

more because I pick up on her jokes now! Thank you so much for your contribution to improving my relationship with my mother.

*Yours truly,
Jay Lee*

Being an Asian American teenager, I am grateful for the numerous opportunities that were not available for Asian Americans just a few decades ago. Since the fourth grade, theater has been a growing passion and without it, my life would have very little direction. I hope to one day act and perform for audiences all around the world and to help young adults discover their own passions and pursue their dreams, despite any barriers they may face.

L E V E L 3



Leslie Chae, Grade 10
Individual Entry
San Marino

The Two Princesses of Bamarre, Gail Carson Levine

Dear Mrs. Gail Carson Levine,

When I entered elementary school nine long years ago, I constantly read your book *The Two Princesses of Bamarre*. Every word, every sentence drew me in as I began to envision myself in this world of dragons, gryphons and ogres. More than that, I saw myself as the younger, timid Addie and my own older sister, Estelle, as the courageous Meryl. At that age, I didn't know why I cherished your book so much that I couldn't stand to even bend the pages in hopes of keeping it brand new. But recently I found out the most intriguing way.

I am not considered puny. In fact, I am taller than my sister. At 5'8" I tower over my 5'6", slightly bigger built sister. Yet my sister seems taller than me as she holds herself high in the air while I hunch down with my shoulders slightly inward to hide myself. Her stylish clothing stands out next to my usual cute shirt and jeans and her long, silky black hair blows as if by an invisible wind, while my coarse one hangs limp upon my head. I guess I could be being too harsh upon myself, but after 15 years of being overshadowed, I do not know what else to do.

A phrase that I heard throughout my 6th grade career was "Hey, Estelle's sister!" At first, I responded to their comment by yelling back a greeting so maybe I would seem cool like my sister. Even before, I never had the courage to deviate from the standards that my sister had set. I hoped for the same teachers, I hoped for the same awards, I hoped for the same reputation. That year, I began my slightly hunched figure, feeling the weight of her name outweighing mine. Even at home I became to be overshadowed by my sister.

Just about one year ago when I was in 9th grade, my beloved grandmother developed dementia. Day by day, her memory grew worse and after a few months, she was hardly able to recognize my mother, her daughter-in-law. My dad continued to ask her questions, though, to help jog her memory and always pointed to my sister and me to ask “Who are they?” Some days my grandmother would look up with a blank expression and stare at us until her vacant gaze became painful. Other days she would slowly answer in Korean, “Estelle, my second son’s beautiful daughter.” I would wait and wait, wishing that maybe she would say my name as well, but no other words or even word would exit her mouth.

I felt disappointed every time. I started to expect that I would receive no praise and that, for certain, I was not in any way better than my sister. When my grandmother died last spring, I followed my sister around at the reception like a shadow. She engaged in conversations with our cousins, aunts, and uncles while I blended in nicely at her side, simply listening to conversation and not trying to participate. And, indeed, our relatives praised her achievements profusely.

When I dug up your book a few months later in the summer, I reread the book ten times over, again seeing the similarities between Meryl and Addie and my sister and me, but realizing that something was different between us. Meryl and my sister were both outspoken. Addie and I were both shy. Meryl and my sister wanted adventure. Addie and I preferred to stay at home. So how was it that Addie and I were different? This unknown divergence continuously bothered me until I found the quote by Meryl, “You are strong.” Instantly I found it.

I found that I needed to have courage. In *The Two Princesses of Bamarre*, Addie became courageous and transformed into someone who could stand tall next to her sister. I needed to be able to walk down the school hallways, head high, shoulders back, unaware of the students who regarded me as less than my older sister. I needed to go to family gatherings completely sure that I would be seen for who I am instead of being overshadowed by my sister’s reputation.

It has been no more than six months since then. In that time I have battled the monsters of fear with my courage and made my way into a different perspective of life. Rather than seeing the horror of the differentiations between my sister and me, I rejoice in the unusual paths that my life has taken. I am no longer afraid to learn new skills and make different choices.

Thank you for helping me fight the monsters.

Yours truly,
Leslie Chae

I am fifteen years old and a sophomore at San Marino High School. I love to play the violin and I participate in my school orchestra as well as two other orchestras outside of school (the PCC Orchestra and Pasadena Young Musicians Orchestra). I hope to continue my music studies in college as a major along with pursuing an advanced degree in another subject.