

# Autobiographical Notes

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## The Junior High Varsity Locker Room

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The hurt I had caused Ms. Bronson reminded me of an incident that occurred the year before in a ninth grade physical education class at the Cañon City Junior High School. After showering at the end of class one day, I was ganged up on by some other students in the junior high varsity locker room. A popular boy, with whom I had gone to grade school, got some other athletes to punch me and shove me around before I could get dried off and dressed. It seemed he liked making fun of me because my family was poor and we went to a small, unpopular church. It did not help that I had wet my pants in our early grade school years due to some health issues. He told me only a baby would do that.

This person especially disliked the idea of me having a varsity locker. Since I was significantly bigger than him, he normally did not confront me. But this particular day he got some of his buddies to help him humiliate me. Soon, it seemed everyone in the locker room had joined in. (Interestingly I thought I saw in some of their eyes a relief that it was not them being bullied.)

They let up only after someone warned that the coach was coming. I toweled off and dressed as fast as I could and got out of there. It was like walking down an emotional gauntlet as I passed through the main physical education locker room. Everybody seemed to know what had happened but no one said a word. They just seemed to gawk with a knowing look.

I was mad, hurt, confused, humiliated, and scared all at the same time. Perhaps it was in response to a comment he made. I do not recall now. But on my way out, without thinking about it, I shoved the last boy I passed to the ground as he was tying his shoes (perhaps in response to something he said). He was a relatively new kid at school and we had struck up a quick friendship. But in a moment our budding friendship ended as I saw him look up at me in shock and a hurt confusion. Seeing him sprawled out on the floor caused me to freeze and a deep sense of sorry for what I had just done gripped me. Having just left a tormenting situation, I knew so well what it felt like to be hurt. So in that moment, almost as reflexive as I had shoved him down, I vowed I would never hurt or humiliate another person like that again.

That night at home I did not tell anyone what had happened to me. I just knew I never wanted to go back to school, especially not to that locker room. But a confident presence came along side me the next day, guiding me back to school and accompanying me as I went back in among my tormentors.

It seemed unusually quiet as I walked in the locker room. Come to find out, no one thought I would be brave enough to “show my face” in that locker room again.

The other boys in the varsity locker room left me alone after that, and some of the friends of the one who instigated the abuse that day even started showing me some respect for the courage I displayed in coming back so soon. In fact, the atmosphere of the whole locker room seemed to change for the good after that incident, at least as far as I was concerned.

I hated being ganged up on, and I hated, even more, hurting others. So why had I so carelessly hurt Ms. Bronson? I did not know; just plain orneriness I figured. Still I wanted to change, to be constructive, not destructive.