

Changing the Sight of Society

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9-10th Grade Category, Third Place**

Sophie Scholl's heart surged in fear as if its hasty beats could keep her alive. Her hands shook with unease as they clasped around the leaflets, evidence of her crime. Aware of the consequences, Scholl and her comrades dispersed the flyers among trusted friends. Any of those friends could turn Scholl in, and the resulting punishment would be execution.

At its core, inaction is action. Scholl knew that by accepting stereotypes and conforming to society's propaganda, one involuntarily chose hate. She believed that "the real damage is done by those millions who want to 'survive.' The honest men who just want to be left in peace. Those who don't want their little lives disturbed by anything bigger than themselves. Those with no sides and no causes" (Scholl). Because she abhorred the complacency of bystanders, Scholl martyred herself for hope.

In 1942, that complacency was easy for Germans to justify when it was socially required to trust Hitler's leadership. Disgusted, Scholl, her brother, Hans, and classmate, Christoph Probst, organized a leaflet under the guise "The White Rose," that opposed the mass deportation of the Jews. A universal symbol of love, the rose represented unity and acceptance, a perfect title to express the purpose of the pamphlets. Distributed by Scholl and her friends, the leaflets urged students to unite as enemies of complacency and encouraged passive resistance against fascism. Included in the leaflets were essays declaring that Hitler was destroying the German race. Aware of the consequences of opposition, Scholl remained determined and eventually distributed six different leaflets around her university.

Scholl and her friends needed a colossal sum of moral courage to challenge Hitler's dogma. Moral courage is sacrificing everything for the greater good regardless of the price. Scholl resolutely believed that Hitler's influence was demolishing Germany and boldly took a stance by distributing the fliers, even though the consequence was execution. Scholl didn't directly save anyone's life, yet her actions may have inspired others to rescue. Her perseverance, dedication and moral courage spread hope. Scholl's moral courage and her belief in passive resistance eventually killed her. Following a hasty and unjust trial, Sophie, Christoph, and Hans were sentenced to death for treason against Germany (Burns). Sophie's actions encouraged disobedience in a time when the repercussions included death, and her acceptance of her fate proved her moral courage.

The actions of the White Rose show that seemingly small and insignificant actions truly make an impact. The Gestapo feared rebellion would spread across the German community and executed them to prove their power (Axelrod). I know from my own life that hate can be an invisible barrier separating two individuals, but I'm fortunate enough to live in a time when standing up for myself doesn't risk death. Music from the stereo blasted as we scrambled around the chairs, ready to sit whenever the sound paused. Somehow I always ended up near a chair and was unable to fake losing. Eventually and reluctantly, I

made it to the final round of musical chairs, praying I wouldn't win. As Katie clapped in glory, anyone watching realized that I stumbled out of the way, clearing a path so that Katie could win. It was my first Friday volunteering at VSP, Very Special People, and I was totally out of my element.

Complete with a theater, game room, dance floor and popcorn machine, VSP is a place where teenagers volunteer to spend their Friday nights hanging out with disabled kids their age. Before volunteering at VSP, holding a conversation with the disabled was awkward and fake on my part. I stereotyped them and believed that we were too different to relate. Through these parties, I met Katie, a senior with Down Syndrome, and she has become one of my best friends. Being a part of VSP has taught me that Katie and I are exactly the same; we both like to dance to old 80's tunes and have absolutely no luck when it comes to games.

Had misunderstanding and inaction defined me, I would have never met such a great friend. I know that it's easy to be fake and awkward around those with disabilities because I've been that way. But everyone on this earth is exactly the same, complete with a body and a brain. Our minds separate us, and we accept judgments based on prejudices. Scholl's story teaches us that we must react and that a little effort can change the world. The inaction of bystanders, the people with "no cause," are the ones that spread hate and slowly cripple the sight of society. (Scholl) She inspires me to reach out to Katie and many others with disabilities.

Today, if people had the moral courage to reach out and connect with others, prejudices and stereotypes aside, they could change the face of society. Katie has changed the way I see others, and Scholl's effort continue to inspire me to act. I believe that the walls of hate can fall down one stereotype at a time. Because of a simple invitation, the way I perceive others has changed. Now, every Friday, I make sure to invite a friend along with me hoping to change the way they look at others. Sophie's determination and faith spread awareness and hope throughout Germany . Instead of settling, Sophie chose life and hope; she chose to challenge the face of society. And in every action Sophie took, in every pamphlet she distributed, Sophie chose to display moral courage. In every evil, there is opportunity, but in every defeat, hope has a home. Sophie Scholl chose hope.

Works Cited

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