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The Bridge Is Built Before It Is Needed

A bridge is often unnoticed on an ordinary day. People cross a bridge without thinking, trusting that it will carry them safely to the other side. If water rises or the path becomes dangerous, then people will fully understand the importance of what was built long before the moment of crisis. In many ways, allies are the same. Strong communities are not only formed in moments of tragedy. They are built beforehand through respect, courage, and the willingness to stand beside others when it would be easier to stay silent.

I believe one of the greatest challenges in society today is that people do not choose to care until hatred becomes obvious. They wait until someone has already been excluded, humiliated, or harmed before deciding to speak. However, division usually begins in much smaller ways. It begins in stereotypes, careless jokes, ignorance, and the quiet acceptance of unfair treatment. If we only respond once the damage is visible, then we have already waited too long. Real bridges are built before they are urgently needed. Real allies act before silence becomes dangerous.

As someone who has lived around different cultures and backgrounds, I have learned how meaningful inclusion can be. Feeling welcomed is often created through small actions that may seem insignificant to others. Little things like a conversation or an invitation to chat can change how a person experiences a place. Similarly, indifference can make a person feel isolated. These experiences have taught me that belonging is not automatic. It is created with a purpose by people who choose to make room for others.

I didn't fully understand how important bridges were until I saw one actually make a difference in real life. One day, I was driving and came across a bridge that connected two areas that otherwise would have been completely separated. Without it, the trip would have taken much longer, and some places might not have been accessible at all. Seeing how much time and

distance it saved made me realize that bridges aren't just physical structures. Bridges are essential connections that people rely on every day.

That idea of connection also helped me understand a more meaningful kind of bridge. When I learned about the Holocaust, it felt like trying to understand something distant and difficult to fully grasp. However, through education, stories, and personal accounts, I was able to form a connection to that history. In a way, learning became a bridge between the present and the past, allowing me to better understand the experiences of others and recognize the importance of remembering them.

This lesson is especially important when remembering the Holocaust. The Holocaust did not begin with concentration camps. It began much earlier with hatred becoming normalized, with people being treated as less than human and with others choosing not to speak up. That history reminds us that silence can be dangerous. It also reminds us that indifference can allow injustice to grow which proves that allies matter. Every person who resisted hatred, protected another life, or refused to accept brutality became a bridge in a time when the world desperately needed one.

Building bridges and allies today means carrying those lessons forward. It means rejecting antisemitism and every form of hate. It means speaking with people rather than about them. It means defending someone who is being targeted, even when doing so may be uncomfortable. It means refusing to laugh at prejudice. It means understanding that respect should not depend on whether someone shares our religion, race, nationality, or beliefs.

One powerful example of an ally becoming a bridge during the Holocaust is Oskar Schindler. At a time when hatred and violence were widespread, Schindler used his position as a factory owner to protect more than a thousand Jewish lives. He risked his safety and resources to stand against injustice. He became a bridge between life and death, offering protection and hope to those who had been dehumanized by society. His actions demonstrate that even in the darkest moments, individuals have the power to create connection, dignity, and survival for others. Like

the bridges we build in our own lives, his courage reminds us that standing up for others can change the course of someone's future.

I believe college campuses such as SMU are important places for this work of building bridges. Universities bring together students from many backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives. That diversity creates the opportunity to learn from one another. Students need to choose openness and courage to build communities that are stronger than fear and hatred.

Many people imagine bridges as grand structures built in dramatic moments. In reality, most are built quietly, piece by piece, long before the storm arrives. The same is true for allies. They are formed through everyday acts of decency, respect, and moral courage. If we choose to build those bridges now, then when future challenges come, far more people will be able to cross safely together.