By Kelly Bailey

“What Does It Mean to be Educated?”

Each human being is born simply, bearing a minimal range of abilities and with a mind at the mercy of its environment. But as soon as we enter the world we begin to learn; shapes, colors, sounds and scents. Although we have yet to learn the names of these new and foreign aspects of the world around us, or what they mean, we are aware of their existence. Soon, with the help of our environment and the people in it, we begin to learn beyond the physical and form our own ideas, opinions and philosophies. To be educated means more than simply retaining knowledge presented to you, it is the ways in which you utilize that knowledge in establishing who you are and your capabilities.

In today’s world, it’s not uncommon for children to have similar viewpoints as their parents or guardians. However, with the accessibility of information and the progressive nature of the younger population, not only is it easier for people at an earlier age to form their own beliefs, but there are a growing number of issues that trigger differing opinions. With this influx of information at the feet of malleable minds, it is more important than ever to ensure they are properly educated.

In the modern battle between the ignorant and the wise, the former tend to hold the belief that they are in fact, the latter, and vice versa. There is a danger with this, as those who are brought to believe false information can suffer in terms of how they are perceived by society and can be met with tension and hostility. In many cases, those with more extremist views tend to shield their children from any other information, whether it be fact or opinion, to maintain the radical nature of their reasonings. If kept within this bubble of bias for most of their younger and more impressionable years, a snowball effect can take place, and these ideologies can be passed down from generation to generation. Executed to the extreme, this form of brainwashing can trigger a sense of paranoia with a general fear of the outside world and of those with differing opinions. Prime examples of these situations and their effects are displayed in the memoirs of Tara Westover in her book, *Educated*.

In the first few pages of the memoir, the reader is exposed to a lifestyle foreign to most - a family living off the grid. With almost complete control of the household, Tara’s father has instilled an unwavering fear of the government and most of the outside world in his wife and children. If not unimaginable enough, it is soon explained that a few of the younger children have no births certificates, including Tara. There is, however, a shift in power in the home after Tara’s father instructs her mother to become a midwife. Quickly, she learns the ins and outs of midwifery and visibly gains a sense of confidence and identity.
As time progresses, a few of the children, much to the father’s dismay, display interest in furthering their own education and becoming more than just his scraping labor. It soon becomes apparent the shift from blind following to independent thinking occurs the more the kids familiarize themselves with “outsider” types of thinking. From mindlessly claiming to never want to attend public school in chapter one to attending college in part two, Tara’s thoughts on education, and how she wants to live her life, dramatically changed. The inevitable effects of her upbringing begin to surface as the bustle of the area appears quite intimidating. The behavior of strangers, including a roommate, initially are identified as wrong as originally classified by Tara’s father. The flow and function of a college campus are lost as she ends up in the wrong classroom, the majority of the lecture missed after taking the wrong bus. To an incoming college freshman, this sequence of events would be something out of a nightmare.

This experience gave Tara a sense of identity for the first time. It separated her from the strict and extreme views of her father and allowed for her to learn in a much more open-minded and free-thinking environment. A girl originally raised to fear the outside was now letting that same side of the world, and everything in it, get a glimpse into how learning made all the difference. Because when it all boils down to it education isn’t just knowledge, it’s knowing who you are in the world.

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