

Kati Sorbin (11th Grade: Parma, Ohio)

Level III Semifinalist

Letter to Laurie Halse Anderson concerning her book, *Wintergirls*

Dear Laurie Halse Anderson:

For once in my life, I was forced to look inside myself and face my demons. I was granted this opportunity by connecting with Lia Overbrook in your novel, *Wintergirls*. Starving, freezing, and in denial, my tears dampened page after page. I felt like something was reaching out from inside the book, and rubbing my face into the truth as a dog's nose is rubbed into the stain on the brand new carpet. From the moment I opened the cover, my life was changed.

For over two years I have lived in fear—of myself, of the scale, of the mirror. Every morning, I undressed and stepped on what seemed like broken glass. I stared at the numbers, they never felt right. I looked in the mirror, and it never lied; unlike myself, where I put on a front and went through my day. As if I weren't suffering, I hid my pain. I smiled, biting my cheeks. I laughed, but from bruised lungs I breathed. No one paid attention enough to notice. Or I had become better at disguising myself than I had ever wanted. I was hopeless.

Until one night, I was sitting in my darkened room. I had been looking for something new to read, I had nothing better to do. Searching through my library's online catalog, I stumbled across *Wintergirls*, requested it, and patiently waited for it to arrive. I picked it up the last day before it went back, though. Had I waited one day later, I might not be here writing you this letter.

When Lia faced the challenges throughout the story, I was facing mine. Every time that she did crunches she was soaking with sweat, just as I experienced. Every day she counted calories, just as I did. At first, I took the book as a symbol to go on, to keep losing weight—to disappear more and more each day. I felt that I wasn't alone. And then, things became real...I was scared to learn how best friend Cassie had perished, and I wondered how I would feel. If I would ever make it so far, where I couldn't turn back around, where I couldn't heal my scars....

When finally Lia turned around and called her mother, I knew it was time for me to change. I needed a new way. With Lia on her path to recovery, the book's real symbol I was slowly discovering. Hope. Change. Freedom. I was able to turn my life around. I now know that help was there all along—all I needed was to reach out.

I no longer struggle with anorexia. I am free from the pain of the broken glass. My lungs have healed, my disguise cast off. I am a healthy weight, and I now look in the mirror with confidence. Happy. Strong. Finally, weightless.

Sincerely,

Kati Sorbin