



IN THE TRENCHES FORGIVENESS IS A HUGE PAIN IN THE ASS

THERE. I SAID IT.

My hurt is my hurt. As so many of us do, I carry it on my back, bring it with me to bed, and keep it fed and alive so it can grow alongside me as I make my way through the years. I notice more and more that there is a deep sense of my identity found in and around my own history of suffering and that I still sometimes guard those old feelings with my life even now, years after the initial infliction occurred. Much of the connection I feel to my humanity seems to have been formed during sad times, more than once having had the experience of stepping closer to my true self in moments when all had otherwise been lost.

Recently, after I reviewed Lee Hirsch's documentary "Bully" for another gig and recounted my own horror story of being tortured by my peers as a young man for being ginger, queer and different, I received a message on Facebook from a name I had not seen for nearly twenty years but instantly recognized. In a flash I was transported back in time and broke into an all-too-familiar sweat, my hands cold and clammy with panic. The message was from one of the ringleaders of this group of mean kids I had grown up with and I have always counted him as one of my primary tormenters from back then. Suddenly I was 14 again and all alone in the world, just me and my teenage fear.

As I had done many times before in locker rooms, classrooms and hallways when I spotted this particular bully, I puffed myself up and prepared for the worst. Once I had worked through the acute PTSD around even seeing his name in my inbox, I opened the message and, to my surprise, took in the following words: "Hey Logan, I read several of your stories on The Huffington Post. In short, I just wanted to say that I'm very sorry for any bullying that I did when we were younger. I know that's not much (if any comfort), but I wanted to say it. I sincerely hope my own kids are more tolerant. Congrats on your sobriety and best of luck with your community work."

It was strangely comforting. I burst into tears. This jerk had made me cry before, no doubt - but this was different.

It took me four days to work up the courage to respond to him and even then I didn't know what to say (or if I should say anything at all). The idea that true change had come to this mean boy was unfathomable to me on some level. How could someone once so twisted and cruel have opened his eyes to the hurt he had caused? Did he deserve to be forgiven or should I just let him suffer with the memory of having tortured me, just as I have suffered from the lasting impact of the torture all these years? Was I, in fact, re-injuring myself by accepting his apology? The waterworks began again, only this time I felt something leave my body as I cried, the pain now turning from adolescent and overwhelming to grown up and irrelevant.

On some level I would have preferred to remain angry at him, but that just promises to make me sick and keep me traumatized. So, I chose to open the vault; every mean thing this kid had ever said to me released, every book knocked out of my hand replaced, and every wad of snot spit in my face returned to the back of the bully's throat from whence it came.

Ultimately, forgiveness is a selfish act...at least it usually starts that way for me. In this case, I chose to reply to his note so that I could close the chapter and move on. He and I will most likely never be friends, but I can appreciate the man he has become. It takes bravery to cop to the things we are most ashamed of. This is something I've had to do a great deal of in my life as well, so I can relate to that struggle. I thanked him for letting me know he was sorry, told him just how hard it had been for me back then (something I had always wanted to do), and I shared how happy I was to hear that he had also turned out cool in the years since.

Be yourself and honor your experience in the world every day so that others will, too. Let your pain shape you rather than shackle you, and let love and new joy replace your old anger when the time is right. As it turns out, we aren't actually required to carry it on our backs forever. Who knew?

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