

Alana's Advice...



**When There's a Clique,
You've Got to Think Quick**

By Alexandra Sabina Bender

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Introduction

I wrote this because I wanted everyone to get the message that it is okay to be different and unique. Unfortunately in middle and high school, kids often divide themselves up into various cliques that are based on a similar (if not the same) type of personality.

Sometimes bullying happens in or out of school because kids see others as threats because they are “different,” “weird,” “nerdy,” or just because of problems at home. However, people are different in many ways. The differences are not always tolerated and one group will deliberately exclude kids that are not the same as other clique members. Sometimes they can be very controlling as well.

One group or one person should not be allowed to have the power to control who you can like, what, or who is cool or not, or what you do. Do you really want someone else deciding these things for you? Is being popular really worth what it might cost in the end? Don't you want to be different and if nothing else, do the things you like to do? Wouldn't you rather have real friends than just be part of a clique where everyone blindly follows some ring leader? What are you willing to “pay” for?

We don't have to be enemies. People who have tempers can learn from people who are calm. People who are dyslexic can learn to learn to write in different ways. We all can improve by learning from each other but especially from those that are different. We do not have to “hate” every (or any) little flaw that someone else might have. Hate is a very dangerous emotion. We have seen for too long the bad consequences of exclusion in adults: elitism, prejudice, and discrimination.

Nobody has to or should hate anyone at all. Unfortunately, many (even adults) choose to act this way and when societies choose to turn against each other because of differences, it results in war. There is always the option of taking the higher road, which in the long run, can only lead to a higher society.

Two of the characters in this book, Alana and Jane, are enemies and they choose to despise each other. The two girls do not understand each other because they do not really know the details about each other's lives. Alana, in most instances, tries to be the better person and just walk away from confrontations. Jane, on the other hand, acts out, but neither of them is perfect. But fate has a way of changing things in a most unexpected way.

Some people are happy, while others are not, but the forced facades of school make it hard to tell who is really feeling what about anything.

Understanding and tolerating diversity be it cultural, economic, social or personality differences is a major issue with both kids and adults starting as early as elementary school. People feel a need for whatever reasons they may have to claim that they are better, smarter, or more talented than others. There is always another way. Little flaws should be worked around somehow. It is not a good idea to act bigheaded, and sometimes a really nagging flaw is hard to swallow, but that doesn't mean you have to hate someone. People can't help their habits. Tolerance is the key.

Sometimes if someone tries to act like the bigger person and apologize, it is not accepted. There is no problem between two people large enough to merit fighting or holding a grudge for a long time. When someone says those two powerful little words to you, "I'm sorry," try to accept them, forgive them, *and move on*. It is not up to one person—it is up to everyone.

Words and actions do have consequences. Call me weird, or call me crazy and maybe I don't care, but then again, I just might. If we can understand how to live together as kids in school, perhaps we can also do the same as adults in society.

Alexandra Sabina Bender



At Home

Dear Alana,

I have an extremely nosey relative who always asks for my most personal secrets. I never want to tell, but my relative will pry and poke until I give her the answer. My parents told her to stop doing this but she never listens. I always make up an excuse to get away from the subject but that doesn't work anymore What do I do?. -Needs privacy NOW

Dear Needs Privacy,

Try telling your relative yourself to stop it instead of having your parents stick up for you all of the time. She might actually listen to you because it comes from you directly. Or, if that doesn't work, say that you have nothing to say and no secrets to share. There's nothing to ask for if there's no response. -Alana ☺

“Alana you can't hide it from me forever or even at all. You know what I want to say. I'm staying all night, and remember I *will* get it out of you.” Jackie finally managed to corner Alana in her room after a half hour of running around outside.

“No I don't.”

“You know one of the main reasons why you despise Jane...”

“Well, duh, she's a pain.”

“And you...”

“Don't say it Jackie!”

“Like...maybe it's because of ...”

“I mean it Jackie!”

“Sean Pedene!”

“Grrrrr, you got it.”

At James Walk Middle School, there were all kinds of cliques and gangs. The sporty guys and girls were considered popular, while writers and artists were below average on the 'in-crowd scale.' Jackie and Alana had known each other for years and Jackie knew that Alana wasn't big on the idea of popularity measures at school. Because Sean wasn't an idiot and was very creative in writing, and had a successful column as a news specialist, Alana had developed a crush on him. Jackie was the only person who knew this, but Alana had a suspicion that Jane was clued in to everything she felt.

"But why were you mad?" Jackie continued, "I knew something was up. You normally have ideas by the truck-load. Today you are blanker than the blackboard in Gym class! Why is that?"

"Jane is a big flirt and Sean has fallen for the act. I've known him since first grade and we've been great friends forever, even if he doesn't speak to me as often as he does to Jane. Besides I see him everywhere and when that happens I can't get anything out of my head. Jane Luklit hasn't even known him for a year. Didn't you see them today working on the lead articles. Always talking, always working together, it's a pain. I can't even think straight. That's why I'm a blank."

"Why don't we listen to our favorite pop band, *The Planettes*, or watch our favorite show *Cow Daze* or look at the work you did before Sean moved to this part of town at the beginning of the year. Come on, what do you want to do first?" Coaxed Jackie holding up a poster of a group of teens in cow-skin boots along with a CD case of *The Planettes* which included a brunette, (Vanessa Venus,) a blonde, (Natasha Neptune) and a redhead (Missy Mercury) in futuristic silver outfits and jewelry with colors that matched their personality/planet.

(Alana never understood why film directors, writers and other creative types always thought that people in the future would be wearing identical silvery body suits for clothing.)

"Music," They said together smiling as if it was decided long ago.

So for an hour or more Alana and Jackie listened to *The Planettes*. They were even singing along to their favorite song, Solarverse.

*Get up off your feet
The world needs you
You will also need the world
Because there are many things to meet*

*You have the unlimited power
You are always in control
Throw your curse back in reverse
And you'll be in solarverse*

*Nothing can keep you down long
If you have the proper mind
Be positive and smart and yourself
For confidence just sing this song*

*You have the unlimited power
You are always in control
Throw your curse back in reverse
And you'll be in solarverse*

*You'll always have your own strengths
Nobody can deny it
So Get up Get up Get up Get up
You are on your way kid*

*You have the unlimited power
You are always in control
Throw your curse back in reverse
And you'll be in solarverse*

*You'll always have the unlimited power
You are always in control
Throw your curse back in reverse
And you'll be in solarverse*



Todaze a Helligant Day

Dear Alana,

I'm in the AV club and most of the others look down upon us "dorks" but I look and act nothing like the label. I'm just smart with technology. I hate labels and I'd like to know how to change mine. -NOT a soup can

Dear Soup,

It doesn't matter what other people think of you. Some people just want to make themselves feel better by putting down others. If you don't care and just go about your business, then they will back off. Be confident with who you are and eventually those "others" will disappear and go find their next victim. --Alana ☺

Alana and Jackie scurried back to Jackie's house and after spending an hour frantically searching for the necklace. They finally asked Jackie's parents to drive them to Alana's house. Since parents always seemed ready to start the day early, (unlike Alana and Jackie) they eagerly agreed. Alana thanked them for having her over as they all rushed off back to Alana's house. They needed to either find the necklace or Mr. Shannonson because he was leaving for some business appointment. Alana and Jackie caught up with him just as he was getting into his Porsche.

"Hey Dad, wait. Where are you going?" puffed Alana, having now given up on finding the necklace at home.

"Alana why are you up so early?" joked Mr. Shannonson. "Is it time to go to school already? I'm going to the Cow Daze set where they're filming new episodes for season four. It was because of you two I got a big new contract and a promotion."

"Congratulations Mr. Shannonson!" exclaimed Jackie.

“Nice joke Dad, now may we go to the set with you?” asked Alana. “I may have left my necklace there.”

“All right, but please don’t try to take over. I already have one boss and I don’t think I can handle another. Now come on you two, get in!”

Alana rolled her eyes as Jackie laughed while Mr. Shannonson started the car. The girls climbed in as they made their way to the familiar white building. Through the mob of workers and cameramen the three found their way to Mr. Shannonson’s new office. It was a large space with a window. There was a desktop computer and a color printer. A polished wooden cabinet was next to a large white board that included four different markers for making graphs. A set of drawers sat under the edge of the desk. Alana was so surprised at the size of the office, she was now completely awake. Out the window she saw a view of the forest and a small lake to the left of the parking lot.

“Wow! Is this really your new office because it looks great!” exclaimed Jackie.

“Unless you know another Bob Shannonson that works here, this is my office.” He pointed to the door. There was a small black sign to the left that had his name on it in white letters.

“We have 20 minutes until they need to shoot the beginning scene. So you two just make yourselves at home, but not too much. I need my own space, which I don’t get in any of the rooms at home, if you know what I mean.”

“What about the men’s room?” teased Alana.

“Very funny you goofball, now why don’t you and Jackie doodle on the whiteboard or something, because we have a little time before they call us down to the set?”

“Good idea!” Alana said, “Why don’t we think of new episodes for the show. I see some lined paper next to the printer.”

“Cool, maybe they’ll use some of our ideas.”

Alana and Jackie worked and brainstormed on the floor of the office and came up with some great ideas for some new episodes. One of Jackie’s “brilliant” ideas (as Alana said) involved Helligant or Himcules singing in an episode

since the studio already used *The Planettes*.

It hadn't been difficult to brainstorm everything because Alana and Jackie based their ideas on what happened to them in real life. Finally everyone had to go to the set for the taping of the show. Alana slipped her papers into her jeans pocket. Jackie did the same. They were hoping for a chance to recommend their ideas to Steven Charles if they got one.

"Places cast, crew, and cameramen," called out Mr. Charles through a megaphone. "Is every cowboy or cowgirl on set? Misty, Billy, Darcy. Derrick?" The actors nodded gingerly.

"Are the outlaws on the set? The Kid, Sandy, Cat L. Herder, Tornado?" The outlaws nodded fervently.

"OK, before starting this scene, let's go over the plot line one more time. The outlaws, working together, can control dry weather and can generate windstorms as well. Their aim is to steal the cattle from the good guys. Everybody get it? Let's begin. Start the camera in 5... 4... 3... 2...1...and Action!"

Tornado and Sandy aimed a sandstorm at Darcy and Billy, who were blown back so hard that they had no time to react. Misty tried to grab them with her lasso, but The Kid pushed her down and blew sand in her face so she wouldn't be able to help her friends before they landed hard. Derrick tried to take Cat L. Herder's gun away with her lasso, but before she could, the outlaws had stolen every last cow. Pleased with how they had succeeded, the outlaws fled on their horses in a rush of sand and wind with Cat leading away the herd of cattle.

"And cut!" called out Steven Charles. The cameras stopped rolling and about half a dozen workers started fixing up the set by adding or removing sand from a hidden bag that had caused the storm.

"Take a 10 minute break. We are way ahead of schedule this time." Alana and Jackie, who were fascinated with all the action on the set, decided that now was the right time to thank Mr. Charles for everything that he had done for them.

Cliques and bullies in middle and high school can have a devastating impact on the lives and development of the children affected. Unfortunately in middle and high school, kids often divide themselves up into various groups based on similar personality traits.

Bullying goes hand in hand with cliques, as some kids see others as threats because they are "different," "weird," or "nerdy." Sometimes bullies behave the way they do because of a frustrating life out of school. Personality differences are not always tolerated and one group of kids will deliberately exclude others that are not the same as they are.

Here we follow the escapades of Alana and Jackie, who have been best friends for years. They both work on the school newspaper at their middle school, where Alana runs an advice column, but their arch rival, Jane, who is editor of the newspaper, never ceases being a thorn in their side. Twists and turns of an adventure await the girls, including a shocking history class final, meeting some of their favorite celebrities, giving some solid advice, daydreaming, planning to get even, but in the end, they finally learned the truth about who Jane really was.

This story has a little of everything in it, but along with all the adventures the girls go through, comes some excellent and sound advice for students on how to survive the tribulations of school. More information can be found at www.Alanasadvice.com.

In an age when Instant Messaging and MySpace have become the preferred method of communication, Alexandra Sabina Bender's method of reaching out to her peers is quite remarkable. Not only does this 12-year old have some important things to say about tolerance and self-acceptance, she has taken the time to convey her message through a thoughtful and engaging story. This book has many messages for young teens, but first and foremost it tells all of us that caring about others should be a priority in our lives, and that it is well worth the effort.

—Lawrence E. Shapiro, Ph.D., author of *How to Raise A Child with a High EQ: A Parents' Guide to Emotional Intelligence*



Alexandra Sabina Bender is a seventh grade student in middle school and lives with her parents and sister Michelle in Connecticut. Observing first hand the hurt and destructive power of cliques, she wrote this book when she was 12 years old to teach understanding and tolerance to others. She is currently working on her third book.

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