

KYLE SUSMAN SCHOLARSHIP FINALIST



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is a junior at Solon High School. He enjoys playing guitar and working on stage and show choir crew. He volunteers at a local arts center and does video and sound for school sporting events. Kyle is exploring his college options, but plans to major in communications.

Last year, my brother left for his freshman year of college. He was going to a beautiful college, high upon a hill. Our happiness soon turned to misery. Instead of enjoying this new experience, my brother was bullied and even had his life threatened.

It started early in his first semester. During the process of getting to know each other, the students found out that my brother was Jewish. A small group of boys began to harass him. They told him that the Nazis should have killed the Jews and that he should not live in the community that he did, because it wasn't Jewish enough.

My brother tried to handle this himself. He tried to ignore them. He began getting e-mails from one of them, asking for money from the Jew boy. Later that student put a knife to my brother's throat, demanded money and ran off. Security was notified. They found these culprits. They all admitted to what they had done. My brother came home.

A dean from the school called my brother. She wanted to know what punishments he thought those students deserved. We discussed this as a family. Since college was a place of learning, we felt that we should use this event as a teaching opportunity. The only way to stop such behavior was for these boys to learn about Jewish persecution. We asked that they visit a Jewish museum and write a paper about what they learned. We also asked that each student write a letter of apology to my brother.

Instead, the students who were verbally abusive received warnings and the boy with the knife was expelled. They did write letters though. These boys again admitted what they had done, but they did not understand that what they did was wrong. There was no remorse.

I wondered what I could do change this bullying. I joined Accent on Youth. This is a group of students that perform short plays for local schools about topics important to today's youth. After the performances we discuss those subjects with the students. Our first performance was about bullies. I portrayed a boy being abused by his peers.

Upon visiting various classrooms, I was surprised at how many of the students admitted to being bullied. Others did not even realize that bullying was bad, just like the students at my brother's college. We discussed ways to stop it, such as telling an adult or sticking up for a friend in need. If this program made an impression on just one person, we may have stopped someone from being hurt or hurting someone.

As for my brother, he left that college on the hill and is pursuing his education elsewhere. I, on the other hand, intend to apply to that school, and if accepted I will go there. Why? Because the only way to change things is to confront them, in a positive and constructive manner, and that is what I intend to do.

