

My face was red and hot and it was a LONG walk home. I wondered if they were going to follow me the entire way. Suddenly, one boy scooped up a rock and threw it at me, just missing my neck, hitting my backpack instead. The others laughed and began picking up rocks to throw at me.

"Let's see if we can make her run!" Just as the boy said that, one big rock hit me on the back of the head. I turned around and the boys ran away. The throbbing pain I felt as I walked home pulsed through my entire body. I never wanted to back to school. I was done. I was embarrassed. I was mad. I was hurt – both inside and out.

I never talked to anyone at home about this. My dad's marriage was falling apart, and they always seemed too busy to deal with any of the stuff going on at school. I decided to deal with this on my own

The day after the rocks were thrown at me, I wanted to show those boys they had not won. That I was tough! But before I even had the chance to prove anything to those testosterone-filled idiots, the girls decided to throw in their two cents.

While getting dressed for gym class, as I slipped my top over my head, a girl made a comment about my 'dirty back'. (This is a classic symptom of NF, but none of my doctors had bothered to check it out.) I was covered with birthmarks, small bumps, and discolorations.

"Ewww, Kristi, You need a bath!" I had never looked at my back before, I mean, who really needs to, right? But I knew I wasn't dirty.

Another girl came up to me, before my shirt had fallen to my hips and poked me, "Yea, and what are all those bumps?"

I just slammed my locker shut, fixed my shirt and walked out of the locker room, my untied shoelaces flying.

I got around the corner, out of sight, and reached my hand up my shirt to feel my back. Tiny bumps all along my spine and my hips startled me. I began to cry, sliding down the wall, putting my head to my knees. Anger was welling up inside me and my heart raced, leaving me breathless.

Working to pull myself together, I tied my shoes and wiped my face. I looked over at the group of girls in my class who were laughing and pointing at me. I wanted to run away. What was happening to me? Why weren't my parents talking to me about it? Why haven't the doctors said anything?

I ignored the calls from my teacher to join the class. I wasn't about to let the other kids see me crying, Lord knows they would tease me for that too. I slipped back in the locker room and just sat on the bench in front of my locker. I was confused and angry. I remembered the day I saw my mom undressing, how I had asked about the bumps on HER.

"Was this the same thing?" I wondered. "Was God cursing ME too?" What had I done to deserve this?

I found my gym teacher in the field watching her class run the dreaded mile.

"You know Kristi, if you don't complete this mile run, you'll get a zero" she said.

"I don't feel good, I need to go to the office." I whined.

I begged her to let me go - but she wouldn't. She just sat me on a bench until class was over. I watched as these thin, pretty girls ran around the track, snickering and looking over at me.

I grew more and more angry and asked for God to just get me through this. "Make them stop!" I whispered, hoping God would hear me, and bring me through this day.

Later, on my long walk home, I felt power and courage well up within me. Yet another boy was apparently hoping to prove his manhood by using a stick to try and trip me. I whipped around, took my glasses off, and looked right into his surprised eyes.

"Why am I was so important to you, that you have to go out of your way to make me feel like crap?" I asked.

He offered no response. My courage growing quickly, I told him to grow up - that one day he would be bald and fat, and would end up being on the receiving end of cruel jokes. I told him to spend his time making fun of somebody else, because I wasn't going to let him affect me anymore. He laughed at me, but I felt much better! I walked home a little taller that day.

I went straight to my room to publicly declare (to the pages of my private journal) that I was no longer going to let these kids affect me the way they had been. I was done with being made fun of! I was determined to show these kids that YES! I was different! And I was okay with it.

The next morning, I got to school early and went straight to the gym. I found my teacher sitting at her desk and told her I was ready to run the mile, if she could track my time. She smiled and we walked out to the field together. Twelve minutes and 45 seconds later, I came huffing and puffing around the baseball diamond. I jogged the last bit of that mile and tagged my teachers hand.

"Good job Kristi!" She smiled at me and jotted down my time.

Even though I knew it was only going to get me a C-. I was happy I ran. I changed back into my school clothes and headed for the library. Three of the main kids who picked on me were sitting at the front table. I always hated homeroom. It was the first hour of school, and it always got my day off to a horrible start.

But not today. Sitting at our shared tables, I just stared at the three boys who were chatting. I smiled sweetly and raised my eyebrows at one of them, and held my stare.

"Hey!" I said to get their attention. "You really don't bother me anymore, you know that?"

"Whatever..." They just laughed.

"I'm serious, I'm really over you guys." I continued. The class quieted down as the bell rang and I straightened up in my chair. I knew I was going to be okay. I felt better about taking the control and not letting these kids win.

On the walk home that day I was sure I would be in for it. I kept looking behind me, waiting for the boys to show up. But they never did. In fact the rest of the school year those boys left me alone.

The girls in gym class, however, continued their tormenting ways. A testament to the persistence of the female gender, I suppose.

Every jumping jack was commented on, every lap around the track snickered at. One day, after a lap around the field, I tried a trick I had heard about to get me out of running. With my breathing fast and my heart pounding, I bent over and held my breath for as long as I could.

I got dizzy and fell to the ground. I woke up with my entire class hovering over me. One girl kicked me with her foot. "Get up lard ass."

The other girls were laughing at me. "She's so fat, she can't even run a lap."

I slowly got to my feet and another girl walked me to the nurse's office. My plan worked. This 'episode' got me out of gym class the rest of the year. But, even with this victory, eighth grade seemed like an eight month death march.

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