

Massachusetts Letters About Literature 2016

Massachusetts Center for the Book

www.massbook.org

Level III Honors Award

Dear Shel Silverstein,

I feel like you're my best friend, like you know me better than anyone. All my life I depended on you, on your poems. It wasn't until recently that I truly realized what they meant for me. *Where the Sidewalk Ends* was a book that meant love and happiness, then it meant pain and loss, finally, it became a symbol of hope for me.

You see my parents are divorced and my mother was a drug addict. Being so young when it started I had no idea what was going on. Things were good for a while. I was happy, she was happy. Every night I was with her she'd come into my room and play with me. She'd read me a few poems from *Where the Sidewalk Ends*, always ending with my favorite, "Where the Sidewalk Ends", and lay with me until I fell asleep. Once the addiction started, I didn't see my mom much. I only saw her every other Friday night and although we didn't have much time together, she would always make sure to come into my room and read me a few poems always ending with my favorite. Her addiction grew worse and eventually I read the poems to myself every Friday night while she was busy doing other things.

After a few years of this going on I was no longer seeing my mom. I would just lay in bed with the book by my nightstand wishing my mom was around. Occasionally I'd pick up the book and read a few poems but it wasn't the same without her. When I was 15, nine years after my mother's addiction began, I picked up the book and read it cover to cover, the first time in years. I skipped "Where the Sidewalk Ends" and saved it for last. This time when I read it, it meant something different. It was no longer a memory of what I had but became hope for what is to come. It was hope that you can "leave this place where the smoke blows black" and go somewhere where "the sun burns crimson bright". It became a symbol of the darkness that my mother was struggling with and the light I hope she finds. It was the first time I saw something deeper in the words. I called my mom later that night and I told her I loved her and that she will find the place where the sun burns crimson bright. She knew exactly where that came from.

Not long after that phone call my mother checked into rehab. She was in and out for about a year and a half. Finally she stuck to it and after about four months she came home clean. The first thing she did was gather me and all of my siblings on the couch, told us she loved us and read us all *Where the Sidewalk Ends*, cover to cover.

For as long as I can remember your books have been a part of who I am. Whenever I am asked to choose a favorite author I will always choose you. Your poems inspired something great in my life. Your poems gave me my mom back. I wish I could thank you but no language in the world has the words to truly express my gratitude. I shall end with this "How much good inside a day? Depends how good you live 'em. How much love inside a friend? Depends how much you give 'em", and you gave me enough love to last a lifetime.

Thank you friend,

Taylor

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