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CFUW Headwaters- Building Bridges Scholarship

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Being a mixed-race individual never proved to be difficult in my early stages of life. With my father being Jamaican and my mother having a German and Ukraine background I was raised with the knowledge that ignorance in the presence of education was unacceptable in any form. Ironically, I was ignorant in my belief that most people also carried the same comprehension. That was until I moved to Shelburne.

It was one of the last days of summer. Two of my friends and I went to Greenwood park after school to enjoy the last of the year's warm weather. We hadn't been sitting at one of the picnic tables long when out of the corner of my eyes I could see a group of what looked like 12-year-old boys slowly moving in our direction. I could tell they were pointing at me and heard some of the whispers and knew exactly what was going to happen. Planting themselves directly behind us they must have hurled every racial slur they had in their vocabulary between their fits of laughter. I did my best to try and ignore them before one of my friends suggested we leave and that is exactly what we did. The scene replayed itself in my mind for a while after that, so much so that my English teacher pulled me aside after class to ask if something was wrong. Soon what started as a retelling of events turned into a venting session mixed with tears as I explained how isolated I felt in that situation and how frustrating it was being a minority in a small town. Her suggestion for me was to join social equity, a group within my school that’s purpose was to discuss social issues within the school and town. Arriving at my first meeting I immediately noticed that in the group of fifteen-plus people only two others were black (Janine Beckford and Kejuana Apple-Wayne). It became even more prevalent during the meeting, as important issues were discussed but none of them pertained to the black community and after discussing Beckford and Apple-Wayne we discovered this space did of fit us, so created our own. Together we rallied a small group of individuals and the Black chapter was born.

The meetings began with sharing experiences but it quickly spiraled into more, as we wanted to showcase our culture, our history, and our importance to Shelburne. We began planning Center Dufferin District High School's first-ever Black history celebration. It was a mix of educational seminars, food fairs, cultural dance and an assembly. Every week was something different focusing on a new theme or culture as we wanted everyone to get the opportunity to see themselves and experience something different. By the end of the year, I realized we had not only created an outlet for education and understanding but we had created the community I so badly carved. I connected with individuals based on our experiences in the world, but more importantly, I connected with individuals based on the world we wanted to create. I've had the pleasure of keeping in contact with faculty member Trinnada Thompson who continues to supervise and help run the black chapter. It's been amazing to hear of the group's new accomplishments along with seeing the number of people dedicated to social change grow every year.

For this reason, I believe I should be considered for the CFUW Headwaters- Building Bridges Scholarship. As I mentioned at the start of this essay I was raised to understand the importance of questioning personal bias and not being quick to pass judgment. Though through this long journey I've realized that was a privilege many are not afforded. I've been attending the University of Guelph pursuing a bachelor's in English. My goal is to become a teacher so I can have those tough conversations and build bridges of understanding through education for students and their peers. I also learnt how substantial representation is and having a group of individuals you relate to, yet this is a simple resource many students don’t have access to. YouthRex posted a study showing that though racial minorities represent nearly 47 percent of the population, they make up only 15 percent of educators. I also wish to become a teacher not only to be a role model students can physically see themselves in, but to be able to advocate for diversity with school boards and their schools factually.

As I am approaching my third year at Guelph I’ve been blessed with the opportunity to hopefully graduate early, meaning my studies there would be done by the end of 2023. Receiving this scholarship would have a major impact on my education as I could focus on my degree without having to pick up one or two jobs during the school year, as I have in the past. If selected for this scholarship I will remain dedicated to education and stay steadfast in my goal of serving my community. I will represent the organization well during my years of university and beyond. Thank you for your consideration in advance.