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Picture this: Fifty wide-eyed, hopeful ten-year-olds, donning humble peasant babushkas and ill-fitting suits, anxiously embarking on their journey to Ellis Island, with dreams of a better life across the horizon...it was 'Immigration Day'. An event in the Fifth Grade that every Hopewell Elementary School student anticipates. We spent months planning our identities, improvising documents, and researching our family history. All those grueling hours were worth it when, finally, we began our migration to the Gideon Welles middle school, or 'Ellis Island'. On the bus we sat three to a seat, a simulation of the transatlantic steamships that most of our ancestors had boarded. I remember putting myself in my Great-Grandmother's shoes, wondering what class she may have been in, what goods she packed in her suitcase, and how her younger brother must have felt...

Part of our preparation for the event included an eight -page creative narrative, my first ever essay. I have always loved writing, and history even more. My grandfather was a U.S. History teacher and my greatest role model. He once convinced my parents into an early school dismissal so I could observe his class and, naturally, I was obsessed with U.S. History ever since.

I decided to interview my Grandmother for my Immigration Day narrative. Her mother and uncle immigrated to the United States from Germany, escaping the Holocaust. I was born with the notion of Jewish pride. Attending synagogue on the high holidays, Jewish sleep-away camp, and Bat-Mitzvah anticipation were all important aspects of my youth. It was this interview where I learned of Antisemitism. An ideology that would plague me for the rest of my life.

When I went home that night I Googled that word. I found images of cartoon devils with horns, horrifying men holding pennies, and large noses with dollar bills dribbling out of their nostrils. I was stunned. These drawings couldn't possibly be based off of my family.

Those images never went away, not when the boys drew a swastika on my notebook in middle school, or when my best friends began making Hitler jokes at the lunch table my sophomore year. I truly felt different, like an uncontrollable part of my identity was unwelcomed in my own community.

Using my writing to uncover more about my personal identity, and the cultures around me has been the most fulfilling part of my educational career. I believe that in order to discourage history from repeating itself, it is crucial to educate our communities on exactly that; history. It is difficult to have sentiment for something or someone without knowing their story.

By sharing our own stories and actively listening to the narratives of others, we can foster empathy and understanding. Encouraging open dialogue and promoting inclusivity in all aspects

of our community can help dispel stereotypes and break down barriers. It's also important to challenge prejudiced remarks and actions whenever they occur, showing that hate has no place in our society.

It's difficult to feel like you're making a difference in a society where jumping through hoops is the norm. So I promise you this: Ultimately, each individual's commitment to self-reflection, education, and action can contribute to a collective movement towards a community free of prejudice and hatred. By embracing our differences and standing together against discrimination, we can pave the way for a more compassionate and united society.