

June Weaver

Grade 7, Garfield Middle School

Enveloped in the quiet night, darkness surrounded me. Cold winter air toyed with my hair. The only sound was rhythmic footsteps on the cement. It was my own voice that broke the silence. "I don't have anything to write about for my Stop the Hate essay. I've never really experienced any hate." My mother, who was walking with me, pondered this for a moment. Then she said a singular word that changed my whole perspective: "Exactly." I thought about this, and I realized it was true. I had never experienced the thing that has distressed people all over the world. But why was that true for me and not others? Why had I not experienced hate? That was when my mother's one-word answer registered with me.

As a white person in this world, I now understand that certain privileges come with my identity. A glaring example was made clear during the Hillary Clinton/Trump election. Many of my male relatives "couldn't bring themselves to vote for Clinton," simply because she was a woman. Even though they believed in what Hillary stood for, they didn't want a woman for president. This devastates me, knowing that many people across the country had a similar idea. Our country is misleading because we claim to be an advanced generation in a free country, yet discrimination against people of color, women, and individuals of different sexual identities continues. It reveals a gaping contradiction in our perceived values. Being a heterosexual white person has become the norm, and realizing this has made me feel somewhat responsible. It's a painful thought to think that many do not have the freedom to go through life without experiencing hate.

To combat this terrible reality, we must actively celebrate and learn about cultures that are unfamiliar to us. That's why I joined the cooking club at my school, where we create dishes from other cultures using ingredients that are uncommon in our area. Recently, we made ube cookies, a Filipino vegetable I had never used before. After preparing the cookies, we learned about the traditions and culture of Filipinos. This experience not only enriched my knowledge of other areas but also gave me a chance to appreciate different cultures. I plan to use my privilege and the opportunities that I have to help those who have experienced hate. I'm participating in H2O, the club at my school that organizes canned food drives and sets up donation bins filled with winter clothing to ensure that those in need receive warm meals and clothing during the colder months. In that regard, I am just an ordinary teenager, yet I am committed to playing my part in transforming the world we live in today into the world we want to live in tomorrow.

Born on the Lower East Side of Manhattan in New York City, June has traveled to several countries, including Colombia and Mexico. She plays soccer, skis regularly, and is currently learning to snowboard with a friend. At school, she participates in H2O, where she helps organize food and clothing drives. She especially enjoys her science and social studies classes, with a particular interest in Egypt and ancient civilizations. In her free time, she loves reading romance novels and spending time with friends. June hopes to attend the University of Michigan and pursue a career as a book editor.

