



2013 DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. ART, WRITING, & MULTIMEDIA CONTEST

KATHERINE MANNING (11TH GRADE)

SPRINGFIELD HIGH SCHOOL

PRINCIPAL – CHRIS SHAFFER

TEACHER – BETH BIESTER

During my first year of high school, I witnessed a fist fight between two students – I cried. The other students looked at me and asked, “Why are you crying?” I didn’t know; I couldn’t give them a good answer at the time. In retrospect, I realized that there were many reasons why I cried. I cried because these kids saw no alternative way to resolve their differences. I cried because it was so violent and disrespectful of human dignity. I cried because inside I felt sad and hurt for both the bully and the victim. I cried because I am, to my core, a peaceful and loving person, one who feels deeply the pain of others. I realized that my empathy is both strength and a curse. I also realized that instead of standing there crying, in the future, I was going to do what I could to prevent this violent behavior from occurring again. It was then that I decided to pick up the baton and be a drum major for peace, justice, and righteousness in my community.

I pursued this goal by participating as a peer mediator at a Peace camp that is held every June at one of the local elementary schools and sponsored by the Springfield Peace Center. Children between the ages of four through eleven are invited for a week of camp where they learn about bully prevention, conflict management, self-esteem and the appreciation of differences. As a peer mediator, I participated in a several days workshop where I learned techniques for avoiding, preventing and diffusing conflict peacefully. I loved the idea that I was participating in the education of children about tolerance and peaceful resolution before it escalated into a fight at the high school level. I have now served as a peer mediator for several years and I have been invited to be a lead teacher at the camp this coming summer.

I have continued my drum major march for peace beyond my community and up to the national level when I participated in a Youth Leadership forum this summer at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. The theme of this youth leadership seminar was Bringing the Lessons Home: Holocaust Education for the Community. A group of one hundred students from across the country were encouraged to analyze current events and explore the nature and consequences of indifference, racism and genocide, as well as our roles as citizens in a democracy. We were taught how to use our drum major instinct to create sustainable change in our communities. At the end of the week, each of us pledged to return to our communities and share what we learned. In January, I visited the history classes at our high school to share how we all can be a part of the solution to end violence both here and abroad.

This is how I am serving as a drum major for peace, justice, and righteousness.

Drum Major Instinct

