

Dear Laura Ingalls Wilder,

Change is something many people are afraid of, but I know it can be wonderful. It is something I have never looked at in the same way since reading your book *Little House on the Prairie* and meeting Laura. My house burned down when I was seven, and I almost died in the fire. Since that night my dad rescued me from my burning bedroom, things were never the same. People have always described the fire as a great tragedy that hit our family, but I have never viewed it that way. Like Laura on the prairie, this was a time when I was faced with big changes. My family had no home to live in and not even our clothes to wear. But Laura taught me that life's challenges can be viewed as a great adventure, something to be thankful for even, and this is a view I have chosen to adopt in my own life.

Laura's life is full of challenges. Laura's family is faced with the move to land that they work hard to settle on, but later learn they have to vacate after all of their hardship and effort. They are overcome by sickness. They even lose their dog, Jack. Laura never lets these events get the better of her. She feels the sadness and the disappointment but she becomes stronger because of them. Just last year, my Dad and I were hit by a truck while driving in our car to the garden store. Our car was wrecked, but we were not hurt badly. When we had to walk and take the bus everywhere in the snow for four months because we did not have a car, I thought of all the things that happened to the Ingalls family, all of the times they had to move because something was not working. This gave me a tremendous amount of strength and hope. Things always got better for the Ingalls, and through it all they had each other just like I have my Mom and Dad.

What Laura taught me most is that I can either be frightened or mad at life, or I can choose to view change as an opportunity to learn some valuable lessons. One of the most important lessons I learned from Laura and the Ingalls is that the challenges I face have to be greeted with gratitude. After the car accident when we had to walk everywhere, I started to think how thankful I was that I could walk. I realized that the car accident could have taken that away from me. I also realized that everyday, when I walked with my Dad, we spent time together and shared stories that I will always remember. The fire took our house and all of my clothes and toys away, but I still had my family and my pets, which is everything in the world that mattered to me. Just like in *Little House*, when Mr. Edwards brought Laura and Mary Christmas presents through the snow from far away, people were so kind and gave us all sorts of things. And folks at my school were so generous and caring. I never knew complete strangers could care like that. This was a gift.

It doesn't really matter whether you like change or not, whether you embrace it or run the other way. It is sometimes wonderful, sometimes disappointing and often frightening, but it is always happening. *Little House* showed me that life is nothing but transition, and change is inevitable. The Ingalls knew this, and your book showed me I can rely as they did, on family, faith and community to get me through. I have learned that wherever the greatest challenge exists in my life is where the greatest growth is too. *Little House on the Prairie* taught me that it isn't the tough times that define us, but rather our response to the challenges we face which makes us who we are. And that is the real gift for which I thank you.

Sincerely,

Reagan Nelson, Grade 6