

how her actions affect Ida and her brother Lee. She never once tried to view her situation in the eyes of her loved ones. Seeing the outcome of her selfishness made me want to change my narcissistic ways and slowly returned my hope and efforts to be part of my loving family.

Although little has changed in the development of the relationship between my mother and me, my attitude towards it has. I now try subsequently harder to understand her perspective and how she must feel. Treating her in an immature adolescent way is not the right way to approach our situation. Although Ramona barely finds peace with her family, she accepts her mother the way she is, in turn helping her find and reconcile with herself. The trials and tribulations we endure are the deciding factor of how our life shapes. The looking glass we choose to see through leads us down different paths of moral obligations, self-explanation. Someday I will be able to choose my looking glass and finally abandon my yellow raft, holding me back from the shorelines of life, love, and family.

I'm a Palm Desert High School Cheerleader and a very dedicated student. I entered this contest as an assignment for English and ended up enjoying it. In the future I hope to go to UC Davis and major in Business and Political Science.

L E V E L T H R E E



Zosha Kandel, Age 15, Grade 10
Nipomo High School
Nipomo, CA

Dear Chaim Potok,

I can't deny it: I gave into the oppression. Sure, it was self oppression, but no matter, it still kept me from my art. Sometimes the biggest bump in the road is your own foot. But after reading *My Name Is Asher Lev*, I realized something: if you just take the effort to pick that foot up a tad, it can take you far beyond that little one-way street.

I was always disappointed with my art. Sometimes I'd draw, and sometimes I'd paint, but it never turned out the way I wanted, really. His nose was always too big, or the sky was too purple; it just never was...right. After a point, I became too frustrated with my results, I gave it up. I would tell myself that I couldn't draw, and just leave it at that, believing it was just something I had to get over. And honestly, it was that way for a long time because that's how I made it, and that's how I wanted it.

But something changed. You see, during the week I spent in Asher Lev's life, there was a voice that called out to me, a long lost friend, and what hit me so hard was that I could understand exactly what that voice said. It was my art, calling me back.

It told me that there is nothing on this earth that could deny that I truly am an artist, and that nothing could keep it hidden away. And if Asher could resist the repression put on him, the attempts to bottle up his talents, then I could certainly withstand myself. Before I knew it, I was lost in another world, a world filled with gray pencil streaks, these streaks that somehow were deep greens and blues with vibrant yellows and pinks, these streaks that laughed and wept, and smirked and sang. And I then stepped back, to look at my one by one inch gray, simple pencil sketch of a jester, who gave me one last snicker before lying to rest, back in his colorful universe of no boundaries. And I felt so absolutely filled with joy; I was complete. And honestly, I knew it should be that way, so that's the way I made it, and that's exactly the way I want it.

You see, Asher gave me something that I didn't think I would ever get. He gave me the strength to never be repressed, no matter the force. Asher Lev is a character of determination. There are so many pressures put upon him, attempting to keep him from his art, just as I did to myself, but he holds on to the one thing he has. This is what I learned is most important. Just as the beliefs of others clashed with the beliefs of Asher, my personal beliefs and self-confidence actually collided with my own needs. But in the end, Asher Lev doesn't give up, so neither will I.

I guess it all goes back to that one little foot, on that one little road, taking that one little step. Some people sit along the sidewalk, waiting for a bus to pick them up, and zip them through life, some not even waiting for anything. There are those people who have always been walking down that road just fine. And then there's some of us who just needed a little boost. A little nudge on the shoulder, a smile and a nod, a sweet simple sendoff. Just a tad of encouragement. That is the gift that Asher Lev gave to me. Inspiration. Thank you, Chaim Potok, and thank you, Asher Lev, because now, I can walk—no, I can dance, down the streets of expression.

My life revolves around the arts: music, theater, dance, and drawing. I wrote the letter to Chaim Potok to show my appreciation for his work in hope that, if he still walked this earth, he may have seen how it affected me, and in hope that it would send the message to others that anything is possible if it is wanted badly enough.