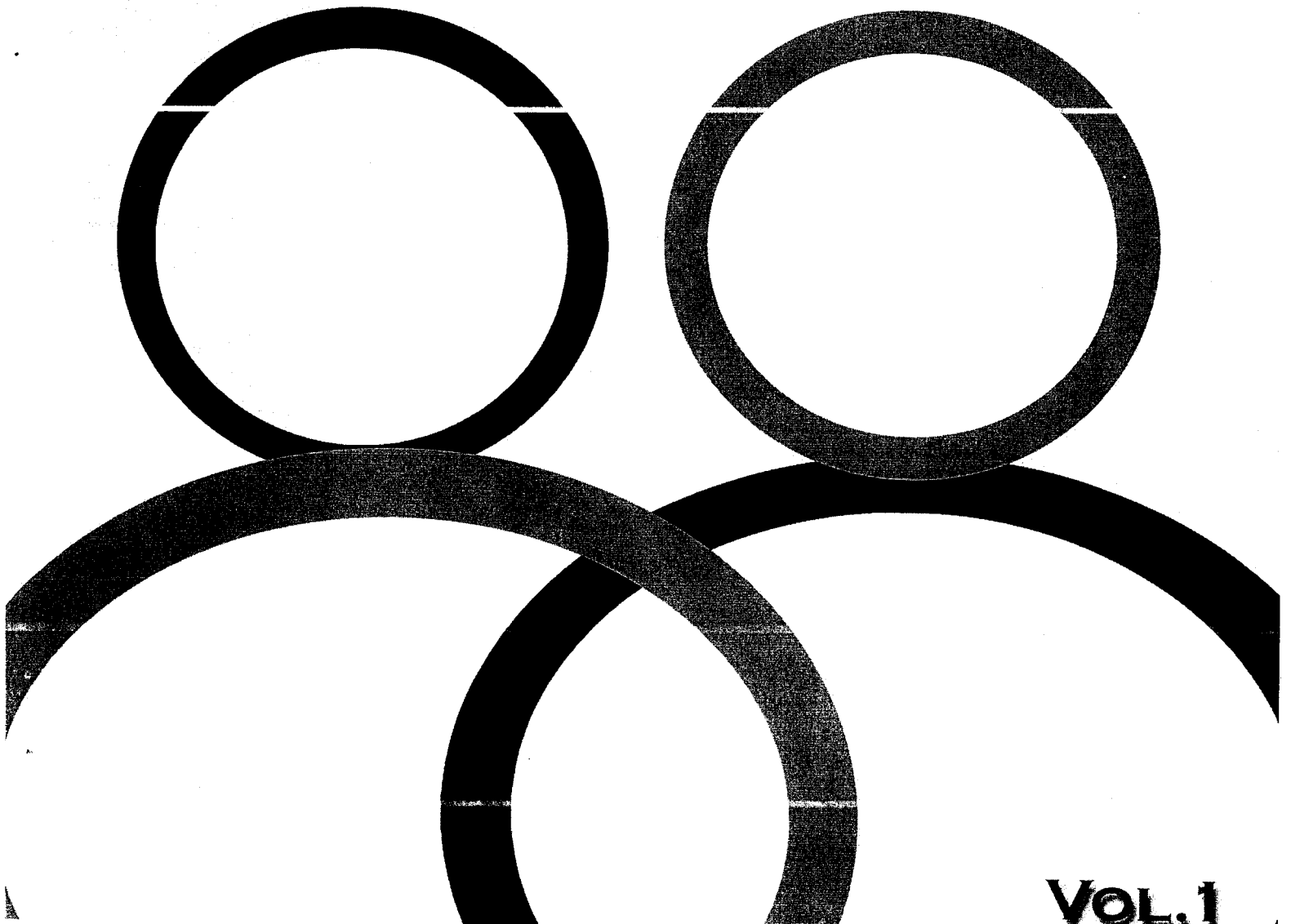


SGORR Presents:

THE VERNACULAR



VOL. 1

The Vernacular

Volume 1.
2010-2011

A Publication by The Student Group On Race Relations (SGORR)

Dear Reader,

This magazine is a compilation of elementary and high school student submissions as well as contributions from teachers, administrators and community members. We hoped to highlight prime examples from writers of each of these categories in a completely voluntary and open format. Submissions include essays, stories, poems and letters and span a great range of topics on human relations from authors that span the generations. Each person that we contacted was given this year's prompt in Mrs. Jaffe's own words; "how we treat each other." They were also given the quote "if each man or woman could understand that every other human life is as full of sorrows, or joys, or base temptations, of heartaches and of remorse as his own...how much kinder, how much gentler he would be." by William Allen White for further stimulation and inspiration. Responses varied from demonstrations of this unity to showing examples of our failures as a community. We chose this quote because this identification of commonalities is often at the core of general peace and compassion that SGORR works to foster in our community. My personal hope is that the slim and sole fact that we are all human can at least be the springboard to encourage the eradication of racial inequality, prejudice and hate. In my humble opinion, maybe in time, hate can yield to tolerance, and tolerance can become acceptance, and acceptance can beget understanding, brotherhood, progress because of commonalities, joy because of connections and love because of openness and new opportunities. We hope you enjoy this publication and we look forward to many more in the future. Thank you to all those who were a part of this process or gave us a submission, without the help of each participant, this project would not have been possible.

Sincerely,
Hannah Lyness
SGORR Leader

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Vernacular Introduction

When Marcia Jaffe and a small cohort of students began the Student Group on Race Relations 28 years ago, their goal was to create a space in which interracial friendships would be celebrated and maintained. These SGORR pioneers noted with disappointment the disintegration of diverse friendships as students entered their middle school years and sought to change this trend by educating elementary school students about race and human relations. Over the years, SGORR has grown from a group of fewer than ten students to a membership of over 300, the largest student club at Shaker Heights High School. We now send twenty student-led teams of high school students into both fourth and sixth grade classrooms three times a year for human relations workshops. And though the faces have changed and many students have come and gone, our mission has remained constant: to celebrate and teach about diversity and human connections across all boundaries of difference.

As a former student core leader in SGORR, I left Shaker for college with a deep commitment to fostering human relations, especially pertaining to race. In Shaker and in SGORR, diversity was on everyone's mind. I quickly discovered that this openness to a constant discussion of our differences is unmatched in most places. During my years away, I yearned for the sense of community I had enjoyed in SGORR, and although I tried to replicate it, I never quite succeeded. When I graduated from college and Shaker's administration offered me the opportunity to work alongside Marcia Jaffe as a facilitator of the Student Group on Race Relations, I jumped at the chance. I'm thrilled to be back with SGORR, a community where I will always belong, particularly during SGORR's time of transition.

The Vernacular is a new publication and in many ways reflects the direction that SGORR is moving towards in the future. This magazine gets back to basics, back to the true purpose of our organization. The pieces in the pages that follow come from a wide array of people and viewpoints, all writing under the broad theme of human relations and the value in the connections that we form with one another, regardless of our differences. Progressive journalist William Allen White once wrote that "if each man or woman could understand that every other human life is as full of sorrows, or joys, or base temptations, of heartaches and of remorse as his own...how much kinder, how much gentler he would be." *The Vernacular* is our attempt to understand and relate to one another and to celebrate the way we treat one another in Shaker and in SGORR.

Thank you for your interest in SGORR. We value your friendship and hope you enjoy what follows in this exciting first edition of *The Vernacular*.

Halle Bauer
SGORR Co-Facilitator and Advisor

Intolerance: *"Oops, I did it again."*

It's the summer of 2010. I have the misfortune of co-running a rifle range with a 22-year old man from Israel. His name is Oved, and when he's not asleep, he's bouncing off the walls, shooting butterflies with a .22 Merton. Oved does his thing while I watch kids shoot guns. I do this for six hours a day. After maybe the third hour, I imagine a camper pointing the barrel of a gun in my face; it's hard to keep your mind from wandering thus when it's your job.

I can't stand Oved. I end up practically running the range, which would be illegal, by the way, if it weren't for Oved's "supervision," which consists of either napping or being too much of a goof to be competent. I must admit, I love the self-victimization. It gives me even more incentive to hate him. However, my most unnerving problem with Oved is his objectification of an Arab boy from Lebanon. He often refuses to speak to, or even acknowledge the presence of a boy, who should be too young to experience the injustice of an unjustifiable struggle. I never bring this up in conversation with Oved, because I want my relationship with him to be as simple and indifferent as possible.

The hours pass. My days at this camp in the middle of the woods are numbered. After lunch, I walk to the administration building, unlock a cupboard painted a lethargic shade of yellow, and retrieve a tin lunch-box full of bullets. I arrive at the range and note the absence of campers. I reluctantly prepare for an awkward afternoon with Oved, who's asleep on a blue towel next to a stack of guns. Oved's a weird guy. Sometimes, I pick up a bit of nervous anticipation in his apathetic psyche. Even as he sleeps, I find it hard to believe that his conscious mind is entirely dormant. His head rests on a mahogany wood-stained guitar, and his eyelids part. He is awake.

He picks up the guitar. I recognize un-tuned harmonic scales that form the opening chords to "Hit Me Baby One More Time," by Britney Spears. I doubt my ears, and it is then that he begins to sing. I laugh. He giggles in between verses. Suddenly, I am face to face with a silver lining, which is shining with remarkable resilience. "Duh," says the silver lining.

So I listen to Oved sing, and I stop hating him. My much skewed perception of the world does me no credit. In fact, it only provides me with more prejudiced intolerance, and isn't intolerance the reason for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the first place? With only two weeks left at camp, I resolve to start over with Oved. Hate doesn't solve the world's problems, and it certainly doesn't make my job any easier. Although Oved and I will never understand each other, the rest of the world may have a chance. Once freed from hate's obligations, maybe the rest of the world will join us, singing "Hit Me Baby One More Time," or anything else.

Lauren Vanden Broeck

Shaker Heights High School Student, Class of 2012

Though I now embrace my uniqueness and that of others, it was not always easy being different.

Musings on Human Relations

The Shaker Heights that my parents knew when they moved here in the early 1960's is thankfully a lot different than the Shaker of today.

When my parents moved into the Sussex neighborhood (around 1960), they were notified that there was one street that was "Restricted," meaning that because they were Jewish, they were prohibited from buying a house on that street. They were shown homes on the other "Nonrestricted" streets in Sussex. They found a home they liked on the south side of Scottsdale, but they were cautioned against buying it because it backed up to Warrensville Heights – a city into which, they were told, many African-Americans were moving. My parents thought this was absurd and they bought the house on Scottsdale, where I grew up.

Back in the early '60's, the Sussex and Lomond neighborhoods were not integrated at all. Within a few years after my family moved in, a few homes were sold to African-American families. This caused a stir among many neighbors. People began talking about putting their houses on the market, moving further out to all-white communities. My parents and others were very distressed by this, and they started calling neighbors together for small meetings in the evenings at different people's homes, to urge them to stay and to not buy into the fear-mongering about home values. My father helped found the fledgling Sussex Neighborhood Association, which was formed to encourage people to keep their homes in the Sussex neighborhood, to ignore the ugliness of "white flight." Shortly thereafter, another group of neighbors joined together for the purpose of pooling their money to buy up homes on the market and thereby prevent their sale to African-Americans. They set up meetings and invited their neighbors to come learn about how they could be part of this effort. My parents found this very offensive, and went to these meetings and stood up and spoke out against this misguided effort. It was a time of tension among neighbors. The collective home-buying effort failed, and eventually all of those who had formed the group to prevent African-Americans from buying homes in Sussex moved away.

I give a lot of credit to my parents and those others who were willing to stand up and speak out about this racism. They were not swayed by the talk of falling home values or other fear-mongering. They just knew it was wrong and they were willing to speak up.

Times have changed since then, and the circumstances are different, but the underlying theme still has great pertinence today: You need to have a strong sense of your values, do what you think is right, and speak up when you see an injustice.

If you feel certain of your values, they can guide you in challenging situations.

I saw this in another context. For twenty years, I was the Associate Dean and the Dean of Students at a law school. During that time, it was my responsibility to handle the disciplinary issues that arose. The reasons students would find themselves in my office ran the gamut: Sometimes it would be someone who had cheated on a test, or had posted something terrible about another student on a blog, or had aggrandized their GPA or some other credential on their resume, or had misrepresented themselves in their admission application, or had been thoughtlessly insensitive to another student, or had plagiarized,

or had done something improper during the student elections process, or had in some other way violated the student code of conduct.

In the end, the thing that really got all of them in trouble is this: They hadn't really found their moral compass.

The students who got in trouble almost always seemed to get there by accident. They tended to be very casual about how they handled challenging ethical situations. Most had just never really thought about what kind of person they wanted to be, what values mattered to them. Because they were casual about their value system, it meant that when faced with a personal dilemma, they couldn't stand strongly on the side of what they thought was right.

I felt that in the events of their own lives, many students were on the sidelines, watching their life happen, not actively involved in the direction it took. They just sort of let things happen. To steal a line from one of my favorite prelaw advisors, **"In the drama of your own life, be the lead, don't play the bit part."**

So back to the story of the changes taking place in Sussex in the early '60's: I think that what guided those who encouraged their neighbors to embrace the new integration of their corner of Shaker and to stand up and speak against the effort to keep houses off the market, was a strong moral compass.

I think that those students involved in SGORR should feel so proud that they are part of something so important to our community that started so long ago: a commitment to openness and diversity and tolerance.

Barbara Andelman
Shaker Heights High School Graduate Class of 1977

A Letter To SGORR

Dear SGORR,

We appreciate all of your hard work and the time that you spent with us. Thank you for taking your time to come to Lomond School to teach us about stereotypes, trust, polarization, prejudice, support, deferring judgment, being open-minded and bullying. You taught us that our behavior is the way that we act. Also, you taught us that being prejudice is not nice because it is a dislike of a group or a person. So again, we would like to thank you for taking your time to teaching us so much.

Sincerely,

Diamond Harwell and Marcia McCoy
4th Grade Lomond School Students of Mrs. Bannon's class, under the direction of Ms. Gorrick

A Certain Cornucopia

Peanut butter and jelly sandwiches: the key to assimilation in the first grade. Sitting in the lunch room, I watched as almost every other first grader pulled out their Juicy Juice and PB&J sandwich, always with grape jelly and always cut diagonally across. This was the first indication that I was different. Instead of Wonderbread and Jif peanut butter, I was greeted with babka and Kubus (the good, Polish version of V8). Delicious, yes. But different, nonetheless. As a young child, I despised my unique lunch. Each time I opened up my Rugrats lunchbox, I was painfully reminded of just how well the other children's lunches fit together and just how sorely mine stuck out. Born in the United States to Polish immigrants, I was raised in a very traditional household, one that relied greatly on the customs, morals, and (of course) cuisine of the "old country." At the time, being different seemed like the absolute worst. All I wanted was to be the same, to fit in, to assimilate. As I grew, I learned to embrace my heritage and all of the interesting characteristics that accompanied it. I continue to celebrate the traditions that my parents taught me, and I now see beauty in the distinctiveness of every individual.

At first glance, it is easiest to notice the differences between people, rather than the similarities, whether you are the one who is different or you are observing that distinction in another. There are so many manners in which we distinguish ourselves throughout society: class, race, gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, creed, sexual orientation. What is often associated with these classifications is separation. Instead of celebrating the special traits which we each exhibit, we seem to be using them to distance ourselves from one another.

It is in this way that I find Shaker Heights to be uncommon. When I moved from the oppressive lunchrooms and crossed state lines for high school, I found Shaker to be a community which encouraged each person to rejoice in his/her individuality. The minute I stepped foot in the high school, I found an accepting and tolerant atmosphere, one where I could develop as an individual without fear of being socially rejected. Shaker's variety of students and group classifications should logically be problematic, because so many different groups should clash. And yes, it is not always easy for students to view the world from someone else's perspective. But, despite this, there exists an overarching theme of tolerance, acceptance, and coexistence.

As wonderful as Shaker and the surrounding community is, it is unfortunately unrealistic to think that the rest of the world operates in this way. Shaker may be unique in its exceptional diversity and high level of tolerance that accompanies it, but it doesn't have to be. If all sorts of citizens could widen their perspective or perhaps open their minds a bit, then they could not only embrace other people's differences, but also see the common thread of humanity that links us all.

Victoria Fydrych
Shaker Heights High School Student Class of 2011

On Human Relations for The Vernacular

How we treat each other

"If each man or woman could understand that every other human life is as full of sorrows, or joys, or base temptations, of heartaches and of remorse as his own... how much kinder, how much gentler we would be."

This is what occurred to me in response to the topic:

Growing up in three different countries, we were immersed in foreign cultures by the time we could walk. Army life brought with it the challenge of creating continuity from some source other than familiar neighborhoods or having the same friends year after year. For my sister and me, we found the consistency in the stories my father told us each night, the family traditions my mother continued, and in the love and compassion of the people we met wherever we lived. How could young Japanese women and later German women open their hearts and lives to us in their war-torn countries less than 10 years after World War II? We were innocent of what they had been through. What we knew was that they laughed with us, played with us, made us feel at home thousands of miles from where we were born. Their humanity taught by example that we were the same, regardless of our race, the food we eat, or the traditions we keep.

Later when I was working as a doctor in the bush in Africa, the people of the village embraced me as a woman among them. They wanted to know about my family, how we raised our children, and how we managed daily needs. They looked out for me as I helped care for them. Here were men who climbed palm trees barefoot with a rope and a machete, to get the palm nuts to make their oil and wine. The women pounded manioc in wooden pestles for their food. They wore clothing of Belgium batik fabric and slept on mats made from woven palm fronds. The children wore half button shirts, barefoot, with no care. And they shared the joys, sorrows, fears, and anger just as did my family and I.

Years later I was surprised to discover that there was an unspoken wall of separation that divided me from some of my dearest friends, friends who were different in age or in race. The lessons from the women who cared for me long ago echoed in my heart. It only took the decision to let it go and that wall of separation came down.

This lesson also came through in my work as a psychiatrist. On two different occasions I happened to help out a patient outside of the scheduled hour. On one occasion I drove a patient to the hospital in my car. He needed immediate hospitalization and no family member was available. On another occasion, I met a patient at a support group that she was afraid to attend alone. Only after my personally reaching out did those two patients begin to improve in their recovery. While the medical techniques and treatment were important, it was the connection on a humane and compassionate level that made the difference.

Do you realize how many people are waiting to greet us, support us, laugh with us, comfort us, depend on us, when there is no prejudiced dividing line? We become accountable to each other based on how we would treat ourselves when no line divides us. We become accountable to ourselves, no longer using the idea that people not like us are the reason we suffer. We are human and it is through comfort and connection with others that our suffering is healed and our humanity comes alive.

Cynthia Taylor, MD
Shaker Heights Resident

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Preface: When I was a senior in high school, I wrote this piece in response to my English teacher's questioning of the socioeconomic climate at Shaker. It was a rough time for my family. My examination of our financial circumstances and their influences on me were in the forefront of my mind, especially through my self-reflection during the college process.

After I submitted the paper, he asked me if it was okay for him to put me in contact with another student who had turned in a paper with similar themes. I agreed and discovered that a kid who I had been sitting next to for my entire high school career was dealing with comparable issues. It was remarkable. This guy felt as alone as I did even though we had had multiple classes together for years.

Everybody has a story. This is a chapter of mine, and I encourage you to open up and share a chapter of your own. You just might give that guy sitting next to you the support system he needs.

Sincerely,

A recent alumnus of Core and SGORR who still struggles to open up

Squeezed

Shaker is a funny place. When I first moved here, it was advertised as a town where some kids' fathers are deans of universities and colleges while other kids don't know their father. I was told that we have owners of sports franchises, corporate big wigs and brand name doctors and lawyers living in the city along with drug dealers, people working two jobs and minimum wage laborers. This broad economic gradient is often visible at the high school, therefore translating into a social gradient as well. Although probably unintentional, lots of cliques and groups coincide with wealth and financial background.

My situation pertaining to this is fairly unique. My father has been unlucky with work in his past years, switching jobs 3 times in our first three years living in Shaker Heights. In all three he has taken substantial pay cuts from his previous employment, and, since the summer before my freshman year, he has been unemployed. My mother has been an editor and translator since my older brother was born, working from home part time. Over the summer my mom started working a second job part time at a grocery store and added substitute teaching during the school year.

The transformation from being an upper middle class family to a family making enough to qualify for free lunch has been a difficult one, and not only within our home. Dealing with my relationships and interaction among friends, it's been a tricky situation. My friends, for the most part, live fairly comfortably. The recent economic downturn has affected them and they undoubtedly make sacrifices, but they are able to spend and consume more liberally than I.

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This makes for awkward circumstances in many instances. At restaurants with friends, I order water and a salad. It's a difficult thing to do when I am getting jeered for getting "girl food", and I end up blaming my lack of a dessert and a drink on my attempt to stay fit for sports. I am not embarrassed, but it averts a lot of explanation when I am just trying to save a dollar or two. The situation is similar when I encounter a new lunch aide in the cafeteria. I scan my card and they press the option for 'Lunch'. When the charge comes up as 40 cents, the surprised looks I get from the workers, as well as the kids behind me in the line, leave little room for interpretation. Once or twice I have been asked to rescan my card because it "didn't register".

Luckily for me, I have felt prepared for the tough things our family has had to weather. My mother grew up in a poor family but with strong parents, and the values instilled in her are becoming established in me. My achievement in school is driven by her lessons and by a natural, yet amplified, ambition to succeed. I find it ironic that the very weights that pull on our financial strings are the same weights that propel my want to learn forward.

Don't get me wrong; missing out on concerts with my friends, lying that I'm not hungry when I go out and getting hand-me-downs from neighbors have all taken some getting used to. I'm not a bagful of smiles, and it's a struggle to see my family working so hard and still just scraping by. Yet somehow, these uncontrollable limitations set upon me have molded me into who I am. They have matured me and have prodded my desire to persevere to a level which would have been otherwise unthinkable.

No Bullying Allowed

One day a girl named Izzy was playing on the blacktop at her school. She looked over and saw the school bully coming her way. Izzy's friend, Kaitlin, didn't see him coming their way. All of a sudden the bully punched Kaitlin so hard that she fell to the ground. When Kaitlin got to the nurse her knees were burning with pain. The bully was still outside, on the playground, laughing. Izzy decided to call SGORR to the rescue. SGORR swept up the bully and taught him how bullying makes people feel and why it is wrong. SGORR helped the bully understand right from wrong and he started being nice to people. The bully made his first friends.

Written by: Oriana Anderson

Illustrated by: Miles McCallum

Edited by: Miles McCallum

4th Grade Lomond School Students of Mrs. Bannon's class, under the direction of Ms. Gorrick

Fighting for What You Believe in

I live in Los Angeles, so when I travel to Ohio, I fly the Red Eye which is why one morning, two weeks after the election of Barack Obama, I was shivering in the Rapid Transit station at 6 a.m. When I discovered I had no change for the train, I turned to the only other person on the platform to ask for help.

She smiled as she rooted in her purse for change; “No problem,” she said. “We have to help each other...”

I couldn't help but smile at the metaphor.

As she and I rode the train, we engaged in one of those delicious conversations about how hopeful the world has begun to feel ever since the election. I'm a middle-aged Jewish white woman; she was black, a decade younger. But our conversation was warm and easy, almost intimate—even warmer, I think, than it would have been one month earlier. Lately I've experienced a lot of those conversations—as if, altogether, we have leaped one more hurdle.

But ever since that election, despite the joy, I've also been thinking that there are things we tend to forget but must remember.

Things like this:

In 1933 Congress created the Federal Housing Administration to protect homeowners, but tucked into those FHA guidelines was support of racial covenants that prevented African Americans from moving into “white” neighborhoods. Fifteen long years passed before the Supreme Court ruled restrictive covenants not legally enforceable and the FHA banned them.

But then there were those so-called gentlemen's agreements.

I know about gentlemen's agreements that supported racial discrimination because in 1962, two years before the enactment of the Federal Civil Rights Act, I was in fifth grade, a student at then nearly all-white Mercer Elementary School. I was oblivious to the homogenous look and feel of my neighborhood and school until an African American family bought a house down the street. I met the family because my dad and Mr. R. were old friends.

I don't remember how I began to understand what was really happening on that quiet street of ours, but it turned out that the bank, operating on one of those heinous gentlemen's agreements, refused to give Mr. R. his mortgage until he had gathered the signatures of all the neighbors, until, that is, every white family on our block agreed that it was okay for an African American family to move in. My dad, a lawyer and passionate Civil Rights activist, threatened the bank with a lawsuit, but meanwhile Mr. R began to walk around collecting signatures. That's how I learned that Mrs. A refused to sign. Mrs. A was one of my best friend's mothers.

The day I learned that news my world turned upside down. I think that must have been the day I truly felt for the first time the sting of racial prejudice. It turned my stomach inside out. I never again walked into my friend's house. I couldn't look at her mother.

The Rs did move in, and over the years the schools I attended began to look a little less white, and I began to understand that Shaker was different, remarkable not so much because of its schools but because of the people who chose to move here, and because of those who chose to move away.

I know people of every color, ethnicity, religious and political stripe—and I knew them all the way through school—who harbor deep, abiding prejudices and behave in reprehensible ways. But I also know thousands who came to Shaker because they, like my mom and dad, are passionately devoted to equality. I know those people who have moved to Shaker because they want their kids attending schools that don't discriminate against anyone, for anything.

But that thought sends me backwards again, to 1969.

I was a junior in high school, taking a government class taught by my mom. I sat in that class feeling, sometimes, embarrassed by my mother's passionate efforts to instill in her students the ideas of justice she embraced. But mostly I felt proud she was my mom.

That was a potent year—that winter Nixon began to secretly bomb Cambodia, Sirhan Sirhan was convicted of killing Bobby Kennedy and James Earl Ray of killing Martin Luther King. That year Neil Armstrong walked on the moon, Golda Meir was elected Prime Minister of Israel, the Chicago 8 were indicted, the number of troops peaked in Vietnam. Micky Mantle retired from baseball, Levis began to sell bell-bottom jeans, Monty Python formed, John and Yoko recorded *Give Peace a Chance*. That year militant black students took over Willard Straight Hall at Cornell, demanding a black studies program, and that year my friend Nancy's sister came home from college wearing an Afro, the first one I'd seen.

There were other protests happening—patrons at the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village, NY clashed for three days with police in what is by many considered the birth of the gay rights movement. That year, too, Ted Kennedy's car crashed in Chappaquiddick, and hopes of another Kennedy presidency died. Closer to home the notoriously polluted Cuyahoga River caught fire.

And closer still to home, one day in my mom's classroom, an African American student was talking—I don't remember what he was saying, but I was sitting across the room, near a young man I'd like to name but won't. He and I had been classmates since 7th grade. I had never much liked him, though he was one of those perfect Jewish boys I was supposed to like. Suddenly this young man leaned over to the girl sitting between us and whispered, "You know, when I look at him, all I see is a monkey..."

I think I screamed. I'm not sure, though I know internally I was screaming, flagging my mom to get her attention, to turn her sights on this monster that was, in no way, a nice Jewish boy.

Remarkably I don't remember what happened. I know that boy and many like him grew up to move away or to send their kids to private schools where they would mingle with people only of their own class and mostly of their own color.

But it is that moment and the moment of learning about the woman on my block who wanted to ban the R family that, I think, turned me into an activist of sorts. I know it was those moments and a few others that led me to understand that no matter how good we think we are, we can always be better.

I've never stopped believing that Shaker's integration policies are a gift to all those who attend these schools, but it's important to remember how far from perfect we are. I also have never stopped believing that we all must continue to be vigilant, to fight our own and others' prejudices and hatreds wherever we find them.

This year change is in the air as much or more than it was in 1969, and still, if I were to say one thing to my fellow Shaker grads it would be this: Never believe the work is done.

Amy Friedman
Shaker Heights High School Graduate, Class of 1970; author and syndicated writer (Universal Press)

Bullying

Bullying is very serious,
it's not nice or hilarious.

It has become quite an issue,
that kids now need more than a single tissue.
In fact these issues have become quite physical,
not like a tickle.

But more like punching and kicking,
even worse than scratching.

So there you go,
all the problems of bullying and so.
We hope you have learned to be nicer to all kids,
Not like those nasty little twids

Thanks you SGORR for teaching us that bullying is wrong!

Clarence Nanamori and Benjamin Betts

4th Grade Lomond School Students of Mrs. Bannon's class, under the direction of
Ms. Gorrick

Human Relations

For much of our society, the difficulty with “human relations” is that “relations” are absent. My personal experiences have shown me the sad truth of this observation. Yet, when efforts are made to meet and “relate” the scene changes dramatically. As a child and young woman, I lived in an all white and, primarily, Jewish environment. This included my neighborhood, my school, the buses we rode and the places where we shopped and found entertainment, such as in movie theaters, swimming pools and skating rinks.

It was not until I married and we bought a house that all this changed. Our home was on Becket Road in a neighborhood situated in Cleveland as well as Shaker Heights and served by Ludlow elementary school. I had just given birth to my second son Bill and my oldest son Dan was only twenty months old, so I was in most of the winter. In the spring, I noticed For Sale signs up and down the street and learned that people were leaving because Negro (the term at the time) families were buying houses in the area.

I was not about to move again with two babies and so I chose to “meet the enemy”. Pushing the stroller and baby carriage, I crossed the street and introduced myself to a new neighbor Mr. Price. Mr. and Mrs. Price, like most of our new neighbors, had substantially improved their property, improving the neighborhood rather than contributing to its decline. Several of us decided to meet our neighbors and coffees and barbecues and international suppers became the order of the day. That was more than fifty years ago and Ludlow became one of the first successfully integrated neighborhoods in the nation and it still is today.

My own field of “relations” expanded considerably when I volunteered in the bush in Zimbabwe and served with the Peace Corps in Jordan in 2000-2001. There I worked with and became friends with several Muslims. After the tragedy of September 11, 2001, I was appalled to learn that most everyone feared and hated Muslims. No one I knew had ever even met a Muslim and I concluded that ignorance was our greatest enemy.

To help overcome this, I founded Communities in Conversation, Inc., interfaith study and discussion groups that bring together followers of different faith traditions to learn about one another’s beliefs and traditions. Several hundred adults have now taken part in these “Conversations” and, many for the first time, met someone whose beliefs and traditions are different from their own. They have all come to appreciate and respect their new acquaintances.

New and healthy “human relations” are the happy by-product of these experiences.

Emile Barnett
Shaker Heights Resident

The Vernacular 2010-2011

Creating the Ohio We Deserve

I was asked to write something on how we treat each other and to respond to a quote about seeing things from others' perspectives.

Shaker Heights is unusually good at elevating diversity, considering other perspectives, promoting tolerance. This community cultivates those goals not just because individual people care but because we've set up institutions that intentionally march on the territory that many towns tiptoe around. SGORR, environmental groups, school support groups like the Citizen's Committee and One Shaker - the list of organizations that students and citizens can choose from is a testament to the Shaker way.

Compared to the New Jersey town where I attended public school more than twenty years ago, we've come far. It's easier to be gay, to be black, Asian or Latino, to be in an interracial couple, to be Muslim, Jewish or Atheist. For women like me, who care about their career and their kids, the trek is much more navigable. We've made strides in how we meet the needs of those who learn differently or have extra physical or mental health challenges. "It's okay to be different" was a hokey picture book I read with my toddlers, but it really seems like it is sort of okay in Shaker.

Unfortunately, though, we're going backwards in too many other ways. In high school in the 1980s, I had reason to think that not only tolerance but opportunity too would keep getting broader. After all, I was born after a generation during which nearly every American's economic life had gotten better. In my preschool years the environmental movement also seemed destined to bring sanity to how we managed our planet.

Throughout the middle of the twentieth century, workers from all over the world found the U.S. a compelling place to pursue a better life and Ohio often led the way. In 1940, just five percent of Ohio adults had a college degree and only 25 percent had even a high school degree. But we decided to put in place policies that would create the world's first middle class. We invested in education – dramatically increasing K-12 spending, giving free college tuition to returning soldiers, creating and expanding universities, and making grants widely available. As a result, by 2010, high school completion rates among adults of all ages had more than tripled, to about 87 percent, and college completion had more than quadrupled, to 23.6 percent.

Other policies contributed too. The minimum wage and strong unions meant that many jobs paid decently and came with health and pension benefits. Public investments meant that companies had access to well-trained workers, high quality research, and good roads, bridges, freight lines and transit hubs to get their products out the door. Government, business, advocates and labor, together, solved problems. The Cuyahoga caught on fire when I was two; by the time I was five those fires had inspired passage of the Clean Water Act to restore our whole nation's rivers and lakes.

Unfortunately, since I was little, federal and state policies have let wages erode and good jobs vanish and we've mostly sidestepped the biggest environmental challenges of today. Declines in the minimum wage, bigger barriers to joining unions, poorly negotiated trade deals, deregulation of financial products and a breakdown in the social contract let companies cut wages, eliminate benefits, destroy career ladders, dodge accountability and move jobs around like pieces on a board game. We made it easy and cheap to stay dependent on highly polluting energy sources that continue to heat our planet. We developed in ways that bypassed cities and inner-ring suburbs, and promoted sprawl.

The top one percent of Americans now take in a quarter of the nation's income every year and control 40 percent of the wealth, while incomes in the middle and at the bottom have stagnated or fallen. In Ohio, official unemployment stands at 8.9 percent, with more than 525,000 of our neighbors searching for work. Working people are not fully sharing in the economic growth that they are helping to produce, as they once did.

We can fix this – by making it easier, not harder to join unions, by enforcing labor standards and improving financial regulation. And we can put the unemployed to work, solving the very environmental problems that threaten your future - retrofitting buildings, constructing wind turbines, installing solar panels, working to reduce reliance on polluting forms of energy, increase efficiency and grow alternative energy.

Shaker Heights and the people in it often work hard to treat each other and the planet with tolerance and intelligence. It's a privilege to live in a community that values those strengths. Before I was born and when I was young, America was helping communities foster broad economic opportunity, environmental intelligence, and shared prosperity. It is time to resume moving forward not just with tolerance and decency in individual behavior, but with a new set of policies that will give your generation the America, the Ohio, and the Shaker you deserve.

Amy Hanauer

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On Being a Friend

In my years of working with young people, it has been clear to me that, at this stage of development, the influence of friends (the peer group) is an extremely strong influence on behavior, attitudes and accomplishments. People need and value friends throughout all stages of life, but during the adolescent years friends become a central focus of daily life. With the emergence of on-line “social networking”, we see even more emphasis on friendship. Who is or is not one’s friend shapes one.

As a teacher of the Classics, I believe strongly in the influence of ancient thinking on modern life issues. In the area of friendship, I think we would profit by giving some attention to the advice given by Marcus Tullius Cicero in his treatise, De Amicitia (On Friendship). (Harvard Classics) Cicero’s words ring as true today as when he wrote them during the time of the Roman Republic.

Cicero suggests that “friendship can only exist between good men”.¹ He defines “good men” as “those whose actions and lives leave no question as to their honor, purity, equity, and liberality; who are free from greed, lust, and violence; and who have the courage of their convictions”.² How much better would we be, individually and as a society, if we were to heed these words! Old-fashioned values some would respond, but what could be better for anyone than a dedication to honor, purity, equity and liberality. When faced with bullying, “mean girls”, dishonesty in academics, etc., wouldn’t we each be well-served by acting with the courage of our convictions, standing firmly on the basic good and good sense within us?

It is hard to take such a stance alone, however. This is where friendship can provide enormous support for good action. Cicero lays down his first rule of friendship, stating that “we should ask from friends, and do for friends, only what is good.”³ By definition, “gang” activity that is destructive, dishonest, illegal or immoral would be outside the realm of friendship. Friends would not ask friends to do such things, nor would they participate in them themselves. Rather, when a friend took a protective stance in helping a child who is being bullied, then a friend would stand shoulder to shoulder, presenting a united front against the bully. The power of friends, united for good, is an awesome thing.

All friendships are not created equal, nor are all friends. As we grow, our friends grow, too. Some grow in ways that help us to maintain and deepen our relationship with them; others move off in different directions and disappear from our constellation of friends. New friends are found and new friendships are forged. As the process continues, I would suggest that Cicero’s words can be helpful to us. Remembering to ask of friends and give to friends only what is good could only improve our fractured society and our hurting world. Wouldn’t it be fun to see what changes could be brought about by each of us and our friends!

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¹ Paragraph 16.

² Paragraph 17.

³ Paragraph 41.