



**Select Noteworthy Quotes from**  
***Please Stop Laughing at Us . . . One Survivor's Extraordinary Quest to***  
***Prevent School Bullying***

***On turning pain into purpose . . .***

“I try to visualize a box. Sealed inside it are the darkest emotions from my adolescence. Immediately before every speech, while I’m waiting offstage to be introduced, I say a prayer. *God, what I’m about to do is hard. Please don’t let it be for nothing. Help me get to those who need this message the most.* Then I rip open the box and unleash the toxins inside. When my talk is over, I take a deep breath, suck all that rage and fear back into the box, and put it away until next time.”

***On being An Adult Survivor of Peer Abuse . . .***

“I don’t know it yet, but I’m far from alone in my inability to shake off the primal hold the popular crowd from school still has over me. In fact, I will soon discover that there are millions of others who are just as ashamed and embarrassed about it as I am. We work, we dream, we marry, have kids and grow old, and rarely does anyone ever suspect the truth. Our classmates put a hole in us, and our self-esteem keeps falling out. We’re constantly scooping the broken pieces off the floor and stuffing them back inside, like the scarecrow in *The Wizard of Oz*, hoping no one notices . . . we are *Adult Survivors of Peer Abuse*, a ghostly population of individuals struggling to break free of your influence. And the worst part is that most of you never meant to hurt us. You probably don’t even remember making fun of us. Every time you rolled your eyes as we passed you in the hall, snickered at our attempts to win your approval, or made us the butt of a joke, you may have believed it was all in good fun. And when you see us today at the mall or the grocery store, you smile and make small talk, unaware of the damage you’ve done. The bully never remembers. The outcast never forgets.”

***On being an activist . . .***

“I begin to have doubts that I’m as strong and unselfish as I thought, and that maybe I’m like the bride who elopes, then discovers that she was never cut out to be a wife. The problem with being an activist is that people expect courage and selflessness from you all the time, and when you need some privacy, not only do they often think less of you but you think less of yourself, too. Then one day you wake up with a chip on your shoulder the size of a cue ball. I don’t want to become that whiny author-activist I often had to work with during my publicist days, who resents how much she’s had to sacrifice. The night before my first talk in Baltimore, I come crashing into this realization, only to have the angelic hands of hope wrap around my throat and choke the fear out of me. Will I get to the point where I’m more afraid of hope than of doubt, because hope is guaranteed never to let me out of this relentless race?”

***The scariest question the author continues to ask herself . . .***

“Every time I talk to my former classmates about our shared past, I always end up pondering the same disturbing question: What part did I play in the drama of my own ostracism? And how many other kids today are coming home from school as I did, confused and in tears, desperate to unravel the mystery of why, no matter how hard they try, they don’t fit in? The victims of bullying always want to believe that it was never their fault, that they were shunned and tormented simply for being different. But *is* it that simple?”

***The truth about school bullying today . . .***

“The public sees only the surface of what’s going on in our schools. The media does the occasional story when there’s a dramatic or tragic angle that justifies the airtime. The government gets involved only when the threat of bad press leaves it no choice. But as I’m going through these e-mails, I’m starting to realize that not even I fully understood the extent of the problem. I believed what happened to me was extreme. I’m finding out now that it wasn’t. Based on what I’ve heard these past few weeks, my experience was *typical*. How is that possible? And why are so many kids telling me they’re afraid to go to their parents? What’s wrong with everyone?”

***A mistake too many parents and teachers make . . .***

“My parents and my teachers told me to ‘ignore the bullies, don’t give them the satisfaction.’ Today, I think of all the adults who give kids the same advice. I still don’t understand the logic. We preach to our children not to be bystanders, that if you see someone getting picked on, stand up and defend that person, but if *you’re* the one who’s being harassed, ignore it. Isn’t that a mixed message? It always made me wonder, why was I less worth defending than someone else?”

***Why some adults in the school system need to quit their jobs . . .***

“Those who make it harder on all of us are the battle weary professionals in a system where compassion has been eclipsed by cynicism. Disillusioned with their jobs, they use the same tired old psychobabble on students, who then respond by shutting themselves off even more from adults. These are the kids who are turning to me, and they deserve more than clichés and empty promises. Looking back on my own life, I know exactly where things went wrong: the innocent but costly mistakes my parents, teachers and other adults made and how to avoid them; what I could have done differently to improve my situation; why the schools I attended were a breeding ground for peer abuse; what all those therapists who were treating me never understood, and what many doctors still don’t understand about their adolescent patients. I have insights, answers, real solutions that only a survivor can know. But will people listen?”

***On feeling overwhelmed by too many desperate students . . .***

“One after another, they keep coming: the quarterback of the football team who says he’s always been a jerk to anyone who’s not popular and wants to know how to change; a

sixth grade girl whose friends turned on her because they found out her father was serving ten years in prison for selling drugs; an obese student in foster care who begs me to adopt her . . . At one point, unsure I can take any more, I get up and peek through the doorway to see how many more students are waiting to see me. The line is still extended to the end of the hallway.”

***Why traditional punishment doesn't work and may even contribute to school shootings . . .***

“All we're doing with traditional punishment methods like detention and suspension is making angry kids angrier. And where are they going to release that rage? Not in the direction of the popular students or their friends, because that would be too much of a social risk. Instead, they direct it toward the most socially expendable kid at school, the outcast. And then, when the outcast finally snaps because he's tired of being the scapegoat, everybody is scratching their heads wondering what happened. Our faulty system is what happened. If these schools thought I came on strong before, if certain principals and superintendents were wary of my unconventional ideas *before*, watch out America, because I'm just getting started!”

***Why so many principals feel cheated by the American school system . . .***

“I never really thought about how tough certain principals have it. The way most districts work, the principal has the authority to hire faculty, but not fire them. The most he can do is make a recommendation to the superintendent and the school board, but they have to approve the dismissal, which can be an elaborate process. I wonder how many teachers have gotten tenure that don't even belong in a classroom because a principal who feels helpless and has convinced himself there's nothing he can do looks the other way. Districts that don't empower their principals lose in the long run because a tired, discouraged leader is no good to anyone.”

***On being diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder as a result of chronic school bullying . . .***

“But what am I supposed to do? I can't just walk away from this cause, especially now. Think of all the adult survivors like me who are also going through life worried they're crazy. At least letting them know they too might have post-traumatic stress disorder gives them something concrete to work with. Half the time, these people are told they're just being overly dramatic, and they need to forget the past and move on. I can't quit now and abandon them or the kids who need me. I just can't!”

***On damaged families . . .***

“One bullied girl who confessed to me she's been struggling with her mom reaches out and squeezes her hand. Another girl rests her head on her dad's shoulder while he gently strokes her hair, his expression a mix of remorse and relief. Watching these parents and children finding each other again is overwhelming. School bullying just doesn't damage kids, it damages whole families.”

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