

Being Me

kidscape 30
30th anniversary 2015

Isn't it time someone heard your story?




Kidscape -
Giving you
confidence to
challenge
bullying at school

Louise's diary for you

7.45am Mum is sitting on the bed reminding me it's only two weeks until the end of term. She says it like it's not long. Two weeks is 10 days of school! I just want to close my eyes and go back to sleep. She tries another tack, reminding me I don't want to miss sports day.

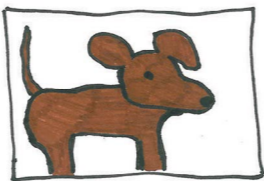
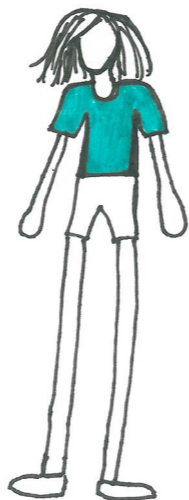
8.10am I have always loved sports day. I'm good at sports. Dad says that's why I've grown so tall – I was made to be a runner. Personally, I think I was made to be teased. A couple of the girls in my class started calling me long-legged Lou and then it turned to Loser Lou. My friend Phoebe who has been my friend since we started school seems to have forgotten who I am. It sounds silly when I write it down but I hate school and I'm beginning to hate being me.

8.50am Mum is telling me to hurry and get out of the car as the bell has gone. I've just seen Jenna and Cassie get out of Jenna's car and I want to wait until they're in. Too late. They've seen me. They link arms and put their heads down and rush past giggling.

 **9am** In English we're reading a book about animal conservation. It's a great book but I haven't read the chapter we're supposed to be discussing. I just couldn't concentrate yesterday. I look out of the window and wonder if it might rain. I wonder if they will let us go home.

10.45am The bell goes for break. Jenna and Cassie had a sleepover last night and are talking about Jenna's new puppy. Girls crowd round looking at a photo. I ask to see and Cassie holds it up but won't pass it to me. This is a game they play – let's not pass Lou the picture or the paint or the book or whatever's being handed round the class. I tell Jenna it's a gorgeous puppy. "Mum says we can take her out when you come over Saturday," she says to the girls. They chat about who'll hold the lead. I want the ground to swallow me up. What's going on this Saturday?

11.05am After break we have PSHE and they're talking about Olympic values – about competitions and fair play. Miss Connor asks the class what makes a good team and people put their hands up and say things like respect and supporting each other and saying 'well done' to people even when they lose. They talk about letting everyone have a go. I imagine myself on the athletics team at the next Olympics – with people who would cheer me on and want me on their team. It must feel so good. Miss Connor wishes us well for sports day and there's a rush for the door and the dinner queue. Maybe she really can't see how I'm feeling – why would she when they're all so nice in front of her? She seemed really pleased with Jenna's answer about giving everyone a go. Yeah, right Jenna.



1.30pm After lunch we're told to get into our PE shorts so we're ready for sports day. Cassie is laughing and pointing at my shorts. "Are they your brother's?" I look at the girls sniggering and wonder if any of them know how mean the others are when their backs are turned. In my frequent spells hiding in the loo I hear them talking about each other all the time. How 'Amy thinks she's so grown up with earrings', or how Sasha is 'so boring' or how Phoebe's house is 'sooo small' or how Jenna's puppy 'smells bad'. I feel angry then. I would never talk like that about my friends. I used to love going to Phoebe's house.



2pm Out on the field I feel lonely and awkward. "Are you doing long jump, Phoebe?" I ask when she walks over. She mumbles "yes" but keeps on walking. "Why don't you go stretch your long legs, Lou?" Jenna laughs, rolling her eyes at the others. "You look like you could do with some exercise to help you shape up." Some of the girls laugh, some look at each other awkwardly. I move across to where the boys are sitting, trying to stop the tears coming again.

L I think about what Miss Connor said yesterday. About me having to learn to stand up for myself, and to ignore the silly teasing. "Rise above it, Louise," she said. "Don't let it get to you." I imagine for a moment what she'd feel like if she was in the staff room talking about maths and everyone rolled their eyes and sniggered, or how she'd feel if she went and sat on the teachers' table for lunch and one of them asked her to leave because they were having a private conversation. And as she walked away how would she feel if she heard them whisper, "Miss Connor's a loser." I wonder if she'd rise above it, or end up in the loos with me trying to wash the tears away so no one spotted them.

2.30pm The PE teacher Mr Peters has put me on the red team, which seems to be made up of kids who haven't been picked. We watch race after race, the girls screaming out names of their friends. Go Amy, go. Aw, hard luck Cassie, that was amazing. They hug each other after each race, squeezing into saved places on the grass. I look to see if Mum has arrived and then line up on the field for the relay. For those five minutes I forget everything else. I'm watching while Bethan goes first, then Martin, then Alijah... He passes the baton to me – and I make my dash. I hear Mum shouting my name. I'm



across the line. We've won. I glance at the class. They're all chatting, oblivious to our relay and to our victory. Mum is watching me. I'm embarrassed to go back to my class because she will see that I have no one waiting to slap me on the back. My eyes smart. I pretend to join a group, sitting outside their circle as they chat. Invisible. Nine more days until the end of term.

By Louise x

HARRY'S STORY FOR YOU!

VACANCY: BYSTANDERS WANTED

My dad has his head in the paper, looking for a job, as I give him another reason I should stay off school. I walk through to the kitchen to talk to Mum about Jamie, and how out of nowhere he has stopped talking to me, stopped including me. How Marcus keeps putting me down and tripping me up and spreading stupid rumours. Hoping Mum might just give me another day away from the awfulness of it all.

"Look at this. Driver wanted to join growing company," shouts Dad suddenly. "Flexible hours, good pay... They want someone who's experienced and has their own car." "There must be a downside," says Mum, typically cautious, giving me a hug to acknowledge she's listening to me too. "What are the flexible hours? Evenings and weekends?! Who would be your boss? What would be your role in this company?"



I pick at a bowl of cereal and think about why the boys at school take on the roles they do. And they seem to enjoy those roles as well. Friends of mine – like Steve and Ahmed and Jamie who I've had here for sleepovers – suddenly worshipping the new boy Marcus and siding with him when he tells me I'm no good at

football, or that there's no room for me at his paintball party. Those so-called friends weren't the ones firing the insults, so I couldn't call them bullies. They were just not arguing with the insults, not stopping them. They laugh when others are mean to me. Mum says they've become what are called 'bystanders' to Marcus' cruel tactics. I feel sick now when I remember Jamie looking away, embarrassed, when Marcus questioned him about *why* he'd hung out with me over the summer.

I start to imagine an ad appearing in the school newspaper.

Bystanders wanted!

Perks of the job:

1. Guaranteed to share Marcus' popularity.
2. Guaranteed to be chosen to be on the football team.
3. Guaranteed invites to cinema trips on Saturday.
4. Guaranteed seat on bus.
5. Guaranteed to have someone to eat lunch with in canteen.

jobs-today.co.uk



Downsides:

1. Must keep mouth shut rather than standing up for old friend.
2. Must lie to teacher (or pretend you were momentarily blind) when boss (aka Marcus) reported for bullying and questioned about what happened.
3. Must hide any relationship with 'unpopular' people. Absolutely no way Marcus can find out you walked home or hung out with them. With me...
4. Must find way to enjoy lunchtime assaults on unpopular people, and learn how to hide away from them (that's me again) even though you know you're making them feel rubbish.
5. Must find way to persuade your mum to drop 'unpopular's' mum (that's my mum) so she doesn't accidentally ask unpopular person over to your next sleepover.

I found myself smiling then, in spite of the familiar sick dread in my tummy. This was exactly what my friends had become and it sounded so terrible. I picked up my rucksack and set off, grabbing my new book off the kitchen table so I'd have something to read at lunchtime.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, I actually felt sorry for these boys who'd taken pleasure in laughing or leaving me out of games, or making sure there was no room for me round the lunch table. Mum says you have to be a little person to belittle someone else. Or perhaps have a big problem in your life and no one to help sort it out, so you need to take it out on someone. I suddenly started to think more about what she meant.

When I got on the bus I gave Jamie a nod but sat down next to a boy I didn't know very well and started talking computer games. And when the bus stopped I marched ahead to class, without even a backward glance.

I'M THE BOSS!



It struck me that my pals – Steve, Ahmed and Jamie – must be having a pretty miserable time in their new position as one of Marcus' gang. Must hate the pressure, knowing that if they fail him they'll be out of the job and end up being me – at the rough end of his nastiness as a result. They must actually have no real idea about the kind of friend they could be (or the kind of real fun they could have!) – if they applied for a different position.



By HARRY!

Anthony Horowitz OBE, author and Patron of Kidscape

"As a writer, I'm aware that words can be very powerful...and they can be very harmful too. I was bullied at school when I was 12 and even now I can vividly remember the experience and can't even bring myself to write down the names I was called. They still hurt. The truth is that bullying doesn't do anything useful for the bully or the bullied. There is nothing beneficial and nothing character building about it. Positive experiences, positive peer groups and positive reinforcement are what build a strong character."



Information for teachers

Bullying behaviour – the type described by Louise and Harry – should never be viewed as an unfortunate but unavoidable part of school life. It does not make children resilient – but instead undermines their confidence and development. Whether it's exclusion from social events or group name-calling, rumour spreading, stealing or hitting, it can have a devastating impact on the bullied and their feelings of self-worth as they develop. It almost always has an impact on their attendance and/or ability to learn. It also, of course, has an impact on the learning and development of the bully, and the others in the class and school who may become bystanders to what is considered 'acceptable'.

Kidscape believes all children have the right to lead their lives free from bullying and abuse, and that all adults have a responsibility to support, nurture and care for children, enabling them to reach their full potential. That has been its mission for 30 years. Kidscape knows schools are striving to make their setting a place where children

learn how to be kind and respectful – both in the class and outside it – as well as where they learn how to read, write and study. Teachers they work with see that ignoring bullying behaviour is like teaching children that the poor way they are treating each other is acceptable.

While your school probably has an anti-bullying policy in place, there is a big difference between policy and practice. Listen to children, and look harder at what goes on when they leave the classroom (children rarely bully in front of adults), as well as their behaviour when they're with you. Remember there is often a fine line between children who seem popular leaders and children who are bullies.

To bring your anti-bullying policy alive – and help it impact on attendance, behaviour and results – it needs to be agreed and supported by everyone in the school, at every level, so there is a clear message in the classroom, in corridors, and in the playground about what behaviour you expect and what behaviour won't ever be tolerated.



You're not alone: Kidscape brings children together so they can see they are not alone, not at fault, and have a say in preventing the abuse



kidscape
preventing bullying
protecting children

Kidscape runs workshops for bullied children and training for teachers. To find out more about how they could support you and the children in your school, visit www.kidscape.org.uk