



# 2017 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Art, Writing, & Multimedia Contest

## The Wonders of Empathy

Hatred and intolerance are rare in small town Van Wert, Ohio. Nevertheless, there are still some cases that have been witnessed, though rare. To stop these things from happening I've intervened in two cases. To drive out hatred I have challenged the aggressor to put themselves in the victim's shoes and have some empathy. Both in a Mexican restaurant and then at Walmart I had to employ this method.

The incident in the Mexican restaurant was particularly shameful because the aggressor was my own aunt. My mother had invited her to meet us there for her birthday. It started with her talking very slowly as if she thought our waiter was lame. She then was extremely upset when they got her order wrong. She began to curse and rant. I thought this was a controlled event because she was only ranting to us and that would be all, but then the waiter came up and she began cursing at him. That was the moment when I had had enough. I got up from the table, grabbed my aunt's arm, asked the waiter and the family to excuse us, and I took her outside. She looked shocked and surprised that I would do such a thing to her. She was 27 and I was 15, after all. I began to speak to her very softly and slowly, and I told her I understood that she was upset about her order being wrong but I knew that would not calm her down. We sat on the bench outside as she pulled out a cigarette to calm her nerves. I told her she cannot start yelling in a restaurant like that and that our waiter did not deserve that. I reminded her of her prior experience as a waitress and told her to think of what she would do if such a thing happened to her while she was on the job. She calmed down as I asked her to think about what she would do if she was a person of color in America and it was one of the few places where she could get a job. She was very quiet for a moment and flicked her cigarette. She walked inside, and I was worried she hadn't gotten the message so I rushed in after her. To my surprise, by the time I had reached her she was apologizing to our waiter and to our family. I had succeeded for the first time in convincing someone to have empathy for another person.

An incident in Walmart was fought by the same method. Though living in a small town, I did not personally know the aggressor or the recipient of the actions. My mother had sent me down the chip aisle for Doritos. I was walking down the aisle and there was a woman and a man. She was short and trying to reach a bag of chips on the top shelf, but she failed at succeeding every time. The man looked at her in disgust, speaking to the woman with malice. He told her that she was useless and if she could not even get the bag of chips she wanted, how was she supposed to feed herself, let alone a family. I walked up the woman, and being short myself, I had to jump, but I reached the chips. I gave them to her and the man just snickered at us. I spoke to him calmly, trying to keep cool. Excuse me sir, but being short and being a woman doesn't make us useless. He laughed and told me to keep dreaming and that all women are useless and nothing without a man. I told him to imagine if he had been born without a Y chromosome and if he had been born as a girl. I asked him if he would appreciate someone telling him what he had told us. He laughed and said he would understand their perspective and that he would accept his uselessness. So, I told him to consider how far women have come and how women are even doctors and could save his life one day, and he got quieter. Apparently, I had struck a nerve, so I continued, telling him to imagine how many fewer doctors there would be and how many more people would die if women were as useless as he claimed. He quietly apologized and then proceeded to apologize to the other woman.

Using empathy and realism can help an ignorant person to see the error of their ways and to even love their enemy and understand them. In both instances, the aggressor realized the error of their ways and apologized to the recipient. In using this method, I hope to allow the aggressor to see what things would be like for the recipient. As the aggressor evaluates the situation, this method forces him or her to think and go beyond their own hate and aggression. This alone can calm a person down and allow them to see that words can hurt. This method can change the way people think about themselves and about others and their situations.

**Cloey Spry**  
**11th Grade Writing Winner**  
Van Wert High School, Van Wert

Nancy Brown, Teacher  
Bob Priest, Principal



## Driving out Hate

