

Do I have something I wish my parents would understand? Yes. Many things.

*A letter to my Mom about what I wish you would understand:*

This is my dedication to you. There are two things that I hope you will remember forever. In those two things are infinities.

One: I love you. 我爱你.

Two: I am forever in debt to you, and I wish I could give you everything.

There are so many ways to describe you. Single mother of two children, full-time job as scientific researcher. Hard working, caring, tough-loving, passionate. It is because of you that I was able to get into the GT magnet (Gifted and Talented), into a STEM program in middle school, and now one of the most rigorous high school STEM magnet programs in the county. When I am stressed and working myself tired with homework, you are stressed and working yourself even more cleaning and cooking dinner and lunch and breakfast. You are the one that drives me every day to all of my activities, you are the one that registers me for my summer camps every year, you are the one that schedules the doctor and dentist appointments and pays the bills and the taxes, and I have so little to give back to you.

To be honest, it wasn't until recently that I began to be aware of how much work it has been, and still is, to raise me. I remember when I was younger being frustrated when I tried to have conversations with you while you were working. I would walk into the office, try to clamber onto your lap, and start to tell you a joke- "Mommy, knock knock? Knock knock? You're supposed to say 'who's there!'" you would continue typing into your Excel spreadsheets and tell me to go finish my homework. Rejected, I would slink away.

Sometimes, as a kid, I felt like you didn't love me. You didn't compliment me when I came back with an art project from school or call me sweetie pie and princess, like I thought a Mommy did. Did I understand that you showed your love in different ways? Did I understand that making me work hard was your love for me in hopes that I would be successful later in life? No. Your signals of love were lost in translation. I worry that my love for you has been lost in translation too.

You always said just me being your daughter, and happy, was enough. But I feel so insufficient, so disappointing, sometimes. I wish there was a way to give back to you, for all the work that you have done.

But what can I do? Give you Mother's Day cards every year. Buy you thousands of sunflower seeds, which you eat like a bird before winter. Get a high-paying job and give you trillions of dollars a year, pay back all the money you spent on me. But it wasn't just money, it was time, and how can I give you time?

I love you, 我爱你. We have phone calls every day now, me giving her a little summary of my day at school as I am at home working on homework and when she is working in her lab. I miss you, 我快到家. 十分钟.

I would learn to say I love you in every language there is on Earth, Swahili or French or binary even, and I would pay you back dollar for dollar every amount that you poured into me, and I would travel from another universe back for you. But I can't, and I wish I could.

As a kid, I loved you as the person who gave me food and drove me and gave me hugs and kisses. But did I *know* much about you? Now, I know that you ice skated as a kid in

China, that you couldn't attend school for a period of time, that you love babies and little kids and you don't like wolves or big dogs. I'm starting to know you as more than just the person that keeps me alive and happy, and I am excited to start a new kind of relationship of mother and daughter, as I grow older and learn more about the world.

Everlasting love and dedication from your daughter.

But what's the topic of this again?

Do you have something you wish your parents would understand. *Parents*, as in plural.

So. Here I go:

*A letter to my [I haven't decided what to call you yet]:*

Father? Dad? 爸爸? What should I address you as? What would you prefer to be called?

I guess I should tell you about me. I'm 14 now, turning 15 soon, and I'm starting high school and I eat sleeves of crackers and sometimes I wish I was a cat. Or a bird. I wish I had a pet, because maybe if I had a pet, I would feel less alone. Loneliness is an old childhood friend of mine. We hung out less when I was little.

When I was little, it was me, Mommy, and 哥哥. Just 哥哥, and never Brother. *Brother*, in English, it didn't feel right. The 哥哥 that I had didn't match with the image of the Brother I imagined. 哥哥 didn't teach me to ride a bike or swing me on the swingset or fight with me endlessly; but he did give me presents every year, and taught me math. And as for

grandparents, I would go to visit 奶奶 sometimes in China. Once, in the hospital, I danced for her.

But you are different, so different, because I have never seen you, or heard of you much at all. What do I know about you? You are my father/papa/dad/爸爸. You left when I was little. Maybe before I was born. You're a professor at the Louisiana State University. I think. Maybe you've moved?

I don't know how to approach you. We have missed so much. Do I miss you? Do you miss me? You sent me emails once. I never replied. It confused me; why would you leave Mom and 哥哥 and me, for over 14 years, and decide to send emails back one day?

I want you to understand that I'm not mad, or angry, or resentful. My life growing up with Mom was more than fulfilling, and I am sure you had your own reasons for leaving. Maybe you did it for the best. But I am also confused, very confused, and not quite ready yet to meet you or talk to you directly.

When I am ready, if I am ever ready, I imagine I am grown up, and I book a plane to fly over to Louisiana. We eat dinner at a restaurant and you say, How much you've grown, you are so successful, I am so proud of you, and maybe you even say I'm sorry. But at the same time, I feel this scenario is too heartfelt, too storybook, for a separated immigrant father and American daughter. It seems like there are too many differences.

A science fact: the stars we see in the night sky, their light takes years to reach us. Even at the speed that light travels, the stars are so far away- the closest star's light alone takes 4.37

years to reach us. For all we know, its shine could have gone out years ago. The fuel in its core burned up from helium to iron, and we would never know on Earth until much later.

You are like a star faraway in the sky, and I am on Earth. But the question is,

Do I want to be the astronaut?