

School Bullies

Probably everyone has been threatened, intimidated, knocked down, punched, harassed, and victimized by a school bully. I had more than my share of bullying during my younger years while attending the four-room Marriott school in Weber County, Utah from the 3rd through the 8th grades (1927-1933). Marriott was a little farming town located about 5 miles northwest of Ogden.

The 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades met together in the downstairs north room. These grades were taught by Miss Buelah Stallings, a teacher I dearly loved. The 1st and second grades met together in the downstairs south room. These grades, which my younger brothers attended, were taught by Miss Robbins. A cement pavement leading from a north-south dirt road on the east side of the school led to a cement stairway and double-door. Inside the doors, there was a small hallway where a stairway to the north led to Mr. Shupe's room, located over Miss Stallings' room. Mr. Shupe taught the 6th and 7th grades. A second stairway went south and ended at Mr. Barnett's room. He taught 8th and 9th grades in the same room and was the school principal. The two story school, which was made of yellowish brick, was demolished many years ago.

School was rather formal with regards to entering and leaving. One did not enter the school before the first classes in the morning until the teachers appeared on the front steps, even in winter! Then Mr. Barnett would blow his whistle which gave the signal for us to line up in military fashion in order of our classes, the youngest class being first. Mr. Shupe would then place the needle on the Victrola (non-electronic, of course) phonograph record. Then to the tune of "O the Monkey Wrapped His Tail Around the Flag-pole" we would march, in step, into the school and to our rooms. The name that I gave to that marching tune was, of course, not the right one. To this day, however, I can sing the tune to those words but do not know the actual name of the march. I have looked through the marching band music books, trying to find it, but have not been successful.

Leaving the school house was the reverse of entering but less formal. We would march out of the building in class order but not to Mr. Shupe's Victrola. After marching down the front steps onto the walk, we were called to a halt by Mr. Barnett's whistle. A second blowing of the whistle dismissed us for the morning and afternoon recesses. We lined up again to march to our classes, without the Victrola when the recesses were over.

I loved school and thoroughly enjoyed listening to what Miss Stallings was teaching in the 4th and fifth grades when I was in the 3rd and likewise for the other grades. I'm very glad that my early schooling followed this "several grades in the same room" pattern.

Some students, particularly boys, disliked school and would often say, "why do I have to learn math or some other subject, I'm only going to be a farmer and don't need it". When the school term ended each year, the teachers would return all of our papers to us. Many students would run down the dirt roads to their homes tearing and strewing their papers along the way while chanting, "No more papers, no more books, no more teachers with cross-eyed looks". Not me! I was teary-eyed over school ending and treasured my papers.

One day, in the 5th grade, two big bullies got hold of me at the back black board while Miss Stallings was occupied with teaching the 3rd grade. They were twisting my arm behind my back trying to make me tell them who "my girl" was. They were hurting me so badly that I said, "Stella", the girl that sat in front of me in her seat. My seat was the last in one of the two rows that constituted the 5th grade class. The bullies released me after I "confessed", and the word of who my girl was quickly spread to my fellow fifth graders, including Stella. Before I knew it, Stella got behind my seat, leaned over, and gave me an upside-down kiss on the forehead!

I liked it, even though she was not really my girl. My girl was Wanda, but I never let Wanda know it.

Other bullying was more insidious. My nature has always been peace-loving, but

the bullies were always trying to force me in to a fist-fight, something that I abhorred. They would square me off with one big bully and try to force me into a fight by having him punch me several times, usually making my nose bleed. Another tactic used to try to get me mad enough to fight back was to take my bicycle away from me and "ditch it" somewhere so that I could not find it.

I was so fearful of these bullies that I looked for a hiding place. I found one in the south-west corner of Miss Stalling's room where there was a return air opening at floor level about two feet square. There was no screen over the opening. I crawled in one day after everyone was gone and discovered that the vertical air passage contained a black cast-iron sewer vent pipe that went all the way to the roof. I climbed the pipe with an assist from the protruding pipe joints. After this discovery, I climbed up there almost every day after school and clung there until I was sure that my tormentors were gone.

In good weather the boys played "work-up" baseball of the hard-ball variety. The girls played softball. In work-up baseball you have a peck-order: 1st, 2nd, and 3rd man at bat, catcher, pitcher, 1st baseman, 2nd baseman, etc. and on to left field. If you don't have enough players, you double up to cover the bases, what else!

At recess, the peck-order was determined at the time you marched out of school at recess. As you were standing on the walk, Mr. Barnett would blow the whistle. This was the signal for all the boys to run for the backstop. The backstop consisted of three fairly straight limbs cut from a large willow tree to which chicken wire netting was nailed. The closest tree to the walk was interesting because it had taken root and had limbs growing on it. The order in which you reached the growing willow pole determined the peck-order. I was a fast runner. Even as a 5th grader, I could beat a 9th grader and, consequently be up to bat first.

The bullies didn't like this and assigned a couple of their compatriots to hold me back so that I wouldn't get up to bat so often. Incidentally, while playing baseball, I was hit squarely in my right ear with a fly-ball to left field. I was positioned to catch the long fly but a fellow student hollered, "let me have it, let me have it." I decided to let him have it and turned my head (he was just in front of me). He ducked and let the ball go by and I got it in my right ear! The ear ached something awful for a couple of weeks and gives me some loss of hearing to this day.

After being hit in the ear, we had a play practice at the Marriott Ward Meeting House not far from the school. State and church were not widely separated in those days. Religion Class was taught after school at the school. And since the school did not have an auditorium or stage or place to play basketball, those events took place at the church.

I don't remember the title of the play. It was a musical and I and other dancers were dressed up as Dutchmen. My ear ache was killing me and I had a tough time doing my part. Somehow, I got too close to the foot-lights and kicked one of them out. I felt a weight of responsibility and thought I must pay for a new light. But Miss Stallings assured me that this would not be necessary. She also sensed that there was something the matter with me, and learning of my problem, sent me home. Home and church were close to each other and about one and a half miles away from home. There was no bussing in those times. I can remember wading through waist high drifts in very cold temperatures at times.

Well, I must continue on about bullies. I mentioned that I could run fast. The bullies and others would not let me play football—yes the kind where you get tackled. They always told me that I was too little. No one had any protective clothing or gear.

One time, they did let me play; probably because they had it in mind to mash me to pieces. A center hiked the ball back to me. I took it and dodged every player on the field to make a touch down. Considering this to be a fluke, they let me carry the ball again. I did the same thing, evaded everyone and made another touchdown. After that, they used other excuses to keep me from playing.

I hesitate somewhat to relate what I am sure the bullies considered to be the ultimate insult to a human being. All four school teachers were having an afternoon

meeting at a location away from the school and had left no one in charge.

Our families clothing at home in good weather was one pair of J.C. Penney's bib overalls that cost 69 cents. We wore no shirt, no underwear, and no shoes and our feet got tough enough to run through hay stubble. For school, we added a shirt, stockings and shoes.

With the teachers away, things got very rowdy. The bullies were out of hand and conspired to commit what they believed, I'm sure, the "greatest of all insults". It is sad that the most obscene words used in swearing, in dirty stories, and in crude and wrongful acts of all kinds vilify the greatest of God's gifts-- to mankind, the gift of creating bodies for our Heavenly Father and Mother's spirits.

They captured me, through me to the ground, pulled off my overalls, and left me without cover, fully spread, flat on my back, with one guy on each arm and leg.

Then they invited the students over to view me and took turns spitting on what you can imagine. I was surprised that so many of the girls came over for a look.

I've often wondered why I didn't approach my parents about my bully problems. I must have felt that I would be in even bigger trouble if my parents told the bullies parents or the school teachers.

Who do bullies pick on and why? Even though I could run fast, I was small and scrawny. When it came to muscles, I did not have them. Bullies pick on the weak. Also, they tend to not like school or succeed in it. Perhaps they even envy kids who do well in their school work. I was a kid who excelled in school. I'm bragging now but forgive me if I brag some more.

When I was in the fourth grade, aged nine, the Weber County school district gave every student from the first to the twelfth grade a comprehensive, progressively difficult examination, encompassing material selected from the 1st to 12th grade subject matter. We were free to work on any item on the exam, going as far as one could in the allotted time.

When the results were in, my parents were notified that I had the highest score of any student in the entire district. One would have expected that honor to have gone to a 12th grade high school senior!

I credit this early accolade to my mother and father. We had the Junior classics and other good books in our home. Our parents read to us when we were too young to read. Additionally, I checked out numerous books from the public library on a biweekly basis, returning those read and studied and checking out new ones.

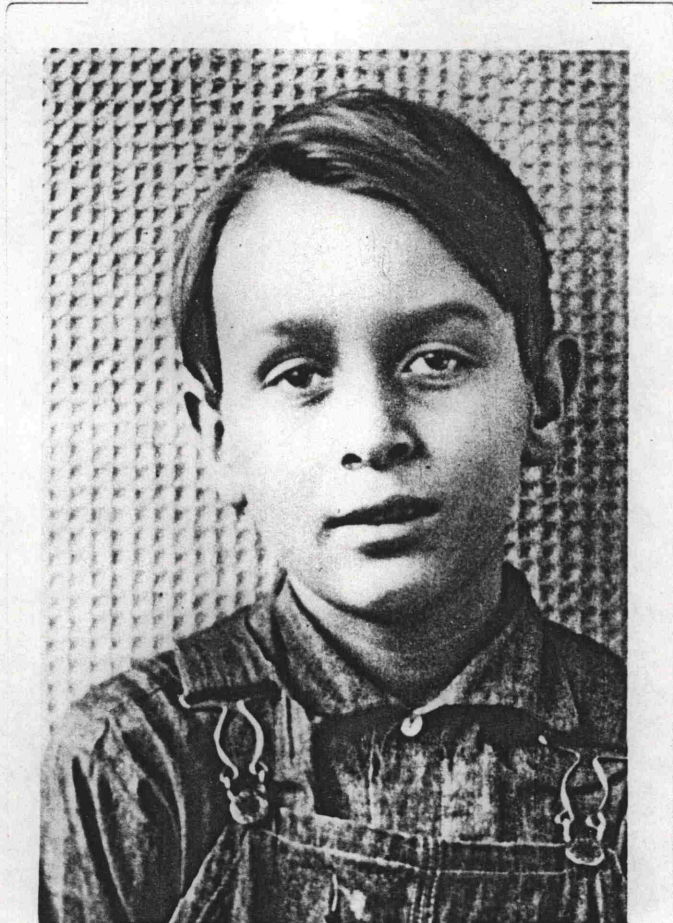
One or the other of my parents pulled a "Red Racer" wagon the five miles to town in the summer and pulled a "Flexible Flyer" sled in the winter, every other week, to get groceries in town and get books from the Carnegie Free Library located at Washington Avenue and 26th streets. I walked beside my mother or father along the Southern Pacific railroad tracks as one of them pulled our meager conveyance along the south-easterly railroad curve until we encountered Wall Avenue near Scocroft's factory. We then went south on Wall until we reached 26th street and turned east to Washington Avenue.

The library was a wondrous place. I explored the world there, discovered science, technology, machinery, photography, radio, mathematics, and more and took to books like a fish out of water. Electricity and machinery especially captivated me, and it was there that I found my early heroes: Thomas Edison and Henry Ford.

After the school board discovered me, three experts came to have a look at the "boy wonder" and meet with my parents, my teacher and the principal. They shook my hand and warmly congratulated me, but the only thing that I remember coming from the meeting was the determination that I was terribly undernourished. They gave my mother recommendations for an improved diet, but we were too poor to afford it.

Mr. Barnett and Miss Stallings met separately with the experts. I don't know what they talked about.

For me, nothing changed, life went on as before, bullies and all.....HTH



Fourth Grade School Picture of
H. Tracy Hall, age 9 years at
the Marriott School