

**HONORABLE MENTION, LEVEL 2****Agustine Benitez, Grade 8****Santiago Middle School****Orange***Redwall*, Brian Jacques**Dear Brian Jacques,**

One of my lifetime goals is to get out of the impoverished river of mud that is my life. Every day, I always awaken to the same daily routine; get out of bed hurriedly, walk to school, and come back home to face another batch of problems my family gets thrown. By reading your book *Redwall* you gave me the chance of a lifetime. Not to sound cliché or anything but *Redwall* must be your greatest achievement. It helped me drive away the haunting emotions that always surround me; it was the turning point in my life that made me want to aspire to becoming an author with talent such as yours.

Your novel *Redwall* taught me that, despite all the harmful things life chucks at you, the world outside can still be just as beautiful, or the other way around. In my case, poverty may exist for me, but that doesn't mean I can't get across it. Your writings showed me that all it takes to get across my river of strife is just the right solution.

Most of the people I've known, save for some, don't share my enthusiasm for *Redwall*. Instead they shy away from it though I understand that they have their own reasons to favor others. However, it caught my eye because of how most of it seems to correspond with my life though I acknowledge only one of these aspects. Matthias is that aspect.

I am like Matthias not because he was a brave warrior, found a magical sword, and saved the day, et cetera, et cetera. Seriously, if you set your eyes on me, your first thought would not be of me jumping out of a burning building, cradling a helpless child between my arms. I guarantee you would think the opposite of that. Straight to the point, the most important connection between Matthias and I is when he was an average mouse, just like I am a little more than average teenager. He did not realize how enormous a role he played in the grand scheme of things. Once I read your novel I began to realize just how much untapped potential in writing was hidden inside me somewhere and I was the key to unlock it.

When I was smaller and less mature writing never appealed to me nor did it seem to help with my lifetime goal. However, your novel and talent, so to speak, rekindled an undying flame in me—a new interest in your trade. If I do have a talent when it comes to writing, it may be exactly what I could do to help my family out of the deep pit of poverty. My passion for writing may seem a bit egotistical, but at least

I have you to thank. Or maybe even blame if it becomes too much of an obsession. Ha-ha, only joking.

Sincerely yours,
Agustine Benitez

I am a teenager (13 going on 14) with an uncanny taste for peaches and authentic ramen. Though terrible at sports, I find ways to amuse myself by reading and/or chatting with friends on social networks, sometimes at the same time. Other than writing, I haven't thought of any aspirations for the future. However, I hope I might enter a college with good writing classes, and start fresh from there.

L E V E L 2



HONORABLE MENTION, LEVEL 2

Erin Hitomi, Grade 7
Lexington Junior High School
Cypress

The Last Lecture, Randy Pausch

Your book *The Last Lecture* gave many families inspiration, including mine. In October of 2007 my dad was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. This was a huge shock and all I could believe was that my dad was going to die. No one really knew what to do. So many late nights, hospital visits, tests, and many tears. It was hard on all of my family but especially hard on my mom and dad. Then they found your lecture online.

Your lecture gave my parents inspiration. Even though you were dying you still had a positive attitude and you left happy memories for your children. I think when my dad read the letters people had written to you it helped him, too. This lecture changed my father's attitude about his cancer. He changed back to his old fun-loving self. You gave him a different outlook on life.

You and my dad were very alike; both fun-loving, smart, handsome guys and fantastic dads. You both also had pancreatic cancer and had to take tests, felt the pain, and all the rest that comes with the illness. I think hearing and reading that you could still live life normally with cancer let him know he could, too. Then I read a passage in your book called "The Man in the Convertible." It reminded me very much of my dad. How Ms. Kosak sees the man in his convertible all happy and then later figures out that it was you! Same for my dad. Everyone was surprised to see him up, still cracking jokes, and going to my basketball games looking totally fine. Definitely not looking like a 60-year-old man with cancer. Both you guys were certainly fighters.

Sadly, my dad couldn't fight any longer and passed in February 2008. I remember for two weeks I sat around my house not caring about anything. All I could think of was how angry I was that day because I wanted to go to our beach house for the