

Published letter on racism punctuated with teen's tears

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Rick Lee sat nervously on a table in the school library in front of all his classmates.

The student from H.E. Bariault Catholic Junior High School didn't think he had done anything wrong, so what were his teachers doing there?

Much to Lee's relief, they were gathered to see him receive the news he had become a published author at age 14.

Edmonton human rights lawyer Shirish Chotalia presented Lee with a copy of her book, *The Annotated Canadian Human Rights Act 1994*. Included in the foreword of the book is a letter Lee wrote to *The Journal* about how he experienced racism.

"I felt Rick's letter was a good example of the types of discrimination that people do experience even here in Canada," said Chotalia. "We have made progress in human rights and treating people fairly, but we have a long way to go."

In the letter, Lee wrote about

how some kids made fun of his Chinese heritage, yelling racial slurs and telling him to go back to his own country. He questioned why his family came to such a bad country and told how he wished he were white.

Lee penned the letter, which won *The Journal's* Golden Pen Award for February 1994, to help him express his bottled-up feelings. He never dreamed it would lead to all of this attention.

"It was just something I wanted to do," said Lee. "I just thought someone would read it and maybe appreciate the writing I have."

Lee found out how appreciative his friends were. He was recently voted next year's class president. Normally, this is not such a big thing, but Lee is only in Grade 7 and the school includes Grade 8 and 9 students.

Before the assembly was dismissed, Lee read the letter again. His voice cracked as his eyes filled with tears.

"I hope people stop and think who they are hurting and doing to other people when they say something like that about other people's culture."