

Level II

Honorable Finalist

Samantha Mumper

(Grade 8: St. Nicholas Academy, Reading. Sponsor: Carol Graler)

Letter to author Robert Cormier (1925-2000) concerning his novel, *Tunes for Bears to Dance To*

Dear Mr. Cormier,

The world is looked at as many different things. To some people it is home, to others it is just the planet we live on. Some people even look at our world as a big science experiment in which they are constantly asking questions. The Earth is made up of 96.5% water. That means that only 3.5% of the Earth's surface is made of land. My teachers taught me this, and I believed them. To a degree, this proportion of land to water is reflective of the proportion between Good against Evil: 96.5% of the world's population is evil, placing the remaining 3.5% in a really tough spot. This is not the most accurate proportion of Good to Evil, but Evil is so powerful that it sometimes *feels* to be that widespread. Society has told me this, but I have not always believed it. I, personally, have to see it to believe it. Mr. Cormier, your book, *Tunes for Bears to Dance To*, can open the eyes of many readers, just as it has for me, to the world of hate in which we live. It is hard for young children to think and be aware of harmful things, just as it is difficult to understand that the world holds so little land but so much water. But just how much water *can* our Earth hold?

I was never fully aware of how much water made up the Earth until I was about 10 years old. To be honest, I never really paid much attention to how much water and land made up the planet I live on. I can say the same thing about my innocent knowledge of Evil in the world. It was unfathomable to me that the world could be something other than good and happy. As I mature, though, I have become more and more conscious of the world around me. I learned that Evil is all around me; and most of the time, I don't even know it's there. I wonder when you realized what the world is and why you wrote your book about it, Mr. Cormier. In *Tunes for Bears to Dance To*, Henry, like me, realizes how much evil is in the world. I never realized how evil people can be so involved in my life without my awareness until I read Henry's situation with his own boss. Being aware is something that can either happen naturally, through learning about it, or through an occurrence that takes place and opens your eyes.

Change is a hard thing to understand and to adjust to. I don't know of many people who enjoy change, either. But, sometimes change is necessary. Henry's life has been all about change. Ever since his brother died, Henry's whole family has had to adjust. They moved to a new town, Henry's parents have acted completely different, and Henry has to make new friends. When Henry started to understand who and what Mr. Hairston was, he realized that he would have to prepare for change, because Henry would not work for somebody like Mr. Hairston. For me, change is very hard, and to be honest with you, Mr. Cormier, I am sometimes afraid of it. I feel the most comfortable when everything is normal in my life. When I learned that the world was not everything that I thought it was, I was scared. This was a new feeling for me and it changed me. I am now more mindful of trusting people and associating myself with people. Your book changed me and my view of the world, because it made me understand just how evil people can be in my life. I wonder how much change you experienced, Mr. Cormier. You seem to know a lot about it. Maybe this book was about an experience in your life. Could Henry have

represented you? Or, did you base him on a friend of yours? Maybe the change in your life affected you, just as much as change affected Henry. The change in my life was necessary for me to mature and understand more; the change in Henry's life was necessary for him to protect himself and get away from evil.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder affects people after they have gone through a traumatic experience. The most common case is found in soldiers after they've fought in war. Wars can change people for worse or for better. It can make people appreciate what they have been given, or it can carry over into their personal lives and make them anxious and on-guard about *everything*. Mr. Cormier, your book has changed me by helping me realize how people, most of whom are in my everyday life, can be so different than what they can appear to be. They might seem nice and caring, but they could also be hiding who they truly are. This is somewhat disappointing to understand as a child, because kids learn to trust the people that are involved in their lives. They comprehend how evil people can seem very innocent; this could be very upsetting to a child. This could be a child's version of PTSD. I realized when you wrote about Henry's boss physically hurting his own daughter and mentally abusing his wife that some people know more than others concerning the extent that Evil can go. Evil people are tempting. I am wary of all people because I do not want to be tempted to do things that I know are wrong, and I also do not want to be hurt by those kind of people. I, along with many other people who have read your book, now look at people differently. The idiom "Don't judge a book by its cover" is a good one to keep in mind. Although, when you have knowledge about who and what a person has the potential to be, this is a hard way to think about others. People get one glimpse of a person and, automatically, possibilities of what kind of character that person could be run through their minds. PTSD makes soldiers wary of people in general because during wartime they encountered countless of people who wanted to kill them; they don't feel safe and are unable to trust others because in the field trusting the wrong person could mean death. When a child is lied to by somebody they trusted, they become wary about all people. In this sense, words and bullets have the same effect. Physical wars and mental wars are both traumatizing, and change anybody everyone in them.

My home, Earth, is filled with all kinds of different people. Good people, bad people, and people who are a mix of both. Mr. Cormier, your book has opened my eyes, and it has made me realize that all people have the potential to be good and also the potential to be evil. The exaggerated percentage of Evil, 96.5%, could be changed to the accurate percentage of Good in the world if people always tried to do the right thing. There will always be temptation in the world, but Evil *can* be overcome with Good. Whichever path a person chooses to follow is up to them. I believe that all people can be good and I don't have to see it to believe it.

Sincerely,

Samantha Mumper, age 14