

Kota Asano Wharton (6th Grade: Upper Arlington, Ohio)
Level I Semifinalist
Letter to Jennifer Jacobson on her book, *Small as an Elephant*

Dear Jennifer Jacobson:

Before I read your book I thought I was the only one, until August 24, 2009 when I received your book *Small as an Elephant*. While reading I soon discovered much to my delight that Jack and I shared similar qualities the biggest one being a mom. Jack's mom had Schizophrenia, and my mother struggles with clinical depression. Jack and I both experience frustration and loneliness with our mothers.

Jack's mom goes away for days and weeks; my mom goes away for a day or so. Either in distress or fear, Jack starts to steal from stores much like me although my version was much less intense and from stores but from work and under less circumstances. I am not saying what I did was wrong but if Jack were alive I think in some sense he would have stolen and hid for the same reasons I did. I stole because things weren't right and mom and dad were not giving me an "output valve" to express my feelings. I was anybody and left in the dark with a mom who came home anywhere between 8:00 and 9:00 pm. Just like Jack I was left in the dark with no communication out, and more importantly no one to contact. Your book was like a small beam of light squeezing its way into a dark room. It helped me to see that there are other ways of communicating and there are other people to talk to.

Your book did help me understand that it wasn't just me and that other people in times of need want to help but the help that they offer is not always the right one for me.

I learned that a true exit was not the right path, and I know you know what I mean in my phrase "a true exit." I learned that life could go on and all it takes is a great leap of faith.

After reading your story, I can look back at it as a reference and true help in my family's relationship. I can now accept others and their troubles, as well as being their "output valve" because I know now what it is like to have that missing. You have been my light, my guide.

Sincerely,

Kota Asano Wahrton