

Dear Bookseller,

Long, long ago, I was a single woman living in a single bedroom with a single cat. We were (mostly) content when I happened to meet a handsome man on vacation in New Orleans. The man and I bonded over children's books and funk music, and danced the night away. I imagined I'd never hear from this man again, but I found a letter from him—yes, a real letter, on paper and everything!—waiting for me when I arrived home.

Reader, I married him.

Scratch that, I married him and his two young daughters from his first marriage. I went from a single woman living in a single bedroom with a single cat to a stepmother living in a house with a husband and two children (and a cat). As I was a stepkid myself, I thought this would be a piece of cake (hahaha). But anyone who has ever parented children knows that it's a tough job. And being a step-parent is its own exquisite challenge. You're walking into an existing culture with its own rules and customs. Even the most amazing, lovable kids remain, understandably, wary of you. Who are you, anyway? What's with that scratchy cat? Will you take their dad or mom away? Will you send them away? Their fear is real.

Mine was, too. I had no experience being a parent. I didn't know how to cook. I didn't know how to play. I didn't know how to cut the kiwis right—a tragedy of epic proportions according to my then six-year-old stepdaughter, Jessie.

But I knew stories, lots of them. When I wasn't reading to the kids, I was giving them books they could read themselves. Stories were the most powerful tool I had to bond with these two beautiful girls.

Years later, I was diagnosed with cancer. My treatment was long and arduous and so, so boring. I could barely read or write anything. But there was this one half-finished novel I had in my computer. When I was feeling well enough, I revisited the story. I stripped it back to the source of its inspiration, which were my own experiences as a stepkid and my often clumsy attempts to get to know my two stepdaughters.

*Me and Ms. Too* is that story, the book I wish I'd had to read to my girls all those years ago. The book born out of the love I have for them and my gratitude for the family we've made together.

One of my favorite pieces of art in my house is a study of various kiwis that Jessie, now a professional designer, drew in college. It reminds me of all the ways a family can be made.

I hope *Me and Ms. Too*, with its spectacular, energetic, big-hearted art by Dung Ho, does this for your family, or a family you love.

Thanks for reading and sharing,

Laura Ruby