

Michael Sturgis – California: First Place Level II Winner

Dear Louis Sachar,

I have done many things that are wrong in my life. I highly regret doing these mean and stupid acts of unkindness. However, the novel you wrote really made my point of view change on the stupid things I've done in the past. The main character in your story, Armpit, had done several wrong things and he had a huge anger problem, just like me. He had been sent to jail, and I've been talked to by the police myself. Armpit still ends being a nice person inside and opens up. I'm learning to open up too.

The title of your novel, Small Steps, matches with the moral and point of the book. Armpit learns to take small steps in order to go on with his life, no matter how troubled his past was. This was a very good theory for me when I tried it and I found out that I could go on. Armpit also does acts of kindness in this story like becoming friends with a cerebral palsy girl (not just to say he did something nice). When I befriended someone with mental problems, I discovered that you definitely should not make fun of them, as I have done in the past, because their syndrome does not change the fact that they are a person with feelings too. I think that what made me turn to doing bad things was other people putting pressure on me and calling me the worst names that would make you want to disappear from all the embarrassment and anger. I never thought of hope, and knew every day when I woke up what my day was going to be like – horrible. This turned me to the wrong side for a period of time.

My environment made me miserable as well, I wasn't getting along with my siblings and it was as if I was looking for a fight with my parents. Afterwards, I'd feel guilty and then say if I'd jay-walked the other day; I would feel really bad for it. If I did a small wrong thing such as forgetting to pay for milk that didn't make a difference in the long run, I would still think I had shoplifted. I guess you could say that Small Steps has changed my life.

I am obviously related the most to Armpit because we both see things in a new light. Though I have made fun of mentally retarded people, broken the law, and done other things wrong, not only to the environment but to me mentally, I felt redeemed after reading your novel. Now I am in accelerated classes, have a 4.0 GPA, and I am involved in theater. I can really be another person if I take small steps through my life and think before doing things. Step by step, I am finding my way. Thank you, Louis Sachar.

Michael is 13 years old and entered his essay in hopes to speak his mind. An excellent student, his favorite class at school is P.E. because he gets to play sports and have a good time. In his future, Michael wishes to be a lawyer.