



Cassidy Artz

is a junior at Hathaway Brown School in Shaker Heights. Cassidy is passionate about hockey and is captain of the school's varsity field hockey team. She is interested in environmental issues and spent a semester in the Bahamas studying oceanography. Although she has not chosen a college, Cassidy plans to be a doctor and would like to be involved in public health issues.

"An example of a stereotype? Sure, like if I were to say that all Jews were money-grubbing, big-nosed, Jesus hating misers....!"

I blinked. Was I really sitting in my English class at one of the best schools in Cleveland in the year 2004? Did I really just hear that from my teacher? As the only Jewish person in my class, I felt shocked, attacked, and hurt. We were studying literary stereotypes, like the archetypal hero or the evil villain. This fully loaded hate-filled definition of a stereotype really had no place in our classroom. However, when my teacher said those words, most of my class laughed.

My body became ice cold and my face was red, and I was left with a heavy heart, not only for myself, but for my laughing classmates. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wisely noted, "In the end, we will not remember the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends." After my classroom incident, I was haunted, not by the stupid ranting of a clearly anti-Semitic teacher, but by the reaction of my classmates. Not one of them was shocked, enraged, or embarrassed for me. They all knew that I was the only Jew in that room. Nevertheless, they chose to laugh.

My classmates are typical of many teenagers today. There are students wearing peace signs and ardently arguing against war. My generation wishes for peace across the world, but seem unconcerned with making peace across the room. When my classmates heard the stereotypical ethnic slurs, they laughed. How ironic that this peace-seeking generation is also described as cruel, vicious, and intolerant to one another. There are heart-wrenching accounts of bullying, "mean girl" antics and even physical attacks both in and out of the classroom. I ponder how my generation can develop our own peace movement, to stop the wars we have declared upon one another.

With a little investigation, I discovered educator Jane Elliott's Blue Eyes/Brown Eyes Exercise, utilized several decades ago. With this historic method, participants are labeled inferior or superior based solely on the color of their eyes. With complete cooperation among students, administrators, teachers, and parents, each group experiences a full day or week of feeling ostracized, humiliated and discriminated against at school. Educators and administrators must carefully control the experiment, so that it does not become a joke or just another avenue for bullies to flex their muscles. Most importantly, there must be deep and broad discussions following the exercise, with the intention of mapping out practical strategies to combat the behavior that surfaces.

Hateful attitudes did not form overnight, and they will not go away overnight. Perhaps an exercise such as Elliott's is just what we need to begin to understand how we treat each other. Maybe the tacit approval of hurtful stereotypes will slowly change into strong defense of the ridiculed. Experience may be the best teacher.