

Neena Dzur (Grade 6, Maumee Valley Country Day School, Toledo, OH)
Level I Second Place Winner
Letter to author Carole Geithner concerning her novel, *If Only*

Dear Carole Geithner:

I read your book, *If Only*, six times. When I first picked it up, I knew it would be meaningful for me, but I didn't realize just how meaningful. Each time I read it, I found myself engrossed in Corinna's story, laughing, smiling, and tearing up at all the right parts, and each time, it gave me the same determination, strength, and especially, reassurance.

Four years ago, my mother died. At the time, I was seven and the only thing that had worried me before was finishing my weekly Second grade homework packet, so this was a shock to me. I loved my mother and having her disappear out of my life so quickly terrified me. She was always there for me, holding my hand and telling me that everything was going to be all right—then suddenly she was gone. I covered up my sadness, fear, and anger about my mother's death and tried to live a normal, worry-free life again. However, inside I felt my emotions bubbling up, threatening to burst out ... until I picked up your book and started reading.

My journey through life was just like Corinna's, though we were different ages. Corinna's mom died of cancer; mine did too. We felt the same anger at doctors for not finding a cure, and we both experienced the same awkwardness when others assumed that we had a mother. To read a story about a girl with such a similar story whose thoughts and feelings weren't always sad (in fact, she was funny at times) made me feel much better, and this is why I read your book so many times,

By the end, I felt almost cured. I was no longer so terrified. Sure, some sad and worried feelings were still there and to this day I would give anything for my mother to come back into my life, but many things had changed. I was stronger, reassured that there were others experiencing these same hardships, and much more determined to make my mom, wherever she was, happy. I had made it through this tough time, and now I could start anew. When Corinna went to Japan in the end, and met the family that her mom had talked a lot about, I realized honoring and remembering my mom was just as important as moving on.

Now four years later, I still miss my mom, but whenever I open my violin book or prepare to ski down a big hill, I think of her. I think of how proud she would be of me if I mastered the piece in violin or skied down without falling, and how she's somewhere listening to me play and watching me ski. In the end, I will always know she would be congratulating me no matter how successful I was.

Your book reassured me, helped me gain strength and determination through this hard time, and turned me from a sad, worried girl to a happier, braver girl through Corinna's thoughts, feelings, and funny words. Each day, the memory of my mother inspires me to be the best I can be and it is because of your book and your character, Corinna, that I am able to do that. So, I thank you. I thank you for creating someone I can rely on to help me and a book I can use to guide me through any hard time. Life is difficult sometimes, but with determination, reassurance, and strength, I believe anyone can make it though.

Sincerely,
Neena Dzur