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Dear Charles C. Finn,

When I was only eight years old, reading an excerpt from your poem for the first time, I was struck by the significance and deep, raw, heartfelt feeling embedded into each letter of "Please Hear What I'm Not Saying." Your poem sang to me, cracked the surface of a shell of grief and anger that I had made when I was five, created in *my own* confusion, fear, and aloneness* that I felt when my mom died. Before, I was often unhappy. At school I was shy, quiet, and by second grade I hid behind a pleasant mask so that adults wouldn't ask questions, find out my mother wasn't just someone I didn't talk about but was *dead*. They treated me like a cracked glass figurine, differently from the rest, with voices like over-powerful perfume that told me they're so sorry for my loss, I'm sure she's in a better place now. When I read that tiny excerpt, for the first time I felt understood, by *your* words. I wondered though, who would be my salvation? Who would look behind my mask to see me? However, I didn't realize I had already struck gold.

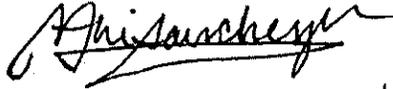
My brother no longer accompanied me to school and back, and my dad was against my walking alone, so he had placed me in an after-school program until he could get me. My teacher asked two of my classmates to help me get used to the unfamiliar surroundings. They helped me around, laughed, smiled, played with me at recess, invited me to their birthday parties, got to know me better, and I got to know them. Soon we became best friends, and as though I were a tightly closed rosebud finally seen and encouraged to grow, I flowered and proved myself to be someone very different than the lonely little girl I was before. I found myself to be full of life, imaginative, and bouncy. By fourth grade I learned how to laugh, grin, even talk, like the narrator in your story so desperately wanted, in a way that was genuine and spontaneous and me*. I became so *happy*. All because of those two people who called me into aliveness*, and you.

Years went by, and I began to forget that lonely little girl. My best friends and I were inseparable, friends forever. We still are. But I began to take my newfound happiness for granted. Then I found myself reading a Chicken Soup for the Soul book, and I found a longer version of that same poem, much more like the original you wrote in 1966. I then realized that this fantastic transformation I had gone through was due, in part, to *your* poem. I had let my guard down, let my mask slip, let something deep inside me take a breath of fresh air when I had read those words. *Don't be fooled by the face I wear**, I had thought, and I am so glad that my salvation had found me.

I can't begin to thank you for what your poem has done. Forever I will remember that first day when I read those hauntingly truthful words. Now, when I feel that I am

alone, when I feel sad or angry, when I feel that everything seems to be going wrong, I think of your poem, and I try not to be mad at the unfairness in the world, because sometimes things aren't what they appear to be. Thank you for helping me come alive again.

Sincerely,



Itahi Sanchez

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3/13/08

*text from "Please Hear What I'm Not Saying"