

**Denise-Marie**

Santiago grew up in the Rochester's Bull's Head area. She started writing for newspapers during her sophomore year at Our Lady of Mercy High School and went on to the University of Missouri-Columbia. Her first paying job was covering town government at the now-defunct Rochester *Times-Union*. She packed her Chevette two years later and drove alone across the country to work at the *Los Angeles Times*. The following year, she returned to the East Coast to write news and features for *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. After 10 years, she took a leave to listen to music and eat wonderful food while running her brother's jazz club in Rochester. Soon after, she gave up her Philadelphia job to marry one of the customers. They live in Brighton with their two children.

Bullies, not victims, should change their behavior

(February 17, 2006) — With each tale of bullying, there were members in the audience who nodded knowingly.

Like when one mother talked about her son repeatedly getting slapped by towels in the gym locker room. Or the teacher's aide who asked about dealing with bullying among special education students. Someone wondered whether it was possible to get protection orders against bullies.

Those are the kinds of inquiries, made during a Monroe County Bullying Prevention Task Force workshop this week, that make it hard for me to buy the theory that Izzy Kalman is promoting in nationwide seminars.

The title of the Staten Island school psychologist's book explains a lot of his thinking. He self-published *Bullies to Buddies: How to Turn Your Enemies into Friends* early last year and is nearing the end of the 5,000-print run.

Now, I'll be honest here. I'd rather not have a bully for a friend. I like people — and readers — who use kind words and keep their hands to themselves.

But Kalman, who'll be here Feb. 28 at the Clarion Riverside Hotel to give a seminar to mental health professionals, says bullies are not the problem. It's how you handle them that matters.

It's a message, he says, that upsets some parents.

Yup.

Even some professionals, Kalman admits, don't like his thinking that "we cause our own problems. Everyone causes his own problems."

His answer to tormentors?

"If you treat your bully like a buddy," he says, "than he's going to be your friend."

He doesn't have research to back up his claims. None that he's published, anyway.

But he says there's nothing new to his ideas of turning the other cheek, ignoring the harasser, taking responsibility for your own misery. He uses role-playing, among other things, to show people just how to do it.

"I'm teaching what Jesus taught, what Martin Luther King taught, what Gandhi taught," he says. "Everybody who understands peace knows what I'm talking about."

They may know what Kalman is talking about, but some rightly disagree on his take that victims should change their behavior rather than the bullies.

There's a place for teaching victims social skills, for instance, or for helping to build self-esteem. But Kalman's line of thinking puts the onus on the victims and not the aggressors.

"A lot of times, it's not the target's fault, at all," says Patty Northrup of the Monroe County Bullying Prevention Task Force. "That's where we've gone wrong (thinking), 'Well, we have made them mad or you should do this differently.' No, no, no," she says. "It's a matter of rights. No one deserves this (bullying)."

In a series of community meetings this year, the task force is offering up other ways to handle bullying among kids.

It held the first session last month. At the second session on Wednesday at Monroe Community College, the topic was the law enforcement perspective. About 60 parents, educators and college students learned from a Monroe County sheriff's sergeant how to investigate and document complaints, and what to do when those complaints fall on deaf ears.

Upcoming workshops include one on March 21 for teachers and another open to the public on April 4 called, "From Teasing to Torment." (For information, call (585) 613-7611.)

The sessions are worth attending, if only to understand that bullying is not about hurt feelings. It's about people's lives.