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IN SUPPORT OF HARTER'S LAW

My first memories of when the Harter/Ferguson family moved to West Greenwich and started in the Exeter-West Greenwich school system was when I was in seventh grade – I was roughly 12 years old. We all rode the same bus from Weaver Hill Road to our respective elementary schools. Lisa Harter was my brother's age (fourth grade-about 9 years old.)

David Harter, Michael & Monique Ferguson were in second grade, same as my sister (around age 7.)

I am including not only my own observations, but also some of the comments that I heard from my younger brother and sister who had much more daily contact with Lisa and David.

Firstly- my own observations– I will say that in hindsight, the disparity I saw between how those children were treated was heartbreaking. I can't even honestly say that it was hindsight...

however, as a preteen/teenager, from a family who had no prejudices, I didn't know how to speak up effectively enough to make an impact.

Back in the 70s, when this was happening, bullying wasn't recognized like it is now. I don't think I ever outright bullied Lisa or David, but admittedly, I didn't do anything to help them – and for that I am truly ashamed.

Our bus stop was before theirs. I think that theirs was almost the last stop before arriving at school. I can remember the four of them boarding the bus – Michael and Monique bathed properly, in clean fashionable clothes, with stylish haircuts, all prim and proper. David and Lisa, both with bowl haircuts, smelly because they hadn't had a bath, and in dirty, hand-me-down, out of style clothing. Everyone on the bus (shamefully, myself included) scooted over to the outer edge of our seats so that they couldn't sit with us. Looking back, it was sad, and we should have known better – done better.

I moved on to high school, but my brother and sister remained in the same grade/age group with those kids.

I will never forget the day that my sister came home from a birthday party for Michael and Monique. However, all could talk about was her disgust for the fact that David and Lisa were - in her words: "treated like slaves", had to do all the serving and clean-up for the party, and were not allowed to participate at all. The fact that she recognized this when she was only 11–12 years old made an impact on me that I've never forgotten.

And my brother (whom I always considered a typical boy) talked to me about the compassion/empathy that he had for Lisa in high school - She had fallen asleep in class, and was shamed for it. He made the effort to ask her what was wrong – her answer was that she was forced to do chores in the household, and wasn't allowed finish her homework or go to bed until she was done.

After having read David's memoir, I have no doubt that every word of it was the truth. And again, I am ashamed, not only for myself (whom I might be able to give some grace, because I was too young to be effective) but for all the adults in our town, who were aware of the situation – yet chose not to do anything to help...

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