

January 6, 2019

Dear Mrs. Audrey Penn,

I still remember the first time I read your book, even though it has been a while. I was just starting kindergarten, and had recently moved to a new state. I was going to be starting at a new school with no friends. I had never been to pre-k or a normal daycare. I hadn't made any friends my own age in my new home yet, which only added stress to the fact that I would be leaving home and going to school for the first time. In order to help with my nerves, my mother and I read your book, *The Kissing Hand*. Although the book couldn't take away all of my nerves, it certainly helped ease my transition into a new life.

As a young child, I really connected with Chester Raccoon, the main protagonist of your book. Like Chester, I'm the oldest child in my family. I didn't have any older siblings who could protect me at school. No one was really around to show me what school would really be like. Even though I was well aware of the potential that there could be when it came to friends my own age, as well as fun games, toys, and books, this was not enough to truly sway me. The most important people in my life wouldn't be coming to school with me, and that was what truly hurt the most.

Reading your book, however, gave me a character I could connect with. Chester has a similar relationship with his mother to the one I shared with mine at the time (so I've always been somewhat of a parent-pleaser, sue me!). Chester's struggle showed me that it was okay to feel the way that I did, and that even though it would be hard, I could manage. One aspect of the book that has impacted my life the most is the tradition of the Kissing Hand. After reading your book, my Mother and I were inspired to start the tradition of our own. My Mom would kiss my hand before school every morning, and I would place it on my heart, and I would do the same for her, similar to as the book characters do in the book. My Mom also bought a special string that we tied around the zipper pull on my backpack that read "I love you!"

Without your book, who knows if kindergarten would have passed the same for me as it did. I can now look back at the time with fond memories. I made friends, played games, and lived the high-life as a six-year-old. With the tradition of the Kissing Hand, I knew that I could make it through school, and that my Mother's love was with me, no matter where I was. The tradition even spread to my sisters when they started school.

Even though I don't need my Mom's kiss to go to school anymore, your book has still impacted my life. One of the women my Dad works with had a son who was starting kindergarten, and he was very nervous. When I heard of this, the first thing I thought of was your book, and how it

made the transition into kindergarten easier for me. Although I have no idea if he thinks it was as impactful as I do, I am happy to report that he is starting fourth grade this year and has grown to love at least the social aspect of school (I think you'd be hard-pressed to find a ten-year-old boy who loves math and other schoolwork).

I can truly say that your book, "The Kissing Hand" has changed my life. As a junior in high school, I've grown to love school. I'm not sure where life will take me, but I know that I will always carry the love of those who surround me and believe in me. Someday, maybe I will have kids of my own. Inevitably, the time will come when they are set to start kindergarten. As they're heading in for their first day, I'll kiss their hand, and they'll press it to their heart, and they'll do the same for me. Their love will always be with me, and my love will always be with them, which gives us the courage to face life's toughest challenges, big or small. For this, I thank you.

Sincerely,

Casey Prior