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Do the Write Thing

Nothing good ever comes of violence. – Martin Luther King

The three of us are close in age and lived within miles of each other; yet, our paths will never cross. While I will have the opportunity to graduate high school and college, have a career, get married and have children, two youths not very much older than myself will never have the same opportunity. While my family will be able to see me grow and succeed in life, two other families will never have these experiences with their sons. Like myself, one of the youths is described as an easy-going person who enjoyed playing sports. Unfortunately, violence has ended his life at such a young age. While I do not know much about the other youth that carried out the crime, I can only suspect that he will spend the majority of his life in prison bearing the guilt of what he did to this other youth and both of the families. My only connection to these youths is through reading a newspaper report: Suburban Lantana 15-year-old charged with first-degree shooting murder over a bike. I wish this was an isolated incident but unfortunately in my county, my state, and in my country, there are many similar acts of senseless violence involving youth.

Although I have been fortunate enough to avoid the direct impact of violence, I realize that my life is affected by youth violence. Because violence is so widespread, my parents restrict my activities outside of the home. I do not have the same freedom that my parents had when they were growing up. For example, they could stay outside playing with their friends or they could go to school activities alone. Because of the widespread violence among youth today, that freedom has been restricted in my life. As I watch news clips and read headlines about all the violence in society, I can understand my parents' concern as I also worry about being a victim of violence.

As a middle-school student, I understand that bullying and violence exist within the school walls. In order to avoid violence, the students at my school are restricted in the type of backpacks we can carry and clothing we can wear. When a fight does take place in school, it disrupts the teaching process. While I am always concerned about the violence that originates in the school, I now worry about the prospect that violence can penetrate the school walls. Shootings at elementary schools, middle schools, high schools and colleges no longer seem like isolated acts of violence. Although I have been able to avoid violence in school, I still worry about the possibility of being a victim. As a student, we need to be able to focus on learning and not to worry about being a victim of violence.

You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view—until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it. – To Kill a Mockingbird, Harper Lee

As I watch the news and read the newspaper about senseless violence, I wonder why I am fortunate that violence does not directly have an impact on my life. It has been said that the internet, movies, video games, music and TV contribute to violence. I am not defending or blaming these different mediums, but I believe that the problem of youth violence stems from ignorance. Ignorance is defined as lacking knowledge or information as to a particular subject or fact. I understand that the violence I see in the real world and the violence occurring in music, TV, movies, internet or games is wrong and harmful. However, for many youths the violence in these mediums reinforce attitudes that the youth have already developed in their upbringing and environment. Through my parents, teachers, school administrators, coaches and religion, I have been taught right from wrong. Those youths that are committing violence are ignorant of the consequences of their actions. They do not have proper role models, inside or outside their home. Unfortunately, many youth are not getting love and attention, so they look for attention outside the home. This could lead to youths joining gangs for acceptance and security. Peer pressure can also cause youth to do things that they should not do in order to get attention. When children lack encouragement and receive negative feedback from a parent, sibling or anyone else, those children can have low self-esteem and anger. This could lead to bullying and other forms of violence.

Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that...and I say to you, I have decided to stick to love, for I know that love is ultimately the only answer to mankind's problems.

Dr. Martin Luther King

I will not be able to stop youth violence by myself. With other youth and adults, we can make a difference. Together we can work toward ending youth violence by showing respect for ourselves and others. Within my group of friends, I can be there for support and encouragement. If I see harmful changes in their behavior, I can talk with them and if necessary, seek adult involvement. We need to have the courage to help those who are being bullied and to speak out against harmful actions of our peers. If others speak out, we will need to openly support them and request that others also speak out. There is strength in numbers.

As I get older, I will make it a point to act as a role model to other youth. I will tell them how hitting a baseball on one of my baseball teams is more rewarding than hitting another person as a member of a gang. I will tell them that hitting the books for good grades is more rewarding than hitting others. As a parent, I will show love and respect for my own children, nieces and nephews. I will explain right from wrong. I will tell them to have the courage to stand up for others and speak against violent acts.