

EXHIBIT 6.17. Monsy and Michelle

I am Mexican American and my friends call me Monsy. In the seventh grade, I met Michelle, an African American. From the beginning of that year, I had always felt scared of African Americans, so when I first saw Michelle in my history class I did not want to sit close to her. Many of the other students did not want to sit close to her either. The boys always made fun of her. They laughed at her because of the way she dressed, how she combed her hair, and because of her skin color. Although the teacher always told the class to be quiet when we laughed at jokes about Michelle, sometimes we got so carried away we made her cry.

At first, I made fun of her, too, but only because I didn't want other students to make fun of me. Since I have a brownish complexion, I thought they would probably make bad jokes about me, too. After two weeks I got tired and sad that some students still continued to make fun of her. The following week, I began to sit next to her.

Michelle was surprised and smiled at me. Everyone in the class was shocked. They began making fun of me. They told me that I was dirty like her, that we were black because we didn't take showers. I felt very bad and I began to cry. I got so angry that one day, I stood up in class and shouted at the other students. They all stood quiet. I told them that it wasn't fair to make fun of people because of their appearance and culture. In fact, Michelle was the smartest student in class. Michelle was so happy I stood up for her that we became very good friends.

Through this experience I learned that all people are the same no matter what they look like. I learned that because of the different cultures we have in this country we can learn many new things that help us have a more interesting life. By speaking out and proving to others what you are able to do, you can make a difference. Michelle and I found out that each human being is unique in appearance, but many feel the same inside. As a result of this experience I learned not to be scared of...those from different cultures.

Source: Dresser, N. (1994). *I Felt Like I Was from Another Planet: Writing from Personal Experience*. Boston: Addison Wesley. Pearson Education.