

A LETTER TO MYSELF | By Jenna Cook '10

(Editor's note: This essay was read by Jenna Cook '10 during the opening session of MLK Day 2009 in January.)

I wrote this letter to my 12-year-old self.
I am adopted from China and live in Massachusetts.
I believe in forgiveness.

2008年十二月六号 (December 6, 2008)
亲爱的我十二岁的自己 (To my 12-year-old self):

You do not yet know me, but in four years' time you will. It may seem strange that we have never met and still, I understand you so completely. Please let me explain:

I remember you riding in the car, your eyes panning the streets outside of the Plexiglas window. I caught you secretly scouring for a glimpse of that man and that woman whose features somehow resemble your own. You searched for your birth parents in suburbia's boulevards—around the block from your house—but then you realized that there were no Chinese people there. So you traveled to Chinatowns in New York, Boston, San Francisco. "Did I walk past them?" you asked yourself. You went to Wuhan, China, and thought, "I am home. This is my city. They could really be here!" But you still didn't know if you had found that exact hue of charcoal hair and that nose as flat as your own. I know you.

When you scrutinized the white burn, a stretched almond sliver on your hip, I remember the dangling star earrings you wore that morning. Through the mirror's reflection, I spied you scrutinizing the "Mark of Love"—the result of a countryside ritual giving illiterate parents a way to say, "I love you"; a way for them in the future—if you ever did meet again—to identify you as their baby. This is the place where your first parents scarred you, blemished you, blessed you.

When you teetered on the verge of sleep, I remember the yellow paperback by your pillow. So close to your resting body, I heard the dream springing out of your ears like an energetic confetti concerto. I, too, imagined the almond sliver scar dancing alive on the surface of your flesh, contorting and pirouetting into shapes like the calligraphy of your Mandarin textbooks—revealing the address of its maker.

I sense your craving, your hunger, your questioning, but I urge you to dispel this fantasy. Use your pen to clear your mind. Use the ink to dust out the tiny crevices inside. These moments may be bound for a greater audience than Plexiglas windows, star earrings and yellow paperbacks, but I advise you to wake up in the morning and hug your pale-skinned mother—your real mother, even though right now you do not think she is so. Your mother is yours not because of the color of her skin but the content of her character. I want you to laugh with your free-spirited sister while you still have enough time to do so. Instead of peeking from car windows, look inside your house rooted in American soil, and thank the precious people who create your forever family.

Please remember what a gift you already possess in the healthy pulses of your heart and the steady breaths from your lungs. You could have died—abandoned on the mountainside, overturned in a muddy puddle on the side of a dirt road. But you escaped. What more could you possibly desire? You got a second chance at existence.

I want you to know that you did not fail your Chinese family by being born a girl. Even if you could have somehow been born the most beautiful or the most talented, it would not have changed anything. Try a trillion times over, but infinite perfect A's and gold medals will never amount to make up for your femaleness. You are already "good enough"; you were always good enough.

I hope someday you will realize that you truly are worthy of life.

祝好! (Be well, my friend!)
夏华斯 (Jenna)



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