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A Night of Candles

Sep. 5, 2013 ? Marcel Neergaard

Marcel Neergaard, an 11-year-old gay activist who made national news forstanding up to a bullying lawmaker[1], attended Southeastern Activist Camp, put on by GSA Network, Mississippi Safe Schools Coalition, Georgia Safe Schools Coalition, and Southern Poverty Law Center. This post originally appeared on theHuffington Post[2].

In July, I witnessed a room of LGBTQ activist campers become a room of anti-hate activists. I realized that we should not be fighting for rights for different groups, but we should be fighting for rights as one community. All of us should be equal.

Drowsy from a long day of racism discussions, I sat in the front row of our homemade theater and waited for my fellow activist campers to arrive. My heart was excited for the talent show to come, even though I really wanted to sleep. Someone announced that the result of the George Zimmerman case was going to be on CNN. The conversation which followed expressed hope for a positive outcome. That conversation expanded when someone uttered the words, "George Zimmerman is found not guilty." I could not understand what was going on, so I went to my mother for answers. She found it difficult to objectively explain the case. George Zimmerman followed a boy named Trayvon Martin, they fought and Trayvon was shot. He died and now George Zimmerman was free. I wondered why Mr. Zimmerman was scared of a black boy in a hoodie carrying Skittles and Gatorade.

A moment of silence was held for Trayvon Martin. I felt uncomfortable because in my house, silence means I am supposed to be in bed, I was not. When the silence was broken, the room filled with discussion. I was surprised about how hard the black community has to work to be equal with white people. My friends cried in front of me as they stood up and told horrifying stories that broke my heart. I saw the pain this verdict caused. The most important thing I learned was that we must come together as one community of people cheated out of our rights.

We held our talent show, but we wanted to do something more. As a group, we drove the short five minutes to the capital building in Jackson, Mississippi. We hoped to light candles on the steps, but were turned away by the police. Discouraged but determined, we returned to our hotel. In a neighboring parking lot, we lit our candles and formed a circle honoring Trayvon's memory.

Our circle expanded for each stranger as they joined our mourning. We sang, spoke, remembered, and stood in silence. We loved each other.
That night was more than a night of mourning. It was a night where each person at camp decided to stand up for victims of prejudice, not just for the LGBTQ community. From that night forward we decided to not watch as racism took over the planet, but act. That room of LGBTQ activists became a group of anti-hate activists. We stood together. We still stand together, and we will fight together.

Read another take on Southeastern Activist Camp from Douglas Williams[3].

Source URL: http://www.gsanetwork.org/news/blog/night-candles/09/05/13

Links:
[1] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/marcel-neergaard/taking-a-stand-against-anti-gay-bullying_b_3368922.html
[2] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/marcel-neergaard/george-zimmerman-verdict_b_3831764.html
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