

Second Place Winner, Level II

Sophia Hudson

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

Dear Sharon Draper:

In your book, *Out of My Mind*, the character of Melody is so much more than she appears to be. Just like me. We are all guilty of judging people by their appearances. Because of Melody's outward appearance she was labeled dumb and unworthy! In my case, because of my age, people didn't think that I could be suffering from severe anxiety.

"Why can't you just calm down? It's not a big deal." These are words that I've heard frequently throughout the last couple of years. At a very young age, I was diagnosed with a hearing loss. I have fluctuating hearing, meaning sometimes it can change dramatically in a good way or a bad way, which is why I wear hearing aids. In 2014, my hearing changed for the worse. After several visits to doctors and being put on medication, I was back to my normal hearing in no time. Soon after, however, I could tell that something was different, that something wasn't right. My heart would pound, as thoughts swirled around in my head and my breath felt like it couldn't come out. I couldn't figure out what this feeling was, or what I was experiencing. Was it a heart attack? Cancer? Failed lungs? Was I dying? The only logical explanation in my Fourth grade mind was that I was a ticking time bomb waiting to blow. I didn't know it at that time, but I was experiencing the horror of a panic attack.

Similar to Melody, people would've never guessed that this happy little Fourth grader would have such a war inside her head, that she would cry every night, that she walked around her little elementary school with the weight of the world on her shoulders. I had no reason to be scared (so everybody thought): my family loved me; I did well in school; I lived in a good neighborhood; I had lots of friends; I had a strong church community. I gave no outward reason for anyone to suspect that I wasn't okay. Your book helped me realize that people can't see your thoughts. I know that sounds silly, of course you can't see someone's thoughts. I somehow had the idea that someone could tell what I was feeling, and that I wouldn't have to say something. Sadly, in Melody's case, no one would've ever guessed that she was so smart, because of her appearance. She was judged by her outside and her true self was not recognized. I felt her pain as she longed for someone to notice her true feelings and what she was capable of. I wanted someone to notice that I was scared for my life. Thankfully, it all worked out for Melody, and people finally saw her true intelligence. I realized that no one would've known if she hadn't taken action, so I knew what I had to do. That summer going into 5th grade, I finally told my parents my feelings and my fears.

I've made much progress since then, but anxiety is still a struggle for me. When I start to feel these feelings bubble up, I'm able to identify what's happening, and why I may be feeling that way. Anxiety is a constant battle for me every day. I can either let it control me, and make me miserable, or I can live, and make the best out of every situation, just like Melody. She didn't wallow in self-pity over the things she couldn't control, so she chose every day to make it the best day possible and live her life. She is a great example of not letting disabilities get in the way! It's amazing how a few words in a chapter book can make such an impact on someone!

I'd like to say thank you for your encouraging book. It played a large part in helping me overcome one of the biggest trials in my life (as did the encouragement of my family, friends, and church community). It wasn't too long after I read your book that I told my parents about my anxiety. Your book encouraged me during my hard times. It taught me that there's more to a person than what's on the surface, that although there may be a smile on someone's face, it doesn't necessarily mean that they're happy. Thank you.

Sincerely, Sophia Hudson