



Jamie Nabozny speaks out about bullying to students at Wallenberg High School in San Francisco.

# Healing Time

Unspeakable abuse at his high school prompted Jamie Nabozny to attempt suicide several times and drop out. In a historic suit won by Lambda Legal, he was awarded close to \$1 million. Fourteen years later, a documentary about him, *Bullied*, is just out. Nabozny spoke to *Impact* about survival, inspiring others and forgiving his abusers.



Nabozny during his historic lawsuit, winter 1995.

I've spent most of my adult life in therapy, dealing with the aftermath of what happened in school, and the post-traumatic stress disorder. Being able to stand up and say it was wrong, and to win in a court of law, was very healing. In the end, in spite of everything, I was able to overcome it.

My proudest moment came after I got a call from the woman who was putting together my 10-year high school class reunion. She said it would be healing for everybody if I came. I thought a lot about it.

**I DON'T KNOW WHY**, but I was expecting everybody there to be the same, even though I'm very different from who I was in high school. They were not the same. They had families and careers and they were grown up. Knowing that helped me stop demonizing them, in a way. A lot of

people came up to me to ask questions about what had happened and to apologize. One of the kids who harassed me was one of the first to come up. I think his words were, "I apologize for being a douche bag back in school." I accepted his apology and his offer of a drink. As it turned out, we ended up working together in the same company.

I got a call last fall from a producer saying the Southern Poverty Law Center wanted to do a documentary about bullying in schools, specifically against LGBT students, and asking if I would be interested in being a part of it. They ended up focusing on my story, I think because mine was the first case of its kind. I'm hoping to go back to school and get a graduate degree in educational psychology. I also want to continue to do public speaking. I think the documentary's going to open a lot of doors for that.

**ONE OF MY MOST MEMORABLE SPEAKING EVENTS** was at a school in Minneapolis. During the Q&A, a student came up to the microphone and asked if he could give me a hug. He was very jock-like. I thought, Is this some kind of joke? He was very emotional. Two weeks later I got a call from his mom. She said, "I want to thank you for giving me my son back." She said he was a good student and a sweet kid, but when he entered junior high school, he started acting out and bullying other kids. "After you spoke, he came home. For the first time since he was 10, he wanted to talk about what happened at school. He told me about your presentation and what you went through—and he came out to me." Now he wants to start an anti-bullying club to make sure that nobody else gets hurt. The fact that that kind of change can happen in one person—that's what makes it worthwhile. It makes me want to keep doing what I do. **L**



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