

## **10<sup>th</sup> Grade – Grand Prize**

### **Anton – Carl Schurz High School**

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. talked about the importance of being disciplined and not being a conformist. He said that these types of people, if they are dedicated to justice, peace and brotherhood, make the world a better place.

I saw close up how important these ideas are. I was born and raised in The Big O, a high-rise building in Cabrini Green. It was dangerous and I worried a lot. When I was home, I would hear gunshots and wonder if they were coming towards me and my family. I was nervous going outside, even just to throw the garbage out, and when I came home at night, I would run to the building as fast as I could. When my Momma was out, I was always worried that she wouldn't make it home. One of my brothers joined a gang and got in a lot of trouble. He was even shot last year. I worry that my little brother might also get in a lot of trouble in the streets. This was not the secure and livable world that Dr. King was dreaming about.

When I was nine years old, a woman named Miss Shanta would visit my building and ask to talk to my family. My Momma didn't really trust her and so wouldn't let her inside. One day when my Momma wasn't home, Miss Shanta knocked on the door and I let her in. She told me about an after-school program called Kid's Club and gave me a registrations package. When my Momma came home, I begged her to sign me up and, after a couple of weeks, she finally agreed to let me go.

Miss Shanta grew up in Cabrini Green herself. She saw everything that I saw, but had it even worse. When she was growing up, the gang wars were really bad. Lots of people were being shot and killed. Unlike a lot of the other girls growing up in the neighborhood, she didn't join a gang, use drugs or get into trouble. She was a good student and wanted to help other people who wanted a good life. She didn't just do what everyone else did but had her own thoughts and dreams. Miss Shanta became the first African American to join the staff of Kid's Club and run a team.

The first day I went to the club, I was nervous because I didn't know anybody. There were all these kids and all this noise and I just sat in the corner by myself. Miss Shanta came up and said, "Hey, little boy, let me show you around." She introduced me to everyone and showed me around the building. I was smiling inside because I was happy to see her, and I think she was happy to see me too. Kid's Club was really a cool place. When you came, you signed in and got some treats like Rice Krispy bars, crackers and juice. We then went to chapel and those that could memorize the verse got to play games and win prizes. After chapel, we worked on our homework with the help of a team leader. Miss Shanty was my first team leader. When homework was over, we got to chose between a number of activities like basketball, arts and crafts, drama, choir, praise dance and bucket drumming. Miss Shanta was in charge of arts and crafts. We ate dinner after this and then were taken home.

Miss Shanta became a second Momma to me. She taught me be to be focused on my schoolwork and my faith in God and to be patient with my family struggles. I can tell her anything and she would always understand and give me good advice. She even had to approve my girlfriends. Most importantly, she taught me not to get caught up in the street and all the things that everyone else was doing but to do my own thing. She always told me to be Anton, not anyone else. I would never have become a straight A student and a varsity basketball player without her help.

I think that Miss Shanta is exactly the type of person that Dr. King was referring to when he talked about building a secure and livable world. I owe her everything.