

LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE

MASSACHUSETTS LEVEL II HONORABLE MENTION 2009

Dear Ms. Kadohata,

When I was six-years-old, my mom was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. I wasn't really sure how I should handle this; should I cry, should I scream, should I seclude myself from all of my other friends? I chose to shut up and pretend that nothing was happening. I, for some strange reason, felt like I was weird because my mom had cancer. For the remaining year of her life, I went on like nothing was different than it was before. It has been six years since she died, and now I am 13. I recently read *Kira-Kira*. I had no idea what the book would be about. I had heard about it from a friend and decided to pick it up. When I got to the part when Lynn becomes ill, I thought, "Oh no, I can't handle this right now." Later I decided that it might be good for me to see how another child may deal with a situation similar to mine.

As the story progressed and Lynn's ill periods became more frequent and serious, I noticed that Lynn realized that it was her job to make her sister's life more bearable. At first I thought that this was natural and would be the expected thing that a child would do, but then I remembered how I dealt with my own mother's illness. I pretended that it wasn't happening, that one day she would just get better, so it wasn't that big of a deal. I would give anything for the chance to turn back time and be more like Katie. I was sort of disappointed with myself after realizing this, and I thought about it for a long time and thought that I could always abandon the book and protect myself from my own feelings as I have been doing for the last seven years of my life. No, I told myself, I have to finish this.

When I finally got to the end of the book and Lynn was sick in bed on New Year's Eve, I knew that something was coming. When Katie said that she was going to watch the sunrise, I was thinking, "No, don't go, you should stay with Lynn!" but she couldn't hear me, so she went anyway. Throughout the entire story I was comparing myself to Katie, noticing our differences, but now, for the first time, I could really relate to her and our situations met at a common point; she felt that it was her fault that Lynn died, that it was because she wasn't right at her side. This was exactly how I felt when my mother died, when I wasn't right there by her side. I had been sitting in my friend's car watching a movie, and afterwards I thought that this was such a meaningless activity that I should be ashamed of it. I eventually realized that it wasn't my fault that she died, and that she would rather have had me out having fun.

Thank you, Ms. Kadohata, for writing *Kira-Kira*. I now realize that children don't all act the same. I also learned that the way I handled my mom's illness and death is nothing for me to regret. *Kira-Kira* was a great tool for me to use to build my strength and deal with my sadness. I will cherish this book forever and never forget the lessons it taught me.

Sincerely,

Sam

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