

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

me coldly, as if to return my own neglecting. My parents would constantly lecture me for hours concerning my “attitude” but I pretended not to listen. Shortly after my troubles began, my grades were also being affected by my depression. I flunked on countless tests that year and it only added to my plethora of troubles. My parents didn’t know what was wrong with me. My dad was on the verge of giving up on me and my mom was convinced I needed to talk to a counselor. Inside I felt horrible because I was letting everyone down, but a part of me was relieved, too. Sometimes I felt like I was suffocating from everyone’s expectations. But now the whole house had erupted into chaos, all because of me.

Almost half a year had passed since my “problem” had begun. I was picking out a book at the local library that I wanted to keep as a gift for completing my summer reading log. It was then that I came face to cover with your book *First Test*. The cover immediately caught my eye; a young girl who looked no older than I did, with a bruised eye and a pleasant grin. Intrigued, I pried it out amongst the profusion of other books and flipped to the first page.

When I was finally able to tear my eyes away from the words, I closed the book and began reflecting on the story. My greatest contemplation was Keladry, the courageous heroine. I was awestruck by her bravery, as audacious as I thought it was. She was a single girl, a mere year younger than I was, yet she seemed so much older and mature. Her determination to become the first female knight and smash everyone’s doubts about girls took me by complete surprise. Kel faced bullying, harassment, and blackmail but never ran away. As I continued to read on, I realized that I had only been running away from my troubles. After reading your book, I understood that I needed to confront my problems properly, just as Kel had strained to overcome her phobia of heights.

It took a lot of courage for me to talk to my parents. After I finished confessing that their expectations for me were giving me a hard time, they immediately apologized. They hadn’t realized they had been pressuring me so much and assured me that they were always proud of me as long as I tried my best. Once summer vacation ended that year, I returned to school with a completely different personality. I can confidently say my socializing level has greatly improved. My grades have also returned to normal, better if I dare say. My math teacher noticed how much effort I gave into my work this year, unlike last year, and offered to move me up a grade. My parents were greatly excited and were very proud of me. I may not be able to fight like Kel, but I felt like I had just conquered a whole army. Now I can look forward to spending every day with my friends and family. Thank you so much for giving me the courage to overcome my fears and teaching me to try my best.

Sincerely,
Ye Rim Park

My name is Ye Rim Park. I am a 12-year-old Korean girl who loves reading, writing, and drawing. My goal is to publish a novel one day and touch the hearts of many young and flourishing readers like me.