

# 2001 Letters About Literature Winners

## Level I (4<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> Grade)

**First Place** To Dean Hughes, *Since You Went Away*  
From Derek Wood  
Whitford Middle School, Beaverton  
Sally Greer, Teacher

Dear Mr. Hughes,

Your book Since You Went Away changed the way I look at WWII. I used to think that all they did to POW's was give them very little food and make them stay in crowded, smelly barracks. I was wrong.

You know how you think when you're a kid? You always dream you'll go into war and kill the enemy, while having fun, and then eventually triumph. But now I know that isn't true. Out in the cold, sitting in foxholes and waiting, just waiting, until you hear the sound of enemy missiles coming towards you. Then all that you can do is sit there more and just hope one doesn't come within a twenty-foot radius of you.

I loved but hated the way you wrote about the POW's. You were so descriptive that I ended up hating every aspect of the war. Now I hope we never have a war that my country and I have to get involved in. Your writing wasn't like a lot of other books that don't always tell you what *really* happened. You talked about the way they had to work for hours and hours. All they had in their stomach was a bowl of rice to give them energy, and then all they came back to was another bowl of rice to try and restore that energy.

Also there was the way you talked about the "Death March." I had never heard of this march until I read this book. And because of how you wrote it I know that's *exactly* how it happened. You talked about the way the Japanese tried to scare the POW's by leaving the heads of Caucasian service men stuck on poles right where the POW's had to trudge past. Then Wally and his friends survived only on sugar cane and water that they could scrounge up. It made me think about all the hardships they had compared to mine. And they are not really comparable.

This is why I loved this book and couldn't put it down. It was written to tell the truth and only the truth. I didn't have to go to an encyclopedia when it sounded kind of cheesy. I knew that was what happened. Your book made a difference inside of me.

Thank you,  
Derek Wood

Runner-Up To Avi, *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*  
From Maya Lim  
Memorial Elementary School, McMinnville  
Mrs. Crabtree & Ms. Lowry, Teachers

Dear Avi,

When I read your book, *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*, I was stunned by the bravery and courage that Charlotte Doyle had. I could not believe that an old-fashioned girl could do all those things and still be determined and willing to do them through the hardest times.

While I was reading the book, I was astonished on how the story just twisted itself from what I thought was going to happen.

A few weeks later, after I finished the book, something exciting happened. When I came back from school I announced that there was going to be a spelling bee next month. Spelling was my worst subject, and I wanted to win very badly. My mom offered, "Why not after dinner I'll quiz you on some words?" so after dinner we practiced. I kept track, and I got 9 out of 47 right. I was appalled. The next night I got 18 correct out of 49. I studied so hard that my mom told me that I said in my sleep, "Did I spell that right?"

A week before the spelling bee, our class had a test to see who would go to the school spelling bee. In the past weeks, I had studied from 22 right out of 60 to 89 out of 99 correct. I had high hopes to be one of the two representing our class. After lunch, our teacher announced the winners. I was one of them! The teacher gave the other representative and me lists and told us to look over them well. I studied like never that week.

Finally, it was Friday, the day of the spelling bee. I did my very best on the test, and then returned to my classroom to wait to see who the winner was. Soon the answer was revealed on the intercom. "Excuse the interruption, but we had held a spelling bee, and the winner is..." I heard no more. My classmates were jumping up and down in happiness, others clapping, and still others cheering my name. I had won.

From this I learned, not only how to spell, but that even through the hardest times, you have to be the captain of your ship, like Charlotte Doyle, and do the very best you can possibly do. Thank you for such a wonderful book. I hope in the future you will write more books that we can follow an example from.

Sincerely,

Maya Lim

### **Honorable Mentions**

To Brian Jacques, *Mossflower*

From Justin Marble

Tom McCall Upper Middle School, Forest Grove

Pat Wade, Teacher

Dear Brian Jacques,

Can I call you Brian? Good, because I have a lot of things to express to you in this letter.

First of all and forthright, I want to tell you what I thought of Redwall and Mossflower. I have only read two of your books out of your grand collection. I am going to try to read all of your books. I encourage you to keep writing this series.

Now, I want to get right down to business, Brian. I want to let you know your writing inspired me to write descriptively, creatively, originally and morally. Martin and Matthias are my favorite characters in these two books. They both show leadership and responsibility and are both positive role models to everyone. They inspired me to be brave and courageous. The ongoing perseverance and the deep care they showed just made me think "Am I being like them as a positive influence?" No, I wasn't. I mean I was being the exact opposite! I am just realizing this at this very moment.

I admit it. I'll tell you straight out. I goof off at school sometimes. I make fun of people. Yet, I manage to get A's on my report card! I just want to run around and ask everyone to forgive me. I am going against the values I learned earlier from my parents and church. Now when I think about your stories, it says in a hidden message, to be a positive influence and treat everyone with respect. It also says to try your best to succeed. Is that the moral of these books?

You helped me to focus on my dream of joining the Air Force and becoming a fighter pilot. My high-set goal resembles Martin's ambition to win back Mossflower and help innocent creatures. I want to help the world and bring it together in unity and faith. Your books helped me so much! I love your works! I just want to thank you one more time. Thanks! Keep in mind you inspired another mind. I hope my letter will positively affect those who read it. Keep up the good work!

Sincerely,

Justin T. Marble

To Dan Gutman, *The Kid Who Ran for President*  
From Paige Halberg  
Lake Oswego

Dear Dan Gutman,

Most of the time I do not like to read but when I read your book The Kid Who Ran For President, I could not put it down. At first when I finished the book I was happy because he became president but then I was sad because Judson refused to be president. After that I was mad because I could not read more but then I found out I had the sequel and I was so excited! My favorite part of the book is when Judson goes to the debate, and he tries to get people to hate him. Then he gets ahead in the race. I like that part because it taught me never to give up even when you are behind and you do not think you have a chance. It also taught me that kids can do anything they want, if they put their mind to it.

One part that worried me is when they told about Judson putting the kid's midterm in the sewer. I was worried because I thought he would lose the race after that happened. When that happened I felt sad for Judson and Lane because it seemed as if they did all of that work for nothing. Another part that was funny was at the end when Lane was trying to help Chelsea become Miss America. It was funny because she could not sing very well so Lane was relieved when Judson decided to take the job as the president. This was the best book I ever read because it was funny and nerve wracking at the same time. Another

reason I liked this book was because it never got boring. If I had to rate this book, one being horrible and ten being excellent, I would give it an eleven. It is the best book I have ever read. Now that I have read this book I look at things differently. Now when someone says I cannot do something, I prove to them I can do it. The book also changed me because now I like to read more, and I am not as afraid to try new things. This book changed me because, when I play basketball, even if we are behind, I keep trying because I know there is still a chance that we could win.

Sincerely,

Paige Halberg

To Brian Jacques, *Martin the Warrior*  
From Liza Goodstein  
Bryant Elementary, Lake Oswego  
Jill Quesenberry, Teacher

## Level II (8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> Grade)

**First Place** To Lois Lowry, *Number the Stars*  
From Keely Koda  
Vale High School, Vale  
Mrs. Page, Teacher

Dear Lois Lowry,

I can't remember when your book, Number the Stars, first influenced me because I've reread it so many times. The courage it must have taken to risk everything for your one true friend is just phenomenal. I guess it really hits home because my family was also affected in a similar way during W.W. II. They had to stick together in the same scenarios described in this book, such as relocation, food shortages, prejudice, and lost freedoms. During this time, there was so much uncertainty and fear that innocent people were treated as though they were criminals or the enemies. They were judged solely on their appearance and beliefs, instead of who they really were. Even the common tasks of daily life were filled with danger and caution, as you so clearly illustrated in your book. In a way, I feel this book depicts what my own Grandmother Mary must have gone through, because she was only slightly older than Annemarie Johansen when Japan bombed Pearl Harbor.

I can't really talk about it with my grandmother because of all the bad memories and feelings she wanted to forget. After reading your book, I think I understand why. This book gave me an insight of what she, as a young girl must have felt. Just as the Johansens, my family had to deal with people judging them by their looks and heritage.

Those who were thought to be friends were threatening to give my grandmother and her family "necktie parties." True friends were hard to come by and were regarded as highly valuable. The neighbors who stood by and helped my family were risking their lives everyday. I now can understand why Annemarie wanted so much to help her best friend, even if it endangered her own life.

When the Jews of Denmark were being "relocated", so were all of the Japanese Americans of the Pacific Northwest. Even though they may have been born native to the country, they were still considered foreigners. All of the things that they cherished were taken away, especially the things that reminded them of their ancestors. Families, just as the Johansens, had to hide all of their valuables, in fear the suppressers would take them away. Many hardships were felt and hopefully, we have all learned from them.

Today, I really don't have to deal with things like that or with the dangers my ancestors had to face. However, every now and then, someone caught in the past takes the liberty of testing my spirit. Of course, it's hard at first and all I want to do is yell at them in an attempt to make them see. In the end, I know the real solution is to talk it out and keep remembering my heritage. Fighting never solved anything and just brought hate to many people. My heart must stay in the right spot, just as Annemarie's did, in order to accomplish anything.

Facts and figures in history books cannot describe what the feelings were like at this time or what they are like now. This book gave me a real insight on what it was like to live as a young girl during the peak of a World War. It gave me a better sense of how to deal with this stage in history and how I should fight to keep it from repeating itself. I also found many questions in this book that helped me communicate about the war with my Grandmother. In all, I must thank you, Lois Lowry, for writing such an extraordinary book and for opening my eyes to the passion of history.

Sincerely yours,

Keely Midori Koda

**First Runner-Up** To Douglas Adams, *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*  
From Hank Keogh  
Crescent Valley High School, Corvallis  
Penny Fulton, Teacher

Dear Douglas Adams,

I couldn't get anywhere without my *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. It has all the answer's to the pressing questions of the Universe. I refer to it almost every day. How can I thwart my French teacher? With a Babel fish. What thing would I take with me to a deserted island? A towel. Why did that teacher assign that dumb research assignment? 42. Where shall we eat lunch? The Restaurant at the End of the Universe.

Your books have the unique quality for humor that enables one to lazily reach for say, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, kick back in a chair, flip to a random page, and be drowned in a ridiculous world of lunacy. A world that is completely impossible because it doesn't make sense, but completely plausible because that is the way the Universe is.

Like many prisoners of high school, I am of the opinion that the world is going to

Hell in a hand-basket. I see the confused Universe that is portrayed in your books as the future of civilization. People in general are decreasing in intelligence, and at the same time sales of complicated electronic devices are increasing. In the world of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, amazingly slow minded life forms fly around in amazingly fast ships with amazingly powerful Kill-O-Zap guns. This notion both frightens me (as I would never put my life in the hands of a dumb guy with a big gun) and pricks my imagination (imagine what would happen if those dumb guys could be put to other uses).

Your books have provided me with a humorous angle to see the world through. From this vantage point I see the world as a joke that is phenomenally amusing to one person, and the rest of us don't get it. The identity of that person remains to be found. Maybe it is Dirk Gently, or Ford Prefect, but certainly not Arthur Dent. He is still grappling with his consciousness the way one grapples with a lost bar of soap in the bath.

I see humor as an intrinsic part of human nature. Shared laughter leads to compassion, friendship, and love. Amusing people live longer lives on average than those who find life a problem to be dealt with. Many people go through life simply surviving. They don't stop and take the time to *live* it. Humor is one of the things that makes life worth living. And there is nothing more humorous than the absurd.

I respect absurd books because they are far more difficult to write. Anyone can write a decent informative essay, but it takes real genius to make it amusing. Making people laugh is more than just telling a joke. It is a matter of which joke to tell at the specific moment that will harmonize with the mood of the listener. And it has to be told well. The timing of the characters in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* is impeccable. I can imagine the air between Zaphod and his father sizzling with quips and comebacks, right when the ship is under fire by the Vogons and Arthur wants some real tea. From there on it is a raucous joyride to the Ruler of the Universe and back. See you in hyperspace, however improbable our meeting may be.

Hank Keogh

**Second Runner-Up** To Erin Gruwell and the Freedom Writers, *The Freedom Writers Diary*

From Heidi Stewart

Wilderness Charter School, Ashland

Jim Hiam, Teacher

Dear Erin Gruwell and the Freedom Writers,

After reading your book I felt lucky. Growing up in an upper middle class town, I had once wished to live in a crime-infested city. I wanted to be a street-smart, tough kid. I never realized how hard that life would be. I just watched a thirty-minute sitcom and thought that was how it was. I know that makes me innocent and naive, but that is who I am. I don't know what it like to be homeless, abused, or to be poor. I guess if you watch too much TV, everything in life becomes glamorized. Even the shit.

When I first started the Freedom Writers, I didn't know what to expect. I was doing a project on female body image, when I came across your book. I thought it would give me a good background on teens today. I was riding the city bus when I first opened its pages.

I became so engrossed that I didn't look up until my 45-minute ride was over.

I enjoyed your stories so much I read them to others. I remembered one day, sitting in the courtyard at my school, I was reading an entry to my friend. As I kept reading, I noticed more kids sitting down next to us listening. Everyone was quiet until I finished. We all sat there in amazement. Then someone asked me to read another. And so I carried your book with me all the time. That was our favorite indulgence, for a friend and I.

The entry about a freshman girl pledging hit home. While I have never joined a sorority, I know the pain of wanting to be accepted. For many years I completely buried who I was. I listened to the opinions of others about me and let that control my personality. This was easier than being an individual. It created a destructive spiral that I couldn't escape. All I wanted was to feel like people needed me. I hated feeling awkward and unpopular. And then last year I woke up and realized I needed to change my life. I had become a chameleon. In retrospect, I see that really, I was afraid myself. I had thrown aside all my self-worth. When I read, "it is just a matter of how far you will go to be accepted." I almost cried; I knew exactly what she meant, but I had never been able to put it in words before.

"No matter what race we are, what ethnic background, sexual orientation, or what views we have, we are all human. Unfortunately, not all humans see it that way." This quote was at the end of Entry 19. I have a hard time understanding bigotry. I was glad to see this statement because this is my belief. It is sad that people can't see through their ignorance. If only people were born with tolerance and compassion. I just hope there are more people out there like you guys, showing that we are all human.

I loved watching the transformation that took place in your group, how you went from not believing in anything to reaching for the stars. In that journey, you made different individuals open their eyes to the undeclared war raging on America's streets. As with any war, it is the youth that is suffering the most. It isn't easy to make people see the truth. A large part of the mass of America would rather turn their backs to the ugliness that lies in our streets, I know this from personal experience. I volunteer with a local organization called Planned Parenthood's Southern Oregon Cabaret Theater. I work with other teenagers to educate our peers about STD's, pregnancy, and empowerment. Reading your book made me realize that the work I do helps fight a different aspect of this undeclared war. Even though I live hundreds of miles from you, there is a battle being fought. And for now I think we are both winning.

Erin, you personally touched my heart. You cared enough not to let these kids fall through the cracks. And you didn't mind getting dirty. Reading your entries helped me see that one person can change the lives of others. I respect your bravery and courage. I want you to know you have inspired me to reach out to others and tell them I care.

Your novel touched my heart, opened my eyes, and gave me hope. I wish there were more people like you in this world; hell in this country. What you have done is amazing. Please remember this, you have changed my life forever. I can never turn my back again. And I won't. I promise.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Heidi Stewart

## **Honorable Mentions**

To Charles Swindoll, "Attitude"  
From Courtney Webber  
Beaverton High School, Beaverton  
Mrs. Oldenkamp, Teacher

Dear, Charles Swindoll,

It was November 6, 2000. It was the day we had to play to see if we would get into the State Championship tournament. The team was Sandy, and although we knew they were an easy team, we couldn't blow off the game like it was nothing. We had to put our all into everything we did, for it was only a short week before we would be competing for the number one spot, the state title.

The night before we left for the tournament, our coach handed us a packet, and told us to read it. To us this meant another assignment to blow off until the last minute. The packet consisted of three poems: one about our hearts, one about our guts and the last about our attitudes. Our coach told us that these are the three things that we needed for the game. But the most important was placed on the top, your poem, Attitude.

Our coach told us that we can win games, but it means nothing if your attitude was not in the right place. Of course we had won games, but none of [us] thought anything of it. It was then that we realized that we had been given a lot of talent and we had been taking that for granted. We had gotten the chance to go to the state tournament, but who knew that it could mean so much to a team who had been misplaced for the past twenty years.

Your poem got our team ready for anything. We knew that we might not get first and we might not win every game, but if our attitude was good, we could win every game inside. If we had to be pulled out of the pool at the end, yet we lost the game that would be okay. As long as our attitudes were high and we knew that we played our personal best.

Your line, "It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what other people think or say or do," is definitely a line that our team used in our heads more than a thousand times. If we knew that we could do it and we put everything we have into it, we could do whatever we put our minds to.

We lost our second to last game, which bumped us down to the third and fourth place game, but we were okay with that. Our team knew that it was better to lose and then win, rather than to win then lose. Our coach said that when he heard us say that, he knew that our attitudes were better than ever. He used your line, "The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude," and from there we knew we were ready to take third.

That game was the best game we have ever played. We told each other one thing before we all jumped into the pool and it was the one line from your poem. "I am convinced that life is 10% what happens and 90% how you react to it." We won that game by five points and as our coach was pushed into the pool he yelled one thing to us, "Attitude is everything!" The stands started to cheer, and everyone has believed that line ever since.

Sincerely,

Courtney Webber

To Nigel Calder, Einstein's Universe  
From Kevin McCullough  
North Valley High School, Grants Pass  
Mr. Moeny, Teacher

Dear Mr. Nigel Calder,

After reading sections of your book, my eyes were really opened to the universe around me. I am fascinated by subjects such as the quantum theory, Einstein's General Theory, and relativity. Throughout my life, I have been introduced to small portions of these theories; however, after reading your book these pieces were put together to form an intriguing reality. You made relativity intelligible and easier to be looked at on a simple every day basis. These theories are difficult to understand, let alone explain to people so they can actually decipher the ideas.

Even from the first page, this book held my interest. I appreciate how you reinforced the seemingly complex concepts with simple understandable analogies. For example, you used the analogy of weighted balls on a sheet of stretched rubber to represent and explain the concept of space bending around planets or areas of gravitational abundance.

Your broke down complex concepts with such clarity that even the most novice student of Einstein's theories could comprehend the ideas. The explanations no longer left me in the dark on these areas of astrophysics and quantum mechanics.

From the time when I was a child in grade school, I have been interested in teaching. I enjoy explaining concepts and improving the minds of the young. I have been leaning towards teaching in the areas of biology, physics, or chemistry. After plunging in this book and other similar materials however, my mind has been led toward the more specific areas of astrophysics and/or spatial-dimensional and theoretical sciences. Teaching in these subject areas would not only allow me to pass on my knowledge, but to increase my own understanding as well.

Throughout my childhood, I have always been a little (and in some cases a lot) different than everyone else. At times this was due to my being or coming across as "a nerd". I would also after look at every day things in much different ways than the "normal" person. I used the term normal to describe the stereotypical image of people, specifically, in this case, young teens of my age. My thoughts and perceptions were on a scientific basis, rather than on the immediate surrounding environment. By reading subject matter such as this book, it allows me to slip into a place and state of mind that comforts me and lets me almost relate to the thoughts of these scientists. I can go to a mental level different than that which is possibly reached by associating with "normal" people.

I am not, however, taking away from the importance and significance of "normal" people in society. Without these individuals, what's to tell what the stereotype would be? This populous community of "normal" people makes up the filler and body of our society. Without people like this our society would surely crumble. Although I rely on

common friends to live my life, there has always been, and always will be a side of me that is different. A side that sees things and concepts in an odd way. In this book, it allows me to open up to new worlds and express myself in a way that has been suppressed.

I truly appreciate everything that your book, *Einstein's Universe* has helped me to understand and learn so far. I hope to finish it within the week and continue to read other similar books by you such as *Spaceships of the Mind*, and *The Key to the Universe*. I hope that you continue to write and enlighten the minds of readers around the world.

Sincerely,

Kevin McCullough

To Maya Angelou, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings  
From Veronica Thomann  
Crescent Valley High School, Corvallis  
Penny Fulton, Teacher

Dear Maya Angelou,

In my imaginary dictionary, I have concocted a new definition for the phrase "to be in awe." To be in awe is synonymous to (1) finding yourself lacking words to describe an experience (2) knowing someone who has inspired you with their wisdom and their courage (3) finishing a novel such as *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Although I have never met you in person, I feel that I have become an expert over the contents of the first sixteen years of your life. I find it uncanny how much you and I have in common. Never have I read a book that made scenes from my past come back and slap me in the face, punishing me for ever trying to push them under to forget.

Once scene in particular screamed out at me, reminding me that I will never get rid of a similar experience, and that I must succumb to the power of my memory. As I read about your experience with Mr. Freeman, my mind returned to the worst night of my life. I still cannot understand how words printed on paper could make the touch of my violator tangible. His touch was one that for six years now, I had suppressed. I could hear him saying, "Shh! don't say anything or we'll wake the others up." My violator, my best friend's older brother, had the courtesy not to rape me; instead he molested me. "Sexual abuse" had not yet found its way into my vocabulary at the age of ten. Therefore, the following day I knew that the incident of the previous night had not felt right, but I did not know it was wrong and, in fact illegal.

Not understanding the situation, the intruder, or myself, I retreated into a deep silence. At the age of ten, I lost the ability to relate to my friends, and my father could no longer give me a hug goodnight; the combination of darkness and touch made my stomach churn. At the age of ten, my childhood and my innocence ended.

Two years later, when I was twelve years old, I figured things out. I began to tell my friends what happened to me and although none of them understood from a personal perspective, they offered me as much support as possible. With the help of my brother, I told my parents what happened. My parents were hurt that I kept such a big secret from

them for five years, and for the first time in my life, both my mother and my father cried.

I do not regret what happened to me. However, I feel guilty to this day for not turning my best friend's brother in, thereby, allowing him to hurt other girls as he hurt me. After experiencing sexual abuse, I matured much faster than most of my classmates. I quickly understood the value of someone willing to listen, and I became a listener for anyone and everyone. I spent five years isolating myself from the rest of society, searching for answers to thousand of ambiguous questions. I did not answer a single question, but I arose from the situation wiser than before. I was not even seeking the answers, simply the search.

Not only did your writing help me conquer the past, but also relieved some of my qualms about the future. Nearly seventeen years old, I find myself trying to establish my place in society. For years I thought as long as I did well in school, my future would be secure. I have not given up on this theory, but the fact that you dropped out of school and still possess all the charm and wisdom I hope to someday engulf persuades me otherwise. You followed your dreams and judging from the way you write, you're exactly where you want to be. Therefore, I need not follow the trends of society, nor submit to the pressure of success; I should chase the meandering course of my dreams. Right now I'm traveling a road without a destination, taking in as much as possible along the way. When I arrive, I will recognize my place.

This is my first time writing about my experience. Ink printed on paper scares me due to the fact that millions of people have the opportunity to read this letter, and I will never know their reaction. You had the courage to share your life with thousands of Americans, and I feel a bit indebted to you, having absorbed your life and your lessons with nothing to repay. The only repayment I can give is the assurance that you have given me the strength to face my past and the future. My past is what shaped me, making me the person I am proud to be today, and not something I should be ashamed of. Only God knows what the future holds. For the time being, I will [hope] for the best, [be] prepared for the worst, so anything in between [doesn't] come as a surprise. Thank you for all your inspiration.

Sincerely,

Veronica Thomann

To Helen Keller, *The Story of My Life*  
From Bonnie Otero  
Klamath Falls

Dear Helen Keller,

When I read your book, *The Story of My Life*, there was a quote that made a huge impact on my life. The quote is, "I am not dumb now." There are people who think I am dumb and will not graduate from high school because of my hearing loss. Some even told my parents, "Your daughter would not be smart because of her hearing loss." I am proving them wrong.

*The Story of My Life* made me feel that I am not the only one who has gone through

hard times. Most people do not understand what I have been through to accomplish my goals.

The book changed me by presenting a good role model to young deaf and hard-of-hearing children and showed me how to overcome obstacles. I can accomplish my goals by doing the best I can, and will not let anyone put me down. I am no different than anyone else regardless of my hearing loss. People think I am dumb because of the way I speak. I do not say the words very clearly. I am a 4.0 G.P.A. (Grade Point Average.) student, in National Honor Society, and am the first hard-of-hearing person to graduate with a regular diploma from my high school, which I am very proud of.

The Story of My Life, changed the world around me by showing me that I have the ability to do everything I want, if I try very hard. The connection between you and me is that people think deaf and hard-of-hearing people are dumb, but we have proven them wrong. Now there are famous deaf and hard-of-hearing people around the world who have gone really far to overcome their obstacles. One example is Marlee Matlin, an actress, who decided she wanted to be an actress when she was little. Marlee went on to practice hard to be an actress, and her first movie was, Children of a Lesser God. She received her first award for best actress in that movie. Beethoven, the deaf pianist, was famous for his music. Heather Whitestone, Miss America, was the first hard-of-hearing person to compete for and win the Miss America Pageant.

Your book mirrors my life in the way that I am proving that we are not different from anybody else, but there are still people who think that way. I was able to accomplish my goals.

We cared about deaf and hard-of-hearing people who want to accomplish their goals. It is not their faults if they did not accomplish their goals because nobody encouraged them to try and achieve.

You forced me to ask myself these questions, "Will other people with disabilities accomplish their goals without anybody putting them down and not able to get support. Or will they let people keep putting them down and not accomplish their goals?" People will not accomplish their goals if they do not ask for help or support.

You do not know how much of this book has affected me; you are my role model, and it amazes me that you overcame your obstacles. I have people who support my goals and help me achieve them. I am really glad that I have support from my family and friends because without them I would be lost.

You have touched people's lives by showing them how to accomplish their goals if they would only try. You were the world most famous author and speaker for the deaf and blind. Thank you for helping raise money for deaf, blind and hard-of-hearing people. Ms. Keller, you have proven that people were wrong about individuals with disabilities. They are smart and able to make the choices they make in life and succeed.

Thank you for encouraging me to do the best I can to accomplish my goals.

Sincerely,

Bonnie Kate Otero  
Klamath Falls, OR