

Level III

Honorable Finalist

Jack Fredette

(Grade 11: Turpin High School, Cincinnati. Sponsor: Sandra Dunston Hoover)

Letter to author Emma Forrest concerning her memoir *Your Voice in My Head*

Dear Ms. Forrest,

This past summer, I was volunteering at the local hospital and I ran into many different people that lived many different lives. Some of them seemed really happy and others seemed sad and lonely. I was surprised to see the people who should be happy were in fact not, and that the people that I thought most likely to be lonely and sad were surprisingly very happy. I was curious why this was so as I walked around helping out where it was needed; I kept careful watch on all the people. As I was rounding on some of the patients, one of them stopped me to talk. As we began to talk I asked him some questions about how he was doing. Through our conversation, he told me what he does for a living and why he was in the hospital. Curious, I asked him why he seemed so happy. He told me that he finds great happiness in small things, like a card that was sent to him wishing him a quick recovery, the medical staff helping him to get better, and ME. He appreciated that I was in the hospital taking care of others on my own time, during my own summer break, not for any school requirement, but just because I love helping others and because I would like to work in the medical field after college. Our conversation sparked a new perspective on the world. I have a great understanding of how the lavish, expensive, and big monetary things in life do not really matter in the larger scheme; it is the small, kind gestures that resonate and have a longer, greater impact on our lives.

Similar to my experiences at the hospital, your brilliantly written book, *Your Voice in My Head*, parallels the belief that happiness can be found anywhere and that “[time] heals all wounds. And if it doesn’t, you name them something other than wounds and agree to let them stay.” As time goes on, the battle scars that are endured begin to heal but as they begin to heal they stay obsessed and committed to the wounds of yesterday, and the memories to come of tomorrow. This resembles a strong person who is willing to fight through the challenges of life and to not let anyone or anything slow him or her down. Reading your book, I learned that you were trapped in a world full of loneliness, engulfed and encompassed by damaging relationships that tore apart your life, and behavior that put yourself and others that got too close in harm’s way. By seeing a psychiatrist, you were able to turn your life around and learn how to find happiness in the surrounding world. Life with mental illness is rough and unforbearing

After my experience this past summer, I had the privilege to also work with some patients who had a mental illness. My prior beliefs or people with mental illness did not change after the summer. I still believe that a person with mental illness is no different from any other person; in fact, people who face mental illness are even more special. In such a fast-paced and chaotic world, happiness can be found in even the smallest cracks and crevices. This book taught me that happiness is achievable and even if someone has a mental illness impairing their quality of life, happiness can still be found. As a matter of fact, the happiest people in life tend to have a mental illness because they have learned to cherish even the smallest of things. Throughout this book, I was taught the importance of providing help when and whenever it is needed the most.

If troubled, no matter the circumstances, go to someone that can help you. A psychiatrist can help one find happiness and normalcy. Fear should not stand in anyone's way. Recognizing that help is needed, asking for it, accepting it, and finding support and comfort can positively change your life for the better. Ms. Forrest, you wrote that before you sought help that there was an ominous cloud that followed you, and that you "saw the pain and sadness in everything, and swirled it around [your] mouth like a fine wine." After a couple of months of meeting with a psychiatrist once a week, life took a spin and the realization came that "you truly find yourself not in travel, but in other human souls." After calling the office of the psychiatrist one day, you learned that he had died. Having realized that you were now alone and had to be your own teacher, you forged ahead, on your own terms, and survived.

Your book taught me the importance of finding help and talking to others. By learning what others can teach, and applying it to what we already know, happiness can be obtained. The book also helped me realize that knowledge is hard to come by, so when someone is given the opportunity to talk to others who care or who are willing to listen and help, seize that opportunity.

Sincerely,

Jack Fredette, age 17