

Dear Richard Russo,

I was born and lived most of my life in a medium-sized city. This city was home to a big university, and there always seemed to be something going on. Concerts and performances of all kinds were constantly being advertised, and new houses, stores, or university buildings were steadily being built across town. Recently, though, I moved with my family to a small rural town in another state. Here, the biggest thing that is happening is the construction of a new Super Wal Mart. Local shops are closing one at a time, and the economy is dominated by a couple of big companies. It seems like half of the town's population works in one of these company's factories, and if one were to shut down or move elsewhere, the town would be devastated. I found this situation strikingly similar to that of your fictional town of Empire Falls. For this reason and others, that book took on a special significance for me.

As I read the book, I began to realize that I was just like Miles. I used to be terribly shy, and I still lack the confidence, especially in dealing with people, to do a lot of the things that I would like to do. The similarity between Miles and me was the most striking in the scenes when he is talking to Mrs. Whiting. I felt sorry for him, but I also realized that I have the very same problem. I might know what I want to say and who I need to say it to, but I never have the courage to actually say it. Another thing that, in addition to being hilarious, further helped me to relate to Miles was the story about his high school driver's ed. course. I had just taken driver's ed. this past summer, so the feeling of being the only first time driver in a car full of guys who had been driving for a month was still fresh in my mind. The only thing in that scene that I would have done differently was that I probably would have stopped at least a little bit earlier. During my own driver's ed. classes, I was so terrified of hitting something that my foot rarely left the brake pedal for longer than a few seconds. At the end of the course, my instructor told me that the biggest problem with my driving was that I was too cautious. This was definitely true, and as is the case with Miles, this is also one of my biggest problems in life.

As a whole, your book showed me that risks are sometimes necessary in order to be happy and to succeed in life. It also showed me that if I keep worrying about what other people think of me, and if I continue to let myself be intimidated by other people, I will never really be able to express myself or to accomplish anything. When I finished the book, I was almost angry with myself, determined to change my attitude towards other people and towards my life. It doesn't matter how small or insignificant my town is, because if I am willing to take risks and try my hardest at everything I do, I will have as good a chance at success as will anyone else. For this inspiration, I thank you.

Sincerely,  
Jim Caraher *Jim Caraher*