

You know I look back and think, "Haha that was super funny." But in hindsight, was it? This is a true story and is still on the internet in several articles in the Ventura County Star. On a so-called "issue" in late 2022 there were 3 kids wanting to do a small singing performance during a school lunch at Cabrillo Middle school. When 3 kids were going to perform in front of what they thought would be 10 kids it turned out to be 500. They were planning to sing an anti-drug song called "Crack is Whack" on our lunch break. All the kids at school thought it was funny but also wanted no part in what the school called a "riot." All the kids at school thought it was funny but also cool that they got kids together to sing a song in front of so many people. I was also very fascinated and remember thinking wow you must have a lot of guts to sing in front of people. However, school administrators quickly shut it down.

As kids went running, school administrators showed up. Lunch ended early and the singers were taken to the office. The 3 kids who were planning to sing stayed at the office. They also took kids who were using their phones to video to the office. Everyone with videos had to delete them. The police department was called and showed up. The main kid who was going to sing had a stage name "Little Pickle." After this happened a couple days later the 3 kids were forced to write an apology letter to the whole school and it was placed in the school newsletter. It was also read outloud in every first period class, the ultimate public shaming. The 3 kids also got a week long detention. Many kids at school were disappointed.

Many kids, including myself and my older brother, believed that their school handled this too extreme. Lots of kids were wondering why "Little Pickle" got in so much trouble for something that was meant to be harmless and funny. My brother and I decided to try to find a positive thing out of this and printed t-shirts that said "Justice for Little Pickle." We came up with the idea thinking it would bring some laughter to something that was meant to be fun. We advertised them by wearing them to school the next week. A lot of kids wanted them, even some teachers bought some. Instead of scrolling through Tik Tok, we were making t-shirts. The Vice-Principal called my brother into the office for wearing one. They called me up to the office for wearing one too. They tried to make me take my shirt off and I said calmly that if it wasn't against dress code I should be able to wear it. They called it offensive and said the word Little Pickle was banned from school for the rest of the year. This was really confusing, how could a word or words like that be a threat to safety? One thing I did understand was I wasn't going to have my freedom of speech taken away.

When more people arrived at school more people were getting dress code violations. Kids got together to stick up to support each other but got treated unfairly. This new rule of no Little Pickle stuff seemed really unfair. Shirts that kids had in their backpack, pickle pins and stickers were taken with new rules. As I look back I think to myself it was just a harmless shirt. This wasn't fair to everyone. The Vice Principal called my dad and tried to get him to side with the school and told him since he's a police officer they thought he would support the school. My dad told them he didn't think they were appropriately using the rules and told them he stands for the protection of freedom of speech.

A few days later the district superintendent got involved and a lawyer and the t-shirts were now allowed as well as the other pickle items. The school principals had over reached. My picture was in the Ventura County Star and there were a few articles. One of the article titles said "Ventura School Gets an F in Civics Lesson." I hope this essay inspires people to speak out and is beneficial to encourage people to use their voice in a peaceful and respectful way.

Thank you for taking the time to read my Rotary essay.