Ignorance is bliss, or so they say. When reading Fitzgerald's, *The Great Gatsby*, we look at Daisy Buchanan, a wife who is living amongst so many lies, and laugh at her ignorance and naivety. What Daisy didn't know, never impacted her mentality. What we don't know, doesn't hurt us, but many times ignorance doesn't feel like bliss. As time goes on, the ignorance fades away, and we are faced with an underlying hard truth.

As an elementary school student, I lived my life, sheltered from the hardships and complexities of the world. When I went to school, I was faced with a lot of racism that I didn't understand at that time. Teachers would not call on me in class or stereotype me to be like every other Indian student that they had in the past. My classmates were much more distant from me than they were from other people and I never realized why everyone treated me just a little bit differently. I was ignorant. I was naive. At that age, I didn't know anything, so it never put me down. I saw myself just like every other student.

As I got into middle school, murmurs of the word "FOB" surrounded me. F O B meaning "fresh off the boat", used to mock immigrants who traveled across oceans to get to this melting pot of a country. When I first heard it, I thought it was a joke and didn't think much about it. I slowly learned that people were mocking me, my accent, and where I come from. As I figured out the meaning behind what others were whispering to me, it hurt. I couldn't comprehend how in the same classroom that all of us pledged to every day, saying "liberty and justice for all," was the same place where my classmates saw and treated me as an outsider. Middle school was only the beginning of it. I was slowly starting to make sense of why my teachers as well as classmates treated me a certain way.

As high school came around, I thought I'd faced it all. I understood why I was treated differently on some occasions and I'd come to terms with it. But, during high school, teachers

would tell me that I had one of those long, Indian names so they wouldn't even try to pronounce my name and had teachers that talked badly about the country I'm from and tell me at the end of class that they were sorry if they hurt my feelings with a smile. I had a teacher that told me to go back to my own country and no matter how much I respected all my teachers, it hurt to think that they all saw me so differently because of the color of my skin that had overridden any of my other qualities. I wished at times that I never even knew about the ideas of racism, bias, and prejudice. Again, because when I didn't know anything, it didn't hurt me.

As I transitioned between these high school years though, I slowly started to realize how many problems there were in the world and how what I've learned and gone through, are things that need to be heard around the world. As much as I wish I could be the ignorant, meek, 9-year-old girl who laughed when someone called her a "FOB," I realized that what I'd gone through in such crucial development years of my life, needed to be heard by other people. By learning about others' experiences and realizing that I wasn't one of the only ones to face hatred in different environments, I became more confident with who I was and what I believed in.

As the fear of the coronavirus grew throughout the world, even on a regular school day, I was blamed for the coronavirus. A girl who I've never seen before came up to me, and while pushing me, said, "You're brown. You probably have the coronavirus too." It didn't hurt as much as it should have because I had finally come to the full realization that some people act this way. I understood why she thought of me like that and I didn't look into it further.

So, now I ask myself. After everything that I've been through, where others have used my skin color as a way to stereotype me and hurt me, why and where do I even belong in society? Why am I a beneficial part of the human race? Why does my LIFE matter? Why do **I** matter? I matter because I have a voice. A story. A vision. A need. A responsibility. I have a responsibility

to share what I've gone through and teach those like me to not be as ignorant as I was by letting hate-filled words slip past as jokes. A responsibility to share with those who are not like me, how their words affect others. A responsibility to those who come after me to share what the people before them have gone through. I haven't gone through anything compared to the activists and the innocent who don't have to get in a word before hundreds of assumptions are made about them from the color of their skin alone.

My life matters the same amount as to how every person in the world matters. We all have something to live for. For me, I live for myself. I matter, not because I've gone through difficult situations, but because I believe that I can use my past to shape the futures of others. My ignorance of huge societal problems caused me a lot of problems when I was younger, but truly, what I didn't know, didn't hurt me. As I grew older and got pushed into the cruelty of society, I realized that the more I knew about racism, and other topics that affected me, the better I would be. The more knowledge I had, the more prepared I would be. I realized that I wasn't as different as my teachers and classmates made me out to be because my past gave me a story. A story that made me feel like I mattered since it gave me a deeper purpose. A purpose of helping others while using my past ignorance as an example. As much as I believe that ignorance is bliss, I believe in a stronger thing: knowledge is power.