

**DAVID SCHERER (12<sup>th</sup> Grade: Westerville North High School)**

**Level III First Place Winner**

*Letter to J.D. Salinger concerning his book, *The Catcher in the Rye**

Dear J. D. Salinger,

When I was ten years old I help my little brother in my arms as he cried himself to sleep. There was nothing else I could do for him. Our mother had just had a stroke and we were at our grandparents homes and I was only ten years old. What was I supposed to do? I was terrified myself, and it was only the fear that kept me from crying myself.

For years I was a stranger in my own skin. I waded through life unsure of myself, unsure of my purpose in the world. Everything felt so insignificant to me, the little and the big. For a long time I just didn't care on the inside. I nearly failed sixth grade math, made no friends throughout most all of the middle school and never even attempted to get involved in, well, anything. I didn't like life, but I didn't hate it. My father was increasingly distant, my mother due to her condition post the strokes wasn't a source of support not that I needed an excessive amount of support.

I entered high school and very little changed, I was still emotionally distant from my peers and my family. Most people couldn't tell because of the façade that I put on but event that only lasted for so long before my patience wore down and I became indifferent. I was critical of everything and everyone that I saw.

For sophomore year literature I was assigned a summer reading project, and for that project I chose to read your novel *The Catcher in the Rye*. Never before and since has a single object, a single story, had such an impact on me than did Holden's story. I read *The Catcher in the Rye* in one sitting three days before the first day of school without even intending to. It was late evening and I decided to start the book knowing I could read it easily in a couple of days, but not anticipating what awaited me in those pages.

I don't know that I've ever cried as much or as hard as I did that night. Reading your novel was like looking in one of thousands of possible mirrors of me. I looked at Holden in my minds eyes and saw myself looking back, and at times it terrified me and at times it saddened me deeply. When Holden visited his sister in the night I saw in him my own love and devotion to my brother, the only person who I hadn't grown distant towards and who loved deeply and richly. He just wanted to see his little sister that he loved and nothing else mattered, and it mirrored my own life so much that when he described what he wanted to do for the rest of his life my eyes watered and I cried because of how powerful an image it was. I saw in myself a desire to be meaningful in the purest sense, that all I wanted for my life was to be the Catcher in the Rye stopping people from falling over the edge.

I know for a fact how much of an impact your story had on my because of the relationships I've fostered since then. I know because every day sitting on my desk in plain view form nearly an angle lays my copy of *The Catcher in the Rye* and every day I see it and remember who I am and what I could be. I know because when I was given the opportunity to volunteer at a local elementary school all I could see in my head was catching the children in my arms before they fell. So I signed up and left school twenty minutes early once a week the entire year to drive to school to be with these kids and at the end of the year they all wrote me little thanks you cards, and it tool all that I had to not break down and cry in that class room with all these kids looking up at me wanting nothing more from me than a high five or a hug.

*The Catcher in the Rye* taught me the purity of life. It woke me up from sleep, partially out of fear, but mostly because of a desire for something more, something better.

Sincerely,

**David Scherer**