

BRANDON SAGLE (10th Grade: Westerville, Westerville Central High School)
Level III Semifinalist
Letter to James Agee concerning his book, *A Death in the Family*

Dear James Agee:

When I think back to some of my most fond memories, I remember my Uncle Mike teaching me how to fish at a popular pond to us on my Aunt's farm. I had always enjoyed watching people fish, but never myself knew who to go to so that I could learn this. This very day when I was watching my Uncle catch multiple fish, pointing out the name of each one to me right before throwing them back into the pond. He noticed how intrigued I was in this activity, so he said that he was going to teach me how to fish. Handing me the Scooby Doo poll, I being only about six years old at the time, that he kept in his truck for the younger kids who could not handle the more heavy and long polls that adult used. He told me that I should bait me hook first with a worm, oblivious to the fact that I had a strong fear of the slimy creatures; I made a strange sound which made him realize that he would have to do it for me. He chuckled and came over with his small container that held the worms, and went ahead to place one of his most big and fat worms on there.

After he demonstrated how to cast off I proceeded to my first attempt ever. I do an absolutely terrible job, but can tell now that he could only expect that because I do not believe that I was the first that he taught. After about a half an hour of putting up with my slow learning, he was able to finally get me to cast off a decent distance. But that first time, I will never forget him smiling at me knowing how excited I was and smiling back at him as I thanked him. That memory stay even closer to me now because this past almost a year ago now, that man who I called Uncle and my teacher, is out of my life forever so I have to cherish each one of these special memories that I have with him, because that is all that I have left of him.

When this tragic event occurred in my life I could not help but think back to the story that I read the previous year, *A Death in the Family*. I had realized that I had not lost someone as close to me as my father, but I lost a very important person; I lost my fishing partner. One of the reasons that I learned to cope with it was from your story. I through about how Rufus heard just a simple story about a butterfly landing on this father's coffin. Even though he was relieved for a different reason then I needed to be, I just figured that if I thought of a special story I had with my Uncle, then I would not feel so poignant, and I would feel more like I did not have any wasted my time with him. I had all of these feelings just rush over me when I heard the news, and I heard from Facebook, which I would have preferred to hear it from my parents; these feelings were just unbelievably terrible that I had never felt before. I would never wish these feelings on anybody because of how I felt during this time.

Experiencing the first true death that was very close to me, was unbelievable and thinking back to *A Death in the Family*, I could not imagine how losing my father would feel like. I felt more sympathy for Rufus and his family, because they lost a person that they did just about everything with, and the main thing that I did with my Uncle is go fishing, but I could not imagine all of the feelings that rushed through them. These poor kids lost just about the most important person in their life, and if I were to give them advice to try and deal with it, I would tell them to remember the good times, not the bad. But when I was thinking about Rufus and his father when my Uncle passed, it made me want to go back and read *A Death in the Family* for a second time. This time when I read the story, I appreciated it in new ways, so that I could relate

to what they were experiencing in their life. Thank you so much, because your story gave me a way to get through this rough patch in my life when I lost somebody close to me.

Sincerely,

Brandon Sagle