

Honorable Finalist, Level II

Shelby Tupciauskas

Letter to author Lynda Mullaly Hunt regarding her book *One for the Murphys*

Dear Lynda Mullaly Hunt:

There are many different ways that people change. Whether it be through small events throughout your lifetime or one huge event that changes your whole outlook on life, no one stays as they were, whether that be from weeks or years ago. However, I've learned that what really determines how those events change us is how they are perceived. Besides physically, it is almost impossible for an event itself to change you if you are not thinking of it in a certain way, whether that be good or bad. After going through one of these unfortunate events in my own life, your book, *One for the Murphys*, was able to pick me back up.

Parent divorce is extremely common, usually just being a mistake between the couple of having picked the wrong person. This does not mean it is not painful. Looking back on it now, I am grateful that I can be in two different households with people who can be themselves completely, not having to worry about a spouse that makes them feel unhappy or restricted. To see the happiness of my parents is something I value much more than being able to keep the idea of being in one happy family. From this, I can understand why Carley was set on separating her mother from her boyfriend, because she deeply cared about her mother. However, when that idea was relevant, I can no longer remember if I was unhappy or just drastically different than now because this event was a way to redesign my life, which I can now say was for the better.

When our family started to split, I did not know what the concept of divorce was. This went on for a while, until my parents were actually looking for new houses to settle into and new people to associate with. Days full of pain and wishing to have the feeling in just one family back eventually turned into feeling like my entire personality was being stripped from me. I became secluded from those around me, not talking unless I had to. I didn't participate in class, or get excited over school activities like I had. This led to my parents' frustration, a feeling like I could please no one even though it felt like it took all of my being just to breathe. Just like the character of Carley in your book had become accustomed to the way she was treated by her mother, I had become accustomed to the numb feeling in my stomach.

After feeling like I was seeing everything underwater for a matter of time, the numbness I had started to turn into anger. Anger that I couldn't just be in one family, where I didn't have to drive from house to house just to see the people who were supposed to raise me together. Anger that I didn't feel like I deserved one. Not knowing how to handle it, I directed it towards myself, was constantly bombarded with negative comments about all aspects of my life.

I no longer felt kind.

But a few years ago when picking out a book at the media center, I happened to pick up your book, *One for the Murphys*. The way Mrs. Murphy helped the main character, Carley, was a way for me to realize that in order to change, that is how I must treat myself, because no one was going to do it for me. The seclusion I had endured convinced me that going through hard events does not prove strength. That you can still be weak regardless of what you've been through, and that I was. But the way I related to Carley's guard on the people around her, and how she thought expressing emotion showed weakness helped me take Mrs. Murphy's words to heart when she really recognized what Carley had been through when going through being put in foster care, and how she said that she was the strongest person she'd met. When watching my parents date new people, I felt almost betrayed. After all, I wanted to be raised by my own parents. However, when seeing what Carley felt when having to stay with the Murphys, it

made me realize how much people can change you for the better; moreover, that I must take chances in order to feel anything close to happiness. For this, I will have to risk changing as a person, just like Carley finally felt she was in a real family.

So instead of not even trying to look at the surface of the water, I started to relearn how to swim. I connected with people I once knew and people I'd never met before, and started to find my happiness within them as well. I'd learned their stories and how they affected them, just like when Carley had Toni, her best friend. I met new teachers who gave me not only inspiration, but motivation to try again. I then became invested in my grades because it was something that could show a fraction of the work that I put into everything that I do. I started to feel what was around me again, rather than just being able to watch it and feel like everyone else was in on something I wasn't. And I know that when I endure another event like this in my lifetime that I will be able to not only use my strength, but the strength I have learned from Carley and Mrs. Murphy in *One for the Murphys* to get me through it.

Thank you for everything you've done, and everything you will do for me in the future.

Sincerely,
Shelby Tupciauskas