

At Ease: Stories I Tell to Friends
by Dwight D. Eisenhower

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“The time came for me to enter Garfield on the north side to complete seventh and eighth grades. Traditionally, there was hostility between boys from the north and south sides of town. Whenever any south-side boy was ready to go to Garfield, he was a stranger entering a rather closely knit group and he had best be prepared to take care of himself.

If no natural, personal rivalry sprang up between individuals, the crowd picked out two who would provide sport. By student consensus, pressure grew for a fight between a boy named Wesley Merrifield and myself. Why fight? There was no good reason. Actually I rather liked Wes and as far as I knew, he had nothing against me. He was short and stocky. I was long and thin and rangy.

Other fellows, some of them older and all of them warriors who loved to watch a battle from side-line safety, kept running back and forth between us, trying to get us involved in an after-school engagement. This went on for days. Finally one evening, by the time we had walked down the street about three or four blocks, the two of us were practically forced together. Neither of us had the courage to say “I won’t fight.”

We began to slug away at each other awkwardly, doing little discernible damage. The only thing that made the fight notable was its length. We weren’t skillful but we were stubborn and persistent so we kept pounding away, with occasional pauses for breath, for well over an hour. By that time, complete exhaustion overtook us and by mutual consent we stopped for a moment. Wes said, “I can’t lick you.” I said the same thing. And that was that.

When I got home, I quickly sneaked into the bedroom to take a look and found that I had a discolored eye. This signal, of course, was instantly noted by my parents when I came to the dinner table. Because they were both opposed to indiscriminate brawling, the fat was in the fire. I got off with a strong reprimand but I had to stay out of school for two or three days.”