

December 10th, 2022

Dear Ms. Yang,

Hello! My name is Sarah; I am 13 years old, and my favorite book is Front Desk, by you. I first read this book in the sixth grade. Amidst the pandemic, we could only check out the first book we touched. As fate would have it, the one my hands landed on was Front Desk. Little did I know what was in store for me. Over the next couple of weeks, it would become my utmost favorite book. I never understood how it was possible that a coincidence could relate so much to my life.

I most relate to Mia, given the fact that I too moved to the United States as a child. I did not know English or the ways of life, so fitting in was extremely difficult. Kids would tease me, and teachers saw no potential in me. Writing has always been one of my passions. I have written dozens of stories; tales about people, lives, and places where anything can be how you want it. Before I learned English, I felt like I had no way to express myself outside of my home. I only became confident in my speaking abilities in the second grade. Although I was not perfect, I tried really hard.

Soon enough, English became my favorite subject because it gave me a space to be myself. Around fifth grade I started to write creatively, I wrote poems, short stories, novels, and so much more. I poured my heart out into them just like Mia. Reading about Mia's passion for English despite it not being her first language really resonated with me. I know what it feels like to have people tell you to stick to math or other subjects just because English does not come easily to you. I have been discouraged in my ability to do things as well as other kids before too. But despite all of this, I continued writing.

Seeing Mia write despite her mom's comments is a huge part of the reason why. Mia herself is not the only thing that stuck with me. My family and I had very high expectations when moving to America. We were looking for a better life, for a chance at success. My parents wanted their children to have every opportunity possible, so they gave up their professional jobs, their families, their home, and their lives all for us; just like Mia's parents. Mia's parents had to work for minimum wage, they worked for hours on end, and had horrible bosses; the same thing happened to mine. I always felt ashamed of the fact that my parents once worked at a hotel, until I read your book. One of my biggest insecurities growing up was financial struggles. My family was in poverty for a very long time, but reading about Mia and her mom pretending to buy things at the mall made me feel heard. Being too ashamed to ask for money or help, never being able to afford nice things, it was all too familiar to me.

But my parents have worked extremely hard to be able to take care of my sibling and I, and that is nothing to be ashamed of.

The last thing that really pushed me to write this letter was the amazing portrayal of how minorities are treated. As a person of color, I have experienced racism on multiple occasions. I have been called every name in the book, and I have also been accused of doing things I never did solely based on my race. Reading this book was the best thing that ever happened. I realized that I wasn't alone in my struggles. Other people have been through the same things as me, and I should not be ashamed to tell my story. I knew exactly what she felt at times, and I learned about how my actions could have also affected people.

Not only did this book help me work through my own experiences, but it also opened my eyes to other people's. So many minorities get pinned against each other when really we all have so much in common. Front Desk completely changed my views. I don't have to feel like a stranger in this country anymore. And most importantly, young girls right now are able to go to their school library and see this kind of representation, see themselves in this book, just like I did. That is so much more than I could have ever asked for. So thank you so much, Ms. Yang, thank you for being our voice.

Sincerely,

Sarah Avelar.