

## CIERA L. WEST SCHOLARSHIP FINALIST



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**is a senior at Whitney M. Young High School in Cleveland. She wants to make a difference in the lives of others and enjoys Christian praise dancing, writing poetry, volunteering and having fun with friends. Among her passions is spreading the news of abstinence and sexual purity among her peers. Ciera plans to become a teacher for the deaf and also start a non-profit for youth that will work to mold productive, respectful and empowered young people. She would like to attend Eastern Michigan University's special education program.**

Imagine living in a silent world. Living in a place where people are constantly judged, stereotyped and ignored. A society where people feel they have no voice and everyone has forgotten that they exist. Deaf Americans live this life too often.

My Uncle, Walter Hamilton\*, is a deaf American who has faced discrimination repeatedly. My Uncle Walter was arrested. Because he was deaf he was not allowed to make a phone call to contact his family. He was unjustly treated, and sued the county for denying him, his rights. He won the case. Throughout his life he has faced discrimination in the workforce and his daily activities. People often make cruel comments, gestures and ignore him, disregarding the damage done to his soul and spirit.

As I grew older, I wanted to know more about the person who everyone, including my family, often ignored. I knew there was more to him than just being deaf. He invited me to an annual deaf festival and it opened my eyes to a whole new world. I learned that deaf people were as capable, intelligent, and unique as any other person. The festival addressed bridging the gap between the hearing and the hearing impaired. I knew at that moment that I wanted to make a difference. The very next day, I enrolled in a sign language class and studied for two years. I am now fluent.

Through sign language I was able to communicate with Uncle Walter. I asked him about the life of a deaf person. His answer was far worse than I expected. He said "Imagine being in a place where you couldn't hear anything, looking at the birds in the morning, but not being able to hear them chirp, where you face being ignored far more than any human should. Imagine being in a family that you couldn't talk to and feeling as if you were living in the world alone." He continued to say "Sometimes I wish that I wouldn't wake up, so I can die and go to heaven and hear everything, but most of all live in peace without facing hatred anymore."

I knew that something had to be done and just knowing sign language wasn't enough. I have participated in the deaf festival for the past four years. I taught a sign language class at a summer camp for children between the ages of 5 and 13. My goal is to help bridge the gap through awareness, working with the deaf community, and breaking down stereotypical barriers. My next step is majoring in deaf education. I want to become a secondary teacher for deaf students, and to educate the hearing on the deaf community.

No person deserves to be discriminated against or subjected to hatred. I am working to help anyone that may confront the ugly face of hate. Be they deaf, blind, black, white, Asian, tall, young or old. Hate hurts all, but one person can make a difference.

*\*Name has been changed*

