

Bullying

Bruce Sutchar
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Recently someone stopped me on the street and asked me to sign a petition to end bullying in public schools. Then over Christmas, I read an article on bullying by Harry Mark Petrakis. When I read the article it brought back some deeply repressed memories. I went to public school in Chicago. The school was 95% Jewish and the students came from 98% intact two-parent homes in a nice middle-class neighborhood in West Rogers Park. What we called a gang was when 3-5 kids who hung out together.

In 1958, the Yankees were playing the World Champion Milwaukee Braves in the World Series. I made a 5 cent bet on the Braves with the school bully Jerry Leon. The Braves were ahead 3 games to 1 when I told my dad what I had done. He advised me to cancel the bet the next time I saw the bully. I did this, but in a very sheepish and quiet way.

Now I should have known better than to have bet with him. Not only was he older than me (I was in 5th grade) but I had watched him in a fist fight one time, where after he was losing he began to fight dirty by kicking and eventually bloodied his opponents face.

Then the Yankees came back and won the next three games to win the world series. At which point the bully demanded the 10 cents that I owed him. Maybe I am righteous, maybe just stubborn, but I refused to pay him. This resulted in my being harassed every day at recess in the school yard both physically and by calling me a “welcher” in front of all my friends. Finally, my dad finally came to school and told the bully to back off.

It is now almost sixty years later. Bullying is becoming a big time school problem and I still remember every detail of this harrowing experience in my life. I could have given the bully the 100% inflated ten cents that he claimed I owed him but I knew it was not right. So I endured until my father came to school and ended the harassment. Why didn't I tell my father sooner, before all the days of harassment

I do not know. Why not one of my friends stood up for me is another unanswered question. But, “boys will be boys.” “Real men don't ask their fathers to rescue them.” But if this could have happened in an educated middle-class neighborhood, with both parents present in almost all the homes, what can happen in a school filled with gang bangers and single parent households?

What I think is important is that parents and teachers realize that today, with the internet, texting, and all the other electronic ways that kids can be bullied, we must realize the impact that this can have on a young child's persona. And I am sure that kids still don't run to their parents for help.

Today, we have all heard stories about some of the things that the True Children went through. Let us not belittle the impact that this may have had on shaping who they are today.

By Bruce Sutchar