

Second Place

The Root of Hate

by
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Ignorance negatively effects many lives in our society today. My law of life is to work against ignorance and try to combat its many wounds already made in our society.

Ignorance is bliss; this saying has been a misconception for many years, when, in all actuality, ignorance is the root of many of our everyday problems. It covers a spectrum that can range from a mere identity problem to something as large as terrorism. Everyone has the same capacity for hate and ignorance. The reason it differs is because there are those who refuse to learn.

In the most literal sense of the word ignorance means simply "a lack of knowledge." The deeper meaning of the word is in the sense of ignoring your ability to further your understanding of others. The two kinds of ignorance are both very important. These are ignorance because of schooling and the kind of ignorance that leads to hate. The kind that has most affected my life is ignorance that leads to hate.

The problem really isn't just ignorance alone. It is all of the things that come from ignorance. Ignorance sets off so many human emotions. The first thing to come from ignorance is fear, then anger, hatred, and finally suffering. This is the kind of ignorance that has polluted our world. Hatred is taught, just as love can be taught.

October 12, 1998, Laramie, Wyoming. This was the date and place that Matthew Shepard died after lying comatose for five days. He had been tied to a fence, his skull smashed by a gun butt, beaten and left to die. While the trials on his case were being held, many local hate groups gathered on the steps of the courthouse with signs, some reading "Matthew in Hell." Why did this happen? Matthew Shephard was homosexual. His two attackers couldn't understand that. The beginning of it all was ignorance towards someone who is homosexual, fear of his differences, anger towards a gay man, hate for him, and finally suffering inflicted upon Matthew, the entire Shepard family, and people around the country. All of this was caused by ignorance.

Earlier that year another example of ignorance had made its impact on the world. James Byrd of Jasper, Texas was dragged 3 miles behind a pickup truck in an effort by three local men to start a hate group. This happened only because James was African-American. The same cycle of emotions can be pointed out in this case. Keep in mind the only provocation the attackers had was their fear and ignorance towards Matthew Shepard and James Byrd's differences. Ignorance is the cause of their deaths.

Religion, Sexual Orientation, Sex, Race and Status are only a few of the reasons for bigotry today. Examples of hatred are all around us. A boy I know became so enraged that when he saw that one of the Wise men in his nativity scene at home was African-American, he threw the porcelain figurine up against the wall because he viewed it as a mere imperfection in the scene of Christ's birth. The amount of

chauvinism shown by one human being is unbelievable. So is the amount of humility. Martin Luther King Jr's best childhood friend was Caucasian. In adolescence the other boy's father separated them. How absurd it seems that a child, so innocent and little, did not fear that which many adult around the world do.

My law of life is to combat ignorance. How fulfilling one's life would be just knowing that they impacted someone's life for the better. To teach them things about the lives of others. To help someone live a more fulfilling life. To live a more fulfilling life. That's the one thing I would love to do. I know that for one person alone to combat ignorance all around the world and win would be impossible, but with many united as one we could abolish this root of hate. All that I ask of you today is that after reading my paper, go out and help someone. Join an organization. If you think you cannot change one's mind, think of T.J. Leyden, a former neo-nazi skinhead who now teaches people how to avoid hate. Follow his example, don't ignore their ignorance, but try to teach them. It would change everything. Go out and tell your story. Be heard.