

“A person’s a person, no matter how small”

-Horton the elephant

During a time in our history when a war was being waged not only on adults, but also on children, the calling for a person who showed great moral courage was never louder. Few were willing to risk their lives to help the most vulnerable and innocent members of our society. Those who did answer that call have left their footprints not only on our past but on many children’s lives. Examples of moral courage walk across our lives, from an elephant named Horton to an inspirational woman named Irena Sendler.

Irena Sendler was a twenty-nine year-old social worker when World War II broke out. She lived in Warsaw and was dedicated to helping the Jews. Irena’s mission became practically impossible when the Nazis forced close to 400,000 people to live in the Warsaw ghetto. As conditions in the Warsaw ghetto quickly deteriorated, Irena knew she had to find a way to help. Irena smuggled many Jewish children out of the ghetto and into hiding. Irena saved an incredible number of children, so many that the exact number is unknown. Irena’s system for taking the children out of the ghetto, along with the help of other underground workers, was going well until October 20, 1943 when she was arrested by the Nazis.

Irena was able to stash away many pieces of incriminating evidence such as the coded addresses of the children that were in hiding, and the large amounts of money that she used to pay people who were hiding the children. This still wasn’t enough though, and Irena was sentenced to death and was sent to the infamous Pawiak prison. Luckily underground activists were able to bribe officials into releasing Irena, and she continued

to rescue Jewish children. The dangers soon became too great; Irena herself was forced to go into hiding until the end of the war.

Irena Sendler showed great moral courage during World War II, and I intend to follow her example. While I will not be facing the same dangers Irena faced, I have learned from her story; one person really can make a difference. There are many aspects of the world that I would like to change. The cause I feel strongest about is definitely the impact of intolerance, discrimination, and prejudice on kids today. A person cannot be judged by the color of their skin, by their religion, or even by whom they choose to love.

Throughout my life I have seen examples of how intolerance is hurtful. Last year a group of kids spoke a different language whenever I was around them because they knew that I would not be able to understand them. This made me feel left out, and like I had done something wrong when in reality I hadn't done anything to them. That group of kids did not like me because of the color of my skin. This incident was not the last time I would see how much hate kids could direct toward each other.

Another time when I saw the effects of intolerance was when a friend of mine named Autumn walked into rehearsal, and told me somebody had drawn a swastika on her locker in permanent marker. I was outraged when I heard this. Autumn is a wonderful and smart girl and she was being picked on at school because she is Jewish. Even after the person who drew the swastika was caught and punished, I was still angry that someone could be so rude to another person just because of her religion.

Later on I was once again shocked at the cruelty of my peers when a new boy came to our school. There were rumors of him being gay that spread around campus like a wildfire. I couldn't believe kids who I thought were so kind were assuming this poor

boy was a horrible person before he even had the chance to say hello to them. When I tried to point out that this new kid was kind towards others even when they were not kind in return very few kids listened. Then I noticed something, the few kids that did listen were able to tell a few more kids and so on until the bullying was almost gone. It was then that I realized how I could make a difference.

I could help to spread the message of tolerance by taking my time to speak to younger kids, or even kids my age, about the importance of looking for the similarities instead of focusing on the differences. When we focus on our differences it only pushes us farther apart. When we focus on our similarities it takes away the lines we have drawn by looking at our differences and it brings us together. Instead of “Hey, I heard she is a Jew” it can be “Hey she is really good in English class like we are. Maybe we can all work on the next project together.” By spreading this message I can make a difference in our world. Even if it’s only one or two kids who listen to me, they can spread the same message to their peers and families, and our world could soon become a different place.

Throughout history people have cried out for role models; people they can emulate. I think the best role model is not a sports star or a celebrity but an everyday person who shows great moral courage like Irena Sendler. Somebody who realizes that the saying “A person is a person, no matter how small” goes past being part of a children’s story. The message is really part of the steps to creating a better world – a world where more people answer the call of moral courage.

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