

Letters About Literature 2013

Level I Illinois Winner & National Honor

Dear Mr. Mosher,

Your book, *A Mother's Ordeal: One Woman's Fight Against China's One-Child Policy*, touches me at the core of my being. It helps me understand all that my Birth Mom suffered and endured to give me the gift of life. Everyone knows me as Rose, but on the other side of the world, I am known as Fu Yuanhong. Fu means good fortune and Yuanhong means everlasting rainbow. In the Year of the Snake, I was born in the Jiangxi Province in China, on March 11th, 2001. I believe, in my heart, that when my Birth Mom named me, Yuanhong – Everlasting Rainbow, she was making a promise to me. She was saying, "I love you; even though we will be separated across a great ocean and may never see each other, my love for you is everlasting." If my Birth Mom had been forced to have an IUD inserted or been sterilized, I would never have been conceived. If she had been dragged to an abortion clinic against her will, I would never have been born. This realization is shocking and deeply disturbing. My Birth Mom had to overcome tremendous adversity to give me the gift of life, when outside forces were urging her to destroy my life. My Birth Mom did something very courageous when she was forced to give me up. She placed me by a government building, silently, but her actions spoke volumes. Her bold actions screamed: "What right do you have to separate a mother from her child? Now, look at my daughter; how can you not value this life?!" When I was found, I was brought to an orphanage for one day, and then placed in a foster family until I could be adopted. On January 27, 2002 at the age of ten and a half months, I was adopted and then traveled to the United States. I come from two very different worlds.

My life is truly an adventure and your book is a source of inspiration. It helps me realize the preciousness of life. I have wonderful parents and go to the best school in the world; I dream of being an author. If I had remained in the rural areas of the Jiangxi Province, I would be spending my life working in the rice fields, and probably would not be receiving very much education. Some people might point out that due to this policy, my life is better, now. What about all the baby girls who have been aborted, abandoned and are still in orphanages? How can I ignore all these injustices and close my eyes to all the human suffering and simply say, "Well, my life is better?!" There is a wise saying that states, "The greatest gift God has given us is life, and the greatest gift we give God is what we do with our life." Your book clearly reveals how China's One-Child Policy is a complete violation of God's laws for it destroys human life and devalues females. Just like my name, Yuanhong – which means Everlasting Rainbow, God found a way to take my sad tragic story and turn it into a rainbow of hope and promise. Our Creator has a special plan for me, so I will serve God with my whole heart and soul.

Sincerely,
Rose Yuanhong Benas
Naperville, Illinois

Letters About Literature 2013 Level II Illinois Winner

Dear Shermain Joy Lipao,

My dad was diagnosed with ALS, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease, early June. It was devastating finding out that my father had a disease that could kill him eventually. Your poem "Hope Behind The Shadows Of Pain" is a poem that everyone can relate to, especially me. I love how the poem can fit into my situation with my father's disease. This piece of poetry taught me that I wasn't the only one out there that had their moment like this. It taught me that I wasn't alone. Other people have gone through similar stages. The last stanza has taught me to never lose faith or hope, "But no matter what caused their pains They move forward as they wipe their tears For in every beat of a lonely heart There is hope that lights the path."

Our family had no idea what to do except cry, we never had anything like this happen to us. For me personally, I thought the world was ending. The line, "Their smiles turned into sobs," explains my experience through this challenging time. Because that's what I did, I'd go to school with a smile on my face as if nothing was wrong and then go home afterwards and cry my eyes out. I knew that I couldn't just give up, because my mom needs me and my sister to help out with my dad. People don't know how hard it is to have your peers come up to you saying "Hey, someone told me that your dad only has 3 to 4 more years to live." I just want to yell at them and say, "You're not his doctor!"

The thing that surprised me in the poem, "Hope Behind The Shadows Of Pain", was how well it fit my life and the situation I am in today. This poem is meaningful to me because it has described and helped me through the most hardest challenge I will probably ever go through. "Hope Behind The Shadows Of Pain" has helped me and is still helping to battle through this experience. There's a statement at the end of the poem, "There is hope that lights the path." That runs throughout my mind every single day. Knowing that there is always hope, helps me get through my day, it helps me not go give up. Thank you for taking the time out of your day to read my letter. Have a great day.

Sincerely,
Abigail Rockford
Springfield, Illinois

Letters About Literature 2013

Level III Illinois Winner & National Winner

Dear Laura Ruby,

A curious question can lead to answers that are deeper than anyone might realize. “Would you rather have the power of invisibility or the power to fly?” This question inspired your novel, *The Wall and the Wing*, but it also inspired me. Instantly I know what my original answer would be. I would want nothing more than to slip through the cracks in the world and slink, undetected, away from prying eyes (or really, any eyes at all.) While it’s true that I am a little afraid of heights, there’s something I used to fear even more; judgment.

In your book, those who don’t have the ability to fly are labeled as leadfoots, social outcasts who are quite literally weighed down to Earth while watching everybody else soar high above them. I was remarkably similar to a leadfoot when, in seventh grade, I was diagnosed with the spinal disease called Kyphosis. While it didn’t pose me any serious medical threat, I was forced to wear a back brace – a big honking piece of outlandish plastic that encased me like a shell. While it was keeping me from being a hunchback, that brace may as well have been a million pounds. I went from trying on outfit after outfit, wearing different dresses and skirts, to only wearing baggy sweat pants and extra large T-shirts because that was the only thing that would conceal my brace. Not only was there the physical discomfort of the brace, but I became horrendously self-conscious, like a turtle who always retreats inside its shell. But the absolute worst thing of all about my brace was being in the presence of other kids at school. I watched all of my friends have great new experiences and create long lasting friendships, becoming popular and even beginning to date. From my own perspective, it felt as if I were standing miles below a cloudless blue sky, watching the people who I longed to be with soar above me. While I still laughed and smiled with them, pretending to be enjoying myself, there was always a nagging part of me, reminding me that we weren’t the same. I was weighed down, coated in a layer of plastic. They were free.

As I continued reading, getting to know Gurl and Bug, I really felt as if they were my friends, because I could relate to their emotions of being useless and isolated. As Gurl developed her invisibility and Bug had his odd adventures, I felt motivated to do something to change myself. Unfortunately, I lacked the skill to spontaneously develop superpowers, so I did the next best thing and started making friends. While I was too shy to speak to the more popular kids in my class, I approached those who, like me, were more socially outcast. Not only did I make friends, but I started to stop feeling so sorry for myself.

When I finally closed your book, something strange occurred. I realized that while I had been inside the pages, I hadn’t focused on how I looked or what others thought of me with my brace on. I had been so immersed inside, enjoying myself with the characters, it simply hadn’t mattered. That realization led me to another. It wasn’t the other people around me who had made me feel like a leadfoot. I had excluded and isolated myself, feeling worthless, although my friends were perfectly accepting of my brace. I missed out on opportunities and maybe I couldn’t wear the clothes I wanted, but that didn’t have to keep me from having fun and making great new friends. At first I’d been hostile to my old friends and hadn’t accepted any new ones because I was worried that I would fail, when I hadn’t even tried in the first place.

My perspective shifted violently after reading this book, and while it’s true that there were other factors that made me realize that I was the one weighing down myself, reading about the characters’ experiences showed me that if you have a goal, you should always strive for it, no matter how impossible.

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Differences are never negative – diversity is what makes the world worth living in. While my situation wasn't positive, I could still make the best out of my middle school years. Our own experiences shape our lives, whether they are positive or negative, and it doesn't matter if you're wearing a huge plastic back brace or not as long as you're having a good time and learning a little about life. What matters is that you live, learn, and love as much of life as you can, and your book helped me to understand that truth. "Would you rather have the power of invisibility or the power to fly?" My answer is still the same as before. I would choose invisibility, but not for the same reasons. I would choose invisibility so I could sneak more chocolate chip cookies without getting caught.

Sincerely,
Emily Waller
Hudson, Illinois