



MARISA LANCASTER

is a 7th grader at Hathaway Brown School in Shaker Heights. She is on the soccer team, but also loves photography. Nothing means more to Marisa than her family, and she spends as much time as she can with them. She pictures herself as doing something with children or teens in the future, but also harbors the dream of producing or directing movies.

One of my best friends, Cassie* is partially Cuban. Her mother was born and raised in Cuba and moved to the United States when she was a teenager. When Cassie and I were younger no one noticed or said anything about her looking or being from Cuba, but when we got to sixth grade a few girls started calling her a, “little Cuban girl.” I became aware that she was Cuban and other people also started throwing around the nickname.

When I talked to her about it at first she said it was okay because it was the truth, but as I kept seeing people call her that I saw how her reaction had changed. She no longer had a it-will-be-okay look but now a somewhat scared look that told me she couldn’t deal with this on her own. When I talked to her again she told me that just because her mother is Cuban doesn’t mean she should be made fun of and teased. And she was right, nobody called me, “little American girl” because I was American. When tears started to roll down her face I told her that I would do something about it. When I talked to the girls I asked them, “Why should she be made fun of because she’s Cuban? I’m American and you don’t make fun of me. Sure, Cassie may look a little different but so do all of us. Treat her like you would treat me and everyone else.” As soon as I confronted them they stopped calling her a nickname and started calling her Cassie and treating her the same as everybody else.

At the time the reason I confronted the name-callers was because they were emotionally hurting my friend. But when I look at it now I really know why I had to bring this to a stop. I talked to them because I like peace. And while my world isn’t always peaceful, I savor every moment that it is. Even when I was little I didn’t like when people were called names or bickered. That’s why nap time was my favorite time of day whether I wanted to admit it or not. Seeing my best friend being called a name based on her race was terrible and I knew that if that was me it would make me angry and make me feel different. I’m glad I stood up for my friend and make her life more peaceful without the hate.

If something similar to this were to happen again I would encourage other people not to be afraid to be the bigger person and stand up for their friend or classmate. Simply being nice to others can rub off onto them and they’ll realize how good it feels. While my vision of peace may be a little far fetched, I know if you start with standing up for yourself and others and not being a bystander you can take it a lot farther.

**Name has been changed*