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**To: Mr. Neil Simon**

It is not easy opening closed doors. Closed doors keep the world from getting in. I learned this from years of having my door shut. I did not want to let anyone in, especially my family. I was too afraid. “Lost in Yonkers,” by Neil Simon, depicted a family whose closed doors made it difficult for them to overcome inner conflicts. “Lost in Yonkers” gave me the courage to look through the keyhole; to have my door be opened for once.

When I was assigned to read “Lost in Yonkers” as a part of my English curriculum, I immediately connected with Grandma Kurnitz. I saw myself in her. Her running away from her home country during World War II to escape the Jewish genocide and the death of her husband and children made her cold. Similar to Grandma Kurnitz, my having experienced abuse left me angry and, at times, ashamed. I thought that the only way to overcome my inner turmoil was to shut the world out; I had to close my door.

While reading “Lost in Yonkers,” I recognized how Grandma Kurnitz’s inner conflict crippled her children. I was surprised to see how difficult it was for Grandma Kurnitz to open her doors to her family. I recognized how her effort to isolate herself made her hostile in return. She became misunderstood. She became vile. I often asked myself if that was me. Was I just as cruel as well?

At a young age, I closed myself off from my family. My father was a womanizer who left my mother and me when I was two years old. I did not want to have anything to do with him. He never acknowledged me as his child. In return, I would not allow myself to accept him as my father. Furthermore, my mother has always blamed me for him leaving. She held me responsible for all of the adversities that she had to overcome as a Vietnamese refugee.

My mother came to the United States in 1989. She had nothing. When my father left her, he took everything. My mother struggled to support me. She worked ten hours a day threading needles and hemming pants. She blamed me for everything. Eventually, I blamed myself too.

My mother entered a stage of manic depression. She was very abrasive and violent. As a child, I suffered from domestic abuse. Each year brought on new defense mechanisms. At my lowest point, I started to hurt myself.

I felt ashamed for having hurt my mother. I did not want for her to be disappointed with me; angry at me for having her husband leave her and having to

support a child alone. Still today, there are bruises from my past. Stigmas left on my skin in the many forms of regret.

My mother doesn't hurt me anymore. At times, I feel that my parameters are the source of my struggles. My mother wants to bridge a relationship with me. But having come from a history of violence, I could not bring myself to accept her. I could not bring myself to respect her, much less love her.

"Lost in Yonkers" gave me the courage to finally confront my mother and open my door. I told her how angry I was at her for hurting me in the times that she felt vulnerable and alone. I apologized for keeping her away. I told her how afraid I was of letting her into my life; of being abused again. It was very difficult for me to tell her that I was sorry.

Like Grandma Kurnitz, I closed my door because I was scared to let my family know that I was crippled inside. I closed my door to hide myself. I did not want anyone to know that I was ashamed of myself. I did not want anyone to know that I grieved because of my circumstances. I did not want anyone to know that I cried.

It is all over now. Much like when Grandma Kurnitz confronted her family about her situation, all that is left is the debris of what once was. Grandma Kurnitz taught me that being strong does not mean being cold. She taught me that overcoming pain is not running away from it. I am glad that she did. My mother told me that she loved me the other day. Guess what? I told her I loved her too.

Thank you Mr. Simon.

*Growing up in the inner-city, kids like me are not expected to succeed in life. As a result, I have gained a deep appreciation for and strive to pursue as many academic opportunities as I can. When I submitted my reflection on "Lost In Yonkers" by Neil Simon to the California Center for the Book, Letters About Literature, I had only one goal in mind: to tell my story. As I now understand, this is only the beginning. I hope, with time, to grow into a more mature individual and be the first in my family to go to college.*