Bully:
In the 1500s, *bully* meant 'sweetheart, darling'; a term of endearment. The meaning went downhill thereafter to 'friend, mate (male), good fellow' and later to 'blusterer, over bearing person' and finally to the present day 'intimidator of the weak'. (It has no relation to *bully beef*.)
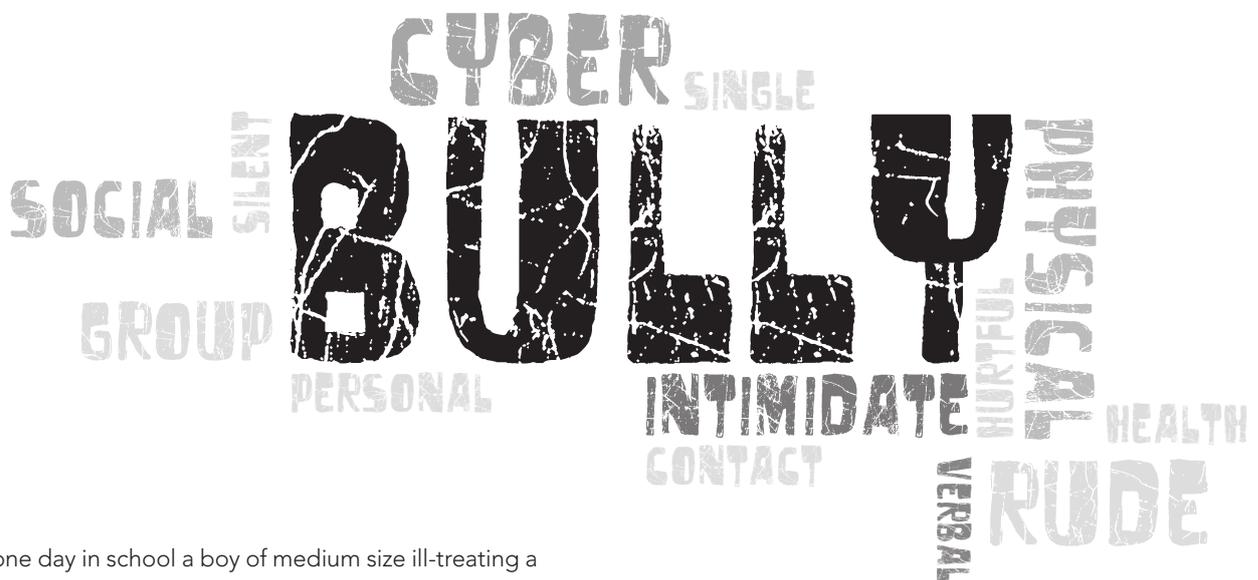
MY WORD
WITH RODNEY MARTIN

"I found one day in school a boy of medium size ill-treating a smaller boy. I expostulated, but he replied: 'The bigs hit me, so I hit the babies; that's fair.' In these words he epitomised the history of the human race." – *Bertrand Russell, philosopher*

Bullying, historically, has been a part of the human condition. It has been recorded in literature over the ages, for example, *Tom Brown's School Days* (Thomas Hughes) and *Lord of the Flies* (William Golding). In fiction, the bully invariably is overcome somehow and the meek survive.

Unfortunately, fiction is not always the reality. Bullying usually results in long-term harm to both the bully and the bullied.

Modern school systems are sharply aware of the effects of bullying and have policies for resolving it. But bullying can be very subtle and difficult to uncover. Victims are often too afraid to speak up.

Modern technology has given bullies new weapons for their trade in the form of email and text messaging. However, this leaves a trail of evidence that can be their undoing.

Children's literature and movies are often a useful way of opening discussion on the topic and getting children to express their thoughts because fictional characters are one step removed. What a child expresses can sometimes reveal what might be happening in the background.

Today's schools have strategies for dealing with bullying, but often teachers need insight from parents. This is an important area for communication, even if there is only a suspicion that needs to be investigated.

Most of all, victims need to know that they can rely on family and school for support; young bullies need to be converted into little sweethearts and darlings.

*Rodney Martin is a children's author and educator. His SA family business, Era Publications, creates interactive online children's books for homes, schools and public libraries around the world. (See free samples at **www.erapublications.com/south-kids**.)*

southKids