



TAME THE JOKER IN THE DECK

By Carlynn McCormick

When you were a child, were you ever in the embarrassing position of having another person make fun of you in front of your friends? Were you ever the butt of a joke? Did you ever suffer the agony of knowing kids were laughing at you? I sincerely hope not.

Such dark memories were, however, a part of my childhood—all centering on a girl named Jackie. She was in my second grade class. A few weeks after school started she walked up to me and said, “*I don’t like you.*” When I asked “why” she said, “*because I hate you!*” I didn’t understand of course. I hadn’t even talked to her before she accosted me with her declaration of hate. All through second grade I wondered what it was that caused her to dislike me so.

Fortunately, Jackie wasn’t in any of my later primary or elementary school classes but she was in my Girl Scout Troop. I tried to avoid her but often, when the troop leader wasn’t looking, or when Jackie saw me on the school playground, she would whisper something to one of her friends and point at me. I can tell you with certainty this was *not* beneficial to my self-confidence.

But before you start to feel sorry for poor little me, you should know that while I was merely confused at age seven, by the time I was ten, I had plotted some rather despicable ways of getting even with Jackie. My only problem: I didn’t have the guts to carry out any of my plans.

But the story includes an interesting turn of events.

One afternoon after a scout meeting Jackie was surrounded by a group of girls. As I walked by she pointed at me and whispered loud enough for me to make out what she was saying, “*That’s the girl who wets her pants in school.*” Of course since she was talking about me and not to me, there was no way for me to deny it.

I was waiting for the other kids to start snickering and already wishing I could be swallowed up by Mother Earth, when a little girl named Jeri, who I barely knew, jumped up, looked at Jackie and said loudly, *“I don’t believe you; that is **not** true and it’s not funny!”*

Amazingly, Jackie didn’t protest; she didn’t say anything. I suddenly felt ten feet tall—someone had stuck up for me!

The next day I was in for another surprise. Jackie saw me but she didn’t make a nasty crack. Her campaign against me was over. My plans of revenge melted into nothingness.

A short time later Jeri’s family moved to another city and I never saw her again—but a half century later, I vividly remember the lesson she taught me.

It is one I pass on to my students. I tell them of an action each of us should take—an action that benefits all:

*When we hear someone make fun of another; when we hear someone tell a joke at another’s expense; when we hear someone gaily criticize or devalue another’s dreams or efforts—we must let that someone know such actions are **not** okay.*

*And we must never let someone get away with saying “Oh, I was just joking” because tearing down another person is **not** good-natured humor—it is ruthless and cruel.*

We set an example for the “joker” to follow when we tell him that degrading remarks are not funny, that we consider them objectionable. In essence, we are inviting him to look at the effect he did create and asking him to adjust it to match the effect he wishes to create.

Or, it may be that there was something the “joker” did not understand about the person he ridiculed. By not going along with the ridicule, we allow him to look for such misunderstandings and clear them up.

Another possibility is that the “joker” needs to work out the difference between a witty remark that is amusing and can be enjoyed by all—as opposed to a remark that makes someone uncomfortable (which would never be amusing for that person).

Or the “joker” could simply be rude. Having a non-compromising attitude toward rudeness will reinforce the idea that such behavior is totally unacceptable.

And for the person who gets targeted, when we stick up for him, we allow him to keep his self-confidence.

Bottom-line, by insisting that people be respectful of one another, we make a kinder world—a more humane world.

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