



### Jane Yiyi Zhang

is a senior at Oberlin High School. Jane enjoys reading and learning about other cultures and their customs. She enjoys creating jewelry and clothes that are beautiful and practical. Her goal is to acquire a double major in international business and Chinese and pursue a career in international law/business.

Jane is deciding between attending Ohio State University or Washington University in St. Louis.

The red velvet curtain fell, signaling the ten minute intermission between acts of *Macbeth*. A multitude of high school and middle school students, from an assortment of schools, spilled out of the auditorium and into the lobby. As I milled about the lobby a group of teenage boys passed me by. They were all in uniform, tan slacks, blue buttoned down shirts, and striped ties. Clearly private school, I thought as they went past. And then it happened. Like a bolt of lightening out of a clear blue sky one of them muttered "Chink" under his breath; audible enough for me to hear it, but without the courage or courtesy to look me in the eye. A drive-by, or should I say walk-by act of discrimination!

I am Asian by birth and a U.S. citizen by circumstance, but this was the first time I had tasted the bitter fruit of discrimination; and it hurt. Like a sucker punch, I was initially stunned, then outraged. I thought of finding a teacher associated with the school and telling her what had happened, but paraphrasing the Prophet Isaiah, "I opened not my mouth...and as a sheep before its shearers I was silent." Isaiah 53:7. Needless to say, the rest of *Macbeth* was a blur.

I not only felt angry, now I felt ashamed because of my silence. Yet what should my response have been? A cutting remark back or a slap in the face? Did not Mohandas Gandhi write that "an eye for an eye only makes both people blind?" How do I balance this with the Edmund Burke quote, "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing"?

Suddenly, it hit me. To change the hearts and minds of others, I had to start with changing me. Had I not pre-judged the teenage boys based upon the way they were dressed?

I realized I could not change the ignorance that breeds intolerance and discrimination; that has to come from within. However, I could raise awareness about my culture which would open up communication and promote understanding, understanding promotes tolerance and tolerance promotes respect for all humanity. To raise awareness I did a presentation about African American music and another presentation about Chinese culture within my school. I talked about several different aspects such as customs, clothes and food, like thousand year old duck eggs. As an individual, some of the things I have done to learn more about other cultures are reading, eating different foods and interacting with others who are of a different race than me.

As Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel once wrote, "They (the Nazis) could take everything from me, even my life, but they could not take one thing from me; my choice of response."