

# MIGHTY MOUNTIE

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**RCMP Const. Tad Milmine, who is openly gay, talks Tuesday with students at Chestermere Lake Middle School about bullying. Milmine has started a website called Bullying Ends Here.**

Tad Milmine saved a life Tuesday.

Of this, I cannot provide irrefutable proof. But after spending an hour listening to the dazzling orator and watching as he holds more than 700 kids spellbound, I feel absolutely certain that somewhere in that crowd of fidgety children in grades 7 to 9, he's made a difference that cannot be measured from post-speech surveys and comment cards.

I wasn't sure what to expect when I headed to Chestermere Lake Middle School Tuesday morning. Milmine, an RCMP officer by day who spends his free time talking to students about the potentially devastating effects of bullying ([bullyingendshere.ca](http://bullyingendshere.ca)),

has been praised widely for bringing his tough but heartfelt message to a segment of society that desperately needs to hear it.

In just over a year, the B.C.-based man has visited more than 300 schools across the country, his visits spurring more than 9,000 emails from kids either being bullied or wanting to help stem the tide — and he's answered every one of them.

This week, he's stopping at a number of Calgary area schools to tell his story. And what a story it is.

Not long after the more than 700 audience members take their seats on chairs and the gym floor, the 38-year-old Milmine gives them a warning. He has no Power Point presentation, no photos to show on a large screen, "no awesome music when you're walking in." Just him. Just stories. A whole hour.

While the sighs are more than audible, the kids don't have even one minute to assess their disappointment. That's because Milmine launches into a story so riveting, over the next hour you can barely hear a pin drop in the brightly lit gym.

The tall, athletic man tells them he was once a crybaby. He cried all the time, with the slightest provocation.

"It was like a river coming down my face ... I had the boogers, I had the drool."

He had good reason. Raised by an alcoholic father and an abusive stepmother, he spent the bulk of his childhood being tormented by classmates, when he wasn't locked up in a dingy basement where he spent all his free hours, including mealtime.

"My father would tell me, 'just ignore her,' he says of his stepmother, who much to his audience's delight he refers repeatedly to as "the Devil."

This story, though, has a happy ending.

At the tender age of 17, Milmine found the inner strength to seek help from child welfare services.

By reaching out for help, he was able to lift himself out of a tragic

childhood and launch successfully as an adult. In time, he'd evolve to the point where he had the courage to actually chase his lifelong dream to become a police officer.

Milmine then tells the story of a friend of his, a teenage boy named Jamie Hubley. He describes him as a "skinny little white boy with fluffy blond hair," a description that elicits much laughter. No one laughs, though, as Milmine gets into the details of the boy's life. Like him, the 15-year-old was teased and taunted from an early age. His love of figure skating resulted in the most severe bullying, which included a mob of kids holding him down and one-by-one spitting into his mouth.

As Milmine tells of the continued abuse, which included Jamie being force-fed small batteries, and the boy's eventual suicide, girls in the crowd can be seen weeping. Such a senseless tragedy, he explains, is why he is standing before them.

Hubley's death is what prompted Milmine — who has the family's blessing to share Jamie's story — to get involved in the cause. "When I started out, I thought I might speak to one school," he tells the kids.

Then he tells the kids that, just like Jamie, he, too, is gay.

"I was gay 45 minutes ago," he says of something he kept a secret until his twenties. "If something inside of you changed in the way you think about me ... then you have some serious things to work on."

On this day, when at the provincial legislature and Calgary's City Hall the rainbow flag waves in protest against Russia's antigay laws, and when SAIT follows suit for the first time ever in honour of its own gay pride day on Wednesday, it seems the tide is turning in society.

"It's an honour," says Milmine about speaking out for those who cannot. "I wouldn't change it for the world."

The honour, really, is for those of us here to listen.