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Level II First Place Winner

Letter to Patrick Ness concerning his book, A Monster Calls

Dear Patrick Ness:

The truth is the easiest thing to lie about. I learned this from your book, *A Monster Calls*. The truth is the easiest to hide and pretend it's not there. Connor won't even admit it to himself until the monster comes and forces it out of him. Your book tackles a subject that is hard to come to terms with: if truth hurts more than can most can bear, we can choose to ignore it. *A Monster Calls* has allowed me to speak freely about how I feel and not be afraid of my own truth.

This book has had so much relevance in my life. I understand exactly how Connor feels. His mom has leukemia and is getting special treatments for it, but they begin to stop working. This is like what happened to my dad; he was a leukemia survivor at age 15. This year, he fell ill when his treatments stopped working for another kind of cancer, which the doctor suspects was a result from the radiation he received as a kid battling leukemia. Connor knows the endless possibilities, but two are always foremost in his mind. They stayed in my mind as well. She could live. She could die. Then there is a haunting feeling, the thought that makes his stomach drop. I know the way he feels because it happened to me so often. We both quickly pushed the thought away each time it tried to come. Because we both knew that it was the truth, it is the scariest thought of all. Truth—it is scarier than any ghost, ghoul or specter. The reason why it is so terrifying is because the truth is real. It's not some terror in the night that we make up in our heads. No, it is reality. This is what you have taught me through your book.

I relate to Connor because I have been though it myself. My dad had two tumors in his neck at two different times and both were removed by surgeries. Then the doctors did some tests before his second round of radiation was to begin. They found many tumors up and down his spine. They told us that it looked like someone had dripped his spine in milk. We tried everything: radiation, chemo and even home remedies. But he still became completely paralyzed. In the end, he could barely speak in a whisper and he needed assistance in breathing. It all happened so fast. So I know what it is like to see a parent wither away to an empty shell. I know how it is to see someone you love on the brink of death. I know what it's like to have death come knocking on your door. I know what it's like to allow death to enter and watch him leave with someone you hold dear to your heart. I know. Trust me, I know.

The story has allowed me, in all my grief, to hear someone say my truth out loud. When I read the fourth story, I was shocked because it addressed my elephant in the room head on. You didn't sugar coat it, for the truth isn't sweet. You told it as it was; you told the plain truth. You didn't make it sound better than it actually was, for the truth cannot be made better if, to begin with, it is bad. You told it as it was and will always be. You wrote that sometimes Connor wished that his mom would die already because he couldn't stand the waiting, he couldn't stop thinking about her dying, and he couldn't take it anymore. Yes, it might be a selfish thought; but it was the truth and he couldn't ignore it any longer. This is how I've felt for the past months. This is what I have needed to hear for quite some time now. Reading this book has most definitely helped me in my grieving process. It has made it possible for me to move on.

When I read your story, I was in awe of how much Connor and I were one and the same. I knew of my truth all throughout my journey into a world full of cancer. But, like Connor, I never wanted to admit it to myself, most definitely not to anyone else. My truth hurt me more

from not admitting it, than it did when I finally let it out. I've learned from you that if you keep everything inside or ignore emotions, you're only hurting yourself. Not letting go emotionally hurts you...a lot. I've learned this from you. Thank you for writing this book.

Sincerely,

Gabriella Schnaidt