

TO THIS DAY

FOR THE BULLIED
AND BEAUTIFUL

SHANE KOYCZAN



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An illustration at the top of the page shows several hands of different skin tones pointing towards the center. The background is a light blue with a fine, repeating pattern of the word 'GREETINGS'.

GREETINGS

My name is Shane Koyczan. I'm a spoken word poet, which means I write poems and perform them on stage for audiences all over the world. The poem in this book, "To This Day," is about my experience of being bullied as a kid.

I can't remember how old I was when I started writing. I know that I was very young. My grandparents raised me and writing became something that my grandmother always encouraged. Writing was a way to escape my real life, a way to cope with cruelty and indifference. Sometimes even worse than the people who hurt you are the people who don't care that you're being hurt—the ones who *could* do something but choose not to. I understand it; sometimes you don't want to get involved and risk having bullies shift their attention to you. That's normal . . . that's fear. I was afraid a lot when I was growing up.



OVER HALF OF STUDENTS HAVE WITNESSED BULLYING AT SCHOOL

I didn't have many friends when I was in school, and I was often picked on and made fun of. I had to learn how to be my own friend. The way I did that was through writing. I could create my own world, and make myself the hero of the story. What I wrote as a kid was mostly just fragments—short sentences about the way I felt. As I got older I started to put those thoughts and ideas into poems. Today I am amazed to see how many people in the world feel the same way I do. I'm astonished by how connected we are through the things we've endured.

I wrote "To This Day" to show people the kind of connection I'd experienced throughout my travels as a poet and performer. At every performance I was met by others who wanted to share their stories about what they'd been through. And while our experiences may not have been identical, I came to realize that they were a way to help us understand one another.

Eventually I brought the poem to my band (Shane Koyczan and The Short Story Long) and they built music around it.

The resulting piece was released on the album *Remembrance Year*. Soon after I started to receive mail about it. The response from strangers was beautiful and made me want to share the poem on a broader scale. So the idea came to crowdsource short animations that could be woven together to create one fluid video. Eighty-six animators and motion artists from around the world donated their time and considerable talent to create something that would speak to those who felt they were alone. Almost 12 million hits later it's



85 PERCENT OF BULLYING HAPPENS WHILE OTHER KIDS ARE WATCHING

continuing to speak. My gratitude to all the artists involved is endless. Thank you for creating something that has helped so many. This work will stand as a testament of what a community of caring people can achieve.

This book is a continuation of that collaborative project. The thirty artists whose work appears here come from all over the world. Each was assigned a section of the poem to illustrate in his or her own style. All of them brought a wonderfully unique and heartfelt interpretation to my words. Several artists also contributed anecdotes about their own experiences with bullying. You'll find their quotes at the end of the book.

I didn't realize it at the time, but writing became the way I could stand up for myself. Self-expression showed me a world that values what I think, and feels what I feel—it makes the world my friend. I realize that you might not be a writer, but in some way you are an artist. The trick is to find your medium, to figure out what helps you express yourself, whether it's art, music, dance, photography, or some other creative form. In order to find your voice you first have to explore. Look everywhere. Realize that not all languages contain words, and that other people may have trouble translating what you've said. Be patient. Fear will tempt you into silence.

**BULLYING WILL USUALLY STOP
WITHIN 10 SECONDS IF SOMEONE
STEPS IN TO HELP THE VICTIM**

**1 IN 7 KIDS HAS EITHER
BEEN A VICTIM OF
BULLYING OR A BULLY**

Remember that the world will never hear you if you choose to say nothing.



WHEN I WAS A KID
I USED TO THINK THAT PORK CHOPS AND KARATE CHOPS
WERE THE SAME THING
I THOUGHT THEY WERE BOTH PORK CHOPS
AND BECAUSE MY GRANDMOTHER THOUGHT IT WAS CUTE
AND BECAUSE THEY WERE MY FAVORITE
SHE LET ME KEEP DOING IT
NOT REALLY A **BIG DEAL**



One day

before I realized fat kids are not
designed to climb trees

I fell out of a tree



An illustration of a forest scene. In the foreground, a large, gnarled tree trunk curves across the frame. Several yellow leaves are scattered around it. In the background, a stream flows through the forest, with more trees and foliage visible. The overall style is simple and illustrative, with a dark background for the trees and a lighter background for the stream and sky.

and bruised the right side of my body
I didn't want to tell my grandmother about it
because I was afraid I'd get in trouble
for playing somewhere that I shouldn't have been

a few days later
the gym teacher
noticed the bruise
and I got sent to
the principal's office



FROM THERE I WAS SENT TO ANOTHER SMALL ROOM
WITH A REALLY NICE LADY
WHO ASKED ME ALL KINDS OF QUESTIONS
ABOUT MY LIFE AT HOME



I SAW NO
REASON
TO LIE

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