

2017 Elie Wiesel Competition

2nd Place Senior Essay

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See Me

I vividly remember the day when I encountered my first racial slur. I was with my mother, and we were strolling arm and arm down a darkened street in the heart of San Diego, California. We had just finished dinner and we had to pick up the pace a little because it was getting gold, as San Diego often does. He came out of nowhere, a greasy man with a long beard and hair and a baseball cap, walking so close behind us I could see the whites of his eyes. He opened his mouth and instead of wishing us a good night or giving a friendly greeting as is customary he said, "Get the hell out of our damn country, Chinks! Get back to where you came from! Chinks! Filthy Chinks!" We walked faster at this point. Both my mother and I were sincerely afraid for our safety and his demeanor was certainly indicative of insanity. When we returned to the hotel, I asked my mother what a 'chink' was, and she had to tell me that it was an extremely derogatory word for Asian people. In one word, he had defined us as deplorable solely for the way we looked.

I am fortunate that this is the extent of my experience with racism. I have always been accepted for, and proud of, my mixed race identity and knowledge of both Chinese and Greek cultures. But I never forgot how racism could look, and how being the recipient can hurt. Racism is something which has great bearing on the world around us, and many feel that it has been brought to an extreme extent, that people are being too 'sensitive' and are consistently failing to see the big picture because of some 'infatuation' with racism. But in a world so easily swayed by the influence of social media and television, where hurtful words and racial slurs can be carried to its recipients within seconds, it does become a matter of pertinence because it can both influence and hurt so many people. Without being conscientious of race, how we refer to others of different races, and how we appraise them as human beings, we can breed a cesspit of hatred and anger which eventually hit a tipping point and ultimately cause devastation, like the Holocaust. Here, Hitler preyed on the people of Germany, indoctrinating them into believing that their Jewish neighbors and friends were their true enemies. When learning about the Holocaust, we have been told from a young age: Never forget. Never forget. But I think that we have forgotten. Merely talking about the Holocaust is not enough. Just saying "Wow! That was horrible! We should never be racist!" is not enough. Nothing is ever enough unless you turn your words into action and make them a reality.

It is our own responsibility to help combat the hate we bear witness to in the world. Just as courageous gentiles in World War II took a stand and helped many Jews to safety with risk to themselves, so must we take up that cross and walk on the path of the right. Loewenbach was able to get to safety because certain individuals took it upon themselves to do the right thing. Without their intervention, the consequences for Loewenbach and his family could have been more dire. The logic among many is, well, if I am not directly discriminating, causing hurt and harm, and if I myself am not personally racist, then I am not guilty of wrongdoing. This misconception leads many to shy away from

taking any action, leaving many victims helpless in the face of need. If one does not take action against injustice when one witnesses it, then one is just as guilty as the perpetrators of the injustice. I hope to help stop injustice when I see it. Although I most likely will not see it in the form of extreme racial discrimination, I will most likely see bullying and other forms of injustice, and it is my duty to help defend the victim. To be a bystander is to conscientiously allow such wrongdoings to perpetuate.

The easiest place to begin combating racism, at least as a teenager, is probably the most obvious, social media. Social media links so many people from so many different places together, mixing people of different faiths and ethnicities together and giving users an anonymous outlet to express their opinions and prejudices. If you see it, stop it. Report that user. Give the person being harassed a helping hand and help stand up for them. Bullies are deterred when people dare to stand up to them, and even just one person doing the right thing can help so many. Without the efforts of individuals during the Holocaust, many more would have been lost. Although defending someone on Twitter is certainly a far cry from risking oneself to help others, it operates upon the same principle and helps to establish a racism free place where peoples of all cultures and ethnicities can intermingle.

I don't want to compare my experiences to that of the Holocaust, because what I've encountered has been nowhere near the level of discrimination which Jews faced during World War II. However, I understand what it feels like to be a victim of racism and it ultimately becomes my duty to help stop such instances because I know how much it hurts. It is my duty to ensure that another Asian child never has to hear the word 'chink'. It is my duty to help those who are discriminated against because of their religion. It is my duty to help stomp out the hatred the world can harbor and help spread love, because even one act of kindness can go a long, long way.