

Erin McIntosh (Grade 8, Garfield Middle School, Hamilton, OH)

Level II Honorable Finalist

Letter to author Sharon Draper concerning her book, *Out of My Mind*

Dear Sharon Draper:

For all my life, I've suffered with anxiety and OCD. I picked up a copy of your book, *Out of My Mind*. I found myself intrigued as I read the summary on the back of your book. I was aghast to see the bravery of your words. This book, about a disabled young girl, not only challenges such a debated topic but also leaves the reader with a life lesson. I began reading this book for its plot. Reading has always been a way that I escaped the world around me when I found myself anxious. It wasn't until I had finished the novel that I became a wiser, changed person. Through the strategic words of your work, I now know that our disabilities don't define us.

Like many disabled citizens, Melody Brooks is ashamed, embarrassed, and even picked on. Yet, she was driven—driven by an unseen force called Faith. Faith in her friends, faith in herself. While reading this, I put myself in Melody's shoes. Her whole life, she had wavered on a tightrope of despair between the opinions of those around her and being herself. She was finally able to accept what she saw as flaws, just to have them pointed out by others.

I'm very familiar with this unseen force. I couldn't put the book down while I read. I was captivated by Melody's world. The book inspired me. It inspired me on my outlook on life. I have many connections to it. My mother was born missing bones and muscle in her legs. At around the age of 11, her legs were amputated. I've always known that she had prosthetic legs, but it wasn't until I heard Melody's story that I acknowledged the struggles she must've faced. I then asked her what it was like growing up. Her answer made me that much more proud of her. She said she received stares, glances, and even nasty words. After hearing this information, I began noticing the abundance of disabled people around me who have most likely suffered the same injustice.

My eyes were opened to it. I lay awake contemplating why people were insulted for something they couldn't control. That's when I realized the issue behind these occurrences.

Many teens in the 21st century become mesmerized by the brand names of their clothes and invest so much money in their appearance. On many occurrences, this can make a person judgmental, just like Molly and Claire. It is too often that I see someone ungrateful for their material items, as well as for their health.

Another crucial lesson I learned from reading your book is what I don't want to be. At my school, we have a large population of disabled students. It is devastating to see a disabled peer struggle with a mental break down, whilst a large group surrounds, stares, and judges. It wasn't until I heard the word "freak" pass through the crowd that Melody's story flashed before me. If I were to be in their shoes, I'm positive a judgmental crowd would only make things worse. Since placing myself on the opposite side of the widened eyes, I realized our outlooks as a whole must change. We must begin to see people from all situations for what they can do rather than where they struggle. My mother, the first thing noticed about her are her legs. Not her caring personality, not her brave soul. Myself, I'm remembered as the girl with the panic attacks and nervous fidgets. When, in reality, that's not all there is to me as a human.

I believe that *Out of My Mind* should be required reading for all to read. If it could change the way I see those who face struggles, I know it can change the outlook of many, putting us a step closer to acceptance for all. I know, as someone with many connections to Melody's situation, that the one thing I so desperately desire is acceptance. Thank you Mrs. Draper for providing me with a wiser mindset that I can now pass on to others.

Sincerely,

Erin McIntosh