

Teachers As Bullies

Until I was in the fourth grade, I loved school. And I loved my teachers. I presume I was like my own children and considered that the teacher was smarter even than parents, and what they said was the gospel truth. The fourth grade was agony for me.

I will not give the name of my fourth grade teacher. I have since found out that she was not well the year I was in her class. Perhaps, therefore, she is to be forgiven for making my fourth year of school a living hell. At least that is how it seemed to me at the time. For this story I will call her Miss Smith.

I was definitely the “goat” that year. I hated to go to school each day, because I knew that I would not and could not please that teacher. Indeed, she seemed to find something each day to criticize me about.

I had always been a good student, but this teacher made me feel dumb and ugly. I had mumps early in the year and it may have affected my general health. I missed about a month of school and although my mother tried to keep me current in my studies, it took me a while to master the four times tables which I had missed. I can remember Miss Smith making comments about my “breathing through my mouth” and “Why don’t your parents have your adenoids taken out?” These comments were made in front of the class.

She had her students do a lot of board work, which I had formerly enjoyed. This year, I was so afraid of Miss Smith that I could not think clearly if she was near me. I can remember one time that she was so upset with my failure to see some mathematical point she was trying to have me understand, that she actually tried to hit me. Fortunately my cringe took me out of her aim and she hit the blackboard instead.

I was always thin. Mother once said that her children were always chubby babies, but that once they started to walk they became toothpicks. She said she had more than one teacher who advised her about “nutrition” and worried about the health of the Langford children. What they didn’t know was that my mother was a student of good nutrition and did her utmost to see that we had a balanced diet and ate plenty of fruits and vegetables. In fact, another of my unpleasant childhood memories is the taste of the cod-liver oil mother gave us daily so that we would not get rickets. Yuck!

I may have been a very unattractive child in the fourth grade. Even so, I know now that no matter what my problems were, no teacher should have ridiculed me as that teacher did. I do not know why I didn’t confide in my mother. She would have helped me, I am certain. Instead, I endured that teacher in silence.

Did I ever win Miss Smith over? No. But fortunately for me, my fifth and sixth grade school experiences reverted once again to happy ones, and I survived Miss Smith. The next year Miss Smith died. I do not know what her health problems were, but it is sad when a young child is not sorry when she hears of the passing of one of her former teachers. And it is unfortunate that she was miserable enough to single out any child for the verbal abuse I received that year. I never knew if I was the only one who felt that way about Miss Smith. I hope I was.