

Sharp video focus on school bullying

I COULDN'T believe it when he said that I should feel proud that I'd done so well for myself. It was several years after school and by that stage I had managed to lose the "square" label that stuck pretty hard when I was growing up. It was still amazing to hear such words come out of the mouth that had been one of the loudest to criticise and harass me.

In the years following high school, as we all grew up, I actually enjoyed arriving at a party or pub to see him in the crowd. He seemed to go out of his way to approach me and say nice things. I realised that he was making up for the nasty stuff he used to say. I was able to overlook the past and forgive, if not forget.

Now, being in my late 20s, I hardly ever think about my childhood and teenage bullying experiences. While I pay attention to the all-too-frequent media reports of bullying in schools today, I rarely think about that aspect of my school experience. In fact, I have even found myself yearning to be back at school - because from where I am now, it seemed like a pretty great time of life. But it wasn't until I watched a video, *Stories of Us* (by Ready Made productions in association with Optima Psychologists and the SA Film Corporation), that the memories of school bullying came flooding back.

At the time the bullying was happening, I recall adults regularly offering advice such as "just don't play with them", "walk



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away", "ignore it". But in the grand scheme of life for those giving the advice, I got the impression that it all seemed rather trivial. The fact that I wasn't invited to some sleepover or was called a name seemed out of proportion with the problems in their lives. This is not to say that they didn't take it seriously. Just that they had lost perspective on how real, painful and damaging it can be.

This is why I am so full of praise for *Stories of Us*, a series about bullying, relationships and stress designed to be shown in a classroom with accompanying questions for discussion.

Secondary students from three schools worked in collaboration with the filmmakers in brainstorming the subjects, developing characters, workshoping the scripts and performing key roles in the dramatised videos. Each video presents the story of two "students" as they deal with a given issue. The results are extraordinary. The bullying segment perfectly depicts the subtleties of girl group exclusion contrasted with the physicality of boy-led harassment. The fact that students were involved in writing and presenting the stories make them all the more relevant and believable. Responses to the video so far from audiences have been that it engages students, sparks lively conversation and makes a real difference to the way in which classrooms are venturing into the subject of bullies.

The memories of bullying may fade in time, but they are by no means trivial experiences. Resources such as this should be snapped up by schools to assist students to deal more effectively, in their own language, with the often harsh realities of growing up.

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