

## **RANDOM REFLECTIONS: Comfortably Numb ...?**

**By Kathryn Wishlow**

About this time last year, I felt the need to express my concerns regarding the ongoing war in Ukraine. One year later, not only has it continued but it has escalated. Likely this now takes a back seat, and is being ignored by the newer issue of the conflict between Israel and the Hamas. Over 20,000 casualties in a just a few months now eclipses the daily death toll in Ukraine.

I must admit, during the busy time in December, I did not have a chance to watch much news.

Frankly, I was paying more attention to weather reports of freezing rain and fog, since I had a fair amount of travelling to do. Now that holiday life has finally settled down, I have had the chance to watch the news again. Sadly, there was no good news internationally.

However, an incident from my childhood did come to mind. I remember in about grade four, playing at recess with a few girl friends. Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed a larger boy from my class chasing a smaller boy from a lower grade. Thinking they were playing tag, I ran towards them, wanting to play too.

The older one caught up to the younger one, knocked him down and started punching him. The boy on the bottom was crying and pleading for him to stop. I reached the two of them, grabbed the larger boy's scarf, and yanked him off of the smaller one. It turned out that this was a common ritual on the days when the young one's mother sent cookies with him for snacks at recess. When he was spotted eating one, the chase by the older boy was on.

I was very tall for my age, and much taller than the both of them. But a teacher on yard duty had turned around just in time to see me yank my classmate by his scarf. She came running over to handle the situation. Without seeing the whole incident, and much to the delight of the boy in my class, she asked the two boys if they were okay, and admonished me for picking on children smaller than myself. I was speechless! She assumed I was the problem. I was sent to the principal's office.

In those days, you sat in shame on the bench outside his door. Recess ended, the children filed past me on their way back to class, staring and wondering what I had done, and if I would get the strap. I was called into his office. I was lectured on my unladylike, violent behaviour. Bullies who picked on children smaller than themselves would not be tolerated. I was told I should be ashamed of myself, and my parents would have to be called. Back to the bench I was sent to think about what I had done. I was confused.

When my mother arrived, she frowned at me as she walked into the principal's office. I heard him telling her that although he disliked giving the strap, (especially to a good student who had not been in trouble before) it was necessary to set an example. I was horrified! My mother came out to escort me into the office, and I was sobbing uncontrollably. Nobody had even asked me my side of the story.

In front of the principal, she asked me to describe exactly what had happened. I told my version. I poured out that I had been trying to stop an incident, not cause one.

My classmate was sent for, and in front of the adults, admitted the truth. To this day, I always try to get as many perspectives as I can regarding a situation, without judging. I remember vividly how it felt to be falsely accused. I saw how easy it was for people with only part of the story, to jump to the wrong conclusion.

I do not know the whole story in the middle east well enough to judge anyone. I know there MUST be many perspectives. I expect there must be people who only see things based on their personal experiences. I also know there is a history. I have seen that anger and injustice can facilitate retaliation. Whether justified or not, surely we can find more reasonable ways to punish the perpetrators, without so many innocent victims, or "collateral damage"?

I know the news is reported from the personal viewpoint of a reporter trying to relate the facts as they see it. But like the teacher on yard duty, they cannot be everywhere at once, or possibly know the whole story. With so much happening so quickly, it must be difficult to gather information from many sides effectively. And I wonder, how many of us do not want to know about, or see any more atrocities? With so much violence everywhere, how many of us are now becoming somewhat numb?

*(Kathryn Wishlow belongs to White Pine Writers Inc., a local group of like-minded authors who encourage and support all facets of writing and publishing literary efforts. Follow them on FaceBook or [www.whitepinewriters.ca](http://www.whitepinewriters.ca)*