



JOSH CERNOMORETS

is a 9th grader at Solon High School. He is involved in drama club at school and is part of a Jewish Family Services Association (JFSA) program that performs anti-dating violence plays in schools. He is an active member of B'nai B'rith Youth Organization (BBYO). Josh also enjoys sports—especially biking and skiing. He would like to be a professional baker.

Hate crimes, racism, discrimination, hurtful words, put downs, threats, and stereotypes. All of these happen every day. The weak join in. The smart will get help. The brave speak up. The bravest are those who walk the halls of schools being ridiculed, and come back day after day knowing it will happen again. They wish it would stop, although most of the time the only voice they have is a whisper. Sometimes the only voice they have is when they scream. But who will listen if they don't want to hear?

I don't know what it's like firsthand to be bullied, but I know what it's like to see it happen. It's a constant internal debate on what to do, and when a decision is made, it's too late. I remember the look on one of my friend's faces, Derek*, who is overweight. I witnessed firsthand at how much words hurt. At a sleepover Derek, his brother, my brother, my friend Sam* and I were all in my basement. Sam thought it would be fun to go on a video chat website. For a while it was fun. Sam and Derek's brother talked to some girls, but then one of the girls called Derek fat. He laughed it off, and left the room. I followed and found him crying; my best friend, crushed by that simple three letter word. It hurt me to see him upset, so I did what I could. I took the computer and told the girls that what they said had hurt my friend badly, and then I turned it off. In the morning Derek told me that it meant a lot that I was willing to stand up for him.

In an effort to end bullying I participate in a program called Know Abuse. This group of teens travels to local high schools teaching about tolerance and dating violence with a theatrical performance and a discussion that follows. I portray a boy who is bullied severely. Being pushed around, being called geek, fag, dork, weirdo and nerd hurts, even though it is part of the play. It's sad that students can't identify with my character. During the show they laugh at me being called hurtful names. Afterword, in the group discussion, I talk to them about how this actually happens, and some kids still think it's a joke. It is my dream to do a performance and not have kids laugh at the studious small kid being called a faggot.

I want to show others how wrong it is to take pleasure from insulting others based on weight, height, skin color, hair color, or other physical features. I constantly tell my friends to stop using derogatory terms, because words like those can hurt people. My close friends have stopped using those words all together. I will continue to spread this message through word of mouth, through Know Abuse, and through my unceasing efforts. It just takes one simple word—tolerance.

**Names have been changed*