

I stood up to bullies as a teen. Now, I join — and invite — others in standing up to Trump

Trump was a bully at school and now continues to wield his signature anti-social behavior in his presidency.

By David McGrath Mar 7, 2026, 7:00am EST

Dirty snow was piled along the curb. It was a school day in Evergreen Park that late January, already getting dark at 4 p.m. I had just finished delivering newspapers to patients at Little Company of Mary Hospital, subbing for my brother, who was the regular paper boy.

A 17-year-old never gets enough to eat, and I walked across 95th Street to Sherwood's Drive-In for a little something to hold me over till dinner. A 20-cent cheeseburger with ketchup and a pickle with a 10-cent cup of coffee with powdered cream would do the trick. I stepped up to the counter to place my order.

Before anyone came to wait on me, three older looking boys slammed open the storm door and crowded the other register window. The ostensible leader, with brown eyes, dark hair and a black woolen overcoat, placed both palms on the brushed aluminum countertop.

"You," he said, looking at the lone clerk through the opening in the partition. "Two burgers, mustard, pickle. Make it [expletive] good."

I had seen the boy before at the bowling alley on Rockwell Avenue, a brawler known around the village and to local police.

As a kid with five brothers who all played hockey and football, I was no shrinking violet. Though I generally avoided trouble, I was the only other customer in Sherwood's and had a feeling of dread. The alarmed expression on the face of the sole employee did not help.

The brawler, tapping his fingers on the counter, suddenly turned and faced me.

"I need 50 cents. You got 50 cents?"

I should have said no, but I could not bring myself to lie. In retrospect, I might have framed my answer differently.

“Not for you,” I said.

He stared as if noticing me for the first time. He turned back to his order, which had been placed on the counter in front of him. Next, he picked up the white bag and handed it to his partner. Then he lunged.

It was not as bad as I expected. He didn't lead with a fist to my eyes or nose but shoulder-tackled me in order to pin me to the ground, where he likely hoped to do more damage. He could not know, however, about me and my brothers, and he felt no stronger than James, the second oldest of us boys.

We rolled around on the gritty concrete floor, and I had hold of him as much as he had me. Then, his other partner, the one not holding the white bag, squatted and pulled him away.

“Cops are comin’, Frank.”

We both got to our feet, and he glared at me another second, a flicker of a smile and they bolted. It was then that I noticed the Sherwood's employee standing in the back by the doorway, holding a black phone receiver.

Growing up in the '60s, we had to avoid, navigate and occasionally defend ourselves against the dozen or so teenage toughs living in “the Park” who were known for fighting.

These bullies may have been born with aggressive inclinations. Or it's possible they had been poisoned as toddlers by gnawing on window sills covered with lead paint, which has been known to cause brain damage and an increase in anti-social behavior in survivors.

Maybe they were simply good at it, the way one might be talented in a sport like football or boxing.

Or perhaps they had training similar to Donald Trump's, who was raised by a taskmaster of a father who taught him that there were only two kinds of people in the world, winners, who he called “killers,” and losers.

Trump would complete his education in bullying at military school, where he reportedly pushed weaker boys around and perfected a lifestyle employing force and insult.

His subsequent development is now documented in American history: mocking enemies with offensive nicknames and threatening all his perceived opponents, including universities, law firms, entertainers, politicians, political parties, and heads of state. He's also since used the war powers at his disposal to take another nation's lunch money, i.e., Venezuela's oil.

And now we have his lifetime signature act of bullying in what [Democrats](#) and even some Republicans consider an unnecessary [war with Iran](#).

Despite his past anti-war, anti-interventionist rhetoric, Trump has succumbed to his individual lust for power and dominance in violently attacking a weaker nation, at the expense, already, of hundreds of innocent lives, and of the economy and stability of the entire world.

I learned back in my Evergreen Park days that you have to stand up to a bully, whether alone or, preferably, with the community's help.

Likewise, Americans and the world community must stand up to Trump with continued resistance via the courts, Congress, United Nations, free press, protests and ultimately, the polls.

David McGrath is an emeritus English professor at College of DuPage and author of "[Far Enough Away](#)," a collection of Chicago area stories.

Send letters to letters@suntimes.com. More about [how to submit here](#).