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Novel Essay

English 2, 2000

The Family that Endures Together

The family unit is something that carries a deep meaning to those who are part of it, which stays with each member throughout their lives. The Duro family unit was founded in a morass of love and confusion that caused the members of this family to reach out to substances that fogged reality. The family that drinks together, stays together, was a motto of the matriarch. The father desperately wanted to cling on to his children. Children that had been exposed to the tragic consequences of seeking love and approval from two very sick parents. There was never a shortage of love, but a shortage of being able to show up for life on its own terms. Through many trials and tribulations, and against the odds of reason, the family endured. Hard lessons were learned, and the children were able to find their own way out of the darkness; breaking the cycle of self imposed misery. In the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, the author Khaled Hosseini expresses the theme of enduring pain through the familial relationships that the characters Mariam, Laila, and Tariq have; Mariam being the shameful harami, Laila the beautiful yet painful reminder of her dead brothers, and Tariq as the adored yet scarred prince receiving love only a son could.

Mariam's life was born into shame, as her existence in Afghan culture was seen as a burden to her family, and anyone else who she came across. Nana, Mariam's mother, had carried her shame to term, and delivered the painful reminder of her rejection from the world. Mariam was constantly belittled for her status as a harami bastard child by her own mother. Even her

father Jalil would not bear the shame of Mariam's existence. Although Nana loved her daughter in the sense that Mariam was the only person she could feel connected to, she made sure to keep Mariam's expectations in life to be that of nothing. Nothing was all Mariam should expect out of life, and that way, she wouldn't experience the harm of having any hopes and dreams dashed. Unfortunately for Nana and Jalil, Mariam wanted more out of life, and through this desire, the family would find out what it means to endure pain. Mariam's desire to be a part of her father's family unit was too much to bear for Nana's heart. As it turned out, it was also too much for Jalil's pride. After Nana commits suicide, Jalil casts his shameful daughter off to the wretched care of a man incapable of loving any woman. Though Mariam eventually experiences what it is to truly love and be loved in her new family unit, it is a life that constantly forces her to endure pain and sacrifice herself for others to be happy.

Laila's beauty could not shield her from the pain she would carry as the painful reminder to her mother of her beloved dead brothers. In a society where the men are rulers of all, it is the sons that maintain the glory for a family. Laila never stood a chance in her mother's eyes to be anything but a hanger-on that would never live up to her brother's storied status in Mammy's heart. Laila's father saw things differently, and had all the love and approval that she could have needed. This kind of mixed message from her parents developed a sense of confusion in Laila. Whether she was a blessing or a curse had been an internal struggle for Laila to figure out for what her place was in the world. When her parents were killed, and the reality set in that she was carrying the baby of her best friend, Laila was forced to make tough choices so that she could build a new family. She allowed herself to be dominated and abused by a man that only saw her as a means to have a son of his own. Laila endured pain in ways that she could never have imagined when she was a young freethinking girl. If not for the love she had for her children,

Laila would never have been able to survive the wretched life she had been given. The friendship and guidance that she eventually found in Mariam also gave her the ability to carry on and weather through the torture of the war that took place in and out of her household. This was how Laila was able to break through the image that had been bored in her mind from her mother that never saw her as enough. As a mother, Laila became the loving and nurturing caretaker that she never had for herself.

Tariq, who experienced the love from his family that only a son could have received, was separated from the woman he loved, as his family escaped the war and fled to Pakistan. Tariq was the golden boy of his family, and had never known the pain of rejection from his parent's hearts. This gave him the ability to grow close to Laila from a young age, all with the blessing from his loving parents. This came with some duty and responsibility to his family, which he always dutifully carried out. His absence was quickly felt by Laila when his family went to visit his sick uncle. Only supposed to be gone for a couple of weeks, when it turns into a month, Laila could hardly bear the thought that something must have happened to him. This was a preview of the pain that Tariq and Laila will have to endure for the most difficult times in their lives. As the war in Afghanistan begins to boil, Tariq's family decide to flee to Pakistan. Tariq made the sacrifice to leave his home and the girl that he loved so that he could be there for his father, who was in poor health, and his mother who needed him to be a protector. The years he spent at a refugee camp and later in prison for attempting to smuggle drugs saw him lose both his parents. The ones he was sacrificing for were gone, and now he had to find a way to return to the only love he had left in the world. When he is finally reunited with Laila, all the pain and sacrifice had finally been realized, that it was worth it all.

With Mariam, Laila and Tariq as the examples in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, the reader is able to realize the endurance of each of them, and the rewards they ultimately receive. Mariam is finally able to love and feel loved by her relationship with Laila and her children. Laila is finally vindicated of the loss of her mother's love by the sacrifices she makes for her own children. Tariq has the final reward of being able to return to the woman he loves and be able to provide a life for her that she deserved. Without the endurance of pain, none of these rewards would have been realized.