

Wallace
& Gromit
are back!

Bright Sox

White Sox playoff
preview inside



ESTABLISHED
IN 1988 & 2001
BY THE TIMES

THE TIMES

FOUNDED
1852
BY BENJAMIN
DIXON



EMILY PARKER/THE TIMES

Julie Blanco, author of "Please Stop Laughing at Me," talks to Valpo students while school students Monday about being bullied when she was young. Blanco spoke in front of four different sections of students.

'It's NOT just joking around'

Author talks about bullying to Valpo students, teachers, parents

BY ELIZABETH HOLMES
eholmes@times.com
704.62.519

VALPARAISO | Julie Blanco's life story sounds like it came from one of the movie sets she used to work on: she overcame horrendous bullying in middle and high school, flourished in a fabulous career as a Hollywood publicist, returned to her 20th high school reunion and married her childhood sweetheart. But on water law buggy the

ON THE WEB

Julie Blanco has an extensive Web site with resources for kids and parents, along with a URL of her presentation. It can be found at www.julieblanco.com.

outing, nothing could erase Blanco's pain from being the social outcast and the brunt of countless cruel jokes. Forget that Mel Gibson told her she was beautiful: Blanco wanted to

hate that from the jocks or the cheerleaders.

Blanco, now 41 and author of The New York Times best seller, "Please stop laughing at me," encountered her adolescence during four different assemblies in Valparaiso on Monday, as a kickoff to this year's Counting A Mile School program.

She began her talk with middle schoolers by discussing the 1996 murder-suicide at Columbian

Author

Continued from B1

High School. Blanco, who once took a knife to school with the intent to harm those who were bullying her, could relate to the inner rage from outside tormenting.

"It's a split-second, my knee went out to the shoemakers," Blanco said.

At no time during her 90-minute presentation did Blanco shy away from sharing horrific details of what she endured.

From the blood of a dissected pig being hurled at her face to her favorite shoes being thrown into a unisexified toilet, the grade played on Blanco's forged, emotional scars.

"She was really intense with what she was saying," said Grant Reed, an eighth-grader at Benjamin Franklin Middle School, who admitted to feeling left out sometimes.

Blanco had messages for both sides: To the bullied students, there's nothing wrong with you.

To the bullies, you may not realize it, but the harm you are doing lasts a lifetime. Her program title, "It's NOT just joking around," addresses the latter.

"We've probably like, all done that before," 11-year-old Kate Workman said. "We should think before we act."



EMILY PARKER/THE TIMES

Julie Blanco, author of "Please Stop Laughing at Me," talks to Valpo middle school students Monday about being bullied when she was young.

The trauma for Blanco didn't stop until her 20th high school reunion, when she faced her fears and confronted her bullies.

It's that - and not her subsequent Graduate marriage to the popular boy - that impressed Denise Korbala, one of the CASH faculty advisers.

"When times you find stories about bullying," Korbala said "But what was impressive about her story was the focus on forgiveness."