

Massachusetts Letters About Literature 2016

Massachusetts Center for the Book

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Level I Honors Award

Dear Eleanor Estes,

One word brings up a distressing, but true story about my mom. Bullying. This book has triggered a whole bunch of questions for me about my mother's experience when she was a child. When she was in third grade, students were bussed around Boston, plucking children from here and there, forcing them to attend different schools, in order to increase diversity. My mom however was not one of them, and instead stayed at the local elementary school she had attended since kindergarten. But that was her downfall because she got bullied by the newly arrived students. Although rarely physical, the bullying took the form of repeated taunts and cruelly directed teasing. Based on what my mother has told me I can draw two conclusions. The first is that the children from other schools were not happy about their new situation; the second is that they took their anger out on my mother. They would pick on and tease her, while the teacher stood still as a stone column watching.

I never truly understood what she went through until about a year ago when there was a little rip in my life fabric for me to peek through. Through that tear in the seam I experienced a few small, but hurtful comments about my short stature. While not exceptionally small, I am on the little side for my age, at times being mistaken for a child of six or seven, when I was actually eleven. I'm not sure if the snide comments were truly bullying, but they didn't feel right. It felt like that person was a twirling ballerina up on a fine line between friendly teasing and being cruel. I never got an "I'm sorry" or a "please forgive me" from that person, but I forgive them. I think in the book *The Hundred Dresses* Wanda was saying I forgive you to Peggy, who bullied her, and Peggy's friend Maddie when she gave them her dress drawings that Peggy had teased her about. After that, I could truly imagine what that experience for my mom was like. Not just a figure of my imagination trying to grasp the thought of someone hurting my mother.

Thinking about Wanda and my mother I wonder what would have happened if someone had stood up for them when they were being bullied? Maddie wanted to stand up for Wanda but was afraid. When she finally found the courage, Wanda left. Was that the same situation for my mother? She eventually fled her school to find refuge in another school in another town. But if just one person had stood up for her, maybe she could have avoided the disruption. This leads me to wondering, did anyone feel like Maddie? Did anyone even want to protect my mother, and if they did were they afraid that everyone would turn on them?

Reading your book, and thinking about my mother I realize that sometimes you just have to speak up for someone without thinking about what others would do. Maddie had wanted to speak up for Wanda, but she was afraid to because she thought others would start making fun of her. What would happen if I didn't speak up for someone, but then the same thing happened to me? If I was truly bullied, not just getting teased, would someone speak up for me? Would they stay in the shadows watching? No one said a thing when I was getting teased.

By reading this book I now think that you can't simply want to help, because your window to help will often close. You just have to thrust yourself at them open-armed, ready to support them at a moment's notice. And by doing that you have not just made a difference for that person, but you've made a difference in the world.

Thank you for your wonderful work.

*Sophie*

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