

The Spacesuit

Have you been hurt by people or events in your life? How do you respond to them? Do you build walls for protection? Walls keep out the bad, but also the good.

Once upon a time there was a boy named Joey who lived with his mom. A long time ago there was a dad, but all Joey could remember of him was a man that yelled at and hit his mom. Then one day the man left and the yelling stopped. Joey and his mom were alone. Joey thought that now he could be happy, but his mom started drinking and when she had had too much to drink, she would yell at and hit him.

Joey was very confused by his mom's behavior. Some days he would leave his toys all over the living room floor and his mom wouldn't say a word. Other times he would forget to hang up his jacket and his mom would yell at him, "You lousy, no good kid! You're always leaving your stuff all over the house!" If she was close enough, she'd hit him, and if there was something in her hand or close by, she'd hit him with that. Some nights he could sit up all night watching TV and other nights he had no sooner turned the TV on and she was at him, "All you ever do is watch TV. You're so lazy." Then she'd start cussing at him and hit him again.

He was afraid to have any of his friends from school over because he never knew what to expect. Some days she would greet him with a hug and a kiss after school. Once he remembered she had baked cookies just for him. But usually she either wasn't there or would yell at him. Then Joey would go to his room and cry, wondering if his mom really cared about him at all or just loved her alcohol.

One night Joey was sitting on his bed looking out of the window just as the stars were coming out. He had heard that if you wish on the first star you see, you'd get your wish. His mom had just yelled at him and hit him again. He didn't know why and he had been crying. He was so tired of being hurt so he looked at the star and made his wish.

"I wish for a spacesuit that would protect me, so that I wouldn't hear my mom yelling and cussing at me and I wouldn't feel it when she hit me."

All of a sudden there was a flash of bright light in the corner of the room and then it was gone. But in its place was a shiny, silver, spacesuit. He went over to it and picked it up—just his size. He couldn't wait to put it on. It had a separate helmet that fastened on securely. He'd be protected in this, and he'd never take it off.

"I'm not going to be hurt again, ever, by anyone," he said to himself as he got into bed wearing his new suit.

The next morning he got up still wearing his spacesuit. His mom was up and said something to him, but he couldn't hear it very well and he didn't care. It was real easy to ignore her.

On the way to school he usually met a crowd of bullies that liked to pick on him. They called him names because he didn't have nice clothes or a father. Some days they even threw sticks or stones at him. But today he was protected and didn't care. He didn't hear their insults and never felt the sticks. "This spacesuit works fine", he thought.

But what Joey didn't know about the spacesuit was that it not only kept out the bad stuff, it also kept out all the good stuff. When Joey looked out of the helmet, he didn't see things as they really were. Everything was changed just a little. When he heard people say things, he didn't hear what they really said. The words were also changed.

So Joey continued on to school and there he started to have problems. His teacher asked him a question and instead of hearing his teacher, he heard his mom yelling at him. Joey felt secure in his space suit so he yelled back and called her all the names that his mom had called him. Soon he was in the principal's office. The principal was a nice man who took a special interest in Joey because he

hadn't had a dad either and remembered what it was like to grow up without one. But when the principal put his hand on Joey's shoulder to show concern and smiled kindly at him, Joey saw the smile as laughing at him and the outstretched arm ready to hit him. Joey tried to kick the principal and swore at him too. So he was left alone - to sit and think.

Finally it was lunch time and he went out to play with his friends after lunch. But his friends had changed. He heard them talking and knew they were talking about him. He knew they didn't like him anymore. They were really afraid of Joey and didn't trust him since his outburst and didn't know what to do to help him. But he read the concern on their faces as rejection. "Fine. I don't need them anyway," he said to himself. Then he stalked off to play by himself, kicking a can as he went pouting.

The afternoon was only slightly better. By ignoring everyone, he managed to get through. He ignored the bullies on the way home and walked into the house. No one was home. "Oh well," he said to himself, "at least no one is home to bug me." He had a twinge of loneliness, but it passed. He turned on the T.V.

After a little while, he heard a knock at the door. It was his aunt and his cousins. His aunt really loved him and was sorry that her sister wasn't a very good mom to Joey, so she tried to be extra nice to Joey whenever she could. His cousins liked him and liked to come and play with him.

But today with his spacesuit on, his aunt's smile was seen as a smirk. She brought him a toy (a new truck) but he wasn't grateful. "She's just doing that to make up for my mom. She owes me that toy and a lot more too," he thought. So Joey didn't even say thank you.

His cousins wanted him to play, but he said, "You just want attention. Go away. You're bugging me. Can't you see I'm busy?"

His aunt tried to hug him, but he could not feel her love and concern through the spacesuit. All he could feel was a squeeze and pinch. It felt uncomfortable and he felt trapped. He wiggled out of the hug as quickly as he could and wouldn't let her kiss him. "She's a phoney and I can't trust her," he thought. "She's just like my mom - kiss me today and beat me up tomorrow."

So Joey's days continued with his spacesuit. He wasn't bothered by his mom anymore. In fact, he almost forgot about her. He just lived his own life - went to school and watched T.V. He didn't really have any friends at school anymore. He met a couple of other kids who also had spacesuits and at first he thought they could be friends, but all they ever talked about was how mean adults were and how you couldn't trust them. Joey wanted to play, but they weren't interested in "kid stuff". He was frequently sent to the principal's office and both his teacher and principal were frustrated trying to help him. But Joey couldn't hear their words and he misinterpreted everything they said. After awhile they gave up. He spent a lot of time alone sitting in the principal's office.

One evening a few months later Joey was again sitting on his bed in his room. He was thinking about himself, his life, and how things had changed since he had gotten his spacesuit: how he missed his mom's hugs on the rare times she was sober, how he missed playing with his cousins, how he wished he could be part of the gang at school and playing with the other kids, how he wished his teacher would like him and not pick on him all of the time. He even wished he could have the principal notice him sometime when he wasn't in trouble. The more he thought the worse he felt. He felt lonely, rejected, and unloved. He wanted so badly for someone to really care and love him. He started to cry. He cried and cried and cried so hard he was getting the inside of his spacesuit wet. He had to take the helmet off. And just when he did, the doorbell rang. His aunt opened the door and called upstairs "Joey, are you home? We came to see you. I brought you some of your favorite chocolate chip cookies."

"Joey!" his cousins yelled up at him, "We came to play with you. We got a new game. Come and see it!" Joey quickly slipped off the rest of his space suit as it was also pretty soggy inside from all the tears. "I can put it on later," he thought.

He ran downstairs and was amazed to see how his aunt had changed. Joey's aunt was smiling at him with a genuine smile and she gave him such hug. It felt warm and secure, not threatening. The

cookies were just for him. She cared enough about him to make something just for him. She thought he was special! His cousins wanted to play with him because they liked to be around him. They really liked him. He sat down with them and shared his cookies. They played and laughed.

Joey had such a good time he forgot to put his spacesuit on and went to school the next day without it. He was amazed at what his teacher was saying. She was concerned about his homework because she wanted him to do well so he could go to college someday. She wasn't just picking on him. The principal stopped him in the hall and asked him, "How's it going? If you've got some time, I've got some things I would like some help with in the office. Could you come down during your free period?" Joey was going to the principal's office not because he was in trouble, but to help. They wanted him. He was important. His old friends wanted to play with him at recess. So he did and had a great time. He noticed the kids off in the corner still wearing their spacesuits with an unhappy look on their faces, but he ignored them and went back to his play.

Joey barely noticed the bullies' yells and insults at him as he walked home. When they taunted him about not having a father, he remembered the principal smiling at him and thanking him so much for his help. They threw a stick. Joey ducked easily and kept on going.

His mom was there when he got home and she was in one of her good moods. She hugged him and even made supper for him. He thought things are going to be okay from now on.

But later she started drinking and by bed time she was yelling and screaming at Joey again. Joey remembered his spacesuit and was about to put it on when he stopped to really listen to his mom. What he heard amazed him. She didn't hate him. She was mad at herself and was hurting, so she was taking it out on him. It still hurt, but not quite as much. Maybe his mom wasn't the kind of mom he would have liked to have had, but she did love him in her own way. Besides he had his aunt, his cousins, his teacher, his friends, and a new friend, the school principal. He would be okay and would just leave his spacesuit in the closet he was better off without it.