



**I**t was a cool winter day in Colorado. Soft, white light squeezed itself through the curtains over the windows, and the sounds of water trickled from the small fountain on the bookcase behind me. It was still and quite, bringing just the right tranquility to a peaceful afternoon. I imaged the wind blowing quietly through the trees—stirring the remaining snow patches into a soft blanket on the lawn—as I typed away on my keyboard. My welcomed serenity suddenly became a troubled alarm as a scream jarred me from my chair, shifting my attention from my computer screen to the front window of my home.

The scream was a distressing sound as if someone was badly hurt – a long, deep bellow that echoed through the neighborhood and penetrated into the room as if there were no wall between us at all. As my feet raced to the window my mind mused all kinds of scenarios, preparing me for the worst. I pushed back the curtains and squeezed the blinds open with my fingers to get a good look. My warm breath fogged up the cold glass as I looked outside. I saw a short, hooded figure walking down the sidewalk in front of my house. I looked to see if there was anyone around, or something else that could have produced that yell, but there was nobody else in sight.

The Screamer was about twelve years old, dressed in saggy blue jeans and a faded black hoodie that covered his head, his face hidden from sight. His backpack draped over his slumping shoulders fixed against him like the hump on a camel's back, and his worn out shoes shuffled back-and-forth in small steps. He stared down at the concrete in front of him. Then, as I watched unnoticed, he did it again and unleashed a long, disturbing scream. From the sound of it you would have thought he had broken his arm, or he was running for his life from an angry grizzly bear. There was nothing around him out of the ordinary. My anxiety instantly shifted to anger because of his behavior. He had no business acting that way and causing such concern, so I decided to confront him.

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I didn't have to move fast. At the rate he was walking it would have taken him half-a-day to reach the end of the block. I walked out onto the front

porch and gave my own shout to get his attention. “Hey, is something wrong?” I asked.

The Screamer stopped and slowly turned to face me. Small tears began to roll down his chubby cheeks and he responded without hesitation. “They’re *ma-mean* to me on the *b-bus*,” he cried with stuttered words. “Everyday they *p-pick* on *ma-m-me* and they *wa-won’t* stop.”

Each stuttered word The Screamer managed to speak was his painful confession, and I immediately felt compassion for him. He gave me his undivided attention as if someone was finally willing to listen and come to his rescue. For the next few minutes I did my best to console him, encouraging him to talk to his parents, school principal, and teachers. I tried my best to lift his spirit. Somehow I felt that my words “*everything will be all right*” were useless and shallow. It was all I could come up with at the moment, but the words obviously fell short. The cold reality was the bullies would be waiting for him on the bus the next day, like ravenous wolves stalking a defenseless deer.

After our short conversation was over The Screamer nodded as if to say, *Thank you for listening to me*. Then he slowly turned and continued his journey home, but this time there were no more screams. I stood there for a moment watching him walk away and praying that I had made even a small difference in his life. Then I thought to myself: *That could be the next school shooter! The one that’s fed up with life and decides to take the lives of others while destroying his own.*

What about the numbers? Statistics seem to arrest our attention and help us grasp the magnitude of issues like bullying. “In the largest survey of its kind to look at the issue [of bullying], researchers

surveyed 524,054 students at 1,593 schools across the nation... to get a better picture of bullying in grades three through 12. They found that 17 percent of kids reported on anonymous questionnaires that they are being bullied two to three times a month or more. Of those bullied, nearly 40 percent of the girls and 45 percent of boys say it’s been going on in some form — verbally, physically or online — for more than a year.”<sup>1</sup>

Bullies are portrayed by Hollywood as the Scut Farkus in the 1983 movie *A Christmas Story*, or the Terry Filkins and Ronnie Lampinellis in the 2008 movie *Drillbit Taylor*. They wait for their victims in the shadows to steal, to intimidate, and to harm. “Words of Wisdom” from the *Drillbit Taylor* website declares: “It’s a cold, cruel world out there, and the only way to survive is to stick together. Look out for each other. And never leave a friend behind.” Actually, this is great advice. It goes on to introduce the *Camouflage Technique*, which advises: The best way to avoid being bullied is not to stand out in the first place.<sup>2</sup>

It’s hard not to stand out when society has labeled you as ugly, freakish, or uncool. Wouldn’t it be nice if avoiding bullies were as simple as blending in or disappearing? The truth is bullies are very real. Their actions towards the innocent leave enduring pain and scars forever. For the victims, hurt becomes deeply rooted, and will eventually escape one way or another. There has to be an intervention and it starts with you and me. Be the difference because: “You’re blessed when you care. At the moment of being ‘care-full,’ you find yourselves cared for (Matthew 5.7, MSG).”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Carroll, L. (2010, October 10). *1 in 6 students is regularly bullied, survey shows*. Retrieved from [http://www.nbcnews.com/id/39758956/ns/health-kids\\_and\\_parenting/](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/39758956/ns/health-kids_and_parenting/)

<sup>2</sup> [www.drillbittaylor.com](http://www.drillbittaylor.com)

<sup>3</sup> Peterson, E. (2003). *The message*. Colorado Springs: NavPress.

