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Dear Sylvia Plath,

When I was fifteen, I felt lost beyond all hope. I never seem to fit into any kind of mold and I floated around aimlessly between my friends, my peers, and my family. I never managed to associate with anyone and was constantly searching for my place in the greater scheme of things. Teenage years are about finding an identity, about discovering that you are not alone, that there is a whole world out there behind the warped glass of the bell jar, waiting to be found. It was your book, The Bell Jar, Ms. Plath, that finally released me and allowed me to find not only my own identity but in turn, the hopes and dreams I still hold today.

My parents used to tell me all of those awful cliches about being a teenager. How nothing was as big a deal as I made it, and everyone goes through it. Despite that, I still felt alone. In my head, I knew that no one thought like I did, no one obsessed over things, no one else felt that they were "very still, and very empty, the way the eye of a tornado must feel." It may have been depression, or it just could have simply been loneliness. Whatever it was, I picked up The Bell Jar the summer when I was about to turn fifteen. I had spent most of that summer sitting in my black inner tube in Lake Michigan spinning around and staring up at the sky. It was hot and sticky outside, and as soon as I read the very first sentence of that book, I knew that it would change my life. Being able to tap into someone else's thoughts to find that they are a mirror image of your own is an incredible feeling. Esther's feelings and emotions reminded me of myself. She was questioning what really mattered and at the same time realizing that many things were just a mirage, that the world isn't as great as it seems.

Together, we felt trapped underneath those heavy bell jars, feeling that the rest of the world was moving on without us. She was faced with the prospect of college, and discovered that everything she thought she had been didn't mean anything at all. I was entering high school and realizing that for once in my life I wasn't the best at everything. The pressure of making perfect grades and choosing the perfect life made me overlook all of the really important things in life, like love and happiness. I would obsess, just as Esther would obsess over minute details of my everyday life.

I also had no experience with boys at the time, and laughed out loud at Esther's exact description of Buddy Willard naked. (In fact, several years later that same paragraph flashed through my head and I realized how accurate her portrayal had been.) By the end of the book I was smiling, but was also scared. When I learned of your suicide, I put my life into perspective. I decided then and there that because of the type of mind that I have, I needed to learn to exercise control over it. The Bell Jar is how I do that. Every time I think that life is weighing me down too much to continue on, I remember Esther Greenwood.

There is one more reason that your book has touched my life so much. Pure and simply, it is the best piece of literature I have ever read. I have never since heard things described the way they are in The Bell Jar. Clothes limp as fish and wonderfully imaginative words like sultry and queer. Your writing made me realize that literature is

an art. Anyone can jot something down on a piece of paper, but it takes hard work and creativity to make it a piece of art that will last forever.

The Bell Jar spoke to the very core of my existence. I learned to make my own happiness. Now, whenever I get depressed, I think of Esther and her shock treatments. Most of all I think of your suicide, of how this letter would be reaching you in person if you were still alive, and I would be able to shake your hand and thank you for changing my life. I still go crazy every once in awhile, but the hope you gave me helps me to get up, take a deep breath, and leave it all behind me.

Wishing you were here,
Shannon O'Halloran