What Bullying Has Taught Me

I, like many other kids, was bullied growing up, and I would like to take this opportunity to share my experience about how bullying impacted my life. I remember being a loud, outgoing, confident young child at the age of three. I often approached complete strangers and struck up conversation. I thought I was pretty awesome. Oh, to be three again! From kindergarten on, a change began to happen. That’s kind of when kids start noticing differences in each other. I was born with Moebius Syndrome, which causes facial paralysis and limb deformities, so I stood out as having a difference. Bullying started, and didn’t completely stop until I was in high school. So, from about age five to 15 I was bullied. I went from being loud to quiet, outgoing to shy, self-confident to insecure. I developed high anxiety and low self-esteem. I hated being different and believed my differences were ugly.

I have a lot of inner scars and pain from being bullied, but I wouldn’t change it. It’s shaped the person I’ve become and has given me my life purpose. I am so much stronger for it and possess an understanding I would have never known had I not been bullied. I have such overwhelming love, compassion, and empathy for all beings. I treat everyone I encounter with kindness. I try my best to seek understanding and forgive those who are cruel to me because I don’t know what they are going through. There’s a saying that “only hurt people hurt people”, and I’ve found that to be true; even for myself. My bullies were hurting because they, too, were being bullied in some way. So they needed an outlet for that pain and to feel powerful. I was being bullied, so, I, too, bullied at times. I was a terrible bully, though. I remember on my bus there was a mentally disabled girl, and the other kids would take her hat off her head and throw it around the bus. I was often bullied on the bus, so the fact they were picking on her took the heat off me. So, I joined in and threw her hat around. Only to go and pick it up, give it back to her, and befriend her. In 3rd grade the kids would bully this boy for being fat. I would join in from time to time. The teacher would yell at him almost every day for not having red pens. I knew his family was poor, so I asked my mom if we could buy him some red pens. I anonymously put them on his desk before class one day. Another time in 4th grade, we learned in class about May Day and how people would leave May Day baskets on people’s doorsteps, ring the doorbell, and run away so they wouldn’t know who left it. So I asked my mom to help me make a May Day basket, and I left one on the doorstep of that same boy. Thinking back on it, it almost brings tears to my eyes how proud I am of that sweet, kind-hearted little girl. With all the crap she was going through, she still had such compassion and empathy.

Sometimes I am still so hard on myself, but thinking back on everything I’ve been through, I know I’ve come so far and have grown so much as a person. Undoing 20+ years of low self-esteem and negative self-talk takes time and patience. More and more I see glimpses of that three-year-old me. For so long my anxiety has made me want to run and hide from people because I didn’t trust them to \*see\* me. But, I’m ready to be seen. For so long I silenced my voice due to insecurity. But, I’m ready to be heard. I may not speak with total confidence, but at least I’m having the courage to speak. I want my story to make an impact. I want to encourage and inspire others to love themselves; to recognize the beauty and uniqueness in themselves and in others; and to treat one another with loving-kindness, compassion, and empathy. Think of what a beautiful world that would be. This is my life purpose.

I never thought I would think of being bullied as a gift, but it truly was. I am grateful for the experiences I’ve had because they have taught me priceless lessons. I am better because of it. I’m in the process of loving myself and my differences because I am worth it. And so are you. And so is everyone. We are all beautiful; worthy of being seen, of being heard, and of being loved.