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A Multitude of Truths

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Elise Damasco

A Multitude of Truths

Since preschool, I have always been the small kid. Perpetually tiny, always shoved to the end of the line when my class and I had to arrange ourselves by descending height order for school concerts. Although it didn't bother me at first, it became horrifyingly obvious to me in elementary school that I was one of the smallest kids in my grade. So, inevitably, I reached for any shred of advice to make me magically grow. When my mom told me to stop drinking so much soda because the caffeine would stunt my growth, I made sure to only fill my cup with water. When I visited my Filipino grandparents, who like most Filipinos had a seemingly endless supply of homemade meals, they would encourage me to eat an extra helping of food so I'd grow up to be a strong woman. Then they would plop another helping of rice in front of me, telling me I was just too small. Living my best caffeine-free, rice-filled, preadolescent life, I was ready to grow.

I impatiently waited until one day I realized I had to tilt my head upwards to talk to my growing friends. They had growth spurts while I had t-shirts I never grew out of no matter how many years had passed. I had followed all the advice I was given, and yet today at age eighteen, I'm still 4'11".

While being in the Under Five Feet club isn't the most tragic thing out there, I still felt confused while growing up. Obsessed with the concept of height, I took my mom's no caffeine rule to heart, and I couldn't help but feel like I did something wrong as everyone started to mature while I wore my kid-sized shoes, which I still fit in today. Later on, my height fiasco

inspired me to write my eighth grade science paper on the effects of caffeine; needless to say, learning that caffeine does *not* actually stunt your growth felt like a freight train smashing into my heart.

My mom had made me miss out on years of Pepsi for no reason.

Okay, maybe passing on the Pepsi wasn't the worst thing for me, but this moment did start to make me question the advice my parents gave me. Had my mom been lying to me just to keep me away from sugar overload, or had she simply not been educated on the truth I had learned through research?

Although Tara Westover struggled with distorted truths a bit more serious than height myths, she too had to reconcile the discrepancies between a parent's beliefs and the truth given through education. Most children accept their parents' concept of truth as the only definite truth. However, as Westover experienced, children do not stay under their parents' wings forever, and will eventually be exposed to different experiences, opinions, and stories that drastically differ from the things they were told as kids. Truth, which is simple and concrete through the eyes of a trusting child, morphs into something ambiguous as a person ventures away from their familiar surroundings.

If ignorance is bliss, then truth can be agony. Hacking away at a shield of ignorance is a daunting, emotional task, but it is necessary for a person to expand their concept of truth; gaining more truths allows people to find their place in the world. Although Westover's father truly believed the things he taught his children, his sense of truth remained small as he shut out the opinions of others. The cognitive dissonance and external struggles Westover experienced, however, allowed her to see the world in a way more vibrant than her father could ever see with his debilitating tunnel vision.

Even though education and openness can enhance one's ability to develop a sense of truth, one pure truth does not exist. A multitude of truths can erupt from a single situation, with every person involved processing their thoughts, emotions, and memories into a uniquely personal yet fragile truth that can easily change in a person's mind. While one can ponder the accuracy of every individual's idea of truth, in reality, truth is built from a variety of perspectives and considerations. Westover states in *Educated*, "Who writes history? I thought. I do" (Westover 318). Although Westover originally took her dad's Mormon beliefs as irrefutable, similar to the myths I believed as a kid, education gave her a new facet with which she could construct a more balanced truth. What a person says is true can be true to them, but it is our responsibility as humans to be conscientious when deciding whether our personal truths stem from one person's beliefs, or if they are backed up with a multitude of other truths.