

KELLY KNASER SCHOLARSHIP FINALIST



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is a senior at Wickliffe High School. She enjoys playing softball, reading, drawing and studying history in her spare time. She plans to attend Cleveland State University and major in English. She hopes to teach grades 7-12 and eventually become a college professor.

I've always been different from my peers. While all the other little girls wanted to play with Barbies, I'd ask my dad to take me fishing. When I would go over a boy's house, we would talk about the cute girls in our class, and when I'd be at a girl's house we would discuss our crushes on boys. Not until I reached the eighth grade did I realize what I was: I was bisexual and I decided to let everyone know about it.

Suddenly the friends I'd had my entire life were looking at me like some perverse villain. As if I'd committed some unspeakable crime, I got called down to the office to discuss my sexuality with our vice-principal. Weekends normally spent with friends turned to lonesome nights crying by myself because nobody wanted the "gay girl" around. At my first job one of my managers said, "Come on, Kelly, you know you're a fag." Pulling up to a stoplight I've had caravans of people my own age shout "dyke" out of their windows towards me. Some nights all I ever wondered was why I couldn't have been born normal or not at all. It seemed the only question I could ever ask was, why?

Why did I have to be singled out for something I had no control over? What did I ever do to anyone to deserve this treatment? Upon further reflection it dawned on me that this wasn't a problem that only I faced; people everywhere are discriminated for things such as their skin color, religion, and even gender. Why has hate become acceptable? Why should societal intolerance restrict people from being exactly who they were born to be? Why have people allowed such atrocious behavior to exist?

I am unable to stand idly by any longer, and so I've made a conscious decision to create an environment where discrimination cannot survive. I plan to spread kindness wherever I go, reaching out to the downtrodden to let them know that someone understands and cares. I will have succeeded whether I impact one or many, because one person may turn into many.

Having been elected president of my school's pro-kindness organization, I have already begun to initiate projects sponsored by our group to inspire others, to choose positive influences, and spread the love. At our elementary school we are discussing with the children the importance of kindness, compassion and respect; beginning a mural of upstanding figures in our student lounge; and aiding with a teacher training session to promote our ideals within the classroom. As a leader and more importantly, a human being, it's my responsibility to stand up for the equal treatment of all people regardless of race, religion, orientation, gender, age, or disability because everyone is human and deserves to be treated as such; nothing less, no exceptions.