

## Level III Winner

Hannah DesChamp

Dear Pablo Neruda,

As a kid, everyone has confused feelings towards their family. My feelings towards my family are complicated and sometimes terrible. I have always felt isolated and guilty about my relationship with my mom and dad, until I came across your poem, 'I Do Not Love You Except Because I Love You'.

My dad turned his back on my mother, my brother, and me when I was six years old. He betrayed us and lied, and never returned. My mother was forced to raise two children at the age of 22 with no support. The pressure was too much for her and two years later she had to go to drug rehabilitation. My brother and I moved in with my bestfriend and her family for three months as my mother tried to get clean.

While in rehabilitation my mom met someone and decided to leave with him. My brother and I moved back in with her, Jason (her new boyfriend), and his two sons. After only a couple of months my mom was pregnant. Jason proposed to her, and they got married. Shortly after the wedding, my little sister, Nevaeh-Rain, was born.

Five months after the birth of Nevaeh, Jason disappeared, leaving us on the streets again. My mom knew someone we could rent a room from, except there were a few problems. All four of us had to share a tiny room and all sleep on one queen size bed. Every morning to get to school we had to take two buses and walk. It was difficult, and things could've been better but my mom loved us just as much any other mom loves her children and she was trying to make life work for all of us.

About a week before Halloween when I was in fifth grade, my mom did not pick me up after school. I called her, my uncle, my grandparents; nobody answered. Finally, at eight o'clock, the administrator at the school let my friend's mom take me home. She took me to get dinner and then took me to my house. As I walked in the door to my house, I did not see anyone. I went to my room to find my seven year old brother sitting on the bed holding my little sister. I asked where mom was, and he did not respond. I called my friend's mom crying, begging her to pick me up. She refused, telling me I could not abandon my siblings as my mom had done.

So I dried up my tears and took care of my little sister and brother.

There was no response from my mom for three years. By that time, I was living with my godmother and her husband with my little brother. My sister was living with her father, and I wasn't able to see her for two years.

I don't really know why my dad left, I guess the thought of supporting a family was scary to him, and he had his own problems that he had to deal with. My mom has apologized and explained herself, but it is difficult to reconcile my hate and my love for her as a person and her actions.

She had her problems, she didn't have any money and no friends to borrow money from. She was thirsty; thirsty for the thrill that being careless held, so she went to the bar and drank away her problems. I don't really know what she did for those missing years. Maybe she made up for the high school years she missed because of me. I now know that she had to leave us, but she just didn't have the strength to tell us that. My mom was and is a caring and loving person. All she wanted was to love and to be loved in return. So now I have forgiven her and what she did to my siblings and me.

When I came across your poem, 'I Do Not Love You Except Because I Love You', the first people I thought of was my mom and my dad. I don't love them, except for the utter reason that I love them. They are my parents, they are the reason I am here and the reason I am who I am. I have to love them, even after what they've put me through. But because of what they have done to my brother, my sister, and me, a part of me despises them. This is why when I read "I hate you deeply, and hating you, Bend to you, and the measure of my changing love for you", I was infatuated. My love for my parents changes every time their names tumble through my mind.

"Is that I do not see you but love you blindly". I do not see my parents, and I don't really know who they are. I love them without knowing them, and I didn't think that was possible until I read this line. This gave me hope. Hope that maybe I'm not crazy, and that it's okay I feel this way. Your poem gave me the explanation I've been searching for. The reason why and the reason how we can love without loving and hate without hating.

With sincere gratitude,

Hannah DesChamp