

BULLYING: Both Sides of the Story

In the November issue of Bridge we explore the topic of bullying. Here are two stories of students who experienced bullying at school. The first story about Jana, who was a victim of psychological bullying at elementary school for years, is mentioned in the magazine. Here you can read the full version. The second story is narrated by a boy who faced bullying at a **vocational school**¹. To escape the **taunts**², he started bullying others. Both the stories were written some time after the bullying took place, so you can see how the traumatic experiences influenced the future life of the victims.

Jana's story was adapted from www.minimalizacesikany.cz. On this website you can find many other stories as well as advice on how to prevent bullying and how to deal with it. The second story was adapted from a public blog. The narrator's name was changed.



They called me Black Death

During the first two years at elementary school only small things happened to me – missing books, rubbish in my school bag (such as leftovers of my schoolmates' snacks).

I never told anybody about it because I thought it was all right. As time passed, I started to realise that it was not all right. But it was too late. I had no friends. I was nobody.

Once two schoolmates came running over to me. One **tripped me up**³ and held me on the ground, the other one kicked me cruelly. Then they ran away and left me there. I was not even able to stand up. The physical pain passed, but I can't forget the things that followed.

Except for a few classmates, everybody **excluded**⁴ me from their company. They called me names whenever I approached them. They said that I was a plague (Black Death) and symbolically sanitised everything I touched. It went so far that I tried to kill myself several times. I was afraid to go to school. Nobody wanted to sit next to me. When I needed to borrow a pencil, I had to borrow it from the teacher. I made a big mistake then – I decided

that I was relatively safe if I became the teacher's shadow. I did not realise that I was withdrawing into my own world and losing universal human qualities.

I still felt anxious and in danger.

I learnt to love animals because when I felt really bad they could feel it. In the seventh grade I began to practise a type of **martial arts**⁵ hoping I would learn to defend myself. But my self-confidence was so low by that time that it did not help. A small miracle happened, though. Two girls from my former class took the same course and we got close, so I had good friends for the first time in my life. We did not care about anybody else. Then the entrance examinations to secondary school came. Standing in front of the list of results I shouted aloud joyfully: "Yes, I did it!"

So I went to a new school. I desperately wished others would not pay attention to me. I wanted a new life. Unfortunately,

I **started on the wrong path**⁶. I tried to get rid of painful memories by eating too much. I put on weight; 13 kilograms during half a year. Moreover, I had some family problems. There was too much studying, and I realised that I still felt **anxious**⁷ and in danger. I had no communication skills and I was unable to be among bigger groups of people. On the one hand, I was free, but on the other...? It went on like that for four years.

One day I looked after animals at an exhibition which took place in our school. When the event was over, a woman sat next to me and started talking to me. She asked me about my animals a lot and talked to me for a long time. Later she said that her name was Monika and she worked as a psychologist. It took me a year to find the courage to come to see her. I was told that I had a social phobia – a fear of people. Monika was the first person to whom I told my entire story. We met often in the following months. She went to the town with me. She taught me shopping and things like that, which I had not been able to handle at all.

I feel better today. I believe I can see a new beginning. I won my life back.

Jana, Czech Republic

Bully or you will be bullied

I had been quite a peaceful boy before I entered a vocational school. I had never been involved in a violent conflict, never attacked anybody without a reason.

Then I entered a vocational school for **plumbers**⁸. Unfortunately, I did not choose a good school... I would say I chose the worst school in the whole city. It was full of bullying, drugs, **corrupt**⁹ people and bastards who had not been accepted anywhere else.

At the school, an unwritten rule governed: "Bully or you will be bullied!" I had always hated such things, so it is obvious how I ended up.

Someone may think that closing somebody in a **locker**¹⁰ with **plumber's hemp**¹¹ and setting it on fire, or pressing **white-hot steel**¹² on somebody's hand or simply beating others and **blackmailing**¹³ them is funny. I was depressed as I had never experienced anything like that. There were mornings when I was crying and trying to persuade my mother to let me stay at home because I just did not want to go to school. She didn't care

much. It affected my **digestion**¹⁴ even. I was going deeper and deeper down, feeling more and more desperate. I had to choose. Either I would let them **trample**¹⁵ all over me, or I would have to do something.

It was sweet to see the suffering of people who used to hurt me.

The change did not happen suddenly. It was more like in military service: First I **mustered up**¹⁶ courage to defend myself. Even if they beat me, I wasn't passive at least. As time passed, they were less and less aggressive towards me. I went to a higher level. Together with people whom I once hated so much, I started to bully others –

the guys who used to bully me. It got so far that I felt like I had no enemy, like I could do whatever I wanted. Eventually, I was **expelled**¹⁷ from the school.

It was sweet to see the suffering of people who used to hurt me. Even now I smile as I write this, remembering what I was like at the beginning and what I was like in the end. I liked the school in a way. Bad experiences like that can make you stronger. And I got over it and went on.

However, I started to **be suspicious of**¹⁸ people. I just don't talk to many people anymore. I was not like that before. Mostly, I wanted to have a lot of friends, even if they acted in an arrogant manner. Now, I've had enough of that. About two years ago, a man really **pissed me off**¹⁹. He was somehow unreliable and God knows what else. So I just stopped talking to him. Now I do not talk to so many people that I could write a long list of them. Bad experiences drove me to it. I don't think there is anything bad about the way I behave. I will avoid all the bastards and only have nice people around. When I am on talking terms with somebody – and have been for a long time – the person can be sure that he is my true friend.

Jakub, Czech Republic



DISCUSS

- 1 How do you think Jana appeared to her classmates?
- 2 Why did Jana's classmates treat her this way?
- 3 What are the symptoms of social phobia?
- 4 Do you think that Jakub can be considered a victim of bullying?
- 5 What other consequences apart from eating disorders can bullying have?
- 6 Was Jakub justified in his actions?
- 7 Do you think he got over the bullying?
- 8 Can you imagine you would act similarly in his situation?

VOCABULARY

THEY CALLED ME BLACK DEATH

- ¹ **vocational school** [və(ɔ)'keɪʃ(ə)n(ə)l] – učiliště
- ² **taunts** [tɔ:nts] – posměch
- ³ **to trip sb up** – podrazit někomu nohy
- ⁴ **to exclude** [ɪk'sklud, ek-] – vyloučit

⁵ **martial arts** ['mɑ:ʃ(ə)l] – bojová umění

⁶ **I started on the wrong path** – šla jsem na to špatným způsobem

⁷ **anxious** – úzkostlivý

BULLY OR YOU WILL BE BULLIED

⁸ **plumber** ['plʌmə] – instalatér

⁹ **corrupt** [kə'rʌpt] – zkažený

¹⁰ **locker** ['lɒkə] – skříňka

¹¹ **plumber's hemp** – instalatérské konopí

¹² **white-hot steel** – žhavá ocel

¹³ **to blackmail** – vydírat

¹⁴ **digestion** [dɪ'dʒestʃ(ə)n, dar-] – zažívání

¹⁵ **to trample** ['træmp(ə)l] – šlapat

¹⁶ **to muster up** ['mʌstə] – posbírat

¹⁷ **to expel** [ɪk'spel, ek-] – vyloučit

¹⁸ **to be suspicious of** [sə'spiʃ(ə)s] – být podezřívavý vůči

¹⁹ **to piss off** (vulgar) – naštvat