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When I was thirteen, I read a book titled *The Martyr's Song* written by Ted Dekker. My parents were and still are avid readers, and any book that they picked up I automatically wanted to read as well. When my mom had finished reading this book, however, she told me very blatantly that I was not permitted to read it, and that I would have to wait until I was older. I was never very patient, and I did not think anything about why I should wait to read it and I subsequently snuck into the living room, grabbed the book off the shelf, and proceeded to read it in a night. When I put the book down, I was a sobbing mess. I had no clue what the book was about and the next day when I went to tell my mom what I had done, and she laughed at my reaction. I had in no way expected to read the story I read.

The story is based around a young girl whose home is invaded by a brute man that has about as much sympathy and charisma as a small pebble. The town has been living peacefully for years, until this day. He comes in with his army of equally savage men, and ultimately kill the young girl who has shown them nothing but kindness and understanding and love.

At thirteen, I had no idea or comprehension as to why anyone would be willing to kill someone, especially not a girl who was only a little younger than I was. There was no experience I had previously been through that could have prepared me for what I had read. Someone who had been nothing but kind to someone who was nothing but brutal to everyone had been killed in cold blood. Something in me realized that what I had read was somehow a reality. Maybe not to the extreme that I was thinking then, but it is now something we see passively every day. There are constant shootings and murders in our own country, and there are wars in different parts of the world. There is unbelievable pain witness every day, and for the first time I was forced to wake up to that.



I remember telling my mom and dad about how I felt. I remember most the way that they smiled at each other, and then at me. They were older and knew something that I did not seem to quite get. My dad told me to go and read it again until I figured it out. I was a little shocked. I had been told before not to read this book, and now they were telling me to go and read it again. I did it anyways, trying to figure out what I was missing.

It was something I did not figure out until a year or so later. At thirteen, I forgot about the book for a few months and carried on with my life, a little less satisfied but not obsessed with what I had read. A good while later I read the book over again and realized exactly what I had missed.

The goal of the book was not to bring attention to the unending, senseless violence of the world. It was not there to provide me with examples of how messy and brutal people can be. It was there to show me how good people are capable of being. There are incredible acts of goodness each and every day, but like I had proven to myself, we are content with looking at the bad and complaining, but not searching for the good. There was a child in the middle of an act of terror who showed nothing but love and joy and peace in the middle of pain. I was focused on my own pain and sadness, and it made me almost incapable of looking for the joy and good in people.

As many times as we see sadness and heartache in the world, we see light and pure, unadulterated, inconceivable hope. There was no moment for me that spoke louder the truth of humanity. We are harsh and destructive creatures, but we are capable of so much more. I read a book at thirteen that made me into the person I am today. I read a book at thirteen that inspired me to become an author and try to recreate the moment that I had years ago for other readers. The Martyr's Song shaped me as a young teenager, and will continue to shape me as a young adult.