

Tommy Panfang
Ames, IA

Dear Mr. Potok,

When I first started your book, it came under an alias. I saw a young boy coming out of a ball game, seriously injured and feeling hatred boil inside of him for one boy: Danny Saunders. However, when I left, I found an amazing story about friendship and two struggling powers: religion and the sciences. Through this book, I came to see the power and responsibilities of friendship and understanding.

My family has always been moving and shifting around cities and nations. I have attended many schools in many parts of the world. However, since I remained at many of those schools for sometimes only a year, I remained aloof to many of the conflicts arriving and leaving in those schools. I had at most only one or two friends because of my shyness and brevity in speech. As a result, I had almost no one to confirm in. Thus, I had to ponder over my own thoughts of myself.

Mr. Potok, I must admit that before I read your book, I had little patience with my friends. I cared little for their talks, even though they poured their secrets with me and needed help. I did almost nothing, and came to just give a nod of agreement or tell them to discuss their issues with those who had caused them their grief. As I reflect upon these reactions, I realized that I might have continued to have allowed my friends to have been kept in that secluded and miserable world of theirs, like Danny had until Reuven came and encouraged him to continue on with his interests outside of his religious community.

When I finished your book, I saw the power and responsibilities of friendship. I saw that when I refused my friends' attention, I was destroying our relationship. I realized by remaining aloof and pondering over my own thoughts to even my friends, I was taking away from the meaning of friendship and avoiding the open hand that wanted to help me back onto my feet.

It seemed to me, Mr. Potok, that in your novel, forgiveness and acceptance is essential to the healing of a tortured soul, and that it brings no dismays. I was surprised, at first, at how easily Reuven had forgiven this stranger who had nearly made him half-blind through a ball injury. Yet, I was more astonished at the similarities of the two characters under all their different backgrounds and religions. I realized, that if I had forgiven more people, perhaps the enmity and aloofness that eventually was built between us could have fallen and perhaps in its place, friendship could have risen.

I also saw in your book, Mr. Potok, the reluctance of fathers to let go of tradition, and thus, refuse favors for their sons. When I read how Reb Saunders went through pain and suffering to continue to raise his son in tradition, I had a similar flashback.

I have moved into many competitive schools and regions, and to stay near the top and keep our family pride, my father made me hours of silent mathematical drills and do hundreds of essays. I nearly never talked to him, except when I need help in mathematics or when we ate our meals. I was always scared of him because it seemed that he was an honorable person and that to disappoint seemed to be a great sorrow. Thus I grew up with many differences with my father. To know that others felt this way, whether real or fictional, made me feel better and lifted my bitterness.

Reuven's father, after hearing Reuven's surprise at how that simple ball game had changed into a complex relationship stated, "Reuven, as you grow older you will discover that the most important things that will happen to you will often come as result...Of ordinary things." I felt a tinge of déjà vu at this statement for it was what I had felt when I finished your book. This book was a jewel to my mind for it brought out many of my fears and troubles and found a remedy for them all. I learned that behind the skin of all of us, we all have the same fears and that we are all not that different after all. I learned that forgiveness must be learned and used. I learned that friendship is essential in everything, and those who are immune to it must cope through the many difficulties of life without a helping hand to aid them. I learned the difficulties which we cope with all need to be listened to, so that the years of silence can be tamed for silence brings pain, and that pain brings fear and hatred.

Sincerely,

Tommy Panfang

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