

Dear Sarah Weeks,

The first time I ever got a fortune cookie from a Chinese restaurant it read, "Life is a journey not a destination." When I pulled the white slip of paper out of the cookie and read the words of wisdom I quickly glossed over them. I really did not understand the meaning of this phrase and was more interested in the little Chinese symbols on the back of the paper. Looking back the message from this cookie was one of the best lessons I have learned about life, I also feel that it is the biggest lesson I learned from your novel *So B. It*.

I guess you can say I am not your typical reader. I do not fall into the category of "child" or "parent"; I am a teenager who picked up *So B. It* while doing an internship at a school. The students in the seventh grade class were reading your novel, so I decided to read it with them so I would participate and understand the class discussions. As I read the words on the page, I was changed forever. Your book made me re-evaluate my perspective on life. Heidi's situation helped me to appreciate how lucky I am to have a loving and nurturing family. Although our families are different, I believe we are very similar in that we both have a strong drive to blaze our own paths in the world.

At first glance, Heidi and I could not be more different. Not only do we live on opposite sides of the country, we also come from different family backgrounds. Heidi lives with her mentally challenged mother but is cared for by her neighbor, Bernadette. Everyone in Heidi's family seems to carry some limitations. Heidi's mother, Mama, can only speak twenty-three words and although she is a grown woman, she cannot take care of herself or her daughter because of her mental state. Bernadette, on the other hand, is the caregiver; however, she had agoraphobia, which prohibits her from going outside. In my family, each person takes on the traditional role. My sister and I both go to school and do not have to worry about buying groceries for our family or playing the slot machines in order to pay for our food.

After reading the book, I realized how lucky I am not to have the same burdens as Heidi. Although Heidi and I have different family situations, we both have missing branches in our family trees. Neither my mom nor I have ever met my grandfather. I have always wondered what kind of person he was. By not knowing this piece of my family history, I, like Heidi, feel incomplete. Of course, my case is less extreme than Heidi's is, having this common feeling allowed me to empathize with Heidi's situation. Heidi's search for her family leads her on a bus trip from Nevada to Liberty, New York. Inspired by Heidi's journey, my family and I went to Ellis Island, the place where my grandfather's family passed through when they came to America from Europe. Although we were less successful than Heidi was, we were able to see their signatures in the Ellis Island Log Book, pictures of the ship they traveled on, and find they were immigrants from Turkey. After this trip to Ellis Island I thought that I would feel complete and that the emptiness would subside; however, it did not. Like Heidi, I learned that I did not have to know my past to feel the love of the family that I do know. By chasing our pasts, both Heidi and I learned that the past is history but the future holds promise no matter where we come from.

Not only did Heidi and I both go on journeys to discover parts of our past, but we also have a strong craving to blaze a trail for ourselves in the big world we live in. I, like Heidi, am embarking on a life-altering journey of self-discovery. Apply to college in itself is a journey; juggling homework, college applications, and major decisions has taught me a lot about who I am. I have found that it is very important for me to create my own path. I want to make a difference in the world by making new discoveries just as Heidi did when she went to New York. I know that the new ground that I break and the people that I inspire will not be accomplished all in one day. When Heidi embarks on her trip to New York, she thinks she will get the answers she seeking and learn about herself and her past just by the experience she has at Hilltop. However, just like the fortune cookie stated, most of the valuable lessons learned were through her journey not at her destination.

Thank you for writing this novel. You have taught me to appreciate the value of my family, given me a new perspective of myself and inspired me to blaze a trail with no limitations.

*Dayna Altman*