



Portrait of an Adoption

- About Carrie
- Carrie's Website
- My Books
- 30 Adoption Portraits – 2015
- 30 Adoption Portraits – 2014
- Top Adoption Books List
- Archive

The Dabometer: A Barometer for Bullying

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By **Carrie Goldman**, Tuesday at 12:13 pm

October is National Bullying Prevention Month. To honor all those who deal with bullying, I will be sharing posts that shed light on this struggle. Today's piece is a guest post by the mother of two girls.

By **Debi Lewis**

For much of fifth grade, my daughter vehemently refused to dab outside our house.

For the uninitiated, this might sound like she chose to wipe her face with a crumpled napkin rather than daintily pat at the corners of her lips with the napkin folded just-so. That is *not* the dab we are looking for.

The dab I'm describing is the dance move marked by one arm bent at the elbow, chicken-dance style, and raised to shoulder level, while the other arm extends straight out and away from the body. The dabber then drops his or her face into the crook of the bent elbow and, *voila!* The Dab.

The dab craze stormed our school district last year. Kids dabbed for emphasis, punctuating prowess in athletics or school or a concert performance. They dabbed in protest, planning mass-dabs to impress a new substitute teacher or as an alternative to applause at a school assembly. They added the dab to the end of unrelated dances in the Dia de Los Muertos celebration in their Spanish classes.

At one point, I was in an empty school hallway and saw a little boy walk out of the bathroom, jump up, and dab in mid-air, just for the fun of it.

Still, my daughter would not dab at school. At home, she ably showed me how to do it, including the variations she'd seen on the playground. She could dab, hit the quan, hit the folks, whip and nae-nae. She knew *all* the dances her classmates were doing, but she would not do these dances at school.

Her best friend asked about it with me one day: "Why won't she dab at school? EVERYBODY dabs."

I asked my daughter, and for months got nothing more than a shrug and a "Don't want to." It didn't seem like a big deal to me, and certainly she didn't *have* to join in these dances at school. There were bigger battles to fight, including our regular struggle, almost daily, with one child in her class who criticized and hassled her relentlessly. From small jabs about her clothes and her unusual name to more frustrating offenses like kicking her backpack across the room and throwing her snacks out when she wasn't looking, the intense barrage of negativity was eating away at my daughter, day by day.

The school followed through on very few of the promises they made whenever we asked for help. Our daughter did not want to change schools or classes, and so we spent hours coaching her through ways to respond. She tried ignoring this student and talking to the teacher and principal. She tried fighting back, but it wasn't in her nature to be aggressive. Instead, she became more anxious, more sensitive, and more reactive to everything around her.

We knew that middle school would bring with it many more children and a new mix of them in each class throughout the day, diluting the negativity even if it lingered at the edges, as well as an administration notorious for their intolerance of bullying. So, we waited it out. The summer came, and she left the stress of school behind her completely. Between the added freedom of a new bike, a cellphone, and a new group of friends at camp, she relaxed. We talked very little about the months of bullying drama, secure in the positive reputation of the middle school for handling such things.

Still, I was not prepared for the 180 change in my daughter's personality this year after only two weeks. Gone are the evenings of tearful bedtimes, wondering what torture the next day might bring. Gone are the sad stories of walking alone on the playground at recess, unwilling to come between friends she shared with the classmate who picked on her. Most importantly, though, it seems that what is also gone is her reluctance to join in the fun of being eleven.

"Mom, I dabbled at school today," she told me a few days ago from the back seat of the car. By then, I had not thought for months about her refusal to dab around her friends. I paused, digesting this news.

"Did you hear me?," she said. "I *dabbled at school*."

"What changed for you?," I asked. "How did you decide it was ok?"

"I don't know," she said. "Last year, I was always scared someone would tell me I was doing it wrong. Now, I know I'm doing it right."

I never thought I'd judge my daughter's self-confidence and feelings of emotional safety by her willingness to stick her face in the crook of her elbow. In the end, though, these little things are really only little to adults.

"I'm proud of you," I finally said. "Hit the dab, kiddo. Hit it."



Debi Lewis is the mother of two daughters and blogs regularly at <http://www.swallowmysunshine.com>. You can find her essays at Kvellier; Brain, Child Magazine; RoleReboot; Mamelode; Coffee + Crumbs; The Mighty; and on ChicagoNow, and you can follow her on Twitter at @growthesunshine. She is currently at work on a memoir about her younger daughter's journey through medical mystery.

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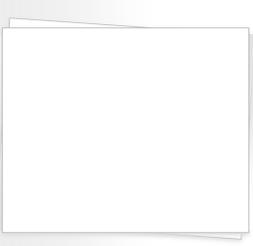


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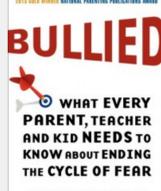
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* 30 ADOPTION PORTRAITS IN 30 DAYS – 2015

For the fifth straight year, in honor of November being National Adoption Awareness Month, *Portrait of an Adoption* is running a special series called *30 Adoption Portraits in 30 Days*. Designed to give a voice to the many different perspectives of adoption, this series will feature guest posts by adoptees, birth parents, adoptive parents, waiting adoptive parents, and foster parents-turned-adoptive parents. Painful and beautiful, these stories will bring you a deeper understanding of what adoption looks like, allowing you to appreciate the many brushstrokes that comprise a family portrait.

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- Nov. 6: [I'm an Adoptee. And I'm Complete.](#)
- Nov. 7: [You'd Fit In Well](#)
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- Nov. 9: [My Love Story: A Road Through Adoption](#)
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- Nov. 11: [Standing at the Podium](#)
- Nov. 12: [More Family, More Alone](#)
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- Nov. 14: [What Adoption Means To Me](#)
- Nov. 15: [Are You Starting To Feel Like Their Real Mom Yet?](#)
- Nov. 16: [Heartlines: How a Jewish Girl Adopted in Japan](#)
- Nov. 17: [Who Am I?](#)
- Nov. 18: [The Adoption Story Nobody Talks About](#)
- Nov. 19: [I Was Left: I Was Loved – An Adoptee Story](#)
- Nov. 20: [The Foundation of a Promise](#)
- Nov. 21: [I Know That I Was Put On This Earth To Become a Mom](#)
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- Nov. 29: [Adopted Child, Adoptive Parent](#)
- Nov. 30: [My Story Is Not Yet Finished: Adoption Is Just One Part Of It](#)

Tweets by @CarrieMGoldman

* MEET THE BLOGGER *



Carrie Goldman

I am a writer, artist, wife and mother of three fantastic girls! My new children's adoption book is *Jazzy's Quest: Adopted and Amazing*, and my adult nonfiction book is *Bullied: What Every Parent, Teacher, and Kid Needs To Know About Ending the Cycle of Fear*. And I LOVE chocolate!

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