

Life Lessons from Darryl

My first day of kindergarten at St. Lawrence School was so fun. It is one of my earliest memories. At dismissal, Darryl Tsatsos walked into my classroom and announced that he would be helping my teacher for the entire year. He made sure that we were safely paired up with our parents outside in the parking lot. He took the time to ask me what my name was and he gave me his infamous high-five greeting. We were instant friends. In fact, at Mass on Sunday, Darryl would walk all of the way around the church after Communion just to give me a high-five. Darryl had an effortless way of making me feel so special.

One day, a classmate hid behind a corner and tripped me. Darryl immediately addressed the kid. He squatted down and said, "We are all brothers in Christ. We look out for each other! Don't ever do that again!" Darryl then came over to me and got on his knees. He told me that one day I would have to do the same for someone else. He told me that I needed to be brave. He said that was always the right thing to do. After that, he asked me what kind of music I liked to listen to and things went back to normal.

Darryl's words had bounced around inside my head for many years. One day as a high school student, I put his words into action. At a football game, I heard my friend yelling behind me in the football stands. Two senior high school students were holding my friend by his underwear. He was being humiliated and bullied. I heard Darryl inside my head. "Be brave." I immediately faced the bullies. I was outnumbered but I told the boys to leave my friend alone. I was quite surprised that they did what I told them to do. Darryl had taken the time to show me how to be an everyday hero and his example made a difference in my friend's life.

A year later, life lessons that I learned from Darryl once again made a difference in another person's life. I was volunteering at the Special Olympics and one of the athletes refused to participate in a race because he said he always lost. So, we did the race together. It was a tough event and he won. He actually did a victory lap and the crowd went wild. This young man was so happy and his parents hugged me. Darryl had gone out of his way for me every Sunday and now I had made a difference in this athlete's life. Darryl's small gestures of love changed my life. Now I lead by example and demonstrate to others that we should never underestimate the power of our actions. After Communion in church, I still think about Darryl and I quietly thank him for how he has profoundly impacted my life with his two powerful words: Be brave.