Letters to Chester
25 Years of The Kissing Hand

Stories from readers about the life-changing effects of Audrey Penn’s classic book.

Compiled and edited by Peggy Tierney
Note from the Editor

Since *The Kissing Hand* was published 25 years ago, Audrey Penn has received hundreds of letters celebrating this heartwarming book and its wide-reaching impact. Beyond helping kids who are starting school, readers have shared many unexpected and profound ways a Kissing Hand has provided them and their loved ones with reassurance that love will survive physical separations.

We felt there was no better way to celebrate this book’s anniversary than to compile and share some of the more moving letters with you. We also included letters from kids proclaiming their love of books and the magic of author visits, along with some of the fan artwork that kids have created for *The Kissing Hand* and Audrey Penn.

This collection is also a testament to the extraordinary author who saw a simple gesture between a mother raccoon and her cub and had the insight to understand she had seen something special that could help children. Audrey’s creativity turned this small moment into a picture book that has touched millions of lives.

I have included some of Audrey’s responses to the letters because they capture the exceptionally caring and generous woman behind the books.

From Audrey Penn and Tanglewood to you, we hope *The Kissing Hand* will enrich your lives for generations to come.
# Table of Contents

Starting School .................................................................5

Authors Are More Fabulous Than Movie Stars, Part I.................................................19

The Excitement of Having a Book of One’s Own ........35

Other Occasions

  Going to College .........................................................41

  Foster Care and Adoption.............................................45

  Family Separation .......................................................51

  Military and Civil Service ...........................................57

  Illness, Death, and Grieving..........................................63

A Lifetime of Love...........................................................73

Authors Are More Fabulous Than Movie Stars, Part II................................................83

Other Books by Audrey Penn Get Love, Too .............89

The Best Gift Is a Book....................................................95

Acknowledgments ..........................................................99
to Audrey
from Lakai

The Kissing Hand

I love the Kissing Hand. It is the best book ever. Thank you so much!

heart
Audrey,

Just wanted to take the time to write you and thank you for your help. My daughter Lakai is in second grade this year, and she had such a hard time leaving me and going to school. She would cry so hard and cling to me when I would try to drop her off. After asking some friends for help on Facebook, I got the suggestion a few times to get your book *The Kissing Hand*. Lakai loved it. We cried while we read it, and she promised me to try harder. I told her that we could put goldfish in a jar every day that she didn’t cry, and when the jar was full, we would get her a real fish. She earned her fish last week [photo enclosed]. She wrote you this letter and almost put it in the mail without me knowing (notice the stamps already attached), but luckily I intercepted it and was able to tell her I would also write a letter to say thank you! I didn’t know you had more books, looks like we need to buy more of them! Thanks again!

With Gratitude,
Krystal Tuft
Dear Lakai:

I am writing to tell you how excited I was to receive your postcard and your mother’s letter. I am so glad you like *The Kissing Hand* and I hope the story made you feel just a little bit braver. Your jar full of fish tells me you are very brave: brave enough to have a new pet.

Did you know the story of *The Kissing Hand* came from a true event? I took my son to the park where they had a train ride. We had been on the ride many times, but this particular day the train stopped in the middle of the ride. The engineer had to leave and go collect a park ranger. There was an animal on the tracks that wouldn’t move. The engineer told us to stay on the train and not to leave our seat.

Well, sometimes an author has to be a little sneaky to get a good story, so I snuck off the train and tiptoed to the front. I thought I would be seeing a deer.

I was suddenly terrified when I came face to face with the biggest raccoon I’d ever seen! She was standing on her back legs hissing at me.

I started tiptoeing backward when I saw a tiny raccoon standing by its mother’s feet. He was only four weeks old. I kept staring at the baby. You can’t believe how cute it was. Then the mother got down off her back legs and turned to her cub. She lifted the...
baby’s hand, opened it and stuck her face in his palm. The baby then put his hand on his face. I learned later the mother was giving the cub her scent so if they were separated, he could put his hand to his cheek and smell her and be comforted. I went back to the car and wrote the story on a brown paper grocery bag.

Stories happen all around us. All we have to do is listen and watch. I may use your story about the goldfish in a book. Is that all right with you?

I hope you enjoy Chester Raccoon and the Almost Perfect Sleepover and Chester the Brave.

Lakai, thank you once again for your wonderful postcard. Keep reading.

Lots of hugs,

Audrey Penn
We adopted my son just before his first birthday, and as a result he struggles with severe separation anxiety. We worked so hard to prepare him to start school, but nothing seemed to help. Every morning he thought his little world was coming to an end. A family friend bought us this book, and I read it to him one morning before school. That day he had me kiss his hands before getting out of the car, and it went a little smoother. Each day from then on, he asked me to kiss his hands and he kissed mine, and each day we saw a bit more improvement. Nothing we said or did up to that point had gotten us anywhere, until the day I read him this book. It was truly a turning point for him. On hard days, he would get in the car and say, “I’m so glad you kissed my hand this morning. I really needed it today.” Or “I had to sit in the settle down chair today, but I was okay, I don’t think anyone saw me put my hand on my cheek.” I am so grateful for this book!

I teach kindergarten and the kids absolutely loved this book. I read it the first day and they were spellbound. The story is great for letting them know that they are not alone in missing Mom, but that she is always there. As I read, I watched them touch their hand to their cheek and smile, and I realized that they were understanding! A definite must read!!!
Oh how I love, love, LOVE this book. Like so many little ones, my daughter was having a really hard time adjusting to kindergarten. She would cry every day before she got on the bus. She would tell me constantly how much she missed being home. She seemed so sad and lost. I reached out to a friend whose daughter had gone through something similar a few years ago and she recommended this book. This book, above anything else we tried, helped my daughter adjust to going to school. If I could hug the author, I would. We had sad mornings every day for the first several weeks of school. After reading this there was an immediate change. Thank you, thank you, Audrey Penn!

I am using the Kissing Hand thematic unit, which is very helpful for small children to understand transitions concerning leaving mom for a learning experience. I teach children, or rather they teach me, and it has been a very good social-story type book for children who might not understand why they are going to school.
Mom

I love you

Kiss Kiss
This is a wonderful book that I use every year with my PreK class. It gently tells the story of a young raccoon who is afraid to leave his mother and start school.

When we’re done with the story, I have both the children and their grownups trace, cut out, and decorate their handprints on cardstock. We punch holes and attach yarn. The parents and kids kiss their handprints.

I then give them heart stickers, which we put in the middle of each handprint. The grownups can take their children’s handprint home, and take them out whenever they miss their little ones. The children keep their grownup’s handprints in school and when they get lonely they can wear the hand and feel their grownup’s love close to their heart. This really helps with separation anxiety, especially from the parent’s point of view! :-}
This book is a treasure in our family. My now second-grade daughter had trouble separating at the start of kindergarten and first grade. This book was recommended to my husband to help her through it. It is a very special book, and we still occasionally pick it up. It is a rare book that manages to be very tender but not cloying. Audrey Penn clearly knows where this anxiety lies and how to reach and soothe it. A gem.

We bought this book to soothe some tiny anxieties that our girl had about starting school. To say she loved this book would be an understatement. Even though school is well in session and she is happy there, she still requests this book at least once a week for story time.

This is such a sweet book. I hesitated getting it and reading it to my son before he started kindergarten because he acted sooo ready to GO! I was wrong. He missed his mama so much. Now he has a Kissing Hand, which makes it a little better for the both of us.
Dear Audrey Penn,

Hope this letter finds you well by the Grace of God as the same attends over here.

Let me introduce myself to you, I teach Kindergarten and Montessori combined together in a school called the Islamic School of ****.

A very good friend of mine from Maryland mailed me two of your lovely books, *The Kissing Hand* and *Sassafras*. Every first day of school in September and whenever a new student gets enrolled throughout the school year the first book I read to the children is *The Kissing Hand*!

The children and their parents love this book, and every time I read and look at the little innocent faces of the children on their first day of school, I just can’t hold back my tears! What a marvelous book!

The children from kindergarten through 7th grade wanted to thank you for writing such lovely books. They all signed the thank you card. All of them have either read or listened to the books.

The children hope and wish that you would write more books like the previous ones on various subjects.

Thanking you sincerely,

Muni
Dear Ms. Penn,

I am writing you on behalf of my daughter Caitie and myself. My daughter is three-and-a-half years old, and we loved your book, *The Kissing Hand*. We have read it many, many times. Caitie was very excited about starting preschool. When we read this story, she kissed my hand, because she thought I would miss her and be sad without her. It is books like yours that help to ease transition periods for children and make them empathetic to the needs and feelings of others. If more parents read to their children and read books to them like yours, our society would be a better place for everyone.

I felt we should write and let you know that your work is admired and appreciated by both children and their parents. You have really encouraged Caitie’s imagination and her empathy toward others, and I admire the work that you do.

Thank you,

Amanda

I wish my parents had known about this book when I was a kid and going through my bad crying fits when I got to school every day.
WOW!!! AMAZING book. My daughter, after going to Pre-K for about a month, was still crying EVERY DAY when we would drop her off. Just after the first day, I read her the book and then listened to the Audio CD and she DIDN’T CRY!!!! Even her teacher called us at home and told us, “What did you guys do, she hasn’t cried?” This is a must-have for anyone going through separation anxiety when starting school. I just wish I would have found this book earlier. All day cares and schools should have this book on the shelf for families having troubles with separation. This book was the only thing that helped relieve my daughter’s kindergarten anxiety. She loved the book and the fact that someone else didn’t want to go to kindergarten too. This is now our daily ritual. Now the other children at the bus stop want Kissing Hands, too!

For the past 30 years, I have been a director of day care centers and an instructor of Early Childhood Education and Children’s Literature at two local colleges. I am often asked to speak to audiences about children’s books, and I love to share The Kissing Hand.
When I first read your story to a group of children, I gave each child a heart sticker. One little girl was so impressed, she wore hers for days, clutching it in her hand. The book is so much fun to read to young and old—it is delightful to see the expressions on everyone’s face. After reading it to a group of children one day, a little boy said, “It makes your heart warm, doesn’t it?” What a great statement for quality children’s literature.

As an early childhood educator, I see this story being used time and time again. Mommies kiss their children’s hands as they walk into the classroom. Children feel sad during the day and press their hands against their cheeks. They truly believe in the power of the Kissing Hand and it comforts them.
I like it ↓
Dear Audrey Penn,

My name is Kelly. I am in the 4th grade. Right now, we are doing author studies in our class with my teacher, Mrs. Thower. I chose to study about you because I LOVE YOUR BOOK ABOUT CHESTER RACCOON. The books I read of yours are The Kissing Hand and Chester Raccoon and the Big Bad Bully. My favorite part in The Kissing Hand is when he is crying because it is so cute. Another thing I like about your books is that you tell your reader to not be scared to do something new. I have always wanted to ask you, do you like to draw? We are collecting autographed pictures of our favorite authors. My teacher says people who make books are more fabulous than movie stars. I would be so excited if you sent me a signed picture, if it’s not too much trouble. I hope you keep writing books because I love your books and I would love to read more books that you write.

Your fan,
Kelly
Dear Audrey Penn,

I love your book The Kissing Hand. I always used to read it with my mom, brother, and sister. My mom always still kisses my hand like Mother Raccoon. She says the book always gives me a boost of confidence, like Mother Raccoon. Thanks for listening.

Sincerely,
Sarah

continued...

Dear Sarah,

Thank you so much for your wonderful letter. I am sorry it has taken so long to respond. You must have spent a lot of time coloring the illustrations. Perhaps you are an up-and-coming children’s book artist.

I am delighted you like The Kissing Hand. It pleases me that you use a real Kissing Hand with your mother. My children are grown, but we still give Kissing Hands when we are together.

Did you know the book is based on a real event? I was taking my four-year-old son to the park when I saw a mother raccoon put her face in her cub’s hand. A few moments later, the cub put his hand on his cheek. I could feel the love pass back and forth between the
mother and baby, and I thought, this is a book I have to write: this is something I want children to have as a gift from the adults in their life that they love.

I learned later that the mother put her scent on the baby’s hand so if they got separated, the baby could smell its hand and relax.

I hope you enjoy Chester the Brave. It’s all about confidence. Next year, Chester Raccoon and the Almost Perfect Sleepover will be published. Chester goes on his first overday. Can you figure out why I call it that?

Keep reading and writing, Sarah. And again, thank you so much for your letter. It gave me a boost.

Lots of hugs,
Audrey

Dear Mrs. Audrey Penn,

I like The Kissing Hand. You wrote it. It reminds me of my mom kissing me when I am sad inside. I sometimes don’t want to go to school but I have to anyway because you can learn there. I am trying to make a story myself, it is going good so far.

Love,
Douglas
Dear Audrey Penn,

My name is Audrey Hamrick and I am doing a literature fair project with my Friend, Whitney Bender, on you and your Kissing Hand books. We are in the third and fourth grades. We thought it would be neat to have a letter or email from you to use in our project on October 14th. We would like for you to tell us something interesting about yourself or your books that people may not be able to find on your website.

Thank you for your time,
Audrey & Whitney

(Response from Audrey Penn to Audrey and Whitney)

Dear Audrey and Whitney,

Thank you so much for choosing me for the subject of your project with your friend Whitney.

When I was little, there were always stacks of books near my favorite chair and next to my bed. Everyone in my family and extended family read to me. I became so familiar with books like Winnie the Pooh and Peter Rabbit, I would sit and pretend to read the stories to myself out loud, even before I could read. When I was old enough, I converted the
stories to plays and assigned parts to myself and to my friends (I always had the leading role). We would then perform the play for our parents, charging them five cents each. The money always went toward popsicles. It was my love of children's literature and my love of creating that eventually led me to becoming a children’s writer.

In addition to the constant reading that went on in my home, there was always the presence of music. I heard everything from operas and ballets to Broadway musicals and my older brother’s rock & roll. My favorite thing to do was show off my impromptu dance steps in the middle of the living room floor. I was finally sent off to ballet school and saw the world in my toe shoes as an adult.

I learned to communicate through the arts, which is what I am still trying to do. It gives me the greatest pleasure to receive letters from friends like you.

One more thing: the ankle grabbers that my brothers told me about have never pulled me under the bed, so I am still here.

Lots of hugs,

Audrey
To: Audrey Penn  
From: Beth Johnson

Recently I contacted you about a project that my daughter, Nellie Kate Johnson, was doing regarding *The Kissing Hand*. I am happy to report that at the school level, she placed first. She will advance to district competition in December. She dressed up as a raccoon and did a great job presenting her project. Thank you for all the work you do in writing children’s books and giving our children a love for reading.

To: Beth Johnson  
From: Pierre Dery

Hi Beth,

I’m Audrey’s assistant. She’s having a hard time writing at this time due to her hands, but she asked me to let you know how much she enjoyed your letter. It really helps her to hear from people who have been touched by her work. Many congratulations to your daughter. If you don’t mind, Audrey would love to see a picture of your daughter in her costume.

Best of luck in the district competition.
To: Audrey Penn  
From: Beth Johnson

Nellie Kate competed at the district level with her project of *The Kissing Hand* yesterday. I am happy to report that she won first place and will advance to the regional level competition February 23rd in Oxford, Mississippi.

To: Audrey Penn  
From: Beth Johnson

Yesterday, in Oxford, MS, Nellie Kate competed against 25 other projects in the Regional Reading Fair. She wanted me to let you know that she placed first and will advance to the state competition in Jackson, MS in April.

From: Pierre Dery  
To: Beth Johnson

Congratulations to Nellie Kate! I apologize for our delay in responding, but we’ve been traveling quite a lot lately, and this week Audrey has had surgery on her left hand. She loves the photos you sent, especially, of course, Nellie Kate in front of her project in costume. She has a copy of it on her office wall. Best of luck on April 16th. Keep Audrey posted.
From: Pierre Dery
To: Beth Johnson

I wanted to check on how Nellie Kate did in the state competition. And Audrey received her card several days ago – she absolutely loved it.

From: Beth Johnson
To: Audrey Penn

Nellie Kate got second place. She was excited. Thank you all for communicating with her/us. This seems to bring the book more to life for her, not just a book from the shelf. *The Kissing Hand* will always hold a special place in our hearts. Last year in preschool, her teacher read the book to the children on the “meet the teacher” night, and they made a Kissing Hand craft that night to keep with them the first week of school when they missed their family. So when she had to pick a book for her project this year, there was no question she wanted to do *The Kissing Hand*. My other daughter has been involved in reading fairs since she was in kindergarten. Ms. Penn is the only author we tried to contact that we actually got a response from.
Dear Mrs. Penn,

My teacher had my class do a project and I chose you. I really like your books and I hope you know that I am a big fan. I love books so much!

My favorite book is The Kissing Hand. I love your books so much that I would buy all of them, but my three sisters and my one brother would color and rip them.

Destiny

Dear Ms. Penn,

My name is Christopher and I go to P.S. **. I like the book The Kissing Hand. My favorite part was when the mom kisses Chester. My favorite thing to do at home is to play games. I really enjoyed the book. I would tell other kids to read this book.

Your fan,
Christopher

Dear Mrs. Penn,


Love,
Jewel
Dear Mrs. Penn,

Hi! My name is Maitane and I am a second grader. My favorite color is blue. I like your book, *The Kissing Hand*, because I like it when the little raccoon gives the kiss back to his mom. I am seven years old. I have heard that you wrote a lot of books, like twenty. Why did you write *The Kissing Hand*? I think you like to write books a lot. What inspired you to become an author? I think you read a lot and you thought, what if I were an author? Do you like being silly?

Your fan,
Maitane

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Dear Mrs. Penn,

I liked your book called *The Kissing Hand*. It was really nice. I am David, I am 8 years old. My favorite color is blue. What’s your favorite color? Where do you live? I live in New York. I have 2 dogs and 3 sisters. Do you have any sisters? Or do you have any dogs or cats? I used to have a cat, but then she died because one of my dogs ate her. Good-bye Mrs. Penn! [smiley face]

From,
David
Dear Mrs. B:

I wanted to let you know that I have answered the children who wrote to me and who attached photos of their most extraordinary biographical portraits. I don’t believe I have ever seen myself in such an interesting light. I’m going to have all of the photographs framed together, and then I’m going to showcase my plural portrait in my brand-new office. I am truly honored by the children’s efforts.

Not knowing when your school system gets out for the summer, I wanted to know if I had time to send the physical letter to your class by snail-mail or if I should attach it to another email. I ask because I would like to send all of your students a signed paperback copy of *The Kissing Hand*. I would need to know how many children are in your classroom so I might send each a copy. I would also like to send a hardback copy of the other Kissing Hand books for your classroom collection.

Thank you for doing such a wonderful, caring job with your students. It’s easy to see that they are getting the best benefits when it comes to reading and writing.

Best wishes,
Audrey Penn
Dear Mrs. Penn,

Wow! What an honor to have our artwork hanging up in your new office! I will be sure to share this news with the students’ art teacher, Mr. Carroll.

We would be so honored to accept your gifts! We are still in school for two weeks, so we should be able to receive the package in time. I am in and out of school all throughout the summer months, as well. I could make sure the students each receive their copy of the book if they do not arrive in time for the last day of school. We have twenty-one students in our class. Thank you so much for your kindness and generosity. The students will be so thrilled! I can’t wait to read them your email this morning when they arrive! Thank you so much!

Dear Mrs. B:

I wanted to do a little extra for the six children who went to so much trouble for me, so I personalized their copies of *The Kissing Hand*, and I sent each a hardback copy of *Sassafras*. I also went ahead and signed six personalized copies of the class letter I sent in your hardback copy of *The Kissing Hand*. Included in the box is a set of Chester Raccoon books for your classroom. I am trying so hard to make children understand that when they make friends with characters inside a book, they have friends for life. Teachers like you are my heroes who are bringing children and these understandings together. Thank you.

Best wishes,

Audrey Penn
Dear Ms. Penn:

Please call me Jamie.

I discovered *The Kissing Hand* about 11 years ago. It was my first year of teaching, and I had a little boy in first grade who cried hysterically every day for about three hours straight because he missed his mom. I had tried all kinds of strategies to help this child feel comfortable. Finally, I read your book aloud in class. As a shared writing experience, we wrote a letter to our group of parents and made a paper Kissing Hand that we attached to it. It was on display at Back-to-School Night, and I had the parents make a paper Kissing Hand to leave on their student’s desk for the next morning. The child never cried again. He actually kept his paper Kissing Hand from his mom in his desk and pulled it out whenever he needed it. I’ve been reading it the first week of school ever since.

On a more personal note, I am a single mom. My ex and I divorced during my pregnancy, so two homes is all my son has ever known. Even though it has been his way of life since birth, he demonstrates separation anxiety from me, especially when I drop him off at day care and he knows he won’t see me for a few days. We started reading your book at bedtime, and it quickly became his favorite. Now, each morning that I drop him off at day care, I draw a small heart on the inside of each of our wrists and we kiss each other’s Kissing Hand. It works wonders for us.

*continued...*
I shared these two stories because I wanted to let you know that when adults connect with a character, the character stays with them for life, as well. Thank you for creating a character and a story that relates to so many people. And I always share with my students that even adults learn something new every day.

Finally, thank you for responding to my students on such a personal level. It means so much to them and is the most powerful lesson in teaching that writing is a form of communication and that words have power. Thank you so much for connecting to my students.

This is the awesomest book ever because it’s all about love. I love to be loved! Especially I love my mom and dad.

-Cara age 5

One of my absolute favorite books. My son who is four has been asking me to read it every night since he was about two. We love Chester! The stickers are a good idea too. We put one on at the beginning of the preschool and school year and whenever we are having a hard time separating for the day. Cute reminder that the love is still there!
The Excitement of Having a Book of One’s Own

Audrey Penn donates many books to schools, particularly schools in which families have limited budgets. Here are the letters she received from the students when she donated a book to every child in a class.

Dear Mrs. Penn,

Thank you for my book.
I enjoyed it when I read it with my mom and my baby brother. I loved the pictures. I loved when Chester’s mom kissed his hand. I wish Chester was a real person.

Your friend,
Reynard

Dear Mrs. Penn,

Thank you for my book. You are my best friend. I feel good because you gave me the book. I like your artist.

Your friend,
Tyler
Dear Mrs. Penn,

Thank you very much for *A Pocket Full of Kisses*. I love reading the book! It is one of my favorite stories. My favorite part was when the raccoon mother gave brother raccoon the Kissing Hand. I read it to my mom. I am going to keep the book for my whole life. The book has a very happy ending. Thanks again!

Sincerely,

Ava

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Dear Mrs. Penn,

Thank you very much for *A Pocket Full of Kisses*. I like the book very much, and I read the book to my little brother. He likes it, too.

Your friend,

John

---

Dear Mrs. Penn,

Thank you very much for *A Pocket Full of Kisses*. I read the story with my mom and dad and my sister.

Your friend,

Derek
Dear Mrs. Penn,

Thank you very much for
A Pocket Full of Kisses.
Because I like to read the
book with my mom.

Your friend,
Tiffany

Dear Mrs. Penn,

I appreciate the book
that you gave me. It was
awesome. You are the
best teacher. Keep working
and you'll be a better
teacher.

Your friend,
Ydalis

Dear Mrs. Penn,

Thank you very much
for A Pocket Full of
Kisses. My favorite part
is when Mom Raccoon said
somebody needs a Kissing
Hand. I read it to my
mom and dad and my little
sister.

Your friend,
Jordan

Dear Mrs. Penn,

Thank you for my book.
I really like the pictures.
They are pretty. I
enjoyed it. I read it five
times a day to my mom
and dad and sister.

Your friend,
Samantha
Dear Ms. Penn,
We are thankful that you are a kind person to us and you also gave us the books.

Sincerely,
Trevor

Dear Audrey,
Thank you for the books.
I appreciate you for donating the books to us so we can read them to the kindergarten.

Donna

Dear Audrey Penn,
I think that was just the kindest thing ever to donate the books!

Sincerely,
Breanna

Audrey Penn,
You have an awesome heart! Thank you for donating the books!

Brianna

Dear Mrs. Penn,
Oh, thank you so much for the book, Chester and the Big Bad Bully. I promise that I will read it a lot and I will not lose it.

Your friend,
Danielle
I purchased this book for my daughter when she left for college. I left it under her pillow as we left her dorm room. There were empty pages to write a heartfelt letter, and I went through the book and added comments and memories. She referred to the book frequently her freshman year, and it was a hit with the girls that lived in her dorm.

Although this book is about a mother and child, my boyfriend bought it for me when he went off to college. Let me tell you, those words were just what I needed to hear. Now he and I have our own special Kissing Hands, and I know that he is thinking about me when he is away.
The first time I came in contact with this book, my oldest daughter was leaving for college. I bought the book and sent it to her so that it would arrive a few days after she had moved into her dorm. She loved the book and says she read it often and shared it with her new friends in the dorm. Now my second daughter is leaving for her first year of college, and I will send *The Kissing Hand* to her and continue this “tradition” when my youngest daughter goes to college in four years.

I got this book for my daughter, who was going away to college. I helped her set up her room and snuck it under her pillow before I left. She called me later that night when she found it and LOVED IT.

This was a favorite of my daughter, and she recently went away to college and wanted this to take with her.
I am writing this as a college freshman. My mom has read this to me before the first day of school for as long as I can remember. While for the last several years, it got to be kind of corny, it was still a welcome tradition. As I prepare to leave for college soon, I am highly anticipating hearing this story for one last time. In three days when I leave, I am presenting her with a new copy that I have written in. I hope I can give back just some of the joy she has given me all these years. It is never too early or too late to start a new tradition.

My mother first gave me this book when I left for college. I don’t think I appreciated it then as much as I do now. This summer I was lucky enough to meet the author and purchase a signed copy – she said it is the 20th anniversary (I had no idea!).
Hello,

I am a Family Support Specialist with the Alaska Center for Resource Families. I was also a foster mom that adopted twelve children from the foster care system. Your book *The Kissing Hand* has impacted many children in my home, one dramatically. He was placed in our emergency home at nine years of age and was with us only two-and-a-half weeks. During his stay, I read *The Kissing Hand* to him several times. After leaving our home, I would go to the school to pick up other children. The principal would tell me that this young boy was in the counseling office. He would be having a fit, screaming and throwing things. I would go into the office and sit down with him, hold both of his hands and remind him of *The Kissing Hand*. He would break down and cry. Two years passed and this young man was placed in our home as an adoptive placement. I could tell you many more stories of how your book impacted children in the foster care system. I now keep a stack of the books at home so I can give them as gifts when children are adopted.

– Tamara
Entry from a contest to have lunch with Audrey

Ms. Penn’s book, The Kissing Hand, has helped me soooooo much through so many years. My mom introduced me to her book when I was three years old, going to school for the first time. We would read the book every night and put the stickers that are in the back of the book on my hand every morning. Reading that book helped me go to school without my mom. It became our first day of school tradition. Even now I ask my mom to kiss my hand when she drops me off. I really want to meet Ms. Penn to give her a zillion thank-yous for helping me through the toughest days of school.

My mom used Ms. Penn’s book, The Kissing Hand, when she was a social worker working with foster children who had to leave their parents. I want to be able to share what I learn from Ms. Penn with my mom because she thinks Ms. Penn is a great writer, like I do. Also, I want to hear about some of her other books she wrote for older kids now that I am older.
Dear Audrey,

I am currently in training to become a foster parent. Yesterday at our class, the instructor was speaking about children’s books and the positive impact they could have on our prospective foster children. When she spoke about your book, *The Kissing Hand*, she cried. Would it be possible to purchase a copy of *The Kissing Hand* and have you autograph it for our teacher? I want her to know how important she and her work is to the children here.

–Kaitlin

Dear Kaitlin,

I am so excited about the work you are training for and so delighted you shared that with me. The fact that your instructor uses *The Kissing Hand* and is very taken by the story is very humbling and I thank you for letting me know. If you will send me your instructor’s name and address where I can send the book, I will be very pleased to send one. Please give her my very best wishes, and I want you both to know how much I appreciate your work and dedication to children.

Lots of hugs,

Audrey Penn
I have been a foster mother for six years. I have cared for fifteen children in that time—some for a few days, others a few weeks, and several for many months. I became aware of your book, *The Kissing Hand*, when I was caring for my first child and she came home from kindergarten. They had read the book in school and—even at her young age—she was moved by the theme. I immediately bought the book and have treasured it ever since. I had her for nineteen months and then she was adopted. Just today I received a note from her. I know that her exposure to your book and the booklet that I made for her were a great part of her adjustment and her ability to love her new parents.

—Kathy
Family Separation

September 11, 2001 began a tremendously difficult time in our country. Our children are four and five, and we have been reading this nearly every night since then. A friend’s daughter was having terrible nightmares and great fears about not seeing her Daddy (he’s a police officer currently assigned to Ground Zero). We loaned them the book to read to her. Her mom now tells me she is sleeping soundly as long as she has been kissed in the palm of her hand.

Sweet Dreams, America and the World

My grandson’s mommy had to work some very long hours after Hurricane Irene. I bought this book for her to read to him. It became an instant favorite. He would put his kisses in special places and always feel his mommy’s love. When I visit him, I leave a kiss in his hand now, too.
Dear Audrey Penn,

Your books are being read on tapes by incarcerated women in TX to their children as part of the Storybook Program. As a volunteer, I adore *The Kissing Hand*—perfect for these children!! Thanks for writing it!!

–Marge Gurrola

As a Lutheran pastor, I used it as a children’s sermon in connection with Isaiah 49:16 (“See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands;...”), as well as sharing it with my four-year-old granddaughter who had recently moved away; for both the children at church and for my granddaughter, it was meaningful and special.

I had a copy of this when my kids were little, so when one of them went to France as a foreign exchange student, I purchased it and read it to her before she left.
I read this story to my three-year-old when I was pregnant with our second child. Knowing that I would have to be away from him for the first time while I had a C-section, I could barely get through the book at times. After the first time, he started giving ME Kissing Hands, and they have become a part of our lives now!

Dear Ms. Penn,

My 6-year-old and I love to read *The Kissing Hand* together. As we struggle with divorce, the story with the lovely illustrations touches our hearts. Thank you.

Your book has done wonders for my family. My oldest daughter just started school and she had major separation anxiety from me for many reasons, especially due to my separation from my ex-husband. Her tears started rubbing off on my other two daughters and they wouldn’t leave my side either. I read your book to my three girls and it has worked wonders for me and them. Within two days, the tears ended. No more tears!
The Kissing Hand is such an encouraging story during this particular time in our lives as my boys now live in two homes since their father and I divorced. They know that my love is always with them and they have their Kissing Hand to hold onto. <3

I bought this on recommendation from my three-year-old son’s therapist about two or three weeks ago. His daddy and I are separated, which means I no longer can remain a stay-at-home mom. So taking my son to day care was really hard on him. I bought this book along with a stuffed animal, Chester the Raccoon. Both items have helped to make transition from home to school to even his dad’s house so much smoother. I let my son take the stuffed animal with him to his daddy’s house so he sleeps with it every night. Then when he is home with me, we read the story every night before bed.
This book really helped soften the blow of monthly court-ordered visitation of my custodial grandchildren to the inner-city with their paternal grandmother. The screaming scenes were just horrendous and heartbreaking as the children begged not to go. I found this book, and although I can’t say it was the end of the nightmare, this book absolutely empowered them to deal with just that one day each month. I honestly feel this book should be known to every family court, legal guardian, and anyone who is in a court-ordered visitation situation that is not welcomed by the children. This book was a godsend for us.

This book was recommended to me by my daughter’s therapist. She had something happen to her that made her terrified of me not being with her at all times. This book has been a lifesaver!

We’ve read this book sooo many times. Any time my daughter is upset about anything (doesn't even have to be school-related anymore) she wants to read this and snuggle.
The Kissing Hand, by Audrey Penn, represents every military child and every military parent as they say "good-bye".
During the Iraq war, the U.S. Army Child and Youth Services and the Military Child Education Coalition provided soldiers who were being deployed and leaving children behind with a Kissing Hand packet. It included a copy of the book with information sheets, activity suggestions, and a letter from Audrey Penn. The section on family traditions in the activity kit describes the need for the book and packet.

Children learn about family love and security through everyday interactions, hugs and kisses, and activities like snuggling up to read a book together. Family traditions and rituals also play a huge role in making children feel safe and comfortable in their place within the family. They are the essence of stability as, time after time, children learn that certain things will remain true and consistent within the family. Family traditions are especially important among highly mobile military families. When children cannot expect consistency with schools, care providers, or physical surroundings, safety and security among their own family becomes even more vital. Carrying on family traditions teaches children what’s most important – they carry the love of their family wherever they go.

In *The Kissing Hand*, Mrs. Raccoon passes a cherished family secret to Chester on his first day of school. The kiss is more than a gesture from a mother. With that kiss, Chester receives confirmation that he is a valuable member of the raccoon family, trusted with an important family tradition, safe in his mother’s and extended family’s love.
Dear Friends,

It is my greatest pleasure and honor to be able to give something back to you and your families. I can’t imagine making the kind of sacrifices you make every day when you are away from your home and families, keeping our nation and the world a safer place to live. Hopefully, The Kissing Hand will make saying “good-bye” just a little bit easier. As a child advocate, I am always looking for better ways to give children a sense of security and self-esteem. They would have no chance for either if our armed forces were not out there in the world, providing us all with a greater feeling of comfort and safety.

I hope Chester Raccoon and his mom offer you a way to connect with your children. A kiss from your hand to their heart may help them bridge the time and distance. After you read the story to your child, place a kiss on your hand and point it to the camera. Have your child put his hand to yours on the television screen, then place your kiss on his face. It’s a little bit of magic that hopefully will go a long way.

A heartfelt thank you for all that you do, all that you are, and all that you mean to us.

With appreciation and best wishes,

Audrey Penn
United Through Reading is another nonprofit dedicated to providing books for military kids.

Dear Ms. Penn,

In 2009, an Army wife fought back tears. My beloved husband and father of our children left for a deployment to Iraq. The kids and I worked to establish our new routine that summer. Then, one beautiful day, an unexpected previous treasure arrived in our mailbox from United Through Reading. It wasn’t an expensive gift...but it is priceless. It was the beautifully illustrated book *The Kissing Hand* by Audrey Penn. Even eight years later, it brings hours of joy. We didn’t know then, but we can wholeheartedly affirm now that United Through Reading has blessed us with a forever way to remind one another how much we love each other. *The Kissing Hand* continues to be a family tradition.

–Holly
I just wanted to write you a quick note as I just LOVE your books. I taught first grade for a few years and used *The Kissing Hand* and *A Pocket Full of Kisses* for lessons. I now read them to my two-year-old son who just loves them as much as I do. We are a military family and tonight, as my husband was leaving for a work trip, my son asked him for a Kissing Hand, and then one more for his pocket. It was such a sweet moment. We just started day care with my son as well, and he likes to have a Kissing Hand before he goes in, and always “checks” it by putting it to his cheek and says, “Momma loves you” as he does it. Your books are not only sweet, but really do help make the separation easier (for him and for us!). I was excited to see your book about moving on your website since that is our life in the military world.

–Julie
I just wanted to tell you how much your book *The Kissing Hand* has impacted my relationship with my daughter. Ten years ago, I gave my five-year-old daughter this book when she had to leave me and stay with her Dad. I drew my hand in it and put a lipstick kiss in it.

I never knew how much this book helped her make it through those times without me until this year. You see, I am now deployed to Kuwait and she sent the book back to me. When I opened it up, she drew her hand on the other side of the book and put her “lipstick kiss” on it and told me, “Now that you’re away, Mom, your gonna need MY Kissing Hand!” The child I thought I had missed out on so much time with has turned into a strong, confident, and wonderful young lady. This book is now my most treasured possession and I hope to pass it along to my grandchildren one day!!

—Crystal
Dear Ms. Penn:

My name is Joanna. I have been doing an author’s study about you in my class. My favorite book is The Kissing Hand. When my grandma died, I took her hand and kissed her on the palm. I have a couple of questions for you. Do you like writing? Did you write The Kissing Hand because someone died in your family? I hope to hear from you soon!

Sincerely,
Joanna

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Dear Ms. Penn,

A few years ago, the day after my son Casey turned one, he had an accident that caused him to have severe burns on both of his tiny little hands. He was in extreme pain and the physical therapy we had to do was torture for all involved. During that time, my friend in California sent us The Kissing Hand. This book and its message came to us at just the right time, and to this day remains one of our family treasures.

–Patty
Dear Ms. Penn,

I am writing to share with you a sweet story of how your book, *The Kissing Hand*, has touched the lives of our family. My sister-in-law was recently diagnosed with terminal cancer. She has read this sweet story to her children and husband, her extended family, and countless numbers of friends, as a way to say good-bye and to express to us all her love and faith. She has purchased books for each of her children, and she will write a message for each on the inside. She also had pictures taken with each child as she kissed their hand. These will be enlarged to poster size, and each of her six kids will have one for their bedroom wall. She also has bought Kissing Hand charms to make a necklace for her children and other family members.

–Valerie

My family recently had some experiences with hospice. They used this book as an end-of-life tool as well. All I can say is Wow.
Dear Ms. Penn:

As the Clinical Social Worker for the Palliative Medicine team, I work with families of adults who are dealing with serious or life-threatening illnesses. Often these patients have young children, and we work with them to provide resources and support as they struggle with these difficult situations. Many parents find it difficult to have their young children come and visit them in the hospital, so we work hard to gift them with items that the children can bring to their parent—or the parent can give to their children while they are away from one another. This helps to strengthen the bonds of love and security, which are so precious during these times. Often a Kissing Hand is just what they need to make them feel safe again.

Last fall, our team had the opportunity to work with a young mother dying of cancer in our hospital. She had three young boys and the severity of her illness limited her interaction with them. We were able to use *The Kissing Hand* book to create a lasting memory. Our patient's friend read the story out loud, and Dad helped Mom kiss each boy's hand in turn. It was a beautiful moment for all who bore witness, including our staff.

– Kendra Micka, LCSW,
Palliative Care Services
On May 4, 2010, I gave birth to the most precious little boy, Gabriel Anthony. He was seven weeks early and suffered from a genetic disorder. Every night I read your book to him. On May 28th, I tearfully read him your story one last time and told him not to be scared and how much Mommy loved him. As I kissed his tiny head, he barely opened his eyes, smiled, and then the angels took my baby home. I miss him greatly but will always have and remember *The Kissing Hand*. I read it to him when I visit his grave. Thank you so much for this wonderful gift.

–Tiffany Christie

I have been using and promoting your book for many years. I have been in hospice care for thirty years and lecture nationally. I thought it would be lovely for you to know.

–Liz
Dear Ms. Penn:

My 42-year-old cousin, Susie, died this past February after a four-year struggle with cancer. She left behind four children, ages seven to sixteen. At her funeral, the eldest son talked about your book *The Kissing Hand* and how his mother would read it to them the night before school started. Susie’s husband told those attending the funeral that Susie would also give each of the kids a sticker to wear. Every one of the kids, no matter what age, would wear their sticker to school.

Thank you,
Cindy
Dear Audrey Penn,

I would just like to let you know that your book *The Kissing Hand* really impacted my life in such a positive way. When I was a little girl, my aunt read the book to me many times, and every time that we would part, she would always give me a kiss on the hand so that I would have it if I needed it throughout the day.

On December 13, 2000, my aunt died. It was just a week before Christmas and a month before my ninth birthday. It was brutal for me. But what got me through her death was that book. I remember looking at my hand after her death and thinking…well, I have about a hundred kisses left, and whenever I’d get sad, I’d just put my hand to my face and remember her. I got a tattoo of a finger-painted handprint with a little red heart in the middle to honor my aunt this past December for ten years without her.

So basically, thank you for creating such a strong memory that I will always have with my aunt.

—Bianca
This review is twenty years in the making. My 23-year-old daughter came home to stay with me for a few weeks, to help me deal with a cancer diagnosis. On the morning she had to leave to go back to school, she asked if I could do something with her that she had found from her childhood in her armoire. She disappeared into her room and came out with *The Kissing Hand*, the book that we used to help her start going to preschool. We tearfully read the book together and gave each other Kissing Hands to cherish while I fight this disease, knowing that her love is with me.
Audrey,

I was a mother of three beautiful little boys. I am still mother of three little boys, but sadly I lost my previous 2-1/2-year-old son who drowned in our neighbor’s landscape pond. Upon coming home from the hospital without my child, a friend later pulled a little heart sticker out of her pocket and said, “Oh! I forgot to tell you this. While I was hugging you in the hospital I pulled this sticker from your hair. I don’t know why I kept it, but for some reason I did.” As she handed me the sticker, my immediate thought was of your book, *The Kissing Hand*. I have no idea where the sticker came from or how it got in my hair that day, but I knew—I KNEW my son was trying to tell me, “Aaron loves you, Mommy! Aaron loves you!” as he slipped away from me to a place where he will never be scared again.

I want to thank you. *The Kissing Hand* was one of our favorite books, and through some miracle, it has brought me so much comfort in this tragedy. I want you to know that God used you to help me. I’ve learned many things from this tragedy and one of them is to never let your gratitude go unspoken. So, thank you for your wonderful book, for the wonderful memories I have of reading it to my children, and for bringing me comfort.
Dear Mrs. Penn,

I just wanted you to know how much *The Kissing Hand* means to my family. My father passed away from Alzheimer’s two years ago. Both my mom and I read *The Kissing Hand* to him when he wanted to be put to bed. Mom still read it to him every time she visited him in the Alzheimer’s unit. It was the last bit of communication they retained until almost the very end. They parted by kissing each other’s hands. The story and the gesture was the way they were able to share love even when he was beyond eye contact or speech. We both have copies now, and I suspect Mom reads hers as often as I read mine when we want to feel Dad’s presence again. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts!

– Lisa
Dear Audrey Penn,

*The Kissing Hand* played a huge role in growing up for me. My mom would read your book to me so often, my childhood somehow wouldn’t be the same without it. At first a kiss on the hand gave me the courage to try new things, just like Chester.

As a little kid, I went to kindergarten. Kindergarten only lasted about three hours each day, so I never really missed my mom too much. I knew I would eventually have to go to first grade, which lasted the whole day. My mom would always tell me and my twin sister, Vicki, how fast we were growing up and how much she was going to miss us when we went to school.

First grade finally came. Every day before my mom took us to school, she would take my left hand, spread my tiny fingers into a fan, lean forward, and kiss the middle of my palm. Before she left, I would take her hand in my own, unfold her large familiar fingers, lean forward, and kiss the center of her hand.

*continued*...
At first the days seemed very long, and I missed my mom a lot. But eventually I made friends and got so busy, it became easier to be away from her.

Now I’m in sixth grade. I go to school early in the morning and often don’t get home until supper time. I barely get to see my mom. But *The Kissing Hand* taught me that my mom loves and supports me no matter where I am. Knowing this, I have the courage to go to new places, meet new people, and make new friends. With the courage that built up over the years, from a small kiss on my hand, I have the courage to grow as a person and try new things.

Because of *The Kissing Hand*, the raccoon is not a symbol of mischief for me, but a symbol of love and childhood. At this point, I’m not thanking you for the magic of love. Instead I thank you for the same courage as little Chester used to leave his mother’s comforting arms, to a brand-new place full of brand-new people.

–Kate
When I was a child, I used to ask my mom if I could stay home with her just like Chester does in the book, and one day she came home with this book and read it to me. After she read it, she took my left hand and kissed my palm. Ever since, this has been our book, and finding it online sixteen years later makes me so happy, and reading it brings a tear to my eye, remembering my mother’s unconditional love for me. I would definitely recommend that every mother purchase this book and read it to their child and share a special memory that lasts a lifetime, like my mom did.
Nothing beats a warm and loving book to guide a parent towards a beautiful ritual of giving their own child a Kissing Hand to start the day.

So deep, so powerful, so beautiful.

I was soooo excited when I found this book online because twenty years ago I was doing the same thing with my four-year-old daughter. Now she has transferred it on to her children! When I saw this book, I had to get it for her. She was sooooo excited!!!!

This was a childhood favorite of mine. My mom used to read it every year before school, and we still do the Kissing Hand every once in a while. When I found out one of my high school friends was having a baby, this book immediately came to mind.

One of the best children’s books ever. I read this to my own daughter almost every night when she was little (she is now seventeen), and I saved it for her to read to her little ones one day!!!
From a grandmother of a boy with autism:

I read *The Kissing Hand* and its follow up, *A Pocket Full of Kisses*, with Junior. It quickly became a favorite read. He also wanted a Kissing Hand. Once I filled his hand with kisses, he insisted on filling mine. When he came home from school, he would tell me if he was low on kisses. This was a highlight for me. Touch does not come easy to Junior. Neither do great shows of affection. It is just part of his autism. That he wanted kisses on his palm thrilled me. That he wanted to give them—well, I don’t have words to fully express my joy. All from this wonderful story of a mother’s love. We continue to read this book together. It is one of his frequent requests.

From the boy:

I love this story. It told me about the Kissing Hand. Now I don’t have to miss my grandma so much. I have kisses in my hand. I really like the pictures. I like the raccoon. It wears a mask like a bandit. I thought it was because it will steal your food. But I read about them and maybe it is to help them see. Did you know a raccoon can run so fast at 15 miles per hour? Did you know they like to go in water? They examine things they find in the water. Their hands have fingers. That is what makes it so good at stealing food. Like the book says, they stay up at nighttime. I wonder if Chester closes his hand to keep the kisses in? I do at first, but when they are stuck, I open my hand.
Dear Audrey Penn,

I wrote you about twelve years ago when my little redhead was going into kindergarten. Now that kid who I love so much is going off to college next year and I need a book just for me!!

–Connie

Hello Mrs. Penn,

I just want to say that I LOVED *The Kissing Hand* as a child; it made me cry. I still feel like tearing up when I reread it for nostalgic purposes, and I’m already in high school! Please continue to write! I hope that future generations will continue to be inspired by your work for years to come!

Sincerely,
Sierra

One of my absolute favorite books. My son, who is four, has been asking me to read it every night since he was about two. We love Chester! The stickers are a good idea, too. We put one on at the beginning of the preschool and school year and whenever we are having a hard time separating for the day. Cute reminder that the love is still there!
Dear Ms. Penn,

I have two daughters ages 9 and 6 who have been helped by *The Kissing Hand* in so many ways. I just sent my older daughter to sleep-away camp for the first time and gave her a “kissing letter” inspired by your story if she needed any kisses from home. My younger daughter may not have ever attended school had it not been for *The Kissing Hand* (which she held to her cheek for the first month of school when she was two). So, I thank you for your wonderful story, which has been used and reused in our family over the years.

–Jen

Love this book. I think it helps parents as much as it does their children!

This will be an heirloom book for my other child as well as my grandchildren.

My grown children still consider this one of their favorites.
Throughout the years all of my children have been read or have read on their own this book. It is a book that has been a “staple” in our home. I get the pleasure of now reading it to my littlest one, like a handed-down tradition.

Get ready for the tugging of the heartstrings! The first time my husband read this to our daughter, he came out of her room a little teary-eyed. He gave me the, “Why didn’t you warn me??!”

Oh my gosh, this is the best book to read to little kids because they will do the Kissing Hand forever. My mother read this to me as long as I can remember, I guess since I was six, and we have been doing the Kissing Hand ever since and I’m thirteen years of age. HAHA! I love this book, it is great!

MY BIG BAD MARINE

My son is a United States Marine, stationed in Okinawa. I am sending him this book for Christmas.
I am ten and love this book! My mom used to read this to me all the time, and I loved it so much, it is one of my favorite books!!!! I would buy it but I don’t have enough money on my gift card!!!!!!!!!(

This is one of my favorite children’s books, and yet I found it appropriate for an adult that I love very much as well. The issue seems to be that with work, family responsibilities, and life in general, we just do not get to see each other enough or spend as much time with each other as we would like. For our first anniversary, I gave my Chris a copy of *The Kissing Hand* and gave him a kiss in the palm of his left hand. Now he takes me with him wherever he goes! Children’s books can really get adult feelings across in a special way.

As a child I had horrible separation anxiety. My mom said I was always glued to her side. Starting school was impossible. My mom read me this book. From the young age of four till I was in high school, I made mom kiss both my hands. I would hold onto those kisses so hard my hands would be white as snow.
Dear Audrey,

Thank you for the "kissing Autry Hand" you gave me. I also thank you for letting me play in the "miracle" yard. I love you, Frances.
Authors are More Fabulous Than Movie Stars, Part II

There is nothing like a visit from a great author to excite kids about books. Audrey is one of the best speakers I’ve heard; she entertains, instructs, and encourages reading and a love of books in their lives. Audrey has always said that the most important thing about her books is that she wants young readers to feel like they have found a friend. Clearly, from the letters below, kids feel they have found a friend in the books and in Audrey.

Dear Audrey,

Thank you for The Kissing Hand book that you gave me. I also wanted to thank you for letting me play the part of Sophie in The Miracle Jar. I had fun doing that also.

Love,
Frances
From a teacher:

Dear Ms. Penn,

Both my first and second graders could not have been more excited if Hannah Montana showed up at our school! I never imagined the star power you have among children who know your books and sing the Chester Song on a regular basis. I met you years ago and I share what I remember of your presentation with my new students each year, the story about your inspiration for *The Kissing Hand*. The big book will be the first one I share next September.

From the kids:

Dear Mrs. Penn,

I love your stories. They are so cool, I want you to write back to me. Here’s my phone number: ***-****. Call me, I’m the one in the overalls and pink turtleneck. I live at **************.

Sincerely,
Kimi

PS. I’m going to be an author.
Dear Audrey Penn,

Thank you for coming to our school. I like the writing of your books very, very much. Please continue to write for the rest of your life.

Love,
Rachel

THANK YOU
To: Audrey Penn
From: Kendall

Thank you for coming to our school and talking about your books. If you come again, bring free books.

Dear Ms. Penn:

Hi again, I loved The Kissing Hand! I loved how you showed expression. Do you have any hobbies you like? My favorite hobby is reading. Are you going to write another book? I really enjoyed your books. It was nice knowing you.

Your fan,
James
Dear Mrs. Audrey Penn,

I enjoyed your speech very much. You are the funniest I have ever seen. I like to read your stories because they tell me a lesson and because you really experienced them. Most people say I’m a pretty good writer myself. I’m planning to be a writer when I grow up. Have you ever written a story from scratch? Do you think of stories or do you write things that you really see happening? Hope you come again.

Sincerely,
Swathi

Dear Audrey Penn,

The titles you made up are great titles. Thank you for spending time with us and telling us how you write your books. You are funny, you may be the funniest person in the whole universe. I didn’t know you until now but for the first day, you are very funny and nice.

I want to buy some of your books because they are sooooo good. I think you should get more money for your books because your books are amazing. Your illustrator draws great pictures. Good-bye Audrey! See ya! And...THANK YOU!

Sincerely,
Lanny
Dear Ms. Penn,

You were a fantastic guest to me. It was a quick presentation. Everything you said was totally amazing. Your presentation was like five minutes off our recess. Your story about _The Kissing Hand_ was a wonderful story that was the best story I ever heard. The rest of the stories are too. I think all of the people you sold your book to will enjoy it forever and ever. Ms. Penn, you will always be my favorite author.
THANK YOU

Chester Raccoon and The Big Bad Bully
Dear Audrey Penn,

I don’t know how to express my thanks to you for writing _Chester and the Acorn Full of Memories_. This Saturday we had a boy in our community die in a car accident. He would have been eleven this week. I teach at the school he attended. My daughters go there, too. We were all struggling with the loss. It was also the first day of our book fair. I saw Chester’s sweet face and picked up the book. As I started to read, I started to cry. I shared it with the librarian. She shared it with the Principal. And she shared it with a group of teary faced fifth graders. They cried and remembered and found a way to cope. I feel you were truly inspired to write that book, and we were blessed to have it when we needed it. Thank you!

–Jackie Loertscher
Dear Mrs. Penn,

Hi, this is Meghan, the one who asked you about why did you name the book A.D.D. not B.A.D. I know why, don’t tell me again. I love your books. You are a good book teller and also a good person. I love the way you come up with this stuff. Mrs. Penn, can you give advice please? Can you visit my school or my class? My class loves you.

Sincerely,
Meghan

From Barrow County News

Stephanie Morgan was a much-loved teacher at Statham Elementary School for over twenty years, and first grader, Alexis P, remembers all the great times she and her classmates shared with Ms. Morgan.

In memory of Ms. Morgan, Alexis and her mom donated a wonderful book to the SES media center, Chester Raccoon and the Acorn Full of Memories, by Audrey Penn. Just as Alexis and the entire Statham family had to face the loss of Ms. Morgan, many young children must face the loss of a loved one. Chester Raccoon and the Acorn Full of Memories will help children understand the positive effects of “making memories” and learn how to gain comfort and cheer in the aftermath of death. It is a welcome addition to the media center’s collection at Statham.
Dear Mrs. Penn,

I wanted to thank you for sharing your gift and inspiration for the love of books and writing with us all. Our family is currently undergoing a sensitive situation where my husband had to exit the country due to adjusting his immigration status. The absence of his presence has impacted my son tremendously. Ever since reading *A Kiss Goodbye* he has come to comfort with the situation. The reassurance this book translates to children that we can all keep a little memory until it all gets better, has uplifted his spirit. As a mother, I know how many times you cannot translate a situation such as ours to children where they will find understanding. Our job is to help them cope with their feelings, and from the bottom of my heart I truly thank you for this beautiful story. We read it every night, and before we got to sleep, he gets his Kissing Hand.

With all heartfelt appreciation,

Vanessa
Dear Mrs. Penn,

I like your books because they make me happy. The book I like best is The Big Bad Bully. I also like The Kissing Hand. I like this book because it’s about an animal who loves its mom. I love this book because it makes me love my mom, because she is very nice and very kind. Every time I go to school, she puts a bow in my hair and it looks very nice in my hair.

Yours truly,
Alayna

DEAR AUDREY,

Hi, I am 6 years old. My favorite book was A Kiss Goodbye. Are you writing any new books and what will they be about? Maybe you should write a book about cats. And I have two cats. Their names are Daffy and Luna.

Sincerely,
Evelyn

Dear Audrey Penn,

I have never read one of your books before. But then I read Mystery at Blackbeard’s Cove. I loved it. I want to read more books.

Sincerely,
DeAndre
We bought *Chester Raccoon and the Acorn Full of Memories* because it was by *The Kissing Hand* author. It’s a great book, but please be prepared to talk with your little one about death. We had the unfortunate circumstances to have to share with our 3-year-old son about death about a year ago, and this book would have been a nice way to work through it. It was a book that had me bawling, but very good.

Hi Ms. Penn,

I met you last week at the school you visited. I had mentioned to you that my daughter had never taken a liking to reading like I had and it was upsetting to me.

My daughter seemed VERY interested in the *Mystery at Blackbeard’s Cove* series, so I ordered it online because I didn’t want to lose her interest or momentum.

I wanted to share that this is the FIRST TIME EVER IN HER LIFE that she is asking to keep reading, that I can tell she is following along as I am reading, that she is thinking about the book after we are done reading, and she is enjoying the story. I could cry just thinking about it.

Now... we must plan a trip to Ocracoke!

–Kelly
Dear, Audrey Penn,

we appreciate that you donated the books to our library & am glad they are still good people in the world.

Sincerely,

John
Dear Audrey Penn,

We appreciate that you donated the books to our library. I am glad there are still good people in the world.

Sincerely,
John

I was told to bring my favorite childhood book to my friend’s baby shower. Growing up, I loved this one so I purchased it for her.

I love all of Audrey Penn’s books. They have such wonderful life lessons portrayed in ways little ones can understand and relate to. I purchased this book for my cousin’s great granddaughter, and I know they will enjoy it. The illustrations are beautiful.
I purchased this book for my newborn granddaughter. I used to read this book to my daughter, her mother, when she was a child. It is a wonderful story about a mother’s love for her child when the child is afraid to begin a new chapter of his or her life without a parent being with them all the time. When the baby raccoon is afraid to start school, the mother raccoon tells him a story about how much she loves him and will always be with him. When he becomes afraid, all he has to do is open his hand and his mother’s kiss will be in his palm. An easy and heartwarming story.

I read this book to my son when he was a child and loved it. Now I buy it for every pregnant friend or relative. It’s my signature gift.

My 3-year-old daughter brought this book from school. I was so touched by the story that I decided to research the book online. No other book at school measures up to *The Kissing Hand*; she always asks for it, and we both enjoy reading it. I will definitely recommend this book to all the mothers with a toddler. Might be my Christmas gift this year.
Dear Audrey Penn,

My sister gave me The Kissing Hand as I was returning to work after having my son, and this book helped me go back to work knowing this sweet baby is always in my heart. Thank you for helping me make it through the day while missing my son. Then I had another baby boy, and it was as if you were writing for my life.

I cry as I write this because you have hit on just about every topic that has impacted my life and helped me through, as well as help my children adjust.

–Shannon

One of the best children’s books ever written. I love this book! I bought it for my fifteen-year-old granddaughter when she was small; it was her favorite. I bought the whole package for my new granddaughter.

This seemed like a fitting end to this collection of letters. What better testament than a mother saying that Audrey’s books helped her and her children with every topic impacting her life.
Acknowledgments

We would like to thank all the booksellers, librarians, teachers, and others who put this special book into the hands of the people who needed it. I hope you have found special satisfaction in reading these accounts, which confirm books really do change lives and bring happiness to readers young and old.

We would like to thank all the people who wrote a letter, email, or online review sharing your personal stories, whether included here or not. They have all been very meaningful to Audrey and her family, and inspiring to me and the other publishing professionals who have worked on The Kissing Hand and the other Chester Raccoon books over the years.

And on a personal note, I wish to send a thank you to Audrey Penn for the honor of working on these special books, and the years of laughs, adventures, and a commitment to enrich children’s lives through literature. And in this particular instance, thank you for allowing me to invade your home to root through 25 years of letters and artwork.

Thank you to Pierre Dery for all your help and offering me a glass of wine when I need it the most.