Reflection on “The Promise of a Pencil” by Adam Braun

By Maria DiSpigno
Class of 2018

After reading Adam Braun’s *The Promise of A Pencil: How an Ordinary Person Can Create Extraordinary Change*, I found myself thinking about my own education and life experiences, compared to the experiences of children who grew up in impoverished countries. For many, poverty is just one of myriad barriers preventing them from getting an education. Violence, drug and human trafficking, and gender discrimination also play a role in preventing children worldwide from getting an education. While having the vision and drive necessary to build schools in developing nations is commendable, efforts must also be made to address larger issues if we want to end the global educational deficit.

Growing up in a middle-class family in the United States, my access to education has been relatively unlimited in comparison to many other children. After spending nearly three years in Americus, Georgia, I got my first real glimpse into how my access to education was easier than it was for many other people in my school. According to the 2012 census, the median household income for Americus is $27,408 with 36% of the population living in poverty. Only 22.6% of the residents over age 25 have earned a bachelor’s degree or higher.¹ My parents both hold bachelor’s degrees and, in my father’s case, a master’s degree. We were able to comfortably

Reflection on “The Promise of a Pencil” by Adam Braun

afford a home and only my father had to work, in comparison to friends who had both parents working to make ends meet in low-income apartments. I believe that since my family was much more financially secure than most of my classmates’ families, I had more time and resources to devote to strengthening my academic abilities.

Compare my American upbringing to that of another girl from the Middle East, India, or South America. Many girls in the Middle East are denied an education under the threat of the Taliban. In India, women are still constrained by gender roles and newspapers around the world show the rise of sexual violence toward women, who are often raped or sold as child brides. In South America, drug wars have decimated villages and women are also subjected to domesticated roles. While these barriers stand it will remain difficult for women in developing nations to have access to education.

How much does an education mean to these women? Malala Yousafzai has become perhaps the most powerful symbol for women’s education, both in the Middle East and worldwide, after she was shot by the Taliban for refusing to stop attending school and encouraging other girls to do the same. Malala still continues to spread her message in a philosophy similar to Adam Braun’s own ideas: “One child, one teacher, one pen and one book can change the world. Education is the only solution. Education First.”2 She was willing to die for an education. And yet, I have heard myself and others complain about the very education many girls worldwide can only dream about receiving.

My education has allowed me to see how lucky I am compared to so many others in the world. I will be part of the less than three percent of the world’s population who has a college

---

Reflection on “The Promise of a Pencil” by Adam Braun

degree. Even if I cannot bring an education to another woman in Pakistan, India, or Mexico, I can advocate for their rights. I can use my education to fight for theirs. I believe that if I can even get one more girl on the path to a college degree, that is a step toward more equality and justice within the world. Education is only part of a greater story that is a person’s life.