
Hannah Sellers

is a ninth grader at Kenston High School in Chagrin Falls. Hannah loves the theatre and everything that accompanies it. She enjoys writing poetry and short stories. She also likes to run and her favorite sport is softball. She would like to travel to Europe and have a career in writing. She has yet to make a decision on what college to attend, but knows she will major in writing or acting.

Severe intolerance has never been directed toward me.

I have heard jokes that make fun of different cultures or religions. I have seen one gender favored over the other. But my friend Ruth, through her experiences, makes these examples seem mere trifles. She shares her memories, with me, of prejudice and just how troubling intolerance can occur where it's least expected.

Born in the small town of Fulda, Germany, in 1930, Ruth witnessed some of the horrific events of the Nazi rise to power. She heard of Kristallnacht or "Night of Broken Glass," and saw her father taken away to a detention camp, wearing no shoes. Strolling down the street with Jewish friends, Ruth sensed the hatred of German kids who would beat up Jewish children. Ruth learned not to make a fuss or ask questions. She learned not to grow up like any curious child, because she didn't want that curiosity to be a bother to her fearful parents.

And, in America, she witnessed the intolerance they were supposedly leaving behind. One particular memory, during her early life in the land of the free and home of the brave, was while living in New York City. Ruth played with children in the streets. One day, a little girl around Ruth's age, maybe 8 or 9, offered to have her baptized. The little girl reasoned that, with a baptism, at least Ruth would be German and Christian instead of German and Jewish. This comment, coming from one so young, shows how the seeds of prejudice start.

I thought about this incident. Although there were far worse acts of prejudice going on in the world, at that time, this one remained clear in Ruth's mind, almost 70 years later. Acts based on hate and intolerance start from prejudice. They begin by being planted in the most innocent of all human beings; children.

Misperceptions, which form into a larger hate, don't just pop into peoples' minds from nowhere. As Ruth's encounter demonstrates, prejudice can begin with children. In some countries, prejudice is preached in school. I believe an effective way to abolish the views held against people because of religion or skin color is to have parents educate their children to practice tolerance.

With any problem, you start at the beginning. You start small and work your way to understanding. It can be small as stopping a racial joke from being told to refusing to attend or view entertainment that contains intolerant references. If every child was educated about tolerance, then my friend Ruth and others would not have personal stories to share about encounters with prejudice.