Non-Fiction—Second Place
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Who Cares?

I zipped up my sweater feeling a slight chill against my cheek and walked across the playground at George Washington Elementary School to line up for class like the rest of my classmates. We always lined up in pairs and today Ruby was lined up beside me. I gave her a quick smile and then the line started moving forward towards the classroom entrance.

I smiled again, but this time to myself. After what I had witnessed last week, I had made it my goal to go out of my way to be friendlier to her and invite her to hang out with my friends and me during recess. She typically said no to my invitations, but she always politely thanked me for asking. Sometimes, she would hesitate and I could tell she wanted to say yes, but something always held her back from accepting.

Ruby had shiny, long, straight, black hair reaching slightly past her waist. She always wore her hair back in a ponytail. Her dark brown eyes were large and alert. She had light tan skin and was quite a bit overweight. She was, in fact, the heaviest student in our class. While I never had any problems with her, I knew she was extremely shy and a bit of loner.

I thought back to last week when I had secretly caught her crying during recess. I was playing hopscotch with my friends when we decided to play dodge ball instead. I offered to get the ball and raced excitedly towards our classroom to the large bins where our teacher left them during recess. As I approached the bins placed on the side of our bungalow, I could hear voices coming from just behind the bungalow. I peered around the corner to look. Ruby was sitting by herself on a bench under one of the oak trees. Surrounding her, in a semi circle, were four boys and a girl. They were all giggling, pointing and laughing. Ruby’s eyes never met any of theirs. I quickly realized what was happening.

They were taking turns snarling, laughing and hurling insults at Ruby. One boy, who looked about a year or two older than the rest, with blonde hair and a tall and lanky build seemed to be the main agitator. He’d get the rest of them all worked up. He’d point at her and crack fat jokes. The four others would laugh along and then come up with their own fat jokes to insult Ruby. The whole time Ruby seemed to be ignoring them like she didn’t even realize anyone else was there.

After a moment or two more they finally left, turning the corner opposite of me. I went back to get the dodge ball, scooping it up in my arms. Then, out of curiosity, I decided to take one final glimpse. Ruby sat there in her usual quiet spot crying. She wiped her tears only to have a fresh set of tears stream down her round cheeks.

I looked away and down at the ball in my arms. Seeing other people cry made me feel uneasy. I was never sure how to comfort someone. So, instead, I headed back to my friends who had apparently changed their minds and were now playing basketball.

During the rest of recess I kept looking back towards where I knew Ruby was hidden, probably still crying. I tried to push it from my thoughts, but my conscience wouldn’t let me. I confided in a friend as to what I saw. Her response was a shrug as she asked, “You mean the fat girl? Who cares?”

After hearing that, I decided I would try to be nicer to her. I thought of all the times
Ruby always stood off to the side alone and how she didn’t really have any friends. When the bell rang signaling recess was over, we lined up in pairs in front of our bungalow. Ruby was standing there beside me. Her tears were gone and had I not just witnessed bullying, I never would’ve suspected that she had ever been crying at all.

From that day I made it a goal to not be so self-absorbed and wrapped up in my own affairs that I was unaware of my surroundings. I sat down in my seat beside my best friend Rebecca who had initially shown no sympathy to Ruby, but was starting to come around. Rebecca had shrugged her off like most did. She had said, “Who cares?”

I took off my sweater and made brief eye contact with Ruby. I realized at that moment that I cared. Ruby’s incident was the first time I had ever witnessed true bullying. It was the first time I realized how mean kids could be. Moreover, it was the first time I truly wanted to be compassionate to another in need.