

Amy Poon

Living Among Her Image

Comparisons are something almost everyone throughout the world experiences. Growing up in a traditional Chinese household, there was often unspoken competition between siblings and other family members who were around the same age. Since my older brother was 13 years older than me, my parents would often compare me with my older cousin of three years, Julia Yu. Julia often excelled in her classes and was well liked by everyone within the family because of her social nature. She also tended to excel in school, which did not help in minimizing the comparisons being made. It was perhaps the constant competition that made me feel less confident of my own abilities and caused me to often doubt myself when it came to subjects in academia. However, she has also been the one to support and push me along as I struggled with English.

Growing up, the bond shared between Julia and I was so strong that she was like a sister I never had. Whenever I needed help, I often turned to Julia for support or advice, regardless if it was about boy drama or school. I looked up to her and thought of her as my role model. Starting middle school, I remember witnessing her love for books, which stirred a curiosity within me to perhaps give this reading thing a try. That moment was when my reading experience was influenced because I had never enjoyed nor understood the idea of reading for fun. Opening the book, I was pulled into another world and from that moment on, reading was never the same for me. Words that were once foreign to me are now words I am able to use and incorporate into my own writing. I found myself asking her for book recommendations and found joy in being able to share this hobby with her.

In addition to asking her for book recommendations, I often found myself asking her to help me edit my essays and to come up with possible ideas of topics to write about. However, a sense of dread and fear was felt whenever I pulled up my essays for her opinion. Even when I knew that I do well on my assignments, I still felt shy and slightly embarrassed to allow her to give feedback on my work. As she scanned over the paper, I noticed the continuous onslaught of emotions flitting across her face ranging from amusement to downright confusion. I knew she would not be mean enough to tell me that my paper downright “sucked”, but it did not change the fact that I often sought out her approval. Due to this, I began to break a sweat. Thoughts like “I did horrible” and “Maybe I should’ve asked someone else to edit it first before I let her see it” flitted through my mind. Those few minutes that she took to read my paper felt like eternity. It wasn’t until she was through that I could take a breath of relief.

This kind of experience continued to happen up until the moment when I was writing my personal statement to apply for colleges during my senior year. After struggling to come up with something to write about, I sought advice from Julia once again. She suggested the idea of writing about something that I held dear to my heart. With the decided topic, I wrote. When completed, I asked Julia to help me go over it to find ways for improvement. I remember this moment was the most nerve wracking because I had poured my heart and soul out into the paper and was scared to death about the upcoming criticism. However, when she turned to me after reading it through, all she said was, “It’s beautiful” with tears in her eyes. She went on to tell me of the few grammatical errors I had and some other ideas that I might want to think about incorporating, such as paying more attention to verb tenses. “You should have a teacher from school look it over too since they’ll probably be more helpful than me”, said Julia. When she

said those words, it felt as if a big weight was lifted off my chest because of the realization that even she needs help sometimes.

Maybe it was my constant comparisons to her that I believed that I was never as good as her. Once I was able to see that she had flaws too, it made her that much more approachable. She helped me to see that there is no shame in not writing well the first time, and that everybody struggles with writing. I was able to realize that writing takes time and effort to develop skills and that I should take pride in my writing. This realization was able to help me become more confident in my writing and not be ashamed to ask for help when stuck on a certain section. Julia was always willing to edit and look over my work and I can see that it was out of care and compassion to help me get to a position that was higher than hers. All she wanted was for me to succeed and to take pride in my writing.

I have also learned many other tricks to improve my writing from Julia, such as typing all my ideas out and taking a break for a day after writing before going back to edit and reading passages out loud. She caused me to pay more attention to my grammar and selection of word choices. Julia led me to begin thinking that criticism should be welcomed because it can help to improve a paper. Due to this, I am less likely to be hung up on questions regarding whether my paper was good enough and instead, focus more on what I can improve to make it better. I am able to take pride in my writing and not be ashamed of mistakes being seen or caught by others. Instead, I should be grateful others caught it so I can change it to become better. These little strategies have now carried into my college years and make me a better and more confident writer.