

## An Innocent Life

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I grew up surrounded by the images and stories in National Geographic Magazine. Generally, my parents leave the magazines on the kitchen counter and I become their only reader. Several years ago the cover of National Geographic bore a haunting picture of a brown-eyed girl with dark skin and full lips. Although the girl's hair was covered, I knew that it was also thick and black, not unlike mine. The featured article bore images and stories of beautiful little girls and their aged husbands. It recounted how girls as young as seven were being sold by their families into a horrific life of servitude and rape. There was a picture of a girl with burns over most of her body. She tried to kill herself to end the abuse that she suffered in her marriage. At the end of the article it pointed out the key to ending child marriage, education. When girls are educated they have a tangible value to their family. They are no longer seen as a burden. Education is fundamental in breaking down child marriage which continues the cycle of poverty, ignorance and injustice in many developing countries.

Recently, my parents and I attended a lecture by Pulitzer Prize journalist, Nicholas Kristof. He recounted appalling stories about the lives many women in developing nations he personally witnessed. He emphasized in his closing points, the critical role that education plays in altering the cycle of poverty. It provides women the chance to improve their standard of living and the lives of people around them. In *Half the Sky*, written by Kristof and WuDunn, "One study after another has shown that educating girls is one of the most effective ways to fight poverty." Money that is frivolously spent on the latest electronics could save the lives of so many girls. The fact that in rural China, the cost of education is thirteen dollars per year provides no excuse for people to ignore the importance of providing education to all.

As a young woman, I am so grateful to live in a country that has made tremendous progress towards gender equality. There is no barrier preventing girls from being educated. Mandela's statement, "Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world" is accurate. Change and innovation comes from those who have been educated. Ignorance leads to nowhere. It is my hope to find a way to spread education to girls who live in poverty by raising awareness that we all have the responsibility and ability to help educate girls in developing nations. In *The Last Lecture*, Randy Tausch wrote, "When we're connected to others, we become better people." My passion is to help people understand the plight of numerous girls and women in developing nations that can be remedied by an education.