

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

Dear Victoria Forester,

Piper's story stuck with me for many years, leading to me read it over and over again. As I grew, I felt Piper growing alongside me, and she became something akin to a sister.

When I first picked up your book, I had been young and impressionable. I was about seven or eight at the time, still discovering chapter books that didn't contain at least one picture. The title is what originally drew me in. I was filled with a childish wonder and the thought of a girl who could fly fascinated me. As soon as I opened it, I could not seem to put the book down. I finished it in one sitting, then read it over again. Piper's struggles impressed me in a way I could not even begin to describe. The fact that she could remain so hopeful despite the doubt of her family, and those constantly trying to bring her back to Earth. But my still developing mind did not comprehend many of her victories.

I put the book down, and did not see it again for years. My family moved, and during it the book was lost. Your book introduced me to a new genre that combined fantasy with science and that stuck with me for years, and diverted my attention away from the novel. With so many new works in front of me, Piper soon became a distant memory as I moved onto bigger and more advanced texts.

I remember the day I was unpacking, the book long forgotten. I was home alone and had climbed into the dusty attic to see what else lay in untouched boxes, when staring me right in the face was that beloved book. I dared to take a peek at the story that had so drastically changed my view of the world. As soon as I opened the book I was drawn back in, and it taught me new things I hadn't been able to understand before.

My second discovery of your book was during a darker time of my life, during eighth grade. I was struggling to understand myself, who I really was, and where I fit in with everything around me. I constantly had this weight on my shoulder, a tiny voice whispering in my ear that I wasn't good enough. That I was a failure who could never reach anyone's standards, including my own. It led to me doing many things I regret today, just to feel something. Simply put, I hated myself. However, as soon as I re-read that story, Piper's journey had a new meaning to me.

When I was younger, I didn't understand why her happiness had suddenly been taken from her as she lost the ability to fly. This girl that I resonated with so well before became a stranger to me, as she no longer smiled so bright, and stopped being a beacon of hope for the other children. This time, though, I understood. Piper's most notable trait at first was her ability to fly. After that was suddenly taken away from her, along with her ability to walk, she became an empty shell of herself. Her true strength, I realized, was how she recovered. After being so hollow and treated so cruelly, she pulled herself from that dark place. Piper took her recovery so far as to forgive the woman who caused her to suffer and asked her to join her, for the sky was a big lonely thing when you're the only one to enjoy it. She accepted her demons and attempted to co-exist with the people who caused her harm. This was something I needed to comprehend, in order to save myself from... well... me.

I began to understand that if my childhood hero could pull herself from those dark times, that depression, I could do it, too. One quote still stays marked in my copy of your work, for it struck so deep within me that I could never bear to part with it.

"There is a place deep, deep inside every person that is hidden and hard to find. If things get bad enough and life gets too hard, though, some people will go to that place and never come back from it. Certainly, all outward appearances would suggest otherwise. They will look as they always did. They may even act somewhat like their old selves, but the truth is, the *real truth* is that they are hiding in this place deep inside where no one can touch or hurt them anymore" (p. 275).

After reading this, I found myself filled with new found strength. The way you described it so vividly made me realize that I had indeed been hiding inside myself. I wasn't sure what I was protecting myself from, but if Piper could escape this place, so could I.

At first I took on the battle alone. I tried to force myself to notice every good thing, anything that could make me feel any better. And it worked, for small amounts of time. However, there was no drastic change. So I went back and read it over again and understood what I had to do. I realized Piper had not fought alone. She never would have been able to recover if not for Jasper's newly discovered ability to heal. I reached out to my friends, made new ones, and even spoke with trusted adults. I found their help was something akin to Jasper's healing. Suddenly, I found myself with a growing support system that was always there right behind me. I hadn't even recognized the problem until Piper practically shoved it in my face. With their help I am in a much better place now. I certainly do still have days where I struggle with self-loathing, but I have a family to turn to. Similar to Piper's, they are not all related to me by blood. But they are family none the less.

Her journey, though different from mine, led me on and empowered me. I can truly say that Piper is the only character I've ever felt such a connection with. Her strength gave me hope, and that hope allowed me to realize I was more than the dark thoughts telling me I was never good enough. I've grown a lot since I was that curious little girl, and I've grown even more from being the self-pitying girl I once was.

And all I really have left to say is, thank you.

With best regards,

Charlotte

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