

Addison Paul—2016 Gary E. May Peace Scholarship Awardee

*“What is humanity’s greatest weapon for waging peace?”*

*Imagine there's no countries*

*It isn't hard to do*

*Nothing to kill or die for*

*And no religion, too*

*Imagine all the people*

*Living life in peace...*

- John Lennon, “Imagine”

I was born on a cool and blustery autumn Wednesday. It may seem irrelevant or otherwise ordinary, but my birthdate has always shared its spot on the calendar with another holiday: Veteran’s Day. Each November eleventh, I celebrate not only my aging, but the significance of a greater idea rooted in history. As a child, I did not comprehend the weight of this holiday and the hope and respect that it represents for peace and those who fought for it. I was just an excited kid who never had to go to school on her birthday, but as I’ve matured and learned more about the world, I have also built a great passion for peace and kindness toward others. I believe that people must strive for global peace through patience and diligence, and that humanity’s greatest weapons for achieving this peace are education and understanding.

On the daily bus ride to my old middle school, the route took us by a peculiar tree standing alone at an asphalt intersection. Upon closer investigation, my family discovered that this tree was actually a symbol for peace as well. An aged wooden sign, usually adorned with small American flags, reads “International World War Peace Tree” and as it would happen, this tree also shares my birthday. The seed was brought to Evansville by German immigrants and planted in celebration of the Armistice on November 11, 1918. It signifies the end of the first

world war and the resolution of those who ended it to never engage in such appalling conflict again. Despite these plans being overruled later, the tree still stands tall and reminds me that if people would simply listen to each other and consider the greater good of all humanity, then the world could finally attain peace.

Education plays an integral role in working toward wide-spread peace. Cultural ignorance is at the heart of every war and ideological conflict. Battles begin over differences in religion, race, nationality, and traditional values, which shows how misunderstanding leads to hatred. The cumulative lack of knowledge or resistance to learn about various cultures promotes close-mindedness and prevents people from viewing the world through diverse and unique perspectives. Cultural extremist groups purposefully incite war through their refusal to learn about other perspectives and practices. So many people are ingrained with one ideology that it becomes difficult to resolve any conflict due to their unwillingness to compromise or even consider an opinion that doesn't align with their own. Humanity must try to see people of other cultures as individuals, as opposed to ideological groups. Educating everyone from every background, demographic, and economic status opens the doors for the pursuit of diplomacy and cultural acceptance as well as people's' minds.

As a student at an International Baccalaureate school, I am lucky in my exposure to global customs, ideas, and understanding. I interact with peers of extraordinarily diverse family histories and cultural backgrounds, which are preserved through the school's globalized education system. My classmates and I are not only taught global acceptance and knowledge, but we live it during each day of our education. It's common to find at least one first generation American in every classroom, not to mention religious faiths ranging from Islam, to Judaism, to Christianity. Our student body includes people from Cameroon, Vietnam, France, Cuba, China,

India and many other countries of complex cultures. The sheer diversity of the learning environment enforces that understanding other cultures can prevent ideological conflict. Getting to know actual human beings with beliefs, genealogies, and emotions that differ from each other helps to eliminate the ignorance that spurs violent actions. It is not just educating people about diversity and peace, but also applying those teachings by actively practicing cultural understanding in an educational environment.

I am privileged to have such a close relationship with a holiday so representative of peace, as well as to be educated with a global curriculum in a beautifully diverse environment. I believe that to achieve global peace, humanity must first work towards educating all people to broaden their horizons and open their minds to new ideas. We must then practice understanding by engaging in diverse interaction, connecting to each other, and experiencing cultures. By learning and applying this global knowledge, people could solve conflicts diplomatically and set aside their ideological differences in order to attain peace. The prompt addresses humanity's greatest "weapon" for peace, however I believe that what the world needs is not a weapon at all, but rather kindness, acceptance, and willingness to learn. Though I was born eighty years after the Armistice was signed, the greater significance of my birthday continues to inspire me and motivate me to educate myself and personally practice understanding. Perhaps eighty years from now, I could be celebrating my birthday along with global peace.