

“Why don't you go home?” “Don't ever come back.” “Disappear.” “Die.” These words were spoken to me, spoken by some of my classmates, when I was in the fourth grade of elementary school.

Before this started happening, I liked school. I liked studying, and I liked my friends. But one day, the classmates who I thought were my friends started bullying me. They teased me, ignored me, and sometimes they saw to it that I didn't get a lunch tray. I didn't understand what was happening, and I couldn't deal with it. I started to hate myself because I couldn't get up the nerve to fight back. My teachers wouldn't take my situation seriously, and I started to hate them too. I started thinking of everyone except my family as the enemy. In the end, I stopped going to school.

One day when I was in fifth grade, my mother said, “Mei, let's change schools. I found a real good one, a small school with only twenty students. Let's go take a look.” So we visited this other school, and I liked it very much. I decided to change schools as soon as possible. I remember feeling really excited. We were so lucky to be able to find such a good school so close to us, only thirty minutes away. And I was about to find out that the twenty students who attended this school were like brothers and sisters to each other. For me, what had happened before that disappeared like a fog, and I was able to forget the pain of being bullied.

So today, I would like to send a message to anyone out there who may be suffering right now because of bullying at school. The message is this: “Run away now.” It is not a bad thing, or a cowardly thing, to run away. In fact, it's a very good way to protect your life and your heart. Why?

First of all, just standing there, and cowering in fear is not an option. Doing so only puts us at the mercy of the bullies' violence. Fighting back may be a possible solution, but it is likely to draw us further into a meaningless and unending cycle of violence. Running away, on the other hand, is a very practical solution, because by running away, we are putting immediate physical distance between ourselves and the bullies.

In the end, it's a choice between subjecting yourself to violence or not. So let's think about it together now: Would you ever choose to be wounded emotionally for the rest of your life, for someone who is not so important to you? I don't think so. So get the heck out of there! Every time I see a news report of another bullying incident somewhere, it just makes me so sad, and so angry! Why didn't they just run away?

At that very crucial time in my life, when I was being bullied, I made a conscious decision with my family to run away. The result is that now, I am living a very happy school life. I laugh a lot, I learn a lot, and I'm trying many new things. I also entered my dream school, Gakugei Junior High School, and this year I've become student council president. Today, I am very happy to be able to participate in this speech contest and tell everyone about my experience. Let us all choose life, and continue to enjoy our lives with our heads held high, even as we run away from bullies.

Thank you.