

**BIG BOYS DON'T CRY:
REFLECTIONS ON NURTURE IN MALE CULTURE AND EDUCATION**

JOHN PENTON

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Abstract

This project takes on the form of a personal narrative of my life experiences as a boy, man, teacher, parent, and husband. My focus is on nurture in the male culture as it relates to a man's experience in our society. The process of intense self-reflection necessary in creating a narrative project of this type is, in itself, part of a personal defining or redefining of myself. I believe that going through such an exercise can be a very valuable teaching tool for anyone seeking to change or improve his or her life. From a teaching perspective I believe this is especially important as teaching is, or should be, a very personal experience that relies on much more than technical skill. In many respects, I believe that who we are is how we teach.

This project examines male nurture from within four primary topic areas. These are: Male Suppression of Pain; Male Sensuality and Nurture; Fathers and Nurture; and Nurture and Male Teaching. Through the discussion of this issue through these topics, I hope to be able to show my audience what it is like to be a man dealing with an issue that is not traditionally considered to be within the male sphere of interest. I want to show, as well, how men are constrained in their society and culture just as many women are constrained by theirs. This is not, however, a comparison between men and women since comparisons often encourage us to emulate others rather than be true to ourselves. This personal account of my own journey as a male in our society and on the teaching profession is about what I have perceived and want rather than what I have been told to desire.

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An Invitation

During the course of writing this paper I have come to realize that in a way, I was rewriting my life. It's not so much that I have changed my actions — although I think it has had that effect — but rather that I have come to see myself differently than before. By putting some of my experiences into words, I went through a process of introspection. This allowed me to see how patterned my life had been by the way I grew up and developed. We are all taught, trained and programmed to act within certain social, cultural and familial constraints. Although necessary as a stage of development, many of us have difficulty in stepping past this programmed existence.

I believe it is important to examine and re-examine our own lives in order to be able to choose who and what we are. Many people seem to accept constrained lives within narrow parameters instead of opening themselves to every possible experience. The safety and security created by fitting into society's boxes have an incredibly strong lure for us.

I'm reminded of my own children's attitude to music when in high school. They seemed to embrace the narrowness of liking only one type of music even though I had seen them as younger children enjoy a wide variety of music genres. At a certain stage, they ridiculed any music that did not fit within their peer group. All country music was bad while all heavy metal rock was good. I remember asking them why they did not simply like what they liked instead of creating and choosing based on categories defined by others. To them I was being weird. They were still at the stage of belonging rather than being.

It is now a joy to see them change and mature as most young people do. As a father it was both a privilege and a duty to teach and guide my own children in their young lives. However, I also know that by doing so I helped to create patterns of thought and action that they will need to struggle with through the course of their own lives. I try, although it is sometimes difficult, to embrace and enjoy the fact that they sometimes choose differently than me. Despite some personal dissonance, I would rather that they be different from me than copy me. They have their life while I have mine.

My invitation through this project is to both men and women. To men, I would say that the narrow confines placed on our masculinity by society need to be examined on a personal level. Do you truly want to be the way those around you tell you to be? I am not saying that all men should be this way or that, more nurturing or more macho. Rather, I am saying that you should look within yourself and choose who you want to be.

For women, who have an equally defined existence, I would ask that you examine yourself in the same context. Reflect on your life and make your choice on who you want to be. In addition, look at the men in your life and try to understand the social constraints and forces that act upon them as you would wish them to do for you. If we see each other simply as stereotypes, we will limit our own range of relationships and interactions.

As I was doing the research for this project, I remembered a story I once heard about an old man who was reflecting on the course of his life as he lay on his deathbed. He regretted deeply that he had not risked more, experienced more, or *was* more in his life. He opted for the security of the social box and deeply regretted those limitations when his life was almost done. This story had a major impact on me and my personal

reflections. How can I live a life based on security and constraint when I know that I would be just like that old man?

I know that we all create or buy into many such boxes. Not all are bad and not all are good. The freedom to choose who and what we are is the most precious gift of all, yet that gift is often left unopened. I invite all of you to open up this precious package.

Introduction

How can you get very far
If you don't know Who You Are?
How can you do what you ought,
If you don't know What You've Got?
And if you don't know Which to Do
Of all the things in front of you,
Then what you'll have when you are through
Is just a mess without a clue
All the best can come true
If you know What and Which and Who.
—Benjamin Hoff, *The Tao of Pooh*

The subject of this project is one that has been on my mind for many years. My own experience as a man in our society, with the connected experiences of being a son, brother, husband, father, lover, teacher, administrator, etc., has caused me to question the roles men are allowed to play in our culture. I am particularly interested in the concept of nurture as it relates to men's experiences. Our society seems to have a clear view of nurture as it relates to the female experience but when viewed in conjunction with males the picture is much more fuzzy:

The torrent of feminist writing on sex and gender in the past two decades has expanded our knowledge of women's capacities and desires. Meanwhile, the cults and codes of manhood remain virtually unchanged. The state of being a "real man" is more uncertain and precarious than ever. (Sheehy, 1998, p. 51)

I have often felt a disconnect between what I have understood as my male role in society and what I actually feel in my heart with regard to how I relate to other men, women and children. At first I thought that I was an anomaly in my culture but in talking to other men I have discovered many with similar feelings of discontent about the "boxes" we are forced to fit into:

Just over one-fourth of the men polled by Gallup believed that women “had a better life in this country” than men. Twenty-eight percent confessed to having felt resentment at the expectations society placed on them “as a man.” And nearly half said that the women’s movement had made men’s lives harder over the past twenty years. (Sixty percent of the women agreed with that assessment). (Cose, 1995, p. 27)

I suspect my feelings are quite similar to those of many women in society who have rejected the “traditional” roles that have acted to confine them into a type of servitude not of their own choosing. Much has been written about the struggles of women and the advent of feminism that has been a powerful vehicle for freeing them from socially restrictive roles. Men have not had a similar “consciousness raising” because of the commonly held view that men hold a privileged position in society and do not need a similar type of emancipation:

... one day [author William] Farrell began to question why women but not men were listening [to his speeches]. “I reviewed some of the tapes from among the hundreds of women’s and men’s groups I had started. I heard myself. When women criticized men, I called it ‘insight,’ ‘assertiveness,’ ‘women’s liberation,’ ‘independence,’ or ‘high self-esteem.’ When men criticized women, I called it ‘sexism,’ ‘male chauvinism,’ ‘defensiveness,’ ‘rationalizing,’ and ‘backlash.’ I did it politely — but the men got the point. Soon the men were no longer expressing their feelings! (Cose, 1995, p. 28)

I do not, in this project, want to get into a direct comparison between men and women, especially power structures or relative degrees of privilege. Rather, I want to examine, primarily from my own perspective and experience, the roles men fit into with regard to nurturing. This project will not be an attack on feminism. In fact, I view the women’s movement with a certain amount of envy for the successes it has achieved in liberating women from roles they found uncomfortable or constricting. However, it will be necessary to draw comparisons between men and women, but this is for the purposes

of clarifying my thoughts and showing how culture and society act as limiting agents on both sexes.

Finally, the whole issue of gender behaviour is extremely complex and crosses many fields of inquiry. Rather than trying to prove one thing or another about how and why men and women do or feel certain things, I wish to give a personal account of my experiences in order to show how much my behaviour has been affected by cultural presuppositions. For me, one of the most important realizations I have come to in my life is the necessity for reflection on my own beliefs and practices. Without this type of reflection, we exist within the trap of our patterned behaviours.

My method of research and delivery of this project will be through the medium of narrative. Although I will be referring to other writings on this subject, they will act primarily as a means of informing my narrative. It is important, I believe, to allow the first person experience to come through this work as emotion/pathos is integral to an understanding of nurture. In fact, it is the analytical/logical (commonly understood to be a more male perspective) means of examination that is anathema to the topic. In other words, it would be counter-productive to deal with nurture (an emotion laden concept) using only logic as a tool. By using narrative I will be able to touch the core of the issue which is how I, and I believe, other men, feel about nurturing others around them. As a part of my narrative I will be using various literary genres such as poetry, stories and personal anecdotes to illustrate my points.

As a teacher, I believe this issue has a profound impact on the education of children, both boys and girls. Again, when looking at gender issues in the school systems the focus has been on the issue of the acceptance of women in administrative positions.

Equally important, in my view, is the lack of male role models in the elementary system. In addition, there are other restrictions on men within the system which actively inhibit tendencies towards nurturing by male teachers. These imbalances will continue to perpetuate artificial and harmful stereotypes unless both men and women allow broader roles for themselves. Consequently, after dealing with issues relating to the forces within our society that have an impact on nurturing in a general way, I will be relating how this affects men in their role as teachers of children.

This project will be structured around a number of topic areas under which I will discuss personal experiences and observations. These topics deal with areas within men's lives that have an impact on male behaviour and particularly the issue of nurture. I am sure that many more topics could be used but these are the ones I have seen as central to the social conditioning of men away from nurture. The topic areas are:

1. Male Suppression of Pain
2. Male Sensuality and Nurture
3. Fathers and Nurture
4. Nurture and Male Teaching.

Literature Review

I will not be doing a traditional literature review in this project as most of my writing will be from personal experience; instead I will draw from my experiences in relation to the literature. As none of us live in a vacuum and the topic itself is about connection, I felt it important to read about others' experiences. As well, I find it necessary to check my perceptions with reference to the research in the field to bring

discipline to my work. I do not simply want to ramble on with my musings but rather seek to place them within a framework which is intelligible to a diverse audience.

Therefore, I will at times refer to other works to clarify or emphasize my thoughts.

Interestingly, I got my first taste of working on this subject when I went into a Chapters Book Store. I intended to do a quick overview of available books on the subject of men and nurturing. As I approached the stacks, I saw a large bookcase with shelves entitled Women's Studies and Men's Studies. I felt this was a good start and was happy to see some resources on this topic. However, as I started to examine the shelf containing books on men I was surprised to note that only three books pertained directly to the male experience; filling up this shelf were overflow books from women's studies. There were over five full shelves containing works on or about women compared to three books on men. I was finally able to find more books on men while going through the internet and have included some of those in the References section.

Definitions

As I first conceived of this project, I thought I had a good notion of what makes up the concept of nurture. However, as I looked more closely at what I wanted to do, I realized that I had to define my terms so that others reading this project would have a better chance of knowing what I am talking about. Upon looking up the word nurture in the dictionary, I found the etymology to derive from the Latin word *nutritus*— to suckle. This very clearly puts the term into the female realm, which is much narrower than the accepted meaning today. As I looked at the various definitions of the word, I found that they seemed to fit into two broad areas. One is a meaning more in line with the practical,

the duty, and the teaching while the other is more to do with emotions such as caring and affection. The first definition of nurture is:

Nurture:

1. Something that nourishes; sustenance.
2. The act of bringing up.
3. *Biology*. The sum of environmental influences and conditions acting on an organism. (American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 2000)

Men have always had the right or have been expected to fulfill this type of nurture, even though these duties have not often been expressed as nurture. Again from another source we get this meaning of the term nurture:

1. To feed and protect.
2. To support and encourage, as during a period of training or development; foster.
3. To bring up; train; educate. (*A to Z Dictionary*).

Men have been expected, by society as well as themselves, to feed, protect and in many cases, to train, that is, to discipline children: “If you were born into a middle- or upper-class household, mom stayed home, did all the housework and cared for the kids, dad went to work to earn the money” (Farrell, 1995, p. 10). This definition has much to do with duty, and in many ways can be accomplished by the man being physically apart from his children. For example, a good provider is more often away at work bringing home the bacon than at home playing with the kids:

These distant fathers were often well-meaning but inept. They were likely to work long hours outside the home and have less time and energy for the hard work of connecting with adolescents. Distant fathers didn't know how to stay emotionally involved with their complicated teenage daughters. They hadn't learned to manoeuvre the intricacies of

relationships with empathy, flexibility, patience and negotiation. They had counted on women to do this for them. (Pipher, 1994, p. 118)

A father who is a protector is the one who puts himself at risk to protect the family whether that means being the one to get up during the night to check out the unexplained noise in the house or in more extreme cases, enlisting in the military to protect the country and by extension, the home. In fact, men are socialized to believe that serving these roles shows love, and they become confused when their wives can't see it:

In a recent marital therapy session, Susan remarked that she was unsure some days whether Alex really loved her. He shot back, "Of course I do, I'm here, aren't I?" "Yes," Susan said, "but you don't seem to enjoy being with me unless you want sex." Hurt and frustrated, Alex sighed, "I go to work, I help with the house and Eliza, I'm faithful to you— all that means I love you!" Life experiences have given each of them unspoken scripts, highly idiosyncratic, defining how men and women should, and do, express love to their partners. (White & Tyson-Rawson, 1996, p. 54)

I know of many men who find their satisfaction in doing these types of things and who feel that this is all that is required of them: "Because of their socialization to the male role, they did not value the qualities necessary to stay in close long-term relationships. They labelled nurturing and empathizing as wimpy behavior and related to their daughters in cold, mechanical ways" (Pipher, 1994, p. 118). To me this is only one part of nurture and is not enough. In my life, I am more interested in the other meaning of nurture which, when looked at as a noun, captures the emotionally understood meaning today:

Nurturance – warm and affectionate physical and emotional support and care.

(A to Z dictionary, Internet: infoplease.com)

When I originally thought of nurture, my conception of the concept was the meaning mentioned above. The idea of a *warm and affectionate physical and emotional support and care* is the core of what I believe has been suppressed in men by our society

and culture. It is this lack that I wish to talk about and explore within my own experiences and perceptions.

Male Suppression of Pain

Little Girls

What are little girls made of, made of?
What are little girls made of ?
Sugar and spice and everything nice.
That's what little girls are made of.

Little Boys

What are little boys made of, made of?
What are little boys made of?
Snakes and snails and puppy-dogs' tails.
That's what little boys are made of.
— Eloise Wilkins, *Mother Goose*

Little Boy

What is it to be a little boy?
Snakes and snails and puppy dog tails?
From the beginning my life is set.
Expectations of generations past.
Ignoring my wants and needs;
Blind to change, blind to desire.

What if I want to be sugar and spice and everything nice?
Risking my membership in the club of boys.
Doubting myself about what I should be?
About who I should be.
Fearing my friends looking askance at me?
Friends only as long as I am the same.

Playing games of good and bad,
Testing strength, testing manhood.
Hiding tears, avoiding jeers.
Shielding the heart, fitting in.
To this world of boys.

My treatment of this area will begin with a narrative of my childhood involving developmental games that, I believe, had a profound effect on my development. I will then lead into my experiences entering the work world where this tolerance or denial of pain was of great importance. It was a type of socialization that was important for two main reasons: The need for acceptance of pain in order to continue working, and the need to fit in with the culture of the other men.

My own experiences have led me to believe that a connection can be created between this suppression of physical pain to the denial or covering up of emotional pain:

Boys, as they grow up, exhibit much more rough-and-tumble play. There is sometimes a cruel edge to this aggression; boys were found to be much more hostile to the weak and the disabled, and their response to hearing cries of pain was one of annoyance with the victim. The girls tended to feel more sorry for the person in pain (Moir & Jessel, 1989, p. 81).

Again, the socialization of other boys was an important part of this connection and one that I want to explore in much greater detail.

Finally, the transference of this suppression on my parenting and teaching is of great interest to me. Even when I knew intellectually that it was not appropriate, I would often have a “gut” feeling about how children should behave. Thus the circle closes. My expectations of myself, my sons and daughters are intimately wrapped up in my own experiences and socializations as a child.

This topic is interesting to me in that it highlights the difficulty in separating nature and nurture in male versus female roles. Although I don't want to get into the biology of gender differences and am not qualified to do so in any event, I do find it interesting as a parent of both boys and girls, as well as reflecting on memories on my own boyhood, to see the differences between the two sexes. I realize there is much debate

over the roles environment versus biology play, but I have a difficult time believing that gender differences are primarily environmentally driven.

What's in a Game?

The future is not some place we are going, but one we are creating. The paths to it are not found but made, and the activity of making them changes both the maker and the destination.

—John Schaar

My early memories of being a boy often focus on times of play. I was a typical boy in most ways and tended to enjoy the rough, physical type of play that anyone can see on any playground today:

The writer H. H. Monro, 'Saki', wrote an instructive little story about a liberal household where the parents sought to suppress their son's natural male aggression by refusing him a set of tin soldiers; instead they supplied a set of tin civil servants and teachers. All, they felt, was going well, until they sneaked into the playroom and saw that he had set out a battle royal between the regiments of the toy teachers and the model bureaucrats. (Moir and Jessel, 1989, pp. 7-8).

One of the rules I learned early on was that I had to stifle outward expressions of pain. In fact, a number of games were designed specifically for this purpose. The most common one was "shoulder punch" This was a game where we took turns hitting each other's shoulder. The first to give in and admit pain or "give up" lost. The victor received considerable respect and was looked upon with envy. I was by no means the champion at this game but I did comport myself well enough that I fit in with the crowd. In fact, I was probably a bit better than average as I remember instigating the game a few times. I don't think I would have done so had I been poor at it.

I remember as a child reading a passage in Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer* and being delighted about how Tom and his friends were spellbound by such things as cut fingers, pulled teeth, and other gory injuries while the girls in the story looked upon such fascinations with disgust (Twain, 1876, p. 50). At the time I felt much more affinity with Tom than with the girls and remember feeling that girls were sissy by their attitude. How typical of boys then as well as now to be so interested in things that should, by all logic, be looked upon with abhorrence. Although boys are socialized into this type of behaviour, the intimate relationship between nature and nurture seems to be at play here. There are studies which indicate that this aggression is inherent in males, which gives rise to the age old question of what was the cause and what was the effect.

Men are more aggressive than women. . . In every known society, men are more likely than women to play roughly, drive recklessly, fight physically, and assault ruthlessly, and these differences appear early in life. Some people with a romanticized notion of primitive cultures imagine that before men were corrupted by civilization they lived in harmony with one another. But this was scarcely the case. One review of the archaeological evidence suggests that in the state of nature, about one-quarter of all human males died in fights. . . As men grow up, they are much more likely than women to cause trouble in school. (Wilson, 1993, p. 4)

Another game for the stoically minded was the "hand slap" game. Although often touted for its demand for fast reflexes, I believe it was more about tolerance for pain. This was especially true for those pitted against an opponent with faster reflexes. The smart player should have given up quickly but this did not accord with the boys' code of machismo. It is interesting for me to watch kids play the game today because in forty years nothing has changed. The boy who is not good at the game is still egged on to continue playing even when his hands are red and sore. I have observed that girls will play the game but are much more likely to quit sooner.

I remember being confused once when playing a game of football. I must have been about ten or so and was often to be found at the neighbourhood park searching for like-minded boys to play games with. At the time, football was our game of choice—tackle of course—not for us the sissy game of touch or flag football; unless of course, one of the parents was watching. As in most games, I performed at an average level. I was never the star but was proficient enough to enjoy myself and not bear the brunt of any ridicule.

One day however, I discovered an interesting thing about myself, which was that I was good at running with the ball. As I was fairly compact and solid (read stout) I had learned that the kamikaze approach worked for me. I was able to score points if I charged straight through the other kids ignoring the pain, assorted bruises and contusions that resulted. Here, I thought, was the glory that had eluded me to this point. I could now be the star and get all of the touchdowns. I was now living fully in the world of boys. I knew how to be successful and admired.

Unfortunately, my dreams went up in smoke and my glory days died before they were born. The problem was that machismo only went so far with the other boys. They complained that I was too rough and that I was deliberately trying to hurt them.

What is interesting to me now as I look back on this incident was the power of my perception of what was acceptable. I remember being shocked at this reaction of the boys because I thought I knew how boys were supposed to act. The socialization I had undergone really did a job on me. My belief system at the time is especially striking as I did not have parents who encouraged this type of rough behaviour. In fact, both of my parents were and still are rather gentle people who did not try to promote a machismo-

like attitude in their sons. Peer pressure is certainly a very powerful force in our lives and can leave lasting impressions on us even without our conscious knowledge.

As I grew older, I was able to make more thoughtful choices in my life and moved away from the games that needed physical endurance and tolerance for pain. The most likely reason for this was a lack of parental encouragement as well as a growing realization that I would probably not ever excel at these activities. However, I never lost the feeling that a certain tolerance for pain was necessary to exist in a male world. In fact, I remember a time when my father, who has a very low pain tolerance, pinched his finger while moving some furniture. I'm sure it must have been very painful but the howls of anguish that went on for a considerable length of time became somewhat embarrassing to me. Here was a man that I looked up to a great deal, who was acting in what I felt to be a non-masculine way.

Similarly, I have struggled throughout my life in raising my own children. My two older boys, now men, went through many of the same struggles as I when growing up. I often found (and find) myself complicit in the same types of socialization that I now decry. I found it difficult to accept a less than stoic acceptance of pain in my sons and always wanted them to exhibit more toughness in dealing with physical discomfort. Even today, while I intellectually know better, I always find it emotionally uncomfortable to view a non-macho reaction to pain in men.

It is such a difficult line to walk. As a parent and a man I do want my boys to become strong men and good people. The problem arises in deciding what makes for good men. What qualities are good and appropriate and which are bad and harmful? In thinking about this, I did some reading in the book *What is a Man: 3,000 Years of*

Wisdom on the Art of Manly Wisdom and enjoyed reading about how different cultures have such different values regarding male virtues (Newell, 2000).

Going back to Roman times we see the example of Cato the Elder who was exemplified as “a manly father” by his peers because of the training he did with his son:

Not only did he show him, as well, how to throw a dart, to fight in armour, and to ride, but also how to box and to endure both heat and cold, and to swim in the most rapid and rough rivers. (Newell, 2000, p. 380)

This example, plus that of similar cultures, shows how different qualities are valued at different times. A Spartan male citizen was not valued by his peers for qualities of sensitivity, communication skills and nurture. Even today with the decreased need for physical strength and toughness, we have the attitude of seeing the ideal man as one who is physically strong, courageous and tough. Our national security no longer depends on physical prowess and the ability to withstand pain. Yet, in many ways, we still value this ideal. The young man of today who aspires to a football or hockey career would benefit as much from Roman training as did the youths of Cato’s day.

My most recent experience in looking at appropriate behaviour in boys has been with my stepson’s involvement in soccer. As a typical seven-year-old he will cry and seek comfort when hurt. I need to gauge whether his reaction is appropriate or not. Why do I need to do this? Well, I am afraid that without the proper or accepted reaction to events, he will become a person subject to ridicule by others in society. Our culture has come some way in its toleration towards individuals showing pain. Yet there is still a line that can’t be crossed if acceptance is desired.

When I look at the other boys my stepson associates with, they range in their reaction from a stiff upper lip to complete collapse. What is an appropriate level for

showing pain and when should one tough it out? I have found the safest thing for me is to compare my reactions about appropriate levels of pain tolerance between my boys and girls. In other words, if I feel that the reaction is appropriate for my girls, I will accept it in my boys. Although realizing that this is a very subjective measure, and maybe not completely appropriate, at least I am avoiding subjecting my boys to a tougher standard than my girls. The question still remains about what is appropriate in tolerating pain. I constantly struggle with it because I just don't know for sure. Therefore, I have focused on this area because it has affected my actions and the attitudes I hold about a number of issues.

Unfortunately, in our society and culture this view of what men should be is often counter productive. At the very least, it does not apply to many aspects of our lives today. As William Farrel says in his book *The Myth of Male Power (1993)*, we are in a transition period where the older, more traditional roles of men and women are changing towards a new model of behaviour. His way of explaining it is that we are moving from a "stage one pattern" that defines male and female roles as obligations and duties to a stage two development where males and females behave according to chosen values. This "stage one" was in place in order to enable survival in a time when huge effort was required for basic survival. The "stage two" is where we are now in our industrialized society and where we need other skills in order to survive and prosper (Farrel, 1993, p. 65).

Unfortunately, it can be very difficult for men to switch back and forth. One minute we need to be strong and tough; at other times sensitive and gentle. This hit me most dramatically a few years ago when I saw the pictures that were very popular of strong, viral young men, partially naked, holding a young infant. This picture of strong

masculinity and the tender nurture of holding and caring for a young child was arresting simply because of the strong contrast. This is now seen as the male ideal and, as men, there is a strong pressure to be everything to everybody. If so, it may be the male equivalent of the Super Mom syndrome.

Calluses on the Hands, Calluses on the Heart

We must not hope to be mowers,
And to gather the ripe gold ears,
Unless we have first been the sowers
And watered the furrows with tears.
It is not just as we take it,
This mystical world of ours,
Life's field will yield as we make it
A harvest of thorns or flowers
—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

As I grew from being a boy to a man, I graduated to a different type of pain tolerance. This involved my working life that, for my earlier years, consisted of manual work. Any young man who has gone from school to labouring jobs or the trades has probably experienced the shock of being asked to do things that are physically painful. I remember thinking with shock —“You want me to do what!?” Whether I was asked to move heavy objects and accept the strain it involved or doing something that resulted in cuts, scrapes or burns, I was amazed that this was often a part of the expectations of the job. And, not only did I have to put up with the pain, but I also had to accept it in a stoic fashion. In a group of guys who have lived the rough work life for many years, complaining or making much of hurt does not generate sympathy. Rather, derision and laughter are the order of the day.

I remember well one of my early bosses who had absolutely no sympathy for anything negative that impacted his co-workers. His favourite expression was: "It could be worse; it could be me." He would say this whether I had incurred a minor scratch or a major injury. I remember when he drove a large splinter of wood through his arm and was bleeding all over the floor that I reciprocated with the same comment. His reaction was at least consistent in that he laughed instead of getting angry. Strangely enough, I didn't resent this type of attitude. Rather, I thought of it as appropriate and (rather shamefully as I look back on it) took this man as a role model. When you are doing work that is dangerous and which, by its nature, causes many small injuries during the course of the day, you have to develop a stoic attitude toward pain or you cannot survive in the job.

Another example of this type was when I was welding in a machine shop. Welders are constantly in danger of getting burned and have to learn to accept the pain that this causes. Because of this, the overall attitude of the men was one of bravado and callousness towards their own and others' pain. I remember one incident where I was using a cutting torch on a high tower. Because of my position and how I had to hang on, my mobility was severely limited. A blob of molten metal the size of a dime landed on my arm. Because of how I was positioned, I couldn't dislodge the molten metal or submerge my arm in water. I had to stand there as it bubbled its way into my skin. The reaction, after I came down, was general laughter by the rest of the workers as well as by myself. Although in severe pain, I learned to accept the reaction of the group and gain respect by my own macho reaction. Little wonder that this type of socialization has a general deadening effect on men's ability to be sensitive to others.

For about a ten-year period in my life, I tried my hand at farming. I found this a very interesting experience as I had long felt that this life would fit my temperament. Admittedly, I had a very romantic, albeit naïve view, of the agrarian lifestyle. Perhaps it came from living in highly urbanized southern California for a number of years previous to the experience, but I had bought into all of the clichés of farming: being closer to Mother Earth, producing food for a hungry world, the almost Rousseau-like view of the nobility of the simple, fundamental way of life. As I look back on it, I must admit to some embarrassment about my youthful and rather naïve view.

Here I was, a city boy whose only contact with farming were the stories I had heard of my great-grandfather. He had homesteaded in Saskatchewan in 1910 and remained there until his death in 1945. Although my grandfather did farm for a while and raised my father in that area, there had really been no Pentons on the land for over 20 years. My father certainly had no idea about the farming life and, in many ways, also romanticized the rural lifestyle. I think he always liked the idea of being a gentleman farmer as long as the manual aspects of the work did not get in the way. Through his auspices, I had a chance to take over the family farm in 1980. My father was concerned that the government might be making life unpleasant for absentee landlords and asked me if I would like to move to Saskatchewan to start up the farm again.

At the time, I was building houses in southern California and had recently become a new father. The idea seemed an exciting one to me and, after some soul searching and discussion with my wife, I decided to give it a try. I didn't know the difference between a cultivator and a set of harrows but I figured that it couldn't be very difficult. When I started, I realized immediately that I was in a completely different world. I won't go on

about all aspects of life on the farm but I do believe it had some impact on me with regard to nurture.

Farming, even in today's world of technology, market futures and sophisticated agricultural techniques, is still much more primal or atavistic than life in the cities. In some respects, it is much closer to the hunter-gatherer society than much of our other cultures. As such, men are more closely tied into the battle of survival against the natural elements. This is true with regard to the weather as well as the way nature in general is viewed. I remember my first instance in helping out a neighbour with his cattle. We were doing the typical chores that surround a cow-calf operation and had to castrate, dehorn and brand the new calves. Anyone who has performed these operations knows that they are quite brutal and inflict a considerable amount of pain on the animals. I remember feeling quite shocked and rather queasy about inflicting this on very young and cute animals. However, I quickly accepted the necessity of the action and convinced myself that this was an appropriate thing to do. I remember thinking to myself that I needed to toughen up and be manlier about such things. I soon began to do these and other unpleasant chores without thinking of them again. I had no trouble shooting gophers and other assorted pests around the farm as well as butchering assorted livestock for the family's use.

I am not trying to say that these jobs are wrong or brutalize people. I am not a farming practices reformer or vegetarian. It is simply another way that men are conditioned by society to perform necessary tasks which lead away from the gentleness associated with a nurturing nature. In the farm community, even throughout the decade of the 80s when I was farming and could observe it first hand, these tasks were generally

deemed the province of men rather than women. Although I knew a number of women who were just as capable as the men in performing these tasks, the majority did not. In fact, I knew a number of farmwomen who had been raised around these things that would have nothing to do with them. In some respects, they were lucky in that they had that choice.

I also recognize that the necessity of the situation can cause changes of behaviour in both men and women. For example, I remember an instance where I needed to move three six-month-old calves from a pasture into the barn to give them some medication. As I had just started to raise livestock, the farmyard was not set up with the necessary equipment to do the job effectively. I was also by myself without any experience, training or the skill to do the job. This meant that I spent about an hour of exhausting effort running after playful calves who didn't once get anywhere near to the barn door. If I didn't know how stupid cows really are, I would have suspected a conspiracy of some sort.

My less than pleasant experience ended when I started to pick up stones and throw them at the stubborn beasts. This was even less successful than previous strategies but did offer the benefit of relieving some of my frustrations. However, my wife quickly took me up short when she saw my behaviour. I received quite a scold from her for the abuse and mistreatment I was heaping upon the poor bovines.

It is frequently observed that male speakers are more likely to be confrontational by arguing, issuing commands, and taking opposing stands for the sake of argument, whereas females are more likely to avoid confrontation by agreeing, supporting, and making suggestions rather than commends. (Tannen, 1994, p. 236)

At this point, exhausted, dirty and not very appreciative of my wife's lack of support, I somewhat caustically asked her to help me. To my surprise, she agreed. With some amusement, I watched her go through her steps of persuasion. She started with gentle cooing noises much as she would use with a small puppy or kitten. I guess that she felt I had traumatized the cows to such an extent that they needed to be calmed down. This did not work. She then advanced to giving authoritative directions that meant that she was serious and wanted the animals to obey. Finally, she took hold of an old pitchfork that had been lying around the barn and used it as a pointer. She would slowly point to a calf and then, with great dignity point to the barn door. I can only assume that she felt the learning style of the calves was visual instead of verbal. Again, this did not work.

At this point, it should surprise no one that she was completely ineffective in getting the calves into the barn. The situation degenerated to the point where she started to emulate my previous behaviour by running around after them, yelling deprecations and throwing clods of dirt and other assorted lumpy barnyard matter. Somewhat to my shame, I must admit that I took considerable pleasure in watching these events and allowed them to follow their inevitable course. I finally had to bring the whole matter to a close when she, in a final fit of desperation and frustration, hurled the pitchfork at one unfortunate calf, inflicting a minor injury on its unrecalcitrant hide. Needless to say, they went without their medication that day.

I'm not sure whether the above incident says anything about nurture except that anyone can be driven to behaviour that is non-nurturing if the situation is frustrating enough.

A woman in the army who had been promoted to drill sergeant had a hard time getting recruits to follow her orders at first, but over time she changed her style and became successful at her job. And the change carried over to her way of talking at home, where it began creating problems in her marriage. (Tannen, 1994, p. 1994)

My wife did, however, start off with a more gentle attitude than I. It never occurred to me that herding cattle should start off with gentle persuasion.

If I Can't Feel it, it's Not There

The man who can think but does not know how to express what he thinks is at the same level as he who cannot think .

— Pericles

To this day, even though I have not worked for quite some time in an environment where pain is a constant, I see myself reacting differently to pain than others around me. This is especially true of my family. When my wife or children experience pain, they want comfort and attention. When it happens to me, I want to be left alone and will try to ignore it as much as possible. Having a big deal made of it simply makes it worse as I focus on it more. By ignoring the pain, its effect on me is lessened.

All of this may very well be a good adaptation to working in a harsh environment, but I am afraid that this reaction to physical pain carries with it an attitude of stoicism towards emotional pain. I find myself reacting to physical or emotional discomfort in the same way — I want to ignore it in the hope that it will go away. This is not a great way for a father to react to a young child or a partner in a relationship. Instead of showing loving concern, I want the other person to “suck it up” and “tough it out.” If that attitude is not counter to nurture, I don't know what is.

Again, where are the limits? I have seen the other side of the coin where someone is so empathetic that they become paralysed and ineffective in helping others. As I went through my training in special education, I saw many in my class who had incredible empathy and desire to nurture and help those in society who had handicaps of various types. They knew their theory and did extremely well in class. However, many of them flunked out quickly as soon as they went to their student teaching placements. Because they related so closely with some of the students, they lost their sense of objectivity and professionalism. They would either challenge the supervising teacher or forget the other children in the class. For a student teacher, this was not a good thing.

In addition, I have often seen women encouraging children to give in to their feelings to the point of melodrama. This most often happens when the adult female empathizes so much with the feelings of the victim that there is a reinforcement of the emotion. Pain, either physical or emotional, is amplified by a continued focus on it. An adult telling a child how awful something is will actually make it worse that it is. My brother tells a tale of viewing our sister interact with her three-year-old son. His father was leaving the house to run an errand. My nephew wanted to go with him but was told that he could not. Immediately, he started crying — an appropriate response for a three-year-old. Instead of his father leaving and allowing the boy to get involved with something else to distract him, his mother tried to comfort him and told him she knew how badly he felt. The more she talked to him and stroked his head, the more upset he became. The more upset he became, the more she tried to comfort. After about five minutes, his initial unhappiness had turned into a hysterical fit where he was throwing

himself about in an uncontrollable fashion. He only stopped after becoming exhausted and falling asleep.

I have also seen this with students in the halls of high schools. Typically, a young female adolescent will be exhibiting signs of emotional upset. Very quickly, she will be surrounded by her peers who will listen with horror to her pain then reflect this emotion seemingly endlessly between themselves. To me, it looked like an emotional feeding frenzy. The result is that not only is the original girl further traumatized but her compatriots are as well. I have actually been present in a situation where one girl with a relationship problem caused herself and two of her friends to have to leave the school because they were emotionally distraught. When I commented to one of the accomplices that missing class was perhaps not a good idea, I was told that I didn't understand and furthermore that I was being very insensitive.

This seems illustrative of the extremes that male and female behaviour can exhibit. What I think often happens is that the male and female behave at opposite ends of the spectrum and feel that they have to compensate for their partner's (in school, the male teacher or administrator) overreaction. This is, of course, a gross generalization but as true of most generalizations, it contains a germ of truth. My concern in this project is the generalization that many men are desensitized towards nurture in much the same way that women often equate nurturing with giving in to children. It is when the two sides are at opposition that there is overcompensation.

The very nurturing quality that women have is also something that can cause them grief in that, for many, there seems to be a great deal of guilt surrounding their care and nurturing of children. This seems especially true today when many women are out of the

home working and have to find care-giving services for their children. I know that my wife has a great deal more difficulty with this than I. Because I have older children, I have had more experience of leaving them in another's care as I went to work. This was the role society had given me and it was, if not desirable, at least comfortable. The fact that I now have to leave my children in hands other than my wife's is unfortunate but not much different than before, as long as I trust that they will be cared for in an appropriate manner. My wife, on the other hand, suffers a great deal every time the children are dropped off at the day care. She feels personal guilt every day she heads off to work. Now, the question I ask myself is: Do I have a healthier attitude towards this situation or have I been desensitized towards my children? Perhaps it is not so much the different levels of nurture between my wife and me as the social indoctrinization we have experienced: "When it comes to child-rearing, society expects far more of women than men" (Cohn, 1998, p. 10), and

[g]ender is one of the first things each of us learns about ourself as a young child, and the gender roles that we learn in our families continue to develop as we grow. We begin taking in elements of gender roles from significant others from the time we're born. These ideas are incorporated into our individual sense of self and assumptions about how men and women—both ourselves and others—ought to believe and behave. We learn what is expected of each of us not only from what others teach us directly but also from how we are treated, disciplined, nurtured, and loved. (White & Tyson-Rawson, 1996, p. 4)

I think that many men see a desensitization of pain as a beneficial attribute.

Whether it comes from the days when men hunted the woolly mammoths or from present day work or sports related experiences, this "toughness" is part of a need to survive. I have seen this taken to a horrible extreme when working in the school system. It was quite common for the fathers to express a desire for their sons to be strong and tough.

Yet, I was shocked one day to learn of a young boy who had been fed, on a continuous basis, small doses of arsenic in order (in the words of the father) “to toughen him up.” Although this is an extreme example, this worship on the altar of toughness/manliness shows how very difficult it is for men to fight against the masculine norms designed by society.

Male Sensuality and Nurture

Sex and the Boys

A primal force, central to being alive.
Yet shrouded in mystery, hidden in shame.
How does a young man know?
Which way should he go?
What part does sex play in his life?
Impulse? Instinct? Reason?
Lacking guidance, defaulting to popular culture.
Whatever sells? Doing what is easy?
Going along with the guys?
Losing in the end, limiting experience and joy.
Unaware of how rich sex/life can be.

This is an area of increasing interest for me. As I have grown older I have had more opportunity to talk with a number of women of my own age. One of the more common themes of our discussions has been the lack of sensuality in their relationships. They usually blame this on the man in their relationship and attribute it to men's perception of what sex should be. They constantly decry the lack of sensitivity and sensuality expressed by their partners. Sam Keen, the author of *Fire in the Belly: On Being a Man*, writes extensively in this area. As I was researching this topic, I found his writing to be very interesting in that what he says parallels much of my own experience.

I have it on good authority that when women get together and talk about their lovers they don't speak much about hardness, speed, or numbers of orgasms. Instead they praise men who are as comfortable in melting into the softness of communion as in thrusting vigorously in the frenzy of climax. My informal poll of women of all political persuasions reveals that they all agree that they would like men to slow down, take their time, enjoy the trip and not worry so much about the outcome. (Keen, 1991, p. 77)

This denial of sensuality on the part of many men has, I believe, caused an emotional withdrawal on the part of these men not only from others, but even more from themselves.

Never once as a budding man did I hear another man boast about the long, slow pleasure he experienced in sex, or speak of the beauty of the changing hues of a woman's eyes, of the sweet contentment of lying with a woman after love. For that matter I never heard a man speak of the pleasure a woman took in him other than to boast of how many times he had made some chick come... But I don't think male feelinglessness is limited to the young. We are too hooked on the proof of our potency to pause to enjoy the flowers. (Keen, 1991, pp. 76-77)

In my narrative, I want to re-experience/re-write for others my own experiences and how I have been led to believe that this lack of sensuality is the proper attitude for men. Again, I will start with early occurrences and follow them through to maturity. In my particular case, strong religious influences have had a major impact on my behaviour

in this regard. Although not as generalized as other types of socialization, it is still, in my opinion, a strong societal factor to be considered. The concept of sexual shame (largely brought about by religious and cultural socializations) has a major impact on both male and females, but the narrow views of male sexuality seem to have had an especially deadening effect on male sensuality.

Peer groups also always have a major impact on one's belief system and behaviours. "Teens who hardly speak to their parents talk all night with friends. Peers validate their decisions and support their new independent selves. This is a time of deep searching for the self in relationships" (Pipher, 1994, p. 67). This is as true with how one views sensuality as with any other aspect in life. The teenage male perspective on sex is widely explored in popular culture but what is often missing is how this relates to sensuality and sensitivity. A gentle view of women, children and those aspects of behaviour pertaining to nurture is strongly denied by much of teenage male culture and has, I believe, a very strong impact on adult males.

The socialization of men after achieving adulthood does not vary much from that of adolescent males. Although much more subtle and by necessity, more cautious, the attitudes can be much the same:

The evidence suggests that many men never graduate from the locker-room school of sexuality. The smell of old jockstraps and raunchy attitudes still clings to the macho heroes. The frequency of date rape, the sale of girlie magazines, and the popularity of hard porn provide a fairly accurate index of how many men in their chronologically mature years are still caught in the adolescent philosophy that reduces women to objects with desirable parts to be used and abused by men. (Keen, 1991, p. 74)

This varies somewhat depending on age, class and position in society but generally, inside every man is an adolescent wanting to come out. (Most women would

probably agree with this). It is only when one gets to know another man sufficiently and achieves a level of trust with him that the shield of bravado is lowered. Even then, many men have difficulty discussing issues of personal content. It is very easy to be caught up in this type of culture yet it has a deadening effect on male nurture. As one male teacher discovered while teaching a course designed to assist men in realizing the benefits of community:

As the course proceeded, it became obvious that my dream of an informal “men’s community” forming in the course was destined not to materialize... the men stayed separate from each other, tended to remain quiet—except for the one man who vociferously opposed gender analysis per se—and when they commented, generally endorsed course themes or feminist critiques of chauvinist masculinity... Most unsettling, however, was my experience of myself as teacher. I was annoyed with the men students for not being more forthcoming, but also aware at times that I was no more forthcoming than they were. (Bullock & Stewart, 1996, p. 3)

Even as I sit down to write about this topic I am aware that I am a product of my generational culture. I find I approach the issue of sexuality/sensuality with a bit of nervousness. I feel a vague unease about it that, in part, comes about from my generation’s discomfort with this topic. However, sensitive though they may be, I believe that some of the stories I will be narrating here are central to my development and inherent to my perspective on nurture.

Size Doesn’t Matter

The process of spiritual growth is an effortful and difficult one. This is because it is conducted against a natural resistance, against a natural inclination to keep things the way they were, to cling to the old maps and old ways of doing things, to take the easy path.

—M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled*

To start off, I suggest that there is a close connection between sensuality, sexuality and nurture. In the following pages I will be writing about all three and will attempt to draw links between them in a coherent fashion so that my points are made clear. However, to facilitate initial understanding, perhaps I should give my reasons up front for why I see this connection. I believe that sex is one of the primary forces in all human lives. One only has to look at the newsstands or watch TV or movies to see that sex has lost none of its appeal to our nature. It dominates many of the behaviours we all exhibit and drives many of our actions. Since sex is so important and central to who we are and how we see ourselves, our attitude towards it is incredibly important.

Sensuality, by the following definition, relates to the physical rather than the spiritual. "Pertaining to the body, in distinction from the spirit" (The New Webster Encyclopedic Dictionary, 1984, p. 764). However, my use of the term here means a broadening of pleasure to encompass all of the senses rather than that of the tactile. By being a sensual person, one is embracing a much broader definition of pleasure that includes the emotional as well as the physical. My premise is that a deadening of sensuality through some of our stereotypical attitudes about sex hardens men to other types of connection.

Sex is viewed in many different ways in our society. Sometimes it is viewed as a mechanical, physical release that is momentarily pleasurable yet disconnected to emotion. Towards this end of the scale is also the belief that it is simply a function necessary for procreation. On the other hand, sex can be viewed as an intensely emotionally connection with many pleasurable aspects ranging from the sensual to the spiritual to the physical. It

is a prime way in which to connect to another person but is also a major factor in how we view and feel about ourselves.

As nurture is primarily about an emotional connection, that “warm and affectionate physical and emotional support and care,”(A to Z Dictionary), it seems to me that one’s attitude to something as important as sex will necessarily have an impact on other types of emotional commitment. If one cannot be nurturing to another or to oneself in sex by embracing sensuality and emotional connection, than how can one be open emotionally towards others in other nurturing ways? There is, of course, a difference between the concepts of sensuality and sexuality. Although very different in nature, they have an intimate connection that moulds a person’s perspective on future relationships.

As a child, my concept of sensuality was fairly narrow and more closely tied to sexuality than my understanding of the term today. I always conjured up a mental picture of a woman belly dancer with veils when I thought of the word sensual. I thought of slow undulations and movements that were very seductive in nature. As I think on this, I actually rather appreciate that I came up with that image as it seems quite appropriate. However, I see the word today in a much broader context, relating sensuality to anything that feeds the senses, such as good food, beautiful scenery, soft texture, etc. Nevertheless, the connection between sexuality and sensuality is still a very strong one.

As a man, when thinking of sensuality in the context of sexuality, I see it more as an emotional bond or connection created by an opening up of the self rather than just a physical trigger. Sensuality is something that should lead to a more full expression of sexuality. Unfortunately, when I look back on my childhood, I believe that the development of my sensuality was impaired by my environment and how my culture

trained boys and men to think of sex. I also believe that this is a problem that is generalized to many other men. If this true, what are the causes?

Kneeling at the Hidden Altar of Sexuality

To be authentic is literally to be your own author (the words derive from the same Greek root), to discover your native energies and desires, and then find your own way of acting on them. When you have done that, you are not existing simply to live up to an image posited by the culture or by family tradition or some other authority. When you write your own life, you have played the game that was natural for you to play. You have kept covenant with your own promise.

— Warren Bennis and Joan Goldsmith, *Learning to Lead*

I know that in my own case, my upbringing has had a major impact on this area of my life. This was partially due to my generation's values and beliefs about sexuality but was also very strongly influenced by my religious community, The Jehovah's Witnesses. I suppose I am not different from many men of my age who grew up seeing their sexuality as a rather shameful part of life.

I didn't feel that my parents were overly repressive about sex. Discussion was not forbidden; it was simply not encouraged. It was understood that it was not a topic that was discussed as a family. They were a part of a culture that saw sex as something to be hidden away and not talked about. Also, as strong adherents to the religion this narrow view of sex was strongly reinforced. Despite this, evidently my father did feel some responsibility for passing along at least some training and knowledge about the subject. However, when he gave my brother and me the obligatory discussion about the birds and the bees I missed out. (My father tells me that he took us both aside to do this but I fell asleep during the discussion). Apparently, my lack of interest at the time militated against rescheduling.

Probably stronger than my parents influence was that of the religion in which I grew up. (Since my parents strongly supported and encouraged our faith, their influence was blended with that of the religion). Jehovah's Witnesses form a highly moralistic religion that stresses the sinfulness of extramarital sex. Although more known by general society for such things as their door-to-door preaching, refusal of blood transfusions and non-adherence to religious holidays, it was in many ways quite mainstream (for its day) in views of sexual morality. Although lip service was given to the "sanctity" of sex within marriage, by far the emphasis was counter to sex. It was not seen as a celebration of life or even as a basic human need but rather, a shameful weakness that needed to be sublimated. The "good" person was able to push down these libidinous thoughts while the "weaker" ones were counselled to marry to avoid sinning.

Young people in the religion received mixed messages about sex. In common with many other religions of the day, masturbation was a sin. Because of this, many young men and women lived lives of guilt because they found it impossible to refrain from this means of sexual outlet. Although it was taught that sex within marriage was a good thing, the restrictions and shame attached to thoughts and reactions of normal sexual development put sex in the realm of the sinful. Considered even worse were such things as oral or anal sex. Of course, these terms were not commonly used because they were deemed offensive. Even necking with a girl in a movie or parked car was considered evil and grounds for public sanction. Homosexuality was way beyond the pale and so shameful that I didn't know what it was for years because no one would define it for me. I simply had a vague understanding that men were not supposed to show much affection

for other men. I recall being quite shocked when watching television and seeing two men (I think they were Russian) giving the European double peck on the cheeks.

Needless to say, this atmosphere generated in me a rather warped idea of sexuality. I clearly remember my own feelings about the matter as a young man. I always felt unworthy of my faith because I couldn't seem to subjugate my sexual feelings. In fact, even into my first marriage I felt guilt over having sex. It still seemed something shameful and forbidden. Little wonder that as a young man I had no clue about how to go about it in any other way than I heard about in the locker rooms from more experienced and adventuresome peers:

Fathers who may have led profligate sex lives still do not talk candidly with their sons about sex. For the most part the sexual mysteries are taught (and usually mistaught) to young boys, not by experienced men, but by slightly older boys. In modern America the locker room has replaced the kiva as the site of initiation. (Keen, 1991, p. 74)

I certainly don't think I was alone in this. Many others, even those that did not have as restrictive a religious upbringing as I, had to deal with similar prevailing social attitudes. Such a thing as couples on television not sleeping together in the same bed or not even having a double bed, as in the Dick Van Dyke show, exemplify how our popular culture dealt with the subject.

Recently, I was watching a show on television that dealt with this whole issue. It was called *Sex in Our Century* and discussed these same issues. One of the statements made in this show was that the common belief was that "women did not enjoy sex." This had great resonance for me as I grew up believing exactly the same thing. I am not exactly sure of how this idea was generated in me but it was certainly strong in my mind. Perhaps it was that men were always portrayed as the pursuers and women as the

pursued. Not only that, I felt that sex was something that women put up with and as a consequence looked down upon male desire as a rather shameful attribute. Then, as well as today, I have often heard women discussing male sexual behaviour with some disdain. They characterize it by expressing the idea that men are controlled by their sexuality rather than being in control of it.

Locker Room Talk

It is with the heart that one sees rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.
—Antoine de Saint Exupery, *The Little Prince*

Among the other boys at school, I found that their idea of sexuality had little to do with anything other than the physical. They talked about girls in terms of conquest and scoring rather than connection and relationships. I remember being in all male discussions where the male ideal was held up to be the guy with the most girlfriends and that had the most sexual variety. Sex was often viewed as a rite of passage where the physical act was all important while emotional attachment was seen as non-virile.

The result of all of this for me was many years of doubt, confusion and insecurity. What I experienced growing up was a view of male sex that was in opposition to what I was as a male. Keen categorizes the different personality types of boys in their reactions to this sexual socialization:

... the self-acknowledged studs and make-out artists; the courtiers who applaud the big men and encourage the telling of the tales; the shy virgins who are embarrassed by locker room curriculum, and the silent lovers who have girlfriends they both love and respect. (Keen, 1991, p. 74)

I guess that I fell into Keen's category of "the shy virgins who are embarrassed by locker-room curriculum" and, lacking more appropriate guidance or role models, simply

viewed sex as confusing. It has taken me many years and much reflection to come to an understanding of my own sexuality. Unfortunately, I believe that this indoctrination had a very negative effect on my ability to be a nurturing and gentle man in my earlier years. I suspect that the same forces have acted on many other men in a similar fashion.

Past the locker room and into adulthood, the most common aspect of male socialization in regard to sexuality and relationships could be characterized as shallow. This is not to say that men do not talk about meaningful issues when together. However, sex and relationships are rarely discussed. In the absence of such discussions, the default is to popular culture which in our society still portrays men as being more interested in getting laid and scoring than as being nurturing beings:

I suspect that many men never get far beyond a performance orientation to sexuality even in their marriages. The messages we get from culture—from our parents, teachers, bosses, advertisements, films, TV—tell us that, “A man is only as good as his performance,” “A man makes it happen,” etc. It is psychologically naïve to expect that somehow men are supposed to be able to strip themselves of all this conditioning when they leave the office and enter the bedroom. (Keen, 1991, p. 76)

As a man, I have seldom discussed issues of my sexuality with other men. My brother and I have, on occasion, talked about it but only in recent years as we both entered our forties and after we had both experienced a number of painful relationship debacles.

Fathers and Nurture

A Man's Duty

How can that most important of jobs be sublimated by all of the other things?

They seemed so important at the time,
Money, security, status, the duties of a man.
Providing for the family.

Mommy will take care of the kids,
She's better at it anyway.

All of those soft meaningless little kid things,
That aren't a part of being a man.

Looking back, seeing what was missed.
Crying over lost chances, wishing to change.
Why is being gentle not the duty of a man?

I have always enjoyed being a father, but it is only since I have had a child in my middle age that I am able to see what I missed when having my earlier children. I am sure that my experiences as a father when I was younger parallel that of many other men. While I loved my children, I always felt somewhat distant and awkward around them. Although my wife was quite a bit younger than me, I often deferred to her judgment even when I felt it was in error. I didn't know or didn't feel I had a right to judge when to correct or discipline the children or when to let things go. I did feel that my wife was being inconsistent at times but did not have confidence that I knew any better. To some extent, I believed that women had a natural knowledge or instinct that enabled them to parent even without previous knowledge or practice. Their natural nurturing abilities would fill the gap of no experience.

I had bought into the belief that I had little to offer infants and young children. I expected to have more input as they grew older. As a result, I missed out on many beautiful moments with my babies that I regret greatly now.

Another aspect of being a father is that by default, at least in my experience and culture, my role was that of the chief disciplinarian. I do believe in discipline for children and find that I am good at the job. However, as in many things in my role as a man, this was out of balance. I found the experience of having to deal with disciplinary matters the moment I walked in the door to be soul destroying. Instead of looking forward to seeing my children, I had to steel myself to be the stern, uncompromising father. Sometimes I longed to do nothing but hold and cuddle them despite their transgressions:

All fathers are products of their times. The rules for fathers have changed a great deal since the 1950s when to be a good father, a man should stay sober, earn a living, remain faithful to his wife and not beat the kids. Men

weren't expected to hug their daughters, tell them they loved them or talk to them about personal matters. Now fathers are expected to do all the things they did in the 1950s, plus be emotionally involved. Many fathers didn't learn how to do this from their own fathers. Because they missed their training, they feel lost. (Pipher, 1994, p. 116)

I think many men are really closet baby people. The following point made by Pipher illustrates that the desire by men to be closer to young children is often constrained by feelings or the reality of knowledge or skill: "In my study, the majority of fathers fell in the distant relationship category. They may have wanted relationships, but they didn't have the skills" (Pipher, 1994, p. 118). One just has to stroll through a mall with a little baby to notice the disparity between the attention men and women give to the baby. It is an accepted thing for a woman to come up and talk and play with a baby. Very few men will do so. I myself am a baby person. I love babies and like to play with them. However, I learned caution in doing so with a stranger's baby after being given scowls and suspicious glances. I don't think I look dangerous but most people aren't willing to take any chances. The bottom line is that I have always (and still do) feel constrained about showing my feelings towards babies in public.

Having a young baby now in middle age has opened up a whole new world for me. I have decided to change how I behave and have been lucky enough to have had the opportunity to spend a lot of my time with my little girl. I have a much different relationship with her than with my other children and have enjoyed seeing her grow and develop from the intimate perspective mothers often enjoy. However, being a househusband has its down side. I was very surprised at others' reactions. I thought it was fairly accepted – boy was I wrong! Neighbours, my father, colleagues, even people I don't even know have found it hard to accept my choice. I remember a social situation

where my wife and I were at a party. After explaining to the group that my wife was working while I was at home with our daughter, I was fascinated by their reaction. Some were merely bemused and puzzled while others were openly hostile.

Interestingly enough, the greatest pressure has come from women. Often they will be defensive and indicate that I have somehow taken over what is a woman's prerogative. I have been told, both subtly and overtly, that fathers lack the intuition, understanding, or nurturing ability women have. I find this interesting because it shows how women as well as men can get stuck in gender roles. Although it is accepted that women can do traditional male jobs, the converse is not always accepted:

'For many feminists, both female and male, it is commonplace that men sorely need to be feminized. Women can do what men can do,' says Gloria Steinem in a recent television interview. 'Now men need to do what women can do.'
(Cumming, 1996, p. 1)

Not all of the reaction from women was negative however. Some were very supportive and positive about my choice. A number of them have even stated openly that they wish their spouses had played a similar role. In stating this they came from two different perspectives. Some mentioned that they felt it very beneficial to the children to have the fathers play a larger nurturing role. Others focused on the fact that they wished for a decrease in having that responsibility themselves. I was surprised at how many women have told me that they tire at having to be the one to nurture their children. I guess it is another example of how easy it is to fall into stereotypical beliefs about social roles.

Men's reactions ranged from curiosity to subtle scorn. Some seemed to feel that I wasn't working because I couldn't get a job. Others simply could not relate to why I

would have any interest in staying with a young baby while some showed envy that I had dropped out of the career world.

The Paternal Teacher

Being a father has been and is a central theme in my life that has spilled over into my life as a teacher and an administrator, both in the school system as well as in other fields. I felt very much the father while I was teaching, both in the classroom as well as when I was creating and organizing programs for students with special needs within the school system. As an administrator today, I feel even more that I am a father figure for my employees. As I am writing this it occurs to me that it would be a very interesting study to ask principals if they feel the same way. Certainly many of the responsibilities are the same.

As a teacher, the obvious connection to parenting is the duty of *in locus parentis* imposed on teachers by law. Teachers are expected to exercise this parental care in dealing with students and many of the social interactions take a similar form to that of parenting. While this was certainly my experience in teaching students, I felt equally a father figure to many of the adults that were a part of my life as a teacher. My job as special needs teacher put me into direct supervision of a number of teacher aides within the school. Although these were mature women with many skills of their own, I often had to mediate conflicts between them and others at the school. They would express to me that they felt powerless in their position and were frustrated in trying to accomplish their duties. They had a wide range of issues that I had to deal with. Some students would give them trouble because they were not teachers and were not seen to have any authority.

Other issues resulted in conflicts between aides and teachers because they felt that some teachers treated them in a demeaning way. Some parents as well could be openly dismissive of them and treat them with disdain. Of course, the aides' own behaviour was not always appropriate. The bottom line was that I was the one that dealt with the issues. I was often called in to mediate these spats and it felt little different from those times I had to settle arguments between my own children.

Dealing with other teachers, parents and students followed a similar pattern in my teaching life. Part of it was a result of my role as special needs teacher. Parents and teachers alike were often very frustrated and emotional about the difficulties inherent in educating students with learning or developmental disabilities. Different belief systems, shattered expectations, overwork, limited resources and a myriad of other factors tended to exacerbate already difficult situations. As a result, I played out the paternal role in all of its aspects. I disciplined, I judged, I consoled and I mediated.

When I moved into a supervisory role in the central office of my school division, there was little change in my job duties. If anything, I was doing more problem solving and mediation. I was simply working with different people in that my primary contact was now with principals. Interestingly, I found little difference in the type of conflicts and the need for the paternal role demanded of me.

The filling of these roles is certainly a constant for me, in my work as well as my private life. Perhaps it is that I see many people as having poor skills in social interactions and problem solving. I seem to jump into situations where I can fix things. The word that seems most appropriate in describing my feelings and consequent behaviour is paternal or paternalistic. At times I am almost overwhelmed with these

feelings in that I feel an incredible sense of responsibility. This makes me somewhat uneasy as this is a term that has developed a negative connotation, especially in recent years. It seems to denote a power over others that takes away their power and choice. In fact, when I looked up the term, I found that the actual meaning, according to one dictionary, was specifically negative. This definition is as follows:

pa·ter·nal·ism

n. A policy or practice of treating or governing people in a fatherly manner, especially by providing for their needs without giving them rights or responsibilities (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language).

Here is a bit of social commentary that links treating people in a fatherly manner by not giving them rights or responsibilities. What a negative view of fathers. I wonder if this is because fathers are seen in a disciplinary light rather than one that is more nurturing? Or, perhaps it is because the authority that is inherent in the ability to discipline is seen as intrinsically negative. Maybe it is an extension of the belief that Lord Acton had that “power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely” (Lord Acton, in a letter to Bishop Mandell Creighton, 1887. [Http://phrases.shu.ac.uk](http://phrases.shu.ac.uk)). When I looked up the term maternalism, which should be the female equivalent of the male paternalism I found only this reference:

ma·ter·nal
adj.

1. Relating to or characteristic of a mother or motherhood; motherly: *maternal instinct.*
2. Inherited from one's mother: *a maternal trait.*
3. Related through one's mother: *my maternal uncle.*

(The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language.)

Here there is no negativity. As well as looking in a dictionary, I would risk saying from my observations that, in our culture, the term maternalism has a positive connotation rather than the negative one attributed to the masculine form. Paternalism, as well as patriarchy, are terms which are often seen in a pejorative light and seem to be associated with power in a negative manner. The following quote shows this as well as the fact that power comes in different forms:

When we say we lived in a patriarchy, we think of living under a male-dominated government or power structure. We forget that the family had at least as much power as the government in people's everyday life, and that the family was female dominated. We forget that it too was a power structure. (Farrell, 1993, p. 97)

Maybe what we need to do in our society is to rewrite our definitions of what a father is and what he should do. I guess that is what I am doing in a personal way by writing this narrative.

The Evolution of a Father

Every day all of us make hundreds of choices, most of them so menial and habitual that they are almost as automatic as breathing. Those who live in unhappy failure have never exercised their options for the better things of life because they have never been aware that they had any choices.

—Og Mandino, *The Choice*

My life as a father encompasses two very distinct periods of my life. The first started when I was a young man of 25 years of age with the birth of my first son. A second boy and then a girl followed soon afterward. The second period started 20 years later with the birth of my fourth child, a girl, to my second marriage as well as having a seven-year-old stepson. Having these children over this span of years has taught me a great deal and, in many ways, has forced me to reflect on many of my beliefs and values.

My initial period of being a father can best be characterized by the term stereotypical. By this, I mean that I was the typical young father who saw his role as being primarily a provider rather than a nurturer. By “bringing home the bacon,” I was fulfilling my duties and responsibilities. I felt much kinship with the following example of fathering:

First time round as a father I had truckloads of rules, oughts, ideals, and explanations all of which kept me at arm's length from my children. I thought it was my responsibility to oversee and direct their experience from my superior position, to protect them from complex adult emotions and from the harsh realities of the world until they were ready to confront them. (Keen, 1991, p. 228)

I was quite awkward and nervous around my children when they were young and gave over most of the responsibility for their personal care to my wife. I wasn't totally distant from them as I did change diapers on occasion and would spend time with them. However, my mental model was that this type of nurturing was more the province of women than of men. This mental model came to me from my own personal experiences while growing up as well as the models I saw on the television and movie screens. One of the programs I watched as a child was *Father Knows Best*. Even in the title are those echoes of paternalism that are so decried today. One could ask the question: Father knows better than who? Better than the kids? Better than Mom? Better than the school? The thing that I remember from this program was that many of the problems of the family waited until Dad came home from work. He would then dole out whatever was necessary, be it discipline or sympathy. To its credit, the show did represent the father as a kind and loving man. However, it did bolster the stereotypical father that I emulated.

Wait Until Your Father Gets Home

The major role I played with my older children was that of disciplinarian. Being a man with a deeper voice made it easier for me to get the children to do what we wanted. Looking back on this, I think I fell into the role for a number of reasons. One, which I have already mentioned, was that it was relatively easy for me to get my kids to obey. Another was that I saw this as one of my principal responsibilities that, as luck would have it, freed me from doing some of the more messy stuff. A third reason, which has only recently occurred to me, was that my wife really did not like to discipline and would avoid it simply because I was available and willing to take on the job. I am not saying that this was done in a conscious manner, but I believe that she protected her own view of herself as a loving, nurturing mother by allowing me to be the bad guy. I in turn reinforced my belief that I was not the loving nurturing parent because the two roles were in conflict. I no longer believe that they are mutually exclusive, but when there is such a clear dichotomy between roles, it becomes difficult to have a proper balance. I suspect this happens with other couples as well.

Sometimes prior to walking in the door I wondered with dread what was going to confront me. Did I have to be stern or could I come in and be joyful at being with my family? This has given me quite a bit of empathy for my father as I remember as a young child waiting in terror for my father to come home to deal with my transgressions of the day. Back then I was worried for myself. Now I know what a toll it must have taken on my father.

Gee, Dad Sure Has Learned a Lot in Twenty Years

Everything can be taken from us but one thing: the last of human freedoms - to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstance - to choose one's own way.

—Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*

When looking back at this period, I now realize that most of my beliefs, behaviours and actions were a result of thinking from patterns I developed within my own childhood and adolescence. My fathering style was that of my own father. My view of children was the same. He took great pleasure in his family but played the role of benevolent patriarch and ultimate disciplinarian.

My perception of marriage and what it meant to be a man directly followed what I saw as I grew up. In many regards, I was very lucky because I had a fine role model to follow. My father is a kind and compassionate man and my mother is a wonderful and loving person. Both of them provided exemplary role models for me to get my start in this life.

Along with the good, however, came the bad or, for me personally at any rate, attitudes and behaviours that did not suit my personality or my ever changing culture and environment. The type of fathering I adopted falls into this category and directly relates to the subject of nurture. Interestingly enough, I am not now looking at this issue from the perspective of whether or not I was a good parent. In fact, I think I did a reasonable job with my first set of children given my training in that area. They have turned out to be very exceptional and competent people and continue to have positive experiences in their lives. I believe that children are incredibly flexible and can develop properly under many different models of parenting. What will be fascinating for me to see is how they will view themselves as fathers and mothers and whether the two groups of my own children

will have different perspectives on this issue when they get to that stage in their lives.

How will my own disparate set of values and beliefs over the years and with the two sets of children translate into different patterns of behaviour for them?

However, rather than worrying about them, I am, at least in this narrative, more concerned with how my patterned behaviour affected me and my own satisfaction with life. I have come to value the nurturing side of me much more than before and now find myself in a place where I want to grow stronger in this area. Looking into the past provides me with an understanding of why I do things in order to be able to choose to be different. As Keen says,

Lately I have come to believe that the best thing I can give my children is an honest account of what I feel, think, and experience, to invite them into my inner world, tell them stories that will give them some sense of my pilgrimage as a man. (1991, p. 228)

Nurture and Male Teaching

Choices

As a young man the world seemed simple.
Follow the rules and reap the rewards.
Yet that way seemed shallow and material.
Success that others could see.
But in the end it meant nothing to me.
I look at myself and like more of what I see.
Now I know that choice means everything to me.
Choosing for myself what I will be.
Despite what others say.

All of the topics mentioned previously blend together to provide a picture of how men are made in our society. My experiences in school provide me with a much clearer picture of how my indoctrination into our culture's maleness has affected my teaching and, I suspect, that of many other male teachers.

As I started my teacher training, I knew that I needed to head into either junior or senior high. I knew this for a number of reasons. I didn't encounter any overt pressure against teaching in elementary school from my professors at university. In fact, a number of them tried to encourage the male students to go in that direction. The pressure was much more subtle than that and, in fact, primarily came from within. Looking back, I believe the main reason I rejected elementary was that I did not perceive myself as nurturing enough to teach little kids. I hid this under laughing references to not having enough patience, mucus tolerance, or the ability to stay interested at such a low academic level. I know now that these were all excuses I gave myself for not believing that I was nurturing enough or gentle enough to make the grade. I know now that I do have these qualities as I see them in myself when I am with my own children. There is no longer doubt in my mind that I could have brought them to teaching children in lower elementary.

In addition to my internal doubts, I also knew that men were under more actual constraint in teaching young children than their female counterparts. In teacher training, we men were constantly warned not to hug kids, to have no physical contact with them whatsoever. This can work with older kids, but when a distraught seven-year-old boy or girl comes to you crying over some traumatic event, to not give that child a hug is cold and unfeeling. As well, it sabotages one's ability as a teacher to develop trust and caring

relationships with the students. I am fully aware of why men are under such constraints but that doesn't help when only a hug will do. In my stints as a student teacher at this level, I also felt some wariness on the part of some female teachers and parents. I am not sure if my own sensitivity to this issue is making me see things that aren't there, but it is the same feeling I get when I offer to baby sit for the neighbour's children and am politely turned down. This occurs despite the fact that on other occasions the mother next door has needed someone to look after her kids for a little while and asked if my wife would be able to do so.

As well, there is I think for many men in teaching an implicit drive or necessity to get into administration, not simply because one might be suited to this type of work, but because it is the logical direction for anyone with ambition. I remember discussions in the staff room about one male teacher in particular. This man was a fine example of a teacher. He consistently showed good judgement and leadership. He was universally liked by the other staff, itself a rather difficult accomplishment, and had been asked by central office to consider becoming a principal. The staff was generally puzzled by his lack of desire to step into this role for which he was seemingly so suited.

I think there is more cultural pressure on male teachers than female teachers to follow this route. We all have known of the older woman teacher who has spent a lifetime with younger children. This is an honoured position that is fondly pictured by many in society and is simply another very acceptable choice for women to make. Many male teachers, affected by the cultural bias to be goal oriented, feel somewhat unsuccessful in their career if they do not make it to some administrative post.

The Calling of a Teacher

I first became interested in teaching for very practical reasons. I had just finished a 10-year experience with farming and needed to find a way of making a living. I had a wife, three children and a dog to support and didn't have credentials for a professional career. I had done many things in my life and had developed a number of skills. However, I was feeling very much like a jack-of-all-trades and master of none. I did have some university training from before and decided that I needed to complete university in order to move into the ranks of the professionals. I knew that I was not interested in the trades as I had done that before and found it to be lacking in mental stimulation. Having grown up in a family that stressed academics, I found that I had reached a place in my life where I needed to fulfill the intellectual of my life.

As I mentioned before, I decided to go back into university at the end of my farming career. I wasn't sure what I wanted to do but knew that I needed to finish a degree with marketable skills. My previous university training had been directed towards the study of history; that was still a major love of mine. However, I had some concern over continuing in that field without some more practical course of action in view. I knew I had three years to go and had to convince my wife to put up with penury for that length of time. Although I was eventually able to sneak in a history degree along with my education degree, I knew I was at university for more than simply the love of learning.

In university, unlike many colleges, this limited the fields I could go into. Although I know that many who graduate in the fine arts, humanities or social sciences find many good jobs, I wanted something more definite. I also knew that the Faculty of

Business was not for me. This left me with Education. Now I know that this is not the generally accepted way in which one is supposed to go into the field of teaching. It is supposed to be a calling that one has to follow. I wonder how many people go into it because it seems like a good career rather than an avocation. Anyway, I decided to try it out.

As I did my undergraduate education at Lethbridge, I had to follow the process laid out by that Education Faculty. At this university, one was not granted entry into the faculty without going through a course called Education 2500. This course was an introduction to teaching that had within it a student teaching element. This I think was a very good idea because it gave those interested in the field a real taste of what was to come. I knew a number of individuals who thought they wanted to be teachers only to discover after this experience that they never wanted to set foot inside a classroom again. Luckily for me, the opposite occurred. Although I approached the whole affair from a rather pragmatic perspective, I found that I did have a passion to teach. My experience in Education 2500 was a very positive one that took all of my doubts away about whether I should be a teacher.

Gentleness and Strength Are Not Mutually Exclusive

One of the reasons I underwent this change was the result of a rather unique experience in my practicum placement. I was put into a typical grade two classroom within the city. This class had 25 students of nice little boys and girls along with a few that were considered as having special needs. However, what made this class different were not the students, but rather the teacher. He was an anomaly simply by virtue of the

fact that he was a male teacher in the lower elementary grades. Although there are some men in this division, their number is small indeed. He was a man who was able to show that soft and gentle nurturing quality that can be so important in working with students. At the same time, he showed strength and purpose that was very evident to all of the students. I was told after my practicum that a number of difficult students were placed in his room because he was excellent at classroom control.

At the time, I noticed how this man was able to bridge the gap between gentleness and strength. I find it interesting to note now when I am thinking back on my experiences that the reason I found the initial teaching experience positive is different than I thought then. I believe that I felt a strong attraction to the caring and nurturing element in teaching and experienced this strongly though unconsciously during that first practicum. I now believe that it is an intrinsic part of my nature to need to work in a field that has a nurturing component, such as teaching. What is amazing to me is that for a long time I hid this fact from everyone including myself. I guess that I had built up a false picture of myself over the years because of the many social, cultural and personal factors that conditioned my perception of what it meant to be a man.

However, now that I have spent a number of years in the profession I am more impressed with this man's desire to teach children at that level and the degree of nurture he showed towards them. I believe that I was attracted to teaching through this experience because I saw a man showing his gentle nature. Again, I believe that this attracted me in an unconscious way because consciously I was more attracted to the strength. Unfortunately, at the time, I was much more interested in his classroom control rather than his gentleness. I know, by talking to other teachers that many of them were

more concerned at the beginning with learning how to control a classroom rather than being able to express nurture.

We had a number of conversations about the subject of how teachers should behave towards students. Although we did not specifically discuss nurture, we talked about what it meant to be a male teacher, especially at the elementary level. He expressed to me what I have since discovered for myself: that it is difficult to maintain the nurturing element in school because men are so often called upon to do the disciplining. At the time, I didn't see this as a problem. However, as I developed my own career I appreciate his feelings on the matter. On some level, this teacher resented the fact that he was given some of the more difficult students because of his ability to handle the behaviours. He expressed that what he really enjoyed was the teaching and relating to the young children. He was never so happy as when he was sitting on the floor with the children circled around him learning a lesson or listening to a story.

Although I had a very good experience during this practicum and enjoyed working with the younger children I never tried to enter the profession by teaching at this level. As I entered the Faculty of Education and started my teacher training, I believed that I needed to head into either junior or senior high. My own children were at that stage and I felt comfortable in relating to them. I also felt some pride in being able to assert some control in the classroom at that level as it is considered by many a difficult thing to do. In some respects, junior high school teachers are considered a separate breed because of the challenges in managing students during this adolescent stage of life.

Again, looking back, my self-perception was not that of a man who would be successful in teaching younger children. Even through my first practicum, I felt that I did

not have much to offer little children in this way. When I was sitting on the floor with the kids or when I comforted a crying child on the playground I somehow felt that I was out of place. To some extent I believed that I was faking my compassion and caring. This was in spite of the fact that I had three children of my own that I loved and nurtured. What amazes me is that I held this belief in spite of all indications to the contrary. Perhaps this is the same problem that people with eating disorders have: they see themselves as fat even though the reality is very different.

Somebody Has to Do it

What's the world's greatest lie?' the boy asked, completely surprised. 'It's this: that at a certain point in our lives, we lose control of what's happening to us, and our lives become controlled by fate. That's the world's greatest lie.

— Paulo Coelho, *The Alchemist*

As I progressed through my education program I found myself attracted to the area of special needs. I now believe that the caring and nurturing involved in what can be a very difficult field is what created the attraction. However, at the time, the ostensible reason I gave, at least to my family, was that it was a practical way of getting a job at a time when the market for entering teachers was extremely poor. As a Social Studies major (a dime a dozen at the time) I felt that I needed some way to make a niche for myself.

I was very lucky in my first teaching job. I was hired by a junior/senior high school that was just starting to develop a special needs program. It's rather amazing to me now that they entrusted this development to someone new from university and green as grass from an experience perspective. However, I did not look a gift horse in the mouth

and proceeded to get on with the job. The school had about 400 students and about 25 teaching and administrative staff. It was a good school with good leadership. I still appreciate the principal who gave me my start. He is a very compassionate man with a good feel for his staff. He also showed a great deal of confidence in me that helped me to have confidence in myself.

I think my own inherent nurturing qualities really came out during this experience. I was often confronted with students who tried very hard but had been beaten down by the system. One of the more difficult aspects of the job was the teacher conference with parents. By the time their child had come into my orbit, they had gone through a number of difficult years where they saw their child meet constant failure. One of the influences in my own life was the experience of having my own child, my second son, go through a painful experience in school as a result of a brain injury resulting from a bicycle accident. Because of this, I could empathize greatly with other parents. This spurred me on to do the best job possible for their child.

Special needs is an interesting area to teach in because the normal rules of teaching do not always apply. Often one needs to act and teach in counter-intuitive ways. One of the things I found most difficult was to deal with the other teachers in the school. Most of the teachers were fine examples of the pedagogical art but many had difficulty in understanding the nature of the student's disability, particularly in making judgements as it related to behaviour and work ethic. With some students, they gave a lot of latitude and allowed themselves to be manipulated while with others, they were quite incensed by what they thought of as laziness on the part of the student. On one hand I would be

advocating for the student by trying to persuade the teacher to ease up while on the other I tried to show the teacher that the student was capable of much more.

It was an interesting study in nurture in that the male teachers tended to be much harsher on the students than the female teachers. This is a generalization, of course, but an interesting observation nevertheless. The exception to this was when negative behaviour was also a part of the equation. In this case, few teachers were able to look past the behaviour to the cause of the difficulty and had little ability to ameliorate the situation. Again, this created an interesting and somewhat dichotomous situation for me. On one hand, I was asking the teachers to be patient and understand the root causes of the behaviour while on the other I was often asked to help solve the behaviour. In many cases, I had to take on the job of disciplinarian.

This disciplinarian role I have had placed upon me is a recurring theme of my adult life. I am not sure whether it is because I am a male and the females of my acquaintance have felt it appropriate to download it to me or because I am good at it. I suspect it is some of both. I have fulfilled the role at the bequest of male teachers as well but the large majority of cases involved female teachers asking for my assistance.

I have mentioned earlier that as a father and husband this role was given to me. My first wife much preferred to have me act as the heavy in raising our children. In some respects, I became more severe than was desirable. I believe this was in compensation for what I felt was a major abrogation of responsibility on her part. Even my present wife, who tries very hard to be consistent with discipline, finds it quite difficult and will sometimes give way to the children through pity or exhaustion.

As a teacher, I had to help some of my colleagues with their disciplinary difficulties. This even reached beyond the special needs arena when I was asked to take over a high school English class because the existing teacher had lost control. I took on these responsibilities because I felt that someone had to do it.

In addition to working with the other teachers, I was also the direct supervisor of six teacher aides. Some of these worked directly in the regular classrooms while others worked in a small special needs classroom. These women were very caring individuals who tried their hardest to help the students and teachers. Aides have an especially difficult time in a school because they have little credibility with most students. As mentioned previously, the students don't see them as teachers or as having the authority to demand compliance. Because of this, I had to step in even more often than with the teachers to discipline a number of students. At the school I started to become more the paternal father figure with the heavy hand than the nurturing teacher.

There was one woman who was a very skilful aide working with students. I appreciated her very much because she did not need me to protect her. Rather, she was quite capable of handling the negative behaviour while remaining a kind and nurturing individual. The thing I liked most about working with her was that for a short while I was able to be who I wanted to be rather than fulfill a role others needed from me.

Today, I find myself in a similar situation. Although I am not in a school, I am in a field that involves teaching. I am presently the executive director of a non-profit agency that provides day programs for adults with developmental disabilities. In some ways, this is a natural extension of my teaching career. Instead of dealing with students with disabilities, I now work with the same type of individuals after they have left school.

Now, I am more in the role of principal than teacher. My staff is predominantly female, which is little different from my school experiences. What have not changed are the demands upon me to be the paternal figure. I am still called upon to administer discipline and make the hard decisions that often have little to do with nurture. To some extent, I know that what I do is necessary since I realize that it is for the long term good and could be considered nurturing in that sense. However, I do continue to find it wearying.

My biggest challenge from an administrative perspective is to get those of my staff, both male and female, who are in leadership roles to hold their team members accountable. They find this extremely difficult and will always turn to me to be the bad guy even though they have the authority to administer their own discipline. They will often allow a bad situation to go on and on without any resolution. Their common approach is to talk and continue to talk rather than finally taking action. This is not usually effective and they then expect me to solve the problem. When I ask them to explain their difficulty, I am told that they have a hard time being mean. Their belief seems to be that maintaining accountability would destroy the other aspects of the relationships they have cultivated with their colleagues.

I have mentioned the above situation to illustrate the rather consistent demands on me by others to be a father figure. I do realize that I continue to choose this course for myself and do not mean to complain about it. Perhaps I really do enjoy fulfilling this role or perhaps I enjoy surrounding myself with women because I enjoy their nurturing natures.

My wife and I joke about the differences in our jobs in this regard. Whereas I work mostly with women in a nurturing profession, she works primarily with men in an

engineering firm. Sometimes I will come home from work complaining that I can't handle any more talking and discussing of problems while my wife will come home complaining that the men she works with refuse to discuss anything.

From Evolution to Revolution

What I want from my life now is for it to be simple, without secrets, I want to be who I really am with everyone, all the time.

— E. L. Doctorow

I don't want to be guilty of over-generalizing when I reflect on the impact of male socialization on teaching. I especially do not want to be negative towards many of the male teachers I have come to know and admire. However, I do believe that our society and, by extension, our school systems, still have within them many of the stereotypical inculturalizations that existed during my childhood and adolescence.

While mothers tend to have a strong influence in their son's lives when they are young, fathers and other influential adults may have more influence as boys grow into their sense of masculinity. According to Blye Frank, a contributor to the book *Systemic Violence: How Schools Hurt Children*, the meaning of masculinity is in a constant state of flux and conflict. There is a dichotomy between fulfilling internalized needs and meeting standards mostly set by other men and boys, as authority and domination are merged into the personality itself. (Peets, 1999, p. 5)

I think we have come some way in assisting girls to look past many of the previous social limitations imposed on them but have done little to encourage our young men to be more nurturing and gentle.

When I was teaching at the high school level I was shocked and disappointed at the many negative values held by the teenaged boys. Their behaviour and attitudes towards girls and sex, their culture of machismo, and their own self-views were little changed from those that I experienced as a young man. What I find to be the most depressing is the fact that this is still seen by many of the adults within the system as the norm.

As fathers and teachers, men need to overcome many of the socializing factors which deaden their sense of nurture. This is not to say that they need to act or react in the same way as women. As in most things in life, there is a balance that can be achieved. Both men and women need to come closer to the centre in order for their nurturing to be positive and of use to our society.

One of the major lessons I have learned in life is the need for constant self-reflection. Self-reflection is something that can be difficult to achieve but absolutely necessary to effect change in one's life. I remember when I was taking my university courses in education at an undergraduate level how the faculty stressed the value and importance of self-reflection or as they called it "meta-cognition." I remember with amusement how this frustrated me as well as my fellow students. At that time we viewed our education in a more simplistic way than I do now. I, along with many others, looked at teaching as the acquisition of a number of skill sets rather than a complex interaction of personal relationships. I wanted to know "how" to teach more than I wanted to know about the "why" of teaching. We wanted to know about classroom management and curriculum and lesson plans, etc., etc. At the time, the insistence on looking inside was annoying because we felt that the answers to our questions were external to ourselves.

I believe I have grown since that day and now realize that teaching, parenting or managing is a complex mix of both who you are as well as what you do. Back then, what I was interested in were simply details rather than what was at the heart of teaching, parenting or simply living a fulfilling life. I am grateful today for the emphasis that was placed on this meta-cognition, because it has helped me to look at myself with more intensity and honesty than I did previously.

This point was really brought home to me when I was asked to give a presentation to some undergraduate education students on my experiences as a teacher. The first day, I came prepared with some stories of my teaching life which centred on issues of relationships: how to get along with other teachers and walk the political tightrope of the school, how to talk to parents about things both good and bad, how to create your own style of teaching, etc. These were the things I had found most difficult in the school and to my mind, much more interesting than the logistics of preparing lessons. I was quickly derailed from my presentation by the same issues that existed when I was an undergraduate. The students were still interested in the more concrete parts of education.

Feeling frustrated from the encounter and having one more session the following day, I went home that night and did some research. I looked through the calendars of Alberta Colleges that offered two-year programs in qualifying to become a teacher's aide. The next day I started by asking the students to list the things they most wanted to learn in their education program. The hands went up and I soon had a list of all of the items on the blackboard. As expected, the items all dealt with lesson planning, how to deal with special needs students, classroom discipline and the like. I then passed out copies of the course lists from the college programs. The things listed in the calendars paralleled almost exactly the list of items from the students. My final statement was that if all they wanted to do was to learn these skills they would be much better off by going to college instead of spending four or five years at university. I also mentioned the difference between a teacher's salary compared to that of an aide.

As a caveat, I should say that I don't hold the logistical skills in contempt, as I believe that they should be taught. However, I think there should be a clear delineation

between these types of skills and the more relational or personal skills that are so necessary in being a teacher.

My point in the above story is that it is only through self-reflection and consciously choosing one's course of action that one can achieve an autonomy of style. Otherwise, we follow a formula that may not work for us as individuals. We all seem to want to be told how to act and told how to be. We want a recipe for life instead of looking within and choosing how our life will be. We want the security of surety rather than choice. Unfortunately, defaulting to someone else or to society in general is often not helpful in our complex society.

As I look back on my life so far, I see that it has been a long series of trying to escape patterned behaviours. As it relates to nurture, I was suborned into the stereotypical male pattern set where the ability to be nurturing was low on the priority list. As a young man I thought I knew what it meant to be a man, a father, a teacher, a husband. As I have grown older I find that I have rejected many of my previous assumptions. I am a more nurturing man than I was told I could or should be.

The implications of this to teaching are in many ways the same as the implications for society in general. Schools derive from our societies/cultures and reflect their values. Because of this, it often takes a rather powerful external force to jar or upset the status quo. One of the forces that has had an impact on society and schools is the feminist movement. The movement arose through a belief by a number of women that the roles placed upon women were unfair and restricted most women to stereotypical positions that lacked validity in modern society. Through the feminist movement our view of women and girls has undergone a fundamental change. Within many schools there are conscious

attempts to raise the consciousness of girls to look past the external social restrictions based on patterned thought. There is a conscious inculcation to teach girls that they can do and be whatever and whomever they wish. This, I think, has been a tremendously positive advance for our culture.

Unfortunately, feminism has often focused on women in comparison to men. Often this comparison has dealt with relative degrees of power and income as it relates to our economic system. The push for women has often been for them to move into what was traditionally considered a man's world and take over the plum positions and earn the big salaries.

The reality is that the male world is just as set in patterned behaviours and stereotypes as that of women. It is, in my opinion, not something to aspire to. Power is ephemeral and often does not lead to self-fulfillment or happiness. Money is the same. Although too little money can cause grief, a life based upon its acquisition can also lead to sorrow. The present materialistic view of society has crippled us all and has, to some extent, covered over the real issue, that of personal fulfillment. As a man, I was channelled into that path of success. In order to achieve it I was led to believe that I had to forego that which was inherent in my nature. I have found this to be as deadening to me as I suspect many women have felt when their natural abilities and talents have been stifled by social expectations.

In the schools, as in society, we need a consciousness raising for both boys and girls. We don't need girls to aspire to a man's world or boys to aspire to a girl's world. Rather, we need to encourage all children to think, reason and decide for themselves what and who they will be. In some respects, feminism has created a false dichotomy between

male and female. The reality is that both sexes need to be released from the stereotypes that chain them:

“Nay, be a Columbus to whole new continents and worlds within you, opening new channels, not of trade, but of thought”

—Thoreau from Walden

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