

Level II

Third Place Winner

Margaret Taylor

(Grade 7: Lee Burneson Middle School, Westlake. Sponsor: Sara Latkowski)

Letter to author Rick Yancey concerning his book, *The Fifth Wave*

Dear Rick Yancey,

Up until the 6th grade, I was a very happy child. I would go along with the flow of things, staying away from anything that could possibly get me looked at funny or judged. I stayed put with my small group of friends, and I was always very content and looked at the positive side of things. The small group of friends that I had quickly grew into a respectable amount of people who truly cared about me. They helped me to come out of my shell, to not care about what other people thought. I truly loved each and every one of my friends, and would have done anything for them. That was up until the last semester of my 6th grade year, when things with my friends went a little sour. One of my best friends started bullying me. I would have been able to deal with it if it was just one friend. I had lots of friends that I completely trusted and loved. At least, that's what I thought. Over the period of a week, each one of my friends found some way to avoid me, or just stop talking to me all together.

I dealt with around a week of being completely alone, like I had a dark cloud surrounding me, and that cloud repelled all of the people I thought I loved. After that week, things just got worse. My old friends went from just ignoring me to whispering snarky insults every time I walked by, or staring at me with the most judgmental of looks. I had nobody. The dark cloud that had repelled all of my friends was starting to engulf my brain and fill my thoughts with self-deprecation and hatred. I had gone from being completely happy to spending all of my time crying under my covers or talking to the school counselor—all in the matter of just a week.

Over the summer, I came across your book. I had avoided reading it for the longest time because my old friend had loved the book, and I didn't want to think of her and remember how alone I was. After I had read just about everything else I could find, I picked up your book and started reading it. Reading your book was like jumping into a new world, somewhere where bullies didn't exist, where I wasn't spending all of my time with a dark cloud in my thoughts. I related to how Cassie felt, as if everyone had abandoned her and she had no one left to rely on. Reading your book actually made me feel happy for once, as if when I read your book I was escaping to a new life where I wasn't being bullied, a life where little things like what someone said about you didn't matter. I would find myself going to sit down and read for an hour, and glancing at the clock only to find out that I had been reading for three. I would completely forget about the countless hours I spent with the guidance counselor, all the tears I shed thinking about all of my old friends.

I still have panic attacks from the bullying to this day, and someone suggested I keep some things that calm me down on my nightstand for when I have a panic attack. One of the things I like to keep on that nightstand is a copy of your book, and whether I read it on my phone or look at a hard copy, flipping through the pages of the book and seeing the beautifully composed words always calms me down.

This year, the nearly unbearable feeling of loneliness has finally begun to creep away, since I have a new group of friends. The depressing thoughts have completely diminished, and I can spend my time with my amazing new friends instead of crying under the covers. Thank you for writing *The Fifth Wave*, it truly kept me from going to some dark places I know I would regret.

Sincerely,

Margaret Taylor, age 13