



Sunday, November 30, 2014

It is a subject that is receiving a lot of attention these days, and justifiably so.

It is often cited as a contributing factor when a person inexplicably commits mass murder in a school, movie theater or any other populated venue.

We are talking about bullying, defined as an unwanted, aggressive behavior that includes actions such as making threats, spreading rumors, attacking someone physically or verbally and excluding someone from a group on purpose.

In 2012, Waynesburg Central High School graduate and 2008 Miss Rain Day Elissa McCracken was crowned Miss Ohio, and with most major pageants, contestants are required to adopt a platform to speak about an issue important to them. McCracken chose cyberbullying.

She was quite knowledgeable about that subject, so much so we suspect her presentation at the pageant contributed to her capturing the title. Her expertise on such an unpleasant topic came about, we learned, from her own experience. She was the victim of bullying.

And we were pleased, and definitely not surprised, when she returned to her alma mater last week and talked to the high school student body about what she went through as a middle school student – a time in her life when she felt “ugly, depressed and alone.”

McCracken did not sugarcoat her presentation. It would have been a disservice to the students to have done so.

“I hated middle school. (The bullies) told me I was ugly, and I was never going to be pretty enough to have a boyfriend,” McCracken said. “I was very shy and smart and made good grades, but I didn’t

have a lot of friends. I wore glasses sometimes and my skin was breaking out, and they teased me about that.”

The hurtful barbs were not said to her face. This was the time social media began to evolve.

McCracken said during the years she found herself the target of bullying, instant messaging and Myspace were the trends for online communication. She told the students this was the equivalent to their Twitter, Instagram and Facebook interactions today.

Most likely, when McCracken was being cyberbullied 10 to 12 years ago, the meanness directed to her came anonymously. Bullies, whether overt in their actions, or choosing to hide in cyberspace, are cowards.

McCracken had sound advice for her audience. She said never engage in a back-and-forth exchange with the person sending the messages. Next, she advised blocking their social media profile or cellphone number. Lastly, McCracken said students should tell a trusted adult the abuse is taking place.

She said she “never, ever” responded to her tormentors. Instead, for two years she dealt with the abuse alone, crying in her room each night. McCracken said everything she did made her a target, from wearing a new outfit or getting a new hairstyle.

As we said, she did not hold back. She shared the trailer for the 2012 documentary, “Bully,” depicting real-life stories of bullied kids, some who chose to end their lives out of desperation.

She suggested the students find the movie and watch it for themselves.

“It is really heartbreaking, but it happens. The problem is real. It is happening all over the country and all over the world,” she said. “Take care of yourself. Tell. If someone gets in trouble for it, they deserve every bit of it (the punishment).”

We commend the Central Greene School District for kicking off its Olweus Bullying Prevention Program at the high school and McCracken for having the courage not to hide from what she endured, but to speak out about her experiences.

If she touched but one bully or potential bully, or gave a victim the same courage she eventually found, then her platform is indeed a success.

Copyright 2014 Observer Publishing Company. All rights reserved.
This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.