

RACHEL LITTLER SCHOLARSHIP FINALIST



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is a senior at Garrett Morgan School of Science in Cleveland. She is a straight A student who has never missed a day of school. Her true passion is volunteering and being involved in her community. She volunteers at the Metroparks Zoo and is an usher at Playhouse Square. She is a member of Key Club and the National Honor Society. Rachel is preparing to major in early/middle childhood education and become an elementary school teacher.

Childhood and youth obesity is becoming a very serious matter in today's society. In the past twenty years, "the rate among adolescents aged twelve to nineteen more than tripled, increasing from 5% to 17.6%" according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Therefore, we can see that there are several children and teenagers that are considered overweight and obese in this day and age. My best friend happens to be one of them. I first met Phoebe* in 2008 in my junior year of high school. In the beginning of that school year, I heard there was a new kid in school, but I didn't know who. Later that week, while I was eating lunch in the cafeteria, I overheard two girls making fun of another girl. They called her "fat" "a tubbo", and told her to "go get liposuction." The girl shouted words back, but it only encouraged the two girls to continue. She then began to cry as the other girls persisted to belittle her.

I couldn't believe my ears as to what was going on. I became enraged at how cruel people can act towards one another. No one should ever be treated in the way that they treated the girl. I could no longer stay silent. I forced myself to march over to those girls, full of fear, and not knowing what I would say or do when I approached them. When I confronted them, I told them what they were doing was wrong and that they should stop it and apologize. Though they only laughed and told me to mind my own business, I decided to ask the crying girl if she wanted to come eat with me. After talking with her, I soon found out that Phoebe was the new girl. In no time we became close friends and remain friends to this day.

Being friends with Phoebe has really opened my eyes to the weight problem facing children and youth in America. Knowing this, Phoebe and I have made a pact to live a healthier life style. We exercise together and eat healthier diets that include a variety of fruits and vegetables. We both encourage our friends, family members, and classmates to live healthier as well. One of our goals is to start a weight loss club in our school that will build self-esteem and help prevent weight-bullying.

As a country we must, as someone once said, not "wait for people to be friendly, show them how." If I would have never intervened in the cafeteria that day, I would not have gained a greater perspective on the problem that is facing children and youth in this country and I would not have made a lifelong friend. Therefore, the youth of today need to step up and speak out about weight-bullying and other types of discrimination. Maybe we'll learn something and who knows, we may just make a new friend.

** Name has been changed*

