



## BULLYING

# Shame on you or shame on us?

I was shocked this past week to hear stories about bullying in our community and schools. High school can be one of the best times of our lives; it can also be the worst for those who are bullied.

I was frankly disgusted when I heard a mum speaking about her daughter's experience at one of the largest high schools in our area. I was further shocked when listening to a neighbour's daughter's experience at one of B.C.'s most popular food retailers.

This is 2012, opportunities to help others are at the forefront with celebrities and opinion leaders championing all kinds of causes. Showcasing differences and celebrating them is at an all-time high. The pink shirt day against bullying has thousands of participants. So why is bullying still prevalent?

Many of you likely saw the video of a middle-aged supervisor on a Florida school bus being harassed and victimized by high school students. Most people were disgusted and outraged when watching the display of ignorance. Many reached out to the woman with support as the piece went "viral."

Yet many people choose not to get involved or help others in a bad situation. Caring sets humans apart from other animals. Doing nothing is as easy as being an ape.

Defining harassment and discrimination is the place to start to understand the issue. Not only are both against the law and a form of discrimination, it is just plain mean.

Harassment is defined in the Human Rights Act as "engaging in a course of vexatious comment or conduct that is known or ought reasonably to be known to be unwelcome." It can be verbal, physical, visual or written, and does not necessarily need to target a specific individual. Harassment does not have to be a long string of events, it can be a single act.

Unlike its disciples, bullying and harassment see no boundaries between people. Most victims may not realize it is taking place initially; they don't want to share the experience with those who can help for fear of retaliation.

Bullies pick their victims well.

It makes me wonder what could have happened to them to make them so toxic to society? If they are so outgoing and opinionated, why not accept our differences and lead their group in a positive way instead of being negative.

The mentality of those who conduct themselves in this manner is troubling. We've all seen them. These are people who make jokes about people's physical characteristics, ancestry or age. They may tease or intimidate them, make offensive remarks or belittle and threaten others. They may display or pass around sexist, racist or derogatory pictures or material. They may make obscene gestures or make negative comments about a person's sexual preference.

When did it become someone else's business who we decide to be intimate with?

Back in high school, a good friend of mine received a new car for his 16th birthday. If it was ever dirty, derogatory comments about his being gay were written in the dust. Grade 10 is tough enough being straight and learning about sexuality, let alone realizing you are gay. He didn't choose to be gay, and it was an incredibly tough time for him in realizing his sexuality, let alone being harassed for it.

That was 35 years ago. People, don't you think we can be a bit more accepting in 2012?

In the recent school incident, I learned from the mum of a special-needs teen in Kelowna that kids pointed, stared and laughed at her daughter daily. The girl did not decide to have special needs;

she was born that way.

When the mother complained, she was told there is no bullying or harassing allowed at the school, and her complaint was dismissed.

She secretly followed her daughter one day and saw first-hand students harassing her. When the mum shared this in a meeting, she cried. She said the only power she had to help her daughter was to allow her one day a week away from school to have a day off from the abuse.

Come on people; is this the community that we want to call home? Shame on you. Shame on us.

My neighbour's daughter was harassed at work over taking another person's shift at the large retail food operation. When the schedule came out, a co-worker who is a single mother and "needed as many shifts as possible" started harassing her for taking her shifts.

The sad thing is the new employee felt she was doing something wrong. As in most cases, the victim feels anxiety. Instead of looking forward to coming to work, she was afraid to be alone with her harasser and didn't want to go to work.

In her case, she was afraid to share her experience and became ill because of it. Thankfully, she finally confided in her mother, who shared information with her from a "respect in the workplace" workshop. Only then did she realize she was a victim of harassment and bullying and was able to properly go through the channels to bring some resolution.

What we can do to stop bullying is really quite simple. If we see situations like these transpiring, have the strength to stand up and protect the victim instead of taking part by saying nothing. Stand up to the harasser and stop them in their tracks.

Appreciate diversity. Can you imagine how boring it would be if we were all exactly the same? Celebrate other cultures and ways of life. We are lucky to live in Canada, where we are allowed to

keep our heritage and share it with others. When my husband and I first moved to this region, the first thing I noticed was a lack of diversity and culture. I am happy to say that has changed dramatically. Diversity is all around us, which allows people to feel comfortable sharing their differences.

I feel like I fit in more when I hear other languages and see people with diverse abilities around me. We were brought up to celebrate differences and have brought our children up to do the same. Not only do we learn more by being an inclusive family, we have a diverse group of friends and family who all contribute unique and interesting parts to our lives.

Why not start today by celebrating Canada's 145th birthday and embracing all our differences? Why not dare that bully or harasser to stop bothering their victim and join in the celebration? Why not make instead of break someone's day? How about asking a stranger if you can help them, or just smiling at someone you don't know? How about telling someone something nice and committing an act of random kindness?

I bet you have it in you to rise above the bullying mentality and to stand out as a positive force.

Shame on you if you have bullied. Shame on us as a society if we tolerate harassment. Now is the time to move forward in a positive, inclusive manner.

Happy Canada Day!

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*Whose Challenge Is It Anyway?*