

## **Rattling The Cage**

By Ellie Tinsky, Walt Whitman High School

Mylar space blankets are lightweight and excellent insulators. They provide warmth by preventing the escape of body heat, even in freezing temperatures. I knew their use in hot weather was considered counterproductive when I wrapped my little sister in one and placed her in an 8-foot-high cage. It was nearly 90 degrees under the blazing sun. Ten-year-old Neve sat on the ground holding the foil wrap uncomfortably around her shoulders as she stared despondently at the house in front of her. We had set her cage in the middle of the street. Instantly, she became a spectacle, drawing the attention of hundreds of people. Tourists offered her water; journalists took photographs; a little boy—maybe 5 years old—grabbed the cage with both hands and shook it violently in his effort to free her. He cried uncontrollably when his parents instructed him not to interfere.

Neve refused every offer of help, food and drink. Exhibiting what seemed like profound hopelessness, she would not even stand. She sat on the ground, sweating under the space blanket, as the discomfort grew among all onlookers. This was working.

We put that cage in the middle of Pennsylvania Avenue on June 23, 2019, to protest the Trump administration's policy of separating immigrant children from their parents. The news showed screaming children in huge cages, suffering without beds, soap or contact with their parents. Originally, both my sister and I planned to sit in protest opposite the White House that day. Setting up, we changed our plan slightly. Our sibling resemblance is fairly strong, but my olive skin, brown hair and eyes couldn't be more different from Neve's fair skin, blond hair and green eyes. Perhaps I looked a bit like some of the kids being held in those makeshift immigration centers, but Neve certainly did not.

People were disturbed to witness this little blond girl in this austere shelter. An endless stream of strangers practically begged to help. We were disrupting their vacations, their outings and their weekends. We told them that Neve was pretending but that other children were in much worse situations and that those kids needed their help. Those kids did not have their 13-year-old sisters sneaking them freezie-pops and bottled water.

It shouldn't take a cute blond girl from the suburbs to remind adults that no children should be made to suffer. I don't know if our efforts made a difference for any of the children we wanted to help, but we saw it make a difference to hundreds of people who had not been focusing on this problem. We were 10 and 13 years old, and we understood that there was not much we could do to change this policy, but we couldn't do nothing.