

Leah Currie

From the Mountain

We all have a Buck's Peak; a place that makes us feel small and enabled. It is difficult to imagine what exists beyond this one place, and the person we could potentially grow into when everything we've ever been taught and all the people we trust are rooted in a single point. The University of Delaware is larger in population than my hometown of Smithfield, Rhode Island, and Louis Redding Hall is three times the size of my high school. When I was home, I felt trapped and my education was centered around chasing grades and proving that I was worth something to others. I perpetuated self-doubt and my character was defined by the sacrifices I had to make to achieve my goals, rather than the material I was learning and the experiences I had. My potential was measured in expectations and grades; I became a pawn in the game of school and not an active player in my life.

Tara Westover spent much of her life under the pressure of a manipulative family dynamic that prevented growth. Her inability to be independent emerged from "having a father who shoved me toward the chomping blades of a shear....It had come from those moments on the floor, from knowing that Mother was in the next room, closing her eyes and ears to me" (273). There is comfort in familiarity, but the people that she grew up with, are not the same people that allow her to grow. Her family gawks at change and makes Westover cower to beliefs that ultimately keep her world small.

The most difficult part of education is accepting that everything we know, and the people we are, may not be permanent. Ignorance paints Tara Westover as an outcast amongst society, and her ability to coexist depends on relinquishing her grip on the girl from the mountain. When

Westover leaves Buck's Peak, she enters the melting pot of cultures, beliefs, personalities, and ideas that is the world. Harvard and Cambridge provide the best foundation for academic growth, but it is in Rome that Westover experiences the greatest transformation. For the first time, she allows herself complete freedom from her restrictive past and she experiences "Rome as they did: as a place of history, but also as a place of life, food and traffic and conflict and thunder" (268). In the fleeting moments when she allows herself to absorb the nuances of foreign life and ideals, she can "engage with the great thinkers...rather than revere them to the point of muteness" (269). Her ability to immerse herself in a world so distinct from her own, without feeling guilty reflects a moment of immense growth. Education is not measured by how much is taught or how much information can be memorized, it is about navigating our way through the unknown and allowing it to transform us.

I moved to Delaware to escape the timid girl controlled by perceptions and expectations. In the short time I have been here, I have allowed myself the freedom to experience the pitfalls of failure, the excitement of engaging with new people, and the challenges of being independent. This campus offers an abundance of opportunities to learn, it is my responsibility to be open minded and pursue life in a way that is uniquely my own. I will learn in the classroom, but the education I will receive from being immersed in a creative, supportive environment, surrounded by a diverse portfolio of people will be far more valuable. I strive to leave the University of Delaware with more confidence and insight than the girl that left Rhode Island.

We are not frauds because we have changed into a person so distinctly different from the person we left behind. The beauty of education is the metamorphosis that unfolds when we allow everything we've learned and observed to become a part of us. As Dr. Kerry told Tara Westover, "You are not fool's gold, shining only under a particular light. Whomever you become, whatever

you make yourself into, that is who you always were....Even gold appears dull in some lighting—but that is the illusion. And it always was” (242). When we go back to our mountains, whether it be Buck’s Peak or Rhode Island, we return without fear of regressing because education becomes a part of us.