

OPEN LETTERS TO BULLIES

The following are letters from people who have been victims of bullying. Bullying – physical or verbal – occurs all around us and is not addressed sufficiently. Hopefully these accounts will inspire people to take a stand.

VERONICA GOMES

LETTER 1:

Dear Bully,
Fear is induced and you were the initiator. It was 8th grade. I wasn't popular much. Don't get me wrong, I had friends all right but we were juniors. I used to take the school bus to and from school. While the first part of the journeys was pleasant, coming home from school turned into a different story, thanks to people like you. The seniors, with you as the leader of the pack, used to force us to play dare or die. Now one may ask, what's so harmful about that, right? Well, it wasn't the game itself as much as the conditions under which we had to play. It was either us complying with your ways by performing the assigned dares or getting hit. You gave us no choice, and there was no forfeiting the game.

Some juniors were chosen and I guess they had the guts to do the dares. I, on the other hand, didn't want any part of this. You can say I'm a coward but that's just your perspective. I used to be forced but I escaped using lies. I don't like lying. I never have. But you made me. I had to say things weren't going good for me at home, that things weren't going good in my life and I had to be depressed in order to escape the dares thrown at me. I was scared that I was going to get a dare and I either had to do it or lie to get out of it and that was it. I let fear win.

Now, six years down the line, I realise how fear is just a choice and I chose poorly time and time again.

Signed,
Zaraf*



LETTER 2:

Hi,
Was the momentary triumph worth the psychological trauma you put me through?

We're well familiar with the words "asking for it" these days. In the bullying scene, the small, quiet student who minds her own business is apparently "asking for it". I was introduced to this concept at a very early age, thanks to you. My happy bubble burst when you went off at me on everything – starting from the modest length of my skirt to how my looks would stop me from achieving anything good in life. You probably don't even remember me now, but you're what my nightmares are made of.

From making me trip during games to planting cheat sheets on me in exam halls so that I failed, from calling me names to yelling nasty comments and "rhymes" when I walked down the hall – what had I done to deserve this? Did you have any idea how it feels to be on the other side of psychological and physical abuse? When you're trying hard to fit in and constantly get told that you're too skinny, short, dark, nerdy, boring and what not, day after day, year after year, it's bound to get to you. I was surrounded by so much negativity that my self-doubt shot through the roof, making me more anxious by the day. Even then, I tried to conceal it and my mental health started taking a toll. But thank God, I'm not one to back down, so I decided it was time I stood up for others and myself.

Know that, you casually throwing around the word "sorry" after the damage had been done, really doesn't make a difference. However, your acknowledgement of the effect bullying has on the victims and repentance in the form of stopping others in the act is what's going to make a difference.

Signed,
X

LETTER 3:

To Soha*,
First and foremost, I never really liked school. Ours had zero room for creativity and we always ended up learning like parrots. To make things worse, there were the bullies who made school a living hell. You wouldn't know though; you were one of them.

It started with my tiffin disappearing into thin air to my entire bag going missing at times. I never had the courage to speak up or complain because I did not have a friend circle of my own but I always knew from your sneers that it was you. There were countless times in kindergarten when I would go hungry since my tiffin had already been eaten up. We grew up but you didn't change; only the form of bullying changed and intensified. It worked itself up all the way to my worst year ever – 8th grade. This was indeed the time around which you and your friends spread completely untrue rumours about my personal life. This was followed by days when you said rude things about me – sometimes to my face and other times behind my back – while all the other girls laughed and cheered you on. You being my cousin made the situation even harder to deal with. I didn't do or say anything because I was always intimidated. Talking to my mom about it ended up in me crying my eyes out.

Looking back I am grateful that those days are gone. However, I do feel that these have somehow shaped me into who I am today. I have turned into a timid person with very low self-confidence. The silver lining is that I learnt about differentiating good people from bad.

From,
Tanha*



LETTER 4:

Dear former best friend,
It was grade 2 and I was the only Hindu kid in class. But, that did not impact my daily life in school much until one day when everything changed.

I do not know what caused the change in behaviour of my classmates but something odd definitely happened. I could feel that everyone was acting a bit weird around me. It was recess and I used to share my tiffin with my friend circle. But nobody wanted my tiffin that day even though it was something everyone usually loved. I asked you, my then best friend, why you didn't want it. You had replied, "Oh you don't know, do you? I will go to hell if I ate your tiffin." I did not know how to react. What could a 2nd grader say to this anyway?

Everyone did not stop interacting with me but some did, including you. You used to tell others how having a Hindu friend is "wrong". I noticed the contempt when they talked to me. It was as if I was less of a human. I was always picked last in team sports and there were always a few who kept frowning at those who interacted with me. Micro aggression was a part of my daily life. I still remember the day you and your friends cornered me and told me maybe I should change my religion. After all, that is what was causing the problem, right? The academic year could not end soon enough and I was moved to another class by the authority for reasons other than getting bullied. Thank God that happened. The new class had welcomed me and I could make new friends who did not consider me "different".

I know you did not have malicious intent when you were bullying me. You probably thought that was the right thing to do. But I really hope that you do not teach your yet-to-be-born kids the very things that made you change your behaviour. I hope you teach them how everyone deserves compassion regardless of their identity.

Signing off,
Your former best friend.

*Names have been changed as per the interviewees' requests.

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