



**BRENTON SULLIVAN**

is a 10<sup>th</sup> grader at Shaker Heights High School. He takes honors and advanced classes and has made the honor roll three times. Brenton is a dedicated member of the varsity swim team and is involved in theatre, MAC scholars and SGORR. His dream is to be a professional film actor/director.

Whether or not we are superheroes, everyone has their own form of kryptonite. For some it may be what they see around them, what they love or hate, or even how they are treated. Poor treatment can negatively affect anyone, and sometimes key words cut like a knife. I was at what felt like a superhero status, unstoppable, confident and protected. That was until the Dinosaur decided to verbally attack many innocent Black people. The six-letter word he used destroyed them like six packs of dynamite. I thought I would be resistant, immune to such a word; yet I was wrong, and the difference between a five-letter disrespectful slang term and a six-letter derogatory name for slaves, hit me hard. I fell from my superhero pedestal, my force field destroyed and my pride gone with it. I felt as if I had just been beaten in public and those passing by just let the violence happen; I felt alone.

It turned out that I was not alone. There were other dinosaurs preying on the innocent. I refused to sit around and let these attacks continue! I wanted justice, for myself and the other victims. I wanted to show that the word he was using was more than six letters, but generations of pain and hate. We were being judged and excluded over things we could not control. Polarized and belittled, nothing was being done to fix the situation. The dinosaur had labeled me, branding me with such hatred that I felt as though I was unlike everyone else. The six-letter word he spit left his mouth with such ease, like he was playing with a gun not knowing its true power. He pulled the trigger, shooting me right in the chest, and he did not seem to care. My injuries became my downfall, and his attempts at discrimination were successful.

From that point I refused to get beaten down by that six-letter word again. I try to explain to those who do not understand, that there is a huge difference between the n-word ending with “er” and the n-word ending with an “a”. I have eliminated the word from my vocabulary, and I continue to try to assist others to do the same. I have talked with other people who have been attacked by these dinosaurs and helped them get back on their feet. I try to let people know what the definition of the word they all are saying actually is; there is no compliment or comfort in the word, but insolence, ignorance and hatred. With awareness and knowledge, there is room for respect. This produces peace and unity, and eliminates judgment, intolerance and discrimination. Then we could truly feel like superheroes once again.