

Synopsis

"All girls [should read] *The Breadwinner* by Deborah Ellis." — Malala Yousafzai, *New York Times*

The first book in Deborah Ellis's riveting *Breadwinner* series is an award-winning novel about loyalty, survival, families and friendship under extraordinary circumstances during the Taliban's rule in Afghanistan. Eleven-year-old Parvana lives with her family in one room of a bombed-out apartment building in Kabul, Afghanistan's capital city. Parvana's father — a history teacher until his school was bombed and his health destroyed — works from a blanket on the ground in the marketplace, reading letters for people who cannot read or write. One day, he is arrested for the crime of having a foreign education, and the family is left without someone who can earn money or even shop for food. As conditions for the family grow desperate, only one solution emerges. Forbidden to earn money as a girl, Parvana must transform herself into a boy, and become the breadwinner. The fifteenth anniversary edition includes a special foreword by Deborah Ellis as well as a new map, an updated author's note and a glossary to provide young readers with background and context. All royalties from the sale of this book will go to Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan. Parvana's Fund supports education projects for Afghan women and children.

Book Information

File Size: 1664 KB

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Language: English

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Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

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Customer Reviews

Life for women under the Taliban regime in Afghanistan is not the stuff of which happy children's books are made. There is no happy ending here, regardless of the obstacles which are overcome, because the real-life ending has not yet come. This book, while fiction, is the result of interviews with women who escaped from Kabul and who were living in camps in Pakistan, including one mother who disguised her daughter as a boy. The setting is true to time and place as it captures life for one family in one short period of time. (Ellis is donating the book sales to an organization dedicated to educating girls in refugee camps.) It is a simple story, and engaging, as the reader follows the daily life of a fictional family as they struggle to survive the imprisonment of the father. His absence from the home means that they no longer have food, or communication outside the home because the female members of the family cannot go out unescorted by a male. Parvana, who is pre-adolescent, surrenders her long hair to help her family, and disguised as a boy earns a little money by selling things from their home or reading for the largely illiterate population. Thus she is able to shop for food. Her bravery is the focal point of the story and the reader is reminded of the courage and strength of children everywhere who survive against incredible odds. Ellis has done well to write this as a story for children/young adults. While she does not gloss over the hard parts of life in Kabul under the Taliban with executions, dismemberment, and imprisonment without a trial or a public charge neither does she dwell on them at length. Being without food or a father is hard enough for one story; living in fear adds more trauma.

"Stay away from Afghan women or we'll kill you." Underneath was a crude drawing of a knife with blood dripping from it. This note was delivered in spring last year to Deborah Ellis who was in Peshawar, researching her book *The Breadwinner*. This is the story of Parvana, an eleven year old girl, who, in order to save herself and her family, cuts her hair short and wears the clothes of her older brother, Hossain, killed by a land mine. Back in Toronto, Ellis paired up girls' schools in Ontario with girls' schools in the camps in Peshawar and Quetta. Funds were sent for building classrooms and establishing scholarships. In the spring and fall of 1998, Ellis visited Moscow. By this time she had begun researching the role of women in the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. She wanted to find out how this war, which lasted for 10 years, impacted on women from the time it started in 1979 until the present. Her book, *Women of the Afghan War*, published by Praeger, makes a connection between the women on both sides: the attacker and the attacked. But the most searing

indictment of conditions in Afghanistan is her most recent book, *The Breadwinner*. Written for children and published by Groundwood Books, *The Breadwinner* evolved from Ellis's conversations with refugee Afghan women and girls. There is a connection between *The Breadwinner* and Ellis's first book *Looking for X*, set in Toronto and winner of the Governor General's Award, 2000. In both books strong girl characters work out how to survive in a difficult world. Ellis met the mother and sister of a girl in Kabul who cut off her hair, put on boy's clothes and sold things off a tray in the marketplace to support her family. "They told me a lot of girls were doing this," Ellis said.

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