



Catching It FROM ALL SIDES

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Bullies aren't really that big, and you see that when you're older

I went to high school with a girl who used Nair hair remover on her upper lip. I say "used," but to my knowledge—and everybody's knowledge, I guess, it was only one time. That one time left her with little white, untanned blotches if she took in too much sun. Why would she do this? Some classmate boys gave her a rough time about the hair on her lip.

The particular boys that did this weren't focused on this poor girl all of the time, mind you. It just so happened that something was said or noticed and that started the ball rolling. She was really only teased just the one time, but that's all it took to result in permanent changes, or in her case, permanent chemical damage.

This most certainly is a case of school bullying. Although these few boys didn't dwell on this particular girl all the time, what they did to her is still called being a bully.

A couple of years ago GFW Elementary and Middle School Principal Ralph Fairchild allowed me to speak to his school kids about bullying. What I told the kids made many of them laugh. From my position on stage in front of the microphone, I saw giggles and smiles. That was fine, because the truth be told, what I was

telling them is truly knee-slapping funny. I did notice, however, there were a few kids that weren't really laughing, but instead had a look on their faces, almost as if they were saying, "Tell us more! Tell us what happened to you so we know we're not alone."

I don't think it's too much to assume to think that we have bullying problems right here in our own schools. One thing's for sure, my impression of the teachers we have today is one of more understanding to a child's needs and situations, which in turn results in less tolerance for bullying of any kind.

In ninth grade, showers after Phy-Ed was mandatory. Thank goodness. If it weren't for the 30-second sprinkle some of those boys were taking, it's safe to say they would never have taken one at all. Let's just say Mondays were the worst when it came time to sit next to one of those dirty little buggers in the classroom. Their little naked dance through the shower heads did indeed improve their smells little. I guess in some respects, the breakfast programs the schools offer now are similar to the showers back then: if it wasn't for the initiative of the school, the kids just plain wouldn't have it.

The terrible thing about showering after Phy-Ed was the rowdiness in the shower room itself. This I told to the kids at the Middle School.

It wasn't that any of us had a choice of going in there, as I mentioned, showering was mandatory. The horror stories alone about years past were enough to make a grown man cringe.

One of the stories I heard was that in the mid to late 70s, one boy in particular was fond of snapping his naked classmates with his wet towel. After hearing a legend such as this at the beginning of the year, it wasn't any surprise that some joker felt he needed to assume the role.

As the legend went, one boy received a death-dealing blow to his privates, which landed him immediately in the hospital and brought all kinds of grief for the towel snapper. Regardless of hearing of the outcome of that story, somebody was always snapping a towel at someone else.

If the boys with the towels weren't in a snapping mood on any given day, then they were bound and determined to antagonize someone in a different way: they would spit loogies. If you were unlucky enough to be the recipient of one of their hearty nose snags, there was little that could be done except to go back under the shower head—where you just came from—and get the disgusting wad to slide off your back under the water. If these bullies were really organized, one of them would be on standby to nail you again while you were making a bee-line for the locker room.

One day it happened that I was one of the unfortunate ones who got nailed in the middle of my back with an infamous

loogie. The roars of laughter was always practically deafening every time they made their target.

Under the shower head I went to get that thing rinsed off of me. There was always one bad guy that played good guy and let you know you had it rinsed away.

Just as I was nearing the shower room doorway, headed for my locker to get dressed, I heard the chest-rattling of another phlegm ball being coaxed up for a spit. In no time at all I felt one again, this time on the back of my arm. Man, was that nasty.

Under the showerhead I went, and this time I had a plan. The shower was a centralized post, coming up out of the floor in the middle of the floor drain. On this large post were several showerheads, spraying water in 360 degrees. As soon as I knew the loogie was off my arm, I pushed off from the post with one foot and launched myself completely clear of the shower room. It worked. I made it out without another incident. Had I failed, the urinators would have been next. These, too, were another reason for having to go back under the showerhead.

As I flew from the shower room, I tried desperately to turn and angle my run on the water-soaked floor. No luck. Instead I went down and slid straight for the locker room door, which opened into the hallway. Luckily, no one was around to see this funny sight, and I was able to get up and get back to my gym locker and get dressed.

Is it funny? Now, yes. At the time, not so much. I've seen three of these bullies since ninth grade. I'm now bigger than each of them. Funny how a person's world can be so small, making everything look so big.