

Vrinda Tarneja

Fairport High School Class of 2011

“Character isn't inherited. One builds it daily by the way one thinks and acts, thought by thought, action by action. If one lets fear or hate or anger take possession of the mind, they become self-forged chains.” Helen Douglas is absolutely correct. Our life is a series of steps, actions, thoughts and decisions that make us who we are and what we become. Succumbing to anger or hate and letting them creep in our minds we enslave ourselves. Intolerance, discrimination, and prejudice keep building walls around us and make it impossible for our heart to reach out to others in need. Prejudice, malice, hate, intolerance, disrespect...all these are self-made barriers that has only resulted in bloodshed throughout the world. Today we are fighting in the name of God, killing on basis of skin color, and hating due to sexual orientation. However, I believe love, compassion, and tolerance can re-revolutionize our world. Yet, we have to do something about this because this is our world. And as they say, “Kindness begins at home”; we have to begin in our, home, neighborhood, community: Rochester.

We have to shatter these barriers that we have build against other ethnicities, and the only way to achieve this is by foremost understanding that we are all the same. Sure, I may belong to a different religion than others, but does that really define who we are? Aren't we still the same? Doesn't the same color of blood run through both our veins? The truth is that we are all the same on the inside with different wrapping paper covering us on the outside.

Recently, Fairport High School celebrated Brotherhood-Sisterhood Week and it was inspiring, fun, and most of all powerful. This week celebrates C.A.R.E: Civility, Awareness, Respect, and Embrace. Each day we celebrated and preached about each of these aspects and I heard stories that sent chills going down my spine and formed tears in my eyes. Yet, there was one presentation that really touched me: a presentation which addressed prejudice, discrimination, and hate. The emcees started of the presentation by asking anyone to stand up if they had heard racial, religious, or sexual prejudice in the hallways of FHS, and to my surprise each and every student in that packed auditorium slowly stood up. That moment was a shocker and an eye-opener at the same time. I had always prided myself in saying barely no prejudice occurred at Fairport and there was so much love, but that was me being naïve. But this is what is happening in every school in Rochester. No matter how much love exists amongst classmates, there has always been a little bit of prejudice that has held us from connecting to each other whole heartedly. The cause: ignorance.

Ignorance. This is what is obstructing Rochester from eliminating the differences between people with diverse backgrounds. Many of us don't even know the person before we start making wrong inferences. I think one would be surprised how similar we are to each other. I also believe only after we understand and accept other people's viewpoints can we eradicate the hate. Even if we don't agree with someone else's beliefs, we need to respect it. To develop understanding and cooperation among people with diverse backgrounds we have to strive to be more aware, respectful, tolerant, and compassionate. We should try to educate ourselves by learning about their culture, taking part in their festivals, and joining them in their happiness. We have to cooperate with one other not as if we were mingling with people with a different nationality, creed, race, or religion, but as with another human being. We need to be tolerant of other people's views and beliefs. Foremost, we need to be compassionate about our mission of building our community. If these few qualities were so easy to imply in one's life, then there would be no differences in Rochester or the world. This takes practice and drive. To put into simpler words, these traits are the building stones in bridging our differences and bettering Rochester.

Another way we can help eliminate barriers that exist amongst diverse ethnicities in Rochester is by teaching others and being role models. I think it would be a wonderful idea to expand Brotherhood Sisterhood Week because it is the best way to bring a powerful message to a lot of

people. This Week helps to raise awareness about what causes these differences and also demonstrates how to transform these same differences into understanding. Establishing Brotherhood Sisterhood Week will also instill moral qualities into the youth of Rochester, who are also this city's future.

Rochester is a city which is booming with diverse cultures, religions, races, and beliefs. Yet, sometimes these differences create barriers of prejudice, discrimination, and malice amongst the citizens. This world doesn't need anymore hate; love is the need of the hour. I believe that if we take one step at a time we can get rid of this hate and replace it with cooperation and understanding. Rochester is a strong community and I have full faith that if we stick together we can accomplish anything.