

Second Place Winner, Level I
Anna Mancino

Letter to author Audrey Penn concerning her book *The Kissing Hand*

Dear Audrey Penn:

When I was younger I was afraid to leave my mom and experienced the same fears and anxiety as Chester in your book, *The Kissing Hand*. I was four at the time and had to go to safety town. The first day of it I remember crying because I was afraid of leaving my mom. So, my brother had to stay with me the first day. Kindergarten was the same. Every day I would start bawling, my eyes full of tears because of how much I had missed her. I told my mom about it right away, and she said to maybe say a quick prayer for a sense of comfort, security, and love. The next day I tried to say a prayer: that helped a little, but not enough. After a week or so it got more intense. I wouldn't even want to go to school if she didn't come with me. We tried everything, singing a song together, even going to a therapist. Nothing worked. Until my mom read me your book *The Kissing Hand*. It changed my whole perspective of leaving my mom and was the only thing that worked for me.

Chester showed me that it was okay to leave mom at times and how just thinking to myself "Mom LOVES ME!" can really change how I think about the situation. It changed how I thought. I thought that it was cool that I could leave my mom without being scared. Every day, just like Mrs. Raccoon and Chester did in the book, my mom would kiss me on the head and say, "Mom LOVES YOU, Mom LOVES YOU," and I would head off to school. Now I am ten- years-old and a big tennis player. Whenever I am playing a tennis match and I get nervous I think to myself that my mom loves me no matter what. Mom loves me to the most that she can. Today, I am able to stay home alone without being scared.

Staying home alone was very scary for me when I was eight and nine. My brother would always have to stay with me and watch over me until my mom got home. Sometimes, even though I didn't want to go with my mom somewhere I would have to go. That really stunk because my mom said that I was allowed but that I was too afraid. Eventually, I had to step up to the plate. The first time that I stayed home alone was pretty cool for me. Even though my mom was only gone for 30 minutes it was a pretty big deal to me. But I couldn't have done it without your book. I would be freaked out if I didn't have something to remember my mom with. Luckily, I did though. I also had my mom read me *The Kissing Hand* before my first sleepover: like always, she kissed me on the hand and said "Mom LOVES YOU, Mom LOVES YOU!" My friend was a little confused with the whole thing but she understood. We are still friends and she knows that sometimes I can get scared. Your book has really helped me become more mature and open to new risks.

Without your book, I probably would still have the fear of leaving my mom. Your book really opened up a new life to me and even though I don't use *The Kissing Hand* as often I know that it is there in my heart and in my thoughts. Today, I am not afraid to leave me mom, but sometimes I can be afraid. When in that situation I say a prayer and think to myself, Mom LOVES YOU, Mom LOVES YOU!"

Sincerely,
Anna Mancino