

Speak Up

Reinaldo Hermawan Liem

Bailey Oratorical Contest, March 5, 2014

Reinaldo Hermawan Liem, Class of 2014, is from Bandung, Indonesia. He is the winner of the 2014 Bailey Oratorical Contest.

Decades ago, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., said, “Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.” Yet even today, many people, you and me, we remain silent. The National Crime Victimization Survey reported that seventy percent of witnesses of assault tend to sit down and remain silent. Moreover, the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality shows that nearly all victims of racial and religious discrimination choose not to report to anyone. Like them, we say nothing and watch the destruction of things that matter in our life, such as equality, justice, and freedom. We have let history record our silence. Was Dr. King right? Have our lives begun to end?

I was born and raised in Indonesia. I have studied in Singapore and the USA for almost eight years. I have been taught that I am, we are the citizens of the world. In order for equality, justice, and freedom to ring for all, we, the citizens of the world, must speak up. It is because silence breeds torture, silence breeds pain, but speaking up brings change.

Let us think back to the year 1998. What was happening at Juniata College? I am sure that Juniata students were still complaining about Baker food and monstrous amount of work, and that classes were not being cancelled even though there were snowstorms and slippery sheets of ice. But what was happening in my home country, Indonesia, in 1998?

Indonesia was not as peaceful as Huntingdon. For thirty-two years, dictatorship crushed people’s voices and worsened ethnic-based class inequality. This enforced silence brought about the tragedy of human torture. In May 1998, there was a massacre of my ethnic group, Chinese Indonesians. The Chinese Indonesians, regardless of age, men and women, were tortured, raped, and burned to death. The *Jakarta Globe*, Indonesia’s leading news source, reported that more than 168 women were gang raped during the rioting. Many were raped in front of their family members. Over 1,000 people were killed.

Back then, I was a seven-year-old kid. My family and I hid at home, closed our curtains, and saw the military prowling outside of my house. The only defense we had was just a Taser in my Dad’s shivering hand. Hiding for our lives was bleak. It was frightening. It is a heartbreaking memory. The long suppression of people’s right to speak out resulted in this tragedy of human torture. Elie Wiesel, a Nobel Prize winner for speaking out against violence, wrote, “I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever

human beings endure suffering and humiliation. . . . Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.” Even though torture in Indonesia may seem miles away to you, the memory is still very close to me.

Today, you do not have to travel miles away to find pain caused by silence. This case happened a few years ago in our community. Our neighbor university, Penn State, faced a case of child sexual abuse by Jerry Sandusky. The prosecuting attorney reported that those forty-five victims had been silenced. The website PennLive.com by the *Patriot-News* reported that one was afraid of being rediscovered, some were dissuaded from being honest, and some were even being scolded and bullied into silence. Even the janitors, who witnessed the child sexual abuse in the year 2000, did not report this scandal. The news came out ten years after this act.

The American Psychological Association reported that adults who were sexually abused as children experience depression, anxiety, and self-destructive behaviors. Pennsylvania Governor Tom Corbett said, “[T]here are monsters among us. . . . [T]here are people who will hurt children for their own sexual gratification and . . . we do have to report that. We do have to follow up. . . . Unfortunately we will see conduct like that again because there are people who will do this again and again and again.”¹ These helpless young children needed justice. However, long silence brought eternal pain for those victims.

Let us imagine if people in Indonesia and people around the world had spoken up about class inequality sooner. Many tortured lives could have been saved. Imagine if people had spoken up sooner on behalf of those helpless children. Their pain could have been avoided. And imagine if heroes of the world, such as Martin Luther King, Jr., had chosen to remain silent. What would our society be like today? Silence breeds torture and pain. But when our voices are heard, speaking up can bring change for a better society.

Our home, Juniata College, is committed to creating an active, supportive, and safe environment, so that equality, justice, and freedom can ring for all. Juniata has a bias response team, the notice of concern, and multiple events such as the Bailey Oratorical, open forums, and student panels. The way for Juniata to fulfill its commitment is for us, the community, to use our right to speak out for ourselves and speak up for others. Through every piece of our writing, our artwork, and our speeches, Juniata and the world will hear our voices. Tonight, the world hears my and our voices. Together, we can create change for a better society by speaking up.

Decades ago, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., said, “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.” With love, courage is born. Through this courage, we, free citizens of the world, will speak up. We will be heard and create change. Never again will we let history record our silence. Let history record our voice!

NOTE

1. Ivey DeJesus, "Freeh reports [*sic*] teaches lesson to all universities to be active and responsive to abuse allegations: Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Corbett," PennLive.com, July 12, 2012, http://www.pennlive.com/midstate/index.ssf/2012/07/freeh_reports_teaches_lesson_t.html.