

Dear Mr. Barrie,

When I was a little girl, it seemed that all I wanted to do was grow up. I wanted to go to school and have a lot of homework like my older cousins. When I turned fourteen I believed I had finally gotten my wish. Of course, I realized that fourteen isn't *really* a grownup yet, but it seems to be the age at which everyone expects you to act like one. After all, at fourteen you start your first year of high school! But when I reached it, Mr. Barrie, I found myself longing for thirteen and twelve again. The picture that was painted for my future did not match the vision of younger days. I had to do well on my SAT, get accepted into a good college, graduate with honors and then get a job and work until I died. I had reached the height of my younger ambitions, and it wasn't any fun at all.

But then, while I was volunteering at the library (that's another thing that I knew I had to do, volunteer hours look good on college résumés) I saw *Peter Pan* on the shelf. Having nothing better to do, I took it home with me and started reading it. I'm not going to tell you how it made me shriek with laughter and cry buckets of tears, because I'm sure you hear that kind of praise a lot. Instead, I want to share with you two things your book helped me come to grips with. Peter helped me in one of them, Wendy in another. I don't think one was more important than the other, but I will go in chronological order; for you see, these lessons took a while to sink in.

After my second trip through your book, Peter became my constant companion. I can quite honestly say that, like Wendy, I was completely smitten by him. At a time when I was assailed by deadlines and an insane amount of "grownup" things to accomplish, I felt that Peter was the one safe thing to hang on to. It seemed that, while everyone was bent on pushing and dragging me into the grownup world, Peter had hold of my other arm and stubbornly held me back. I wanted him to! I wanted to stay a child and put off responsibilities for a time. *Peter Pan* gave me a companion that didn't worry about the latest fashions or the newest gossip. Peter didn't mind when I blew off school work, or sang (loudly) in the shower. I had begun to leave "childish" things behind, but now I had found someone to make me linger a bit longer.

In addition to helping me stay young, your book also helped me to grow up. While I read about Wendy's adventures, I knew in the back of my mind that she would eventually leave the Neverland, go home, and grow up. At first, I didn't understand why she would even think about leaving! To my mind, she had it made, no grownup worries, no one telling her what to do, and no responsibilities. I was angry with you during the last chapter when you told about how she grew up, and perhaps that's why I didn't catch what I think you were trying to say. Childhood *is* free of worry and responsibility, but if I didn't follow Wendy and choose to accept the worries and responsibilities, I'd never know the joys that come after them. Wendy's story helped me realize that if I didn't

accept the grueling hours of study, I'd never feel the thrill of getting an A+ on my test. Peter Pan does have "ecstasies innumerable," like you said, but he can never experience the relief that comes after a long night of worry, or the joy of being in love with another person (a joy that I am personally looking forward to). When Wendy understood this, I did as well. Again, I found myself wanting to grow up, but not as I did when I was younger. This time I understood most of it wouldn't be fun, but there would be spots of joy that I would miss out on if I failed to step up to my responsibilities.

So, that's what Peter and Wendy taught me. Two lessons, one about staying young, the other about growing up. I'm fifteen now, the age that I set in my mind for irrevocable growing up. *Peter Pan* rests on the top of my bookshelf, surrounded by sprigs of dried rosemary and model fairies. I don't have much time to read it now, between all of my classes and my newly acquired job, but I still remember Peter and Wendy. They are still as much a part of me as when I spent hours imagining their "unrecorded" adventures. Perhaps Peter would be angry with me for growing up, but that doesn't matter much anymore. You see, I'm no longer angry with myself.

I know Peter is impossible to reason with, but if you ever see him, try to explain that growing up isn't as awful as I thought it would be. And, while you're at it, say hello to him for me.

Sincerely,

Anna Eichner