

Massachusetts Letters About Literature 2016  
Massachusetts Center for the Book  
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Level I Honors Award

Dear R.J. Palacio,

I remember sitting in my 7-year-old brother's room, my mom reading Wonder to us for the very first time. I was only 9-years-old, but I remember looking forward to reading it every day. I may not have understood the book as thoroughly as I did when I read it a few weeks ago, at age 12, but I loved it just as much. Out of the blue a few weeks ago I had a sudden craving for Wonder. Sure, I wanted to read it because it's a wonderful book that I love to revisit, but there was more to the story. Wonder helped me appreciate what I have, and helped inspire me in what has been a tough time, even though it's nowhere near as tough as Auggie's whole life was.

Last year I found out that I had something called alopecia areata. It makes your hair fall out, and it is an autoimmune disorder. Most people don't lose all of their hair, but I did. The first year was hard – it was all new to me and I felt very sad or afraid sometimes. Even now, a year later, I get upset about it. A few weeks ago, my mom had to go to a bookstore to buy Wonder because I wanted to read it again so badly. Wonder really inspired me. The way that Auggie dealt with things, even little moments like going to the store or taking his dog for a walk throughout the book made me feel really brave. At least I don't have to worry about those kinds of problems because I can just throw on a hat or a wide headband. If Auggie could have so much courage, so can I. The part when Auggie goes to school for the first time in fifth grade even though he didn't want to really made me feel encouraged. I really felt like I understood how Auggie was feeling. He had to make a difficult decision that would help him in the future, and I have had to do that as well. Now, whenever I am having trouble putting on my wig, or I just don't feel like having to go to school without my hair up in a ponytail like most of the other girls, I just stick through it even though I don't feel like it, because Auggie would stick through it too. Reading Wonder made me feel lucky because even if I had to wear a wig to school every day, it would never be as hard as what Auggie has to do at school every day. Speaking of school, I am so glad that everything worked out in the end for Auggie, but the way that people treated him in the beginning made me really appreciate the way that the people in my school treated me. None of them treated me differently because of what I had. Some of them even sent me letters, which made me feel really grateful that I had such good friends.

Every two weeks, I have to get steroid injections in my head to make my hair grow back (which it is, in case you were wondering) because there are no cures for alopecia, and if I stopped my hair would probably fall out again. I know that it is nothing compared to the surgeries that Auggie faced, and whenever I am sitting in the waiting room and am nervous, I think of him and how brave he was. Brave: I've used that word a lot, but if I had to pick one word to describe Auggie that's what it would be. Brave, and inspirational. Auggie has inspired me so much throughout my life.

Another one of my favorite qualities that Auggie has is a positive outlook on life. He is so optimistic most of the time, and that makes it feel like it is easier for me to be optimistic. While I can easily relate to some of Auggie's feelings, I know that what he is going through is much harder than what I am going through. Every day Auggie inspires me to be brave and positive. So thank you, Auggie. And thank *you* R.J. Palacio.

Sincerely,

*Anna*

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