



ABBY WHITE

is a sophomore at Shaker Heights High School. She is an only child who loves to read, write and sing. Abby is “obsessed” with Harry Potter and elephants. She is not sure what she would like to do after school but knows it will involve writing and travel.

A little man roughly sketched with disproportionately small arms. His head was nearly invisible behind masses of curly-cues—long hair, beard; hat on top. Next to him was a tree with rectangular leaves.

The drawing was nearly done. “There,” the artist said with finality, filling in the bearded man’s speech bubble: MY MONEY TREE! “Have a good summer!” He handed me back my eighth grade yearbook.

“What is this?” I asked, confused.

My classmate blinked, surprised. Then he grinned. “It’s a Jew!” he exclaimed. “Cause you’re Jewish!”

A wave washed over me, numbing my senses. I could only nod, which the boy took as his leave. I sat down and looked at the tiny, sloppy sketch that had just bowled me over.

Months beforehand, entering a new school in a new country, I had naively assumed that my religion wouldn’t be unusual. And for so long, it wasn’t. No one shouted slurs; no one laid a hand on me. Sure, I was the only Jew I knew, but not once had I been asked rude questions about my customs, or teased for not celebrating Christmas.

Indeed, nobody I knew hated Jews. Yet anti-Semitism was as rampant as weeds in a neglected garden.

Between Money Man’s lines, I learned a worse truth than I could’ve ever imagined. These students, kind and well-educated, had become so accustomed to anti-Semitism that it was no longer insulting. In fact, it was so funny to them that even a Jew, they thought, wouldn’t be offended.

I would rather have a rock thrown at me. I would rather people spit at my feet. I would rather somebody curse my family, so long as they know that what they’re saying is hurtful.

That was the last day of school. I’m ashamed to say that I continued my normal routine. No other yearbook signers commented on little Money Man, my supposed kin.

I moved back to my hometown a few months later. My life returned to normalcy with astonishing ease—same old friends, same school, same stores and sights. But I was a new person, in no small part because of that drawing. Suddenly, my near-utopia was just a glass pane, one that I shattered as I finally looked around. I saw intolerance everywhere I turned, both in the news and in my neighbors.

I began high school that year and joined the Student Group on Race Relations. As a member of SGORR, I visit fourth and sixth grade classrooms to educate children about discrimination. SGORR helps prevent the problem before it starts. Moreover, I promote a lifestyle of open-mindedness in my personal life. Now, I stand up for my homosexual friend; when I see a girl being teased for her weight, I make sure she’s okay.

It’s the little things that matter—the kind word, the warning chide, the outstretched hand. These actions are contagious, and I’ve made it my life mission to sway as many people as possible to join my cause: understanding and friendship.