

*Holly Warren*

*First Place*

*Junior Division*



I live by many rules in my life, most of us do, laws that protect us, such as not murdering people and not to rob. Some of us, in fact most of us, set our own personal laws in life to help us be the best that we can. My major law in life is to have an open mind and not be prejudiced against people who are different, no matter how minor.

I have seen how people react to differences in people a lot of different ways. One of the biggest ways I have seen it is in TV shows, where you don't often see a handicapped or mentally challenged person as a main character. This is because a lot of people are not very comfortable seeing people different than the 'norm', so, as a result the show doesn't do well and ends up going bankrupt. In the very rare occasion that you do see a mentally challenged or handicapped person as a main character in a successful show, they've had to work twice as hard to get that recognition than anyone else has to, to be accepted.

You don't often see a person in a wheelchair or a blind or deaf person being the star in a show. For the exact same reason as before, many people don't feel comfortable watching them or even talking to them because they are either prejudiced or they are scared of them. This is one reason I make not being prejudiced a law of my life, because this is something that shouldn't be happening, but is and a change starts one person at a time.

I have noticed when a person is sick many people become distant to the sick person, especially when the person has Aids or some form of cancer or a visible sickness. People often won't associate with the person because they think they will get the disease just by being around or touching the person. Some people are repulsed by the sight of a sick person who is visibly different from everyone else. Others may pull away and treat the person differently because they don't want to get attached to a person who may die. I feel this is wrong because I think if I was going to die, I wouldn't want people to abandon me, I would just want people who I knew cared about me and weren't scared of me. I think most people feel like this but are still prejudiced.

Most people are prejudiced about race and religion. A lot of white people don't like black people and immediately blame them for bad things that happen in the world. So often this is a learned behavior, picked up as a child or young adult from someone else's prejudices. The same prejudice exists between black people not liking white people. I believe this is one of the main reasons I have made not being prejudiced the main law of my life, because I think that everyone deserves a chance at succeeding in life and everyone has feelings that can be hurt, whether they are black or white or any other colour.

As I mentioned before, many people are prejudiced against people who have different religions and beliefs from their own. I wish people wouldn't be prejudiced against this because we all believe in something and everyone is different, but ultimately I believe there is one God.

Another type of prejudice that is not very noticeable but is there just the same, is people who are bald. People look at them and immediately label them skinheads and are not always nice to that person. Meanwhile that person may be bald for an entirely different reason, perhaps they've had cancer treatments and lost their hair, or maybe they have a genetic problem. It is a form of labeling people that can be particularly painful to the person. Learning to accept others the way

they are could rid our world of this prejudice one small step at a time.

Prejudice has entered my own life. I was born with Cerebral Palsy; I have faced more in life than most people my age. My mother would often tell me about the people who stared at my legs in braces or wondered why a big child was riding in a stroller when my younger sister walked. If they'd only known how tired I got walking any distance.

I remember in Kindergarten, I wore braces and used a walker to get around. The teacher I had was wonderful at preventing any teasing. One day she sat all the class down and passed my braces around, letting everyone try them on and walk around in them. Talk about walking around in another person's shoes! I was never teased by the kids that were in that class and because it was a small school, most of the kids followed me right through public school.

Last year, when I started high school, I found it difficult because I didn't really have the same respect I had growing up. I heard lots of snickers and comments as I walked by. Some days I walked down the hall wondering why people are so hurtful.

Since the beginning of this year I have looked at myself differently. I wonder what it would be like to walk as gracefully as my friends and everyone else. I wonder what it would be like to be accepted for who I am not what I look like. What would it be like to run and not have your legs aching in pain after a short distance? What would it be like to walk around and not worry about falling? What would it be like to have perfect balance, and be able to participate in high jump or other activities?

I'll probably never be able to experience these things and I know that all the things I overhear are just preparing me for the big bad world out there, but wouldn't it be nice if others like me did not have to deal with things like this?

Maybe if everyone walked a mile in someone else's shoes the world would be less judgmental and better for everyone. Maybe we would all have more respect for each other just like I had with those nonjudgmental five year olds who walked in my shoes for a while.

Not a day goes by that you do not read about some type of fighting or killing in the world that was ultimately caused by some type of prejudice. The shootings in Columbine were basically caused by people not wanting to accept other people's beliefs and by labeling. I think that if more people in the world tried not to be prejudiced and used it as one of their laws in life, there would be more compassion, understanding and tolerance between people in the world and everyone could be spared a lot of grief that had been encountered because of prejudice. This is why I strive to meet my law in life, to not be prejudiced.