

## The Power of Choice

For the entirety of my life, I was raised to believe certain ideals and in my house of prayer, I would speak when told to speak, and stand when told to stand. I did so passively, with no real understanding of what unconscious decision I constantly made every time I entered the space. It was not until I hit the age of 16, where the leader of the prayers prompted the congregation to wait to stand until they were ready. This pause—this simple moment of reflection to prepare myself for prayer—was everything I had been looking for in all of my time developing into the curious teen I was at the time and continue to be to this day. This changed everything. I had a moment where I knew that I was choosing prayer, and prayer was not just forced upon me. Choice was exactly what Tara Westover needed: the realization that her life did not have to consist of only her father's teachings changed her was one of the most educational experiences she could have had.

I brought up my experience, not only to relate to her risky, yet thoughtful, choices made throughout her life, but to acknowledge the relevance that choice has in most children. I, personally, was forced to go to school since I was old enough to attend, and most other children were, too. It was something I never really wanted to do, but what my parents said, went. However, that wasn't the case for Tara: she wasn't allowed to go to school because her father didn't believe she should. Instead, she self-taught herself occasional lessons on math or science to supplement her evident absence of education, which was, of course, not sufficient in teaching her everything that she might like to know.

Choosing to go to college was a simple moment of reflection that changed everything for her. This small fact is so important, because we know from this that she is different from every

other child: she wanted school; she wanted to learn. This choice was important because it shows a true desire to learn, rather than being forced to. Similarly to how I finally chose prayer, she found a moment to change an aspect of her life that she finds important and she did not ignore it.

The thing that's different, however, is that other than her older brother who chose to go to college, she was defying most of her family and their beliefs. While I found my moment in an accepting and open environment, she had to fight the strongest aspect of her life: family. I truly cannot imagine how difficult it must be to go against the will of the people who know you better than anyone. In any case, her family is easily one of the most influential parts of her pursuit of education, because their disapproval motivates her efforts towards and throughout college and grad school.

I am now a freshman in college, attempting to piece together everything I've been taught for eighteen years of my life to figure out where I see myself going forward. Starting my exploration experience by reading about the most unconventional education was bittersweet. There is nothing I would rather be able to do than to know that I am choosing education, rather than following the path that I have been told was the path for me, the same way Tara did, and the same way I did with my religion. But, I am, again, a freshman in college. I cannot go back and change the way I was raised in hopes that I will truly choose to learn. I can, however, take my time now, at the University of Delaware, and explore further what I would like to do for the rest of my life. My time here will be filled with learning and growing as long as I follow a path that I am passionate about, and not a path that is forced upon me. As Tara Westover states in her memoir, "an education is not so much about making a living as making a person." I will study to grow into the adult and human being that I would hope and love to be, without emphasis on a

career that will make the most money. Education is about seeking new knowledge that yields eternal happiness. And if *Educated* has taught me anything, it's that it's not too late to do so.