Beating the Bullies

By Krystal Armstrong



Bullying Awareness Week is in November

In October of 2008, my oldest daughter came home from school one day and started to cry. When I asked her what was wrong, she told me that she did not want to go to school anymore. This statement was very upsetting to me because she loved school. She told me that a classmate of hers had threatened to beat her up several times after school. I was shocked when I heard this, shocked that at seven years old, my daughter was being bullied. I didn't think this kind of thing would start at such a young age.

The next day, I approached both her teacher and principal about what had happened and they were very supportive. The teacher discussed bullying in the class and it seemed to have helped. About one week later, my daughter was at a birthday party which this other child attended as well. Again, she was threatened about being beat up and this time was physically pushed. Now my attitude was 'enough is enough.' My husband and I approached the parents and they were very receptive in dealing with the bullying and it has now stopped. I have to admit that I had many sleepless nights over this situation. I felt so upset for my own daughter, who I could see was not only afraid but also stressing out because of the bullying, but now I was feeling upset for all the other children and families who have been dealing with bullies for not only a week, but for months and years.

After this incident occurred, I took it upon myself to become more educated on bullying. I went on the Internet and came across the Web site bullying.org. This site was founded by classroom teacher Bill Belsey from Cochrane, Alberta Canada, and provides so much information on what bullying is, how you can deal with it, as well as real life stories from children and adults all around the world. I also discovered that there was an online course for parents and educators. I enrolled in the online course for parents and was supplied with excellent information and resources on bullying. After completing the course at bullying.org, I feel I have a much better understanding on bullying, something I think from which everyone can benefit in learn-

Through bullying.org, I also learned about Bullying Awareness Week, an annual event approaching its seventh anniversary in November 2009. The whole idea for this week in 2008 was to not focus on the bully or the victim, but on the bystanders. These are the people that see this type of behavior, but do nothing about it. In fact, 85% of bullying occurs within the context of a peer group.

I went to the school's principal and told her about Bullying Awareness Week and how it would be great if the school could participate. She was all for it. I was hoping that if we brought more awareness to bullying, that maybe it could help at least one child or family who is dealing with this terrible situation.

A fire started to burn within me. I found myself on a mission. It was great that I had my daughter's school support on this, but what about the rest of the community? As I have come to understand, bullying is a community issue and is happening to adults and even senior citizens. I contacted the local radio stations and they agreed to broadcast a public service announcement that I had gotten from the Bullying Awareness Week Web site. In addition, I presented a proclamation for Bullying Awareness Week to my city council that they approved, officially making November 16-22, 2008, in Kamloops, British Columbia, Canada, Bullying Awareness Week. I also contacted the local newspa-





per, hoping again that I would be able to bring more awareness to bullying and possibly help someone. They published an article on me on entitled "Mom Takes Action Against School Bullying." After the article ran in the paper, there were a few letters to the editor. Some were from adults who were bullied as children, talking about how it made them feel even now as adults. Another was from a girl in seventh grade, telling her story on how she has been bullied for the past three years. Her school was even aware of it, but had done nothing to stop it. Three years? This letter really touched my heart. I responded to that letter and again stressed that in order to prevent this type of behavior we needed to be better

educated on it. I commended her on the courage to write the letter and hoped it had helped her. I still think about her often.

I had many parents come up to me and tell me that they saw my article and that I should be very proud that I did something. I also had some tell me that their children are being bullied or have been bullied and how traumatic it has been. A couple of moms came up to me and thanked me for doing what I did. Wow! How could the efforts of one person affect so many? It still amazes me.

Sure, I could've stopped my efforts when I talked to the child's parents, but like my good friend Chief Master Robert Ott says, "We should give something positive back to others." I had the absolute honor in meeting him in September 2008 at a women's self-defense seminar he was holding in Olympia, Washington. My friend and I drove six hours from Canada to attend. I first met him through email after reading his biography, Certain Victory. I emailed him to tell him how his book inspired me to not only be a better person, but a better martial artist. To this day we still communicate through email. I feel so fortunate to have someone like him in my life and to be able to call him a friend.

Training in martial arts has done so much for me, not only physically, but mentally and spiritually as well. It gave me the self-empowerment to do what I did. The way I am today is because of my martial arts training. It gave me the courage to believe in myself. For me, presenting to the city council was a bit scary. However, helping others and bringing more awareness to an issue that needed it was far more important than my own fears. I feel so blessed to be able to train in the martial arts and to have my daughters train as well. Martial arts teach not only self-defense, but also respect for ourselves and for others. Respect is something that is lacking in today's society. Bullying is certainly a community issue and addressing it at a school level is only part of the solution. We, as parents, need to step up and be positive role models for our children, so that they can be part of a strong and happy community.

For now, everything seems okay. My daughter loves school again and her classmate that once bullied her is now nice and friendly to her. However, she is only in the second grade and has many school years ahead of her. If I continue to address bullying, maybe, just maybe, one day this kind of thing won't happen. I have to think positive.

I am so proud of what I accomplished and have realized that if we go the "extra mile" in our everyday lives, like we do in our martial arts training, we can accomplish so much more. TO

For more information on Bullying Awareness Week and how you can participate, visit bullyingawarenessweek.org.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Krystal Armstrong enjoys training with her daughters Hayleigh and Emily and recently received her first-dan black belt via the Canadian Martial Arts Federation.

