

**WINNER, LEVEL 1****Lara Bagdasarian, Grade 5****UCLA Lab School****Los Angeles***The Circuit*, Francisco Jiménez**Dear Francisco Jiménez,**

I used to think my dad was too hard on me. Whatever I did just wasn't good enough for him. I had no idea why he was being so critical of me, so I assumed he just didn't believe in me. After reading your book, *The Circuit*, I understand my dad better and what he has been trying to tell me.

My dad is an immigrant just like you. He came to the U.S. when he was 14 years old. He spoke broken English, his family had to sleep together in one room, and he had to work to help his family out. He had to earn everything he got.

My dad chastises me about not taking enough initiative to learn another language. He says that when he was a kid he had to learn English on his own. I used to not listen to him, but after I read your book, I started to think about what he said differently. I thought about when you chose to stay in for recess at school everyday to practice English and when, while you were working in the fields, you looked at your notebook and tried to memorize the English words that you didn't know. It must have taken a lot of initiative to do that all by yourself.

My dad also gets upset at me when I start asking for too much. My dad says that one Christmas he was hoping for a soccer ball. He got a tennis ball instead, so he used to pretend his tennis ball was a soccer ball. Your story, *The Christmas Gift*, made me feel for the first time what it must be like not to get something that you want so badly that you would do anything for it.

My dad makes me do extra work even after I have done all of my homework. He says working hard is the only way to get far in life. *The Circuit* describes the importance of hard work much better than my dad described it. When you won a prize for your butterfly drawing, it made you feel like you were bursting out of your cocoon and you were flying away on your wings to become noticed. Before, your classmates had not paid attention to you. My dad told me that when he had just come to the U.S., he won a math prize. Now I understand how he must have felt. I think he is pushing me to work extra hard because he wants me to feel the same way.

Your book made me feel a lot better about my dad. I am now sure that he cares about me and he is just trying to help me become a better person. *The Circuit* has

helped me understand my dad and realize his good intentions. Thank you for sharing your childhood memories with me.

*With appreciation,
Lara Bagdasarian*

I live in Los Angeles with my parents and 8-year-old brother. I enjoy basketball, music, writing, and math. Lately, I've been learning about parrots and would love to get an Amazon or Macaw one day.

L E V E L 1



HONORABLE MENTION, LEVEL 1

Eleanore Hamilton, Grade 4

Individual Entry

Truckee

Hattie Big Sky, Kirby Larson

Dear Kirby Larson,

I love how Hattie Big Sky has a “bumpy” life. Your book made me see that I want a bumpier life as well.

A bumpy life to me means experiencing new things and becoming strong through all those experiences. When Hattie builds her new life in Montana, she becomes stronger and braver and sees where her real home is...and that is in her skin.

Yes, Hattie had a bumpy life when she was moving from relative to relative, but Hattie has an especially bumpy life when she is in Montana. Hattie has to almost drown her hen to have her lay eggs. She gets her hand stuck on the water pump because it is so cold. She survives in the rasping shack all winter. And she has to see horrible things happen to her friends, the Muellers, just because Karl is German.

I have started doing some things Hattie does to make my life bumpier as well. I have made Hattie's Lighter-than-Lead Biscuits. I curled my hair with sugar water and strips ripped from a towel. I heated up water on the stove for a bath. It took one hour to fill the tub 1/6th of the way with 8 pots of water! I even opened the window to feel the cracks in Hattie's shack. The bath wasn't very satisfying. I had a cup of tea afterwards.

But of course my life is still not as bumpy as Hattie's. I get my eggs at a grocery store. I get water out of my faucet. I have a warm bed and house to live in in the winter at the west end of Donner Lake (which is very snowy). I don't have to walk three miles to get my mail: I have e-mail. Even though around Hattie's time my town was racist against Chinese people (Chinatown burned down “mysteriously”), now there is very little racism. Truckee is a resort town now, where most people play and have fun.