

Bullies mocked boy's shoes; his friend got him a new pair with his own allowance

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Melvin Anderson (left) with his classmate and close friend Romello "Mello" Early. When students were bullying Melvin for having dirty shoes, Mello used his allowance to buy him a new pair. Photo: Bryant Brown Jr./Washington Post Photo: Bryant Brown Jr. / Washington Post

Romello "Mello" Early couldn't stand watching his friend and fellow seventh-grader, Melvin Anderson, get taunted for wearing worn-out sneakers.

"I really didn't appreciate other people talking about him that way," said 12-year-old Mello, a student at Buffalo Creek Academy Charter School in Buffalo, New York.

On October 24, he called his mother on FaceTime, which he does every day after school. That afternoon, though, Mello broke down in tears the moment his mother, Anita James, answered the phone.

"Romello, what happened?" James recalled asking her son.

"I'm getting tired of them bullying my friend about his shoes. It's making me so upset," he responded, explaining that his classmates mocked Melvin for having muddy sneakers.

Then, Mello earnestly asked, "Can we go buy him some shoes?"

James told her son they would talk about it when she got home from work. During their in-person conversation a few hours later, she said, he was still distraught.

Mello was adamant about buying his friend a fresh pair of sneakers to stave off bullies — and remind him that he has people who care about him.

"Can I use my allowance, or you can take something away that I would get for Christmas?" Mello asked his mother.

James admired her son's sincere plea.

"I was floored, because most kids are not willing to give up something to another child; most kids are about themselves," she said. "Just to see at that age he was acting as an adult, it touched me in a way that I almost can't even describe."

For Mello, the decision was intuitive.

"You should always treat people the way you want to be treated," he said. "I have a lot of stuff, so I was thinking, let's bless somebody else today."

That evening, they went to a sneaker store and bought a pair of black-and-white Nike Dunks for Melvin. Mello used savings from his allowance to pay for the \$135 shoes.

This way, he said, "nobody could make fun of him or say anything about him anymore."

James was touched by her son's gesture, and she said it fit with his caring nature.

"He is supersensitive, and he is the most giving person," James said, adding that the boys met about two years ago and are among each other's closest friends.

James believes Mello was especially empathetic toward Melvin since he, too, has been a victim of bullying.

"He was bullied at his old school about his height, and he would come home crying sometimes," James said. "I started encouraging him and letting him know that it's all right to be different."

Mello was so excited to give Melvin the gift that he woke up nearly an hour early for school. Before class began, he handed his friend the orange Nike box in private.



"I was totally shocked," Melvin said. "I felt very happy and very surprised."

After weeks of getting constant smirks about his sneakers — which his peers called "dirty" — Melvin was tired of being tormented.

"It made me feel sad, mad and very disliked," he said. "I was so grateful that he gave me the shoes."

Bryant Brown Jr., the dean of culture at the school, spotted the shoe box on Melvin's desk and asked him for the backstory. It brought Brown to tears.

"I was so moved," Brown said. "It's so beautiful."

It's "everything I want these kids to be," he continued.

The story hit home for many reasons, Brown added, including that when he was growing up, his older brother used to buy him sneakers when his parents couldn't afford them. Now, in their adult lives, Brown buys his brother a pair of sneakers for his birthday every year to show his gratitude.

Having someone look out for him throughout his life "meant everything to me," said Brown, who said he was also bullied as a child.

Brown decided to share the story on Facebook, hoping it might inspire others.

"My student Mello told me he was tired of other students picking on Melvin about his shoes. Mello used his allowance and bought Melvin some shoes. This is what I live for," Brown wrote.

The post got thousands of likes, shares and comments. Brown was stunned by the response.

"I'm just overwhelmed with the outpouring of love," he said.

The families of both boys are blown away by the generosity and positive reaction to the story.

"It has just been so amazing," James said.

When Melvin originally brought his sneakers home, he told his parents that they were a hand-me-down from a friend who outgrew them. But when Brown asked permission to post the photo on Facebook, they learned the truth.

"I was a little disconcerted at first," said Melvin's father, Wesley Anderson. "I didn't want anyone to think Melvin was a charity case."

His son had never told him that he was being bullied, Anderson said, nor did he express a desire for a new pair of shoes.

"He's a very humble young man," Anderson said of his son. "I never had an inkling about it at all until I heard about Mello."

Going forward, he urged Melvin to "start letting me know these things so I can step in," he said.



While Anderson was initially disturbed about his son's mistreatment, he was warmed by Mello's meaningful gesture.

"That was very touching," Anderson said. "I hope this is contagious for other children. Maybe they'll realize that being kinder to another person goes a long way."

Quiz

- 1 Select the sentence from the article that suggests that Mello is protective of his friend.
- (A) On October 24, he called his mother on FaceTime, which he does every day after school.
 - (B) During their in-person conversation a few hours later, she said, he was still distraught.
 - (C) This way, he said, "nobody could make fun of him or say anything about him anymore."
 - (D) Having someone look out for him throughout his life "meant everything to me," said Brown, who said he was also bullied as a child.
- 2 Which sentence from the article shows Melvin's MAIN problem?
- (A) That afternoon, though, Mello broke down in tears the moment his mother, Anita James, answered the phone.
 - (B) "It's making me so upset," he responded, explaining that his classmates mocked Melvin for having muddy sneakers.
 - (C) "I was floored, because most kids are not willing to give up something to another child; most kids are about themselves," she said.
 - (D) Mello was so excited to give Melvin the gift that he woke up nearly an hour early for school.
- 3 Which answer choice MOST accurately characterizes Bryant Brown's reaction to Mello's kindness?
- (A) He was reminded of how his brother helped him when he was younger.
 - (B) He tried to get people on Facebook to buy Melvin more shoes.
 - (C) He asked other students in the school why Melvin was being bullied.
 - (D) He encouraged Mello to share his story with others on social media.

- 4 Read the selection.

"He was bullied at his old school about his height, and he would come home crying sometimes," James said. "I started encouraging him and letting him know that it's all right to be different."

Why did the author include this idea?

- (A) to suggest that Melvin helped Mello when they were younger
- (B) to show how Mello discovered that Melvin was being bullied
- (C) to reveal the reason why shoes are important to Mello
- (D) to explain why Mello felt an emotional connection with Melvin

Answer Key

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