

Dear Ed Dodge,

My grandpa would tell me about Vietnam when I asked. But his eyes would always mist over, and he would get that far away sound in his voice. Now I know why.

Dau changed my perspective on everything. Dau made me realize that I have been selfish. I am not proud of that, but I must admit it. I have been thinking I had it bad, while kids in Vietnam had to look out their window and see the bodies laying around their village. I made myself finish the book, just to force the truth into my brain.

The part when Morgan lost his friend, Bruckner, made me cry. No other book has made me cry. But I did more than cry. I feared that my friends could die, and I would have only mom and stepdad left. What then? What if they died, like my dad did? Just left me alone. What if? What if? What if?

Dau is Vietnamese for pain. That is what this book brings out in me, pain. Pain, the unimaginable pain the soldiers had to go through. Pain, the pain of the Vietnamese people. Pain, the pain of the loss, the soldier's death brought to the family. I have always approached death warily. The unimaginable, unsolvable subject. What happens when you die? I ask myself that question all of the time because I am agnostic. What is the scientific explanation of what happens when your life ends? I don't know, but this book made me feel comfortable when speaking of death, able to deal with the pain the subject of death brought me. I just got told that my grandpa, Dale, is dying from cancer that has spread t

Dear Marina Gessner,

Your book, *The Distance from Me to You*, really inspired my personal thoughts about how I always need to be true to myself even if those who love me try to change and influence my thoughts, decisions, and what I may think of other people.

Before I read your book, I sometimes let my friends influence how I would dress or how I thought of other people. I even let my family decide what activities I would do. I let them do those kinds of things for me. I thought it would make me a better person. After reading this book, it taught me to be the best person I can; I have to do what I love, whatever it may be. I need to do what makes me happy.

Your book made me think that it is important to be passionate about an idea or an activity. This is what makes everyone unique. If I am passionate about something, and I really want to do it, I really need to work hard. Like in the beginning of the book as McKenna plans a hiking trip with her friend Courtney, her family does not think it is a very good idea. McKenna wants to prove to her family that she is prepared. She does a lot of research and practices those things she would need to do on the hike.

When her friend Courtney backs out of the hike, McKenna still holds very firm to the idea of hiking the trail and even decides she will go alone. From this I learned two important lessons. One, if you really want to do something, like a hike, then go for it. For me, McKenna represents the ideal of being true to yourself. Don't be the person that gets pushed around or always follows the trends; this person is never going to be original. Next, if you think you can do it, work hard to prepare yourself and you will succeed.

As McKenna is on the trail alone she notices a lot of people there are worried about her, complete strangers worried about her! McKenna knew though that if she stuck to her plans and always listened to her gut feelings she would be perfectly safe and prepared. It is important in life to always have those people around you who can support you and are there for you, but it is just as important to make sure you listen to your inner self.

As the story continues, McKenna meets Sam on the trip. At first she remains true to herself and her plans, which keeps her safe. As her feelings grew stronger towards him, she starts letting go of herself, and lets them influence her. This is a very important lesson in life. If I love someone and they love me, they will always support who I am. I shouldn't have to change for them. I really feel this will help me at my age. I am just at that time in my life when I worry about friends or potential boyfriends and what they think of me. As I start to meet new people, even if I have strong feelings for them, I will always remember the lesson that McKenna taught me.

McKenna realized this lesson in the end. After they were rescued she was angry at Sam, but even angrier at "herself for not standing firm, for not listening to her own inner voice." She was upset for following Sam off the trail even though she knew they could get lost. Her feelings for Sam had gotten in the way of what she knew was right. She did not make the best choice for her.

After realizing she wasn't done with what she really came to do, McKenna finished the hike. Once again instilling in me the important lesson of doing what is right for you. Even when you make some bad or unwise choices and get off the right track, you can get right back. If your friends and family truly love you, they will support who you are and what you want to do.

Now after reading your book, I know it may not always be the best thing for you to listen to others or do it their way. We were put in this world to make our own mark not to all be clones. We are all different and reading this book influenced my opinion on the subject.

Thank you, Marina Gessner, for writing this book. Others may have looked at it differently, but I think it shows a very important lesson. This is your own life and you need to make it your own.

"Real beauty is to be true to oneself. That's what makes me feel good." –Laetitia Casta

Sincerely,
Alexandra Madsen