
Michelle Hoffman

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I live in a small town community in a neighborhood where everyone is close and friendly. It is basically your every day suburban neighborhood. In places like these, people like to think discrimination doesn't exist, but I experienced religious discrimination not too long ago very close to my home where I never thought I would see it.

My neighbors were a normal family who had just moved into the area. The mother and father had a boy and a girl, who were twins. Being the friendly neighbors we all are, we welcomed them to our neighborhood with a small, get to know you party. During all the conversations that went on during the party, no one asked what religion they were. It just wasn't something that was cared about enough to bring up.

Months went by, and the family became good friends with everyone in the neighborhood, but when Halloween rolled around, everything changed. When all the young children were out going door to door collecting candy, everyone noticed that the only house not distributing candy was owned by our neighbors. Some nosy mother eventually knocked on their door to inquire why they weren't participating, and the answer was simple. They were Jehovah Witnesses. Because of their religion, they do not celebrate holidays. Word quickly spread like a wild fire.

The next morning, the family awoke to find that their house had been vandalized. Eggs had been thrown, and garbage was strewn across the yard. A select few knew who had committed the crime, but everyone kept silent.

When our friends were cleaning, no one helped them. When they were upset, no one comforted them. When they demanded answers, no one apologized. When they decided to move away, no one stopped them.

"In the end, we will not remember the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends"-Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

It is these words that haunt our neighborhood. We said nothing, did nothing, and now our friends are hurt and lost from us forever.

The thing that people need to realize is that discrimination still exists, and it is going to take each and every one of us to help stop it.

I used to be afraid to stand up for what I believe in. After taking an influential class at High School about hate and the Holocaust, I found my voice, and I am not afraid to speak with it loud and clear. It helped me see that even though I am only one person, I can make a difference, and so can everyone else.

More classes like this need to be available for students. History classes should put more emphasis on the importance of the Holocaust and genocides that are happening around the world. In addition, there should be electives available as a choice for students who want to learn more about this kind of situation.

School is a major part of each person's life. It is a place where people gather a voice with opinions. School is a place where children and young adults are taught and influenced. If classes in school were to teach the importance of speaking out and sharing opinions, more people would feel that it is important to do so.

School is the perfect opportunity to raise awareness and for students to acquire a voice their own. A class like this helped me, and they could help a lot more people. Together we can make a difference.