

An Innocent Bully

BY LINDA GERBER

*If you see this, you probably won't even blink.
You won't realize I'm talking about you
because you don't think of yourself as a bully.*

*Maybe you joked around a little when you were in school,
but it was nothing serious, just some innocent teasing.*

Except . . .

Teasing isn't intended to cause humiliation.

Teasing doesn't tip the scales of power against the victim.

*Teasing isn't repetitive to the point of chipping away a
person's self-esteem.*

You didn't think you were being a bully.

You were just having fun.

And since I'd been taught to suck it up

*and that names could never hurt me,
I wouldn't let you see the way the knife twisted inside me
when you and your friends mooed
as I walked down the hall
because my last name was Cowan
and you thought you were clever.*

*Or when you told everyone at school that my dad felt me up
because I made the mistake of explaining to you once how
he was blind, so he had to "see" with his hands.*

*Or when you smudged red paint all over my drawings in art
because they were chosen to hang at the front of the room
and you didn't think I was cool enough
to have my pictures displayed
so you destroyed them
and then you stared me down,
and threatened to hurt me if I told.*

*You didn't think you had already hurt me.
And if you did, it wasn't your fault.
You didn't know I would take it so hard,
even when you stole my clothes in gym
and stuck them in the toilet
and then gagged out loud whenever you saw me
for weeks afterward
and told everyone I smelled like shit.*

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*You didn't think that would cause me to run home in
tears
and look at myself in the mirror
and cry some more
because I was starting to believe
the names you called me.*

I was gross.

I was weird.

I was stupid.

I was ugly.

I didn't deserve any better.

*You'll never know any of this because
you won't recognize yourself in a word I've said.
You didn't think you were a bully.
You didn't think you hurt me.
You didn't think.*