

Oregon PSR's 2017 Greenfield Peace Writing Scholarship
1st Place - Jessyka Evans, Tualatin High School, Tualatin, OR

Rejuvenated from a night of restful sleep, I stretch as I slowly get out of my warm bed. As I wait for my coffee to brew, I flick on the morning news. Today, March 6th, 2038 marks the 20th anniversary of the last tragic mass shooting at a public high school. The reporter covers the stories of the victims and he explains why this type of violence has been eliminated. Almost all schools have now adopted programs to promote peace. Students are taught to think before taking actions, to meditate, self reflect, and express themselves effectively through words. More and more schools are now implementing this program into their curriculum as it has shown dramatic results in reducing conflict.

While eating breakfast, I scan my emails, pausing when my brother's name catches my eye. It's a link to a new video game that he is developing. His company's games focus on fun entertainment for audiences of all ages without weapons and violence. I wince as I remember the horrific games that kids played while I was growing up. Games like Call of Duty no longer exist because gun violence awareness has increased, changing attitudes towards killing for entertainment. Honestly, I'm shocked at how the media used to normalize shooting through songs, TV, books, and movies.

Just as I was about to jump into the shower, I notice a text from my friend. She is thanking me for recommending a program that is helping her fight depression. It amazes me how much the program is changing her. She had been in an abusive relationship with her boyfriend that led to severe depression. After a few months in the program, she is doing better and is now sharing her story with others in similar situations. Even her ex-boyfriend is now part of an anger management program and is involved in a support group. I shudder at the thought of what could have happened had there not been programs to help them out.

As I am about to head out the door, my mind wanders a little bit as I think about my work's plan for the week. I'm an assistant director of our state's Unification program, promoting peace in communities by unifying people of all backgrounds. It is our goal to foster understanding, which leads to respect and acceptance. As I am waiting for the TriMet to arrive, I am thinking about all of the projects starting soon to help further cultural, racial, and religious awareness. I'm excited to start hiking and gardening community programs that will cultivate healthy relationships and bring people together around a common goal. Guest speakers will go throughout the state to talk about their experiences dealing with prejudices. I am working with different groups to plan holiday, religious, and cultural celebrations that will bring the community together. Also, I would like to work on providing educational programs to spread awareness about disabilities such as Autism, Down Syndrome, and Alzheimer's Disease. Of course, I plan to continue public service announcements against bullying. I smile as I walk into my office, enthused to do my part in making a difference in the world.