

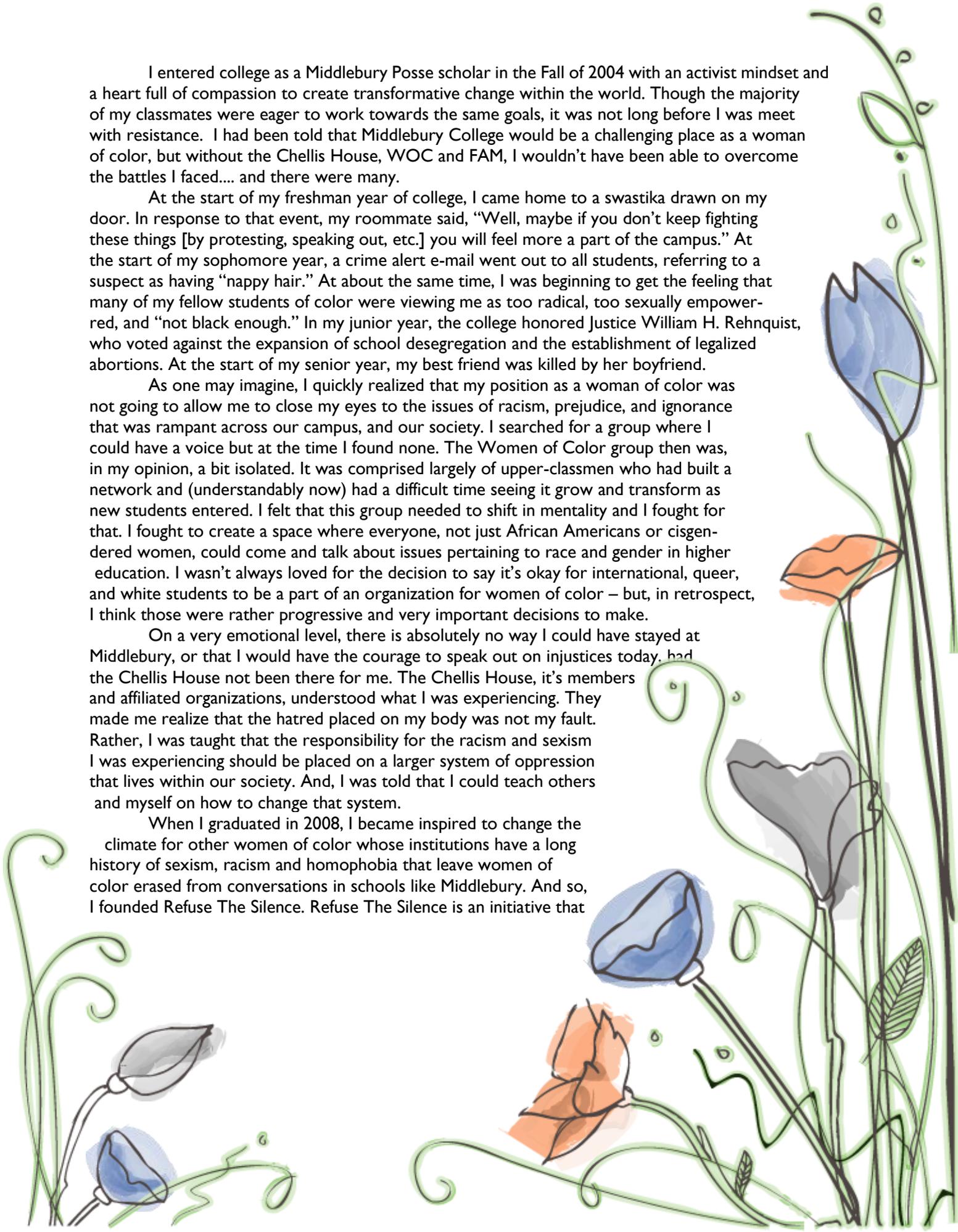
I entered college as a Middlebury Posse scholar in the Fall of 2004 with an activist mindset and a heart full of compassion to create transformative change within the world. Though the majority of my classmates were eager to work towards the same goals, it was not long before I was met with resistance. I had been told that Middlebury College would be a challenging place as a woman of color, but without the Chellis House, WOC and FAM, I wouldn't have been able to overcome the battles I faced.... and there were many.

At the start of my freshman year of college, I came home to a swastika drawn on my door. In response to that event, my roommate said, "Well, maybe if you don't keep fighting these things [by protesting, speaking out, etc.] you will feel more a part of the campus." At the start of my sophomore year, a crime alert e-mail went out to all students, referring to a suspect as having "nappy hair." At about the same time, I was beginning to get the feeling that many of my fellow students of color were viewing me as too radical, too sexually empowered, and "not black enough." In my junior year, the college honored Justice William H. Rehnquist, who voted against the expansion of school desegregation and the establishment of legalized abortions. At the start of my senior year, my best friend was killed by her boyfriend.

As one may imagine, I quickly realized that my position as a woman of color was not going to allow me to close my eyes to the issues of racism, prejudice, and ignorance that was rampant across our campus, and our society. I searched for a group where I could have a voice but at the time I found none. The Women of Color group then was, in my opinion, a bit isolated. It was comprised largely of upper-classmen who had built a network and (understandably now) had a difficult time seeing it grow and transform as new students entered. I felt that this group needed to shift in mentality and I fought for that. I fought to create a space where everyone, not just African Americans or cisgendered women, could come and talk about issues pertaining to race and gender in higher education. I wasn't always loved for the decision to say it's okay for international, queer, and white students to be a part of an organization for women of color – but, in retrospect, I think those were rather progressive and very important decisions to make.

On a very emotional level, there is absolutely no way I could have stayed at Middlebury, or that I would have the courage to speak out on injustices today, had the Chellis House not been there for me. The Chellis House, its members and affiliated organizations, understood what I was experiencing. They made me realize that the hatred placed on my body was not my fault. Rather, I was taught that the responsibility for the racism and sexism I was experiencing should be placed on a larger system of oppression that lives within our society. And, I was told that I could teach others and myself on how to change that system.

When I graduated in 2008, I became inspired to change the climate for other women of color whose institutions have a long history of sexism, racism and homophobia that leave women of color erased from conversations in schools like Middlebury. And so, I founded Refuse The Silence. Refuse The Silence is an initiative that



has been collecting the personal stories of women of color at elite liberal arts institutions to show other women that they are not alone in their journey. While I am still working on Refuse The Silence, I have also recently obtained my masters in Gender and Peace building from the UN University for Peace in Costa Rica, I am teaching courses at Hunter College on Feminism, New Media and Health, and working at the Arab-American Family Support Center in Brooklyn.

The Chellis House provided me with the safe space to explore my activism and to challenge systems of oppression both locally and globally. While I was always an activist, it was powerful women like Karin Hanta, Sujata Moorti, Laurie Essig and Jennifer Herrera, who gave me the political context and terminologies to express what I was going through. And it was the community that I found through Women of Color and Feminist Action at Middlebury, who provided me with the emotional support to keep pushing to become the person, and full time activist, I am today.

So with that, Happy Anniversary Chellis House and WAGS! You certainly showed me a little bit of what peace means, taught me how to achieve it and showed me a lot of love and compassion while on the journey.

-Morgane

