

Q & A for media prep

Tell us a little about your son Jared and why you compiled this book

Jared was my youngest son, a gentle-souled young man. During the last few months of 6th grade, Jared was harassed and assaulted by a chronic bully. This set in motion a “trigger” that caused Jared to become clinically depressed. A few months later, on September 29th, at the age of 13 years and 6 days old, Jared took his life.

Over the years, I began to find other parents who had experienced the same loss, under similar circumstances as I did. We were determined that we wanted to stop this tragedy from happening to other families. In May of last year (2006), we began to work on our book, “Bullycide in America: Moms speak out about the bullying/suicide connection”, in an effort to change the way parents and schools think about school bullying.

Do you believe this book can change attitudes about bullying?

I believe it will. After reading this book, people will never see bullying or “bullycide” the same. By the way, the term “bullycide” was coined by the late Tim Field, a UK author and anti bullying activist. The definition is, “A suicide attributed to the emotional after-effects of bullying.

I am hoping this book will spearhead an attitude of change throughout the USA and English-speaking countries to awaken their responsibilities towards the safety of all our children, thus saving the bullied child from further harm as well as the bully who damages himself through his or her actions.

...My personal belief is – if someone read this book and their heart hadn’t changed, I would recommend that they either, 1) Go to church to see if they could get a Soul put back into them or 2) See a Psychiatrist to see if they have somehow lost their mind – of course I’m just being facetious, but I really feel strongly that this book will change hearts and minds about bullying.

Do you believe your book will be able to prevent all bullying?

There is a story about a boy on a beach in the early morning pitching starfish back into the sea. When a man walked by and saw him throwing the starfish he said, “Look at all these thousands of starfish? There is no way you can make a difference.”

The boy quietly picked up another starfish, looked at it and then threw it into the sea. He then commented back, “Well, I made a difference for THAT starfish!”

No, we can never prevent all bullying. No school, (or child), will ever be perfect. But to a child that was saved from being bullied because someone read our book, “Well, WE make a difference for that child!”

What is one of the challenges you have experienced in raising awareness about bullying?

Changing attitudes. Many in our society have a “survival of the fittest” attitude about life in general. Somehow, we need to help people understand that some children cannot survive the abuse that comes with that attitude.

Why should a child have to “take it like a man” or have to endure bullying as “just part of growing up”. Can a child understand why an adult feels that being bullied and abused in school is a “growing experience” or something that will “help them become a better person?” ...No more than an adult would feel that being bullied or harassed at work would do the same for them. It is a two-faced logic.

Has there been any research on school bullying

Until recently there has not been any serious research done on this subject. Bullying had been written off “as part of growing up” and a “symptoms” such as drug use, cutting, and truancy, instead of the school environment itself.

However, today we are seeing many more studies, some from government sponsors and others from private organization such as the Olweus programs.

As the moms in this book begin to get the message out and other moms across America begin communicate their child's stories, we are hoping that Education Researchers will make bullying studies a higher priority.

Is bullying a big problem for a child?

I believe it is a big problem. In the Christian world, we have been taught to treat each other kindly but what happens to a child who receives just the opposite in their schools each day?

Maybe as an adult, they might be able to cope with abuse at home or in their workplace, but children are just beginning to figure out how this world works and how they will be able to cope with life. Besides trying to understand themselves, many kids are going through the body-changes we call puberty...and most parents understand what a trying time this is. Being bullied just doesn't make sense to a child experiencing it. Some will blame themselves. Some will become depressed. Some will become angry, lashing out at, or getting even with others.

If you could talk to only one group of people about your book, which group would that be?

I would go to colleges and universities and talk to the future teachers of America. They are the eager faces that will mold our children's mind and attitudes on bullying. I believe that if our book, "Bullycide in America" were required reading for Education Majors, we would find that in a few years, bullying would be seen as a rare experience in our schools.

IF there were ONE THING schools could do to stop the bullying, what would that be?

Take responsibility. The Adults in charge must stop the bullies from bullying. I know that sounds too simple, but that is the easiest way to solve the problem. Schools must learn what to watch for. They must enforce their policies on bullying making sure there are strong consequences for physical, emotional and sexual harassment and bullying.

We have too long been focused on the victim and "why" they are victimized – too short, too tall, too fat, too skinny, too unpopular, too popular, too gay, too straight... Well, I am telling you, the victims are not at fault for being bullied. The victim is not the problem. The bully is. Stop the bully from bullying and you will have no victim(s). It's as simple as that.

Years ago, victims of rape would be taunted, "You wore your skirt too low, you were in the wrong place, or you were hanging with the wrong crowd. Today we know that none of those "excuses" were valid reasons for being raped, and in fact, even 82-year-old grandmothers could be the victim of a rapist. The rapist is entirely to blame for his/her own actions.

What kind of problems will the bully have to face in life?

Bullying not only creates problems for the victims, but also for the bullies themselves. According to the FBI in a study done after the Columbine shootings, bullies have a 75% chance of ending up in prison by the time they reach 24.

How have you dealt with Jared's death?

I have dealt with my loss the only way that I know how and that is to become proactive in the cause to prevent bullying and let the world know what happened to him. Jared could have been anyone's son. Telling my story to everyone who will listen has helped me heal. I believe that *Bullycide in America: Moms speak out about the bullying/suicide connection* is a healing project that will help many others...educators, parents, and students for many years to come.