



JESSICA HARTIG

is a sophomore at Solon High School. She likes to cook, paint and spend time with her friends. Jessica also likes to read and journal and often finds herself doing various craft projects. Jessica would like to be a child psychologist when she finishes school.

What is the value of a single word? Faggot. Nigger. Fat-ass. Kike. Dyke. Retard. To a bully, the value isn't big. They're simple words that can be uttered in a single breath and forgotten in the blink of an eye. They have the power to elicit laughter from peers. What is the value of a single word? Not even worth a penny. But what is the value of a single word to the victim? It is worth worlds of pain and shame. The sharpness of it feels like a slap in the face. Your heart sinks under the weight of a single word like that, but you have to keep your head high. The worst mistake you can make is to let them see how broken you are. But how many simple words can one take before they collapse under the weight of them?

Being a high school student, I hear a lot of hateful words. A couple weeks ago, I had a conversation with one of my classmates. He said that every gay person on this planet deserved to die, and that I deserved to die for supporting the LGBT community because G-D hated me and the rest of them. I felt struck. Never had I seen such a passionate hatred. What disgusted me even more was that no one stood up against him. Many agreed with him. I was alone. My best friend is bisexual and it pains me to see people who hate something that they don't even understand. For weeks after that confrontation, the boy would harass me about caring for one of "them". All I could focus on was trying to keep his words from hurting me. I came home from school crying every day, trying not to collapse under the weight of his words. I felt like giving in and staying silent. After all, I'm not gay. If I just gave in, he would stop hurting me, right? But I wasn't standing up for just myself. I was standing up to this boy for every gay person who was hiding from judgment. I was standing up for the voiceless. I was standing up for the victims of bullying everywhere- even if they didn't know it. If we all stood up for those who cannot stand for themselves, the world would be a prettier place.

To stop the hate, I have joined my school's Gay-Straight Alliance and I actively stand up when someone says something discriminatory. I try to inspire others to stand up as well. It's not enough for one person to stand against a tsunami of hatred. But if we all stand up, the tsunami becomes a small wave. As president of my TYG*, I will plan social action projects that support the LGBT community, as well as anti-bullying campaigns. I will do all that I can to help fight adversity in my community and worldwide.

What is the value of a single word? Hope. Love. Peace. Empathy. Equality. The value can be astronomical.

** Temple Youth Group*