

## The Immigrant Kid

Brace yourselves.” said Mama. We were entering the area Mama had told me and Fernando about. She said it was filled with bandits and fake police officers. I think she went over 100 in that stretch at least seven times. Fernando and I were so scared because the “bad bandits”, as Fernando calls them, would take the car. After that, as Mama said, it was “smooth sailing”. We crossed the border after another few hours and arrived in El Paso. Mama found a hotel and we, another one of Mama’s sayings, “slept like a rock”.

It was the next morning that I realised two important things. One, we would have to find an apartment and two, I would have a new school to go too. Fernando is four and he went to daycare in Mexico, so he’ll be out of Mama’s way.

Within a week, Mama had taken care of problem number one. We’d bought a small apartment. Mama says it’s just the right size for a family of three. I think she bought it because it was cheap and in a respectable neighborhood.

I started school that day. Mama said to keep calm when I entered the classroom, but I couldn’t. I was so nervous that I asked my new teacher Mr. Terry if I could go home. He said no and that everyone has the first-day- of-school-jitters, whatever that was.

I found a seat located toward the back of the room and put all my things in my locker and in my desk, hung my coat up, went back to my desk, and settled in. There was only one problem left. I didn’t know one person in that classroom other than Mr. Terry, and that was because he was my teacher and I had just met him. I knew I could make friends, but I didn’t want to. I don’t know why, I just couldn’t figure out a reason to get to know a person who was completely different from me in every way but being a human being living in El Paso.

Just as me and my fellow classmates, whom I knew nothing about, got into our seats, Mr. Terry said for all of us to come and sit in a circle. He said we were going to play something called the name game and get to know each other.

Even though school is about learning things, the only thing I learned was that I had a lot of John't in my class. Five, to be exact.

Next we went to science with Ms. Martinez. We studied plants and chloroplasts. After that came Math and reading with Mr. Terry.

Finally, after an exhausting day at school, the last bell rang. Just as I was about to leave, I felt a sharp punch in my back. I turned around and my gaze was met by John, the bully of my class.

"You're not like us, so why don't you go away, huh?" he said. Just as he was about to punch me again, David, a classmate of mine, walked up and said, "Oh John, stop picking on Juan. It's his first day and he has other things to think about." John rolled his eyes and sighed. "You got lucky Mr." he said and slinked off.

"That was great, what you did and all," I said. "I could never have stood up to John, like that,"

"Oh, it was nothing," he said modestly. "He picks on the new kids every year. I have to go now, but it was nice meeting you."

"You too," I said. And then he walked away. I never forgot what he did for me on that day.

When I got home, I told Mama all about what had happened. She said if I ever meet that mean and nasty boy again, I should run to an adult. But when I told her about David, she said he was a role model to all people.

Anyway, the next day was uneventful, and the next and the next, and the next, and so on. It wasn't until two months after that fateful day when something interesting happened. We were at recess and David and I were playing hide and seek with a few other people.

David and I hid under a slide and he told me that there would be a new kid at our school. He said his name was Björn, and that he was from Norway. Just then John found us and Mr. Terry called us in for gym. I was so excited that we were getting a new classmate. I hoped he would be nice and that we could get along.

After gym, David told me that he would come in a week. I told David I didn't think I could wait that long. "But even though I thought it took forever, the day finally rolled around. I walked to school the same way I'd done it for the past two months: left on

cherry, walk two blocks then right on Church, walk 5 blocks, turn left on Hill and then walk the final 4 blocks to the bus stop, where I would get picked up and dropped off at the front steps of my school.

I got there and played with David until the bell rang. Just as I was about to run inside, I saw an unfamiliar car pull up and a blond-haired boy stumble out. He was very short, had big black-rimmed spectacles and looked like the most nervous kid I'd ever seen, maybe even more nervous than me on my first day of school.

He ran past me at lightning speed into the building and then followed the crowd to our classroom. I thought to myself that that must be Björn and if Mama were there, she would say that I should be as nice as I could be to him. So that's what I did. For the rest of the day, at least.

Every time we had to have partner, I worked with Björn. I learned a lot about him like that he wasn't from Oslo, a big city in Norway, he was from Bergen, a smaller city and that he spoke Norwegian and English fluently.

Every so often, I casually looked around the room. When my gaze met John's, he quickly looked away. After all, he was a big, fat, mean, stink, harassing, obnoxious and torturous bully. I felt like a father to Björn, in a friendly way, protecting him like that.

When the day was over and I was about to leave, I thought to myself maybe I should check on Björn and see if he was okay.

When I approached Björn, I saw that he wasn't alone. "Just as I suspected," I said to myself, John was bullying Björn.

"Hey John, stop that. Björn is new and has other things to worry about," I said. As usual, John gave me the regular eye-roll and muttered, "Why does this always happen?"

"Thank you," Björn said in a very thickly Norwegian accented voice (who could blame him)."

"It was nothing. If you ever run into him again, just call for me and I'll be there 'quick as a wink', as my Mama used to say."

"Does your mom have a saying for everything?" he questioned.

"I bet she does." I replied. "Well.....see you tomorrow."

"See you." Björn said.

While Björn, David and my friendship grew, John's hatred for us grew even more. John hated me especially. When I would walk past him, he would snicker and sometimes whisper foul words. But because I ignored him, he got even more mad at me.

One time in December, he got so mad that he threw a wooden block at me right in front of the teacher, Mr. Terry. He had to go to the principal's office and stay there until he came to get John. But, that only made John hate me and my friends even more.

The last straw came in June on the last day of school. I was chosen the most popular in the class, Björn was chosen kindest and David was chosen the funniest while John wasn't chosen anything, even most hard-working, which he was when it came to being a bully.

Once the awards ceremony was done and we were out of school until next September, John came from behind a bush and tackled me to the ground. I tried to get up, but he just shoved me down.

"Give me your award and I'll let you go." he said. Then he shoved me even farther into the sidewalk.

So, not wanting to get hurt more, I gave it to him and he let me go. I ran home to Mama and told her what happened. She told me to find that boy and get my award back. So, me being a good son and all ( I'm not trying to brag, but I was her favorite son), I obeyed and tracked John down.

"So, you came back for more, eh?" he said.

"I guess you could say that," I replied.

"Well, you came to the right place," he muttered. Just as he was about to hit me, I said, "Could I have my award back, please, please with a cherry on top," I pleaded.

"No, no, that wouldn't work," he said. " You see, I deserve this award. I was supposed to get it. Why do you think all those kids follow me around?"

"Because they are scared of you," I replied. "And, if you don't hurry up with giving me the award, I'll have to call my big brother. He's in eighth grade and will pound you like a sack of rice."

“He will?” he said, obviously a little nervous. “Well, fine, you can take it. But next year, I will get you so badly, and your friends.” That was the last I heard of him until next year.

You see, I wouldn’t have stood up to John if David wasn’t so kind to me. It was the same kind of thing with Björn. David helped me, I helped Björn. And if Björn helps someone and then that someone helps someone, it would go on and on, helping the world one person at a time. That’s the good thing about kindness: once you start being kind, it’s difficult to stop!