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Dear Lurlene McDaniel,

Before I picked up your book, *A Rose for Melinda*, I was just a teenage girl with a knack for dancing (and a bit of an adventurous side) that spent *a little too much time* with her head in the clouds. Your book has pulled me down out of the clouds and shoved me firmly into reality... and given me the inspiration to push back.

I think that one of the reasons that I really connected with the book is because my life is parallel to the characters' in so many ways. On the surface, Melinda and I appear the same because of our backgrounds and environment- loving homes and communities, a passion for dance and movement, and a strong potential to succeed. But, like most things in life, the resemblance really goes deeper than appearances. We both care a lot about the people around us- even if it doesn't always show. Also, we appear to be doing well on the outside, but looks can be deceiving. In the back of our minds, doubt nags and chews away at our thoughts. This book has helped teach me to break away from the antagonist in the corner of my mind and to see the good side in things, even (and especially) when life is not easy. I also feel a connection with Bailey... more than I would like to admit. Frankly, we both have a bit of a jealous streak. After I read the book, I realized that it is best to move on and to be glad for the person that you are envious of, rather than being resentful.

Not only did I learn about myself as an individual, but I also learned about my life in this world. I hadn't appreciated how fortunate I was until I saw how others were living. I knew that there were people out there that had cancer and other diseases, but it just hadn't hit home until I "experienced" what it was like through Melinda's story. I know that I won't ever *really* understand what living through hardship really is like, but now I have a better realization of just how much I take for granted in my everyday living. I am truly blessed, and I need to share those blessings with others.

Your book has changed many parts of my life. I am still a teenage girl with a knack for dancing and a bit of an adventurous side, but now I have an empathetic heart, a love for life, and a strong inspiration for dance. Your book, *A Rose for Melinda*, is what has given me such a *rosy* outlook on life. Overall, I learned that everybody needs to take time to "stop and smell the roses", even though you may run into the occasional thorn.

Respectfully yours,

*Ellen Muehling*

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