

Dear Shel Silverstein,

When I was still very young, perhaps seven or eight years old, I was introduced to your book *The Giving Tree* by my older sister, who had received it as a birthday present. While simple in style and minimal in illustration, I was struck by the strange combination of sorrow and joy it inspired in me. Try as I might, I could not seem to pin down exactly what could inspire such an emotion in my eight-year-old self. I finally decided it must have been the selflessness of the tree; how could the boy have been so cold and thoughtless towards the tree, which had always protected him and loved him unendingly in spite of his constant neediness? Because of your book, I learned at a very young age the value of friendship, and how it can endure through adversity. A true friend, like the Giving Tree, will always forgive you for your shortcomings. This rationalization sufficed at such a young age, and so I settled on my conclusion and forgot all about "The Giving Tree."

When I turned thirteen and began the awkward transition from middle school to high school, I found myself drawn once again to your book. Looking at the tree from a new perspective, I saw my own parents and myself as the little boy. Throughout all of the boy's trials and tribulations, and in spite of his wants and needs, the tree is willing to give every last piece of herself to make him happy. In this sense, I saw my parents and their unconditional love for me despite my mistakes and personal failures, and found solace in the fact that they would continue to stand by me regardless of the path I chose in life.

Just days ago, I discovered the now tattered copy of *The Giving Tree* under my coffee table, its once vivid green cover now discolored from age and neglect. I turned to the first page to find the text was fading, but still legible, and was greeted with a familiar line: "Once there was a tree, and she loved a little boy". While I was expecting little more than fleeting nostalgia, I suddenly began to well up with tears as I turned the pages of your book one by one. I watched the young boy transition through childhood into adolescence, wishing I could beg him to be more appreciative of the Giving Tree and her unconditional love.

With the prospect of college now looming on the horizon, I recognize that while my parents will always be a continuing source of support, I will soon be on my own in this world. So, exactly who is the Giving Tree now? Who is it that will protect me from the unknown, and stand by me through my sadness, my anxiety, and my joy, in a world where unconditional love is nearly impossible to come by? Could it be some higher power, Mr. Silverstein? When I am old, will the Giving Tree and all her infinite love still exist somewhere in my heart? I am certainly hopeful for the future and all the wonders it has to offer, and I can only imagine what *The Giving Tree* will have to teach me in years to come.

Sincerely,
Marcus Chiaretto