

Massachusetts Letters About Literature 2016

Massachusetts Center for the Book

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Level I Honors Award

Dear Sharon M. Draper,

In a way, for a while at least, my family had to adapt like Melody's family. No one in my family has cerebral palsy like Melody, however we know what it is like to have to learn to communicate with someone who can no longer communicate and my grandmother knew what it was like to have the words in your head but you can't get them out.

I have many very fond memories of my grandmother teaching me to play games, playing cards with me, making long trips to see me, going for boat rides, the list goes on. I think the most important thing to her was family. Before things got in the way, if you asked my grandmother what the most important thing in her life is, I have no doubt that without hesitation she would say "my grandchildren of course". She cared and wherever she is now still cares deeply about my grandfather, her five children, and especially her eleven grandchildren. My grandmother, however, had a stroke when I was the age of five, but mostly recovered. She could talk and everything and even walk with a walker but then another series of strokes left her unable to move. For a time, she was able to communicate a little bit with the help of a device and the movement of her mouth and eyebrows but that too eventually went away.

On my visits I would try talking with my grandmother. At the time, I was probably six or maybe even seven. I understood what had happened but somewhere deep down when I was talking to my grandmother I expected her to start talking to me like nothing had happened. Silence. Sadly, the cruel thing that is reality stopped that miracle from happening. Still, I would read to her and talk with her but I couldn't help wondering if she could really understand me. Melody's Dad wanted to understand what Melody was thinking and I know how that feels.

My Aunt Lori is a special education teacher. She acquired a book, your book, and after reading it saw how inspiring it was and how it fit our situation. She then passed it to her daughter. Her daughter then passed it to my mother. Then my mother passed it to me. Your book truly opened my eyes and gave me a whole new perspective to this world. More than that your book finally answered my question. The answer to my question is nothing on the inside changed with my grandmother and that even though I could no longer get a response I strongly believe that my grandmother took in all the information I said and that she could still think.

On my next visit to my grandparents, after reading Out of My Mind, I talked to my grandmother and read to her. I talked to her like anyone else because I was keeping in mind what Melody taught me. My grandmother was taking it all in just like Melody does and I was so happy. Your book gave me the best gift that it could have. It gave me an even stronger bond with my grandmother. As I would talk to her I could see her expression changing and I even got her to smile as wide as a smile could be. I would love to think that I have a special bond with my grandmother even now thanks to the determination and knowledge that your book has given me. My grandparents' home is very far from ours so we always used Skype. I had recently started to take piano lessons and started to play music from *The Sound of Music*. My grandmother loved *The Sound of Music* and the piano so when I played that for them on Skype she lit up and I could tell that she was singing right along in her head.

Melody's relationship with Mrs. V taught me and many others that if you take the time to know someone like her or my grandmother it will be worth it. In recent months, my grandmother has passed away but I believe that from heaven she is looking down at me. Sometimes I can feel her sitting next to me when I play the piano. My grandmother was an extremely strong woman and her love of her family was always and still is in her heart. After reading your book I truly did realize that nothing on the inside changed in my grandmother and the love she has for her family didn't even come close to wavering it only got stronger. Thank you is not even close enough to express my gratitude but that is all that I can think to say, so from the bottom of my heart, thank you.

With much gratitude,

Amanda

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