

## **Acceptance, Not Tolerance**

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11-12<sup>th</sup> Grade Category, First Place**

The Jewish people have been persecuted for hundreds of years because their religion is practiced by the minority. But why would this be? Is this because people, in general, are incapable of accepting anything besides that which they have personally experienced? They only believe what they know to be true. Is it because humanity as a whole has agreed to tolerate their neighbors but not accept them? People love themselves and people who look and act the same as them, but everyone else is merely tolerated. This cannot be true for everyone. People are not naturally filled with disdain towards others. They are taught this. The Danish Freedom Council refused to learn.

On September 16, 1943, The Danish Freedom Council was established in Denmark. This council was made up of several different leaders of the resistance against the German army. The goal of the council was to establish independence, freedom and democracy again in Denmark. With Denmark's government resignation, the country was void of order and justice. The Danish Freedom Council filled this void. The first proclamation of The Danish Freedom Council read, "...Among the Danish people the Jews do not constitute a special class but are citizens to exactly the same degree as all other Danes...The Council calls on the Danish population to help, in every way possible, those Jewish fellow citizens who have not yet succeeded in escaping abroad. Every Dane who renders help to the Germans in their persecution of human beings is a traitor and will be punished as such when Germany is defeated." When the Jewish population needed their country, their country was there for them, more than willing to help. The people of Denmark did not see large noses or any other ignorant stereotype placed upon the Jews. All these people saw were their neighbors, their friends, the Danes. This proclamation alone shows the power and meaning of the word "morality," which is defined as, "concerned with the principles or rules of right conduct or the distinction between right and wrong."

Seven hundred Jews had escaped Denmark by October 7, one week after persecution had begun, with the help of their country. On October 9, 1943, one-thousand four-hundred Jews were brought to safety in Sweden. Approximately seven-thousand six-hundred people had been rescued out of Denmark by the end of November. In

addition to these heroic acts, the council also created pamphlets detailing their reports which were distributed throughout the entire country. The illegal press also published these reports. Courage is defined as, "the quality of mind or spirit that enables a person to face difficulty, danger, or pain without fear." These people, the Danish, but more precisely the Danish Freedom Council, acted in accordance with their beliefs. They could have died for people they had never met, but they sincerely believed in humanity, which is defined as, "all human beings collectively, the human race, humankind, as a whole." The Danish Freedom Council and its followers are truly beautiful because of their actions. These people did save their entire world and the ideals that uphold it for all of the Danes.

Do you think you personally would have the courage to represent your convictions? Do you honestly believe that under any circumstances you would do what is right and honorable? If you believe that you would uphold the pure and innocent in any situation, you are a truly noble human being. I, myself, once believed undoubtedly that if I witnessed another human being in pain or suffering, no matter who this person would have been, that I would help him/her in any way I could.

About a year ago, I attended a Unitown camp for the weekend. Unitown camp teaches young adults from schools all over Omaha about social justice which deals with issues such as sexism, racism, and ageism. We were taught how to stop these negative aspects in our community. I met Carissa, Michael, Ben and Curtis there and they quickly became my friends. The morning of departure, my friends and I headed to the cafeteria for breakfast. When we arrived, we discovered we had assigned seats which had not happened before. We sat and got our food when we were told. We behaved very much like dogs in that respect, obeying every command.

Most of my friends and I were separated, segregated more like it. The Caucasians, African Americans, Hispanics, and homosexuals all had their own tables. I felt extremely alone and sadly I did absolutely nothing to change it. I ate and watched my friends eat from what seemed to be different corners of the world. This was all a test administered by Joe, the leader of this Unitown camp. He was testing our moral courage and with every fiber of my being I wanted to pass. I was too frightened. Joe walked through the room watching over us and making sure we stayed in our designated areas. I missed my friends. Curtis is African American and since he is, he, along with the other African Americans, was told to bring us our food and retrieve our trays. It felt like he was miles away, but in reality it was only a few yards. At that time, I was sad for him. I look

back on that experience with regret and ironically now I am only sad for myself. I watched as one of my friends was degraded and I did nothing. I am and will forever be ashamed of that day when I was too scared to help a friend. With each new day that passes, I hope to become more of the person that I once thought myself to be. I wish to become a person who would be willing to risk everything for another human being. In the Talmud it states, "Whoever saves a single life is as one who has saved the entire world."