

Danny the Bully

I thought Danny Brifogel was my friend. And sometimes he was. But sometimes he wasn't. It was very confusing. He was the catalyst for a very important juncture in my life. It was the winter of 55/56, on the flatlands of northwest Iowa. Estherville to be exact. I was six years old. Back then you walked to and from school no matter what the temp, precipitation, or distance. Nobody got picked up after school, unless they were on crutches.

I was walking home from first grade on a cold snowy day with about 6 inches of wet snow on the ground. The sun was low in the sky. As I rounded the corner on the solidly white middle-class block where I lived, I spied Danny, Paula Graham (my first girlfriend) and George (a wimpy, but normally friendly guy). They were standing on the corner of the street where we all resided, looking at me. Something struck me as off. These were my friends. But they didn't look friendly. More like a trio of foxes eyeballing a swamp chicken.

I thought about going off route and staying on the side of the street I was already on even though my house was on the side that they were on. But my brain said "why should I change

course from my regular route?" So, I crossed over and came to within a few feet of my "friends".

They had a stock of well packed snow-balls and unleashed a barrage on unarmed me. I took a couple to the face and few more to the body. The ones to the face hurt and I started to cry. But the crying had more to do with getting ganged up on by kids I thought were my friends. The tears only encouraged Danny, the undisputed leader of the pack. He started grabbing big handfuls of snow and shoving them down the back of my jacket and even down my snow-pants. Paula and George weren't as aggressive, but joined in as well.

There I was, being picked on by my three best friends from the neighborhood, not fighting back, clothing full of snow, and tears streaming down my face. Then something happened. Danny decided that I needed some snow in my hat. He pulled my hat off and started to fill it up with the white stuff. Inside all of the tears and emotional pain, my reptilian brain sparked. The message was; "mom's not going to like me getting my hat wet". Don't know why my inner dragon differentiated between the rest of my snow packed outerwear and my hat, but it did. It felt like coming home with a hat full of snow would disappoint and anger my mom. And I did not want to do that, ever. I got so pissed off so fast I didn't even realize what was happening. I turned into Danny and landed a

round house punch right into his nose. A very satisfying gush of blood spurted out.

At that moment the pecking order on my street changed for good. I wound up for another punch into Danny's bloody face but he took off like a shot, running for his house. I turned to Paula and George who were mesmerized by the sight of their leader's blood. I raised my measly fists over my head and shrieked like a wounded shrew. As much as a scrawny fifty-five pound kid could anyway. That broke the spell and they sprinted to their respective homes. I walked the rest of the way home that day down the center of the street. I'd never imagined being the tough guy in the neighborhood until that moment.

I had gone from fear to rage in a nanosecond. Fear felt powerless and vulnerable. Rage felt powerful and cast out the fear. I had been a smallish kid with little self-confidence and no siblings to stand up for me. I had spent a lot of my young life being emotionally vulnerable as mom was very hard to please. All of a sudden, I had a tool to switch my feelings from weak to strong. I never forgot that experience. Neither Danny nor the other kids on the block ever tried to bully me again. And we all looked at me a little different. I had gotten in touch with my inner dragon.

I've let it out hundreds of times over the years even though it never again manifested in my actually punching someone. And I never again had such a decisive showing that the other folks ran home, but it was effective enough that bullies quickly decided that the crazy skinny kid with an oversized temper, just wasn't worth picking on. Then they would move on to someone else who would take it quietly. It has worked for me as an adult, even standing up to guys who were a lot bigger and experienced fighters. But damn near every time, after hearing me scream at them, or foam at the mouth, or just give them a hard dead eyed stare, they decided to move on to a submissive person and leave me alone. When this happens, I feel no fear, only the rage dragon coming forth from my being. When the threat has passed the dragon disappears and I'm back to being me

I understand that this rage dragon that lives within me has caused me a lot of problems with relationships as I sometimes let it out when I think that someone is *trying* to hurt my feelings or put me down. I have used my emotional anger way too often on my kids and women that I was in relationships with to the point that they sometimes felt intimidated. For that I have apologized and will always try to do better. But for the fact that I was never successfully bullied after that day in 1st grade, I am eternally thankful.

Consequently, I never felt like a victim or lived with a victim's mentality, which has been proven to invite more bullies to go after a person.