Dear Orson Scott Card,

Recently at my school, an administrator was forced to resign because of his marriage to another man. Although I know you are not supportive of gay rights, many of your books have strongly conveyed to me the idea that all people should be treated with respect and understanding. I have seen this philosophy expressed in several of your writings – including Ender's desire to understand and communicate the emotions of the Hive in Ender's Game – but I think it comes across most clearly in Pastwatch. In this book, Christopher Columbus believes that all brown-skinned people are worth less than white-skinned people and that he is therefore justified in enslaving them. Of course, this was a common belief during Columbus' time period and Christopher is simply blindly following what others believe. In your book, however, you suggest that it is not morally acceptable to simply follow the majority. Through conversation and example, Diko prompts Christopher into thinking more deeply about his ideals. He realizes that to follow the words of Jesus (Christopher is a devoted Christian) he must treat all people as equals. Once he realizes this he wants to take action to make things right.

I have always known that I believe in equality for all people but I have rarely taken action on my belief. While I would never call someone names or exclude them for who they are, I have not stood up against a group that is acting on prejudice. It was hard for me to take a stand against what I was worried was the attitude of the majority. I felt that gay rights are an awkward topic that mostly went undiscussed. I did not know how my friends felt on the issue. I was frightened that it might make me an outcast; that people would disagree and argue; that my friends might ostracize me for having a separate idea. I wanted to promote my ideas without the conflict that follows. Pastwatch clearly showed me that this is not likely. In Pastwatch, once Christopher takes actions on his new ideas about slavery, he is imprisoned by his crewmates. After Christopher escapes from captivity he flees to a mountain village. In the village he is treated kindly and he eventually emerges a better person than at the beginning of the

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book. Christopher needed to fully commit to acting on his new ideas before he could become a truly good person.

When the administrator at my school was forced to resign, protests quickly followed. I began to see that even though I was worried some people might disagree with me, I had to take action if I wanted change. It was necessary for me to act, even if that action might cost me something. I thought back to Pastwatch and how the characters gave everything to promote the change that they wished to see. While Christopher emerged as a better and happier person by acting on his beliefs, Tagiri and Kemal both die for what they believe. They know that the cause they were fighting for was important enough to sacrifice their lives and do they do so without regret. Hunahpu and Diko gave up everything they knew to make the world a better place for others. In fact, in an act of amazing bravery, everyone in their world sacrifices their version of time for a better version of humanity. This struck a chord with me. They knew with absolute certainty that they were going to die if they made that decision. It takes incredible courage to sacrifice your life for other people. They had themselves and their own families to worry about but they gave themselves up for others. They thought that it was more important for the principles and values of humanity to continue, even if they had to die. When I read this part of Pastwatch, I was amazed by this courage and generosity. It made me realize I should strive for just a fraction of the goodness they had. They lived and loved and gave it all up. I wondered where that courage came from and realized it had to be from believing completely that what they were doing was right.

Inspired by these examples in your book, I took a chance and joined the protesting. I wanted to act on what I know is right. I made posters and spread the word. I went to several rallies over the next week and used my voice to contribute to the cause. At one rally, I stood in the cold for over an hour and by the end my throat was sore and my arm ached but when I got home and lay down I felt satisfied. I felt

that maybe this small action could change the world. I knew that it had changed me. It felt good to take

a stand for what I believe. I wondered if Christopher, Tagiri, Diko, Kemal or Hunahpu felt that way. If,

even as they gave up everything, they felt like they had become stronger as they tried to help others. I

know that I felt that way. <u>Pastwatch</u> showed me that to be the person I want to be, I must face my fears

and voice my beliefs – even if they are different from the beliefs of people around me. The characters in

<u>Pastwatch</u> face life or death consequences, which I do not, but this book did teach me that I should not

be afraid to make sacrifices or take risks. Like Christopher later in the book, I believe all human lives

have equal value. By acting on the ideas in <u>Pastwatch</u>, I made a small change in myself. I hope that if I

persist I will make the change in the world that I desire.

Sincerely, *Owen Bernstein*

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