

STICKS AND STONES MAY BREAK MY BONES AND NAMES CAN ALWAYS HURT ME

I wanted to tell you a story that happened to me a few years ago. When I was in kindergarten my teacher told my parents that she thought it would be best for me that I be held back a year. So instead of starting first grade at six I was seven.

I was big for my age anyway so when I was in first grade I was a couple of inches taller than Pete who was the next tallest in the room.

Because of my size people would always ask me how old I was. And as soon as it was common knowledge in my classroom that I was seven instead of six, I was given the name "Donnie the Dummie."

Many times I would walk home from school with tears in my eyes saying to myself, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names can never hurt me." Actually I found no comfort in reciting that over and over because I was hurt. I had no broken bones but my feelings were hurt. Didn't kids realize how much pain they were inflicting with their stupid and cruel words?

My cousin Randy who was twelve noticed I was very unhappy most of the time so he asked me what was wrong. At first I didn't tell him because I felt so embarrassed but he finally convinced me to tell him what was wrong.

When I told him how the kids were making fun of me at school he said, "Look Donnie, you're bigger than the rest of the kids in your class and if you want them to respect you then you have to demand respect."

"But how do I do that?" I asked.

"Just start letting them know that you're not going to let them get away with saying mean things to you. Just beat up anyone who says anything and believe me, the kids will not only stop saying mean things, they'll be afraid of you and give you respect."

I thought about it for a minute and what he was saying made sense to me.

The next morning I ate an extra bowl of cereal so I would be stronger. As I walked to school I was daydreaming about Pete saying something to me and how I was going to handle it. After going through it over and over in my mind I decided that if he or anyone else said anything that day I would tell them that I was going to beat them up after school.

I was disappointed but relieved that nothing was said that day. But on the way home from school I kept daydreaming about how I would handle it when I would have to face the situation.

I got great pleasure when I imagined a whole group of kids watching on as I delivered some hard blows to Pete's body and then to finish the fight off I hit him in the face causing his nose to bleed. I stand there the victor as Pete runs home crying.

I didn't have to wait long for my daydream to become a reality. The very next day during recess while we were out playing in the schoolyard, Pete was trying to show off in front of the girls and he yelled out to me, "Hey, Donnie the Dummie, don't you feel dumb being with the first graders instead of being with the second graders?"

My heart started pounding and I wanted to go deliver some blows right then and there but I knew we'd get in trouble if we fought while school was in session so I said, "I'll tell you what, Pete the Creep, why don't you meet me after school behind the K-Mart and I'll show you a thing or two."

I could tell by the look on his face that he was surprised but he wasn't about to look bad in front of the other kids, so he said, "Sure."

I could hardly keep my mind on school the rest of the day because all I could think about was beating up Pete. Word got around school that there was going to be a fight so it was no surprise to me that there were over twenty kids there waiting to see the fight. I had problems breathing and could hardly catch my breath as I waited for Pete to show up.

After a few minutes he showed up and I could tell he was nervous. He was trying to hide his feelings but I knew he was scared and that made me feel good.

The kids immediately started cheering for him and saying, "Teach the Dummie a lesson Pete!" which only made me madder and determined to hurt Pete more.

I was so angry that I didn't even feel pain when he punched me. I grabbed him and pushed him into the dirt and he got up and tried to push me down but I held on to him and he ended coming down with me. While we were both on the ground we exchanged several blows and within minutes of exchanging blows it was obvious that I was going to win the fight so I delivered that blow to his face that I had imagined myself doing so many times in my daydreams. And just as I had imagined his nose started bleeding and he ran home crying.

But instead of the praise and respect that had always come to me at the end of my daydream, the kids started jeering me and calling me a bully. Julie Adams whom I had had a secret crush on since the beginning of the school year came up to me and said, "That was really mean of you Donnie."

I was crushed. My daydream had turned into a nightmare. What I thought was going to be the solution to my problem had only made it worse.

I walked home dejected and depressed.

When I got home my mom could tell I had been in a fight. I had a scratch on my face and my clothes were all dirty from being in the dirt. I didn't want to answer her questions about what had happened. I just wanted to clean, up but she insisted I tell her what happened.

After I had explained about how the kids made fun of me and how my cousin Randy had advised me to handle it, I told her what had happened that day.

I could tell by the look on her face that it hurt her that the kids were making fun of me. After listening to my whole story she said, "Randy gave you bad advice. I wish you had come to me and talked about it."

I just sat there with my head down feeling ashamed. She hugged me as dirty as I was and I couldn't hold back the tears. I didn't want to go through life known as Donnie the Dummie. And now the kids hated me even more. My tears turned into sobs at the prospect of being an outcast. After a few minutes my mother had calmed me down and sent me to the bathroom to get cleaned up.

Life seemed so hard. After I got out of the tub and changed into some clean clothes, my mom sat me down for a talk. She told me that the Bible has all the answers for life's problems because the God Who wrote the Bible is there to help us no matter what we have to face. She explained though that God promises to help only those who obey Him and that meant handling problems the way the Bible says to handle them. She showed me in the Bible that we are never to be unkind or cruel to those who treat us badly but instead we are to be kind to them and pray for them. I couldn't even imagine myself being nice and kind to those kids that had hurt me so badly. I had only found pleasure in imagining beating them up!

But I could see that what she was telling me was in the Bible so I went outside afterwards and prayed to God to help me do the right thing even though I didn't feel like doing the right thing.

And then the thought came to me that I should apologize to Pete for hurting him. I didn't want to do it but in my heart I knew it was the right thing to do.

I slowly walked over to his house and the closer I got the faster my heart beat and I wanted to turn around and go home. But I took a deep breath and knocked on his door.

It took a few minutes before he answered and I was surprised to see that his eyes were red from crying. I felt really bad for him. He said in a really unfriendly voice, "What do you want?"

I said, "Pete, I'm really sorry for hurting you today. I should never have picked a fight with you."

I could tell he was taken back by my apology and he said, "I guess it was really my fault because I'm the one who was picking on you."

I stood there for a minute looking at my feet not knowing what to say. Then he said, "Do you want to come in?"

That was the beginning of a friendship that has lasted until now. I'm thirteen now and I've learned by experience that God's way is the only way to handle things. There will always be people like my cousin Randy who will tell you what they

think you should do to handle your problems but unless their advice agrees with what the Bible says, their advice should be rejected.

After Pete and I became friends a lot less kids called me Donnie the Dummie but it hurt just as much when those kids did say it. But instead of thinking hateful thoughts about them when they did, I prayed for them and went out of my way to do things for them.

By the time I got to second grade I had lost that label forever and the respect that I had so badly longed for became mine.

I have come to know and understand that the knowledge we need to live our lives the way God intended us to live them can only come from reading and obeying the Bible. If a person has something wrong with his car, he doesn't read a book on how to enjoy good health. He either reads a book about how to fix his car or he goes to a mechanic. And if something is wrong with his body, he doesn't go to a mechanic, he goes to a doctor!

We need to know that human beings are not only physical but spiritual beings and the only Book in the world that can give us knowledge about how to live our lives is the Bible. God wants what is best for us and He clearly tells us how to experience an abundant life, one that is filled with joy and peace. And when we do have hard times and heartaches, He is always there with us to help us through.

Please don't miss out on the wonderful life God wants to give you.

Read your Bible every day and follow the instructions!