

" Dicky and Me"

by Gordon Laird

I had moved to "Kerrisdale" from "South Hill" that year - the year I was 10 years old - the year I lost my friends - Bobby Campbell and the others - the year I gave up piano lessons because my teacher wanted to enter me in the festival and I knew I wasn't good enough. But that's another story.

I want to tell you about "me and Dicky" - which is how I have thought of that searing event in my life ever since. Dicky sat beside me in my grade 4 class. Seemed like a nice enough boy, we could have been friends. But during recess one day Dicky said to me, "I want to see you and your gang after school today. Meet me at the High School."

I knew I didn't have a gang. I really hadn't had time to have as much as one friend. Before the year was out I had two, Gordy and Glenn, both of whom became lifelong friends. But it was too early in my experience in this foreign land in which I was the outsider. Never had experienced that before. I was always the insider - "The Bank Manager's Son". Now I was clearly unknown and an outsider, and to one boy at least, somewhat of an annoyance.

But I showed up at the High School. I am surprised now that I was that spunky. And who met me was, it seemed to me, a group which included every other boy in my class standing beside Dicky. They were his gang.

I was alone.

"Where's your gang?"

"I don't have a gang."

I don't remember anything I had done to Dicky, yet I had a feeling I was about to be punished. Maybe just for the look of my face. I can't remember what happened next. I guess someone started to hit me. Probably Dicky and maybe one or two of his gang. Someone hit me on the top of the head. I readily confess now that it didn't hurt. But that is when I took the only action I could think of.

I began to cry. And then I explained, knowing all the while that I was telling a

complete and utter lie, that I had had a "stitch" in my head and that one of the gang had hit me "right on the stitch". The group turned from hostility to some sounds of pity and it all broke up.

I went home.

But I have lived with the guilt. I knew then that this was not a manly way for me to get out of a situation. I have always thought I was cowardly in what I did. I remember that I lied. I knew even at 10 years old that I should have punched my way out and taken my lumps.

Until today, I have never blamed the 30 or so boys [maybe it was only 20] for threatening a defenseless boy by himself. I have only blamed myself.

I don't know why!

And I now think that what hurt so bad, was not the physical threat all those boys posed for me, but the total sense of aloneness it produced in me. Dicky had everyone. Soon I was to have two best friends. But at the time of this story, I was the newcomer, without any friends. I had no one.

Later analysis of this story: Wednesday, September 25, 2002

This is the only time I remember a gang-bullying event in my life. I think the biggest shock of the event was how lonely I was, and how much a whole gang of boys hated me. It was not immediately the prospect of physical pain. It was the pain of loneliness. I was the new boy in the school. I expect this happened within a month or two of my coming to Maple Grove School from Sir Alexander McKenzie School in South Vancouver. There I had friends, and probably had some good friends in the classroom. I do remember an April Fools Day when a number of us hid in the school closet of a particularly favourite teacher (she was single and had a son she occasionally brought to meet the class). There was no fanfare when we marched back into the classroom. It was a decided non-event. But I must have had friends who had participated in this prank with me.

But now I was in a new school and I was "naked of friends". I was alone. Totally vulnerable. And that seemed to be the only reason I was picked on.

I liked being liked. I didn't like being hated. I didn't think I was a hateful person

or a person who encouraged hatred from others. As far as I know, I had done nothing out of the ordinary to make me a target.

I wonder if this became a tape for me for any other situations in which I felt I was being "ganged-up on"?

What are some of the long-term effects of this experience? I don't believe I have ever taken the other side: been part of the gang who picked on a person. I empathize with my children, whenever they entered a new class, but particularly in Germany. It helps me evaluate the price we paid to take our children to Germany.

It also helped me identify what was going on when a group of people have singled one out for score, often on a secret basis. This certainly applied to a gay person in one congregation.