

School Bullies

H. Tracy Hall 02-07-95

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 third through the eighth grade (1927-1933). Marriott was a little farming community located about five miles northwest of Ogden.

The third, fourth, and fifth grades met together in the downstairs north room. These grades were taught by Miss Buelah Stallings, a teacher I dearly loved. The first and second grades met in the downstairs south room. These grades 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 led to the north to Mr. Shupe's room located over Miss Stalling's room. Mr. Shupe taught the 6th and 7th grades, and in addition to other subjects taught music. A second stairway went south and ended at Mr. Floyd Barnett's room, which was over Miss Robbin's room. Mr. Barnett taught the eighth and ninth grades 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 regard 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. At this point, Mr. Barnett would blow his whistle, which gave the signal to line up in military fashion in order of our classes, the youngest class being first in line. Mr. Shupe would then place the needle on the record of the Victrola wind-up phonograph player. The mechanically generated music emanating from this machine would then play the tune "O, the monkey wrapped his tail around the flag pole," whereupon we would march, in step, into the school and to our rooms. (The name I gave to the 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 schoolhouse was the reverse of entering but less formal. We would march out of the building in class order, but not to the Victrola. After marching down the front steps on to 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 Miss Stallings while she was teaching in the fourth and fifth grades when I was in the third, and likewise for the other grades. You see all three grades were in the same room. There were two rows of the old fashioned desks for each of the grades. I'm very glad that my early schooling followed this 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 school 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 fifth grade, two big bullies got hold of me at the back blackboard while Miss Stallings was occupied with teaching the third 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 the last desk in the row. I sat just in front of her. The bullies released me after I confessed, and I returned to my seat. 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 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 into a fistfight, something that I abhorred. They would square me off with another bully by having him punch me several times, 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 hide it somewhere in a ditch or some weeds so that I could not find it. I was so fearful of these bullies that I looked for a hiding place to run for right after school was dismissed. I found one in the southwest corner of Miss Stallings’ room where there was a return air opening about two feet square at floor level. There was no screen over the opening, so I crawled in one day after everyone had 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 my tormentors were gone.

In good weather, the boys played “work-up” baseball of the hardball variety. The girls played softball. In work-up baseball, you have a peck order: first, second, third man rotating at bat, catcher, pitcher, first baseman, second baseman, etc., on to left fielder. If you don’t have enough players, you double up to cover the bases. At recess, the peck order was determined at the time you marched out of the classroom, down the front steps and onto the wide concrete walk. As you were standing on the walk, Mr. Barnett would blow his whistle. This was the signal for all the boys to run for the backstop, which 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 fifth grader, and could often beat a ninth grade student. Consequently, I could be first up at bat. The bullies did not 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 just in front of a fellow student and positioned to catch a long fly ball to left field. But this student hollered, “Let me have it. Let me have it!” I decided to let him have it and turned my head. 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. Hardball baseball is a little dangerous for kids to be playing. On another occasion, I was hit in the chest with a hard thrown ball. I could not get my breath and nearly collapsed before being revived.

Returning to my hit in the ear episode, we had a play practice at the Marriott Ward meetinghouse not far from the school. Church and state 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 a place to play basketball, those events took place at the church. The play was actually a small operetta, and we were engaged in a dress rehearsal. I, along with others, was dressed up as a Dutchman. My earache was unbearable, and I had a difficult

time concentrating on my part in one of the dance routines. Somehow, I got too close to the stage footlights and kicked one of them out. I felt a weight of responsibility and thought that I must pay for a new light. I remember fighting back the tears from the earache and the money that I didn't have. Miss Stallings, by now, though, had sensed that something was wrong and asked me what was the matter. I told her about being hit in the ear with a baseball just a short while ago, and she sent me home. Home and church were about one and one half miles from our home. There was no bussing then, and I can remember wading through waist-high snow drifts with other children on the way to and from school and church in freezing temperatures.

This aside, I must continue my story about bullies. I mentioned that I was a good runner. It's true; I was very skinny and not very tall. Most of the farm boys were husky and strong. They would not let me play tackle football with them. But one day, they decided to let me play quarterback. In retrospect, I suppose that they intended to squash me. No one had any protective clothing. It was the Great Depression, and such frivolous things as helmets and special clothing with padding were not available. They hiked the ball back to me. In those days the quarterback stood about ten feet back from the man who threw the ball back to you between his legs. I caught the ball and dodged every player on the field to make a touchdown. Thinking that this was a fluke, they let me carry the ball again. I made another touchdown. From that point on, they invented 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 family's clothing at home in good weather was one pair of J.C. Penney's bib overall that cost sixty-nine 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. The shoes were made of canvas with a rubber sole. We called them tennis shoes.

With the teachers away, things became progressively rowdy, and the bullies got completely out of hand. It is sad that obscene words used in swearing, in dirty stories, and in crude and wrongful acts of all kinds vilify the greatest of God's gift to mankind—the gift of creating bodies for our Heavenly Father's spirit children.

They captured me, threw me to the ground, pulled off my overalls, and left me without cover, fully spread, flat on my back, with one boy holding me down on each arm and leg. Then they took turns spitting on what you can imagine and invited other students to view my nakedness. I was surprised at how many girls came over to take a look.

I've often wondered why I didn't approach my parents about my bully problems. I never told them how serious it was. On reflection, I believe that if the bullies' parents were notified, I would be in even bigger trouble. Who do bullies pick on, and why? Even though I could run fast, I was small and scrawny, and when it came to muscles, I did not have them. Bullies pick on the weak. Also, they do not like school or succeed in scholastic endeavors. I was a kid who excelled at schoolwork. I'm bragging now, but forgive me if I brag some more.

When I was in fourth grade, aged nine, the Weber County School District gave every student from the first through the twelfth grades a comprehensive, progressively difficult examination, encompassing material selected from all 12 grades. Two hours occupied the morning, and a final two-hour exam occupied the afternoon. We were free to work on any item on the exam, going as far as one could in the allotted time of four hours. When the

countywide results were in, my parents were notified that I had the highest score of any student. One would have expected that honor to go to a twelfth grade senior high school student.

I credit this accolade to my mother and father. We had the Junior Classics and other good reading material in our humble home, in addition to the scriptures and old books from our grandfather Tracy. Grandmother Tracy lived with us for many years and the books came with her. I own some of them to this day. Additionally, I checked out books and returned them on a biweekly basis from the Carnegie Public Library located at the corner of Washington Avenue and Twenty Sixth Street. One of our 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 library. I walked beside my mother or father along the Southern Pacific railroad tracks as one of them pulled our meager conveyance along the southeasterly 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, where the library was located.

The library was a wondrous place. I explored the world there, discovered science, technology, machinery, photography, radio, mathematics, geography and more, and took to science 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. I was very sad when I read in the Ogden Standard Examiner of Edison’s death in 1931 at the age of 84 years. I was 11 years old and living in Marriott at the time.

After the school board discovered me, three experts came to see me and meet with my parents and teachers. They shook my hand and warmly congratulated me on my accomplishment, but the only thing I remember coming from the meeting was the finding that I was terribly undernourished. They gave my mother recommendations for an improved diet, but we were too poor to afford it. The teachers met separately with the experts, and I have no idea what they talked about.

For me, nothing changed. Life went on as before—bullies and all.



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