

2017 Elie Wiesel Competition

Honorable Mention Senior Essay

Kathryn Monnin, 11th Grade

Grassfield High School, Stephanie Clements

Love Will Win

Hate. It's a word we use every date. "I hate that move." "I ignored her at the party, and now she hates me." It's been tamed by society's constantly wagging tongue, dumbed down, diminished. We're starting to forget what hate really means.

Hate is not the annoyance one feels when watching an awful movie or eating an unpleasant food. Hate is not the anger one feels at a small social slight. Hate is less of an emotion and more of a drive. It's fuel, fuel that Adolf Hitler pumped into the German people like gasoline into a tank. It's what we feel when we're too scared or too lazy to feel anything else. Hate, and its cousins ignorance and fear, are what we turn to when love seems like too much of a risk, and when understanding seems like too much work.

I remember the first time I truly felt the sting of someone's hate. It wasn't directed at me personally, but it might as well have been. Because when Omar Mateen walked into the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida on June 12th, 2016, pulled a gun, and killed forty-nine people, he shot me too. Not just because many of those killed were part of the LGBTQ+ community, as am I, but because all of those killed were human, as am I. In a world where it seems like there's a shooting every other day, the Pulse incident is the one that has affected me most. I stayed up late scrolling through online articles, my numb fingers trembling over the keys a forty-nine holes were torn in me. Every click of the mouse was like a gunshot; each informed me of more death and more hate.

Hate. There it is again. We can't really know what was going through Mateen's mind when he committed this atrocious act, but whether it was hate against the LGBTQ+ community, hate against Hispanics, hate against the world as a whole, or a combination of all of these, hate was at the root of it.

The solution to hate is simple, not easy, not at all, but simple. Understanding. We hate what we fear and we fear the unknown. Confronted with a belief alien to our own, our first instinct is to go on the defensive, but it doesn't have to be. My generation, as well as the rest of the world, can make an effort to learn about those who are different from us, to appreciate and celebrate those differences. We can study other cultures, both in and outside of school. We can make a point of talking to diverse people, because only by getting to know others as human beings can we begin to break down the self-imposed barriers that separate us.

One of the moments that struck me most of Hanns Loewenbach's story was the line he used to describe how he felt when he was hiding out illegally in Germany: "I felt like a deer, and it was deer season." I can't claim to understand the complete depth of his fear as he lived as a fugitive in the very place he had grown up, in danger of being killed at any time for something that was as much a part of him as his beating heart. But I can understand a bit of it. It's what I feel when I read comments on

online news articles saying that homosexuality is immoral and disgusting. It's what I feel when someone at school uses "That's so gay" as a put-down. It's what I feel when our vice-president is a person who has pushed for anti-LGBTQ+ legislation throughout his career. For me and others in the LGBTQ+ community, it's been deer season for a long time.

Deer may run and hide, but not me. Hanns Loewenbach said "Evil does not need your help, just your indifference." My generation cannot afford to turn a blind eye to the rampant hate and anger that poisons humanity's veins. We also must not match hate with hate; we must fight hate with love, with knowledge, with courage, and with remembrance of the past. Stories like Hanns Loewenbach's serve as a model to which we can hold ourselves. All races, all religions, and all orientations. We will swim through the frigid water, and if they turn us away on the other side, we will swim back, but we will not drown. Love will hold us up, and someday we can hope to look down and see the chains of hate slip off of our ankles and disappear into the water's depths. In the end, love will win.