselves as responsible for assertively intervening in their children’s school experiences. Rather, the working class and poor parents carried out their chores, drew boundaries and restrictions around their children, and then within these limits, allow their children to carry out their lives. It is in this sense that I use the term “the accomplishment of natural growth”. (Lareau, 289)

Most working class and lower class parents raise their child in the sense of natural growth:. They allow the child to grow themselves while giving them a set of boundaries to follow. My parents both had jobs. I have two siblings also both younger than me. Growing up, my mom told me the dangers of what a child cannot do, like open the stove, cook, light a fire, answer the door, go outside without permission and play with friends outside without permission. As long as I did not do any of those things I would not get into trouble. Most of the time, I stayed home watching my younger siblings. Even till now, I care for my siblings like a second mother. My parents child rearing strategies can be compared to Lareau’s concept of natural growth.

I learned at a young age that we did not have money to burn. Even though my parents tried to hide it, money was an issue. At the age of ten, I went through a phase where I wanted to learn piano. Even though my parents promised me that they would get me lessons soon; I knew
that they hid something from me. My working class parents had already enough trouble raising three kids. Lareau mentions:

   Formidable economic constraints make it a major like task for these parents to put food on the table, arrange for housing, negotiate unsafe neighborhoods, take children to the doctor (often waiting for city buses that do not come), clean children’s clothes, and get children to bed and have them ready for school the next morning. (3)

With no spare money lying around, I consider twice before asking something. In the fourth grade I really wanted to learn how to play piano. I wanted to learn because all my cousins knew how to play an instrument and my siblings and I did not. My extended family understands how we live and sometimes they try to help by offering to take us to amusement parks or movies. My cousin, who lives in middle class lifestyle, knows how to play the piano; she also takes art classes and learns Chinese on Saturdays. With great restraint I try not to say “How come Annie has piano classes and I do not?” My parents always tried to make life better for us (even though I did not see them much), like getting us up for school, doing our laundry, and getting us ready for bed at night. There was this one night I pestered my parents to o on a field trip, I did not realize how tired they were but all of a sudden my mom snapped at me and told me to go to bed. Economic constraints inhibit the ability to develop skills useful in real life.

   Neither of my parents graduated from high school, neither of the hold GEDs. Both my parents came to the United States to make a better living. They did not understand English making it difficult to participate in anything with English involved. English as a second language made it difficulty communicating with authorities because of the language barrier. This clearly shows an emerging sense of constraint through parents as well. Lareau mentions:
The working class and poor children, by contrast, showed an emerging sense of constraint in their interactions in institutional settings. They were less likely to try to customize interactions to suit their own preferences. Like their parents, the children accepted the actions of persons in authority (although at times they also covertly resisted them). Working class and poor parents sometimes were not as aware of their children’s school situation (as when their children were not doing homework). Other times, they dismissed the school rules as unreasonable. (6)

My parents worked extremely hard and they come home from work exhausted but still have to get three kids to sleep. As an older sibling, I feel obligated to prepare my siblings for sleep first before I start on my homework or study for an exam. Frequently, I compromised my studies for the well being of my siblings. My parents would meet with my teacher and my teacher said that I lacked homework efficiency. My parents explained their situation and I tried to translate for them. Despite the circumstances he stressed the importance of homework. Even though my teacher understood, my parents still believed that taking care of my siblings is more important than studies. My parents could no argue with the teacher because of the intimidation that the teacher gave off. Instead they meekly said that they would make more of an effort in checking their homework. Even in thus example one can sense that there is an emerging sense of constraint with the parents. The lack of knowledge of dealing with authorities makes it difficult. Also my parents find it pointless to argue with an educator.

When families gather at family reunions, it happens that children are naturally obligated to take care of younger children. Although parents often do not ask them to, older children often take care of the younger children anyways. It is because children from the working class have an
instant access to their extended family, therefore cousins, aunts, and uncles are a close part of the child’s life. Annette Lareau explains further:

At these and other family events, older children voluntarily play with and take care of their younger siblings and cousins while adults mingle and talk among themselves. (141) Children growing up in a natural growth environment do not have a packed schedule as a child raised in a concerted cultivated environment. In my younger years, my aunt and uncles often held family parties, where all the extended families in the area visited their house. All the families that visited had children of their own, so I had many cousins. Although my parents did not tell me to take care of my baby cousin, I felt obligated to take care of her while my aunt was busy. Taking care of my baby cousin turned out not bothersome at all, in fact I quite enjoyed it. As I am one of the older children, I feel obligated to make sure the children do not get into any trouble. In some situations where my aunt does as for my help because she has her hands full. All my cousins, whom I have played with since I was a toddler, are like my siblings. I treat my aunts and uncles like my mom and dad. These extended relatives are all very close in my life, so I do not mind taking care of them.

While growing up in an immigrant Chinese family, respecting adults is a decorum that my siblings and I followed. If we were ever to disrespect an adult we would be disciplined. I have been following this rule since I was a toddler. Even now, I dare not to act surly to adults. It is the utmost importance to respect adults. Lareau mentions:

She places a premiums respect on for adults. All adults, whether they are related to Tyrec or not, receive automatic respect and deference from the children. (71) As the oldest out of three siblings, the importance of leading an example to my brother and sister is vital. In Chinese culture acting rude to adults is extremely rude and disrespectful. It also casts
bad luck upon your family. My parents taught me, if you act rude to adults, it would show that my parents cannot be good caretakers. It also shows that my siblings and I act spoiled. Although there are some unfortunate circumstances that comes with acting “respectful.” When accused wrongly of something I did not do, I did not have the courage to stand up for myself. This is something Lareau also mentions in her book Unequal Childhoods. In this situation I did not have the experience or the courage to talk back.

Siblings in lower and working class families tend to establish closer relationships than siblings in the middle class. There will always be a form of sibling rivalry, but it does not occur as often in the working and lower class families. In working and lower class families Lareau sees that siblings develop relationships more deeply than working class families. They also get along better as a family than middle class families.

Tyrec’s sister and to a lesser extent his older brother are important part of his life. Although Anisha can be bossy at times, she and Tyrec are close companions. They help each other out, providing mutual support when, for example, their mother is in a bad mood. They spend time together both inside and outside. They often watch television together or play video games together. (76)

Here Lareau clearly states a close bond between siblings in a working class family. Since their schedules involve a lot of free time; they have more time to spend it together. My siblings and I can be considered very close companions. Although we do fight, I find it not as often as in comparison to my aunt’s three children. Since our schedules did not fill up with activities or team sports, we spent our time together talking and playing. I remember this Sunday afternoon, my siblings and I had finished our homework and with nothing to do, I decided to make a car out of cardboard. In a group effort we finished the car beautifully only to be thrown out into the
dumpster in the end. Although the product was wasted, the development of the sibling relationship can be considered the most important. I believe close sibling relationships can help keep familial bonds close as children get older.