

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

weekend and we couldn't because of my dad. We did end up going but for an entirely different reason; my father didn't want my brother and me to see him die. For the longest time I thought I was super selfish for being mad at my dad that day. I thought I was a bad daughter and that him dying was my entire fault. Then my mom gave me your book and it helped me a lot. At the end you said you did the lecture for your kids. Then I knew my dad really loved me and that it wasn't my fault. I wasn't a bad daughter, all that mattered was that I loved him and I'll love him forever. From that month till today I've worn my purple PANCAN, Pancreatic Cancer Action Network, bracelet around my ankle to show how proud I was of my dad. Your book also told me to live my life to the best and accomplish my goals even if they're not major change-the-world goals. It also taught me to have a good attitude. If Randy Pausch can be happy and positive and he knows he's deathly ill then I can be happy, too.

So Mr. Pausch, thank you for writing *The Last Lecture*. Just like on page 18 of your book, "It was almost as if I could hear everyone collectively exhaling their anxiety." Well, now my family and I can exhale, too.

Sincerely,
Erin Hitomi

My name is Erin Hitomi. I love to play basketball, hang out with friends, and read. What I really hope for the future is to go to college and either become a lawyer or a doctor.

L E V E L 2



HONORABLE MENTION, LEVEL 2

Ye Rim Park, Grade 7
Pine Valley Middle School
San Ramon

Protector of the Small: First Test, Tamora Pierce

Dear Tamora Pierce,

My parents always expected the best out of me. I had to get 100% on every test, win every competition, and pass every exam. When I found my grades satisfying, they urged more from me. They would get upset when I got A-'s on my report card or get 2nd place at a competition. I didn't know what to do under all the pressure so I gave up trying to do my best since it seemed like they would never be satisfied. I became extremely reclusive and austere because of my depression so I was no longer able to socialize with my friends and classmates like I had used to. Most people would probably have brushed it off as that "phase" of adolescence but my problem was growing more troublesome by the day.

At first my aloofness didn't affect me much but I slowly realized that I was stuck in a quicksand of despair that was dragging me deeper and deeper. My friends treated