

SEVENTH GRADE

DODGEBALL



RICHARD CARLSON

**Seventh Grade:
Dodgeball**

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My name is Marty. In seventh grade, I was a shy twelve-year-old, living in the desert of southwestern Arizona. The school year had recently begun.

For the third time this week, we were playing dodgeball in the main gym. Our P.E. teacher, Mr. Lebowski, hadn't been here all week, so the girls' P.E. teacher told the boys to play dodgeball in the gym until it was time to leave. Meanwhile, she went with the girls to the basketball courts.

Everyone assumed she wouldn't be back, as she hadn't returned after making this same announcement the previous two days.

My classmates and I were all playing dodgeball shirtless, wearing our middle school standard-issue red shorts. We were barefoot; our shoes formed a line along the gym wall near the entrance. We had played two games, which my team had lost, and already, we were drenched in sweat. Two of my friends, Sean and Tony, were on my team.

That's when it happened:

Creeping up behind me like a cougar going in for the kill, Sean pulled my shorts and whitey-white underwear down to my ankles, and I tripped on them and fell. Then, Tony grabbed my shorts and underwear and sprinted away like an Olympic sprinter. He disappeared, as fast as a supersonic fighter jet, and hid them somewhere in the gym.

I continued to lie on the floor, wondering what had just happened. I knew I was naked, and the entire

class of boys could see me; I felt so embarrassed to be seen naked by the class. I couldn't believe this was happening to me!

Logically, I knew that the boys already knew what I looked like naked, because we showered after P.E.—and so what? Their bodies were just like mine. They weren't seeing anything they hadn't seen before; we were all basically the same.

But school had started recently, and I was still getting used to being seen naked by the boys in my class.

This wasn't about them—it was about me.

Sean finally came over and held out his hand to help me stand up. As I stood, I noticed the boys looking at me, and I felt my face turn red.

Then, I calmed down. So, I was naked—so, what? The class continued to play like nothing unusual was going on. I could tell by all the smiles and giggles that the other boys were having fun.

We kept on playing. The gym was full of sweaty, tweenaged, pubescent

boys, and one of them was completely naked: me.

In the first game after the pantsing, I was hit in the head right away and had to stand out. During the second game, I got five players out, but was then hit in the chest, and I was out. But in the third game, I won it for my team: I was the lone player, after striking the other team's lone player in the arm.

Our team won all three games. Then, class was over. Before I could say anything about my clothes to my

friends, Tony retrieved my shorts and underwear from behind a bleacher.

“Here you go,” he exclaimed, handing me my clothes. After I got dressed, we put on our sneakers and headed to the boys’ locker room with the other boys, where everyone stripped and showered. Sean and Tony showered next to me.

“That was so much fun,” I said, lathering my underarms, belly, and chest. I was having a lot of fun with my buddies in the shower.

Tony lathered and washed his smelly feet. Sean washed his oily face.

“You were so embarrassed at first when your clothes were stolen,” Tony said, poking my arm and making us laugh and laugh as we continued to wash up.

“You guys shouldn’t have done what you did, though, even though I ended up having a fun time; maybe I’d be too embarrassed and feel very upset or angry about it,” I said.

“I apologize,” each said.

“You’re right. It was very wrong to do. I’ll never do it again,” Tony exclaimed, and Sean agreed, I could tell by their faces.

“I’m really sorry,” Sean said.

“Okay. I forgive you guys, but be respectful of other people’s feelings,” I explained feeling empowered to teach them a lesson. They won’t forget today, I knew!

Then, we dried off and got dressed. P.E. was over. It was time for lunch.

I felt very excited and happy about today. What would tomorrow be like?

I knew I should have gotten my clothes back right away and put them on and not played naked. I could have gotten in trouble if I had been caught.

We had had enough fun for one day. From then on, I was more careful about my choices; I did not want to get in trouble at school. For the rest of junior high and high school, I did not get in trouble a single time, and I did not do anything that could get me in

trouble. In fact, I became a real goody-two-shoes.

When adults aren't around, sometimes kids do things they shouldn't. I was usually a good kid. Acting the way I did that day was unusual for me. The important thing was that I and my buddies learned an easy lesson.

A Girl Will Like Me

My name is Rich. I was a shy, sensitive, and imaginative thirteen-year-old and had just finished seventh grade at Cross Junior High School. It was early summer in the unbearably hot southwestern desert of Arizona, USA. I was at my friend Sean's house, with Sean, Susan, and Anthony. Sean was my age; Susan, his sister, was a year younger than us; and Anthony was Susan's classmate. We were all playing *Hungry-Hungry*

Hippos on the floor of Sean's bedroom. Madonna's hit song, *Like a Virgin*, was playing on Sean's new dual-tape and LP record player stereo system, which he'd bought with his paper route money. The four of us had just been swimming in the pool and were still in our swimsuits.

“Girls like guys with muscles, not someone with a scrawny body; not like this,” Anthony said, poking my arm, “and this,” poking my chest with his finger.

Sean just laughed; I could tell he wasn't laughing to insult me, though. Susan kept a straight face and didn't say anything.

I stared at my lap in disbelief. What a character. Insulting me in front of my friends. I was very surprised and angry, but kept my feelings to myself. I was too shy to defend myself, especially in front of a girl close to my own age. My stomach sank as quick as an elephant diving in quicksand.

I was miserable inside; I was hurt! But I didn't say anything back; we continued to play the game. I won two games, and Susan, one. I was a winner at the game, but not a winner in my mind. Anthony was right: I did have a scrawny, nonmuscular body. I wasn't as muscular as Anthony, and he was younger than me!

After we finished the game, I sadly rode my bicycle home. All I could think about was my scrawny arms, legs, and wimpy chest. I was not good-looking enough to find a

girlfriend, even though I was secretly hoping to have a girlfriend very soon. But no girl was going to like my body; Anthony had said so.

Shrugging, I walked into our house and trudged by Mom and Dad, who were talking about the new furniture they were planning to buy.

“What’s wrong?” Mom asked, interrupting Dad.

I shrugged. “Nothing,” I mumbled, dragged myself into my bedroom.

I lay on my bed, thinking about my body. Then, I got up to change into my clothes.

I took off my swimsuit and looked at my naked body in the mirror behind my bedroom door. I didn't like what I saw.

No girl will like me; no girl will want to marry me! I won't get married. I thought and thought and thought about my lonely, disappointing future.

Then, finally, I got dressed.

Someone knocked on my door; it was Mom. I invited her in.

“Is everything all right? It seems like there’s something wrong,” she asked, radiating concern.

“Oh, it’s nothing,” I replied. I was so glad to know that I could trust my mom, but even so, I wasn’t honest with her.

“Did someone say something to you?” Mom guessed correctly.

She was concerned about how I was doing. She was such a good and caring mom.

I plopped onto my bed. “I was told by a boy that I didn’t have good

arms or a good chest. They're scrawny," I said, staring at my lap. I was trying to hide the fact that I was upset about it, but I really needed someone to help me feel better about myself.

"What's wrong with your arms and chest?" Mom asked. Before I could reply, she answered her own question: "Nothing!"

I wasn't certain, though.

Looking back now, I can see how silly I had been. I hadn't listened to the person I could always trust.

Instead, I had believed a boy whose only goal was to be mean to me.

“Okay,” I replied, but I was still not satisfied.

After dinner, I tried to forget about what the boy had said. Then, Grandpa phoned. Mom talked to him for a while.

I overheard her tell Grandpa, “A boy told Richard that there was something wrong with his body--that he’s scrawny,” she explained. She listened to Grandpa’s reply and then handed me the phone.

“It’s Grandpa. He would like to talk to you,” Mom said.

“Hi, Grandpa,” I said into the phone.

“A boy told you there was something wrong with your body and that you were scrawny?” Grandpa asked with his Slavic accent.

“Yes,” I replied, hoping he’d convince me otherwise.

“Boys told me the same thing when I was thirteen or fourteen, just like you. I married your grandmother. Did you see how beautiful she was

when we got married?” Grandpa asked.

“I don’t remember exactly,” I answered, but then I remembered the picture of my grandparents on their wedding day on the wall.

“Hold on, Grandpa.” Still on the phone, I walked into the dining room, where the picture hung.

“Yes, I see. I’m looking at your wedding picture. She was beautiful and still is,” I exclaimed, very happy and relieved. Grandpa had married a very attractive girl.

“So true,” he said, and I giggled.

“Thank you very much, Grandpa! Now I feel a lot better,” I declared.

“Here’s Mom again,” I added, handing the phone to her.

I eventually figured out that I shouldn’t let someone else decide what I believe about myself. *No way!*

Anthony may have said it just to make himself feel better about himself. In fact, there might be something about himself he doesn’t like, I realized. In fact, I started to feel a little sorry for Anthony—it’s really

pathetic to feel so bad about yourself
that you have to insult other people
just to make yourself feel better.

A Genuine Gentleman: A Puberty Story Taking Place in Middle School

My name is Brett. When I was twelve and in seventh grade, I sat in the cafeteria one winter day, eating pepperoni pizza with my friend Jennifer. The Arizona desert got cold at this time of year, so I was wearing a thick blue wool sweater, and she was wearing an orange wool sweater. I wanted to date Jennifer, but was too shy to ask her out.

After we finished our lunch and were heading outside, we started talking about the movie or film that we were planning to make. My uncle had recently given me a professional and expensive video camera as a gift. I couldn't wait to use it.

I asked, "Do you have any more ideas for a movie? I'd like to start writing the script. Your last idea about a teenage girl who decides to run for president was really good."

"Oh, I don't have any other good ideas right now," she said.

I scratched my head. “We could work in Hollywood someday,” I suggested, hoping we would. I wanted to marry Jennifer; then, both of us could work in Hollywood, writing and making movies and TV shows.

That was when something happened. Jennifer had her first period: Her menstrual cycle had begun. Her light-colored blue jeans were stained red in between her legs where everyone could see. I pointed to in between her legs, and she looked surprised. I hesitated for just a

second, and then removed my sweater. I wore a blue shirt underneath.

“Tie this around your waist,” I said, coming to her rescue.

It was cold outside, and now I was freezing, but I didn’t care. Jennifer was more important.

She tied it around her waist, hiding the red spot. “Thank you,” she exclaimed with relief.

I was so glad she was my friend and that I had been able to help her.

“You’re welcome. You can bring it back tomorrow.” I tried to control my shivering.

We talked a little while longer, until the bell rang. We were hoping to come up with a great idea for our film soon. We went to our classes. I was chilly the entire day. I was so glad to get home and finally put on another sweater. As I did so, I smiled: I had done the right thing by coming to Jennifer’s rescue.

Just then, I had a great idea: I could turn what happened today into

a short film! I wrote the script right after finishing my homework.

Days later, over the weekend, Jennifer and I used my new video camera to create the short film about what had happened.

“This film has turned out great!” I said to her as we watched at my computer in my bedroom.

We posted the film online and got over two hundred fifty thousand views in one month!

Jennifer and I submitted our project to an online contest for teen

filmmakers, and we won first place.

We got a three-thousand-dollar prize, which we split and planned to use for college.

(And, by the way, I mustered the courage to ask Jennifer if she'd be my girlfriend: she said yes.)

A Sixth-Grade Boy's Crush on a Fourth-Grade Girl: A Tween Love Story

I was in sixth grade at Donaldson Elementary School, and today was the last day of school. For the past month, I had been sitting next to Sarah, a pretty fourth-grader, on the bus ride to school. Just about every day, I flirted with her by teasing José, a boy who always sat in the seat in front of us.

Today, I sat next to Sarah, right behind José, like usual.

“It’s something or someone we can’t explain. My sensors can’t determine what he is,” I said, touching José’s neck with two orange felt piping strips left over from art class; I was using them like an imaginary electronic sensor.

José turned and looked back at us, laughing.

Sarah giggled.

“You are a goof,” he said, smiling.

“He’s not something from our world. What planet is he from?” I asked Sarah, adjusting my imaginary sensor on José.

After I put my fake sensors away in my backpack, I had a surprise for Sarah and José: I pulled out two cherry lollipops and handed one to each of them.

“Thank you, Richard,” she said.
“You really care about me.”

I was so in love with her!

“Thanks,” José said. Then he asked, “Did you stick these in a used toilet?”

“No, but I peed all over them,” I said.

They grinned, knowing I was only joking.

“In that case, thank you,” he said, and Sarah giggled. They unwrapped and licked their lollipops.

“You’re welcome,” I replied.

“What’s your favorite color?” Sarah asked me.

“Umm. What is yours?”

“Bluish green, like your eyes. You have very handsome eyes,” she said, making my chest tingle with joy.

“Mine is green,” I said.

I smiled at her.

Her feet must be pretty, because she's so beautiful. I'd like to see them.

“Let me guess your middle name. What letter does it start with?” she asked.

“W,” I said.

“Waldo?” she asked.

“No.”

“William?”

“No.”

“Wilson?”

“No.”

“Winston?”

“No.”

“Watson?”

“No.”

She pressed her finger to her chin and looked up at the bus ceiling for a second or two. “Walter?” she said, and I grinned.

“Richard Walter Carlson,” she said, smiling at me.

I very much wanted to kiss her,
but how could I with all the kids and
the driver right there on the bus?
Besides, I was too shy.

I tried to think of something to
say or ask.

“Do you like hamburgers or pizza
better?” I asked. “I like pizza.”

“Me, too,” she said.

Think fast, Rich! I had to say
something so I could see her over the
summer.

I'd love to play footsies with her,
both of us barefoot. I'd really like that.

She's petite and dainty. I bet her feet were smaller than mine.

“It's going to be a real scorching summer. Does your house have a pool?” I asked. “Ours doesn't. We have nowhere to swim and keep cool.” I was hoping she'd invite me over during the summer to swim at her house.

“No,” she said, dashing my hopes just as the school bus arrived at school. I couldn't think of anything else to do or say.

The bus stopped, and the driver opened the door. Then, Sarah stood in the aisle, with me right behind her. Everyone got off the bus. Her sneakers were smaller than mine, I noticed, which made me smile. My heart was fluttering, but I was worried because this was the last bus ride to school for the school year. Next year, I'd ride the bus to Cross Junior High, and she'd still be in elementary school.

As we separated on the walk to our classrooms, I already wanted so

badly to see her again. But in truth, I felt so shy.

Shucks! I folded my arms over my chest and wished I had the courage to ask her if she'd like to come to my house over the summer.

Shucks! It would be fun to date her and walk around holding hands with her. How romantic that would be!

Shucks! Maybe next time...

Seventh Grade: Dodgeball

About the story: It was the fall of 1983, in the southwestern desert of Arizona, USA. Marty, a twelve-year-old seventh-grade student in junior high school is pantsed in dodgeball during P.E. by a close friend. What did Marty do? What did Marty's classmates do?

A Girl Will Like Me

About the story: Thirteen-year-old, shy, sensitive, and imaginative Rich has a problem: A younger boy insulted him, causing him to doubt himself. The story is similar to a true story that took place in Tucson, Arizona, in the southwestern desert of the USA, circa 1984.

A Genuine Gentleman: A Puberty Story Taking Place in Middle School

About the story: Brett, a twelve-year-old middle school student is a

gentleman when he helps the girl he loves through her predicament.

A Sixth-Grade Boy's Crush on a Fourth-Grade Girl: A Tween Love Story

About the story: Richard, a shy, sensitive, and imaginative twelve-year-old sixth-grader who was in elementary school had a crush on a fourth-grade girl, Sarah, whom he usually sat next to on the bus ride to school. Based on a true story that

took place at Donaldson Elementary
School in Tucson, Arizona, USA, circa
May 1983.