

Getting the Best of the Bully

I had to face up to her, but how?

By Douglas M. Brown

When you are 12 years old, life is hard enough. Caught between being a child and being a teenager, you struggle to really know who you are. I was in the middle of that struggle when my parents announced we were moving to the small town over the hill. The move was only a few miles away, but to me it was a world away.

I grew up in a suburban town of 30,000. I walked to school. The playground and the youth center were a block from home. And I went to the movies every Saturday.

Our new home was different. It was a rural town of 6,000—and planned to stay that way. I was a mile and a half (2.4 km) from school and had to ride the bus. My playground would become the woods and hills nearby. Saturday matinees would become only an occasional treat.

The move itself wasn't so bad. I was adventurous and loved exploring. But I had a hard time fitting in at school. The other students had all grown up together, and I was the outsider. To make matters worse, I didn't hide my emotions and was an easy target for bullies.

One of the biggest bullies I had to deal with was Tracy. That wouldn't have been so bad, except Tracy is a girl.

I had dealt with boy bullies before. You either faced them or learned to avoid them. But Tracy seemed to be everywhere: in the hall, at lunch, in my classes. She had a way with insults that just chopped you to pieces. I dreaded seeing her anywhere.

Since it seemed I couldn't avoid her, I had to face her, but I didn't know how. A talk I heard at church changed all that. I don't remember who was speaking, but I remember what was said. The speaker was talking about dealing with difficult people. He said, "If you can't beat them, try loving them to death." He got a laugh out of the congregation, but I thought about it for some time. I finally decided what to do with Tracy. I would "smother her with kindness."



Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44).

I started looking for Tracy the next day. When I saw her, I said, "Tracy, you look nice." She looked shocked and stammered a thank you as we passed in the hall. I kept it up. Every time I saw her, I would pay her a compliment before she had a chance to say anything. The insults stopped, and my life gained a little peace.

A few months later, the school year was coming to a close. One of the closing activities was a dance in the gym during school hours. I went to it but didn't feel like asking any girls to dance. Frankly, I had never asked a girl before. But then a girl came up to me and asked me to dance.

I was shocked to see that it was Tracy. I said yes, and we went out onto the floor. When the song was over, I said, "Thank you," and Tracy went on her way.

I never did see her again. She moved somewhere else that summer. I hope she fit in at her new school more easily than I had. But I learned that day that my plan had worked. Where I had an enemy, I found a friend. ■

