

On Bullying  
Robert S. Griffin  
2013

I was bullied as a kid. Preparing this thought has brought up those painful memories and prompted me to think about their long-term impact on me. Those experiences inform the substance of this thought.

One bullying memory that stands out, once a week for three months, on Wednesday afternoons, I haven't forgotten the day and time even though this was over a half century ago, I along with the other students in my seventh grade school class walked unattended six or so blocks to another grade school to get manual arts training, as it was called. The manual arts teacher, Mr. Damberg, I still remember the name—he had an accent, I suppose he was German, though I didn't think about things like that then—would instruct us on making things out of wood, and then we would all walk back to our school. I was eleven, and since I had been put ahead a grade in school, the other kids were twelve.

My manual arts project was a small, dark-stained knick-knack shelf that fit in a corner. As it turned out, no knick-knacks, or anything else, were put on the shelf after I finally got it made—nobody got less done in manual arts than I did—because my mother, bless her heart, immediately after I gave it to her, and without a word, threw it in the trash.

While that hurt my feelings some, what Mother did with the shelf wasn't uppermost on my mind during that time. Nor was my mind on learning how to saw boards and pound nails in the Mr. Damberg's class. In fact, truth be told, Mr. Damberg both chose the shelf as my project and constructed it while I stood motionless and mute.

What was my mind on? Pete Holm, a fellow student. Why? Because on the way to and from manual arts, Pete, whom I barely knew, would walk along side me and verbally vilify and threaten me and push and hit me, though I don't remember him hitting me in the face, just the back of my head and my body. Interesting to me now, while I remember Pete's name, I have no mental picture of what he looked liked, nor do I remember what he said while this was going on, including what reason, if any, he gave for debasing and hurting me.

What do I remember from that painful episode in my life?

*That I had no sense of indignation or outrage, or even that Pete was doing anything wrong.* Now that I think about it, in my mind what was happening to me just was, like the weather. I'm quite sure that I didn't tell Pete that what he was doing was bad, or even to stop doing it. I just rounded my shoulders and curled my head and took it as I walked along. Reliving it now saddens me.

*That I was very frightened.* As Wednesday grew near each week, the anticipation of the walk to and from manual arts training pervaded my being; anxiety, trepidation, dread, became for all practical purposes who I was. I started missing school on Wednesdays. This along with my preoccupation with Pete accounted for the other kids getting all sorts of things made during that time with Mr. Damberg while all I had to show for the three months was the little corner bookshelf that wound up in the trash. I don't recall that my lack of productivity, or, really, that I had no connection at all to what was going on in the class, made any difference to Mr. Damberg, or my home school or to Mother or Dad. As I bring myself back to that time, it strikes me that I don't have to live with anything remotely approximating that level of fear now in my adult life.

*That I felt alone.* I assumed no one cared what was happening to me, or that anyone would do anything about what was going on. Actually, I may have been accurate in that perception. None of the other kids said or did anything about what Pete was doing. I remember one Wednesday when I stayed home saying I was sick my mother remarking that I didn't look sick to her. That prompted me to say that I didn't want to go to school because of what Pete Holm was doing. She shrugged and walked away. On a Wednesday I did go to school, I was slow getting into place with the group of kids to start the trek to Mr. Damberg and I suppose looked as if something were off with me. Miss Kelly the teacher said, "Come on, Robert, time to go." When I didn't respond, she said "Is there some problem?" In the halting, terse, eyes-diverted way I communicated in those years (and oftentimes still do), I said what Pete was doing. "Well, you are just going to have to fight back," Miss Kelly replied. "Get in line."

Miss Kelly could have been right in her advice. Perhaps I should have fought back; I just took it until Pete decided to take a break for a while. Why wasn't I fighting back? Why didn't I defend

myself? Was it simply fear and cowardice, or were other factors involved? As I look over my life, I believe it is fair to say that I haven't lacked courage. Was there something in my circumstance in those years, at home, in school, that lead me to simply endure and, if I could, avoid, Pete's abuse, or even think I had it coming?

As I ponder that, I take note of the difference in my life now from what it was back then at eleven. As an adult I don't have to be prepared to physically fight every assailant that thrusts himself into my life. If a colleague at work threatened and hit me every Wednesday, a supervisor wouldn't say, "Well, you'll just have to fight him. You and he have a fistfight." This observation leads me to my basic posture these days and a premise that pervades this writing: *children should be protected and defended in the same way adults are*. For whatever reasons they aren't; or it is assumed that they can't be, which I really don't buy. I remember in high school, as I was walking out the door at the end of a class, Jack Pavlich out of the blue punched me in the face and blackened my eye. Nothing was done. Students and teachers just smirked at me with my black eye. If that happened to me now as an adult, if somebody sprung at me and punched me in the eye and blackened it, for certain something would be done, by my employer if it happened at work, and by the police wherever it occurred. Society simply won't put up with anybody punching me in the eye; it protects me. But at fourteen, Jack Pavlich was my individual problem to handle. Anarchy reigned.

*That I tried to cope by placating my tormenter.* When Miss Kelly had us fill out a questionnaire that included naming your best friend in class, I wrote down "Pete Holm." I guess I assumed that somehow that might stop him from attacking and demeaning me. Or, as awful as this is to contemplate, that hurting me was what anyone close to me would naturally do. In any case, the best friend designation didn't work. Pete kept at it. I'm dismayed that I tried to manage the situation in the way I did, but I try to understand that if you are a young child and all alone and afraid and think you are worthless and a punching bag, you might do something like that. And really, that kind of conduct is not unknown among adults, abused spouses, others.

*That the effects of the bullying have lasted.* What happened back then didn't just go away. It was stored as part of the organism I have experienced moment to moment from then on as me. That

inner referent made up of physical sensations and their meanings, thoughts, and inner images—me--has guided my actions and reactions over the course of my life and thus has shaped the nature and quality of my existence. And since my life has had an impact on others' lives and on circumstances in the world, the effects of the bullying go beyond just their consequences for me personally.

Although I have thought about it in some detail in recent days, this is not the context for exploring the effect the Pete Holms in my world—Walter Swenson is another name that comes to mind, and Harold Romansky, a teacher who when I was fourteen grabbed and twisted my shirt and held me off floor against a wall and said how much he wanted to pound my face in and then threw me down a flight of stairs, my books scattering--have had on me and my world. What I want to do is use what I've just related as a backdrop and guide to the thoughts on bullying in general that follow.

I don't know whether bullying is worse now than when I was a kid. The conventional wisdom is that with the coarsening of the culture and the emergence of the Internet and all of the negative possibilities that opens up, it is worse now. I don't remember suicides over bullying in the past as we read about currently, though perhaps suicides back then were covered up or didn't make the news. In any case, bullying is getting much more attention these years than it got back when it was going on with me, or in the decades that followed. That said, I don't think it matters if bullying is more or less prevalent now than before. It seems to me that it was bad back then and it is bad now, and that it deserved attention back then and it deserves attention now. I'll leave it at that. I certainly don't consider myself any kind of expert on bullying. Take what I offer here as simply food for thought as you ponder and act upon this concern.

About me: I have spent my career, which is near its end, in education, first as a secondary teacher and then as a professor of education in a university. I'm the father of an eight-year-old daughter—I'll call her Dee—who lives with her mother across the continent from where I live and work. I only see Dee every two or three months. We write back and forth (I'm hearing impaired and can't use a phone or hear with Skype). So my contact with Dee isn't as extensive as the typical parent's.

To organize this presentation I will offer responses, or comments, to quotes from a book on bullying (Lee Hirsch and

Cynthia Lowen, with Dina Santorelli, editors, *Bully: An Action Plan for Teachers, Parents, and Communities to Combat the Bullying Crisis*, Weinstein Books, 2012). I'll set in the quoted material and put it in smaller type to distinguish it from my reactions.

The first series of quotes, from pages 232 and 233 of the book, define bullying.

[A] student is bullied or victimized when he or she is the repeated target of deliberate negative actions by one or more students who possess greater verbal, physical, social, or psychological power.

Why the reference to being a *repeated* target? Would we tell a woman that it is only rape if it happens repeatedly? And why the qualification that the bully(ies) must have greater power? If someone assaults me, is it only an issue if that person or those persons has/have greater verbal, physical, social, and psychological power? If my lesser in these regards tips over my desk or calls me names while I'm eating lunch in the cafeteria, am I not victimized? Perhaps the reference to multiple incidents and attacks from the more powerful are setting bullying off from single instances and the misdeeds of one's equals or less that are of equally serious concern, but if that's the case it should be made clear. If Pete had done what he did to me once, and was my inferior on some basis or another, would that have been bullying, or something else; and if it were something else, what is this something else, what are these something elses, called exactly, and since I was eleven and not, say, thirty-five, would it/they have mattered? It/they absolutely would have mattered if Pete's victim were thirty-five. In any case, I'm taken by the tendency toward qualification and nuance when people talk about bullying with children.

Direct bullying is a relatively open attack on a victim that is physical (hitting, kicking, pushing, choking) and/or verbal (name-calling, threatening, taunting, malicious teasing) in nature.

Again the qualifications. Why a "relatively open" attack? How is relatively open different from just open? Is there such a thing as sort of open, and does that distinction really matter? How about if it

is just open, without the relatively? Why not just attack, period? Again that basic point: children are treated differently from adults. With adults there isn't all the mealy-mouthing. It doesn't have to be relatively open hitting or choking--as opposed to just hitting or choking, no qualifiers--for it to be a crime when we are talking about adults. For that matter, the word bullying isn't used with adults. Why is it used with children and not adults? As an adult, I don't have to put up with hitting, kicking, pushing, choking, name-calling, threatening, taunting, and malicious teasing for a minute, regardless of whether it is relatively or completely open (open as opposed to what? sneaky?). Those assaults against another human being are not embedded in the larger concept of bullying as if they didn't exist in themselves. With adults, these actions stand out in bold relief, as the despicable violations of the tenets of human decency they are.

If one of my colleagues on the faculty in my university, or a student, kicks me, nobody goes, "Oh, this is an instance of bullying and this person is a bully." It is simply kicking. Security gets involved, the police, the university administration, and the perpetrator is dealt with right now. If it's a faculty member, he's out door, and if it's a student, he's expelled. With the bullying concept, the kicking, if it were dealt with at all, would become a problem to solve--what are we going to do about bullying?—and would prompt a drawn out process of handwringing, analysis, speechifying, moralizing, coaxing, and strategy implementation. In the process, everything would become fuzzy and multi-faceted, we would wind up thinking we needed to understand and help the bully, and so on and so on. Simple, straight-ahead, this-doesn't-play-here, nip-it-in-the-bud, quick and unambiguous condemnation, punishment, and exclusion which, at least so far, has resulted in my being about to walk to the library on my campus without adult Pete Holm's terrorizing me along the way gets lost in the shuffle. An unintended consequence of labeling the problem with children bullying actually compounds it. We do better with adults by not employing the term.

I know there is the idea that kids don't understand things as adults do, and so you have to do things differently with them. I don't buy it. Kids, even very young ones, can grasp the concept of being kind to other people. They are capable of understanding that hitting, kicking, pushing, choking, name-calling, threatening, taunting, and malicious teasing are wrong and unacceptable. And if

some children can't figure that out or don't go along with it, they have no business being allowed around other children. They and their parents should be working on getting clear that you don't do these things to other people, period. Being kind and decent to other people isn't a tricky concept, really, and it should be a requirement for being in school. The notion of bullying carries with it the idea that we're talking about something subtle and involved, a panel discussion type concern.

The bullying label attracts experts like a light bulb attracts flies. Invariably experts make anything—education, mental and physical health, governance, you name it—seem complicated, there are no simple solutions, everything's in flux, it's different today than it was yesterday, you have to be up on the latest, what do you know. Whatever it is is beyond the ability of everyday people to understand and manage, and that calls for, guess who, people like them, experts, to be center stage and call the shots. And count on it taking a long, long time for things to get accomplished. If you're an expert, it's no good if the job gets done in a day or two, or a week or a month—then what do you do? The ideal for an expert is for there to be improvement—or a sure-fire way to improve they've come up with that hasn't been implemented yet—but for the problem to go on forever. It's like in therapy, you're always better than you were before, but you still need more sessions.

Indirect bullying is more subtle and difficult to detect. It involves one of more forms of relational aggression, including social isolation, intentional exclusion, rumor spreading, damaging someone's reputation, making faces or obscene gestures behind someone's back, and manipulating friendships and other relationships. Students increasingly bully others using electronic communication devices and the Internet. Cyberbullying involves sending hurtful or threatening text messages and images with these devices in order to damage the target's reputation and relationships. This form of bullying can be very difficult for adults to detect or track, and almost half of those victimized do not know the identity of the perpetrator. Electronic bullying most commonly involves the use of instant messaging, chat rooms, and e-mail.

I find the distinction between direct and indirect bullying helpful. While I don't have to put up with direct bullying in my life as an

adult, I'm protected from it, I do have to deal with indirect bullying, though of course that term is not applied to it. As I read down the list of relational aggression, good concept, I hadn't heard it before—social isolation, rumor spreading, and so on—my stomach churned, because I've had to deal with that kind of thing a lot in my adult life. We don't need to go into the details of why in this context, other than to say that what I confront has to do with my ideological/philosophical and professional outlook and activities running up against the conventional wisdom and power structure in my world. Beyond that, I believe there is just something about me, as a human being, which has, from my earliest years on, brought out the nastiness in some people. I'll leave it at that.

Back to this discussion of bullying, I'm not going to get much if any help from my context with the indirect bullying I experience. That is to say, I can't call security about rumor spreading, social isolation, and intentional exclusion. So what do I do? How have I dealt with it? I do a lot of things, more than I can get into here, but there are three tactics I employ I would suggest that anyone, including a child, incorporate into their personal repertoire of responses to what happens to them:

*Have contempt.* It's understandable to react to what this author calls indirect bullying with feeling hurt, ain't-it-awful bemoaning, moralizing (how could they do such an awful thing, it's so wrong), getting mad, waiting and hoping they will stop, hiding out to avoid more of it, trying to turn it around by reasoning with the attackers, showing them how they are wrong about you or in what they are doing, ingratiating, playing nice, self-effacement or entertaining as a way to seem less of a threat or target, and so on. In my experience, that kind of thing is simply dishonorable and thus unacceptable. Plus it wastes energy that could be more productively. And it unintentionally reinforces the abuse. It gives attention to the attackers and elevates their centrality and importance, and those are payoffs for these people, and anything that pays off, is rewarded, perpetuates whatever was done that resulted in it. It simply doesn't work, or at least not in the long run. You might lessen the attacks in the short run by pleading and begging or putting on a show, but eventually that plays out and they start working you over for whatever reasons prompted their doing it in the first place.



So what do you do? You feel and demonstrate *utter contempt* for the people doing whatever it is. With the whole of your being, in your posture, your stance, in the world, you have disdain not just for their behavior but for them. You don't have to say anything; it's more a bearing toward people who bend so low as to do this kind of thing to another human being. You have a pervasive, cold, disgust toward them, and any contact you must have with them—you don't seek them out--comes out of that. Nothing is more powerfully aversive to people than being sincerely disapproved and disrespected and discounted. And nothing is more uplifting and empowering than to respond to those who try to hurt you with unqualified contempt. It's a way of saying to yourself that you do not deserve this and you have the power of judgment, and this posture is an easily-invoked and highly effective way to let the whole of your world, not just the perpetrators, know it too. There's a lot of talk about the value of resilience in children and young people, and it is good as far as it goes, but it is basically defensive. I'm for going on the offense, and having contempt for somebody is that. It's easy to invoke and maintain, it's effective, and it's self-honoring.

2) *No self-abuse*. People who hurt other people like it when these other people start hurting themselves. Don't do that. I'm so deeply saddened when I hear of bullied young people committing suicide. No, no, no, no, no, no, no! I have worked very hard to get it embedded in my head that the very last thing I do is abuse myself in response to others abusing me. In fact I go the opposite way: when attacked, I build myself up, not tear myself down. I metaphorically, and literally, drop to the floor and do twenty push-ups. Instead of being unhappy, I smile and laugh. People who mean me harm do not control how I treat myself nor my state of being.

3) *Stay on course*. I've got positive things I'm trying to become and trying to get done in my life. Bullying me is not going to deflect me from that. I'm not giving you attention or power over what I do, and whatever number you are trying to run on me is not going to be what my life is about. My life is about making good things happen and living with integrity, where my actions are in accordance with my highest values and goals. It's not about dealing with the likes of you and the low-end crap you pull. My life is about having a good time and being happy. I refuse to be unhappy because of you.

I'd like to think children could learn early on in their life to respond to indirect bullying, all bullying, with contempt for the bullies, a commitment never to hurt themselves, and a resolve to stay on course making good things happen in their lives and being upbeat and happy.

The second series of quotes are pages 200 and 201, outline what parents should do if their child is being bullied.

There are a number of steps to take in the face of bullying—when your child is the victim. The first action is to empower your child. Strengthen his or her self-esteem, build pride, and help them feel less guilty or inadequate about how they have acted. Learning martial arts can help many children, not so they can beat up the bully, but how to feel better about themselves. Help your child build courage to act in the face of fear, not just when fear goes away. Teach them to get help from adults and rescue others.

On a visit to my see my daughter Dee last fall--she was eight--one afternoon I was propped up in bed reading a book and she came into the room and sat on the bed obviously wanting to talk about something. It turned out to be about bullying. It fell into the category of indirect bullying. A group of girls led by, let's call her, Charlotte were telling her that she was dumb (she is actually very smart) and that they didn't like her and didn't want to play with her. Dee is a gentle, dear child and was very hurt by that. And of course I was very distressed hearing what was going on.

Contrary to the advice in the quote from the book above, my first response wasn't to empower Dee by strengthening her self-esteem, build her pride, or help her feel less guilty or inadequate. I focused on what the girls were doing. I let Dee know it was wrong, period. It shouldn't be happening. She doesn't deserve that kind of treatment. And the big thing, I let her know that she wasn't alone with this issue. Her mother and I were on this case. We were going to protect her.

I certainly didn't recommend that she take martial arts to deal with the issue. I have no problem with the martial arts; in fact I like them and would like to see Dee get involved with them. But not as a way to fend her way through elementary school. I've made it clear to Dee that her job is to go to school and do her very best to learn

there. And that she should be kind to other children and the teacher there. In her and my talk, I didn't give her any speeches about going to school being a test of courage. Elementary school shouldn't be a war zone. And I didn't tell her that at eight years old she has the job of rescuing anyone, and particularly anyone who is trying to diminish or hurt her.

What did I suggest Dee do about Charlotte and her gang? Have contempt for them. Disrespect them. Have nothing to do with them. If they say something bad to you directly, I suggested, tell them what they are doing is bad and walk away. Dee doesn't have to set these other kids straight or win them over or resolve the problem between them and her. She just has to have disdain for what they are doing, and more, for them as people. The last thing Dee should do is be nice to Charlotte and the others in an attempt to get them to be nice to her. Don't be nice to people who aren't nice to you. Don't teach people that the way to get you to be nice to them is to be cruel to you. I suggested to Dee that she put her efforts into finding good kids to be with and doing her schoolwork. I told her to tell her mom if the problem with Charlotte continues or makes her unhappy or gets in the way of her schoolwork. It's Mom's and my job to protect you, I said. I'll fly out to deal with this issue in any way I can think of, no holds barred. We'll go to the teacher, the school administration, we'll confront the other parents, whatever it takes. Mom and I are in this with you, you aren't alone with this, I reiterated. Whether I was right or wrong in how I handled this encounter is for the reader to decide.

A postscript, the report from Dee's mother is that the issue with Charlotte and her gang quickly dissipated. I flew out for the third grade graduation ceremony. I noticed that Charlotte seemed to be following Dee around the classroom. I also noticed that Dee ignored Charlotte. It felt good to me to see that. I'm not big on forgiveness and reconciliation.

The second action is to teach them to name the crime, tell the bully to stop, walk away (if you can, make a joke out of it), or tell friends. They can actually understand and help the bully with the help of their other victimized friends.

I did the first part of this, naming the crime. And I suggested to Dee that if the girls did something to her directly to tell them it was bad.

However, I didn't tell her to seek them out and tell them that—she had better things to do. And I didn't suggest that Dee tell them to stop what they are doing. That would have just gotten her into a time- and energy-consuming no-win game: Dee tells them to stop; Charlotte and the others say you deserve what we are doing to you and we aren't going to stop. In the process, these other girls get attention and power; they experience positive consequences as a result of their conduct. Expect anything that is met with positive consequences to be repeated. There's truth to the adage, don't give anyone flowers after a fight.

Making a joke out of being mistreated? Absolutely not. For one thing what is going on is not the least bit funny. I don't want Dee learning to make light of any cruelty to her (I did that as a kid). And more, making a joke out of it is another positive consequence, another payoff, another reinforcement, to these girls' behavior. Having someone tell you a joke or act silly feels good; and it is puts the joke-teller or comedy relief beneath you as they take on the job of entertaining you, and that feels good too.

Try to understand and help Charlotte? Here we go again. If their actions are met with their victim serving them, that is a favorable outcome of what they have done. Whatever is met with a favorable result will be continued. The posture I want Dee to have is, mess over me and you don't get my understanding and help; you get my contempt, and I'm gone. I want Dee to have a powerful, pervasive sense of personal pride and honor. Servicing and kowtowing to people in response to their mistreatment of you is self-demeaning and dishonorable. Certainly I want Dee to be helpful to other people, but not those who are cruel to her.

A third action is to form partnerships with other parents, your child's friends, and the school. Listen to your child so they can tell you what is working and what is not. Support them in doing what they need to do. Of course, help them if they are in real danger but let them assert their own skills first to think through a strategy and act upon it.

The whole thrust of this quote from the book is that bullying is the child's problem—support them in what they need to do, let them assert their own skills first, that kind of thing. My thrust is that, from minute one, what's going on is *our* problem, the family's

problem. Dee has a part to play in it because she is a member of the family. But it's not her action, it's our action; hit one of us, you hit all of us. And while Dee is involved in taking on the problem, she is not the primary agent in that. Dee's job is to do her best with her schoolwork and to be kind to people. It is the adult's job--her mother's and mine, and the teacher's and the other school personnel's, and if need be, the police's--to protect her as she does that. Dee is eight years old. Adults protect children, not support them as they confront aggression on their own.

A fourth action is to recognize that there may be a bully in all of us, angry, scared, and frustrated. What does the bully want? Sometimes it is friendship or acceptance. Don't go it alone. Work with friends or groups at school to reach out or have adults reach out. If it is your child who is the bully or is just starting some bullying behaviors, teach them to manage their anger. Don't be angry with them, show them how they can channel their anger into positive action. Remember that in the film [the book was based on a documentary that got a lot of attention, *Bully*] parents and friends were able to turn their anger into positive action. Remember that in the film parents and friends were able to turn their anger and grief into community demonstrations that brought more support and understanding to the problem.

Yes, and there is a murderer in all of us. The murderer may be angry, scared, frustrated. What does the murderer want? Sometimes it is friendship and acceptance. Reach out to him. Cruelty and hurt are on a continuum; they differ in degree, not in kind. Bullying and a street mugging and murder are not isolated and separate phenomena. I told Dee to be finished with Charlotte. No more with her. Done. Dee is not Charlotte's social worker or psychologist. And later on, Dee is not the savior of an abusive boyfriend of husband. If someone tries to hurt her, I want her out of there, immediately, and for good.

Channel Dee's anger in positive directions? Psychobabble. If something warrants being angry, be angry. Anger is a perfectly healthy human response in some circumstances. Don't a priori rule out its legitimacy. There's no need to feel compelled to dissipate anger or transmute it if you have something to be angry about. Sometimes raging anger in response to injustice is exactly what is

called for. I don't want to take the edge off Dee, or limit her repertoire of responses to her world. I want her to be capable of every emotion from love to hate. Yes, hate. Some things that go in this life are so contemptible they deserve to be hated, all out. Don't tell me or my daughter not to hate, and particularly if you feel justified in hating me or her.

If Dee were bullying? In no uncertain terms, I'd let her know I thought it was wrong. You don't treat people that way, period.

As for organizing group actions against bullying, fine, for those who are so disposed, which I happen not to be. I'm just not an organizer. More fundamentally, I don't want to foster the idea that unless and until the community takes collective action bullying is somehow acceptable. I don't have to organize support among my colleagues at work in order to prevent people from slamming me up against the wall or punish them if they do. Organized support, no organized support: slamming someone up against the wall doesn't go.

And I don't have to work anything through with a wall slammer. I don't have to have anything to do with him at all. And I'm not telling him an amusing anecdote or analyzing his motives or life circumstances, and I'm not committing to helping him out. Just don't slam me up against the wall, that's it. If you can't figure out why I'm telling you that, that's your problem, not mine. I have better things to do than deal with the likes of you, so get out of my way. And if you hurt me it's not going to be just you and me; others are going to be involved. And I'm sure as hell not going to designate you as my best friend (I don't want Dee or me doing what I did with Pete Holm). And I'm not going to hurt myself; I don't as much as eat an extra Milky Way candy bar over jerks, and if I can help it, neither does Dee.

I'll stop here. I guess it comes down to helping Dee to see herself as a precious and inviolate human being (unlike me as a child). She's nobody's plaything or scapegoat. She doesn't have to put up with or go along with cruelty for a second. She doesn't have to battle her way through life alone; there are people to help. And most of all, I want Dee to know that her first protectors, for as long as we are alive, are her mom and dad.