

Dear mom,

Hello! I hope everything at home is good still, and that Clara's happy and doing well in school. I hope her soccer team is starting to win games now. Anyways, remember how I moved abruptly and never told you about it? And then you got that text from me mentioning I have a new address and you were really confused and asked me if I was going through a phase? Well, I'm not. I've gone to the realm of martial arts for a little while and I think I'm gonna stay here for a bit. Maybe even longer than a bit. I'm really happy here!

I don't know why I didn't tell you about this journey- I think I was embarrassed or self conscious or maybe even a little surprised at myself for doing it in the first place, and I didn't want to have to explain it to anyone else, not even you, lest I talk myself out of even trying. I'm not the most physical person, no one has ever used the words 'sporty' or 'athletic' to describe me to my knowledge. And as a result, I'm always a little self conscious when performing physical tasks in front of others- I usually lean in to being bad at the thing, and make it into a joke, but taking classes at a wushu studio makes that comfort tick a big no-no. Instead, I'm finding it easier with each lesson to embrace my novice and the mistakes I'm making.

I go to lessons at my studio weekly, on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Wednesday classes are taught by Sarah, who never sweats and has a kind smile but only smiles outside of class in a way that really intimidates the crap out of me during class. Saturday classes are taught by Ryan, who could kill me in five seconds should he ever chose to do so, and could honestly probably kill me on accident one day while demo-ing an application move. (Application moves are moves that have a basis in self defense or can be applied in self defense or combat situations. Forms or stances are more visual and performative and focused on appearance and providing a workout.) The studio is about 10 minutes away from me by car, in east Providence, and it's called The Way of the Dragon. They teach all sorts of Chinese martial arts, and it's overseen by Master Wu- a master of both internal and external styles of wushu. Master Wu, I've been told, is actually lowkey a crazy accomplished wushu master. He's won international competitions held in Taiwan and is officially recognized as having achieved grandmaster status. Master Wu's master, my grandmaster, is a woman which is pretty cool. There are paintings of her hung up all in his office and in the studio, wearing silk and holding a sword. She's pretty badass. Master Wu's parents and child often walk through the studio during class, and everyone recognizes them and bows to them

Master Wu is kind but I get the distinct impression he doesn't take me seriously. From the first time I met him, and the way he smirked as he said "that's nice" after I explained my goals and intentions with him, I've secretly suspected he's waiting for .

me to deem practicing Chinese martial arts too physically challenging and for me to quit. I really wonder what made him think this, as I'm not the youngest person there, nor am I in the worst shape. I am one of the most novice people there, but think I'm holding my own pretty well. He also pointedly asked me if I could speak Mandarin, in an almost accusatory fashion, on my first visit, and seemed unimpressed when I said "yes, but not perfectly". I'm the only Chinese student I've ever seen at any of my classes (where the students rotate regularly) and wonder how/what or even if Master Wu thinks about that. I've noticed that several of the instructors have Chinese characters or images tattooed on their bodies (not in a dumb way, but in what I think is actually a very meaningful way to them) and it makes me feel weird that all these white people have a stronger, deeper, and more intense connection to this aspect of my culture than I do. I don't like when they try and teach me the names of moves I can pronounce correctly and that they butcher. They have the moves, mindset, and intention down pat and I have everything to learn in those respects from them but it makes me feel weird to want to correct them when they speak of the historical roots of certain formations and the applications/origins of moves, even the use of moves in performance today, and butcher the beautiful and illustrative names with their fully American tongues.

In my first month of classes, I've been surprised and excited at how connected I feel to this land. As you might have noticed, I spent a lot of my childhood surrounded by peers whose families have been born and raised in America going multiple generations back, and outward public displays of my Chinese culture mostly just embarrassed me and made me feel different, or I suppose, foreign. I've always been a little embarrassed of associating with things I deemed too Chinese, because I didn't want to be that Chinese girl. I wanted to be seen as American. Things from bringing Chinese food for school lunch and having different clothes were often things that made me feel uncomfortable. Recently, however, as I learn more about my family and our cultural history, my Chinese culture has begun bringing me a distinct sense of pride. It wasn't until last year that I began viewing my family's history as one of color and beauty and this year I've made it my distinct goal to engage in more conversations regarding Chinese culture, thought, and history; to understand my background and embrace and celebrate the very things that made me feel different and uncomfortable just a few years ago. I think part of my ability to do so comes with my age and maturity now, studying and engagement with specific practices of Chinese culture has been a really powerful force for me in developing some real cultural pride. It's also helping me understand Chinese military history, Chinese spirituality and mindfulness, and Chinese health and fitness practices, all things that I've been uninterested in as a child.

Anyways, I've rambled on for long enough. I'm happy here; it kind of feels like home in another way, you know? A home I moved away from early. A home that I've been missing all these years.

Love, Angela