

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

Dear Louisa May Alcott,

Time and time again I've opened your book and reveled in the ever exciting world of *Little Women*. My heart has broken again and again, for poor Laurie, who hoped to win the heart of his best friend, only to find it locked up, waiting for another. I've shed many tears for sweet Beth, who lived her life only for others, and saw the goodness in everyone. I've sympathized with gentle Meg and all her trials as a new wife and mother. I've laughed with Amy whose "vocabulary" has much improved. And I've felt the "genius burn" with Jo and her wild tales. *Little Women* has given me comfort during sad times and quenched my thirst for excitement when dry boredom set in.

Little Women has really changed the way I think about the world. In chapter eleven Mrs. March says, "Then let me advise you to take up your little burdens again, for they seem heavy sometimes, they are good for us, and lighten as we learn to carry them...". I've read *Little Women* many times, but after reading Mrs. March's hopes for her girls, I saw the book in a new light. The girls talk about their burdens as bundles that they carry through life. As they began to grow and change I saw each of the girl's bundles "lighten". After each girl shared their burdens, I began to think about what might be in my bundle. Soon I had found a full pack to carry.

Over time my load of worries had slowly formed, so I sat down and began to sort through them. The first few things in my pack were from school: homework, organization, grades, tests, report cards, friends. Next came activities, like dance, theater, singing, memorizing lines, remembering steps, and a pile of musical notes. Along came a stack of schedules full of times, dates, and places. Finally after sorting through a mess of concerns new and old, I threw out a few old ones I didn't need to carry anymore.

As I gathered up my problems and hoisted them onto my shoulder it occurred to me that other people might have much heavier bundles to bear. In the beginning of the book the girls are celebrating Christmas. On Christmas morning they give their breakfast to a poor family, with three children and only one parent, no food and practically no shelter. Throughout the rest of the book the girls happily share their kindness. Now when I see someone whose bundle is too heavy for them to lift, I try to help them carry it or make it lighter, so that soon they can easily hold it on their own.

Over the years, the words of *Little Women* have stayed with me, and each time I read it a new thought is thrown into the whirlwind of ideas swirling around in my head. I've learned that as you grow older the world changes and you change too. Like the girls my bundle of problems and worries has "grown up with me" and changed. I've learned the importance of thinking of others and being able to put down your own bundle for a while to help someone carry theirs. And when you need help later on people will be there ready to put down their bundle to help carry yours.

Sincerely,

Emma

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