

Girl Called Genghis Khan; How Maria Wazir Pretended to be a Boy, Defied the Taliban, and Became a World Famous Squash Player

Michelle Lord

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Michelle Lord starts off this book by vividly describing the setting and circumstances in which the story takes place. Maria Wazir was born in the hills of Pakistan, where a girl had very little rights. Girls were expected to listen and obey, but not to have their own thoughts. While boys Maria's age played outside, she was stuck in her house helping her mother prepare the next meal. Maria dreamed of getting out of this everlasting cycle where each and every generation of girls were told to stay quiet and keep their heads down. She wanted freedom, and unlike the parent's of most other girls, Maria's parents agreed with her. They let her live as she wanted, and she was even allowed to secretly play outside. Soon after she had her first taste of freedom, she chopped off her hair and threw away every piece of clothing that might give away that she was actually a girl. From that day on, she was called Genghis Khan, after a great warrior.

Maria had never felt so free. She played with boys, hunted with her brother, and no one noticed that she was actually Maria, a girl. However, her new freedom came with a risk. They feared that Maria might be found by the Taliban, a violent group who demanded that women should not be heard or seen. And worst of all for Maria, they forbid girls from playing sports. When Maria was ten, her family moved to Peshawar, a city where no one knew who they were. Soon, Maria discovered the sport ,Squash, and she fell in love. Maria, who then was still known as Genghis, realized in order to play officially she had to submit her real birth certificate. She went to the director of a squash club, handed her birth certificate as Maria, and was accepted in as the only girl on the team. With Maria's secret out, her entire family feared that the Taliban would hunt her down. So, she got on a plane to Canada to pursue her dreams of playing Squash. She had left behind the only life she had ever known. In Canada, Maria practiced twice a day while still upholding her cultural traditions. Eventually, Maria worked her way up to become the number one female player for Pakistan. Today, Maria is back in the hills of Pakistan working to give girls a chance to live their life to the fullest.

Personally, I feel like this book shows readers a side of the world that not a lot of people get to see. Though I know of the struggles that women still face to this day, I was not aware of everything that goes into it. This book, through it's illustrations and words, shows us the struggles women face everyday in their fight for equality. After reading this, I became more grateful that as a girl living in the United States, I am able to do things I would not be able to do in a lot of other countries. Not only does this book teach the readers about the struggle of equality, it does so in a skillful way. With both the illustrations and the actual content of the book, this book paints a picture of what it would be like living as Maria Wazir. We are able to imagine life in Pakistan under the Taliban. Though I liked the story and the lessons that it taught, I feel as if the book could have been longer and more descriptive. It would have been even more interesting to see more details in Maria's story. I would have liked to also hear not only how she felt about her situation, but also how her entire family felt. I would recommend this

book to children and teens of all ages because this is truly a very empowering book. Not only that, it is a book that anyone can quickly read and enjoy. I believe that this book would be best as a gift since it is such a short read. However, it is such an inspirational and empowering book that it is something I feel most readers would like to hold onto. This seems like a book that can be read whenever someone is feeling inspired. Overall, I would definitely recommend this book to readers of all ages as it is something that has not only inspired me but made me delve further and learn more about this particular story.

Other related books to read:

1. *I Am Malala*- Malala Yousafzai
2. *In the Land of Invisible Women: A Female Doctor's Journey in the Saudi Kingdom*-Qanta A. Ahmed
3. *That's What She Said: Wise Words From Influential Women*- Kimothy Joy