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Level III Honorable Finalist
Letter to author Isaiah Austin concerning his book, *Dream Again*

Dear Isaiah Austin:

The day after I was discharged from a five day hospital stay, I came across an article about a guy named Isaiah Austin through the power of the internet. Not only did I read the article, I also felt the article. I immediately told my mom about your book, and she surprised me a day later with it. After receiving your book in early May 2015, I had no idea of the bright new path I was about to venture down.

For me, it all started on April 25, 2015. It was a rainy morning and I was with my three best friends Evan, Landon, and Thibaut. It was the day before my actual birthday so we were on our way to go indoor go-karting in Fort Wayne, Indiana. As we walked into the building, we discovered that there weren't many people around. As we advanced up the line, I remember cracking up with Evan about God knows what for the entire wait. Evan is my best friend, and our friendship is one where it's rare not to see us laughing. As we arrived at the front of the line, my dad wanted to get a picture with my three friends and me before we went and raced. I remember the flash on Dad's phone, and the clicking sound of the camera. I remember taking one step but after that, I remember nothing. I had no clue that my life had been changed forever.

As I woke up in the ambulance with a very combative, scared, and confused state of mind, the first thing I did was to scream at my mom. I don't remember what I said. I don't know whether it made any sense or not. I don't remember if it was the nicest thing, either. I remember her not responding, then I remember more screaming. After the second episode, I remember as clear as day what my mom said to me: "Luke, you had a seizure." After that I only remember waking up in the Emergency room and Evan's mom walking in. She was there to pick up Landon, Evan, and Thibaut to take them home. I knew if she could stay there for my family and me, she would in a heartbeat. After my friends were gone, a nurse walked in and told us that they needed a urine sample from me. My dad helped me sit up because of the excruciating pain in my legs from the convulsions of my first seizure. I was halfway to the end of my hospital bed. That is all I remember.

The next thing I remember is waking up in a different room. This time I had been taken out of the E.R. and admitted into the hospital. I hadn't eaten in 16 hours, so I ordered two cheese quesadillas and some mac and cheese, my two favorite foods. By that time, my aunt and uncle had gotten a room five minutes away from the hospital that I was staying in. I'm so grateful for my Uncle Dave and Aunt Barb. Dad is a carbon copy of my Uncle Dave, and I'm physically a clone of my dad, which means all three of our minds work in the same way. When all three of us are on the same page, we could probably do some pretty heft damage. I could talk to them for hours about anything, whether it's about basketball, life, or the variety of cooking appliances that my uncle has.

After numerous blood samples, different tests and endless waves of questions, they diagnosed me with Epilepsy. Solving a problem, whether it is a math problem or trying to figure out why I spontaneously started having seizures, can be a huge bowl of bitter-sweet stew. It's a huge relief once you finally figure out why something like that happened. That's the sweet part. At the same time, it forces you to remodel your lifestyle. First you have to tear it down, then rebuild it around your condition. The adjustment factor of that process is the bitter part.

Being in the hospital for a week was an experience that made me look at and approach life a lot differently. Seeing all the kids my age and seeing young children in that hospital with far worse conditions and circumstances than mine really taught me how to look at things from a positive

standpoint. It taught me how to make the most out of things in life and to not take anything for granted. It helped me realize that there are people in the world today that are praying for what we take for granted every single day.

The thing that inspired me most in your book was that you used your Marfan Syndrome as a part of your story and not as an excuse. Trying to turn a negative situation into a positive situation was your mentality. Before I read your book, the process of turning into a negative person was starting for me. I don't entirely know why that vicious cycle started. Whether it was me letting the negative influences around me infiltrate their way into my life, or I simply needed the Lord in my life to guide me in the correct direction. Your story helped me to look at my faith in God differently, as well. You taught me what it means to be a Christian. One important part of being a Christian means trusting in the Lord and to remember to have the same kind of faith when you are at the lowest point of the valley that you had when you were on the highest peak.

There are points in this letter where I was overwhelmed with happiness while I was writing. I used to get offended when people would ask me about my condition, as if they had no right to be curious. Now I am asked frequently how I'm doing, and the difference between the old me and the present day me is that I am actually glad they are curious. With that being said, I believe that I have the ability to change lives and inspire people with my story. Reading your book strengthened that belief even more, even though my story is far from over. Before I read your book, I was a strong believer in the concept that no matter how bad a person's circumstances were, it was still possible to accomplish whatever needed accomplishing. Yet, there was one piece missing from that philosophy. That missing piece was faith in Jesus Christ. Nobody can reach their dreams by themselves. The only thing we humans truly need in life is the love, compassion and encouragement of Jesus Christ.

There were parts of your book that made me laugh. There were others that made me cry. I am going to keep your book so that one day, my kids can read it, and I hope they will in turn pass it on to their children. I hope they will hold the book as close to their hearts as closely as I have held it to mine. I cannot thank you enough for what you have done for me. You are truly the definition of courage, humility, faith, persistence, and hard work.

Sincerely,
Luke Conover