THE ROOTS OF WAR ARE IN THE WAY WE LIVE OUR DAILY LIVES.

— Thich Nhat Hanh

on the road to healing
a booklet for men against sexism
"FEMINISTS LONG FOR MEN TO HEAL... We dream of a world full of men who could be passionate lovers, grounded in their own bodies, capable of profound loves and deep sorrows, strong allies of women, sensitive nurturers, fearless defenders of all people’s liberation, unbound by stifling convention yet respectful of their own and others’ boundaries, serious without being humorless, stable without being dull, disciplined without being rigid, sweet without being spineless, proud without being insufferably egotistical, fierce without being violent, wild without being, well, assholes.”

STARHAWK
from her essay “A Men’s Movement I Could Trust”

resource lists like this can never be complete, also, not completely endorsed either. here are some groups, websites, and other resources for you to look into. hopefully you’ll find what you’re looking for.

Men Against Violence Webring
The sites in the Men Against Violence Webring give examples of how men can get involved in the struggle to end rape and sexual assault. Sites are by men and women who recognize that rape and sexual assault are not merely a ‘Woman's Issue’ but everyone’s issue. Men are perpetrators, survivors, and friends of survivors, and need to get involved.
http://www.interactivetheatre.org/mav/

TransFeminism.org
This web site was established to facilitate communication between intersex and trans people who are feminists and their allies.
http://www.transfeminism.org

National Organization for Men Against Sexism
An activist organization of men and women supporting positive changes for men. NOMAS advocates a perspective that is pro-feminist, gay-affirmative, anti-racist, and committed to justice on a broad range of social issues including class, age, religion, and physical abilities. We affirm that working to make this nation’s ideals of equality for all people a reality is the finest expression of what it means to be men.
NOMAS • P.O. Box 455 • Louisville, CO 80027-0455 • usa 303-666-7043 • www.nomas.org

National Organization on Male Sexual Victimization
Dedicated to a safe world, we are an organization of diverse individuals committed through research, education, advocacy, and activism to the prevention, treatment and elimination of all forms of sexual victimization of boys and men.
1-800-738-4181 • http://www.nomsv.org/

ProFeminist.org
There is hope. Patriarchy has not existed forever and will not continue into eternity. Men are not naturally aggressive and warlike beings, just as women are not naturally peacemaking and passive. Patriarchy will continue to exist only as long as we perpetuate it and validate its premises. No system that derives its power from fear and oppression can survive for long.
http://www.profeminist.org/

deal with it
a journal currently put out by anti-sexist anarchist men in support of the struggle to end sexist oppression, deconstruct gender, overthrow patriarchy, and achieve total liberation.
P.O. Box 5841 • Eugene, Or 97405 • usa http://www.fruitiondesign.com/dealwithit

planting seeds community awareness project
a group of people collectively working for non-violent social change. our goal is to play a significant role in rebuilding human society based on principles of respect, love, communamism and an end to oppression. we facilitate men against sexism (as well as other anti-oppression) workshops and publish this zine.
post office box 84171 • seattle, wa 98124 • usa http://www.pscap.org

Men Can Stop Rape
Men Can Stop Rape empowers male youth and the institutions that serve them to work as allies with women in preventing rape and other forms of men's violence. Through awareness-to-action education and community organizing, we promote gender equity and build men's capacity to be strong without being violent.
P.O. Box 57144 • Washington, DC 20037 • usa www.mencanstoprape.org

Oakland Men’s Project
Conducts workshops on understanding the roots of male violence, including racism, sexism, sexual harassment, and heterosexism, in order to change abusive behavior and break the cycle of violence.
1203 Preservation Park Way, Suite 200
Oakland, CA 94612
(510) 835-2433

pander zine distro
write for a catalog of tons other zines.
pos box 582142 • minneapolis, mn 55458-2142 • usa http://www.panderzinedistro.com/

The Men’s Bibliography
PO Box 26 • Ainslie ACT 2602 • AUSTRALIA http://www.anu.edu.au/~a112465/mensbiblio/mensbibliomenu.html
• Don’t expect us to wait for you to be comfortable with your oppression of us before we make demands
• Don’t force us to take on traditional gender roles
• Respect our womanhood
• Realize that men are still the oppressors; it’s your job to stop it, not just understand it
• Don’t make it so hard to be friends
• Realize that women don’t always feel comfortable or empowered enough to stand up for themselves
• Realize that sexual violence is prevalent in this community
• Be accountable for your actions
• Stand up to each other
• Don’t ask us to cuddle if we’re in a platonic relationship
• Be mindful of the language you use (i.e., girls, boys, guys, women, men)
• Realize that we are not representative of all women
• Don’t just be “not surprised” about our Silent Witness
• Listen to women, even the “hard asses”
• Give equal consideration to our wants and needs
• Think through your actions
• Don’t assume that you’re the ones who define “radical”
• Recognize who’s not here [at the gender conference]
• Combat size-ism; acknowledge it as a problem
• Take all of our views into account
• Realize that our activism is restricted
• Don’t force guys’ projects on us, while ignoring women’s
• Don’t belittle our projects until a guy takes them on
• Realize that we deal with harassment constantly
• Recognize that sometimes we are physically not as strong; encourage us to do stuff, even teach us how
• Believe and support us
• Realize that “youth gone wild” is not necessarily radical
• Admit when you fuck up
• Encourage women to do adventurous stuff
• Don’t act like your “oppression” as men is comparable to our as women
• Realize that we [the women] may disagree on some of these points, but that does not at all invalidate us or them
• Create an atmosphere that is dynamic and empowering
• Realize that we will support you
• Realize that we will help you with your mistakes
• Notice that we interact awesomely and respectfully with each other
• Realize that we do care about your gender issues, but it’s just not comparable to sexism
• Communicate in intimate relationships
• Take notice of the fact that several women mentioned specific instances of sexism in our community
• Take notice of the fact that several women spoke of incidents when men didn’t have their back
• Don’t just believe in your own story
• Remember: This list is not complete or all encompassing. How do you participate in sexism in your community, family, individual lives? What steps can you do to change your actions?

In his poem, coded language, Saul Williams speaks: “We enlist every instrument: acoustic and electronic. Every so-called race, gender, sexual preference. Every person as beings of sound to acknowledge their responsibility to uplift the consciousness of the entire fucking world.”

I know that zines are an instrument of mine. I have seen the pain of sexism and know many ways I participate in creating that pain. I know that now is the time to work on my own patterns and to encourage others to do the same.

This zine exists to provide a printed space for articles, stories, art, photography and other printable mediums directed at critical theory and personal reflections on male socialization, sexism and the concept of manhood. How have these concepts influenced and molded us? How do they relate to all other facets of our lives?

For me, sexism and the concept of masculinity I was raised under are deeply connected. Through acknowledging and criticizing that I came to a place in my life where I understood the impact of patriarchy and sexism on my life and in the world. Hence, I created this zine as a space for people to talk about masculinity in an anti-sexist framework.

I was motivated again to finish this zine because the writers in here have much to say, and I want their words to inspire dialogue, communication and social change. I want you to read this as a conscious being who is ready think about what is being said here, let it touch you, let it light a fire under you. Let it make you sad, mad, connected. Eat it up. Rip it apart. Create your own spark. Use your own instrument.

hey, welcome!

yesterday I was motivated again to finish this zine. I was reading a zine called RAW — a zine where this woman talks of being raped by someone close to her [get a copy by sending $1 to lupine ladies press / po box 543 / acookeek, md 20607 / usa]. I was motivated out of the anger toward her rapist and out of my feeling of necessity that as time ticks, sexism in it’s many violent patterns continues on and on.

all the extras you might like to know:

contributors: jeff ott, donald cavanaugh, chris crass, chris dixon, ahimsa timoteo bodhrán, cameron bustamante, loolwa khazoom, michael flood, tony switzer, brian, and me, basil.

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if you want to order more zines or get in touch with a contributor, write to me:
basil • post office box 84171 • seattle, wa 98124 • usa • plantingseeds@tao.ca

this zine is a project of the planting seeds community awareness project • http://www.pscap.org

thanks to all the people who contributed articles, time and money to this project.

while laying out this zine, I listened to “Broken Speak,” a cd by “I was born with 2 tongues” — a Chicago based panAsian spoken word group. More info is available on them online through www.2tongues.com or by writing 1658 N. Milwaukee Ave #428 . Chicago, IL 60647. I also listened to Saul Williams’ cd — which is amazing.
cult of manhood
written by Jeff Ott

1. A religion or religious sect generally considered to be extremist or false, with its followers often living in an unconventional manner under the guidance of an authoritarian, charismatic leader. b. The followers of such a religion or sect.

2. A system or community of religious worship and ritual.

3. The formal means of expressing religious reverence; religious ceremony and ritual.

4. A usually nonscientific method or regimen claimed by its originator to have exclusive or exceptional power in curing a particular disease.

5.a. Obsessive, especially faddish, devotion to or veneration for a person, principle, or thing. b. The object of such devotion.

6. An exclusive group of persons sharing an esoteric, usually artistic or intellectual interest.

I recently read a book that got me thinking about what we call manhood. It’s called Refusing to be a Man, by John Stoltenberg. The basic premise is that what has come to be called manhood is not a naturally occurring phenomenon. I always thought that was the case but I never really thought about how the whole thing was put into place. I couldn’t really put it all together in my mind until I stumbled onto the idea of putting the concept of “manhood” into the context of a Cult.

When I was younger I was apprehended by a cult called the O.T.O. or Ordo Templi Orientis. They did the usual cult things to get kids into their cult. They gave out a lot of free pot and speed. They attracted guys with the allure of sex from their women, and visa versa. They presented the promise of being able to reveal the mysteries and secrets of magical power and so on.

Personally I was into the speed and the “free love”, so I hung out with them and they happened to move into the house where I was crashing at the time. I was getting more dope in my arm, and I never ended up joining them. None the less when I started to back away from them, one of them tried to stab me. Every time I try to question them there are more implied threats of violence/death, even today. The reason I said that I was glad I never joined is because the penalty for unjoining or resignation is supposed to be death.

So any way once I started thinking about my experience with them I realized that it was basically the same experience as the one I had with being socialized into my gender role.

This goes in two stages:

1. Lures and Encouragement

2. Threats of violence or actual violence for lack of compliance

When I was little they tried to lure me into the manhood thing by showing me the advantages it held for me, power over the women, being higher on the hierarchy ladder, etc. They told me lots of lies about why it made sense to not have my emotions. They told me I was good and/or rewarded me when I played with guns and trucks and dirt and sports equipment. There are probably tens of thousands of examples but if you are male I probably don’t need to tell you about them cuz you already know. The basic equation is that if you act in accordance with how they defined your gender you get praise and encouragement.

On the other hand if I didn’t go along with their brand of manhood a very different reaction would occur. It would usually be something like, “when your father gets home I’m going to tell him and he’s going to…” or I would get beaten with something out of the drawer of the kitchen or they would laugh at me in a way to intentionally shame me. If it wasn’t my parents and it was my peers or my brother, they would call you a sissy and a faggot and if you didn’t immediately disprove that you weren’t a sissy then they took that as permission to beat you when ever they felt like it.

So today things aren’t much different. Out in the world most of the “men” are still out there trying to prove their “manhood”. I’ve gotten pretty good at avoiding them, but sometimes it’s impossible. It’s always the same thing, they violate your space until you give some sort of reaction to acknowledge their action, then they do the physical intimidation thing to prove that they don’t have to abide by any sort of social conduct. The stupid thing is that these are the same asshole’s who are constantly verbalizing the American worker’s mantra “yes sir, no sir,

demands from women

These are a list of demands from women that arose from discussions at a recent statewide gender liberation conference held for the activist community. Men should read this list carefully, reflect on how items on it may correspond to our own sexist behavior, become aware of when we engage in those behaviors and work to eliminate them from our relationships with women in our everyday lives and in the activist community.

submitted by Chris Crass

- Give us more mad props
- Don’t sexually objectify us
- Don’t judge women
- Stay focused on sexism, not your gender role socialization
- Recognize women for all work that is done, even yours
- Share secretarial and clean-up work in activism
- Actively combat sexism
- Take reproductive responsibility
- Back up women when they’re being attacked
- Do housekeeping stuff
- Don’t be egotistical because you’re “better” than mainstream guys
- Respect women as activists
- Be more self-sufficient; nurture each other
- Don’t be defensive
- Take sexism on as your struggle
- Don’t act as if you can understand our oppression
- Take action against sexism in your own communities
- Remember that equality is the standard of which to judge yourself by, not the current state of things
- Don’t trivialize women’s issues
- Learn how to have one healthy relationship before having more
- Women don’t want to be represented and referred to as partners of men
- Don’t judge women for being “girly”
- Fight sexual violence in your community
- Realize that women don’t hate men
- Honor women for non-activist stuff they do
- Take part in intimate relationships without sex
- Don’t force women to be “nags”
- Realize that when you’re off traveling and train-hopping, women are the ones staying at home and building community
- Make childcare a priority
- Don’t force women into polyamory
- Even when dealing with your own gender role socialization, address sexism
- We want an immediate commitment to fighting sexism
- Write stuff down!
- Get over your ego
- Realize that sexism runs really deep and always plays itself out
- Don’t gawk at our body parts
- “Better” than mainstream guys
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- We want an immediate commitment to fighting sexism
- Write stuff down!
- Get over your ego
- Realize that sexism runs really deep and always plays itself out
- Don’t gawk at our body parts
- See us as activists; don’t focus on our sexuality
- Don’t make excuses for your sexism, deal with it
- Be proactive, not reactive
of ‘homophobia’, eg. “behaviours and beliefs that put down women, or gays & lesbians”.

3. When was there a time that I stood up against sexism/homophobia?

The facilitator gives several examples of his own, and then invites everyone else to share their stories. After this general sharing (eg. for 45 minutes or so), the facilitator introduces some ideas about what seems to work or not, and about what sorts of issues exist. Have general discussion of these, eg. of different sorts of strategies, and of issues such as taking risks. The facilitator should affirm that challenging sexism/homophobia is hard and scary.

The workshop could end with this discussion, or you could include other exercises such as the following:

* When was there a time that I colluded in sexism/homophobia?

Have a general sharing of stories. Why did we collude, what stopped us from speaking up or resisting?

These stories could be retold as fantasies the way they should have happened.

* Do a role-play of interrupting sexism.

For example, role-play a conversation in which one man begins making anti-gay or rape jokes, the other man must try to respond. Discuss what’s hard about challenging what’s going on. Which responses are useful and productive?

At the end of the workshop, the facilitator can make the point that we don’t have to be non-sexist in order to be anti-sexist (or non-homophobic to act against homophobia). And the facilitator can affirm the daily struggles we engage in.

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kiss your ass sir! oh, of course sir!”, at work. They are probably trying to prove their “manhood” all the time because they feel so powerless inside.

I find it most difficult to call people on their sexism when they are people inside the punk scene. I guess I still hold the fear instilled in me that if I question them they will take back their approval of me or that they will publicly question my “manhood” or that they will react violently.

There is this other part of manhood I noticed. It is the structure called hierarchy.

There were once kings. If the king abused, taxed and violated everyone equally no one would tolerate it, they would collectively kick his ass. However if every man was told that he was the king of his own family then he wouldn’t have to redirect the abuse back to the original abuser, he could just take it out on his wife and kids. This is the same way that manhood resembles a cult, there is someone at the top who receives all the benefits and privileges. This might sound a little weird but you know what they say.

A man’s home is his castle.

Furthermore it hasn’t been until lately that some women aren’t considered property. Also children are still legally considered property until they are eighteen.

So sometimes I get kind of discouraged because sometimes it seems punk is built on a foundation of “manhood” and not much else. It makes me wonder how much I want to invest (emotionally, physically, intellectually) into punk. It all seems like macho guys, servient worshiping women, stratified classes that necessarily include violence.

"All the time I was growing up, I knew that there was something really problematic in my relationship to manhood. Inside, deep inside, I never believed I was fully male-I never believed I was growing up enough of a man. I believed the same place out there, in other men, there was something that was genuine authentic all-American manhood-the real stuff-but I didn’t have it: not enough of it to convince me anyway, even if I managed to be fairly convincing to those around me. I felt like an impostor, like a fake. I agonized a lot about not feeling male enough, and I had no idea then how much I was not alone.

Then I read those words-those words that suggested to me for the first time that the notion of manhood is a cultural delusion, a baseless belief, a false front, a house of cards. It’s not true. The category I was trying so desperately to belong to, to be a member of in good standing-it doesn’t exist. Poof. Now you see it, now you don’t. Now you’re terrified your not really part of it; standing-it doesn’t exist. Poof.

But also to the other children in his community.

• A man should be emotionally, intellectually, physically and spiritually available to his partner.

I have been finding it increasingly helpful to try to define for myself what manhood could/should be:

- A man should be emotionally, intellectually, physically and spiritually available to his partner.

- A man should be emotionally, intellectually, physically and spiritually available to his children.

- A man should be emotionally, intellectually, physically and spiritually available to his community.

- A man should strive to nurture his family and his community.

- A man should be responsible for respecting his connection to the Earth and her inhabitants by not harvest-
I realized this, but the fact remains that it hit me. The subject was sexual violence, and our inability to discuss it with any fervor was strikingly ironic. No matter how "conscious" of the issue we claimed to be, our silence possessed a horrific echo. No matter how much we thought of ourselves as being part of the solution, that night's discussion group left me feeling like a large part of the problem.

Of course, being a self-righteous revolutionary, I just couldn't let that be. So I began assembling my thoughts and doing some reading and generally putting the issue of sexual violence to the forefront of my thought. The more effort I put into doing this, the clearer it came to be to me: I had never given it much thought. The lack of premeditation that I had (and I would think that the same is true for the rest of my male discussion group) was characteristic of the problem and how it continues to be a formidable one, if not its very backbone.

I came across a man named Jeff Hearn's research of what he refers to as "anti-sexist men's movement" and others who are attempting to change these trends both in their personal lives and in society itself, he finds that "...because many men prefer to keep their public and private lives separate, they regard their relationships with women as their private business. Consequentially, they are unwilling to challenge other men's violence against women."
The dichotomy we generally make between our "public and private lives" that this quote refers to is very apparent in our everyday lives, and isn't thought of as being a problem most of the time. Privacy is a naturally conducive to intimacy, it would seem. Some of us would even go as far as to say that the inverse is true as well. I would add that these notions seem true enough, but the problem persists. As our relationships with other calmly. Even start off by agreeing with them or sympathising with them. Try to understand why they may be saying the things they are. 

[iv) Provide the person with information about the oppression, expose the facts and undermine the myths.]

Challenging sexism is taking risks. We're being brave, questioning the norm, speaking out, going public with our beliefs and emotions. It's a scary stuff. We risk being seen as weird, attacked as gay or ostracised. And we fear being bashed.

There are times when it's more dangerous or difficult to interrupt another man's sexism. When he's a stranger, he's drunk, he's in a pub being loud, when there are lots of them. The danger of course is that you'll be bashed.

There are times when it's easier or more useful to do the challenging later. When I'm in conversation with a guy about something and he makes a sexist comment unrelated to the conversation, I might let it pass and deal with it later - "Just by the way, a little while ago you said something really weird -".

Challenging our male friends' sexism is always worth it, as ultimately it builds closeness and trust. If you continue to bite your lip when he's making AIDS or rape jokes, you're distant and tense, your friendship is blocked and awkward. And, if you do try to deal with the jokes or whatever in a fair and caring way and he won't listen, it is he who is being your friend anyway?

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Some sorts of responses to sexism never work. Accusatory and full-on moralistic responses don't work. Angry name-calling and heavy guilt-tripping will hardly allow the other person to thoughtfully consider their thoughts. They make him 'shut down', stop listening and turn away. I confess, when it comes to anti-sexism, sometimes I've behaved like Fred Nile on speed, but I'm getting better.

Sextism is all around us, and every day we make efforts at shifting it, undermining it. This is courageous work. Challenging sexism is a project we must affirm, explore and refine.

Non-sexism and anti-sexism

I/we do not have to be non-sexist in order to be anti-sexist. Men can not wait for that never-never day when we'll be Blake enough to speak.

To say to ourselves that we each must first become "non-sexist" is to confuse trying to appear non-sexist with actively working to eliminate sexism. Trying to appear not sexist makes us deny our sexism, and therefore exclude the possibility of change.

(Thank you to Elly Bulkin for these insights, originally applied to anti-racism. She is quoted by Terry Wolverton in "Unlearning Complicity, Remembering Resistance: White Women's Anti-Racism Education", in a book whose title I can't remember.)

Practical work on everyday anti-sexism

Men are whittling away at the patriarchy all the time. I didn't really know this until a workshop at the 1990 Men's Festival; I heard seven others tell stories from work and play, about the daily little things they do. We were warmed, happy, proud of these struggles and victories. I realised that many men have skills and strategies that we use every day, vital experiences of what works and what doesn't. But these are hidden.

In the 'men's movement' there is almost no discussion of the 'how' of undermining sexism. Why don't we apply our practical and productive male minds and hearts to the task? This absence is also evident in the masculinities literature - even in a book called Beyond patriarchy (although it's a good book!). It's only in the early works such as Men against sexism (1977) that there's exploration of the practicalities of challenging sexism and patriarchy.

It's easy to feel isolated - that I'm the only man trying the stop the sexism, no one else cares. This is also a sort of arrogance and cynicism - "men are all bastards" etc. But it's clearer to me now that at least some men are doing something.

Workshop plan

1. Introduce the workshop, do some sort of names exercise.
2. Give a brief and simple definition of 'sexism' and/or...
S EXISM IS ALL AROUND US, AND SOMETIMES WE TRY TO DO something about it. Sometimes this doesn’t work, sometimes it does.

CASE: It’s the middle of the city, Saturday night. David walks around the corner. There’s a man and woman, he’s pushing her, slapping her crying face. It’s fast, scary, violent.

David calls out, “Is everything alright?” “Fuck off!” the man shouts. Another grabs the woman’s arm. “Anyone taking up your time today? Do you need a taxi?” David stands there, heart pounding, sweating. The man and woman are quiet now, they walk off. In David’s mind, “Will he take her home and bash her some more, should I get the police?”

* Make some attempt to intervene when you come across men directly oppressing women. Call out, ask what’s going on, just be there. This can slow down what’s going on and give the man from noticed, and offer practical assistance to the woman. If she’s being bashed, get the police.

CASE: Andre is visiting a good friend, John. They’re catching up over morning coffee, chatting away. John’s talking. “Yeah, work is going really well, but my boss is a real cunt, he keeps giving me the boring jobs.” Andre notices the word, is a little uncomfortable, but nothing is said.

Later that day, John again, “My old Fiat has broken down again, it’s a cunt of a car!”

Andre responds, in a tone of amazement and curiosity, “What, are you taking up your time today? Do you need a taxi?”

* When your friends or colleagues are trivialising things, try to ask them what they mean, listen really well, and offer practical assistance to the woman. If she’s being bashed, get the police.

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CASE: Grahame is listening to the news with a friend, Steve. A woman has been raped, Steve comments “She asked for it”.

Grahame explodes, “That’s fucked! You can’t say women ‘ask’ to be raped, that’s sexist!” Steve - Look, if she goes to a party and has a drink, and then has sex, probably flirting away. She wouldn’t have minded.” Grahame, now louder, angrier, “No way! You’ve been sucked in by all the myths mate, what a load of shit”.

There’s a tense silence, Steve starts talking about something else.

* When people say things like this it can really ‘push our buttons’. We explode, leap down their throats with morality and accusation. It’s hard to resist this habit, this temptation. But this sort of response to our friends’ sexism rarely works. Grahame could have responded in some other ways;

“That’s my sister you’re talking about”. By this, Grahame could imply that this woman is just like my sister, a real person, or this person could be Steve’s or his sister, ie. making the rape and the woman much more real to Steve.

Grahame could have said “A good friend of mine was raped, it’s a terrible experience, no woman ever deserves to be raped or wants to be raped.” He could have asked “How can someone ask to be raped?”

* When your friends or colleagues are trivialising things like rape, or gay-bashing, or AIDS;

i) Make the oppression more real. Personalise it, describe the experiences of people you know or people you’ve read about and could know.

ii) Ask them what they mean, listen really well, and people fold inward, becoming more and more private, they become almost untouchable by public scrutiny. Sexual violence persists both in practice and in its apparatuses (in the form of those graphs, probably flipping away. She wouldn’t have minded.” Grahame, now louder, angrier, “No way! You’ve been sucked in by all the myths mate, what a load of shit”.

There’s a tense silence, Steve starts talking about something else.

* When people say things like this it can really ‘push our buttons’. We explode, leap down their throats with morality and accusation. It’s hard to resist this habit, this temptation. But this sort of response to our friends’ sexism rarely works. Grahame could have responded in some other ways;

“That’s my sister you’re talking about”. By this, Grahame could imply that this woman is just like my sister, a real person, or this person could be Steve’s or his sister, ie. making the rape and the woman much more real to Steve.

CASE: Andre is visiting a good friend, John. They’re catching up over morning coffee, chatting away. John’s talking. “Yeah, work is going really well, but my boss is a real cunt, he keeps giving me the boring jobs.” Andre notices the word, is a little uncomfortable, but nothing is said.

Later that day, John again, “My old Fiat has broken down again, it’s a cunt of a car!”

Andre responds, in a tone of amazement and curiosity, “What, are you taking up your time today? Do you need a taxi?”

* When your friends or colleagues are trivialising things like rape, or gay-bashing, or AIDS;

i) Make the oppression more real. Personalise it, describe the experiences of people you know or people you’ve read about and could know.

ii) Ask them what they mean, listen really well, and
that allocates the Earth to mankind. Just as we do, it is another extension of the same egoism by limiting what they are able to achieve in life. By perpetuating the myths of women being the weaker sex or unable to make their own minds within. By rationalizing abuse his own property and patriarchy allows us to take because it is something that can not be owned. This is a very humbling statement by western standards because it implies that mankind is part of the earth, and not some heaven-bound creature who is the exception to every natural rule. For these reasons its just as humbling when we realize that as men we cannot own women. This is all nice and uplifting when it hangs among the rafters of theory, but when it comes down it will deal a painful blow upon male heads. I’d like to think of it as a wake up call. ¶

You can almost hear the capitalist mentality we have been born into, but because of the capitalist lines, women were, and continue to be, covered under this concept. Our language is a testament to this because even if they are used in the most endearing way, “wanting” a woman implies a certain work that needs to be done to achieve a material gain. How can you enjoy an object and not feel the need to own it? You can almost hear the capitalist mentality we have been born into, but because of the capitalist lines, women were, and continue to be, covered under this concept. Our language is a testament to this because even if they are used in the most endearing way, “wanting” a woman implies a certain work that needs to be done to achieve a material gain. How can you enjoy an object and not feel the need to own it?

This goes beyond the physical as well. Not only do we own the female body, but the mind within. By perpetuating the myths of women being the weaker sex or unable to handle stress, we are able to own their fates by limiting what they are able to achieve in our world. Our possession of the female spirit is another extension of the same egomism that allocates the Earth to mankind. Just as we have seen, when mankind has positioned itself as the ideological ruler of the Earth, mankind has fewer qualms with abusing it. Of course, not all of mankind have traditionally believed that they “owned” the earth, just those who stepped up and beat it into submission. Readily available in various cultures is the concept that the earth is something that can not be owned. This is a very humbling statement by western standards because it implies that mankind is part of the earth, and not some heaven-bound creature who is the exception to every natural rule. For these reasons its just as humbling when we realize that as men we cannot own women.

As Susan Brownmiller deftly chronicles in her book “Against Our Will”, rape has a strong historical bond to our inability to conceive of women as the equal to us. Historically, our objectification of women goes beyond sexual desire and has resulted in treating women as property. As our concept of property evolved along proto-capitalistic lines, women were, and continue to be, covered under this concept. Our language is a testament to this because even if they are used in the most endearing way, “wanting” a woman implies a certain work that needs to be done to achieve a material gain. How can you enjoy an object and not feel the need to own it?

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I’m spending a lot of time right now trying to figure out how this assault affected me — trying to figure out how I’m explaining it to myself. When I get hit I acted like stone. I didn’t want those guys to see the whirlwind of emotions raging inside me. In the safety of my home I could feel my anger rise. It brought me back to a time when I was younger and being abused. All of the past assaults on my selfhood rose up in me and I felt a culmination of everything that ever took power over me. I remembered teachers holding me down and cutting my hair for being too feminine; white people using anti-Arab racism against me; people who had power in my life squelching the pain. I didn’t pretend to be John Wayne or Superman. I didn’t try to come across as a winner and I worked hard at not using my socialization to try and one up my attackers. This queer bashing incident has been a humbling and growth-filled experience for me. As a man involved with anti-sexist activism for 6 years now, I was able to challenge myself to be grounded. I used the skills I have learned from feminism to create a safe and healing space for myself; and to connect with myself holistically. I was learning to be real. I was learning to heal.

Fortunately, my attackers could not take my power because it is in my emotions — I was now expressing that. I was feeling a peak in my anger and a depth in my despair. For the next couple days I was connected to the ways in which the world seems unsafe. I was connected to the pain of being assaulted. I was healing.

As a boy I was taught to hold still and concentrate when being assailed. I was taught that the less power you give to others, the less they can take from you. I wasn’t taught, however, that power over others isn’t the only kind of power. And I wasn’t taught healthy ways to deal with the pain of the world.

If I were John Wayne or Superman, I could have won again. I could have pulled out my gun or super strength and used it to show that I have power over my attackers — in all situations.

As a mere man dealing with this experience, I held still while under attack. I didn’t validate my assailants by confirmation that what they were doing had any affect on me. I acted strongly from the lessons of my childhood. What was different this time, however, was what I did afterwards.

I let the experience sink into me and let my feelings come out. I didn’t follow my childhood lessons of squelching the pain. I didn’t pretend to be John Wayne or Superman. I didn’t try to come across as a winner and I worked hard at not using my socialization to try and one up my attackers.

There is a deep connection to the ways in which the world seems unsafe. I was connected to the pain of being assaulted. I was healing.

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I kept telling myself that I was glad it happened to me. From calculated complex analysis to fear, sadness and anger, I became a contradiction. I wanted to take care of myself and be a martyr at the same time. One that brings together the good and the bad. In the celebratory way. Rather, this is a tribute worthy of him, a tribally tied.

Here I’ll start with my late father. I want to pay tribute to my father. Y DAD WAS DIFFERENT. SURE, HE AND I PLAYED CATCH and wrestled, watched sports and enjoyed Star Wars together. But he also talked about feelings, cooked dinner regularly, and encouraged me to play with dolls and action figures alike. He didn’t even flinch when my mom began painting my toenails pink. Although I wouldn’t realize it until later, my father was the first pro-feminist man to touch my life. Growing up, I knew him as a man uncomfortable with ‘manhood.’ I saw him openly struggle with his own entrenched sexist and homophobic socialization. I watched him try to break down rigid gender roles, with mixed success, in his relationship with my mother. And in the process, I learned about patriarchy and heterosexism, not the least of which is their frustrating resilience.

These kinds of experiences are uncommon. Most of the men that I know don’t have much praise for their fathers, particularly when it comes to sexism. Indeed, more than a few define their anti-sexism in deliberate opposition to their dads. Even as that demonstrates, though, fathers are so often central to our formative experiences as men around gender and sexuality. Many of us have our first run-ins with patriarchy through the older men in our lives, frequently our dads. Consciously and unconsciously, lovingly and punitively, they teach and model ‘being male’ for children who are expected to identify as boys and unquestioningly accept prevailing notions of ‘masculinity.’

In order to understand this perpetuation of patriarchy, we have to look first to those who most embody it — men, fathers and sons. As well, we have to try to grasp how we came to wear and display its indelible imprint. And yet we must also locate the unlikely chinks in its formidable armor: the sites of refusal and struggle in which men, often hesitantly, have challenged patriarchal privilege. Thus I think it’s useful, perhaps crucial, to revisit our dads with both sincere compassion and unflinching criticism.

Here I’ll start with my late father. I want to pay tribute to him. And I don’t mean that in any kind of simple, celebratory way. Rather, this is a tribute worthy of him, one that brings together the good and the bad. In the real world, where domination and oppression intertwine with all aspects of our lives, there are no easy, uncomplicated sources of inspiration. But there are lessons. I look to my dad, then, for lessons about how to struggle against sexism and homophobia, as well as for lessons about the structures of patriarchy and heterosexism that lurked inside him and continue to lurk inside me. In his example, I find both inspiration and warning, inseparably tied.

Beginnings

My dad was born in Fort Worth, Texas in 1934, right in the middle of the Great Depression. His mother was young, seventeen-years-old at the time, and she had just married his father. Six months later they moved to California, where he would spend the rest of his childhood.

My dad grew up white, male, and working-class, an only child in a family constantly struggling to make ends meet. Along the way, he also inherited a healthy distrust of wealth and power, largely through his own troubled father, a self-identified socialist as well as an outright racist. Tellingly, his parents gave him the middle name "Eugene" for Eugene Debs, the turn-of-the-century radical labor leader. And though my dad came of age during the deeply conservative 1950s, he never lost his gut sense of egalitarian ethics. Decades later as I was becoming politicized, he would confess that, at heart, he was forever a socialist, convinced that the staggering inequalities of our society were fundamentally wrong. I suspect that this core ethic contributed to his acceptance of feminism.

Poverty and hard work framed my father’s young adulthood. High school offered very little, so he skinned through while also working as a gas station attendant. After graduating, he took a stint in the army, narrowly missing the Korean War. And finding nothing redeeming about military life, he then entered college, working his way through. During this time, he also entered his first marriage, which lasted just long enough to bear four children, my half-siblings. By the 1960s he was a pursuing a career with the State of California.

At first glance, my dad’s story looks deceptively like a ‘bootstraps’ tale of hard-won success and class mobility. But it isn’t; his opportunities and identity were
clearly shaped by his access to white, male, and straight privilege, in particular. Without those, he would have likely followed a markedly different path. To some extent, my father realized this. He wasn’t oblivious to the social movements of sixties and seventies or the openings that they created. Specifically, he would later recount, civil rights struggles forced him to clarify his values and consider his own position as a white person.

Likewise, the women’s movement, burgeoning as he met my feminist mother in the early seventies, challenged him to rethink his manhood and, to a limited degree, his sexuality.

Inspiration

My parents married in 1973, on the cusp of a major shift in gender roles and relations that would come to alter kind of everything. Their marriage, centered on household work, for instance, stretched far beyond occasionally bar-bequing hamburgers or fixing broken appliances. And contrary to TV sitcoms, these weren’t begrudging duties. Some of them simply couldn’t. Their fear of touching other men—their internalized homophobia—was too deep-rooted. But my father said that he had been able to hold hands the whole way. I saw how scared he had been, and I was proud of him.

Some years later, when I was in my early teens, my dad invited me to attend a local men’s conference with him. To this day, I still vividly remember the workshops. In the morning, we joined a discussion with lesbian activist and musician Libby Rodrick, who provided an historical overview of the feminist movement, putting out lessons for us men to grapple with. “You all,” she offered conclusively, “have a lot of work to do among yourselves.” In the afternoon, we participated in a lively multigenerational “dialogue between gay and straight men.” For me, still trying to come to terms with my feelings, to nursing my own internalized homophobia by rationalizing my assailants’ behavior and giving myself no space to heal.

Coincidentally, I’m reading a book written by Eliana Gil called “Outgrowing the pain: A book for and about adults abused as children.” It’s a great book that talks about many aspects of healing from abuse, and although its focus is on adults who were abused as children, the proposed methods of healing from traumatic incidents are universal.

Gil says, “It’s very important for you to understand that all types of abuse are important on an individual basis. The crucial aspect of the abuse is not what occurred, but what impact it had on you, how you explained it to yourself and others and how it affected your life.”

This advice has been crucial for me right now, because I’ve been spending a lot of time being attacked. What could I have done differently? What are the larger political and social contexts of queer bashing in...
I blame the social disease of male violence against women as the force that ultimately destroyed the great potential between Brad and me. Our spiritual, emotional, and physical connections simply were not powerful enough to overcome the impact of this violence. The destruction of our relationship is just one of the many ways this violence has fucked up our lives - mine as a woman, his as a man, and ours as a couple that cannot be. I consider a situation like this to be no less than tragic and call on all of us to use our power to prevent it from happening in anyone else's life.

I may have no control over an individual man's choice of how to deal with the impact of sexual violence, but I personally will not let this violence get in the way of my life. I will not let the violation sit in my body like tar twisting through and tainting all my sensibilities. I will not let the abuse sit like a gag in my throat, making me feel it is not there. I will not let the pain prevent me from experiencing joy. I will not be denied my story, my voice, my power, my sensuality, my sexuality...any part of my full and vibrant being.

I will see the violence. I will feel its impact. I will name it. I will grab it by the wrist, hold it up, and proclaim for all to hear, "This is the violence that has affected my life. Here it is. This is what it looks like, this is what it feels like. And this is what it impacts you as a man and me as a woman right here, right now. Deal with it."

This, I believe, is what healing is all about - not forgetting about the violence, not "getting over it," not shutting up about it, and not checking out of our bodies so we can follow socially-prescribed formulas for sex and look OK. I believe that true healing is about being, realness; it does not consist of ignoring the consequences, using all our sensation to propel us through the crazy shit into a new and beautiful reality - both on the personal and social levels.

I invite conscious men to join conscious women in the exciting and revolutionary process of transforming sexual violence into powerful love - by thinking with us rather than against us, by raising his consciousness about how violence against women impacts his life. And I do think that each man needs to do something about it - whether personally, socially, or politically, as a lover or as a friend.

Women of course need to do our healing too. Brad's ex-girlfriend purportedly did not do her part in dealing with her past trauma. My unhappiness with the way we have experienced. I would guess that many of us have not even considered the possibility of involving our lovers in a deep sexual healing process. So when a man runs to a more sexually accessible woman, he actually may run to a woman who also bares the scars of male violence but simply does not open them for see.

As long as men leave women who open the scars, women may not open them. As long as women are silent about the violence against us, men may run to them. And as long as men run to silent women, women may remain silent. None of this cycle will help heal the violence. So as a general rule, I try to avoid women who need to talk more, and men need to stay more.

This issue of course touches on our social conceptualization of sexual relationships: Do we want to be with the person we want, or do we want the person who wants us? If we want the sex, what kind of sex do we want and expect? Do we hold the act of sex as more important than the person we are with?

As powerful as it can be when a man goes through sexual healing with a woman, I do not think it is healthy for him to stick around if he truly does not want to. If his heart is not in it, it will not do anyone any good. I do think, nonetheless, that the moment, experiencing, using all our sensation to propel us through the crazy shit into a new and beautiful reality - both on the personal and social levels.

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Lessons
My father’s story has a natural conclusion: on a wintry day in December of 1999, he collapsed and died, stunned my whole family. But for me, this was less an end than a startling beginning. Since that fateful day, I’ve come to reflect on my dad in all of his flesh-and-blood complexity, strengthening my connection with him while also creating my own sense of closure and farewell. The process is tricky, for he was full of pointed contradictions: a pro-feminist who angrily vented upon my mother, a gender role skeptic who nonetheless reinforced gender boundaries, an anti-sexist who failed to confront some of his most sexist patterns, a sensitive, reflective man who fled from his own feelings, long using alcohol to aid his flight. Only in recognizing these can I piece him together.

On one hand, then, I acknowledge his successes and the inspirational role he has played in my life. Simply put, I would not be the person that I am today without him. He helped equip me with some essential reflective tools for challenging systems of oppression. He embodied a (not entirely) different way of ‘being a man.’ And he taught me basic things: to confront my own homophobia, to contribute equally in household responsibilities, to never forget how to cry. In this sense, I carry him with me.

On the other hand, I acknowledge my dad’s failings. I love him, and the most sincere way I know of expressing my love (particularly in his absence) is by learning from his mistakes and accepting the responsibility of not repeating them. As a (mostly) straight man, the son of my father, I too have the capacity to dwell in my rage and entitlement, to sink myself into emotional avoidance and isolated withdrawal, to rely exclusively on the women in my life for my emotional care-taking. I too can choose to ignore my privilege. To forget any of this would be the greatest disrespect to my dad. In this sense as well, I carry him with me.

Somewhat optimistically, bell hooks recently noted, “we have for the first time a generation of men coming to adulthood who were not born into a world automatically submerged with sexist socialization that says that women are the intellectual or work equals of men.” I am of this generation of men. But for all the tremendous social shifts and major feminist successes, I, like others, haven’t wholly escaped sexist or heterosexist socialization. This struggle will be a long one. I’m fortunate, though, because my father has left me with some inspiring tools and difficult lessons to help me along the way.

Thanks dad.

forgiving our fathers
a poem by Dick Lourie

[taken from the movie "Smoke Signals"]

How do we forgive our fathers?
Maybe in a dream.

Do we forgive our fathers for leaving us too often or forever when we were little?

Maybe for scarifying us with unexpected rage
Or making us nervous because there never seemed to be any rage there at all.

Do we forgive our fathers for marrying or not marrying our mothers?

For divorcing or not divorcing our mothers?

And shall we forgive them for their excesses of warmth or coldness?

Shall we forgive them for pushing or leaning, for shutting doors, for speaking through walls, or never speaking, or never being silent?

Do we forgive our fathers in our age or in theirs
Or in their deaths, saying it to them or not saying it?

If we forgive our fathers, what is left?

I feel that every time a man runs away to a more sexually accessible woman, he encourages the woman he leaves to be silent about her pain or her needs the next time around. He adds to the pressure on her to give in, give up, and shut up about
The staggering levels of male violence in this society, Brad was decidedly non-feminist, clearly priding himself that he bolt from it or not. “good men” like him want to run: The fallout was, still could live in the illusion it is not as bad as “the femi -
lence, so the impact would not be in his face; so he
vidual women’s struggles. To the contrary, he made it
reviewed at school, a close male friend of his was sexually abused by
years had been raped before getting involved with him. His serious girlfriend before her was bulimic. In high
sexual abuse drove her to alcoholism. Her alcoholism in
Each of these experiences of oppression had painful consequences for Brad’s life: His sister was sexually abused by
a male teacher who also made advances at Brad.
Of sexist oppression. His sister was sexually abused by
in high school, a close male friend of his was sexually abused by a
male teacher who also made advances at Brad.
minists” make it seem. Therefore, Brad decried anything that made him

Through these experiences, Brad learned to feel awful about himself. Sexually abused, Brad was more men resist dealing with it, the worse they make it.
A few days after our last night together, I took the risk of writing Brad a long letter in which I communicated to him everything I had wanted to say about my sexual his-
tory and choices and about where I was emotionally and sexually with him. I communicated that to the contrary of being afraid of him or his penis, I felt uniquely safe, comfortable, and free in his proximity. I felt safe with this sexual intimacy that she frequently would not want Brad to touch her at all. And Brad’s male friend became seriously messed up and involved with drugs after his experience with the teacher. As a result, Brad lost a good friend.

So essentially what Brad objected to was the fact that I saw the penis as frequently being used as a

It was maddening irony.
I feel it is no less that the basic responsibility of each
man in this society to find out the facts about male vio-
ience against women and to learn what men can do to help heal it - whether by becoming activists or simply not getting in the way of people who are. This violence is his problem. Women blame the men more for not getting involved and not wanting to help heal it - whether by becoming activists or simply not getting in the way of people who are. This violence is his problem.

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The mantra was repeated when I appeared the next day, baffled by those two words that had a magical power

I was dumbstruck by the whole thing and completely

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and while the thought of broaching the subject of being called really negative names wasn’t comforting, I had to know. I needed to understand what my classmates thought I was.

We’d gone to a regular spot to pick lady slippers. There was an old dirt road that ran along the road trail track near the reservoir. On one side was a narrow forest of scrub pines, perfect territory for lady slippers. On the other side was the railroad track bounded by ascrub area cut through the forest to facilitate high power lines. The sun, even in April, beat down on the roughly open space with a certain intensity. We had gathered a bunch of flowers in the shade of the pines. I was holding them in my hand, half-enchanted by that inimitable woodsy perfume. We climbed into the sun-heated truck and headed for home. I had avoided asking the question for as long as I could. I knew I had but a few minutes on this dirt road before we hit the paved street and the last stretch to the house.

Scared out of my mind but desperate to know the worst I screamed “Dad?”

“What?” he snorted in his usual tone, a mixture of disdain, anger and ennui.

“Uuuhh, what’s a fucking faggot?”

I squeaked “Dad?”

“Jesus Christ!” he screamed, hovering over me like a huge bear with arms raised as if to grab me and crush this foreign faggot before him. His eyes were bulging and the anger vein that popped out of his forehead was visibly throbbing. “Faggots are spawn of the devil!” he screeched, gasping for enough breath to bellow his fear. “They’re men who love other men! Or boys who love each other in the woods! Only the deepest pits in hell are reserved for them! And that’s where they belong! They’re sinners and law breakers and they go to jail when they’re caught.”

But he knew only one response.

When we arrived my mother wanted to know what happened. “Jesus Christ!” he screamed, hovering over me like a huge bear with arms raised as if to grab me and crush this foreign faggot before him. His eyes were bulging and the anger vein that popped out of his forehead was visibly throbbing. “Faggots are spawn of the devil!” he screeched, gasping for enough breath to bellow his fear. “They’re men who love other men! Or boys who love each other in the woods! Only the deepest pits in hell are reserved for them! And that’s where they belong! They’re sinners and law breakers and they go to jail when they’re caught.”

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But he knew only one response.

“When” he snorted in his usual tone, a mixture of disdain, anger and ennui.

“You’d better not let me hear anyone call you a faggot,” he finally said. “I’ll kill ‘em and you should kill ‘em too.”

“And, you better not BE a faggot because every- body hates faggots and total hate faggots too!”

He restarted the truck and we proceeded home in taut silence punctuated with an occasionally muttered “Jesus Christ!” from him and an infrequent sob from me.

When we arrived my mother wanted to know what happened to my forehead. My father said, tersely, “I had to slam on the breaks and he hit the windshield. He’ll be ok.”

His words weren’t a lie and I wasn’t about to add any detail so the subject was dropped. My tears were freely flowing but I still held it in. I got no fur- ther attention as the women put the meal on the table. My father remained in a horrible frame of mind, though, and was less communicative than usual at the family dinner, scowling at anyone who addressed him and leaving me from behind, scooped me up around my knees in the fetal position, and held me tightly in his strong arms. I felt so loved! I giggled with the delight of a baby.

Brad and I moved quickly and within two weeks reached a place where our sexual comfort levels were imbal- anced. Quite simply, I wanted to take my time in get- ting to know his body. I wanted to relish in our sex one step at a time, especially in doing that which was new or rare for me - whether on the physical or emotional levels. I wanted Brad to know about my sexual history because I felt it was important that we really could be together. And, I wanted Brad to know my comfort levels with his body, so he could make informed choices about how sexual he wanted to be with me at any given moment.

Our sexual connection excelled past the speed of our emotional development, so for a slew of complicated reasons, I felt unable to tell Brad what I really wanted to know about my sexual history, though, so that we really could be together. And, I wanted Brad to know my comfort levels with his body, so he could make informed choices about how sexual he wanted to be with me at any given moment.

I was impressed deeply by Rinat’s courage to put out her needs and by Eric’s commitment to having only emo- tionally safe sex with him. With this model of a caring sexual relationship, I felt a new sense not only of hope, but of entitlement - that I had the right to expect this kind of treatment and nothing less.

Rinat’s behavior during our sexual intimacy reinforced this vision of the possible. I used the same codes as Rinat, tailoring them to suit my own needs, and I added a few codes of my own: When I proclaimed Standing Station Identification Break! Ari and I paused from being sexual; and Ari told me his name and said to me, “I am not your father.” He also added additional tid- bits of information about himself that made me laugh. These “station identification breaks” were full of love and humor, a part of the way we connected and were goofy with each other. They themselves became a part of our intimacy.

Ari also intuitively knew what to do, before I even knew what I needed. I remember the first time I said “scared” to him while we were together. He immediately stopped being sexual with me. Gently and swiftly, he spooned me from behind, scooped me up around my knees in the
A while back, I had a beautiful experience getting of animosity and fear to this male organ. Another. When a man I dated did not give me the towards penises. One experience has reinforced women - I have not had the friendliest feelings often have been instruments of violence against - specifically, as a result of the fact that penises Based on the male violence in my life and in society - particularly to or deliberately avoiding the real reason for my failure was so upset with the situation of my bad grades she put me into the Catholic schools in the nearby city. It took me two hours each way to get to and from school, and there was little time for socialization with any of the boys. I finally threw his hands up in despair and said he'd better call my father to come get me. He's disrupting the rest of the boys," he said to my father with a knowing look and an affected limp wrist. "You catch my mean¬ing?" My father got the message and I was dragged from my father, my classmates were right to insist that I join the Boy Scouts, hoping it would drive me further and further into my closet. I remem¬ber one incident that must have occurred in 1956. My parents had insisted that I join the Boy Scouts, hoping it would help change me into a real boy. The local scout troop held its meetings in the basement of the Catholic Church that my family attended, across the street from our house. I was in the meeting being extremely inef¬fective at tying knots and the other boys were calling me a "fag." A man who thought about this issue and had authoritatively assured me that even God hated me because of my feelings that until the previous Thursday I hadn't known were so awful! What kind of evil lived inside me that I could hate this part of me? I actually even had the time of his life instead of whatever way was good!" What was wrong with this God I'd been taught was so loving. If he wanted people like me in hell why did he make us? And worse, I was going to have to make my mother believe that I hated her. How could I do that? How could I walk into that little booth and tell the priest that I was a fucking faggot? What a quandary!

My grandfather came to my bed and tried to find out what was wrong. Of course, I couldn't tell him anymore. "Another. "Not tough touch, me," I thought, as I pulled away from his touch. "You might call me that," he said in a low voice, "but I was never physi¬cally so lacerated that his efforts only increased the suf¬fering. And this was just the beginning. I believe that my father shared his fears with my mother that night when we were alone in the dark and he was on the only one on the floor, the only one who could assure me that I was really OK and wasn't/couldn't be a fucking faggot but she couldn't let on that she knew anything for sure and seemed pretty obviously repulsed at the thought that one of her children was really savor of Satan.

This event was the one that built my homosexual closet with a thick, solid door and a huge bolt lock. At first my parents controlled the lock and they kept it bolted down as hard as they could. My father started calling me a sissy which was followed by similar remarks from my mother and sisters. That was mild compared to the con¬tinuing taunts from my classmates so it was enough to reinforce the wisdom of keeping that closet door shut and bolted. Although since I was going to hell anyway, what did it really matter. I guessed this was the way God prepared us evil ones for our eternal damnation. Constant harassment everywhere, constant and it drove me further and further into my closet. I remem¬ber one incident that must have occurred in 1956. My parents had insisted that I join the Boy Scouts, hoping it would help change me into a real boy. The local troop held its meetings in the basement of the Catholic Church that my family attended, across the street from our house. I was in the meeting being extremely inef¬fective at tying knots and the other boys were calling me a "fag." A man who thought about this issue and had authoritatively assured me that even God hated me because of my feelings that until the previous Thursday I hadn't known were so awful! What kind of evil lived inside me that I could hate this part of me? I actually even had the time of his life instead of whatever way was good!" What was wrong with this God I'd been taught was so loving. If he wanted people like me in hell why did he make us? And worse, I was going to have to make my mother believe that I hated her. How could I do that? How could I walk into that little booth and tell the priest that I was a fucking faggot? What a quandary!

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It's the day before I go to print with this zine and I am looking at it, thinking I should explain a thing or two. hence these thoughts.

1. I began this project with the intent of talking about men’s roles in ending sexism. I wanted to give the space for people of all genders to talk about their experiences with masculinity and sexism. I hoped that the two of those goals would blend together nicely here.

Years ago, when I was unaware of the possibility that gender didn’t have to exist in the two boxes known as man/boy and woman/girl, I believed strongly in talking about sexism as men perpetuating sexism and women receiving sexism. I lived in a world where masculinity and femininity and many other gender ideas exist (androgyne, gender queer and the countless unnamed gender expressions). I believe that sexism needs to be defined to understand the way that patriarchy is manifested upon all the gender variant expressions of life.

In a world that doesn’t see gender expression beyond man/boy and woman/girl, this is a zine for men against sexism. For the world that has gone beyond that limiting gender duality, this zine is more about masculinity and sexism and how the two intersect and all of our responsibility to interrupt sexism in its many forms.

2. The group Men Stopping Violence defines sexism as ‘gender prejudice plus power.’ In their book Making the Peace, Paul Kivel and Allan Creighton define sexism as ‘systematic exploitation, mistreatment, and abuse of women by men.’ I wanted to put both of these definitions here because I think they aren’t even true, even though I don’t completely agree with either of them.

My partner Billie free-defined sexism as ‘the material manifestation of the philosophy of patriarchy.’ I like this one because it’s broader; it includes both of the other definitions; takes under its wings things such as gender differences; and calls out patriarchy as a philosophy that is currently very powerful but still just a philosophy. It’s broader, it’s broader, it’s broader.

I believe that sexism is tied tightly with all other oppressions. bell hooks describes it as “emasculating and feminizing other people.”

3. When thinking about what bell hooks calls the “white supremacist capitalist [rationalist] patriarchy,” I want to make sure to write specifically about the intersection of all oppression. I am an Arab-American woman, I deal with racism constantly in my life and cannot separate this from my anti-sexist work. oppression affects me in specific ways as an Arab man in the US. anyone who denies this fact is kidding themselves. just as angela davis deconstructed “the myth of the black male rapist” in her book Women, Race and Class, we need to make dismantling oppressive versions of masculinity a focus of anti-sexist work. I am not going to ignore the societal vilification I experience constantly and consistently because of my race, culture and gender. and I am not going to ignore my self chosen identities as genderQueer, polyamorous and pansexual. people are not tidy packages. people’s struggles for liberation, autonomy and self-determination around us. and this list goes on and on.

I believe that it is my responsibility to counteract patriarchy and to dismantle it. I believe that it is my responsibility to work toward the end of sexism.

4. With all this in mind, I sit at my computer wondering if this zine will be inclusive enough. will people understand this zine? will it inspire you to create another look into masculinity? will it give you perspectives into ending sexism. will it give you the strength to continue?

When will it ever end? ¶

This excerpt was written by Paul Kivel in his book, Men’s Work: How to Stop the Violence That Tears Our Lives Apart.
**The Panzer Rumbled Forward Relentlessly. Frozen snow crushed and fallen branches snapped as the death machine rolled on. Sgt. Ernie Rock huffed frosty clouds as he squinted at the German tank. He bit down on the butt of his stogie muttering, “Easy Company is a sittin’ duck if I don’t stop dat Kraut joy machine.”**

Rock peered around at his three dead comrades and the 14 German soldiers that they had slain minutes before. He was the only survivor. “Ya dogfaces,” Rock growled in a mixture of admiration and disgust, “Just like ya to die on me before da job is done.” The burly sergeant with four days of scraggly beard picked up the bazooka from Smitty 10 feet away. “Dis oughta say hello to da Furhrer.” But the firing mechanism was hopelessly jammed. A search of the bodies turned up no grenades and only one clip of ammo for his M-1 rifle. The Panzer was now 40 yards away and the clanking of metal was growing louder.

Drawing himself to his full height and biting his stogie Rock broke into a trot toward the steel behemoth. Twenty yards away Rock opened fire with a blood curdling shout. “Die ya yellow bellies!” From somewhere in the tank a machine gun fired back. Clank-clankety-clank. Sarge was quickly out of ammunition. With 7mm machine gun rounds biting trees and throwing snow all around he dove behind a log. In a flash he snapped his bayonet into place. The thought jumped through the muscular man’s mind that no one had ever been so foolish as to attack a tank with a bayonet. “OK, so I’m da first. I aint gonna let ‘em get to Easy Company.”

Sgt. Ernie Rock, Charlie Company, 4th Platoon, zigged and zagged, slowed and dodged bullets as he ran at the Panzer. “Eat death Nazi scum!” From somewhere in the tank a machine gun fired back. Clank-clankety-clank. Sarge was quickly out of ammunition. With 7mm machine gun rounds biting trees and throwing snow all around he dove behind a log. In a flash he snapped his bayonet into place. The thought jumped through the muscular man’s mind that no one had ever been so foolish as to attack a tank with a bayonet. “OK, so I’m da first. I aint gonna let ‘em get to Easy Company.”

Sgt. Ernie Rock, Charlie Company, 4th Platoon, zigged and zagged, slowed and dodged bullets as he ran at the Panzer. “Eat death Nazi scum!” With one final burst Rock hurled up onto the flank of the iron war wagon. Fanatically, he hacked and jabbed away. Argh! Grunt! Then a spark! A fire! Kabloom!!

Ten minutes later that seemed like ten hours the crusty sarge came to. The Panzer belched great clouds of black smoke. Easy Company was safe...for now. Rock wiped blood from his cheek and slowly lifted himself to his feet. He grinned, sighed, and reached for his helmet.

**Johnny saw the world with new eyes.**

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**Through Capitalism,**

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**why i joined the navy**

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**written by Tony Switzer**

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**Wow! My ten year old fingers folded the comic book closed. What a man, I thought.**

I saw a movie which portrayed heroics similar to this comic book story. To Hell and Back was a dramatization of the battlefield exploits of Audie Murphy. In World War II he was the most decorated soldier among US fighting forces. In the movie Murphy is given the Congressional Medal of Honor. I cried. This was a man, a brave man, a man I wanted to be like. To me a man worked hard, with his hands (that’s what my dad did). He carried a lunch bucket. He had a wife and a couple of kids. But before starting a work life. A man was in the military, “the service”. Some males didn’t do their hitch. They were men, I guess, but it wasn’t the same. Those guys came up short somehow.

As a man how could you know what the world was about if you had never been through boot camp? Never done KP? The experience of living in the barracks seemed essential to healthy adult male functioning. These were the assumptions that paced my life into early adulthood. They were largely not learned as direct lessons, but absorbed as part of my blue collar working class family life. Even though less than one in five men in our country has been in the military I contend that all men in our society have been militarized by our cultural conditioning.

I am eager to debate this point, but that will e to wait for later. This is a subjective account of one man’s path into the military. I offer it as a personal recollection, a reconstruction of the influences on my life that led to my enlistment in the Navy in 1968. My experiences certainly aren’t universal, but I have talked with enough veterans and other men to know that they are shared by many others.

I envision three related purposes for writing this down. First, I would have men consider and compare their own experiences to mine. Do you recognize any of this? Second, I hope to convey to female readers unseen glimpses of what it is like to grow up male in our society. Third, and most importantly to me, I hope to embolden other veterans to share their stories. Too many of us have hidden away that part of our lives for...
fear that: 1) we would be labeled violent, abnormal, sadistic, or worse; 2) we would be ignored, scorned or laughed at; or, 3) we would have to deal with our own unpleasant, sometimes traumatic memoirs.

I would like to bring the reader to think about the ways we raise young males, in our families, and in our culture as a whole. Do our values and childrearing practices promote adult males who will be sensitive to the needs of others? Can we hope for a future of peace if we continue to train warriors? Is this the best we can do?

It would be tidy if I could pinpoint one incident from my early youth that clearly initiated my conditioning toward being a sailor. Such is not the case, however. Instead, I have what seems to me rather conventional memories of toy soldiers, playing cowboys and Indians and playing “war”.

It seems so commonplace to me, but I’m sure I need to explain toy soldiers. Beginning at the age of four or five I spent many hours with my plastic figurines of combat infantrymen. They were only two inches tall and fixed in some posture of attack. Most were a green or green-brown, not quite khaki. Some stood firing rifles while others fired from a sprawled or kneeling position. There was a bazooka man and several machine gunners. But my personal favorite was always the guy throwing a grenade. He wore a determined grimace as he prepared to heave the three pound hunk of steel.

Your parents could purchase these “men” at any dime store in a sack containing some size of fighting unit. The smallest sack was a platoon, then a company followed by a battalion, regiment, division, and finally, an army. Military maneuvers commenced with some agreed or dictated plan of action. For instance, “OK, you guys walk down the path over by Tommy’s house. We’ll ambush you over there somewhere, OK?”

It was scripted or silently understood that being on the bad guys team meant that your side would be defeated. You might be devious Japanese fighters who just blew up a Japanese warplane with a bazooka or a bazooka hero who would be expected to suffer quite a bit in imaginary death. The Indian bad guys routinely died agonizingly as they were regarded as evil and uncivilized. These simulations of combat taught me not only the ways of violence and aggression, but also laid in unhealthy racial stereotypes.

Also starting very early as a young person I was influenced heavily by television and movies. The TV documents were real. The军报 combat footage from WWII of naval battles, amphibious assaults (hitting the beach), and aerial bombing. The hours I spent fantasizing these battles! I thought about the cellular bodies of the army man that would be expected to suffer quite a bit in imaginary death. The Indian bad guys routinely died agonizingly as they were regarded as evil and uncivilized. These simulations of combat taught me not only the ways of violence and aggression, but also laid in unhealthy racial stereotypes.

Two or more could play “soldiers”, but I spent most of my time alone. Playing solitaire I always picked one man to be me. Play proceeded by sheer imagination and subjectively judged line-of-sight shots at the enemy. If someone was hit you tipped him over or dramatically gave him a sharp but controlled thump with the index finger.

The indispensable element of playing soldiers as well as the role-played war and cowboys and Indians was the sound effects. The explosion of a mortar shell, the ubiquitous adult rifle bullets zinging past, the guttural uh-uh-uh of the machine gun brought the battle to life. Without sound effects these childhood games would be drab and boring; it’s like the difference between theory and practice.

Cowboys and Indians and war (which for me meant reenactment of WWII combat) were choreographed dramas acted out by 2-15 boys. Girls were seldom allowed. Usually, sides were chosen and good guys and bad guys designated. Military maneuvers commenced with some agreed or dictated plan of action. For instance, “OK, you guys walk down the path over by Tommy’s house. We’ll ambush you over there somewhere, OK?”

I started first grade.

Thus, was I indoctrinated in military organization before I had started first grade. A battle could be concocted anywhere. You just dump the bag over and assemble the little fighters. Sometimes you would pit them against one another, but usually I played alone. I considered how my hometown might look after being subjected to attack by military forces.

The hours I spent fantasizing these battles! I thought about the cellular bodies of the army man that would be expected to suffer quite a bit in imaginary death. The Indian bad guys routinely died agonizingly as they were regarded as evil and uncivilized. These simulations of combat taught me not only the ways of violence and aggression, but also laid in unhealthy racial stereotypes.

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I know a lot of people might read this and think I am just some dumb working-class simpleton because I don’t use fancy language to talk about things, but the fact is that you don’t have to have a college degree to know that trying to control people using gender, sex, racism, intellectualism, money or any other means goes against our nature. I know that we did everything we could to deal with what I was born into (abuse) and now I am a man sharing a life with lots of other people in this body. I am angry about why I’m here and I’m speaking out to heal and make people aware so this doesn’t happen to any more kids. thanks.
momma, u were the first butch i ever loved. many have come n gone since, but none can compare ta yr power, yr strength, yr ability ta command a room, walk within it n own it. u were always at the center of my thinking, the white elephant of my consciousness. It is around u i orbit-ed, a satellite ta yr sun.

i am the woman u never could b. look at this hair, these nails, this skin, these teeth. this is what money can buy. this is what money did buy. yr money. yr life. i attract men like honey ta yr vine-gar. i am the one stung by bees, not u. but it is not their mark i bear, but yrs.

i remember the nights i spent at yr feet, clippers in hand, emery board, bottle of jergens, rub-bering the life back into yr toes, the fallen arches, the horny heels. it has always been this way with me: me at the feet of women, watching the crumbs that fall ta the floor, lifting them up ta my mouth, giving thanks n praise, while other boychildren ran about me: the girls, they too had their rings, ringlets, how i hated yr hair, the smell of chemicals, the beauty shops we went ta; how i lies, between yr legs? where their nest lies, where the rest, yr nest, lies. where i come from is traversing yr terrain, thin-legged spiders crawling up towards yr crotch. is that where their nest way. hairs unbraided, drifted down, side ta side motion, swaying, me, listening for clues.

out the car window i saw the jeep crashing along across fields, through ravines, dodging the bullets of hundreds of angry enemy rifles. Grenades exploded, fire leapt around me as i raced through pastoral scenes turned to hell by war. i had a pistol and a sub-machine gun and a limitless supply of ammunition (just like in the movies). But my task was daunting; I was driving; there was little time to shoot. i wore a flak jacket, a vest filled with lead sheets to stop bullets or shrapnel. Sometimes as dad drove the car down highway i felt the weight of my countryman. He whipped the spitting death rod back and forth as he silenced the lousy, stinkin’ invaders front and back. We were a team. From his standing position he could see perils ahead—“Gully! Swerve right!”—and i could slow down abruptly or whip the wheel such that some sniper’s bullet wouldn’t hit my gunner.

when i set out on this suicide mission there was a gun-ner with me. A .38 caliber machine gun mounted atop a four foot iron pole was planted behind the passenger seat. The gunner stood in the back mowing down enemy soldiers. He whispered the spitting death rod back and forth as he silenced the lousy, stinkin’ invaders front and back. We were a team. From his standing position he could see perils ahead—“Gully! Swerve right!”—and i could slow down abruptly or whip the wheel such that some sniper’s bullet wouldn’t hit my gunner.

mama, i now know all that i ever needed ta know: i know that when u die, i will become u.

written by Ahimsa Timoteo Bodhrán

for Vincent Villanueva & Yosephio V. Lewis
[previously printed in the Brooklyn Review]
meaning to comprehend. Why would an eight year old boy daydream about war, killing, destruction, and his own death? This is not normal. Such imaginary scenarios aren’t rational or sensible for a person of any age. However, it may be close to “normal” in that most men I have asked report similar fantasies of violence, heroism, combat, and death.

While planning our wedding my ex-wife, Rebecca, confronted me about my seeming indifference to the detailed plans she had conceived. In exasperation she asked, “What did you think your wedding would be like when you were growing up?” “I don’t know, never gave it a thought,” I replied. She was astounded. I knew marriage was always held out before girls and young women as an event of paramount importance. But, Rebecca’s question alerted me to how much time and energy females spend in dreaming of wedding gowns, floral arrangements, and marital bliss. For us men and boys it is that central to our image of ourselves and it is that central to being able to fulfill our societally designated roles of protector and provider.

Thus, the meaning of my “jeep fantasy” was that by the age of eight (and probably before that) I had internalized images of the male as a soldier. Since men were soldiers, if I wanted to be a man, I too must be a soldier.

My only sibling, David, is three years younger than me. We were rivals for the scant attention available at our house so what we can both remember is competition from very early.

The refrain of our parents was “stop fighting!” “quit picking at your brother”, “leave him alone”. I suppose it was necessary in lieu of being able to give us the quality and quantity of attention that any child needs. But, I feel that dad pushed us along the path toward mutual resentment. He bought us boxing gloves.

Fourth grade was a tough year for me. We dragged our trailer house across seven states that year. I started the school year in South Dakota, did several months in Utah. It was the year that my eyes went bad and I had to get glasses. It was tough on David, too as he had a lingering sickness which eluded diagnosis. Moves are a major stressor; mom and dad surely had it hard also.

If you are my age or older you might remember the Gillette Fight of the Week on TV, Friday nights, 8p.m. Dad watched “the fights” as everyone called them. So did I because I wanted to spend time with my daddy. Besides, if he liked the fights it must be something I should be worthy of emulating. He talked about left hooks, jabs, combinations, uppercuts. This was didactic; later I received demonstration and instruction. I listened carefully asking some questions, mostly curious, but wallowing people, and worse yet, being wallowed, did not appeal to me.

During the hot summer of ’58 I witnessed Benny “Kid” Perret being mauled by his opponent (whose name I almost remember) until he was limp and senseless. The Hispanic man was out on his feet trapped against the ropes hands at his sides as the other man energetically battered away. Not outraged, but naively curious I expected the fight to be stopped. Couldn’t they see that this guy had had enough? I asked dad about it. He said something like, “the fight goes on unless your man is on the canvass.”

Kid Perret died the next day never having regained consciousness. I was shocked and a little sad. I perceived something about being male from this episode—that it was dangerous, that men play for keeps, and that you better not be vulnerable because your opponent will keep attacking.

Someday around that time mom and dad started joking about getting boxing gloves so David and I could really settle our differences. It sounded ominous to me much like the parental threat “if you don’t stop crying I’ll give you something to cry about!” Mostly though it was a joke in the family about sibling rivalry.

But, on December 25 the joke became real. David and I eagerly tore into the gift wrapping around a medium-sized box that was fairly light. The tag said Santa had brought this one for both of us. My excited Christmas grin turned to a sick feeling in the stomach when we discovered two pair of boxing gloves. Mom wore a patronizing smile, but sounded vengeful and scolding telling us, “Now we will see how tough you two are.” Dad looked happy and seemed curious that we weren’t appreciative of the gift.

Somehow David and I escaped lacing up the gloves right there amidst the festive wrapping paper. It was later, perhaps after dinner, that dad wanted to give us a lesson in the “manly art of self-defense”. We were both scared. Neither of us wanted to put on the gloves. Dad insisted as he herded us to our bedroom at the back of
What amazes me today is how I didn’t question dad’s assumptions about obligation. His attitude was “Uncle Sam is in a scrap with the communists over there”. The rest was implied. Of course, young men had to go fight. He did in ’42 and it was right. So I, too, would have to go because it was right. Men went to war when their country needed them. Those anti-war protesters were disgraceful, they were cowards, wimps, and chickens. I thought all they were non-men as revealed by the most virulent names hurled at them—“pussy”, girl”, “queer”, “faggot”, and “fairy”. To reject dad’s assumptions about military obligation would have been to cast myself with anti-war lepers.

On February 25, 1968, I enlisted in the United States Navy. I reported for my physical on a crisp Monday morning in Spokane, Washington. As I and several other scared, blustering teenagers approached the induction center we confronted the enemy. No, not the Viet Cong. Worse. Several anti-war protesters were handing out leaflets to passersby.

Immediately I felt panicked, intimidated. I had only seen these characters on the evening news. It was even more disconcerting that the two weren’t stereotypes of funky hippies, but seemed like ordinary middle Americans. One man was in his 40’s while the other was about 24. I was so confounded I couldn’t speak. On the one hand, these two represented treason by all my training conditioning had been. Mom, dad, school, and society had emphasized his point. It probably wasn’t his intent, but dad conditioned me to cower from his angry voice, his heavy footsteps. When dad wanted me to beat on David, I didn’t want to hurt you.

For you see, my war, the one I had contemplated, fought a thousand times in my mind, was the bottom of the Golden Gate Bridge on the way back in.

Why didn’t I refuse? Why did I do it? Basically, I caved in; or, more accurately I was overwhelmed by physical and emotional pressure from my father. I’m sorry, David, I didn’t want to hurt you.

Uncle Don told of dad’s drunken exploits on the subcontinent—falling into a village well as he fled from the military police. The two brothers flew crew on DC-3’s ferrying troops over the “Hump”–the Himalaya Mountains—to Chinese forces fighting the Japanese. Also, dad told me a story that started me on a path of social activism. So many people were starving to death each night that the British ran trucks down the road at dawn to collect bodies so as to clear a path for traffic. When the war ended dad flew from India to Egypt with a stop in Teheran. At a military base outside of Cairo, dad tells the story of being insulted by an Italian ensign of war. Enraged, he chased this man on foot, but fortunately didn’t catch him. In my mind’s eye I have always seen dad, the lanky farm boy, sprinting after a dashing man in prison clothes, the pair fading into the desert sun as they pass the Sphinx and the Great Pyramids.

After a week in Egypt the path home led to England with a stop in Calcutta, India. As I grew up we lived in several parts of the country and it seemed dad was always saying, “I passed through here on a troop train in ’43.”

The physical pressure from him was overt. I don’t know how many times he disciplined me with his belt; I estimate 10-12 times total. Were it only once, it was enough to strike terror into my heart. When displeased he could wrap his giant working man’s hand around my skinny, stick-like arm and lift me onto toptires to emphasise his point. He didn’t say it but he knew that day my inherent power as a young person—the spunk, determination, and spirited refusal to acquiesce to injustice—had already been severely squashed by dad’s violence and physical coercion. Sorry David.

Emotionally I felt the push of being the first born son. To refuse or hold back would have been to risk disappointing my primary role model. For me, as for most young boys, dad’s approval felt like a life-giving substance. For me rebelling against the boxing gloves was an almost impossibly act of heroism. I wasn’t up to it at that point in my life. Sorry David. I hope you can forgive me.

For you see, my war, the one I had been groomed for, the one I had contemplated, fought a thousand times already, my ticket to manhood and the good life, waited on the other side of that induction center door. My brain was wired for the military by that time. Read it! Punch him! Stick it in your pocket! Call him a traitor! Hesitating a split second, not breaking stride, I crumpled the paper and tossed it at his feet with a muffled half-hearted sneer.

As we drew near the others made sarcastic remarks. I tried to look straight ahead was too scared. Adrenaline pumped and emotions tore through me one way then another. I tried to look straight ahead but couldn’t because I was so confounded I couldn’t speak. On the one hand, these two represented treason by all my training conditioning had been. Mom, dad, school, and society had emphasized his point. It probably wasn’t his intent, but dad conditioned me to cower from his angry voice, his heavy footsteps. When dad wanted me to beat on David by that time. Be a man already, my ticket to manhood and the good life, wait-

Dad’s unit was the 257th Coast Artillery. They saw little combat; at least dad and Uncle Don downplayed that. He was stationed in many parts of the US—Falkfuries, TX, Richmond, VA, Ft. Lewis, WA, Oklahoma, New Mexico. As I grew up we lived in several parts of the country and it seemed dad was always saying, “I passed through here on a troop train in ’43.”

Dad told of crossing the Pacific on a World War I vintage troop transport nicknamed the “Kaiser’s Coffin” because of its age and state of repair. His description of being weeks at sea and motion sickness from the pitching, groaning ship gave me vivid images. The troop ship stopped in Sydney, Australia for several days before continuing on to Calcutta, India.

Of course I didn’t read that leaflet.
The effect of these tales and travels on my young mind was profound. It was akin to the 1001 Arabian Nights—conjured in my imagination with visions of distant people and places and things to do, unknowable, desirable, adventurous. Like growing up itself dad’s stories hinted at the delicious, unseen future waiting to unfold.

These stories were important in my development as a male. In my adolescence the military beckoned to me as a solution to the confusing task of becoming a man. I was at least as unconfident and awkward as the next guy. If the teen years are a time of doubt and confusion for all young men I didn’t know it. I bought completely the locker room tales of my high school peers assuming that something must be wrong with me since: 1) I didn’t go out for even a single sport; 2) I didn’t get drunk with the boys; and, 3) I didn’t have a girlfriend. Thus, I felt awful about myself; I was not measuring up as a young man.

For males, including adolescents, there are three legitimate masculinities—sports, womanizing, and human activities. Playing sports or being a rabid fan qualifies one for admission into the man club. Having a letter jacket for track and cross-country one can attract. But, at the same time a real man was certainly not supposed to stay to clean up the mess. That plane”, Don shook his head, “was totally shot up. It drooped to a landing and rolled to a stop at the end of the runway. Dad and Don were dispatched to the ambulance to the plane. Of seven crew only the pilot was alive. He had passed out from his own wounds after setting the plane onto the runway. Don sped away in the ambulance with the broken body of the pilot. “Your dad’s experience he may not have wanted to remember. But “just running around in your shorts” was way down the scale from real sports such as hockey, boxing, wrestling, or most of all, football.

In the second area of male legitimacy—women—I was a complete flop. It wasn’t just that I didn’t have a girlfriend, but I never even had a date in high school. It is indeed paradoxical that ones being considered a real man in the military one can attract. But, at the same time a real man was certainly not supposed to be dependent on others (especially women).

The third legitimate identity is “he-man activity”. These well known pass times include hunting, beer drinking, hard physical work (bonus points for long hours), anything dangerous, fist-fighting, weightlifting, and the military. Playing in these areas with the men was actually considered a wimp because I was skinny, didn’t drink or hunt, was bookish, and actively avoided fights. Dad’s statement took me by surprise. The thought of joining the military was brand new to me. I neither agreed nor objected, but, I sure didn’t want him to think I was going to be a sissy. Perhaps his words were designed to steer me away from military as opposed to my war hero fantasies. Now, here was my dad telling me that I would be right there with me and I wouldn’t have to sleep in the mud or on the hard ground.

That little spiel left a lasting imprint on my thinking. Two things stood out. First, here was my dad telling me that I had an obligation to my country by joining the military. Obligated he said, as in owing a debt, as in living up to a promise or paying a debt. I was to carry that memory all your days. The Tet Offensive, the bloodiest campaign of the Vietnam War, was raging on the other side of the world and on the nightly news. At that time I was only vaguely aware of the war as well as the domestic protest. For me there was no decision making process about going into the military. When I was 17 my dad told me, “Son, if I were a young man like you with a military obligation I would choose to be in the Air Force or the Navy so at night my bed would be right there with me and I wouldn’t have to sleep in the mud or on the hard ground.”

My first thoughts! Immediately I was disoriented and bemused. “Oh...I have a military obligation...well, yes, I suppose I do! But Dad’s statement took me by surprise. The thought of joining the military was brand new to me. I neither agreed nor objected, but, I sure didn’t want him to think I was going to be a sissy. Perhaps his words were designed to steer me away from military as opposed to my war hero fantasies. Now, here was my dad, World War II veteran of the Aleutian Islands, India, and Burma, informing me that I had an obligation to go to war.

Don explained that as a young man dad was a happy-go-lucky, cocky soldier. After that day there was an edge of seriousness in his bearing. In my eyes him a lean and hard look. Don had never thought seriously about actually being in the military as opposed to my war hero fantasies. Now, here was my father, World War II veteran of the Aleutian Islands, India, and Burma, informing me that I had an obligation to go to war.

The second message in dad’s statement was in code that I came to appreciate only years later after he had died. The part about “having my bed right there with me” and it may have saved my life.