

Jefferson County Teachers Association

2009 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Contest

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Category/Level: Middle / 8<sup>th</sup> grade

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## A Light in the Darkness

Love is the light that transforms our lives. I know this statement to be true from personal experience. The summer before seventh grade was one that had a great influence on my life. That summer, and each summer following it, I learned that I could transform the lives of others with my love and actions. By doing simple things, I was helping someone, and changing their life. I was even having fun while I did it. The experiences I had are some that are very important to me, and some that I will never forget.

Each summer, the main thing I look forward to is attending Passport. Passport is a camp for church youth groups to attend and have bible study, worship, and perform mission work. Mission work is when our bible study groups go out into the community and do work to help the members of that community. It could be painting a house, yard work, or working with children at a daycare center. Mission work is always the favorite part of Passport for most people, because it makes us feel like we are actually doing something that matters and we are helping others.

I have been to Passport twice. Each year, my mission project was to repaint and fix up a house. This past year, my group actually finished the house we started and almost finished another one. The houses that we fixed up were old and run down. They belonged to elderly people, or people who could not afford to fix it up. We helped them out. We scraped off old paint, put on new paint, cleaned up the yard, and scrubbed mold and such off the brick. We even washed the cars. To us, this work didn't seem like much, but to the person who lived there, it was a lot. For them, it was almost like having a brand new house. They couldn't believe that a group of teenagers, who had no connection with them, would want to spend a whole week of their summer working on their house.

That summer, I learned how important it is to help others. I always knew that it was a good thing to do, but I didn't really understand just how powerful my actions could be until I engaged on a mission project and helped someone. The whole week, I was working harder than I had ever worked before, and for someone that I didn't even know. The feeling I had when the owners came out and saw what we had done for them is one of the best things I have ever felt. The actions we took rewarded someone else, but it also rewarded us, because we knew that we just transformed someone else's life. We didn't give buy them a new house, or a new car, or give them a million dollars, but we used our love to fix up something old, and make it new.

I can connect this lesson and this experience to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in many ways. He taught that we should love one another and show our love. He knew that love really was the light that transforms lives. Without love, where would we be today? Not where we are now, that's for sure. Without our love, those people would still be living in a rundown house. Now, because we cared, they have a nicer place to live. This is all because of love. Dr. King did everything that he did

because of love. He told us that we should do things out of love, no matter what we are doing or who we are doing it for. That is what we did at Passport. It is what I do now.

Looking back on it, I realize that I wouldn't trade those moments for anything. My friends were all having a blast on vacation or shopping or hanging out together, but I was the one who had the best summer. I transformed the lives of others by using the one thing that I had, my love. The things I did were not huge, but the impact it had on the lives of the people that lived in those houses was. I was the light in their darkness.