

Eva Dickerson (10th Grade: Wadsworth, Ohio)
Level III Semifinalist
Letter to Mitch Albom concerning his book, *Tuesdays with Morrie*

Dear Mitch Albom:

Your book, *Tuesdays with Morrie*, was brought to my attention simply by chance. I was looking for something to read during winter break on which I had too much spare time. A close friend of mine, whose opinion on literature I respect greatly, had been recently raving about your book (he had, in fact, just finished it) and so the title stood out in my mind. Multiple times this friend tried to persuade me to read it, and multiple times I explained that I just didn't have the time to read it. But now I had the time, time that had been spent sleeping until noon and sitting in the couch for the better part of the first week of my break. During one of these couch-sitting episodes, I decided it was time to drive twenty minutes away to this friend's house to retrieve his copy of your book. When he handed it to me it was in pretty bad shape. Both the front and back covers had been (and still are) missing, along with several pages, making the dedication page the first: it had been well loved. Still, not being very optimistic about reading the book, I let it sit by my bed for a few more days. I didn't understand what I could get out of a book about a man, 60-years than myself, who had asked a former student to write out one last thesis—on his long and cruel death. I am 16-years-old and I plan on living for quite a while, so I assume that for this reason I would find the information in the book useless. But, my with my friend asking way too often how far along I was with the book, I decided to humor him by reading it. I thought that, at the very least, I could read a few pages and the stop all together if it was unbearable.

To my surprise, the very night I started the book I nearly finished it! I was drawn into it from the very beginning when you asked, "Have you ever had a teacher like this?"

The main reason I continued to read was that your dear old professor reminded me an incredible amount of a teacher I had my freshman year in high school. Her name was Mrs. Kermizis and I was taking her Honors Biology 1 & 2 courses at the all-girls high school I attend, Our Lady of the Elms. On the very first day of class she explained to us that she would not JUST teach biology; she would teach us about life and for the next nine months, that is exactly what she did. Much like Morrie, she would stop class and often take full days to talk about "how to be fully human" or how to "live in the moment." I always liked these days, at first, because they meant no homework, but as the months went on, I looked forward to them because of what I learned and what I came back with to think about later that night. I often visited her outside of class to discuss them further. This isn't quite the journey you faced considering that she still teaches at my high school and I still have two more youthful years to spend in its long carpeted hallways and cold, tiled cafeteria.

Some sections of the book proved more applicable to my teenage life and would attract my full attention. I grew up accustomed to spending my days at school and my nights and weekends training as a dancer. Much like you, work was what I was focused on, and when there was no work to be done, I didn't know what to do with myself. My school wouldn't give A's for being fully human and fully listening at dance wasn't going to win me gold. Many of Morrie's lessons hit home when he came to teaching about what life should really be spent doing. My straight A's weren't going to care for me when I was older, and in about ten years I probably won't be able to touch my toes, but if I play it right my life will be filled with loving relationships that would surpass all happiness any teenage hobbies could bring me. Another

section that I found surprisingly relatable was the Eighth Tuesday; you talked about money. I've grown up in a family that is greatly blessed, and so I have always been able to have what I need and much of what I want. My family, however, is also serious about their faith. I was always reminded when I received a new gift that was just a thing, just stuff. My mother would often ask, "Could you give it up?" What she meant was, if God called me to give up all my stuff and follow his plan for me, could I do so? I always thought I could, but I never was really tested. Morrie had a good outlook on people's love for things: he said, "These people were so hungry for love that they were accepting substitutes." Now I can add to my mother's question, "Is it substituting for something?" I hope to never find that it is, and that I could easily give it up because I have the love I need. Going hand in hand with this was the Eleventh Tuesday; you talked about our culture. Our culture, especially for teenage girls, is constantly telling us what to look like, what to wear, with whom to hang out. The media nearly tries to plan each of our lives without even knowing our gender. Morrie points out that moving or visiting another county won't get rid of the problem; we must learn to separate ourselves by creating our own culture a skill you can use until the day you die. Having that idea put into your head at an age like mine can do great things for a person. Imagine if every high-schooler ignored the media. Growing up wouldn't be nearly as difficult for most of us.

With as many things as I learned as a new student of Morrie, there were also sections of the book that I decided I would read, but keep the knowledge in the back of my mind until later. I was too young for any real regrets, except maybe wishing that I hadn't eaten all my candy on Halloween. I hadn't experienced death in the real sense. Feeling sorry for myself only came when it was snowing and I remembered I had to scrape the snow off my car. Aging, marriage, and children all seemed a million miles away. Who would even be sure that all three were in my future? So, with what I read in the back of my head, I decided that I would put the book where I could easily find it, and a million years later, when someone gave me a ring, I could pull it out and be enlightened. By page 192 of *Tuesdays With Morrie*, I had read a great professor's lifetime of wisdom; more than I could hope to remember, let alone take in. Moreover, this only applied to the information that was relevant to my life at the time. It is now obvious to me why my friend had read the book so many times. Each time something else dawned on him (like it proved to do to me) and each time new circumstances made different portions of the book what one really needed to hear. Many years from now, when marriage or children seem to be in the near future, I will once again pick up the book (probably with fewer pages from many more years of love) and read what your old professor has to say on the subject. Hopefully, I will find what I need to make a decision, or at least I will be reminded to listen to the bird on my shoulder, and see what shape my life is in.

Sincerely,

Eva Dickinson