

"Can I sit with you?" he wanted to say, standing over the porcelain white lunch table, with a tray of chicken nuggets and a carton of milk.

"Can I sit with you?" he wanted to say, with new Nike sneakers on his feet, and crisp, freshly ironed blue denim jeans.

"Can I sit with you?" he wanted to say, as the boys sitting at the table, as his new classmates in this new town, would all look up and smile, and they would make room for him on the wooden cafeteria bench.

"Can I sit with you?" he wanted to say, sitting down, as he would tell a joke or two, and the kids who'd now become his friends would all laugh, introducing themselves to him.

"Can I sit with you?" he wanted to say, and they would discuss sports with him, last night's game, and what a jerk that English teacher is.

"Can I sit with you?" he wanted to say, and after the local sports teams the conversation would switch to the trip to the county fair this Saturday, and would he like to join them?

"Can I sit with you?" he wanted to say, and as he would talk with his new best pals, he would almost forget the stress, the long nights, and the raw tears spilled over the move, thousands of miles away from his old school, old friends, and the old tire swing that swung on the big oak tree in the backyard, a far cry from the stuffy and crowded apartment building he now inhabited.

"Can I sit with you" he wanted to say, and so he did. But the reaction he got from the gaggle of boys was not the one he had hoped for, because when they turned they all laughed at him, snickering with cruel delight.

"Can I sit with you," he thought he'd say tomorrow, maybe to a different table, because his lunch today would be eaten in a bathroom stall, his sandwich wrapper used to wipe his eyes.

Because the next time he'd say those five brave words, life would get better, if he lived to see it.