

Mode: Persuasive Writing

Form: Opinion Piece

Prompt: 'It is the victims of conflict who show us what is really important.'

Priorities in life are rather variable – they differ between cultures, religions and individuals. Some, however, are universal in their importance. Priorities are often revealed in conflict partly in that one only appreciates what one has when there is so little left. While those who benefit from or initiate conflict often have priorities quite distinct from what we might consider important, victims can demonstrate our priorities in life should be.

In the wake of the conflict or disaster, victims cease taking things for granted. Peter Travis' film 'Omagh' documents one saga in the drawn out battle for Northern Ireland between Irish Republicans and British Nationalists. To simplify this complex conflict to just two groups is inaccurate, Travis' main focus is the large group in between, who while possibly still loyal to one particular side, are fed up with military actions that are not achieving any change. These are the true victims of the conflict. The protagonist, Michael Gallagher, is a real life victim of the RIRA bombing of the town. His son, Aiden, perished in the explosion, and while politicians and authorities passed the buck on responsibility, his loss highlighted for him his priorities. The Gallagher family, in a variety of ways, found new and simple methods to pursue their priorities. Michael, the softly spoken Mechanic, was galvanised into action by Aiden's death. After doing nothing in the wake of his brother's death in another IRA incident, he sees no value in not pursuing justice, and plenty of good to be found in discovering the truth. His leadership of the Omagh Self Help and Support Group helped them to organise themselves better, and push for convictions. Despite his best efforts, the inertia of the collective authorities was too much to overcome and all suspects were released. In the wake of a blunt ombudsman's report, he announced the families would press civil charges. At that point, the film ends, but in reality those charges were both laid and successfully executed, meaning in one sense responsibility was laid on someone for the deaths. While providing little actual material gain, this was done for its virtues – Gallagher's top priority was justice and he achieved a sense of that through legal action.

Victims, with their unique perspective, can see ways to resolve a conflict. The ability to bridge the gap between religions in Northern Ireland has proven impossible but in India, albeit for only a brief period, Hindus and Muslims alike united for independence. The reason for this unity can be reduced to one man, Mahatma Gandhi. His philosophy and exemplary leadership attracted people of all faiths to follow him. He is the embodiment of having nothing and truly knowing what is important, symbolic of the destitute poverty of his compatriots, he had an incredibly frugal existence. He wore simple clothes, lived in communal quarters with anyone who wanted a place to stay, and ate and drank minimally, often starving in protest. His foregoing of material wealth favoured by the Imperial British and the extravagant Indian royalty past (Taj Mahal etc) indicated clearly his desires, - peace and independence. Indians, as a whole the victims of a harsh occupation, denigrated to second-class citizens in their own country, collectively stood with Gandhi for independence in a decidedly non-violent manner, what's more they achieved their goal. They knew from previous disadvantage that violence only spread the suffering; and that ending suffering was of the greatest importance. Gandhi's assassination ended the brief period of religious unity, but did not hinder the move for independence. India was granted independence in 1949, not two years after Gandhi was shot by a fellow Hindu. Many in India did not support Gandhi's unified movement, preferring the old partnership. Only those who had truly learnt from persecution discovered that the best way was to eliminate rather than perpetuate it. Gandhi's great humanity, combined with his priorities informed by injustices past, achieved independence in India, and showed true importance of freedom to us all.

Victims of conflict can also teach us the meaning of human dignity. My sister was bullied relentlessly when she was in high school. A quiet, shy, rather sensitive young girl, she was perhaps an easy target. For a period of approximately six months, a week would not go by when she was not harassed, verbally abused and threatened. On one occasion, she was even physically assaulted. I remember many afternoons when she would come home from school in tears. While other people, in desperation, might have been persuaded to retaliate with similar violence, my sister's response is an inspiration to me. She never stooped to the level of her tormentors, but instead maintained her self-respect and dignity, seeking help from trusted adults.

Whether in Europe or Asia, conflicts all over the world create victims. While victors and aggressive initiators enjoy superficial benefits, the victims gain perspective through their loss. It is with this new perspective that life and the world is viewed through this lens of past suffering. Generally simpler than grand material superficialities, these things are nevertheless almost universally agreed upon as important. Tragically, those who have not suffered often cannot see these things and continue causing conflict, creating victims. Whether it is truth, peace or justice, what is of true importance is seen through the eyes of victims.

Comment [AC1]: Clear contention: Victims show what our priorities in life should be.

Comment [AC2]: 1st Point: Victims cease taking things for granted.

Comment [AC3]: Uses the set text, *Omagh*, to illustrate this point and develop the argument.

Comment [AC4]: 2nd Point: Victims, in their suffering, have a unique perspective on conflict.

Comment [AC5]: Uses an historical example to support this point and develop the discussion.

Comment [AC6]: 3rd Point: Victims can teach us what it means to a good human being.

Comment [AC7]: Draws upon their own experience by using an anecdote about a family member to support this point.

Comment [AC8]: Conclusion restates the writer's contention and briefly sums up their argument.