



CLAY McMULLEN is a tenth grader at West Geauga High School. He started the Wetlands Education Team that works to preserve Ohio wetlands and educate communities about the role of wetlands in the environment. He is active in sports and Latin Club and hopes to continue his environmental work by majoring in engineering.

Four year old Magda, my future grandmother, and twenty year old Marie, my great aunt, were two normal, carefree children until they were confronted by religious intolerance. During World War II, they lived in Poland. When the German army invaded, their parents were murdered and their house was commandeered by the Nazis. The girls were lucky enough to sneak away in the bottom of a hay cart. Once she escaped, Marie harbored Jews and other victims of Nazi persecution in her house, but was herself turned in and sent to the concentration camps. She spent several years at Auschwitz before being liberated by the allied army at the end of the war. Both my great aunt and my grandmother are still profoundly haunted by their respective experiences with persecution. My great aunt built her house entirely of glass due to her extreme fear of darkness and the absence of sunlight which she endured during her time in Auschwitz. My grandmother stocks excessive amounts of food in her house because of the famine she experienced while fleeing Poland.

The actions of the Nazi regime disgust me, not only because they attempted to exterminate an entire religion, but also because of so many individuals murdered fellow humans in cold blood. It sickened me that a human being could be so heartless as to shoot a child's parents in front of her eyes, orphaning her on the spot as they did to my grandmother. I find myself extremely disturbed because these soldiers were capable of acting so irrationally and so violently. Under these abnormal circumstances they became suppliants of a vile man. It scares me that anyone could be manipulated as easily as they were.

Because I have been so disturbed by the atrocities done to my relatives, I have taken action to prevent discrimination. The first thing I have done is to educate my peers about my family's story in the hopes of preventing a similar event from recurring. I did an extensive report on my family's experience with the Holocaust and shared it with the school. One action that I plan to take is to start a database of stories about discrimination. I will organize announcements at my school to inform everyone about the database, and create a website to be used much like a blog to make it easy for everyone to share their stories. It will serve as a reminder that discrimination takes place in many different forms and circumstances. If I am able to change one person's perceptions about intolerance or discrimination for the better, I will be a nobler person for it. And more tolerance in the world could do us all some good.