

Natashia McDonald

Dear John Green,

Your novel, *The Fault in Our Stars*, taught me to never take a moment for granted because it could all be gone in an instant. Sometimes I tend to waste the short time my family, friends, and I have together. When I think of all the blessings I have in my life, I just have to smile and take it all in. It's scary to think that the things I cherish the most aren't going to be here forever. Although I sometimes think that I'm not loved or the whole world is against me, I remember that I could have it a lot worse. Hazel and Gus live in the moment because they don't know what might happen when you least expect it. Your book changed my life, it gave me a new perspective on things.

My life has never been easy. I was born on July 1st, 2003. That year was one of the hardest my family had ever experienced. My parents and four siblings weren't just in the hospital being introduced to a new baby, they were there because my 17 year old brother, Riley, was diagnosed with Acute Lymphocytic Leukemia. At the time, there was no cure and there still isn't. Riley had a huge heart and cared for everyone he came into contact with. Sadly, seven short months after I was born, my brother passed away. It was a loss to my family and everyone in the community. Even though my family and friends had known him for much longer than I had, it was still a major loss to me. My family had hope that Riley would get through it all; Riley loved the things that surrounded him, he didn't want to die. No matter how hard he fought he just couldn't beat cancer.

Yes, I guess it gets easier over time but not a day goes by that I don't ask myself, "I wonder what Riley would be doing right now if he was still here" or "What would Riley do if it was up to him?" I hear the way that my family talks about my brother and what an impact he had on their lives. He was a blessing. I just wish I would have been able to get to know him better, but I guess that God had a better plan for him.

Cancer is a scary thing and the characters in your novel recognize that. I felt as though I was part of your book. I wanted to feel what Hazel felt when she met Gus. When something tragic happened in the book, it brought tears to my eyes. How Gus and Hazel felt about each other and how much they loved each other brought joy to my heart. I'm sure we have all felt loss in our life at one time or another, whether it be losing someone we love or just having a bad day. We need something to help us through that, for me it was hearing Hazel's story. Every time I flipped open *The Fault in Our Stars*, I realized that there is good in everything and no matter how much I felt as though my life would never get better, I thought about the happiness that can come from people whose lives are much harder than mine. When Gus told Hazel that he was getting sicker it was like a stake to the heart, for me just as much as it was for Hazel.

The things that I cherish won't always be here. Your novel taught me to live in the moment and not take anything, even the small things for granted because they could disappear. I was able to connect with Hazel. I know how scary cancer is and how it takes away the people you love the most. My mom always tells me to not hold a grudge because you might end up regretting it and *The Fault in Our Stars* made me realize what that meant. Since I read your book, I've thought about the blessings in my life. You taught me that pain demands to be felt.

Sincerely,

Natashia McDonald