

MaleCall

Journal of the Unitarian Universalist Men's Network
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When Bullies Grow Up (or Not)

By Brian J. Kiely
Minister of the Unitarian Church of
Edmonton, Alberta

It used to be that I thought bullies were limited to boys a few years older than me in grade school. They walked with a swagger and threw their weight around in the locker room. They picked on smaller kids, usually causing more humiliation than harm, but not always. I believed that once I grew up, once I got as big as they were, bullies would bother me no more. And since I grew quickly, even in elementary school, they didn't bother me for long.

I was lucky.

I never had to experience some of the day-to-day kind of abuse suffered by many children. I did, however, literally come between a bully and his victim in high school. I say 'literally' because in the class we shared, I sat behind the bully and in front of the victim. Joe had a mean streak a mile wide and a tongue that cut like a saber. Meanwhile, foreign-born, mild mannered Tommy just couldn't defend himself. Every day it seemed I had to stop Joe, some times verbally, sometimes physically. I wasn't being a hero, I was just caught in the cross-fire. A few times in the hallway I had to pull Joe off of Tommy.

I can't say I was ever Tommy's pal. I didn't much like him. But in the home where I grew up you just didn't pick on people. It wasn't fair. I would learn later that Joe grew up in a very different home. He fought daily and bitterly with his foster father. I hear stories of violence, but never knew for sure. He found his own

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Bearing Witness

Bystanders and children who repeatedly witness others being assaulted, bullied or sexually harassed can experience both a psychological and physiological level of stress that over time can equal that of the victim, according to a Pennsylvania State University researcher.

Richard Hazler and his colleagues conducted detailed interviews with 77 students who identified themselves as victims of multiple abuse. In separate conversations held a week apart, study participants reported the subjective impact of abuse they had personally experienced as victims.

In the second interview, they were asked how they felt about witnessing the repeated abuse of others. To measure levels of psychological stress, the researchers monitored the participants' heart rates and perspiration levels as they answered the questions.

They found progressively elevated stress levels as study participants recalled the specific incidents of abuse, regardless of whether the test subject had been a victim or merely a witness, according to a report in a recent issue of the journal *Violence and Victims*.

- From the Washington Post Outlook section, Feb. 13, 2005

Look for these UUMeN-sponsored workshops at General Assembly '05 in Fort Worth, TX (June 23-27):

HusbandSpeak: How Men Do Marriage. UU author Neil Chethik will share details of his new, landmark study of 350 heterosexual husbands.

The Other Side of the Bridge. Rev. Kenneth Beldon will lead this workshop on the struggles and triumphs that young men experience as they move through their late teens and early twenties.

About UUMeN

The Unitarian Universalist Men's Network is a continental membership organization for UU men (which also welcomes other gender allies). Our purpose is to build and sustain a mature, liberal religious masculinity. Our primary objectives are to: develop a continental resource network; support the personal and spiritual growth of men at the local, district and continental levels; and collaborate with other UU groups who share our interests and commitments. Members receive a quarterly newsletter, may vote at our Annual Meeting held in June at General Assembly, and are eligible for discounts on materials.

2004-2005 Steering Council

Neil Chethik (KY), president, 2005

Jim Jaeger (WI), treasurer, 2007

Bob Hospadaruk (MI), 2007

Kenneth Beldon (FL), 2005

Frank Robertson (MA), 2005

Dave Woods (IL), 2005

Drew Johnston (WA), 2006

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MaleCall

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Please send all submissions and concerns via e-mail (info@uumen.org) to:

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As of July 1: Kenneth Beldon

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WWW.UUMEN.ORG

From the President...

I'm a fan of older men. Whether they're members of The Greatest Generation, the Second Greatest Generation, or even the Not-So-Good-At-All Generation, I've found that older men have a lot of wisdom to offer us — if we'll only ask them for it.

Recently, while working on a book about heterosexual marriage, I had the opportunity to interview scores of older men about their marriages. Among other things, I asked them what it was that initially attracted them to their wives, what were the hardships and pleasures of their marriages, and how did housework, sex, arguing and other issues affect their relationships through the years.

I also asked them: What advice would you give a younger man who was thinking about getting married?

My book (tentatively titled, "The Voice of the Married Man") will be out next January, and will be available from the UU Men's Network. In the meantime, I thought you might be interested in what experienced husbands advised younger men who were considering getting married.

Here are seven suggestions from the experienced married men:

1) Take your time. Don't rush into marriage. Wait until you're at least 25 years old. And don't move directly from your parents' home into your marital home. Marriage takes life experience and maturity.

2) Keep expectations reasonable. Unrealistic expectations can kill a relationship. Don't expect your partner to meet all of your needs all the time. There are going to be hard times and down times. Don't give up. We don't marry soul mates. We create soul mates by going through difficult, as well as joyous, times together.

3) Marry a friend. Find someone you trust and feel comfortable with. Look for someone with a compatible personality. Make sure you not only love her, but like her, too. Treat her like a friend and keep her your friend.

4) Learn to give and take. Give more than you expect to get. Be prepared to compromise. Nobody is right all the time.

5) Stay connected. Talk about problems before they fester. Be willing to listen with a minimum of judgment. Don't lie or manipulate your partner. Enjoy each other; do things together that are fun.

6) Nurture your partner's dreams. Develop and work toward common, long-term goals. Find out your partner's greatest fears, joys, grief's, and dreams. Then do what you can to help her accomplish her dreams.

7) Keep the faith. Go to church together, or share some kind of spiritual conversation or practice with each other. It deepens the bond. Maintain faith in your marriage. As one man told me: "Hold on tight. Like a roller-coaster ride, it's the whole ride that's fun, not every up and down."

This is my last column as president of UUMeN. I have cherished the opportunity to serve on the Steering Council for the past decade. I thank all of you for supporting our work, and will continue to offer my moral and financial support to UUMeN in the future. I hope you'll do the same.

In the spirit of brotherhood,



Neil Chethik

TRIBUTE TO A COUPLE OF DEDICATED BROTHERS

On behalf of all the men who have served on the UUMeN Steering Council since its founding over 10 years ago, I offer a deeply heartfelt surge of gratitude to outgoing UUMeN president **Neil Chethik** for his steady and talented commitment to the cause. He has stepped up time and again to lead with a light touch, an articulate pen, and an inspiring spirit. We all appreciate his efforts immensely.

And as I finish my two years of editing this journal, I want to also appreciate greatly the one who makes it look so nice, **Bob Hospadaruk**, another fine contributor on the Steering Council and all around Excellent Fellow. Bob will continue his lay-out magic while my colleague and outgoing Steering Council member **Ken Beldon** takes over editing duties.

Carry on, brothers!

Fondly, Jaco ten Hove

outgoing MaleCall editor

Ripples from a Son's Coming Out

By Dave Woods, UUMeN Steering Council member

My wife Alma and I have two sons. The elder is married with 4 children. My second son, Matt, is a gay man of whom I'm very proud, and this is my memory of his coming out to us. Please understand that as longtime Unitarian Universalists, we already were supportive of gay rights, but when the situation surfaced within our family, it seemed somehow "different."

About 18 years ago, one nice summer's eve on our deck, Matt came to us to say he was gay. He then promptly left the house and drove away with a female friend who had just picked him up.

At the time I felt sad and shed tears, but not for me—really for him and what I thought he would have to now confront in his life as a gay man. I then took a closer look at myself, asking, "What may have prompted Matt's method of a short announcement and rapid departure?" After all, we were UU liberals, a supportive family, but how did he really view me—a Past Master of my Masonic Lodge, a former Scoutmaster of my boys' troop and a UU men's group advocate? Did this all scare him?

Later, Matt told me that it was this way only because the announcement was such a very heavy thing for him to do at the time. He just wanted to do it, get it all over, and leave to get away from the situation.

Meanwhile, Alma and I discussed very openly how we felt and what action should be taken. We both agreed to make quick contact

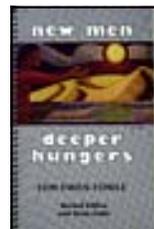
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GREAT BOOKS FROM UUMEN



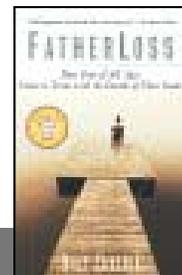
A Community of Men: A Guide to Men's Programming in UU Congregations is available for \$5—free to new members. *For your copy, contact us at info@uumen.org, or at our mailing address. There is no shipping or handling charge.*

For a book with dozens of worthy conversation-starters related to men, get **New Men, Deeper Hungers**, by Tom-Owen Towle, president emeritus of UUMeN, for \$15 (\$10 for UUMeN members). *Shipping and handling is \$2 per book. Make checks payable to UUMeN, and send to our address.*



Save the Males: Changing Men Changing the World, also by Tom Owen-Towle, boldly engages with stimulating topics such as men choosing to be brothers...men as religious beings...joining ethics and power...saying "yes" to aggression and "no" to violence; graying gracefully as elders. \$14.95 plus \$2.00 (shipping/handling)—order directly from Tom Owen-Towle, 3303 Second Ave., San Diego, CA 92103 (uutom@cox.net).

FatherLoss: How sons of all ages come to terms with the deaths of their dads, by Neil Chethik, focuses on the father-son relationship. It comes with a study guide for men's groups. *To order, make your check for \$14 to Neil Chethik, and then send to UUMeN/FatherLoss, PO Box 8071, Lexington, Ky. 40533. Proceeds from sales will be donated to UUMeN. There is no shipping or handling charge.*



(Bullies... Continued from page 1)

apartment when he was 16. An old girlfriend of his said he had been seriously abused.

According to www.bullying.org, “Bullies often come from homes that are neglectful and hostile and use harsh punishment. Bullying may be learned by observing high levels of conflict between parents.” In other words, bullying is frequently an outward expression and sign of family violence.

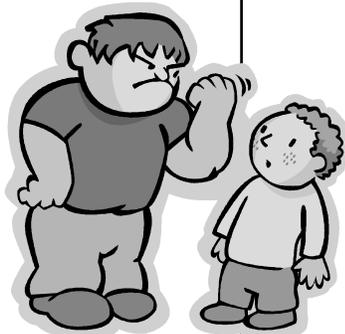
There is usually an element of low self-esteem in bullies. In fact, studies show that “Bullies/victims are the most insecure, the least likeable, and the most unsuccessful in school” [Stephenson and Smith, 1989]. That was true of Tommy, the victim. Joe got good grades, but he never had a lot of friends. I know Joe committed at least one major act of violence. He killed himself in his early 20s. Tommy changed schools and I’ve not heard of him since, but I hope he’s found some happiness. He’s earned it.

What happens when bullies grow up? Recently I heard on the radio about a municipality that adopted a strong anti-bullying law, including penalties for bystanders who egg a bully on. A local police officer freely admitted being a bully in his youth and helped create the law as a means of redress.

Statistics show that incidents of bullying tend to decrease as children grow older. Of students in grades 1-3, 26% report incidents. By grades 7-8 this drops by more than half to 12%. Apparently, some bullies learn other ways of getting along and managing their feelings. It seems they just grow up and get married.

The Alberta Children’s Services Minister held a series of family violence roundtable discussions and circulated background material that linked bullying and family violence:

Power and control imbalances exist in both bullying and violent family relationships. Children who bully and are bullied are sometimes from homes where they have been exposed to family violence... Family violence is the abuse of power within relationships...that endangers the survival, security or well-being of another person. Family violence includes many forms including spousal abuse,



parent abuse, seniors abuse/neglect, child abuse and neglect, child sexual abuse and witnessing the abuse of others in the family... Family violence is not a mental illness. It is not caused by alcohol or drug abuse, although these substances can contribute to violence. Family violence is not a loss of control—it is a choice by the abuser to use violence or the threat of violence to gain control over another person.

It’s all about power in the end. Bullies learn, usually in childhood, that aggression is a tool that works for them. If it keeps working, they keep using it. But studies have shown that when someone intervenes, bullying stops quickly over half the time.

That someone is most often a peer.

Bullies have a need to dominate another person in order to feel good about themselves and they tend to blame the victims for forcing them to punish them. In the playground, any difference is enough of a reason to provoke a bully who already arrives with poor impulse control and a preference for aggression. In spousal and other adult situations, the bully finds fault with the victim: an appointment missed, a disagreement over something small, a child that cries too much. It’s always someone else’s fault. Usually that someone is the victim.

The bully is one of those contradictory characters in our society. He—or she—seems so strong, but it’s not real strength. The bully acts out of fear and anxiety.

Unsure of their place in the world, perhaps told time and again how worthless they are, bullies use

When someone intervenes, bullying stops quickly over half the time.

whatever power can be mustered to try and prove their worth. And they look for the unequal advantage. Bullies are masters of the ‘pre-emptive strike’—lashing out to attack first.

It’s easy to see this in the playground, but it happens in the adult world, too. There are people who will sabotage co-worker efforts or undermine others with vicious rumors and innuendo, because they see these others as a threat to their position in the workplace. This is bullying. There are bosses who will yell at their underlings knowing that they have the power ultimately to fire them. But they seldom use this power, preferring to control with fear. There are coaches in both boys’ and girls’ sports who seldom praise their charges but prefer to harp on every little

(Bullies...Continued from page 4)

mistake. By criticizing they reassert their power.

Because they have a poor sense of self worth, bullies hide it in a quest for power over others. They fear that they will be unmasked and seen for the worthless people they perceive themselves to be (whether it's true or not).

Oddly, the biggest failing in the bully might not be the abusive behavior. It might be their inability to confront their own fears and inadequacy. Tom Owen-Towle, a Unitarian Universalist minister and writer on men's issues has noted [in his book, *New Men Deeper Hungers*, p. 105]:

As men we have been brought up to suppress and ignore rather than acknowledge and embrace our fears. We expend enormous energy projecting our anxieties

onto external foes while we rarely deal with the demons inside our own souls, the ones Jesus called "the enemies within our own household."

I think Tom's idea holds true for many people, male and female. We project our fears outwardly onto those who are less powerful than we are. And if we do fail at something, we often look for a scapegoat.

The growing tide of racism and bigotry is a form of bullying that has grown more intense as some people have felt their jobs and lifestyles threatened. Whenever people are having a hard time finding work, the age-old tradition has been to blame the newest immigrants to the land.

Or, perhaps we will lash out at anyone different from us—gays and lesbians, women, the poor or the rich. By blaming them, we try to put them into a one-down position. We exploit the weaknesses of anyone who is different. And that is no different from the act of the playground bully who shoves a younger child.

You have probably noted that I keep saying 'we'. The fact is we are part of a society that bullies. We may work to change it, but we are still active in that society and many of us benefit from the imbalance of power.

All of this is wrong. As Unitarian Universalists we affirm the inherent worth and dignity of every person and assert the need for justice and compassion in human relations. These principles stand so clearly in contrast to the actions of the bully that we have no

choice but to confront and condemn the behavior.

So what do we do? On a personal level, we can look for the signs of victimization in children, relatives and adult friends. I know for years, having never been a victim, I never noticed or even considered that someone else might be. Physical changes like sleeping trouble, frequent stomachaches, lack of appetite are all possible signs. Bruises, limps and other injuries are also suggestive. Children and adults who delay or avoid going certain places—even home—may well be afraid.

If you see any of those things, speak with the person involved. Ask them if they need to talk. Don't be

Unsure of their place in the world, perhaps told time and again how worthless they are, bullies use whatever power can be mustered to try and prove their worth.

afraid to ask questions, even quite direct ones, about potential abuse. Victims tend to cover up for the bully, either out of shame or fear or both. Don't be afraid to

ask a few times, whenever your suspicions are aroused.

Secondly, don't put up with such abuse when you witness it. Don't give bullies an audience. If you can't intervene, you can still walk away and hopefully take others with you. When you can, call the bully on their behavior. Remember that it will stop the event over half the time. In the case of an adult, you may have to call police. Their training and sensitivity to domestic violence is improving every year. Don't be afraid to get them involved. You could save someone serious injury or even death.

Finally, work with systems to change the culture of bullying. Schools where the principal draws a firm line around bullying have significantly lower rates of victimization. But parents, teachers, students and the wider community must be supportive. Affirm the ideas of shelters and transition houses, zero tolerance policies for domestic violence in government and police. Tell officials that domestic violence is not acceptable, that we need more support for victims and more education and training for offenders.

Bullying and victimization must be addressed from a systemic perspective, but the system involves and includes people like you and me. We are the ones who must say, "Stop!" and "This is not right." Why? Our UU Principles say we should. And besides, too often the victims can't speak for themselves.

(Ripples Continued from page 3)

with Matt, expressing our full support for him. In no way did we want to break off any communication. In fact, we felt the family relationship could be even stronger than before as a result of his honesty.

We agreed with Matt's recommendation that we attend the church's Welcoming Congregation workshop about the issues involved in being Gay/Lesbian. It was a supportive group of parents and siblings of Gay/Lesbian people who had recently come out. We discussed with Matt just how helpful this was for us and he shared how helpful it had been to him to attend our church's program "About Your Sexuality" when he was younger.

It didn't take long to realize that everything, I mean everything, was really okay between us. Matt now has a partner that we also love. Further, we enjoy his parents and their friends as well. I feel that Matt and I are now bigger and even better men today as a direct result of the whole experience.

***A Response from Frank Robertson,
fellow UUMeN Steering Council member:***

Dear Dave... It was nice to read your touching words about the time Matt told you he is gay. I found myself trying to hold a sentiment of the universal observer while reading it, in an attempt to be as objective as possible.

There came from within me a sense of wishing that folks who go through such announcements with close kin would some day approach them not as unfortunate or troublesome but as something rather positive; as if declaring one was better at playing the violin than the piano.

Remember how young people used to expect a gasp when telling a parent that they were in love with a person from another racial group or culture? Liberal, accepting parents would not dream of being totally pleased, but rather try their best to express love and support for their son or daughter in spite of the challenging life they saw ahead. "They will be fine, but what a struggle their children will have."

Far from their minds would be a pure and unencumbered cherishing of the moment, as they would likely cherish the sharing of a similar announcement that did not include race or culture being of any special significance.

What comes to mind is the old button we used to wear, stating "How dare you presume that I'm straight." Such buttons were a novelty in the late '70s. Also popular in the gay community at that time were jokes that built on similar reverse sentiments. I remember a cartoon that appeared in the "UU Gay Caucus Newsletter" that went something like this:

Two gay men were standing on a street corner people-watching when an extremely attractive young woman walked by. Their eyes followed her with obvious pleasure as she stepped past them. Finally they turned to each other and one expressed with heart-felt sincerity, "It's times like this that I wish I was a lesbian."

Thanks for sharing that special family experience of a dad and his son in conversation about a deeply serious identity issue. - **FR**

**Research of Interest:
*The Influence of Church-going
Men on their Progeny***

A 1994 Swiss study of traditional two-parent families found that the church-going habits of the father significantly affected similar habits of his children as they matured. The percentage of grown-up offspring who went to church varied according to whether or not their fathers had attended regularly during their formative years:

In families where both parents attended services, 33% of offspring continued the practice. When Mom attended and Dad didn't, the number shrank all the way to 2%. But when Dad attended and Mom didn't, 44% of their kids continued the church-going habit.

Meanwhile, a 1997 study by Northwestern University and University of Michigan researchers found that church attendance by fathers is associated with higher levels of educational attainment for both sons and daughters.

From the Washington Post Outlook section, Dec. 19, 2004, "Praying for More Men" by Henry G. Brinton, Senior Pastor, Fairfax (VA) Presbyterian Church, who gave these references:

The Swiss study was "The demographic characteristics of the linguistic and religious groups in Switzerland" by Werner Haug and Phillipe Warner of the Federal Statistical Office, Neuchatel. It appears in Volume 2 of Population Studies No. 31, a book titled *The Demographic Characteristics of National Minorities in Certain European States*, edited by Haug and others, published by the Council of Europe Directorate General III, Social Cohesion, Strasbourg, January, 2000.

The American survey was "The U.S. Congregational Life Survey" by Deborah Bruce and Cynthia Woolever, published in 2002 as *A Field Guide to U.S. Congregations*.

MEN IN MOMENTS OF Moist MEANING

By Frank E. Robertson

Over the years, I must admit, there were rare times when some experience meant so much to me that I got all choked up; and, for a few moments, tears rolled down my cheeks and I was overwhelmed with emotion. Perhaps you can recall a few of those times, too.

Some of those experiences were unforgettable. Like when I stood in the crowd in front of the Lincoln Memorial and listened to Martin Luther King, Jr. deliver his “I Have A Dream” speech. When he got to the part that called for universal civil rights—“Let freedom ring...”—all I could do was stand there and sob. It meant so much.

We each have our techniques to get ourselves back into rational control. I give myself a few dry swallows, wipe away the wet, and focus on something specific.

The most common place where tears flow for me is toward the end of a really good movie. In the dark, I hope people don’t notice. My partner, Rick, usually knows. He might look over and say: “You’ve been crying!” But perhaps he has tears in his eyes, too.

For many men, such a moment can happen when their sports team wins THE championship. One UU dad told me recently that he had tears of joy and meaning when each of his children were born.

Well, what should we make of these face-wetting moments?

Personally, I am clearly ambivalent about them. They are embarrassing and call a different kind of attention from others. There is no question in my mind that these tearful moments have a deep personal connection to my past life experiences. Something highly valued in life is vibrating my inner self and woven into deep emotional feelings in my unconscious.

My partner tells me that I am having those choked-up moments more frequently since this past summer when I became a cancer survivor. I went through two major operations, one followed by a dangerous infection. My battle with cancer is ongoing and some things in life are being valued more highly than ever.

Who will understand and appreciate such choked-up moments, especially when I am the only one having one?

One day in mid-summer, one of many hospital chaplains came into my room and introduced himself. He was from one of the Catholic monastic orders and was willing to have a conversation. The fact that I am also a member of the clergy gave the visit added significance, and he stayed for over an hour. My early impression of him was to say to myself, “Here is a fine, well-educated colleague.”

Among our topics was our contrasting faith groups and our stories about them. In the middle of my telling him one of my favorite UU history stories, I found myself having one of those choked-up moments, tears and all. A disturbed look of concern spread over my guest and he said: “Do you want to tell me what’s wrong?”

I tried to explain that nothing was “wrong,” that the story has very deep meaning to me right now. My words seemed to end in mid-air and fall dead to the floor between us. He just could not imagine why I was crying.

Well, I gave myself a couple of dry swallows and shook off the moment, shifting the conversation to something else.

I suspect that some of our UU men—struggling to liberate themselves and affirm the totally human, gentle-but-strong male who values diversity and includes heart as well as mind—would say, “ Oh, go ahead and let the tears flow. We’re honored that you would be willing to share such a moment with us. If you want to tell us about why something means so much to you, fine. That’s up to you. Some of us have such moments, too.”

With me, such moments remain rather private. I do not want them to happen in public. Of course, there will be exceptions, one being when I’m in a crowd and something extraordinary has just happened. Other men and women are having tears of meaning, too.

I don’t mind having them while I am alone. They come and go quickly. I had one recently at night in bed when the radio played one of my favorite symphonies.

I suspect these moments are not easy to explain away as society’s ancient conditioning of her male warriors; and I do not see them as a sign of weakness. Am I off the mark when I wonder if they are part of all people’s basic human nature, but men have a special take on them?

-Frank Robertson is a retired MRE, living in Plymouth, MA

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