

My mom calls it a gift, but I view it as the right thing to do. You see, I have been on the receiving end of some very mean kids. They called me names, they made fun of the sport I love, they called me stupid and they made fun of me for being excited about school. When I was the target of bullying, I didn't always handle it in the best way. Sometimes I cursed at them, sometimes I yelled and called them names back and other times I just cried. Talking to my parents about it helped in the beginning, but really their advice on how to handle it sometimes just got me in more trouble. Talking to teachers about it didn't help either; they usually told me that they couldn't catch them bullying me so there was nothing they could do to stop it. Eventually, my parents and the school decided that I should talk to Father Mark about what I going through and honestly, that really helped. He talked to me about patience and helped me work through my feelings of anger and hurt. The talks between Father Mark helped me helped to find what my mom calls my gift... Compassion.

As much as our society wants to believe that bullying is not as big of a problem as it used to be, I can tell you firsthand, that it is everywhere. It's not just at school, it's at sporting events, practices, on the bus and it is everywhere online. I don't want anyone to feel like I did when it was happening to me. When you are the target of bullying, it feels like everyone joins in, even if they aren't saying the words, just laughing or standing by is participating. One day at lunch, a kid in the grade below me with special needs was having a bit of a meltdown. A lot of the kids in his grade were teasing him and laughing at him. His own sister didn't even go sit with him. I picked up what was left of my lunch and went and sat with him and tried to calm him down. You see, what I have learned is that the more emotion you show or reaction you give to their words, the more power they have over you. Eventually, I figured out he had lost his stress toy, which is what caused him to get so upset, so I offered to help him look for it. He stopped crying and we went to work. Funny how just going to sit with him got the kids to stop teasing him.

I love to swim; it has been my passion for the last 3 years and it is the place I am most confident. Bullying happens there too. The coaches do their best to make sure everyone follows the rules, but they can't be everywhere. I have found my voice in helping people who can't speak for themselves. Compassion is something that is talked about a lot, but often, it's just that...words, no real action. It only takes one person doing the right thing to start something special. If each time a kid saw another kid being mean, they stood up and said, "It's not ok" then eventually, the message would be it's not ok. I think my mom is right, my compassion is a gift, because if it was that easy, more kids my age would show it.