

Jon Faustman

People from the Past

Another long day of seventh grade was finally over and now it was time for the fun part – basketball practice. I was changing into my gym clothes like usual, something that should be traumatic enough in a room full of guys. If Todd was an alligator and I was Capt. Hook, I would be able to hear the watch coming with every step Todd made toward me. In reality there was only one real sign to know he was in the locker room – a swift punch to my arm.

I never understood why Todd hated me. My dad always said he was envious of me, but his fists certainly didn't feel like envy. Of course that's what a dad is supposed to do; give some justification so you don't think you're the loser. In fact, I was far from a loser. I was one of the most popular kids in school, I always had a girlfriend, and now I was on the varsity basketball team. I don't know if Todd hated me in spite of that or because of that, but he definitely hated me.

Todd was the kid who was always trying too hard. He wore the designer clothes so he could be cool, but he looked more like a farm boy who happened to find cool clothes at Goodwill. He tried to fit in, but he stuck out almost as far as his ears did. Most of the kids at school called him Dumbo because his ears stuck out so far. Dumbo would be the perfect name for Todd, if Dumbo were a human and not a pachyderm. He was frumpy, dumb, and humungous. His freckles and red hair made him look like a life-sized version of Howdy Doody. He was a walking cartoon.

I drop my shoes from surprising punch to me left arm. I don't know what was surprising about it, it happened almost everyday. "Hey spaz, I thought I told you not to use this locker anymore. This is my locker," Todd said in a cocky manner unbecoming his looks.

Although he could kick the crap out of me, and often did, I always stood my ground – something that probably only fueled the fire. “I told you before, I’m not moving my locker. I also told you before to stop hitting me, it’s really not cool.”

“Like you even know what cool is.” How ironic Todd was talking to me about cool, but I ignored him and eventually he left. He might have been seeking attention, because without it he left me alone. Maybe him beating me up was his way of being cool; God knows he wasn’t cool without it.

The daily torment continued for several months until a teacher became wise to the situation. I never told on him, I wasn’t a tattletale. Mr. Kyle began staying in the locker room everyday to make sure everything was going all right – something that now seems worse than Todd hitting me.

The last time I was home I happened to run into Todd. I never enjoy running into people I went to school with, and this was certainly no exception. The walking cartoon had turned into a normal looking guy, but he was far from normal. The day I saw him was his first day of freedom.

Todd had gone to jail during high school, which was no surprise to me. Trying to look cool never paid off for Todd, and the ladies didn’t seem to respond to him. On prom night Todd officially became a felon. He must have been angry or jealous he couldn’t get a date, I never knew Todd’s reasons for anything, so he raped a girl who went to the prom by herself. During the trial, his only justification was that the girl should have went with him instead of going alone. The day I saw him, his first day out of prison, he was trying to get his life back on track. He told me he found God in prison; I always hoped he found a cellmate named Bubba instead. He was trying to get a job but ex-cons, especially rapists, have a hard time getting work in our small town. I almost felt bad for him; actually I did feel bad for him. Although he tormented me for a year of my life, his abuse taught me one thing – always stand my ground. He unknowingly

taught me a lesson, and for that I was grateful, but I will never forget what an asshole he used to be. God may have redeemed him, but he will never receive redemption from me or the girl he raped in high school.