

January 27, 2023

Dear Sharon Draper,

Your book *Out of my Mind* really changed my view of how we treat those who are different. We are extremely lucky to be able to walk and talk, even to write. I felt hate towards Molly and Claire when they laughed and made fun of the kids from room H-5. I felt a sense of justice when Mrs. Lovelace made them stand. I almost screamed in rage when they left Melody at home without telling her that she wouldn't be able to make it to the competition. But I understand that that is, sadly, the way people treat kids and grown-ups like Melody. Your book changed my view of the world because now when I see someone with a challenge I don't only feel bad for them but I want to stand up and fight for them.

Who decides what's normal and what isn't? I could say a normal person is someone who does really well in school, participates in sports, and can read anything that people put in front of them. But then my friend could say that normal is someone who doesn't like school, is not athletic, and not interested in reading. Who gets to say what's normal? That was a question you made me think of while reading your novel *Out of my Mind* and really made me think, who does decide?

I can sort of relate to Melody because my aunt has autism. My grandmother once told me that when my aunt went to the special school for kids with disabilities they treated her badly such as by grabbing her. My grandmother has been caring for my aunt (her daughter) for her entire life. She loves her with all her heart, and hates it when anyone treats her badly. My grandmother has a maid who works in her home and she has also helped take care of my aunt. She loves her as if she were her own daughter. I see what happens when people with challenges get cared for and loved as if they had no disability. Being loved helps them feel calmer and helps them enjoy their lives even more

"Like a fish out of water" is probably how Melody felt before she got her Medi-Talker device. I think Ollie the fish jumped out of the water to demonstrate a fish out of water (that was very clever). So when a fish is not in its natural environment, its survival is threatened. I can relate to Melody because when I moved here from Argentina I knew no English. Melody couldn't communicate with other people but she could understand. On the other hand, I didn't understand and couldn't talk to anyone. Melody has it harder because she couldn't just learn English the way I could, she already knew English but just couldn't talk.

When someone is being made fun of the way Melody was I get very angry—even if it is just a book, I get mad. Melody's story made me want to fight for people like her and my aunt. I was also very upset when the team left without telling Melody and when they had breakfast without inviting her. You inspired me to fight for people who can not fight for themselves, like Mrs.V and Melody's mom did for Melody.

Yours truly,
Maria B. Salvarredi
Grade 5