

24015 Point Lookout Rd,
Leonardtown, MD 20650

December 19, 2017

Dear Katherine Applegate,

I have had my face in a book since the moment I was able to read. Even before I could sound out letters and figure out words, I was eager to learn. I remember I would come home from kindergarten to the small library that was in my house, and sit in the big red chair with one of my children's books, trying to read.

I think one of the reasons I was so eager to read was because my mother read all of the time. She still does. I wanted to know the feeling she would talk about when she told someone about a new book she had just read. More importantly, I wanted to know the feeling of living inside of a book. I wanted to know what it was like to be in another person's world.

I am adopted. Though I love my family and have never felt unwanted or unloved myself, I often wondered why someone would let their own child go. I was abandoned at a coal factory in Guizhou, China, on the day I was born. What was my biological mother thinking? What was happening in her world? And why did she have to let me go?

When I could finally read on my own, I read books about families and love, and what one will do for someone they love. I knew that type of love, though. The main characters in those books were saving the things they loved, but they were also saving them to keep them for themselves. I never knew what it was like to *let go* of someone *because* you loved them.

All of this changed when I read The One and Only Ivan.

The One and Only Ivan conveyed love, but it is not like other books. Ivan, a lonely silverback gorilla, has relationships with other animals that are built on sacrifice and trust. Stella, an older elephant, with a chronic leg injury, was selfless. She taught me that selflessness builds good relationships that you can have for the rest of your life. Stella's drive to be there for others is the way that I want to be remembered. It made me realize that being there for someone and knowing that they have trust in you, is one of the most valuable things in a relationship. Trust is what Stella taught me.

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When Stella died, Ivan had to learn how to move on. And, at the end of the story, Ivan releases a young elephant to a new life by encouraging her dreams for the future. The animal's lives were forever connected, even when they were no longer in the same place.

I appreciate and thank you for writing The One and Only Ivan, the book that gave me great examples of love, showed me that the world isn't just centered around me, and introduced me to the idea that some things are out of my control. I now know why it is important to be selfless, and why it is worth it in the end.

Thank you for writing a great book with amazing characters, and for giving me a book I could talk about with my mom.

Sincerely,

Parker O'Brien

Parker O'Brien

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