Victoria Yurachek is a graduate of Kaneland High School and is currently a business administration major. She enjoys writing, coaching, and cheering, and she is involved in the leadership academy. Victoria desires to be successful in the business field after graduating from Northern Illinois University. Victoria's essay "Pain and the Weight of the World" connects a class-assigned story to a personal experience that catalyzed growth in the author’s life.
Pain and the Weight of the World

Victoria Yurachek

Many people experience turning points in their life that result from overcoming stressful obstacles and learning from them. While reading the story *Initiation of a Maasai Warrior*, I felt a strong connection with the author, Tepilit Ole Saitoti. Like him, I too came across a situation that had me terrified of pain and failure. This occurrence happened to me through a sport. Our two stories are very different, but emotionally they are extremely similar, and both resulted with comparable turning points. They showed both of us that even though we may be stressed about something, we were still able to succeed.

Tepilit Ole Saitoti told the story *The Initiation of a Maasai Warrior*. He wrote about his experience of what he had to do in order to be seen as a man, according to his culture. According to the Maasai culture, “You must put all the sins you have committed during childhood behind and embark as a new person with a different outlook on a new life” (133). This change was done by a circumcision ceremony, proving that the young Maasai was brave and serving as a passage into the warrior’s ranking.

Leading up to his ceremony, Saitoti had to prepare for months, which gave him a lot of time to think about what was going to happen. He became very nervous about his upcoming ceremony. He was even responsible for sharpening the knives that were to cut him. He had to shave his head and gather ostrich feathers and wax. An oxen and honey bear were also to be slaughtered. These steps made him very anxious and assured him that he was going to have to go through with it and become a man, no matter how terrified he was.

If Saitoti didn’t go through with the ceremony easily and kicked, struggled, or tried to get away, he would have to live with that in his mind his entire life. Not only would he be physically punished, but he would also know that he failed. He would be known as a coward
who was unworthy to be called a Maasai man. His family would also be in danger and looked upon poorly for shamefully raising him—especially his sister. His sister, who in this case took his mother’s role in the ceremony, would be beaten for giving birth to an unworthy boy. The night before his ritual, Saitoti was sleepless and felt pained emotions. Warriors sang to him with insults and called him names, which continued the next morning. He arrived at the ceremony where ice water was poured onto him. Anxiety took over as he saw the circumciser with the knives in hand, but he was able to toughen up and pull through it without being cowardly. He was praised greatly for his bravery and received eight animals as rewards. He had a wonderful, although painful, turning point for being courageous and being able to take pain and overcome his fear of giving others pain.

While I was reading this story, it reminded me of an intimidating experience that I had to overcome a few years ago. In cheerleading, my team was meeting with our choreographer, who was teaching us our routine for a competition. We first learned a cheer and dance, then we had to work on different stunts that we had to know by competition time. All of our stunt groups worked hard on an extremely difficult stunt, the kick full basket. This is when the flyer is thrown up in the air, spins around, kicks, and is caught in the cradle position. My group did amazing and ended up being the only stunt group that could hit it. The choreographer had to change the routine, so I was the only one doing a stunt. Although it was exciting, I had many worries about successfully executing it.

If I messed up, my entire team would be punished. I could get points taken off of my team’s score all because of me. Every time we would practice, my heart would pound out of my chest, and everyday leading up to the competition I couldn’t stop thinking about the stunt. No matter where I was or what I was doing, my mind was always on it.

I was also very fearful about the pain that could come out of this if I did not complete it right. At the most previous competition I attended, I was not caught and landed right on my arm. My arm was severely broken and I was in horrible, throbbing pain. I was terrified that I was going to have to deal with this pain all over. After imagining the stunt in my head for a few months and worrying about all that could go wrong, it was finally time to prove that I was not going to let my team down. I woke up early one morning, got on the bus with my team, and arrived at a nearby high school for the
competition. Our coach led the team into a big gym with many blue mats to practice our stunts on before we had to perform for the crowd and judges. We practiced a few times, but I still was having many doubts about pulling it off under pressure. I would describe the gym similarly to the way that Saitoti depicted the setting of his ceremony: “There was so much tension that people could hardly breathe” (134).

They called my team to go onto the floor, and we cheered to the crowd and judges as we got into our formation. After we did the first part of our routine and right before my stunt, the woman who was playing our music messed up and stopped. When she had to replay the entire music all over again, we had to wait tensely in our spots. The minute and a half of waiting felt like hours.

Once the music was back to where we left off, I loaded into my basket and performed my stunt beautifully and better than we had ever practiced. I couldn’t believe that all of the months of practice were over in a single eight-count. I was so glad that I was able to rise above my fear of pain and was brave enough to take such an important role and succeed.

We then sat as a team in the bleachers watching the other teams perform their best in front of the judges. No other team had the kick full in their routine. After all of the teams competed, it was time for the award ceremony. They called out all of the winning team’s names, and my team didn’t place. I wasn’t surprised to hear this because our team wasn’t very good, but this did not bother me at all because, to myself, I felt like a winner.

After the competition, my team and I got on the bus to go back to our high school. Our coaches held the judges notes in their hands and read them out loud to us. Everyone was interested in hearing all that the judges mentioned. They noted the things we could improve on, along with a few things they liked about the routine; however, there was a note mentioned on each of the papers that really stood out to me: “Great basket.”

A great deal of personal growth comes in difficult experiences, which mostly happen in public settings. I think this is because when you’re put in a situation like that, you want to prove yourself to other people as well as yourself. It gives you confidence while also putting a great impression on others.

Saitoti and I had two very different stories, yet we both learned how to overcome our fears of pain and having the weight of the world
on our shoulders. We put aside the worrying about pain and were able to focus because we didn’t want emotional pain brought on others or ourselves. We also had to do necessary preparations that made us very uneasy about the situations we were to be in. Both of us had a thrilling experience that led us to great turning points, giving us confidence and strength in ourselves.

Work Cited

Instructor Shane Winterhalter's comments: The assignment Victoria responded to in "Pain and the Weight of the World" required writers to narrate a turning point in their lives in comparison to Tepilit Ole Saitoti’s story in "Initiation of a Maasai Warrior." Victoria’s essay pairs an excellent summary of Saitoti’s circumcision ritual with her own experience of dealing with a cheerleading injury. I was impressed by how well Victoria captures the emotional trajectories of both stories as she describes how they compare and contrast.