

Dear Ms. Grace Lin,

Before I read your book, *Dumpling Days*, I was not proud of being Chinese. I felt that there was some sort of 'cultural barrier' between me and my Caucasian friends. Whether I brought dumplings or steamed eggs, my lunches would always trigger some questions: "Um... What's that?" I remember shrugging shyly, murmuring something about steamed eggs and chicken soup and closing my lunchbox, gritting my teeth and trying not to cry in front of everybody. Those embarrassing afternoons, I went home quietly, pondering why Mom had to pack me these awkward meals. I asked my mom if I could bring sandwiches to school the next day. She agreed, but deep inside, I felt like I was slowly drifting away from my heritage.

All I wanted was to be American. I yearned for bologna sandwiches, pasta, carrot crackers; the things that make you fit in with the others, the things that did not generate revolting looks from my peers. I wished to have blue eyes and golden-brown hair, not inky- dark eyes and jet-black hair. When people asked me, "Where do you come from?" I just mumble something about being Canadian Chinese. When my mom suggested wearing a Chinese dress to school, I roll my eyes and complain that nobody wears them at school, that they were too formal.

When Pacy travels to Taiwan for a glimpse of the country her parents had once called home, Pacy's parents sign her up for a Chinese painting class. She is thrilled to find a new way to explore her talent for art, but she has a challenging time finding new friends, looking like everyone else but not speaking their language, and understanding the art teacher's instruction, while Pacy tries to find her identity and heritage. I, surrounded by a diverse range of cultures in an international school, also had trouble accepting and embracing my Chinese heritage. Reading *Dumpling Days*, I felt like Pacy was somehow a silhouette of me.

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When I read that Pacy accidentally ate chicken feet, I totally related to that, but in a different manner. When I was younger and still living in Beijing, China, I adored gnawing on chicken feet at my favorite restaurant. Now that I moved to America, whenever my father asks me if I want to have some chicken feet, I politely decline. "But I thought you loved chicken feet!" No, Dad. Not anymore. I was not about to be the next victim of teasing by my so-called pals: "Ew, you eat chicken feet? That's so gross!"

But after I read this book, I no longer desired blue eyes or golden hair. I no longer desired to be American. Now, I bring Chinese food to school. I wear Chinese clothes that I previously deemed 'too formal'. When people ask me now, "Where are you from?" I hold my head high and say proudly, "I am Chinese."

Thank you, Ms. Lin, for letting me know that heritage and culture are what make me, me. Thank you for communicating to me that my roots, my traditions, are the most important part of me.

Annabelle Yan

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