



LAURA DEVITO

is an eighth grader at Rocky River Middle School. She recently became a second degree black belt and has been doing karate for seven years. Laura loves sports and participates in cross country, track, soccer and basketball.

She sings in the choir, plays piano and is learning Chinese.

When she is finished with school she would like to work at the United States Institute of Peace in Washington D.C.

The leaves crunched under my bulky school shoes as I darted to catch up to my two older sisters. Recess was my cherished time of day because it remained the only time I could see my two older sisters throughout the school day. At the exact moment I reached them, a boy snorted to my oldest sister, “you are Chinese so you can’t see!” In disbelief of what he remarked, everyone froze. These words cut into her skin sharper than glass. I glanced at her as tears welled in her eyes. I was swallowing hard as I silently let on a whimper, not knowing how to reply to that or how I could stop this injustice. My mouth was open wide ready to shriek, but no words could form. The lingering silence seemed everlasting, until someone broke it.

The words my older sister voiced still ring in my head to this day. As she uttered “don’t say that”, the class bully silently rambled away anxious of creating an unwanted scene. My feeling of relief soon disappeared as a blanket of questions covered my mind. “How could he say that?” and “Why would he say that?” were some that raced through my head. The bell rang, and it was time to go inside and face the rest of the day, confused and enraged. Sprinting off the school bus, I leaped into my mom’s arms sobbing hysterically and expressing what took place. She dried my tears and explained that the boy teased her out of ignorance and lack of knowledge about the world and people in it. Since the innocent age of six, society was instructing me that judging people by their stereotypes was tolerable, and at that moment in time I realized I needed to be the change.

Interested in creating a better world, I educated myself about world geography and culture because I did not even know where my older sister was born! The small hobby of learning about the world around me branched into longing to spread the word about culture to others. I continued my passion for the world, and in 4th grade I started reading world atlases and answering geography questions on the National Geographic Bee web site.

First, at my Catholic school I urged the principal to have the Bee in grades 4 to 8. Then I transferred to the public school and encouraged my teachers to accept the Bee. This National Geographic Bee mattered a lot to me so I was persistent to teach my peers about contrary cultures. If just one person learns that stereotypes and classifying people is not acceptable, then everything I have done to terminate hate has been worth my efforts. Stopping the hate is more than offering a kind word, but educating and abolishing cultural stereotypes that have been learned so that no one is a victim of hate ever again.