

Bullying back in the day

EDITORIAL

The TV commercial says it's the most wonderful time of the year. Some on social media are figuratively dancing on their keyboards over the back-to-school season. And, truth be told, even some kids are excited about meeting up with their pals again and anticipating what the new school year will bring.

For others, the thought of going back to school can be literally sickening. Remaining seated, eyes fixed on the teacher for hours is next to impossible. Others have been bullied and will be again. Many will be too afraid to tell anyone.

It's not easy being a kid. I wouldn't do it again if you paid me. Your friendly, neighbourhood editor was born with a club foot, and while surgery corrected it, I was noticeably pigeon-toed, which was a flashing neon beacon for other kids who called me names and did impressions of the way I walked. Although I would later learn how to box, I was never really a fighter so I took it and held it inside like most kids do.

As I got a little older, I gained weight. The pigeon-toed look had improved, but now they had something else. Pneumonia saved my life. I was so sick for so long that by the time I returned to school the fat was all gone. I played football and rugby and had a girlfriend, but the insecurity was always lingering. I learned to drink beer at 14 and was a pro by 16.

Everyone has a different story and every story is unique. Some kids are born blessed with natural good looks and charisma and confidence oozing from their pores. They're usually the leaders of their pack. I had a friend just like that. We were best friends for years, but I never once questioned my place in the pecking order. We were friends, but I was always the lieutenant. We eventually grew apart, as adults will do over time. He became a corporate vice-president, had a family and built himself a fulfilling life. There were others like him. One of my buddies from high school, a guy I would drink beer and get into a little trouble with, became the CEO of one of this country's largest companies. He's one of those guys you read about on New Year's Day when they write stories about how some CEOs will make your entire salary for the year by lunch.

The ones I think about most, though, are the ones who were just different enough to be noticed for all the wrong reasons. Many people said the 'f' word for gays back then. We probably called each other that word 10 times a day. Who knew it was filthy? But there was a gay kid in our class and over the years I've wondered what his life must have been like back then.

A Jewish friend ? a guy we all loved ? was called Sammy because of a well-known Jew named Sam who owned a chain of grocery stores in the city. You're Jewish? You're Sammy. We didn't know if it hurt. Now kids today know what hurts and social media has made it much easier to spread hateful and hurtful slurs and threats. They're far more educated and savvier than my generation. Most of them, of course, have good hearts, but some get a kick out of pushing buttons.

Be sure to take the time to check on your child's social media channels.

An expert from the Canadian Red Cross explains all of this and more in this week's paper. You'll find it on the front page.