

Greenfield Peace Writing Scholarship 2019
Second Place
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Equal Rights to the Toy-Box

As children, we are taught in school that every human is equal. Every human has the right to the American Dream. In kid speak that is: the right to recess, snack time, and to the toys in the toy-box. Having adopted these ideals at a young age, experiencing racism for the first time was devastating. Picture this: a little girl with braids and a Bratz t-shirt sits alone in her first-grade classroom and watches the other girls play with a toy from the toybox. The little girl with braids gets up from her seat, walks over to the others and asks, "Can I play?" The owner of the toy steps up and says, "No, you're Black" in front of the teacher and all her classmates.

At the tender age of seven, I was denied the opportunity to play with a classmate's toy, not because we weren't friends, but because somewhere that girl had heard that people like me should not be allowed to touch something that was hers.

I was one of four Black children at my school, including my younger sister and although I had never experienced anything like this before, my heart told me how to respond; I told her she was wrong and that I deserved to play like everyone else. I felt this deep inside. I knew that I did not deserve to be treated this way.

What kind of world are we living in where first graders are experiencing racism? What kind of society breeds seven-year-old racists?

Around the time that this incident happened, I was determined to become the first female President of the United States. I knew from the beginning that I was meant to make change, and in my eyes the president had the biggest impact on the country. Ten years later, I realized I was wrong.

In our country and all around the world, the person with the most influence is the educator. Educators impact the thinking of multiple presidents and multiple generations. They have direct contact with the future of our world. Educators can prevent what happened to me in the first grade from happening again. By teaching and modeling tolerance, equity, and inclusion. Looking back now, I'm glad that I had that experience. Without it, I would not have decided to become an educator. I plan to study social science to understand why racism and discrimination persist in our country. Once out of college, I intend to educate educators on culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy. Then, before opening my own school, I aim to be a school administrator.

This terrible situation gave way to my growth as a person. Racism is going to be around for a while. By opening a school and educating people who have influence, I will not eradicate it, but I have to try. Even if it's impossible, I've got to do my part so every child has equal access to the toy box.

