Dear John Green,

When I first happened upon a copy of *The Fault in Our Stars* at the library, I was a bit unsure of what to expect. Since I do not have cancer myself, nor am I closely acquainted with anyone who does, I cannot say that I understand what it’s like. I can’t even begin to imagine what it’s like to live in a constant struggle with a terminal disease. At first, I was suspicious that your novel might be yet another cancer book, like Hazel describes, where the main character is diagnosed with cancer and creates an anti-cancer organization in his/her name and the bulk of the novel is dedicated to him/her battling the disease. But instead of focusing on disease, it focuses on something quite different: the idea of what’s important in life. Augustus knows he is going to die soon, and he regrets not leading an extraordinary life. But Hazel reminds him that what gives life meaning isn’t living an extraordinary life. Instead it is loving your family, friends, and those around you unconditionally, with all your heart.

Before reading your book, I was practically obsessed with becoming famous someday. I aspired to become a renowned actor, perform in popular movies, and possess a collection of Oscars beside my bed. Although I’m ashamed of it now, daydreams of paparazzi trailing me and begging for an autograph had crossed my mind more than once. It’s not an uncommon wish, though. A large number of the population’s greatest desire is to leave a mark on the world in some way or another. Whether it’s becoming a celebrated actor, musician, artist, sports player, political figure, or whatever, it doesn’t matter. We all want to achieve something great. But after reading your book, I have realized there isn’t really much of a point to that wish. It’s rather selfish. We want to be distinguished primarily to outlast death, by living in the minds of many long after our demise. Like when Nelson Mandela died recently, the whole world mourned, saying things like, “He will never be forgotten,” and “He belongs to the ages.” Of course, I’m sure Mandela’s aim was not to become legendary, although he has, but to fight for racial justice.

But now, after reading your book, I am no longer gripped with the idea of fame and fortune. I don’t aspire to be well-known, or even legendary. Although living with the rich and famous appeals to me sometimes (as I’m sure it does everyone), I’ve learned that it’s not the most significant thing in life. Hazel Grace taught me this in *The Fault in Our Stars*.

But what is significant in life? What makes a life important? These are the questions that swirled around in my brain for weeks after I read your novel. I used to believe that what makes a life important is how large of an impact you made on the universe. After pondering those questions for a long while, I realized the answer was written on the last page of your book: what makes a life important are the choices that you make. You can choose to hurt the universe and leave multiple scars on the world. You can choose to help the universe and carefully place Band-Aids on the lesions others have left behind. Or, like Hazel, you can choose to neither help nor hurt the universe, but notice it. Hazel observed the universe carefully, taking mental notes every so often on what she saw. She did this without injuring the world in any way, shape, or form.
Thank you, John Green. Through The Fault in Our Stars, you have taught me that in the end, it does not matter if your name is known by hundreds of thousands of strangers worldwide. What matters is if you have strong relationships with those you love. What matters is if you do not harm the universe by leaving wounds on our planet that will eventually become scars. What matters is if, at the end of your life, you can think back and confidently say that you are happy with the choices you made.

So far, I like mine.

Asha Pruitt