

### **Accepting the Challenge**

On Thursday, October 6<sup>th</sup>, students of Marblehead High School accepted Rachel's Challenge. In two separate assemblies, each grade of the high school watched a presentation led by Luke Towle on Rachel Scott, the first victim in the Columbine High School shootings on April 20, 1999. Because of her immeasurable acts of kindness and compassionate spirit, Scott's family and friends started the "Rachel's Challenge" foundation. After her tragic death, her family came across her six personal diaries as well as school essays. Among the many statements she made, Scott wrote, "I have this theory that if one person can go out of their way to show compassion, then it will start a chain reaction of the same...My codes may seem like a fantasy that can never be reached, but test them for yourself." This statement has become the basis of "Rachel's Challenge"

The Rachel's Challenge program, brought to Marblehead High School by Loren Weston, Friends of the Marblehead Public School, and Marblehead Cares, includes a one hour school presentation and a 90 minute training session for both adult and student leaders during the school day, along with a powerful presentation for parents and other community members in the evening. As stated on their website, their mission statement is "to inspire, equip and empower every person to create a permanent positive culture change in their school, business and community by starting a chain reaction of kindness and compassion."

Scott's powerful impact continued from the school assembly to the training session. Almost one hundred students met and shared a time in which they needed "a Rachel." Senior Susie Likins, who participated in the session, shared her experience. "People went up to share a

time we could have used a Rachel and after that it didn't matter who you were or weren't friends with in that room because we were basically like one big family and it definitely gave me hope for the years to come at Marblehead High School. I knew it was a powerful training when even days after Rachel's Challenge we would see people in the hallways and give each other the biggest hugs because we knew things about them that we would have never known before.”

As a senior at Marblehead High School, I was fortunate to attend the Rachel’s Challenge assembly. After the presentation, I was inspired and hearing her story made me reflect on my own personal high school years. In just an hour, I learned of such a special, one-of-a-kind person who was wise beyond her years. I immediately signed the banner, marking my acceptance of Rachel’s Challenge. I admire her endless forgiveness, tolerance, and love, and I have made the promise to be more like her. A piece of her writing that struck me from her school essay was “Look hard enough and you will always find a light, and you can even help it grow, if you don’t walk away from those three impressions first.” I think the most important thing that I have learned in high school, and what I would pass on to those entering or just beginning their high school career, is to put side judgments. I have learned to always seek the light in people before you base your decision on what they look like, who their friends are, or how they dress.

On the back of one of her journals, Scott traced her hand and wrote “These hands belong to Rachel Joy Scott and will some day touch millions of people’s hearts.” Whether in some way she knew the extent of her impact or if this was just a far away dream, her statement has come true. Her story touched my heart and I know it did the same for the students sitting around me, as well as students across the country who have experienced the same presentation. I now have her

essay hung up on my bedroom door as a constant reminder to be honest, compassionate, and look for the best in every person. I have accepted the challenge. Will you?

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