Vicious: True Stories by Teens About Bullying
By Hope Vanderberg, Editor

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Vicious: True Stories by Teens About Bullying records 20 different accounts of adolescent teens who have experienced forms of verbal and physical bullying firsthand. Each victim recollects their memories of names, physical assaults, and emotional traumas which they encountered on a continual basis. The victims’ stories range from elementary school to high school incidents. The accounts even portray instances of cyber-bullying. However, the adolescent victims are not without hope. Each victim describes steps that he or she took to not only cope but also learn from their personal clashes with school bullies. These experiences, in essence, often proved beneficial as the victims began to learn tactics of self-defense and even empathy over time. Such coping mechanisms include learning to self-defend with appropriate verbal feedback as well as learning to approach other students as a means to establish friendships among similar victims as well as other students who were potential targets for harassment. As mentioned, the victims
reconstructed their memories of being bullied, and many victims commented on their compulsions to bully other students, likewise. As a result, after being the culprit as well as the perpetrator of verbal and physical assault, these victims learned the importance of defending oneself appropriately in addition to feeling the pain of being both bullied and bullying or harming another pupil.

The strength of this collection is the firsthand experiences described by various boys and girls from elementary to high school; vivid details of one-on-one and group encounters of verbal as well as physical abuse are described. In addition, victims portray their feelings openly as many of them also convey a sense of maturity from their harsh experiences. Such maturity is gained from empathizing with other victims. In the end, many of the victims attempt to avoid any possible encounters with other bullies, especially if the victims actually were perpetrators themselves. The final chapter concludes with a few personal steps from a therapist in New York City. He lists and describes three useful steps that a victim, a perpetrator, and even school administrators can use in order to curtail the “vicious” acts among teens.

Regarding limitations, these personal stories do not elaborate on domestic and/or family problems which can contribute to bullying behaviors. In addition, these stories rarely mention attention seeking behaviors that bullies portray, for the stories focus on power and dominance among bullies. Finally, parental opinions of perpetrators and victims are not discussed, and school administrators’ opinions are not mentioned either.