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2020 High School Scholarship Essay Contest \$1,000 Award Winner

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Putting Empathy Centerstage

In a world of constant controversy and opposition, acceptance is vital in maintaining peace and unity. As someone who advocates for acceptance, I always strive to seek mutual support with others and have a deep understanding of one another's true nature. Knowing what hardships someone has endured, especially if you have also experienced the same, instills a sense of appreciation, understanding, and perception of one other. I am a firm believer that although you may be in the "right" that does not mean the other is "wrong." The practice of empathy is a defining aspect of what makes me, me.

A recent confirmation on my perspective towards others occurred after my grandmother passed away. While helping my father clean her house, I came across a worn wooden box with several black and white photos. The disheartening photos depicted my grandmother and her family incarcerated at the Minidoka Japanese Internment Camp in Idaho in the 1940s. The internment camps took place after the bombing of Pearl Harbor which sparked national controversy and fear. At the time, I was barely aware of the devastating history behind the photos, but witnessing the squalid conditions gave me a new realization that I felt throughout my entire being. My family was imprisoned, treated like criminals and stripped of their rights and human dignity, simply due to their race.

I developed a newfound sense of respect and a connection to my relatives due to their unwavering loyalty to our country and enduring spirit, despite the years of oppression. In the time I spent learning about my ancestors, I developed a stronger connection to them because of the prejudices we both faced. Growing up in a community mostly devoid of minorities, I faced many hurtful comments and misguided stereotypes based on my exterior. From our unfortunate history, I have come to understand the true nature of the human spirit and soul, willingness to forgive, and true courage of my ancestors. In this age of extreme political turmoil, I always strive to seek the good in others and understand the trials and tribulations they are facing.

The sacrifices of my relatives inspire me to display the same courage, benevolence, and determination in my future endeavors. Today, I proudly represent my school as Student Body President where I actively engage in the community and campus culture, while also encouraging others to express their individuality. I truly believe that I have instilled a culture of acceptance and compassion no matter one's race, religion, sex or political affiliation. By putting the understanding and acceptance of one's true nature and their experiences centerstage, I have

created long-lasting relationships. By pushing prejudice aside, I will continue developing strong connections, encourage the avoidance of judging others from their exterior, and will guide my fellow peers in opening their eyes to the wholehearted embrace of themselves and those around them.