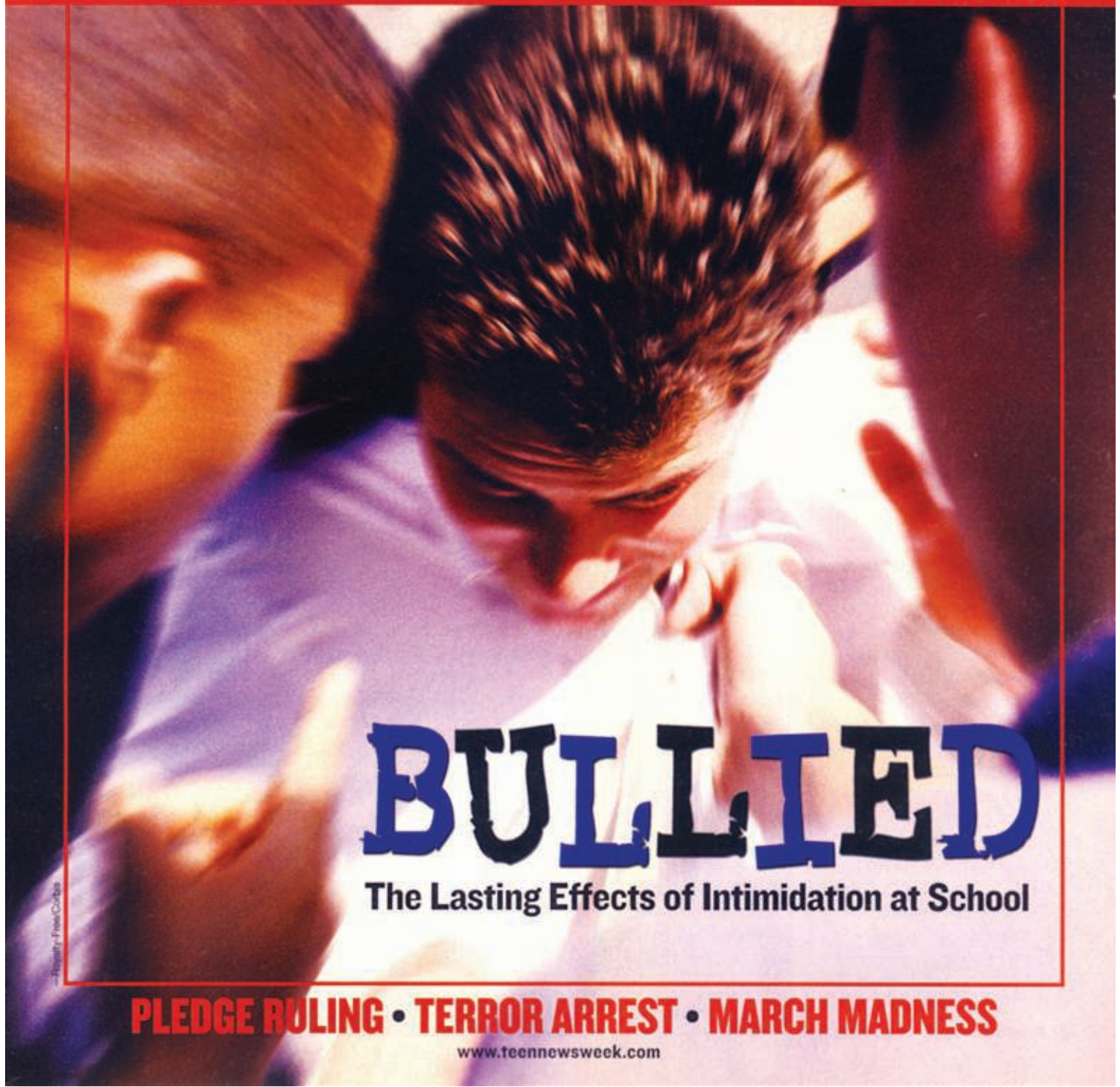


# Teen Newsweek

Volume 4, Issue 21

March 17, 2003

With the editors of WEEKLY READER™



## BULLIED

The Lasting Effects of Intimidation at School

**PLEDGE RULING • TERROR ARREST • MARCH MADNESS**

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# BULLIED

## The lasting effects of intimidation at school

**I**T WAS AS IF A NOTICE WERE HANGING on the school bulletin board: *Worried about your status with the in-crowd? Want to show your friends how cool you can be? Just beat [up] Jodee, laugh at her, and make her cry. Be sure and do it in front of everyone. That way, the popular kids can see how amazing you are.*"

That's how Jodee Blanco remembers her days in school. Perhaps it was because she was often the new kid. Maybe she was different. But she was always the victim of bullying. Sometimes the attacks were so violent she feared for her safety. Once she was so angry she thought about killing her tormentors.

In her book *Please Stop Laughing at Me*, Blanco describes her suffering at the hands of schoolyard bullies. Although she graduated from high school more than a decade ago, her memories are still vivid.

So much for the theory that bullying is something people get over and forget.

Today Blanco has a successful career as a celebrity publicist. But like many victims of bullying, she still bears physical and emotional scars.

Blanco's book hit stores in March. It's already a bestseller, perhaps because many people share experiences similar to hers.

"My torment is a universal torment that millions of teens are going through every day," says Blanco. "I know what it's like to be the outcast, to not have any friends,

to cry myself to sleep, to feel ugly."

Blanco says she wrote the book for teens, to let them know that they are not alone. She wants other victims to see that they can survive and be successful. She also wrote the book for parents and teachers, to let them know what it feels like to be victimized by bullying.

### A serious problem

For a long time, people dismissed bullying as just a normal part of growing up. It wasn't considered a serious problem. Two school shootings changed that.

Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold were outcasts at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colo. In 1999, they armed themselves and went for revenge. They killed 13 and left dozens wounded before

turning their guns on themselves. It was the worst incident of school violence in the history of the United States. But it wasn't the last.

Charles Andrew Williams, 15, decided to get back at his tormentors at Santana High School in Santee, Calif.

"His ears stuck out, he was small, skinny, had a high voice," Scott Bryan, a friend of Williams's, told reporters. "So people picked on him 'cause he was the little kid."

In 2001, Williams brought a gun to school and fatally shot two people and wounded 13 others.

The initial response to those two tragedies was to tighten school security. But many see a common thread between the violent attacks. They believe the root cause of both was bullying.

"The solution isn't zero tolerance for weapons," says Blanco. "It's educating parents and teachers about how kids picking on kids can cause lasting damage."

### Apart from the crowd

Professor Allan L. Beane agrees. His son was bullied all through school. His son fought back physically, but that just made things worse. Beane says his son never got over it. He lost the will to live. His son's death at age 23 prompted Beane to write *The Bully Free School: Over 100 Tips and Strategies for Teachers K-8*.

"Bullies want power and control," says Beane. "They pick out easy targets. They look for people who are sensitive, for people who might not stand up for themselves, who might have a lack of confidence, or who

might be different."

Often the things that make a student "different" are that individual's strong points. Blanco was picked on, in part, because she wasn't afraid to voice her opinions, even when her views were unpopular. Erika Harold was brutally bullied in school. Students taunted her. Some even threatened to kill her. She was picked on because she looked different. Today, she speaks out against bullying as the reigning Miss America.

"The outcasts are always people who don't want to conform to the norm," says Blanco. "You're going to be bullied because [others] are threatened by you. You're someone who they don't understand, and they can't control you."

### Dealing with bullies

So what is the best way to deal with a bully? For years, Blanco tried to follow her parents' advice. "Just ignore them, and they'll go away." But the bullies never did. "It makes them try that much harder to get your goat," says Blanco.

Finally, Blanco confronted her bullies. She looked them straight in the eye and told them off. To her surprise, it worked.

The best way to deal with bullies, Beane says, is to speak up for yourself. But that's hard to do if you're already lacking self-confidence. That's why Beane urges students to develop their talents, make friends outside of school, and do things that increase their self-esteem.

Don't be afraid to tell friends, parents, and teachers about bullying. Beane says. But he adds, "Don't depend on adults to fix it. Kids have got to say when they see it. Walk over and stop it."

### Who's sorry now?

Many students worry they'll become the next target if they stand up for someone being bullied. That was always Annette R.'s fear. She went to school with Blanco. She too is haunted by the experience, but for different reasons.

Blanco was the new kid in school when she invited Annette and her cronies to a sleepover at her house.

"Jodee fell asleep. We proceeded to go downstairs and make a mixture of goop—flour, water, peanut butter—and started

applying this goop on Jodee. We thought it was fun," says Annette. "Jodee woke up, and sat up and looked at herself, and looked at us. And she said, 'It's OK, you can keep doing it.'"

Annette understood then how desperate Blanco was for friends. Annette also knew that what they did was wrong.

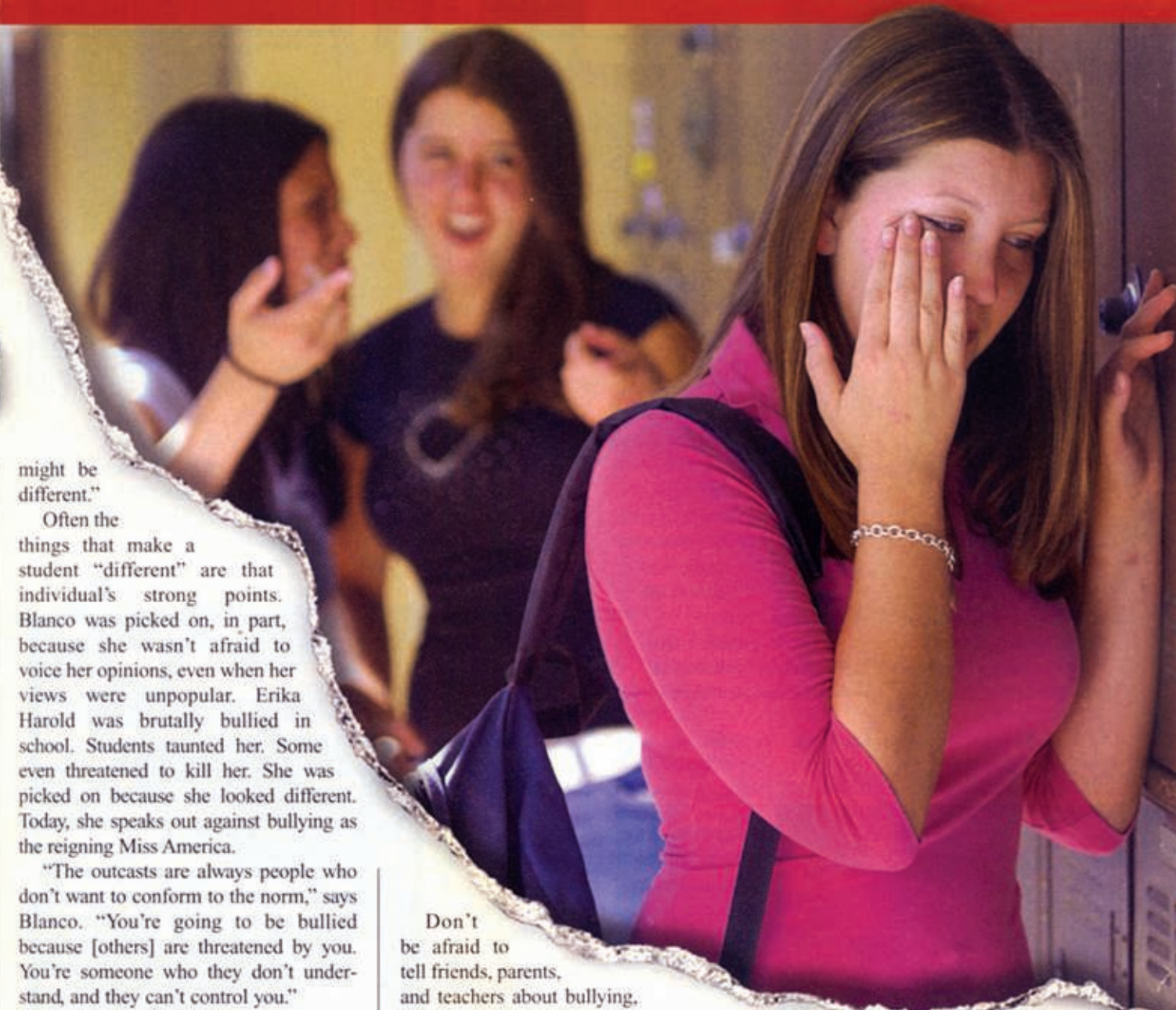
"That was in the back of my mind forever," says Annette. "As a grown woman I thought, 'I did these horrible things to her, and I need to say I'm sorry.'"

Annette got her chance ten years later, at their high-school reunion. "I did apologize," Annette says. Most of all, she says, she wishes she'd been strong enough to stop the bullying.

**Surveying the Situation**

- 15 percent of students are either bullied regularly or are bullies themselves.
- 7 percent of eighth graders stay home at least once a month because of bullies.
- 68 percent of students ages 12 to 15 say bullying is a "big problem" for people their age.
- 43 percent of students say they try to help the victim.
- 33 percent of students say they feel they should help the victim, but don't.
- 60 percent of people who were considered bullies in grades 6 through 9 are convicted of at least one crime by the time they turn 24.

Source: *Bullying in Schools*, by Ron Banks/ERIC Digest, April 1997/Kaiser Family Foundation; photo: Getty Images



—SW Productions