

# DAHLIA

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What do you think of when you hear the word “dahlia”? Most of us will think of the flower. Because to most of us, it is only one of many pretty flowers. Others might think of support, good luck, kindness, or grace, because that’s what the dahlia represents. But to me, the dahlia is a symbol of hope. Why, you ask?

I first met her in 3rd grade: Dalia, a bright, cheerful, and kind transfer student — the girl who would eventually come to change my perspective of life. At first, I was intimidated by her happy aura. But as time passed by, we got to know each other better and quickly became the best of friends. We would talk about trivial things, make bead accessories, draw pictures ... The list goes on and on. Even now, I remember the pink friendship bracelets that we made during our very first playdate. Every day was a new adventure with Dalia. But all that fun and happiness came crashing down one day when she told me about her past: how she had escaped from Iraq with her parents and younger sister to save their lives.

I saw how she ate the free breakfast that was provided by the school, how she wore clothes that had been donated by fellow students, and how she, at such a young age, took full responsibility for her younger sister while her parents worked. But of course, I, being a naive nine-year-old, did not fully understand what it all meant, nor did I give it much thought at the time.

The school year went by quickly, and before I knew it, my birthday had come around. To my delight, Dalia gave me a sparkly pink one-piece dress as a birthday present. At the time, I felt only joy at her thoughtfulness to buy me a birthday present. I was only able to understand the significance of that birthday present years later — how much that one piece of clothing must have cost, and how much it must have meant for her to give it to me.

At the end of our 4th-grade year, she moved to a different part of the state, and that was the end of our friendship. To this day, however, I

remember how devastated I was when I found out about her moving.

Now, six years later, I still find myself thinking about Dalia quite often. The fact that the two of us, both born as the same human beings, and yet so different, makes my heart heavy. I moved to the United States when I was three because of my father's job. I lived without any challenges, eating whatever food I wanted, buying whatever toys I wanted. But Dalia was different. If she hadn't escaped from Iraq, she might not even have been alive at the time I met her. She moved to the United States to survive. But no one was able to tell that just by taking one look at her. Wearing second-hand clothes, eating school breakfast, not being able to buy toys — most third graders would probably be miserable. But not her. She radiated happiness. And I understand now that she was able to find joy in the smallest of things because of her experiences and the hardships she faced in Iraq.

I used to take everyday life for granted. But thanks to Dalia, I have come to realize that nothing should be taken for granted. And maybe, just maybe, the truest happiness lies in being thankful for everything that you do have. I once heard the quote, "Someone else is happy with less than you have," and thinking about Dalia, I realize that this couldn't be more true.

Especially now with the growing problem of COVID-19, we are realizing more than ever that we have been taking too many things for granted. Going to school, going to work, playing sports, playing with friends - these are all things that would have been considered "the norm" in a world without the coronavirus. But not anymore. The coronavirus has taken our "normal" and has completely turned it upside down. And only now that we face such dire circumstances do we understand how blessed this "normal" really is. So I hope, from the bottom of my heart, that our experience with this coronavirus will help us grow to be more thankful for everything that we have.

Dalia taught me that the hardships that we face are what allow us to find true happiness. Even now, the things she taught me continue to shine like flowers of hope in a field full of the darkness that is COVID-19. And that is why I say that the dahlia flower is my symbol of hope.