



GRACI HOMANY

is a 7th grader at Hathaway Brown School in Shaker Heights. When she's not rock-climbing, hiking or playing soccer, Graci likes to spend time with family and friends or visiting the Cleveland Museum of Art. She would like to be a journalist or perhaps a veterinarian for large/exotic animals and work for the SPCA.

I knew something was wrong. When mom answered the phone, her face crumbled. Rapid tear soaked questions dripped out of her mouth. The words hung in the air, yearning for an answer. My uncle, my strong, loveable, uncle, whose homosexuality was hardly a defining factor in his amazing personality, had attempted suicide for the second time.

When Dan* attempted suicide seven years ago, my family hadn't seen it coming. Everyone thought he'd gotten over the bullying and hatred he'd endured as a teenager; everyone thought the first time would be the last. Dan had been bullied a lot as a teenager, the name calling, the spitting, all of it. His feelings had been bottled up, masked. Apparently he was still haunted by the hate, scared enough to cave to his fear, to the radiating hatred from his peers.

Our family loved and accepted Dan, understood his emotions, supported his decisions. We thought our love would be enough to veil the hate. Our family had grown up with Dan being different. He was teased by his peers extensively, ridiculed for being different. This bullying was so discrete for such a long time, hardly anyone could tell from the outside that Dan was hurting, and maybe that's what made him hurt so badly. Needless to say I was shocked; I loved him. Why didn't he love himself?

My family decided that it would be best to show Dan how much we loved him to help him heal. It was our way of patching the hole being bored into his heart. He had been filling this hole with cement blocks, weighing himself down, we knew love was lighter. Love would help Dan soar above the hate, like an eagle, free from all the glares, the spitballs, the words. Love did help; Dan became happier with our support. It felt great to know that just from a bud of love, a beautiful flower can blossom, and that I was part of the sunlight urging the bud to grow. I love my uncle, I never want to see him hurt like he was again, and I will do everything in my power to make sure people don't have to suffer the way he did.

Being one person in a school with over 800 kids in it, I am just a raindrop, but raindrops make ripples. I plan to participate in the Day of Silence, a day made to support LGBT's in their struggle for equality. I will also encourage my friends to partake as well. "Gay" has become a word that describes more than just people, it's a derogatory word used to describe anything bad. It's become an overused, insensitive term. People must understand what it really means, and be conscientious about using it. I want people to understand how important it is to be kind; hatred gets us nowhere, and being a generation of innovators the last thing anyone should have to worry about being held back by hate.

**Name has been changed*