

Someday I'll Be Like Drew

by Daniel Schlordt

The school day was nearing an end, as was a week of presentations about someone we admired. I was the last in the class to give mine, on a Friday afternoon twenty minutes before the home time bell. My teacher called me up and as I stood, I could hear them already – in hushed whispers, the older boys began. "Tube!" "Poof!" "Fatty!" In a way, I had to mentally commend these half-witted louts for sticking with stereotypical traditions of bullying. The intelligent, the homosexual and the fuller-figured were always first to come under attack, followed by the rich, the poor and those who were in any way individual – especially once puberty was in full swing. And I was, at this point in my life, overweight, top of the class and, apparently a big, raging homosexual.

Being gay was never something I'd ever given much thought. If it wasn't in *Pokémon*, a Terry Pratchett novel or a David Attenborough show, I didn't really think about it. I thought life was like it is in the soaps; simple and tragic. But as those in my class, who clearly thought more than I on this specific matter, pointed out: I was gay. I would live a gay life (which to them was a negative thing). I would never be liked because of it, and I would die young. I never questioned them, I just accepted their taunts. They were merely the metaphorical kick as I was always down. As I reached the front of the class with my expertly prepared presentation folder in hand, the girls were giggling at me. I was entirely unaware of how funny I was. I placed my folder on the desk and began.

"The person I admire the most is Drew Barrymore."

"You admire a gay man!"

"Drew Barrymore is a highly successful American actress, model, producer and environmental activist."

As I passed round a photograph, the boys realised my presentation was on Drew and not Michael, and I seemed to get more attention now that the rather smutty photo had reached early-pubescent male eyes.

"At the age of eight, Drew was one of the most exciting young actresses of all time, with a starring role in *E.T.* and lots of film offers coming in. At the age of nine, Drew was beat up by her father. At the age of ten, her mother let her live in Los Angeles with a nanny while she shot films. At the age of eleven, Drew Barrymore was admitted to the California rehabilitation clinic for the addiction to alcohol and hallucinogenics. At the age of sixteen, Drew was bankrupt, homeless and estranged from her parents, but was one hundred percent sober and has been since."

"You're an addict. To food!"

Standing there, giving that presentation dragged on for what felt like hours. I couldn't quite understand why my teacher wouldn't silence the nasty hecklers. I concluded she might not have the best hearing. Either that, or I was more tuned into the jibes; like a dog's ears prick up as they hear the cascade of food fall into their bowl or the soft zoom of a car driving past the house, my ears honed into anything negative. In any case, I felt like it was me against the world with not a soul on my side.

Bullying, for me, began way back when I was around seven or eight. I vividly recall one day at school, when I was ten – my school bag had been hidden from me at some point in the morning along with my lunch box inside it. I asked my teacher if she had seen it and all she did was point me in the direction of the 'bag box', where everyone's bags were meant to be kept. Once again, my teacher wasn't being the adult I needed her to be. I resigned myself to not having lunch and made my way outside to the playground.

When I opened the door, a scrum of my classmates, seeing me, shuffled into a semi-circle around one of the playground bins, a big rotten-smelling vat that if ever touched would 'give you rabies', and one of them revealed my bag as he threw it into the bin. They rushed away to eat their lunch and I rushed to get my bag, not caring that someone just threw it in the bin, not caring about my lunch, not caring about the never-ending torment I'd now get for having a scabies-infected school bag, but worrying about my Game Boy and its safety. Probably my best friend, was my Game Boy. It was safe and I played Pokémon to my heart's content in the grassy corner of the playground, eating my lunch alone.

When the bell went I packed up and made my way back to class, stashing my bag behind the 'bag box' where no one would see it, and sat down, ready to begin the afternoon lesson. Mrs Kellie gave us our work and it began: the constant throwing, not just of names but of pencils, screwed up paper, pencil sharpeners and rubbers as well. A loud eruption of laughter would celebrate a hit to my head and sniggers would acknowledge anything landing near me. Strangely, it wasn't the physical things that would upset me. It was the mental bullying: the name-calling, the taunts about my weight, sexuality, clothes, handwriting, mum, home. It was never-ending and I just couldn't take it any longer. My teacher asked me a question, looking me right in the eye. Could she not hear the taunts? Could she not see the shrapnel of paper, pencils and rubbers lying around me? Could she not tell

from a year of teaching me that I had no friends and I was being bullied to the point of crying myself to sleep at the age of ten? I must have been giving her a glare, because she looked at me as though I'd sworn at her. And as another taunt hit me, while looking my teacher straight in the eye, someone I should have admired, respected and learnt from, I pushed my pencil hard into my thigh, and screamed.

The bullying and torment had manifested itself within me as rage, and for a split second I didn't think about what I was doing. I never consciously wanted to harm myself. The pain wasn't too bad. I remember my leg throbbed for a while, but it was muffled by my teacher shouting at me for screaming. I looked down to see a small hole in my trousers and a wet patch around it, which I presumed to be blood. At the end of the day, I grabbed my bag and ran out. Ran home. I must have thrown my trousers in the wash straight away because my parents never found out. It wasn't until my fiancé noticed the existing scar, 12 years later, that I ever told that story. But looking back now, I wonder if my teacher was too scared to help me. I can't comprehend the idea that she was completely ignorant of what was going on. I don't believe in holding grudges, but if I was ever to see that teacher again, I would ask her why she didn't help me; and I would expect a valid explanation.

"Get on with it, tube!"

"Following a career spanning nearly two decades, Drew Barrymore has built herself from drug addiction and bankruptcy to being one of the highest paid actresses of all time, running her own film production company, running the Drew Barrymore Foundation for lost teenagers, and acting as global ambassador for an environmental preservation charity. All

with no one's help but her own determination and hard work. That is why she is someone I admire."

I was applauded very pathetically as the teacher concluded the day with an outline of our homework for the evening before the bell rung.

As I walked out of the school gates, I felt a presence behind me. In a familiar panic, I picked up my pace. I didn't know who was following me, but I could only imagine it to be one of the boys from school. All I wanted to do was turn around and see who it was, but I wouldn't have enough time to turn back round and run if I needed to. What would Drew Barrymore have done? She would never run. She's not afraid of anything. She would have turned around and kicked some ass, or turned around and given whoever was following her a piece of her mind. I wished I could be like Drew. Someday, I'll be like Drew, I thought. But it wasn't that day.

Suddenly, something hit me over the head and I fell to the ground. This had happened before and I would lay there submissively, enduring the attack, patiently awaiting their boredom to relieve me. I waited a moment, but no kick came, so I opened my eyes and there was no one there. I got up and noticed some of the boys from school running in the opposite direction, laughing. Their attack was suspiciously minimal today. As I stood straight, I realised my head had started to throb and I grabbed it where it felt wet; as I brought my hand back round, I saw I was bleeding. My own crimson blood all over my hand.