JULIA JANTZ

is an 8th grader at Learwood Middle School in Avon Lake. She is known for her bubbly personality and love of sports. Julia also enjoys writing songs and stories. She dreams of being an actress, but would also like a career as a physical therapist for kids.

Stopping hate isn't about huge, life changing moments. Little things make the biggest impact, and added up; those little things can be the real life changers. After experiencing what it felt like to stand up and lend a hand to someone who needed it, I hope others will too.

The girl's eyes were misty and wet. Her face seemed to have a ghostly glare reflecting on it as she rushed away from the huddle of laughing teens, trying her best to conceal her face beneath her pile of books. The odd, plaid shoes resting upon her feet made an obnoxious clunking noise as she tried to continue down the hallway in peace. Even though no words were spoken toward her as she walked, she might as well have been screamed at. The eyes following her were insult enough. I felt for the girl, but convinced myself she had brought the hatred and humiliation upon herself. I was wrong.

Later, in class we were assigned a group activity. Within a matter of seconds, each clique in the room easily separated into groups of three. A simple task for me was a nightmare for her. She stood alone, fiddling with the frays on the edge of her shirt, not even attempting to find a partner, as so many times before it had proven impossible. I looked at my friend Kailey*, and pretending to be pained, I said "Ugh. Let's just be nice and partner with…her." Kailey's lifted eyebrows told me how she felt about the idea, but I didn't care, so I tugged her hand and dragged her over. As we approached, the girl's face went from gloom to terror. Her eyes grew wide and she seemed to be shaking as she uttered "Sorry, I'll…move." I felt terrible. "No." I said quickly, "Wanna partner with us?" Her eyes widened, and a huge smile flashed across her face. "I'd love that!"

Class continued and my ears ached as I listened to her go on, and on, about her cats, origami, and other things that I don't usually stumble upon in average conversation. I didn't say anything though, because I understood simply nodding my head and smiling meant the world to her. Finally the end of class arrived, and just as I was about to leave, the girl grabbed my arm and whispered, "Sorry if I talk too much, I'm not quite sure how to talk with friends."

Little things- a smile, a helping hand, an unsolicited compliment, an invitation to belong- can turn someone's bad day, into a good one. I feel that when someone sees another person take a chance on a victim, they feel the urge to make a change too. If that chain reaction could be created, quite a few lives could be changed. The problem is no one is brave enough to start. It takes someone courageous to stand up and simply say, "Stop." I did, but even still, I understand that once isn't enough to defeat hate.

*Name has been changed