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Holocaust Contest Entry

### CONTAGIOUS POWER

I always wonder if I'm bullying. What if I cheer for my team, but not the other one that's losing? Is that bullying? What if I like to hang out with someone who tells rumors behind other people's backs? Is that bullying? I've never liked the thought of picturing somebody who looks at me like a bully. So, I make sure it doesn't happen.

In third grade, I made a friend. I'll call her Carly. She was incredibly funny, was very mature, and her parent's cooking rocked! As any ordinary third grade girl would do, I started hanging out with Carly. Days went by; weeks went by, months, seasons. We were the closest of friends. I was so happy to be her friend, happier to be her friend than I was about anyone else. As I laughed and joked and whispered and gossiped, my other friends started becoming little figments of the past. They were just people on the same playground as I. My companion Carly then began talking behind people's backs, including those unimportant friends of mine, and mimicking them in a mean way. Some of this caught my attention, and I would get mad. But not mad enough. Somehow, I always got lured back in. Why? Carly was powerful, and I liked being a part of it. It made me feel connected to something big, to something great and strong, like a planet orbiting around the sun.

It had turned a year by now, and luckily Carly and I had been put in the same fourth grade class. But my other friend was not. I'll address her as Nora. She was located in the other classroom across the hall. Last year, "across the hall" would have been miles and miles away, but now with Carly in my class, it was just across the hall, and it didn't matter. Nora and I barely

saw each other anymore, but still things seemed to be going over my head. I didn't think about the other planets circling around the sun, or the stars. My only concern was the big sweltering sun in the center: Carly.

When we entered the fifth grade, things began to shift. Nora was in my class again, and we started to mold our friendship back together. My "sun" had found another planet, maybe you could say, more to her liking. I was the "bad globe." The one that didn't respond to its master. Immediately, I was caught victim: Being told that I was stupid in math, being the only fifth grade girl that didn't make it on her friend list in the yearbook, getting glared at by both her and her mother; I had no idea what I had done. Was I being a bully? Should I be punished for getting social again with my other friends? No. It was a good thing what I had done. It's good to be a friend to more than one person. My moms tried reaching out to Carly's parents, suggesting that maybe we should try to fix whatever was going on between us. That did not work. Instead, it got worse and made elementary school unbearable for me. It was so hard. I would come home every day wounded from the daily verbal blows I was receiving, and often, tears were rolling down my cheeks. I was mad at Carly for turning on me like that, and I was mad at myself for giving in so easily to her.

I was fortunate enough to have my old friend Nora back with me; but I felt so bad when I was around her. I felt we weren't quite as close as we had been a few years ago. One day, I went with my mom to where she worked, because I had a day off from school. We went into her office, shut the door, and of course, somehow the conversation about Carly started up again: Why was my best friend doing that to me? Why is her mom exactly like she is? Why do we have to deal with this? It was all a question to me, because I didn't know if I should be mad at myself, or her, or her mother... I was stuck. And yet, deep down, where I let myself think about

something that I might've done wrong, I knew why I was stuck. I hated how I had abandoned my old friends; how I let power and greed lead me through life the past two years. I was angry and sad and confused. All these thoughts were racing frantically about my mind, and all that came out of my mouth was, "I'm mad at myself! How could I do that to Nora?" I was stricken with frustration. As the tears slowly dripped down to land on my shirt, my mom and I talked. She explained how it's nice to feel a part of something or someone that is powerful, and that I just got caught up in it. But she could tell why I felt so appalled about what I had done, because it was awful and betraying. I wanted to apologize to Nora, and tell her how bad I felt, but I didn't know how to tell her that. So, my mom and I practiced. She was Nora and I was Rachel, telling her how sorry I felt about losing a friendship, and that it would not happen again. Afterwards, I felt confident.

Nora came to my house one day. I wouldn't have wanted to tell her through email or phone. It was too significant. I would have to be facing her. I remember, we were playing a video game on the computer when I brought it up.

"Hey Nora?"

"Yeah?"

"I just wanted to say... I'm sorry."

She turned away from the game and looked at me puzzled, "Why?"

I started the little scripted speech I had prepared. "Well, I just want to tell you that I feel really bad about Carly. I should've never become friends with her, because she kinda took over me, and I shouldn't have let her do that, 'cause I lost being in touch with people."

"Oh, it's okay Rachel. I totally understand."

Was it that easy? Had my friend forgiven me so quickly for something it would have taken me forever to forgive? I realized how privileged I really was, to have high-quality friends to forgive me after making a big mistake. I felt happy again, and I didn't feel like a bully.

Today, Nora and I go to a small and tight girls school, and we both feel very safe and reassured about where we are. I'm not saying my story compares to the Holocaust, but after learning about how the Europeans abandoned their neighbors, friends, and colleagues who were Jewish, gay, Roma, and disabled. I realize how important it is to stay with those you love. The importance of staying linked with the other planets, and not let power of the hot sun take you over, no matter how superior it feels.

The Holocaust has changed my views on bullying. I know how easy it is to be lured into something, how Germans got lured into Hitler's power. It felt promising and secure. The Nazis enticed people and it was awful what they managed to do for praise and honor. I understand how easy it is to be pulled into something; how we manage to go blind, only able to see the richness and glory of power in our eyes. This desire for power is human nature. The only option anyone has after they have bullied and realized what they have unleashed within themselves, the only beauty that we can use to prove ourselves honest and true, is to accept what we have done wrong in this world; to think about the victims, and the different stars that we avoided. It's a gift to be able to face our worst fears: *Is laughing at someone bullying? Is whispering about someone bullying? Is shunning someone from my daily life bullying? Am I bullying?*