**[](https://www.elephantjournal.com/2015/08/what-my-bully-taught-me/)****[What my Bully taught Me.](https://www.elephantjournal.com/2015/08/what-my-bully-taught-me/)**

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There were 499 boys and one girl—me.

Ever since I can remember, I’ve wanted to do something important with my life, something that set me apart from others, and something where I could make a difference. When I was 12-years-old I thought I could make a difference for women by becoming the first female professional baseball player.

That summer I attended Mike Andrew’s Baseball Camp for Boys (yes, it was actually called that). With 500 campers, I was the only girl. The camp didn’t have facilities to accommodate a lone girl so I commuted daily from a neighboring town.

I knew no one.

Terror swept through me as I entered the camp on the first day, feeling all eyes on me. When the coach at the registration asked my dad for his son’s name, he responded that it was actually his daughter.

“Girls shouldn’t be playing baseball,” he said.

I had been playing since I was six-years-old, so I knew I could play baseball.

What I didn’t know is if I would be accepted.

Camp was only a week long. But every day was an adventure. And for the first few days, not a fun one. On Monday afternoon as I put my hair in an elastic, my fingers caught in something sticky. A stocky boy with dark hair had spit gum in my hair. He and his friends were laughing about it behind me.

During our game later that day I played first base. The boy playing right field in back of me yelled, “Glad I’m playing right field so I can look at her fat a$$.” This certainly wasn’t meant as a compliment. Insults made me even more determined to prove myself. During the first inning, a taller boy named Chris, who seemed to be the ringleader of the tormentors, hit a ground ball towards third. The third baseman threw to me and the ball landed in my glove just before his foot touched first base. “Out!” screamed the ump. As he crossed the bag, Chris, pushed me so hard that I fell down.

Everyone had seen. No one said anything. I felt my face turn red with heat as the other kids waited for a reaction from me, perhaps to cry. Instead, I quickly got up, dusted the dirt off my pants and got ready for the next batter.

“You shouldn’t be here,” said Chris under his breath. Later that afternoon he tried to trip me as I ran for a ball during practice. I stumbled but made the play anyway.

I ventured forward ignoring insults and reminding myself of what my hero, Jackie Robinson, had endured when becoming the first African American baseball player. This gave me inspiration even when Chris took the cup out of his pants and stuck it in my face later in the day. Some of Chris’s friends laughed. So did I, pretending I was in on the joke. That was my go-to response. Outwardly, it might have appeared that nothing bothered me. But the minute I stepped inside my house at night, the tears flowed.

At lunchtime I loaded up my tray in the dining hall and sat at a table full of boys in my group. They looked at each other, grabbed their trays and abandoned the table. I ate lunch by myself. The second day, I took a sandwich, went into the girl’s bathroom and hid out in a stall where I ate my peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

On Wednesday morning we were split into two teams. A heavy-set boy complained loudly that he had to be on a team with a girl. “Enough,” said my coach.

Gradually, over the week, I began to prove myself and on Wednesday afternoon one of the cooler boys, Danny, asked if I wanted to join him and his friends for lunch. I remember being so grateful to him for his kindness in the midst of bullies. He had had the courage to ignore his peer group and reach out to me. And it stuck with me.

For him it was probably a small gesture, but for me, it gave me the extra courage I needed to keep going. For the first time, I didn’t cry when I got home from camp that evening. Pride never allowed me to express my gratitude to him.

I also never forgot his kindness.

On the last day, three awards were given out to each age group. To many people’s surprise I was given the much coveted one, “Mr. Camp.” Danny patted me on the back. “Nice job,” he said. “You deserve it.”

It wasn’t until a few years ago that I randomly happened to run into Danny. By now he was older, quite bald and had three kids. I thanked him for inviting me to have lunch with him that day in the dining hall over 20-years-ago. He didn’t remember. For him it was just a small act of kindness but for me it had made a lasting impression. And I never forgot him.

I also never forgot Chris.

Danny taught me who I wanted to be.

Chris taught me who I didn’t want to be.

Although I attempt to live my life like a Danny, I have also caught myself being a Chris. There have been times I have unintentionally bullied people by gossiping or saying unkind things behind their backs. Perhaps at the time I thought it was harmless because I wasn’t outwardly mean to them.

Chris taught me what a world of fear and anger could look like.

Danny taught me what a world of love and compassion could look like. After seeing Danny, I realized that making an impact and difference in the world didn’t have to be on a grand scale of solving a world problem or becoming the first female professional baseball player as I had once thought.

With just a small gesture of kindness, I may not change the world, but I could potentially change someone’s world.

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