ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

PICTURE BOOKS

Just Leave Me Alone
Nakesha Lowe
Irene Olds, illustrator
AuthorHouse
978-1-4567-2641-6
Two Stars (out of Five)

Children need independence in order to grow up with healthy self-esteem and good decision-making abilities. Parents who smother their children with overly strict rules and arbitrary punishments, who do things for them that the children could do on their own, who dismiss their children's desire for autonomy and individual identity are doing them a grave disservice.

Just Leave Me Alone depicts an anthropomorphic family of mice with an overbearing mother and a boy who craves independence. The drawings by Irene Olds portray the mice with charming big ears, mops of hair, and long, expressive tails.

The story is told as a message from the boy to his mother, explaining how he feels about her smothering treatment of him. "You always say no to everything. You taught me the difference between right and wrong. Now you need to trust me." He asks her to let him pack his own lunch, to explain why he is punished, to allow him some privacy, and not to kiss him in front of his friends.

While stating his case, the boy is careful of his mother's feelings, acknowledging that it might be hard for her to hear his statements, and that he knows that her behavior arises out of her love for him.

This is Nakesha Lowe's second book; her first, *It's All About Me*, is about dealing with the arrival of a new baby. In this new volume, she draws on her experience as a child of a domineering mother, and as a mother who is sometimes too strict with her own children. The book is written for kids, but the message is aimed at parents, warning them that denying children independence can hurt the children and damage the parent-child relationship.

Although Lowe writes in an authentic voice, using words that sound like they could really come from a child, her attempts at rhymes are inconsistent and feel awkward.

The book's largest flaw is that it has no resolution. The boy mouse expresses his feelings to his mother and makes his requests, but the reader never sees what happens next. It would

have been very helpful if Lowe had portrayed the mother's response, and allowed readers the satisfaction of knowing whether the mother understands the boy's frustrations and makes an effort to give her son the independence he needs. Such closure would have been encouraging to children who are contemplating such a conversation with their parents, and would have illustrated for adults the positive benefits that can come from such an approach to parenting.

Just Leave Me Alone offers an important message to families.

Karen McCarthy