2nd Place Junior Essay

Remi Schaber

St. Francis of Assisi Catholic School, TN, Amy Cluck

***The Love that Changed America***

My story starts with the love story that changed America forever, because if it was not for the persistence of a young couple, I probably would not be here today.

Mildred Jeter, a black woman, and Richard Loving, a white man, both grew up in Central Point, Virginia. The town’s small community was a mixture of people where people saw their neighbors as family, regardless of the color of their skin. When they were older Richard and Mildred dated for a few years before deciding to get married when Mildred became pregnant. The couple travelled to Washington, DC, for it was the nearest city in which interracial marriage was legal. The Lovings returned to Central Point, where just five weeks later they were arrested.

At 2 A.M. on July 11, 1958, the sheriff burst into their home, questioning Richard, “What are you doing in bed with this woman?”

Mildred spoke up, saying that she was his wife. The Lovings were detained for violating Virginia’s Racial Integrity Act, which prevented interracial relationships. Richard was released on a $1,000 bond the following morning, but Mildred was not as fortunate. She spent three nights in a cell by herself and was then released to her father, not her husband. The judge gave them a choice to either leave Virginia for 25 years or go back to prison.

They left for Washington, DC and did not return for nine years. Never feeling at home in the big city, the Lovings returned to their hometown, but were careful never to be seen in public together. Inspired by the current events of the civil rights movement, Mildred wrote to Attorney General, Robert F. Kennedy, in 1964. Kennedy led her to the American Civil Liberties Union, ACLU, where two of their lawyers immediately took the case.

They first tried to reverse the original ruling of the judge in Virginia, but the court upheld the decision. In 1965 a LIFE photographer took pictures of the Loving family, which ran in the 1966 issue and gave a new view into the lives of the Lovings. The case made its way through the judicial system, where it finally reached the United States Supreme Court in April of 1967. The Lovings never appeared at court, but Richard sent a note saying, “Tell the Court I love my wife, and it is not fair that I cannot live with her in Virginia.”

The judges seemed to agree and in a unanimous decision on June 12, 1967, laws banning interracial marriage were deemed unconstitutional. After nine years, the Lovings could finally live in peace and in love.

The laws that enforced segregation in relationships and halted the Lovings lives were the anti-miscegenation laws. The statutes had been in the United States since the thirteen colonies, until 1967. After some research, I found out that the Jewish people in Nazi Germany were also impacted by version of these very same laws. The Nuremberg Laws were the anti-Semitic laws that forbade marriages between the “superior” race, the Aryans, and the “inferior” race, the Jews. Both the Jews of Germany and the nonwhites of America, along with their partners of a different race, had laws enforced upon them so that they could not live under the same roof as their family.

The battle pf the Lovings-vs-Virginia was a part of the Civil Rights movement, though it was never a front and center concern because so many blacks were hurt by white people that most never thought of marrying them. However, bans on interracial marriage violated the Equal Protection Clause, which was part of the 14th Amendment. After the Lovings’ case, prohibition on interracial marriages ceased to exist in the United States. Even so, some states were slow to drop their ways, for example, it took Alabama until 2000. At the same time, society seemed to be even more slow-moving. Although being biracial or multiracial in today’s world is far from rare, some people still stare at families of more than one race, mine included. Though as time goes by, the glances seem to grow fewer. With all the political and social movements going on in the world, I feel as though society is becoming more and more accepting of each other’s differences.

The right to marry whomever you want is an unalienable right, which is a right that cannot be taken away. The Declaration of Independence says, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.”

For me, as a mixed child of the black and white ethnicities, I have never known love to be limited to separate races. Love is a form of happiness, and happiness comes from within. It should not matter one’s skin color or gender, if happiness comes from the person you love, one should be allowed to marry him or her. Humans have the right to live their life as free individuals. It is our right as human beings to love the people we choose to love.

Without the legalization of interracial marriage I would not be here. I would not have the family, the friends, or the life that I have right now. Being a biracial individual does not make me any less of a person. Having more than one culture in my life is a very special thing to me. I am very thankful to my parents for being courageous enough to love each other and then share the same love with me and my brother. They have taught me many things, one of them being that every single person on this planet, living or non-living, was, is, and will forever be equal. Love has no race. Love has no color. Love is love.