

My story

BY PIETER VAN ZYL



If my parents and teachers hadn't intervened would my anger at the school bullies have spilt over in a bloodbath?

SUDDENLY everyone knows his name and who he is – but for all the wrong reasons. Morné Harmse (18) of Krugersdorp West has been labelled the “samurai sword playground murderer”.

I see pictures of him arriving at court on the front pages of newspapers and my blood runs cold. It could have been me when I was a schoolboy – he's the mirror image of a boy who was bullied and teased mercilessly, an outsider who hid behind the domestic science classroom to avoid the cruel taunts because I wasn't like the other guys. I did pottery, played the French horn and won gold certificates for art at the Welkom show. But I was terrified of a rugby ball and ran in the opposite direction when it was kicked my way.

“Moffie, sissie, queer, freak . . .”

The more you're called names the more they stick and the harder it becomes to get rid of them.

I DON'T know Morné, who has now been charged with the murder of a schoolmate, and I don't want to pretend his story is like mine. But just in case the message gets through to school bullies I'd like to shout from school rooftops: leave other kids alone! Do you have any idea how long it takes to restore a person's self-image once it has been destroyed?

I know. A woman once told me in passing, “Your eyes are too pretty to be a boy's. You should have been a girl!”

When I was in Grade 8 a girlfriend told me how masculine and sexy my sunglasses made

me look. They were those Men in Black sunglasses you got as a free gift with aftershave lotion and deodorants over Christmas.

Suddenly everything fell into place and the bizarre logic made sense to me: the eyes are the windows of the soul and if people couldn't see my eyes they couldn't hurt me.

So I started wearing sunglasses all the time – in the car on the way to school, during break when I hid in a corner on the school grounds, on the way to church, in the *pastorie* (vicarage) where people often came to see my dad for counselling and at mealtimes when I came

home from school. I even wore my dark glasses in the evenings until the curtains were tightly drawn. My mom would hide them but I would always find them.

Whenever a boy at school grabbed me from behind and pulled out my underpants in front of the girls or spat on me from the top of the school walkway I would go home and randomly open the Bible looking for answers. Why? Would the taunting ever stop? I would desperately search for a “yes” or “no” among the verses. But I found the answer only

(Turn over)

I beat the BULLIES

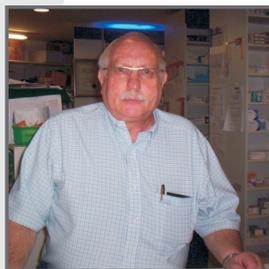
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