



LIYANNA CHANDLER-NIEVES

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She is the oldest of three children and enjoys drawing, reading, writing, playing volleyball and hanging out with her friends. Liyanna is considering a career as an actuary.

This is a story about an intelligent, biracial (African American and Puerto Rican) girl who was excited to go to her friend's house for the first time after school. Her afternoon was going to be great and a whole new experience, different from when she hung out with her friend at school. They met her friend's father, who only talked to his wife and his daughter. He glanced at the girl and quickly looked away, avoiding complete eye contact. The girl was puzzled, but she disregarded what happened.

The next day, the friend spoke to the girl and told her why her father tried to ignore her. She said, "My dad didn't speak to you because he didn't know what you were." She also explained that he didn't like black people. The friend was comfortable with the words she had spoken because she was raised to believe that these words were acceptable. But was it? The friend had no idea how strongly her words affected her friend. However, the girl took no part in being angry at her friend because none of it was her fault.

The girl was shocked and emotions quickly swept over her. She couldn't get her friend's words out of her head. Her wall of confidence was being broken down, brick by brick, with the thought of being disliked because of her race, which she cannot change nor control. She began to wonder if it was her fault. Tear after tear fell as she blamed herself because of her race. The girl wanted so badly to change. This very confused girl was me.

I am privileged to struggle every day with the same question: "What are you?" In my mind, it is completely wrong for people to identify other human beings as unknown things. I learned that we are all equal and that skin pigmentation and ethnic background don't matter. If so, why do we continue to base the "quality" of a person on her race? I believe that the best response to these people is to say, "I am a person, just like you, with two eyes, a nose, and a mouth." I am proud, and I will reveal to anyone my race because it doesn't change the kind of person I am. Can't we treat each other with respect, just as God intended us to?

Because of what happened to me, I will now watch my own words and even my body language to prevent any damaging effects to other people's self-esteem. I will also share what happened to me with others and explain that intolerance is still alive. Additionally, I am a member the Unity Club at school, which focuses on respecting people's different cultures, religions, and races. Our goal is to become one as a community and to stop the prejudice that we face in our daily lives. This experience has brought my friend and I even closer together, I hope to educate others to accept one another regardless of race.