

Massachusetts Letters About Literature 2016

Massachusetts Center for the Book

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Level II Honors Award

Dear Joanne Rowling,

On the 22nd day of September in the year of 2009, my grandfather passed away unexpectedly ... it was a tragic loss to our family, and I was devastated then and for a long time after. I lost a mentor and my guide in the dark; I lost my grandfather. I lost him, like the sky loses the sun after every day, slowly, yet shockingly fast. I lost a person that I loved with all my heart. Years passed and the death of my grandfather still weighed upon me, but I returned to normality and started reading a book, which was the first book of a series. Many people had recommended it to me. It was your book: *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*.

If you look past all the witchcraft and wizardry that is introduced in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, you can see that a major theme beneath all the magic is love, love that is so powerful it is able to conquer death itself. This shook me: love being stronger than death. I had never thought about it that way. For me, my grandfather died, and I was miserable. For a couple of months, I was not even able to see the colours in life, and I noticed myself saying, "I had loved my grandfather". After reading the first book of the Harry Potter series, I recognized that I had been wrong all those years. When a person passes away, it does not mean you can't keep on loving him, whether it's a friend, a child, a parent, or a grandparent. They were all important and caring people in your life and still are, even if they are not physically with you anymore. Just because the sun was not shining on your face at the moment, that does not mean it disappeared. In the book, Harry notices this especially when looking into the 'Mirror of Erised' and seeing his parents and family. Physically, he is not able to touch them; however, he sees them, remembers their memory, and that makes him stronger. Harry might not have known his parents as long as I had known my grandfather, but we both learned that it is possible to say, "I love my grandfather/parents", even if they are not standing right behind us and looking over our shoulders.

For many people, death is darkness, depression, and devastation, basically a shadow falls over them and their lives after the person they loved passes away. I had my own experiences with this feeling after my grandfather's death and I started carrying a little, brown teddy bear around with me wherever I went. My grandfather gave this little stuffed bear to me on the day I was born, and I have kept it close to me ever since. Naturally, this object carries more memories and a stronger connection to my grandfather than any picture will ever do. I think it is important that you have not only the knowledge that the ones that have gone are still mentally with you, but also an object that you can touch, feel and cry into, that has a special connection to the person that has died. I noticed this after reading the passage in your book in which Harry finds out that the 'Cloak of Invisibility' is from his father and when Hagrid gives him the photo album with all the pictures of his parents in it. Through my teddy bear, I can still feel the connection that I continue to have with my grandfather, the same way Harry can feel his parents close by him, even if they are physically not there, and this, only because love is stronger than death.

At one point in the book, Albus Dumbledore says: "death is but the next great adventure" (p. 297). This sentence, just this one small sentence, made me realize that death doesn't really have negative sides. I always thought, and this haunted me long after my grandfather's death, that he would have wanted to live longer, would have wanted to see his fifth grandchild, whom he never met, would have wanted to see me grow up. When I thought of all the things my grandfather would have wanted to do, but how death got in the way of his plans, I started to cry. However, this was before I read *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, the book that changed my views about love and death. When I came upon the sentence, "Death is but the next great adventure", I thought about how my grandfather might have felt before his life ended, and I noticed that he used to say that he doesn't want to turn old, that he'd rather die young and happy than become old and sick. He died with his children at his side, and I have come to peace with his death, for I know he is still watching over me and maybe fulfilling all his unfinished plans in heaven.

Another example of love being stronger than death in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* occurs when Lily dies to save Harry. Her love for her son is so deep that Voldemort can't kill Harry with a curse. It made me realize that even if my grandfather's death can't keep me from dying, I still feel protected. This protection is with me every day, yet it only became clear to me after I read the first Harry Potter book. Actually, the sentence that struck me was: "...to have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loves us is gone, will give us some protection forever" (p. 299). This sentence affected me only as it can affect a child that has lost a loved person to the hands of death. It made me shed tears once more, but I knew my grandfather would protect me until I die and then welcome me wherever he was. In that moment, even though he was gone, I felt him taking me into his arms and saying, "I love you", and I knew he was still able to love me, and I was still able to love him because love is strong; love can conquer death.

Yours sincerely,

Anna

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