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Unforeseen Consequences

 The fourth and fifth grade years of my life had a profound and lasting effect on me. They affected not only who I was at one time but continue to shape my future. During that time, I was put through a great amount of suffering and hardship. I believe these experiences have changed me not only in negative ways, they have given me a well of hard experience that I can draw on.

 I met my first day of fourth grade with great enthusiasm. The summer had been full of long hot days of sitting around the house. I was tired of it and so I was looking forward to the new year if only for a change. From the previous year I only really had one friend but, what the heck, it was only my second year of school; you can’t expect to have everything.

 That year, it turned out, would be different from anything I had experienced. At the beginning it was pretty normal, just a bunch of rowdy nine and ten year old kids attempting to learn basic skills. Gradually though things began to change. There was one kid in particular that really affected the class. His name was Troy and he was a new face in the classroom that year. At first he and I got along really well. We had a lot in common; outspoken, intelligent and not afraid to be ourselves I thought that we could become really close friends. Unfortunately things began to go wrong.

 I don’t really remember how or why it started, but gradually Troy began to become more and more hostile towards me. At first it was only teasing, what I assumed to be friendly joking, but it continued to escalate. He also began to gather a group of kids that would listen to whatever he said. They were too afraid of seeming “different,” or “not cool.” Slowly I began to not be accepted anymore as I refused to become part of the group. I would be the last ones to be picked for games, as a partner for a project or pretty much anything else. Troy, on the other hand, seemed to be able to do everything I couldn’t. He had the respect of our peers, and it was pretty much to the point that whatever he said would go. For the most part I wasn’t worried about it and tended to ignore what was going on until things finally became too much.

 Every day we would be allowed a half hour recess in order to blow off steam. Usually I would swing or just run around. Troy, with his group of followers, would sit up on one of the play structures, talk and trade Pokémon cards. One day I decided that I wanted to join them and join the group instead of being by myself. I climbed up and sat down next to Troy and tried to join the conversation. I was surprised to hear Troy say, “No, you’re not allowed to be up here.” I thought I had been one of Troy’s “friends,” so I had no idea why I wasn’t being accepted. “Just get down,” He continued and before I knew what was happening he had begun to stand up and make like he was going to push me off of the play structure. Before he could, I climbed down by myself, trying to hide the tears of frustration running down my face.

 After that day something major changed in the dynamic of the classroom. Suddenly, I wasn’t welcome anymore. I had never been popular but now almost all of the other children even wanted to be near me. I thought the whole world hated me. I had one friend to talk and play with. I was still blessed but I still felt down. Steadily it became even worse. Having everything on my desk being shoved on the floor became a regular event in my life. I tried talking to the principal for help but there wasn’t a single incident that was so bad as to get anyone in trouble. I continued to bear everything for another year and a half but by that time both my mom and I had been fed up long enough. We had tried talking to the teachers, coaches, principles, basically everyone but no one was willing and able to help.

 I was also having a lot of issues at home. I would fly into destructive rages whenever I was frustrated. I had to see a psychiatrist once a week and was on medicine to help control them. My dad was deployed with the Army in Iraq. I had no fatherly support. I really felt that the whole world had turned its back on me. I really wasn’t in the best shape emotionally.

 After Christmas I moved to a new school. I was hopeful it would go a lot more smoothly but unfortunately it wasn’t all that much better. The teachers were nice but I was still wary of connecting with anyone so I was quickly tagged as “the nerd,” and someone to avoid. My only other friend was still at the other school so I didn’t even have him anymore. What made things worse was that a kid from the new school, named Martin, picked up where Troy left off. While the other children just wouldn’t talk to me he seemed to make it his entire goal in life to just make me miserable. Also like Troy, he held power in the classroom and no one was brave enough to stop him.

 Sixth grade I moved to Bishop Garriga middle school which was a lot larger and allowed me to avoid anyone who gave me trouble. I was still having problems connecting with others. I just couldn’t get myself to trust anyone enough to get close to them. After that year I got a withdrawal and was homeschooled for seventh and eighth grade. I was just too tired of trying to get along with others and worn down with my inability to succeed. During those two years I really had to relearn, all over again, how to socialize and trust people my own age.

 I’ll never forget what Troy and Martin did to me but I have learned to forgive them. Those two years, fourth and fifth grade, undoubtedly changed me forever. They shaped how I associate with people. To this day I still have trouble trusting. I hide behind a smiling, joking exterior but every time I have a conversation or meet a new person it triggers that distrust. My first thought often is, “How will this person try to take advantage of me and how can I avoid it?” The actions of those two young men, though they almost certainly don’t realize it, have changed the course of my life and have seriously hurt me in my ability to have relationships. We can’t ever take our actions for granted. We never know what the consequences might be.