

Singapore HeritageFest 2009
“Our Neighbours’ Heroes” Storytelling Competition
Merit Award Winner (Upper Primary Category)



Participant's Details

Name: Sakthivel s/o Shanmugavel
Gender: Male
Age: 11-year-old
NRIC: SXXXX686H
Nationality: Singaporean
School: Bukit View Primary School

Martin Luther King: I Have A Dream

O God, when I have food,
help me to remember the hungry;
When I have work,
help me to remember the jobless;
When I have a home,
help me to remember those who have no home at all;
When I am without pain,
help me to remember those who suffer;
When I am angered,
Let's remember Dr King who fought with love to even those hated him.
Thank you for where we are and what we have today.
Amen.

I was in my friend Samuel's home for Thanksgiving dinner. Samuel is a 10-year-old African American boy whose family has made Singapore their home for the past eleven years. The Parker family is made up of Mr. and Mrs. Parker, Grandma Joe and my friend Samuel Parker. Samuel has been my neighbour for the past five years but this was the first time he had invited me for Thanksgiving dinner.

I was all ready to tuck into the succulent turkey when I saw a tear trickle down Grandma Joe's cheek. Everyone was silent for minute. Then we started eating dinner. Throughout dinner I kept thinking about who Doctor King was and why Grandma Joe cried when she said the prayer. After dinner I could not contain myself further and asked Samuel, "Who is Dr King?" He looked at me in disbelief for a second and dragged me to the living room where Grandma Joe was reading the bible on her rocking chair. He whispered something in her ear and ran off. Grandma looked at me kindly and called me by her side. Feeling apprehensive, I sat beside her. Samuel came back with a book entitled "I have a dream". Grandma Joe started talking in a shaky voice.

Sathy, Martin Luther King was a very brave, peace-loving noble man. He was born in a quiet street in a black neighbourhood in Atlanta on January 15, 1929. He was born during a time when black people did not have the rights which they have today. It was a bad time for us bad, bad time.

As Martin was growing up he had a close white friend whom he used to play with. But when they started school, his friend attended an all-white school. Martin had to attend an all black school. Soon they began to avoid Martin. One day when Martin went to call him out to play, the boy's mum told him, "Boy, you are coloured. My son can't play with you." Martin was puzzled. This was the first incident of inequality that led his mother to explain to him the history of slavery and segregation in America.

One day, his father took little Martin to town to buy a pair of shoes. While waiting for service the clerk shouted at them, "We don't serve coloured in the front of the store. Go to the back now!" Martin's father insisted that they be served in front or not at all and left the place when they were not served. All this made Martin wonder why black Americans were not equal to white Americans.

Once, when Martin was in high school he entered an oratorical contest. Although he performed well he did not win. After the competition, he and his teacher boarded the bus for the trip home. Soon the bus became crowded and the driver stopped the bus and ordered them. "Coloured people don't need to sit. Give up your seats to these fine people," he shouted. This was one of the incidents that made Martin the angriest.

Martin decided to become a church minister at age of 17 as he thought that was the best way to reach out to people. While studying to be a pastor he began to study the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, a man who brought about changes in India through "passive resistance". Martin saw this method of non-violent resistance as the answer to the unfair treatment blacks received in America. He graduated with a Ph.D. from Boston University and became the minister of a Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. From then on, he was known as Dr King.

It was there, that the turning point in bus segregation occurred. In 1955, a black woman named Rosa Parks was arrested as she refused to give up her seat to the whites in the bus. This time the news of Mrs. Park's arrest was heard around the world.

Dr King made use of this chance to lead the greatest bus boycott in the history of America. Flyers were sent out and Dr King addressed crowds in church meetings. Everyone stopped taking buses. It was very difficult to get to school or work. I cycled four miles everyday to school. But I and my family too wanted equal rights for our people. This protests lasted for 382 days. Finally in December of 1956 the Supreme Court ruled that bus segregation was unlawful. It was a great victory for Dr King and our people.

On August 28, 1963 Martin Luther King led a march for equal civil rights. Over 200,000 people marched from the Washington Monument to the Lincoln Memorial. It was here Dr. King delivered his "I Have a Dream" message. I was there too. I can remember him speaking.

I say to you today, my friends, so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal."

It was one of the greatest speeches in history. In 1964 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in Norway. It was because of Dr King's peaceful protests that we have equal civil and voting rights in America now.

During his life Dr. King was put in jail 30 times for his resistance. His house was bombed many times and his life was in danger. But he never gave up. He always believed that hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. Even then, he was assassinated on April 4, 1968.

Tears were trickling down Grandma Joe's cheeks. I realized that Dr King was indeed a great and noble African American hero.

Community from which the hero came from: United States of America