

ELLIOT RICHARD WAINWRIGHT SCHOLARSHIP FINALIST



ELLIOT RICHARD WAINWRIGHT

is a senior at Elyria High School where he is active in many clubs and organizations including Drama Club, A Cappella Choir and Madrigal Singers. He spends out of school time with drum set lessons, karate classes and Boy Scouts. Elliot hopes to study physics and engineering at The College of Wooster.

“Hey, screw you woman, go make me a sandwich,” disgustingly has become the mindset of even the most talented, bright men. As I walk through the hallways of my school, I witness the most belligerent discrimination of young women by, surprisingly, the “nice” boys—honors students who have become so ill-mannered in their intelligence that they find themselves above common decency and respect. The combination of media influences, sports addictions, and peer pressure has turned my generation into a hoard of ignorance driven by some misplaced sense of superiority over their classmates. Women gained the right to vote 80 years ago, and still day after day they are put down, underpaid, underrepresented, disregarded, and made fun of by men.

These are trivial annoyances compared to the daily suffering women outside the USA and other democratic countries face. Places like Saudi Arabia, where girls are born without a proper birth certificate or any record of their existence, hidden behind their abaya*, and ruled with brutal efficiency under a government that unjustly combines church and state, law and sin. Or in the unruly tribal cultures of Afghanistan, where women are forced to endure unbelievable agony in genital mutilation, followed by unhappy, arranged marriages. Or in Africa, where young women are raped on a daily basis, and young impregnation and childbirth is followed by horrifying fistulas**, whereupon the woman is usually shunned by her own family and left to die.

As one of four boys in my Women’s Studies class, I have become blatantly aware of both the apparent distaste for women in my school, and the misery of women around the world. The fact that there are only four boys in my class in and of itself suggests a lack of interest in the expansion of awareness by my male classmates. My stomach churns every time I enter the classroom, yet I know that the more I become aware of this suffering, the more powerful my passion behind wanting to change it will become. This knowledge has become my power, my sword of understanding to cut through the haze of unawareness that envelops the teens that surround me.

My Women’s Studies class and I have rallied the means to complete several fundraisers to raise money for The Fistula Foundation, an organization which houses, heals and cures women with such an affliction in several countries in Africa free of charge. I designed a t-shirt to sell that simply states: “BeaYOUtiful,” encouraging women to make a stand for their own justice and to promote female empowerment. I still have a daunting task ahead of me—to change the mentality of my fellow man to that of honesty and understanding through volunteering and daily actions, to assist women in places of need where they cannot so easily help themselves, and as Eve Ensler says: to “find freedom, aliveness, and power not from what contains, locates, or protects us, but from what dissolves, reveals, and expands us.”

* A long over garment, essentially a robe-like dress, worn by some women in parts of the Islamic world

** An opening or passage between two organs or between an organ and the skin, caused by disease, injury, or congenital malformation

