

Massachusetts Letters About Literature Honors, Level III | 2011

Dear Laurie Halse Anderson:

I have read your novel, *Speak*, and I would like to tell you how I related to the book. In some ways I am a lot like Melinda. I have had some traumatic events in my life. I feel like the book "spoke" to me (pun intended).

I have had a lot of trouble in my childhood. My parents divorced when I was an infant. My mother had custody of me and my twin brother for a few years. My father never was able to cope with having to take care of a set of twins part time. When I was five, I started getting migraines so badly that I would be rolling on the floor crying, and sometimes it would make me nauseous and I would throw up. If I recall correctly, the Department of Social Services was in my life by the time I was five. My parents were always fighting. Then, my brother set the attic on fire. My brother and I were around seven at the time of the fire. This was shortly after my Nana (on my mom's side of the family) passed away. My mother started smoking, so I got second-hand exposure to cigarette smoke every day for a couple of years. When I was eight, I contracted Kawasaki disease. That almost killed me. By the time I was ten, I was going to doctors for my weight. At that time I was a very tiny girl. I weighed somewhere between fifty-five and sixty-five pounds. I was (and still am) suffering from ADHD and depression. Soon after my eleventh birthday, I learned that I had a double groin hernia and needed to have an operation to have it fixed. I still have the scars, three years later. My mother abandoned me three years ago, and in the last six months there was a 51-A filed on my father.

I have been through roughly sixteen placements in five years because of the Department of Social Services and my Father. This was the reason I never fit in anywhere no matter what school I went to. I was always left out. I did not grow up like a child who lived with one or both parents. I always had someone breathing down my neck for one reason or another.

I was an outcast like Melinda. I never belonged to a clique. I am a loner. Kids never understood what it is like to be a ward of the state, or what it is like when my mother runs down to Florida with her fiancée. They do not think about how my home life is, they only think about themselves and if associating with me is good or bad for their reputation. If they decide that you aren't worth their time they will totally ignore you.

I have always felt alone. I can relate to how Melinda feels after the rape because she had no one to talk to. I have learned that if I tell something to someone then it will go from one person to another and never stop. For that reason, when I have a problem, I don't go to someone. I go to a Journal that I keep under lock and key. If I got too stressed, I would through myself into a good book or my school work.

Now, I am fourteen and a freshman at Minuteman Career and Technical High School. I am taking a foreign language.

I would like to thank you for helping me to understand that life goes on after a traumatic event, no matter what happens to me. You helped me to change the way I think about therapists. I used to hate them because I had been to so many and they all said the same thing over and over. Now I am starting to think that if I used my therapy time better I might start to feel better about not only myself but my home life as well. I want to thank you, Laurie Halse Anderson. You have had a massive effect on my life.

Now I know that I have told you a lot of deep things about me and I hope that you appreciate how much time and willpower it took me to sit down and relive all of these memories as I write about them. I really hope that you also understand just how much I enjoyed your book. That moment I picked up your book I had a feeling that I would learn a very important lesson from it.

Sincerely,

Colleen

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