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Level III Second Place Winner
Letter to Rick Yancey concerning his book, *The 5th Wave*

Dear Rick Yancey,

Throughout my high school career I've constantly struggled to find someone who was able to understand me, even connect with the way that I feel. It's been hard throughout the years, having my parents separate and whatnot. I've come to terms with that and I don't let it bother me like it used to. It was hard trying to cope with everything, from being separated from my dad (the one who I got along with better) to eventually being separated from my little brother who has cerebral palsy. Everything was very hard to adapt to, like moving to the freezing cold temperatures of Ohio when I was used to the blistering heat of Florida; adapting to the climate wasn't even close to my biggest problem.

When I lived in Florida I had several friends, I just didn't really care to spend time with them outside of school; at that point in my life I enjoyed spending time with my family. Once I switched to junior high I saw all of the other kids talking about hanging out and going places together, I felt left out since I had never wanted to do any of those things. I made some friends and started hanging out with them occasionally and talking to them on the phone daily. I felt like I was just like everyone else, I felt connected. I only spent time with my family when I wasn't talking or hanging out with my friends, which was a very small amount of time.

Before I could snap my fingers things started to fall apart, my parents argued more frequently and my mother threw more and more threats to my father about us leaving him. I never believed we would actually leave him behind, we never had before. I thought nothing of it and continued on with my daily routines, until one day my mother randomly decided we were leaving my dad and never coming back. My first reaction was that I'd never see my friends again, I didn't even think of my dad; I never got the opportunity to say my final goodbye and hug him. I took every moment I could have spent with him for granted, but I didn't realize that until years later.

Upon arrival in Ohio I made some friends, but it was nothing like the friends I had before. My mother met another man and they started dating. After realizing that I should have spent more time with my family while they were still together, I tried to spend time with my mother when she wasn't with her boyfriend, but she never wanted to do anything together. The only person who wanted to spend time with me was my little brother. Since my brother has a disability, he had a very hard time understanding everything that was happening, nothing seemed wrong to him. When my mother decided to move in with her boyfriend, I stayed behind with my grandmother because I was tired or staring life over. Over the past four years I've felt more like a burden to everyone than a joy.

My high school friends have been there for me, but they haven't been able to understand everything because they haven't lived anything close to what I've been through. My feelings of not being understood and not connecting with anyone changed as soon as I picked up a copy of *The 5th Wave*. I stumbled across an advertisement for it while I was flipping through a People Magazine in my school library and thought I should at least give it a shot since it had received such great praise. I was not disappointed, I instantly felt connected with Cassie and as I kept flipping pages the connection grew.

While I was reading I noticed how similar I was to Cassie, from her losing her father to her being separated from her little brother who she adores so much. I also noticed how much I

have taken for granted my entire life; I couldn't even begin to think how I would react if an alien invasion happened, if my brother was taken to a death camp, or watching both my parents die on front of me. I wouldn't be able to cope with the guilt of not spending every available moment I had with them. There was one particular quote that really captured my, "We're here, and we're gone, and it's not about the time we're here, but what we do with the time." That quote is so remarkably true, it doesn't matter how long you live, but what you do with that time.

After reading *The 5th Wave*, I have started to change the way that I go about doing things. I've been visiting my mother and my brother as much as I can; I haven't taken one single moment with them for granted. Although I'm not able to see my father as much as I'd like to, I talk to him on the phone daily, sometimes more than once. I'm letting every member of my family know how much I love them and how much they mean to me. I've come to realize horrible things can happen in an instant, but if I live my life the right way I won't regret any choices that I've made.

I wish I would have had the opportunity to read *The 5th Wave* sooner, maybe my eyes would have been opened earlier. I know that I can't change what's happened in the past, but I can change the future and I will.

Sincerely

Megan Blackwell