

**Zafar, S. (with Meg Masters). (2019). A Good Wife: Escaping the Life I Never Chose.  
Toronto, ON: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd.**

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In Samra Zafar's book, "A Good Wife: Escaping the Life I Never Chose," she outlines many aspects of her life that were compromised at a young age and given up for the sake of the happiness of people around her; consisting of both family and strangers. The environment she was brought into at the age of sixteen emphasized that the destiny of a woman is for her to get married and if she does not get married, it's because no one wants her. There is a loss of innocence, identity, and freedom depicted throughout her book. The proposal of a wedding brought in unrest as her peace of mind was now flooded by the anxiety of what her uncertain future held. This book highlights the struggles and sorrow she suffered at the hands of an intruder but most importantly, shows the beauty of a life she worked hard to create for herself.

As a child, Zafar was targeted by older predatory relatives and to that, her mother's solution was for her to cover up more because she was "growing up too quickly" (p. 27). The harassment and inappropriate behaviours from male family members was justified by her mother blaming it on her early puberty. As a young girl, confused by these actions, she was overwhelmed by how she was perceived whenever there was a male figure around. This led to the loss of innocence at a drastically young age as she was forced to be a woman in a short amount of time.

Even though marriage was not her choice, she accepted that this was her destiny. Due to

societal pressures and gender inequality within her community, she was expected to follow the norms of being a child bride. When she was visited by her potential future in-laws to decide whether or not they liked her for their son, “part of [her] was hoping they would reject [her] so that [she] could return to [her] old life, part of [her], perhaps the bigger part, yearned for their approval” (p. 43). Because of all the praise she was getting for landing this marriage proposal, she was concerned that if they rejected her, she might be missing her only good opportunity for marriage (p. 44). The desire to prioritize education disappeared amongst the chitchat among family members which caused her to worry about her future regarding studying. Social groups and peer around her encouraged her and congratulated her for landing a marriage proposal but she wasn’t brought up fantasizing about her wedding. She wanted to pursue education and sports but everyone, excluding her father, demanded she follow a woman’s path and get married. At a mere 16 years old, a young woman was being expected to act different and avoid any of her childlike ways to appear older for marriage.

As an unhappy child bride, the only slither of hope she had left was from her school. However, even though she was extremely smart and praised by her teachers, all of that disappeared when she was judged by her appearance in order to be selected as a pretty wife at the arm of a man. Her in-laws gave her compliments for being beautiful and tall but gave no interest in talking about her education and love for sports. It seemed as if they wanted someone just to make the family look good and bear children with desirable characteristics. It became hard for Zafar to continue her education because all her classmates and friends assumed that she did not care for school anymore since she was engaged. This presents the misconception that a woman should solely focus

on her wife duties after she gets married. No one acknowledged her in school or wanted to be her partner because the fact that she was engaged outweighed her desire to have a good education.

The reassurance that she would be able to continue her education in Canada after marriage is what kept her motivated. Although, that was turning slightly less hopeful for her everyday. She entered Canada thinking of all the opportunities and freedom there would be but soon realized that the move to Canada was a loss of freedom for her. She was able to make her own decisions before she got married, she was able to go to the mall unaccompanied, she was able to go to school and participate in sports. After getting married, she was bound in a “tight, grey, box-like world” (p. 130). She went to having all the freedom a teenager could get to being restrained from basic freedoms. People come to Canada for a better life with endless freedoms, but Zafar had never felt more confined in her entire life. According to her mother-in-law, “women with freedom were shameless” (p. 139). Even the small bits of freedom she was given, like the permission to get a job, was constrained as she was taunted about it every day.

She was brought to Canada with empty promises, her new family turned out to be manipulative and deceitful, “The whole reason I had agreed to get married in the first place was to further my education” (p. 111). Her husband’s family had assured her that they supported independent woman who wanted to study and make a living for themselves. They mentioned that his mom had continued her studies as well, but it soon became clear that she “hadn’t gone to school even after she was married” (p. 111).

The hope in this young woman was preyed upon and taken advantage of by these people, who she strangely had to define as family while they were nothing close to that for her. She was

trapped in a cycle of abuse with her husband, that she had to escape from. The abusive behaviour all started from an innocent request for her to wear a hijab, but it was soon revealed that it was truly his form of marking his territory. The religious head scarf was redefined by him to declare his ownership of her; Zafar learned that this marriage meant that she was now considered property. The transition from overprotective to restrictive was very quick and hard to see coming. She was faced with an identity crisis when she decided to pull herself away from her friends and family back home because it reminded her of a life she so badly desired and she didn't want that to get in the way of any possible happiness she could acquire from this new life (p. 86). Cultural norms came to clash with her values when she was faced with oppression for trying to express herself freely. After being promised eternal help in fulfilling her lifelong goals, Zafar realized that was a pure fabrication and the ultimate betrayal.

The plan to overcome this struggle worked because her goal of regaining her identity was through education. The life that Zafar had been forced to live was a setback in her dreams but with the opportunities that the country of Canada had to offer presented her with aspiration in building the future that she had always wanted for herself. Finding the strength to walk away and focus on herself took immense courage. As her belief in her family fell, her self-respect rose as she soon realized that she could be the only one to lead herself out of this situation. Searching for that support in her abusive husband came to an end as she regained her identity as a leader. Being raised a leader had rooted qualities deep inside of Zafar that would now come to use; they had been oppressed for way too long. It is common for females to be raised unequally; the belief that a man

could save them from their doomed independent life is planted in girls in their early years. The superiority of the male gender constricts females to be challenged at the same level and Zafar was focused on dismantling that view as she went on to become a successful independent woman raising her two daughters with progressive ideals.

The purpose of this book was to illustrate that a seized life filled with anguish can still be turned around if there is enough energy put into innovating yourself. It speaks strongly to women who are trapped in abusive homes and can't seem to pull themselves out. The author is conveying her life story to young and older women as a motivating factor; there is no age limit to fight for what you truly want. This book encourages women to focus on what truly makes them feel whole, whether that be their education, career, or children even if it seems like the whole world is standing against them. There could be someone going through a similar situation and think they are alone and should give up when, all they require is some support to push through it in order to better themselves and enhance their quality of life. Along with motivational support, this book serves to benefit various educational disciplines such as women's studies, sociology, cultural studies, and anthropology. It can be used to study the differences of the western culture from other cultures and civilizations that consider women unequal. I found "A Good Wife: Escaping the Life I Never Chose" very motivational and I recommend it to anyone interested in feminism and women empowerment.