



# Video Story Transcript

## Every Day is Basil Houpis Day: Bullying Doesn't Stop After High School

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**Link to YouTube Video:**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vbVnWSsXfFE>

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Note: The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

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Hello, my name is Robin Bady. I wonder, have you ever felt like you've done something that you wish that you could have done again and done over? Well, this story takes place when I'm in middle school in 1963, in the small town I grew up in on the New Jersey Shore.

So, my hometown teacher is standing in front of the class. And standing right next to her is this geeky looking guy. His hair was uncombed and it looked greasy. He was... had a funny smile on his face and his clothes were, were mismatched and wrinkled. And he was shifting side to side. And my teacher, she looked at him and looked at us and then smiled painfully and said, *(very slowly)*, "Class, this is Basil Houpis. And he is new to our school and new to America. And he doesn't speak English very well. Help me welcome Basil Houpis."

Silence. And then from the guys in the back, "Hoo, Hoo, Houpis! Basil Houpis! He's got the cooties! He's got the cooties!" You remember the cooties. That horrible childhood disease that gets you. The one that you have because someone says you have it. That nobody wants to go near you. Well, Basil had the cooties. And I remember him walking down the hallway with a pained smile on his face. And, ah, we split like the sea in front of him. And he would walk there all by himself, desperately looking for somebody to smile or somebody to talk. And the mean boys, they would go, *(in mean grumbling voice)*, "Oh, yeah. There's Basil Houpis."

And the cool girls and the girls who wanted to be cool, they'd say, "There's Basil Houpis. He's so weird." And there was me. And there was, in truth, lots of people like me, who's pushing up against the wall, wishing I could disappear into it. Where were the teachers, you might ask? I don't know.

High school comes and *puff*, he disappears and nobody knows where he's gone. But, in truth, Basil was never gone. Because once a year, in March, whispers would begin, "Don't forget. Don't forget. Don't forget tomorrow's Basil Houpis Day." Basil Houpis Day, that was a day when lots of kids would dress up with dirty hair and bad clothes that didn't match, weren't ironed, they'd smell. (The teachers... where were the teachers?) And they'd act just like Basil Houpis, which meant crazy and weird and didn't speak their English well. Kids like me... you know, wished I could say something but I was too afraid. You know how it is. I did not want to be the next Basil Houpis.

Well, thirty years later, I am, thank God, out of high school. And I am now living my life and I'm happy, with a family. And I get a phone call from my old friend Stephanie. We had grown up next door to each other. We were one month apart. And she said, "So, Robin, why aren't you going to the 30<sup>th</sup> high school reunion?" I didn't even know about it. She goes, "You got to come! Everyone is coming. Why not?" So, I agree.

And on a very hot day in July, me and my husband... Well, you know, high school reunions are?... Well, you dress really well because you want to impress all the kids that you possibly didn't impress in the past. I was very thin. I had a long, black, silky dress...slinky. I wore a jean jacket and statement jewelry because I was from Brooklyn now and I wanted to impress. Oh, high strappy heels.

And I walked to where the reunion is happening in our high school. I walk in and there's the gym. The gym is decorated with, well, like it's a prom. Not that I wouldn't know. I never went there, to prom. But there it is. It is... something else. All the high school bands have reunited and they're playing. There are kids doing skits. And I walk through. Everybody's really friendly.

Then I go to the cafeteria. And the food they were serving, it's exactly the same old sloppy joes that we had when we were in high school served by the same...the SAME cafeteria ladies wearing the SAME hairnet for the same price--thirty-five cents.

Well, I look around. There are a lot of people there. Everyone was there with their spouse or their partner. And even though there were nametags, I didn't recognize anyone. Because... well, the truth was that if they were not standing in the group that they had inhabited while they were in high school, I just didn't know them individually. And so, I spoke to people but it kept going past me. Who they were and why they were saying things to me about things I had said and done.

I had a pretty nice time. And when I went home, the following weeks, in the following months, the class reunion listserv was buzzing.

"Oh, do you remember going to the beach?"

"Oh, that party!"

"The diner."

"The night after the play."

"The night after the baseball game."

"The night after the football game."

And on and on and on. And then March came. And landing smack dab on my computer, in my email was the message... sent by a friend of mine, "Don't forget tomorrow's Basil Houpis Day! Houp, Houp, Houpis!" And all sorts of emails came in response.

"Oh, yeah! I can't wait to do it."

"Oh, yeah! Know just what I'm gonna do!"

"Oh, that sounds cool!"

And I'm just looking and watching. And I can't stop reading because I can't believe it. This is, well, we haven't seen him in probably thirty-four years, since middle school. What is this about? We're not in middle school anymore. And then I felt, *whap*, the same fears that I used to feel when I was smack up against that puke green, cement walls of our school. And I'm watching Basil Houpis go by and I am wondering, "What I should do? I can't do anything, right?"

I don't want to stand up against them. I mean, those are the popular kids and the cool kids. And I got so mad. So mad that I think, "Wait a minute! I don't even know these people anymore! Why do I care?" And then I go back and forth between tremendous fear and tremendous anger until I settle into rage. My fingers go onto the keyboard and I start writing. "Who the...What the...How the...Why the..." And I decide I shouldn't write anything. My husband comes in. He's been watching me and he says, "Close the computer. Go, do it tomorrow."

And tomorrow I tried to write and the next day I tried to write and the next day and the next day. I think it took me a whole month before I found something that felt okay. And that Tom, my husband, and I agreed was reasonable yet powerful. Because I was not a kid anymore. And I wouldn't stand for this today. So, I write something that goes like this: (Dear Robin, it's wonderful, I mean, excuse me, let me start that again.)

Dear Classmates,

How wonderful it was to see you all at the reunion. I forgot how much fun we'd had in high school and how difficult it was too. You know, we are all successful people in one way or another. We have families. We have friends. We are doing well with our lives. Some of us are very successful. Some of us are just getting along. But we're all adults. And that's why I was surprised when I got that email from you. Well, first the one that said, "Don't forget tomorrow's Basil Houpis Day." And then everybody writing about it. You know, if that happened to your child, what would you do? What would you say? Would you stop it or would you let your child do it? What if your child was doing it? Was the bully?

We are better than that. I know that from spending time in your presence and remembering you from our time together. Let's stand up to the worst in ourselves. Let's stop picking on a poor defenseless kid, who could barely speak our language, who's no longer around.

With Love,

Robin

*Pfush*, off to cyberspace. I closed the computer. I didn't really want to see if anyone responded. But the next day, I looked. How could I not? And I heard, I read but it was if they standing right in the room.

"Who do you think you are, Robin? I always thought you were a conceited, stuck-up person!"

"Well, who are you to be preaching at us?"

"What do you think you are?"

"Do you think you know better? We're just having fun. What's your problem, babe?"

And a lot of bad words and a lot of other things and a lot of meanness. Oh, and I love this one: "Your father would be so ashamed of you!" That one took me aback. And when I was about to give up completely, a couple of other emails came.

"Thank you, Robin. When I was a kid, I wished so much that I could have stood up and taken care of Basil. I would have hated that to happen to me, which is why I didn't do it."

"If that had happened to my child, I would be fighting mad. Thank you."

"Thank you for reaching out to the best of us. We forget when we get all into that group think. Thank you. Thank you."

"Thank you. It's about time."

And I think it's about time I stood up for that kid. And I think about what my father would have said. He'd have quoted his favorite quotation to me from Hillel, the rabbi, who said many wonderful things from a hundred years before the common era. Hillel said, "If I'm not for myself, who am I? If I'm not for others, what am I? And if not now, when? When?"