



CITY OF KETTERING

2020 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Writing Contest Winners

Sponsored by Kettering's Board of Community Relations



High School Winner:

Grace Lipinsic, Kettering Fairmont High School

Submission:

Throughout the history of the world, complications of facing justice and morality have been a difficult obstacle to overcome. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s approach to a sense of righteousness arose many questions of human ethics: What does it truly mean to do the right thing? And why is taking the easy way out, instead of the right way out, such a prevalent choice? What does it mean to be a truly righteous person? In Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech, "I Have a Dream", he says, "the whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright days of justice emerge." He was aware of the societal issue of "injustice" and his approach to mend this problem was to be nonviolent but still determined. Which is why most see Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as a righteous and fair man with a perfect sense of morality.

However, human morality can sometimes make one uneasy. As I have grown, I came to the conclusion that people tend to avoid conflict or confrontation at any cost because they themselves don't want to be the next victim or be dragged into unnecessary situations. So they choose to take the easy route and go around their obstacles. Instead of confronting a problem head-on and making their way through it righteously. During the Civil Rights movement, there were whites who stood up for black people. In doing so, it resulted in white supremacists jumping and murdering those who defended those of color.

Which is why many of those who defied the way of white supremacists, kept their values hidden. They were afraid of becoming a victim.

According to the Greek worldview, “righteousness”, it is an idea or ideal “against which the individual and individual action can be measured. “ Simplified, being morally correct and justifiable. When it comes to righteousness, morality, and ethics, they all differ from person to person and from beliefs to beliefs. Therefore, there is no “unified” way to always approach doing the right thing. Which is why we have different branches of government and the Constitution of the United States; to ensure justice with unity. The closest thing in doing what’s “right” can only be ensured when people work together. I do believe that we can sympathize and put ourselves in the shoes of another. Treating others the way we would like to be treated.

When I was in my early teens, I was fairly popular in school. No one really picked on me. And so, I never really understood how it felt to be truly publicly humiliated or disrespected in any way. I was aware that bullying was a common occurrence, not only in junior high but everywhere. I remember walking down the hallway during class change one day and seeing a pack of girls picking on a girl named Alexandria. Some people may have portrayed her as the “nerdy” type, but I didn’t really see her that way. I remember the girls picking on her clothes, saying that “knee-high shorts are ugly and even uglier on you[to Alex].” They made fun of everything about her, from head to toe. Even the fact that she just wore glasses. I remember just witnessing that people were just walking straight passed (being perfectly aware of the situation) and acting as if nothing ever happened. That was when I walked up to them and told them to quit messing with her. I recall saying that “she never did anything to you. So let her be. As far as I’m concerned, only the insecure bully. So until you’re “perfect” don’t go around and treat others as if they’re below you. That isn’t an “okay” thing and I won’t let you act as if it is.” The girls then rolled their eyes and walked away.

The confrontation of what is right from wrong and the ways of human morality have been a prevalent issue since the beginning of time. People know what is the right choice (for them), but choose to avoid it if it will bring them any confrontation. An individual who raised the questions of righteousness was the preacher and civil rights enthusiast, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. He made his audience ask many questions: Am I approaching this situation the right way? Will I stand my ground and stand up fight for what is right? Or crumble away in fear of any confrontation? Treating others the way we want to be treated wasn’t only an important rule for Martin Luther King, but it is an important rule for all of us to follow. It is true that there isn’t always a correct way of approaching righteousness, but we can try. And at the end of the day, that is what is most important.

Martin Luther King I Have a Dream Speech - American Rhetoric,
www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkihadream.htm.

“What Does It Really Mean to Be Righteous? .” · , 28 June 2018, ethicsdaily.com/what-does-it-really-mean-to-be-righteous-cms-22777/.

High School Runner Up:

Hope Nickel, Kettering Fairmont High School

There is more to Martin Luther King Jr. than his famous and indelible "I Have A Dream" speech. While he has certainly "carved his niche in the edifice of time," as one Mary Poppins song articulates; he also has left a resounding legacy of love, hope, and peace. Today, his culmination of speeches, sermons, and overall personality have all left an outline for the world to pick up as coping mechanisms. These outlines have been particularly useful when I talk with someone who is inconspicuously hateful towards me.

One afternoon last week, I walked home from my bus stop. Along my daily walk, I trudged down the majority of my curved block; passing house after house, and tree after tree. A short time after passing protruding bump in the sidewalk, I presented myself to be in the view of an unconsciously hateful neighbor. He politely stopped in his tracks from raking leaves in the winter. He is always one to have the most immaculate yard. He made eye contact with me as we conversed. Suddenly I realized that his gaze didn't quite meet mine. I had known this man since I was very young; he was always enthusiastic and generous, and his piercing blue eyes showed it. Now, it seemed, his vision was starting to leave him and he didn't see the world as clearly as he once had. To be courteous to his privacy, he is to be called Blue--for the noticeable color in his eyes. As I continued my venture to my warm house and Blue continued raking his withered leaves, he called for me again. I came back over, and this time the conversation was not as pleasant. Blue asked about the "gay issue" and how my church felt about it. He stated that marriage is biblically between a man and a woman--and thus should only be that way. He stated that some church-goers are alright with gay marriage, but personally, he believes in what the Bible "actually says." Blue ended his unfounded sermon by explaining, "I almost wasn't gonna talk to you about this, since you're just a young girl who can get confused and all."

Not only was Blue spouting hateful words, but he also had a monster of Hate on his shoulder, which wore the labels of Homophobia, Sexism, and Ageism. Without any thought, my mind immediately concluded Blue had no angel on his other shoulder; the Hate Monster had killed the angel. However, as I considered the outlines of Martin Luther King Jr., I was told how wrong I was. My first instinct was to feel angry and hated. However, when the eyes of Dr. King cast their view upon my thoughts, that is when I realized I had it all wrong. I grabbed the outlines and thought them over. They rang out with messages of love, hope, and peace. It was then that I realized not only Blue's physical vision had worsened, but his vision and perception of other people had worsened with time, too. With Martin Luther King Jr.'s message of "darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that" in my grasp, I realized looking at Blue in a negative light would not make either of us feel better or be better human beings. Then, with Dr. King's message of "the ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy" in my grasp, I realized I must be strong, empathetic, and open-minded if I was to forgive and forget the conversation with Blue. After that, with Dr. King's message of "in the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends" in my grasp, I realized I had known Blue all my life. I sold Girl Scout Cookies to him every year when I was younger. He always bought the most so he could help me achieve my goals. He always invited us inside his warm and welcoming house that even had a comforting fragrance. He smiled at me and genuinely cared about

how I was. I realized that he still does. In times of his silence, his smiles filled the empty air. His immaculate house with fresh paint and smiling decorations were friendly and affable when I passed it every day amidst the silence of our street. Here I was, sitting in my house, and I was about to let one conversation ruin a life-long friendship with my neighbor. Finally, with Dr. King's messages of "we must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools" and "the time is always right to do what is right" in my grasp, I concluded that I must look past my neighbor's views and appreciate him for his core personality. I must accept Blue's flaws to continue the life of a valuable friendship.

Through my stressful situation of being gifted hate from a friend, Dr. King's messages of love, hope, and peace helped me cope. Dr. King has forged a type of bifocals in which people can live their lives looking through. When people look straight on at life from their own point of view, their thoughts and choices may be one-sided, close-minded, and poorly decided. However, when people shift their glance down through the magnifying glass--through Dr. King's view--it forces everyone to look at the world more closely, more empathetically. This is the lasting legacy that Martin Luther King Jr. has left behind; he left yellowed and worn papers of outlines and rusted pairs of bifocals to be picked up, polished, and perceived by others. By accepting these outlines and bifocals, that is the first step in learning how to cope.

Middle School Winner:

Alivia Shreves, Van Buren Middle School

Choosing What's Right Over Wrong

What does it mean "to do the right thing"? (MLK, I Have A Dream). To do the right thing means to choose taking the harder path over the easier one. Taking a minute out of your day to watch someone else smile, or just help them. A lot of people may not realize how good their life is until they see how others may have it. My family made this amazing thing called "For The People". In this event in downtown Dayton my mom set up free food stands, thousands of free clothes, free haircuts, Help to set up medical and insurance plans, and even Art for the kids to do (ect.). To do the right thing means to, help others no matter what, try your best to help others even when its hard, and to never give up.

To start off, When I was growing up my mom has always worked hard to help others, she has done counseling jobs, certain things for goodwill, worked at homeless shelters and even kids with mental health and anger issues(and more..). When I would go to work with her I really saw and focused on how others had it, living in a homeless shelter is terrible. Not having anyone to turn to, not having that one dollar you need for the food you need, not having clothes to change into. So therefore little by little I became more aware of how good I really have it. My mom would take the clothes off her back and give it to someone who needed it more then us even in times when we were struggling to.

Then last year my mom helped others even in the worst time, we went through our second divorce with my ex-stepdad. This was really hard one my mom and my family. It was pretty unexpected but we all worked together to try and keep it together but it just didn't work. We were struggling with money

and problems like that, but still my mom worked multiple jobs even though it was so hard on her. She raised enough money for us to be able to keep "For The People" even if it included giving up some things, and even as a single mom of three she chose to work hard and do the right thing for all of us, even if it was hard.

She also, Later the same year since she never gave up she met my now stepdad, he has helped my mom through everything. Unlike my ex-stepdad, he put our family first and we got two little amazing brothers to come along with it. He also helped put together this amazing event for the homeless. We this year are expecting over 1,000 people to come just like last time. Through all the hard work she always put so much into others, she is always put others first no matter what and I couldn't be more thankful.

Although, She not just once but millions of times always puts others first, worked hard enough to support her three kids as a single mom and there's not been a time where she hasn't gave everything her all just for one little smile out of anyone, She really did the right thing. Through all this i've seen how she could have just sat on the couch wanting to help but never did. Thought about it but never physically did anything. But instead she gets up every day and plans out all of this, raises enough money, finds people willing to help. Finds some possible way to help anyone and people willing to do the right thing rather than sit back and watch it all go wrong. She chose to do the right thing.

Citations

"to do the right thing"? (MLK, I Have A Dream).

Middle School Runner Up:

Madeline Kramer, Ascension School

A Journal from a Friend of Dr. Kings

Wednesday January 15, 1975

Thinking back, I remember with a sharp memory just how hard life is. There are certain dates that stand out. It could be a horrible day filled with sorrow, or a great day filled with joy. The first ones I remember were a very long time ago.

Thursday February 7, 1918

"Mom I am 18. I can decide for myself what I want to be. If you won't let me be a musician then I'll leave and never return." I screamed with all my might because no matter what she said, I was good at music and it was my passion. She didn't care that my little brother was crying in the corner. She wasn't paying any attention to him, but I was. I noticed how hurt he was at the chance I was leaving, but he didn't try to stop me. If it weren't for how unfair my mom can be sometimes I would have stayed, but I knew he would understand in a couple years. The only response I got from her was "Son, I will not allow you to waste that brain of yours on music. You are black and you graduated at the top of a white class. Now I realize that you only got into that school in the first place because of your aunt, because she

married a white man that owns the school. And because he didn't believe in being the headmaster of a segregated school, so you got in. But that doesn't change how great the accomplishment is. So as long you are living under my roof, you will do as I say." And it was right then that I threw all my most precious things into a bag and left. I slammed the door behind me so hard I felt the house shake from the porch. I passed my father on the way out because just like every other day of my childhood, he was coming home from his job at the railroad tracks. He didn't even bother to ask questions, knowing that whatever happened he was not going to take sides. My father was like that. He had an opinion, but did not share it. Not getting in the middle and just doing what he was told. He took what he could get and did not push for anymore, but I was determined not to be like that. I wanted something I was going to go after it, and right now, I wanted to be a musician. That was what I was going to do.

Wednesday February 27, 1918

"Thank you so much for letting me stay here." That was all I had been saying for the past three weeks. I did not know what else to say. I performed every task in my power to show my dearest friend how much I appreciated his generosity. The funny thing was, though, I was helping him more than he was helping me because whenever I saw the sweat dripping down his face, I knew it must be math homework. See, he was studying to be an architect for homes for black people because it was the only job he could get that would make him able to pay for his house and wife. She was the sweetest, most beautiful girl in the neighborhood, but she was not cheap. Every time I would pick at the chords of my guitar, they would sit and listen to me. But, finally, on this day he came to my and said. "Buddy it has been the most wonderful thing having you here, but I am afraid you can only stay for another night. See I have to move further north for my job but they are only paying for a two-person place. Sorry about the late notice, I just found out today as well. I am really sorry." I knew it would not last forever and now it was at that time. He gave me a locket, told me to only open it when I was feeling lonely and said goodbye. As I watched him walk away I thought to myself; this is the day I am becoming homeless.

Thursday February 28, 1918

As I was sitting on a park bench just letting the water soak into my faded blue jeans I was remembered the locket. It made no sense to me. I realized it was a locket but I did not realize he would give it to me locked. After just staring down at it for what felt like forever, I got it open. I was not sure how, it was like it felt me becoming more and more frustrated so it decided to open. Upon seeing what was inside I was speechless, it was one of the most beautiful things I have ever seen. It was a famous Mother Teresa quote. It was my favorite, but I didn't realize anyone listened when I said so and I don't know how he remembered. It said "Let us always meet each other with a smile, for the smile is the beginning of love." This is the moment I decided to never let anyone tell me that I could not be what I wanted even if they did not greet me with a smile. For however long I stayed homeless I would never let myself down by giving into the unfair world.

Monday June 9, 1964

Sitting on a park bench that has grown to be mine I was thinking. I am glad I never got married or had children. I would never want to bring new human beings into this world that never seems to change. That never seems to accept people for who they are.

With all these thoughts running through my head, I didn't notice what was going on around me, but when I finally looked up, I could not believe what I saw. I was a group of people actually trying to make our world a better place. There were black people, white nuns, rich, poor - just like me - and even a few white people. They were all walking together. They did not stop for anything. Not people getting arrested, not people getting pulled from the crowd, not even when people would throw things at them. They were a united force, led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. that would not stop until they got the equality they were working towards. I wanted to be part of their work, to help people. I did not think that they would care if I was homeless or not, but I was not getting anywhere with this music thing, and I was willing to give it up if it meant helping hundreds of other people including myself and my black family.

I sprinted as fast as I could up to the front of the walk. When I got up there I saw him, Dr. King himself, and I was filled with a feeling I had not had in a long long time. I felt hope for the future, love for people black and white, peace for the world, and light at the end of the tunnel.

I approached the people in the front and they stopped. The entire group of people stopped because I was walking up. I could not stop then, so putting my body on autopilot because my brain was too nervous and walked up to Dr. King himself and asked, "Could I join your walk? I have been watching you on the televisions in the store fronts and really appreciate all you are doing and how brave you are. You are risking your life for people you do not even know."

I got a response I would have never expected. He said "Sir, do you have two working feet that you are willing to make hurt? Do you believe that all should be treated equal? Because if the answer is yes to those two questions, then you can walk right here next to me. You didn't have to ask. You could have just joined since we are willing to talk to anyone who has the intention of fighting with us. I just have one more question for you if you are willing to answer." I slowly nodded my head up and down too speechless to speak. "By the looks of you," he said, "You don't have a job and most likely no home, but I must ask. Are you willing to join our boycott?" The second I said yes, he stretched out my hand for a handshake, pulled me to his side, and continued the walk.

That night he took me home to his own house, feed me a nice meal, and let me spend the night on his back porch. This was the most kindness and generosity that I had seen in a while. I just had to repay him somehow, so the next morning I decided that I would work for him for no charge. No money, no food, and no house. Just letting me help with the cause was enough for me.

Friday September 28, 1964

I have been helping this cause for about three months now and I would not want to be doing anything else. I love it! I have grown to be one of Dr. King's best friends. He uses me as an example, that even if everything seems lost to you, it does not matter. That if you reach out your hand someone will grab on and make you a part of the work to make this world a better world to live in.

Wednesday August 28, 1963

Today my ears sang out in joy. I took in every single word he had to say and I would not change any of it. This speech is going to be remembered forever I just know it. I knew the second he said the words "I have a dream" it would change the lives of people all over the nation.

Friday March 8, 1966

Today my friend and I met with my friend for milkshakes. I was on a trip with Dr. King so my friend and I thought it would be nice to see each other. It is strange being in a restaurant because I had not been in one for so long, but it was nice. He asked me about my living situation, how it was going around the country with Dr. King, and if I had met someone special. Of course the answer to the last question was no, but everything else was good. We just sat and talked until the diner closed.

Sunday April 3, 1968

Today was the day Dr. King gave a speech called "I have been to the mountaintop." It was a great speech, and it had been a wonderful day. Again my ears sang out in joy and I knew this would be something else the nation will remember for a long time. That night we went to church, which was strange because not many churches in the area had Mass at night, but our parish decided to hold a 6:00 mass because we were not able to go in the morning because we had to go see the speech.

Sitting in the pew waiting for mass to start, I had this weird feeling. This feeling in your gut that told you something was going to happen. Something big and something that would change your life forever. But I ignored it. I had never believed in karma or superstitions, so I just ignored it. I thought my head was just messing with me.

Monday April 4, 1968

Sitting in Dr. King's room for the early morning meeting he called late last night, I still had that weird feeling. I wanted to say something but I never seemed to have the chance between talking about the speech from the previous day and what our next move was going to be. Finally, it all got to be too much so I decided to get a breath of fresh air. I tried to say something about where I was going, but everyone was so wrapped up in thought, not paying attention to their surroundings and I was able to leave unnoticed.

Standing outside on the balcony, I see the bushes moving. At first I thought it was just the wind, but then I remembered the weird feeling I still had in my gut. Then something hit me, like a gust of wind right in my face. I saw a man stand up out of the bushes with a rifle. The second he noticed I was not Dr. King, he ducked back into the bushes. From behind, the door burst open and Dr. King came running out. He was yelling at me for walking out. He was yelling so loudly, I could not yell over him. He was just about to give me one of his hugs that he is known for when the bullet hit him in the right cheek, shattering the jaw bone and multiple vertebrae in his spine. Upon hearing the bones crack and break, I knew that this was the end.

I fell to the ground with him, screaming like I had been shot. I didn't even see the other people come out of the room; I just felt their presence. It felt as if they did nothing but stand there and stare in awe.

Finally, the old man who was staying next door yelled at us to keep the noise down, but once he came out a saw what all the commotion was about, he ran inside. I heard him talking on the motel telephone and other people walking around trying to figure out what just happened. But all I knew was that I was not going to let go of my beloved friend. The friend that gave me a new purpose, who gave me something to work towards. And that it was all my fault. That if I would have yelled harder and louder over him I could have gotten him back inside. Inside where we could have contacted authorities (not that they would have done much because we are black). I could have figured a back way out. I could have made sure Dr. Martin Luther King, the leader of black people in this nation, was not shot.

Feeling my body being pulled off Dr. King I kicked myself myself for every time I ignored my gut telling me something bad was going to happen. I try to run after the men carrying Dr. King in their arms to the ambulance, but the arms holding me back were too strong.

Strangely, the first thing I noticed after I could breathe for a second was that the people carrying Dr. King and holding me are white. White people are helping us and they don't care right now that we are Negros. It meant a lot to me that they put helping people in front of the color of our skin. This tells me that we are making a difference. That all this hard work is worth it, but I'm not thinking clearly because the person who showed me the most compassion anyone ever had was just shot in the face.

I spent the rest of the day sitting in the hospital room even after they told me he was dead. Maybe I was hoping he would just magically start breathing again, or that the doctors would come in and say this was all just a mistake and that we could go home just like nothing happened. I didn't notice when his kids and wife came in to see him, but they did not ask me to leave so I stayed longer. That was one thing I never understood. I did not understand why he ever got married or had children, but I guess he did that before he started working to make the nation a better place to live in. But right now I am glad because, with his little girl sitting on my lap, I knew I could not sit for days feeling sorry. I knew he would not blame me for what happened so I decided to try not to blame myself, even though it definitely was not easy.

It was strange, when his daughter walked into the room instead of going and sitting on the bed with her siblings, she came and sat on my lap. I always knew I was her favorite out of all of her father's friends because I was the only one who read her school papers and told her good night when we left. The only one who would watch her new hobbies like hula hooping or dancing. That I was the only one of his close friends that realized he had kids and that was not just in it for business. So I guess she needed me just as much as I needed her too.

We sat all together in that one dark room until we were told to leave so the FBI could investigate. We mostly cried, but near the end little Bernice started to tell me about how every time her father would go away for a speech or walk, he would tell her how if she missed him to do the silliest dance as possible and that he would smile from wherever he was. She told me how she called them her dad dances and even taught me how to do one. This made everyone laugh.

Tuesday April 5, 1968

I still could not quite get over what happened, but I decided that I would not stop. His whole mission was to make people realize that whites and blacks were equal. So in his memory I was going to use the rest of my life to carry on his mission.

Wednesday April 6, 1968 to Thursday January 16, 1974

I went from north to south and from east to west talking to people about how even though our leader was killed that it does not mean we should just give up. That we should work ten times harder for every time Dr. King got arrested. I even managed to get a small group together and across that country we became known as the homeless Dr. Kings. We did not stay in motels or cars we just slept on park benches and up against trees. I guess it was because we did not have the money, but also because it felt that if people wanted to hurt us they could but they did not. They let us be, they let us do our thing maybe because they realized it was important to us. Slowly we started to notice changes in the cities. There were not as many blacks and whites signs saying that people had to be separated and we eventually started to see blacks and whites walking down the sidewalk together.

Wednesday January 15, 1975

After thinking about all these things again I am so glad I did not give up on myself. So glad that I did not give up on what I believed in. So glad I never gave up on this world. I see my two beautiful nieces running up the pathway to my house. Their arms outstretched ready to jump in my lap. I love it every time I get to see them. They both remind me of little Bernice and how it was worth putting in all the effort to make this world equal.

As I send them in the house I talk to my little brother. Every time I see him the first the first thing he does is hug me, and tell me how sorry he is for listening to mom when she told him not to let my stay with him once he got his own house. And every time I say, "Brother, if you had not listened to mom I would not have met the most amazing man in the world and I would not have been able to help this nation become equal."