Be A Light
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When the world is in pain, what can a teenager from Ohio truly do to make a difference? For a long time, I believed the answer was very little. After COVID, I found myself living passively—going through the motions, observing instead of acting. I saw suffering on the news, in my community, and even among people I loved, yet I told myself that someone else would step in. Over time, my conscience began to challenge that mindset. I realized that life is not measured by the quantity of what we do, but by the quality—and by whether we choose to act when our conscience tells us we should.

At fourteen, I was faced with my first real test of conscience. A local youth theater program in my small Ohio town was struggling to survive after being shut down for over a year. I loved theater, and I knew how much it meant to kids who relied on it as a creative outlet and a sense of belonging. My conscience kept nudging me with a simple question: *If you care this much, why aren't you doing something?*

Listening to that inner voice was terrifying. I had never produced, directed, marketed, or hosted a show before. It would have been much easier to stay quiet and let the program fade away. Instead, with the help of three incredible people, I decided to take the risk. That first show succeeded beyond anything I expected. Over the next three years, the project grew into a recurring community event that raised over $15,000 for local youth theater. The benefit wasn't just financial—it was seeing kids rediscover their confidence and passion. From that moment on, I learned that listening to my conscience could turn fear into purpose.

A year later, my conscience was tested again when I learned that my former elementary school teacher was battling cancer and facing serious financial strain. I knew I couldn't ignore that knowledge. I approached her with the idea of donating the proceeds from my livestock at the county fair to help cover her treatment. It required asking for support from local businesses and putting myself in a vulnerable position, but the alternative—doing nothing—felt wrong. Together, we raised $3,000.

That choice led to an unexpected consequence that changed my life. Through the fundraiser, I met Janine, who ran a livestock animal sanctuary in Northeast Ohio. She reached out because she had heard about the event and was interested in one of my goats. What began as a simple conversation grew into a meaningful friendship and an entirely new sense of responsibility.

Through Janine, I became involved in animal rescue work. I witnessed cruelty I will never forget—animals neglected, beaten, and starved. Many of these cases were connected to domestic abuse, where people stayed in dangerous homes because they feared what would happen to their animals if they left. These experiences were emotionally overwhelming, and at times I questioned whether I could handle what I was seeing. But my conscience reminded me that being a light does not mean avoiding darkness; it means showing up anyway.

The benefit of this work wasn't comfort—it was clarity. I saw the worst of humanity, but also the best. Volunteers who dropped everything to help. Strangers who opened their hearts and homes. I learned that compassion is contagious, and that choosing to act can inspire others to do the same.

This belief was reinforced last summer when a close friend and I organized a fundraiser for children with Williams Syndrome, a rare condition affecting development and the heart. This was the largest project I had ever taken on, and it pushed me beyond my limits. What started as a single event became an annual fundraiser that has helped over forty families and raised $45,000 for medical research.

The most powerful outcome wasn't the numbers—it was the joy. The children we met radiated light. Their resilience and happiness, despite immense challenges, changed how I see the world. They taught me that being a light isn't about being perfect or powerful; it's about being present, compassionate, and brave enough to care.

Looking back, I realize that every meaningful moment in my life came from listening to my conscience instead of my fear. There were unexpected challenges, emotional weight, and moments of doubt—but there were also lessons I will carry forever. I gained empathy, confidence, and an understanding that one person can make a difference, one choice at a time.

Being a light in the world does not require fame, wealth, or certainty. It requires the courage to listen to your conscience and act when it matters most. And when all is said and done, I can think of no greater purpose than that.