

A photograph of a person jumping over a wooden fence in a backyard. The person is in mid-air, with their legs and feet visible. The background shows a brick house and some trees. The lighting is warm, suggesting late afternoon or early morning.

the *perfect* gift for a

# Man

VOLUME I

**30 stories about  
reinventing manhood**

**“This is one hell of a book... It will change you.”**

Steve Biddulph, author of *Manhood* and *Raising Boys*

A collaborative man book project for The Inspire Foundation  
Compiled by Gavin Heaton and Mark Pollard

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**We hope it makes a small, positive difference to your world.**

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*the perfect gift for a*  
**Man**

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**Steve Biddulph**  
**author of *Manhood & Raising Boys***

“This is one hell of a book. Born out of a triple j week focusing on men’s lives, and created by its listeners, it’s a remarkable piece of work.

A man’s life, whether he is 18 or 80, can start to go badly. And often, after that, it just gets worse. How to turn your life around is a serious concern. The men who write these gutsy, honest, emotionally vulnerable stories create an excitement and energy in the reader, because they have faced the dragon of their own pain, and won. They got help, they dived in, they didn’t give up, and they trusted the power of their hearts to bring them through.

Every kind of man, every style of writing, with pictures, cartoons, short and punchy, you will find bits of yourself all over these pages. Read it and weep. It will change you.”

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# Our partners

**The Inspire Foundation** was established in 1996 in direct response to Australia's then-escalating rates of youth suicide.

They combine technology with the direct involvement of young people to deliver innovative and practical online programs that prevent youth suicide and improve young people's mental health and wellbeing. Their mission is to help millions of young people lead happier lives.

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*the perfect gift for a*  
**Man**

We're born so pure.  
But along the way, many of us fray.  
Some of us stay frayed;  
others break.  
Some then stay broken;  
while the fortunate heal.  
But how can more of us heal?

Inside this book are 30 brave stories  
written by people who know  
that you may very well go through  
what they've gone through.  
Maybe you already have.

In these stories,  
they hope you find  
solace, hope,  
inspiration, a friend.

These stories are a gift.  
Please share them.

*Mark & Gavin*

**What makes a man?**

**What breaks a man?**

**Breathe**





# Being a man

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**“A life without challenges is like being a man without balls. If you’ve got them, you may as well use them to your advantage.”** Stephen Crombie

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# To my son

## Jorge Albinagorta

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To My Dearest Son,

I am not sure if I will make a big contribution to this *Perfect Gift for a Man* project. What I am absolutely sure of is that, if I could get this perfect gift, I would love to give it to you.

I was thinking I had to wait a few years and see you grow up before I could present you with such a gift. The thing is, at 8, you are already a man in the making. So this quest for the perfect gift has become a matter of urgency, there is no lead time. You need it now; I want to give it to you now.

I am thinking this gift needs to help you be resilient when things are not going your way; loving when needing to nourish life around you; discerning when the choices are hazy; and provide you with a sense of self-worth when you have doubts about yourself.

Whilst people that are cleverer than me come up with the perfect contraption, let me attempt to give you something in the meantime.

Allow me, please, to remind you that when you were kind enough to come to my life, the whole world around me paused to contemplate your beauty, and that it was easy for me to stop being a planet in my own galaxy and to humbly become a satellite in yours.

Let me, please, recount the moments when you amaze me with your imagination, when you lift my heart with your assertive notes on the piano, and when you make me feel satisfyingly inferior with this 3D sense you've got going in your head.

This perfect gift thing is a bit tricky, though. I covet it too, and I'd love to get it from you. So, if you can, gift me your forgiveness and help me get over the moments when I stall your initiative, your dreams, or your desire to share the things that interest you. I feel like crap when I stupidly do that.

Enable me, please, to think — at the right time — that in twenty years time a smudged wall or a broken plant or a messy room will mean absolutely nothing, especially when compared to our ability to bond and trust each other.

Regale me, please, with your time when I stop being your main man, when life goes on and it gets too frigging interesting to call, email or stop by.

And finally, give me the chance to see which gifts you have for your loved ones; they will appreciate it.

Lovingly,  
Your Father,  
Jorge

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# Dealing with personal problems

**Julian Cole**

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In Year 9 after two years of bullying, I admitted defeat and trudged into the school counsellor's office and made an appointment.

Asking for help in my eyes was a weakness.

I was an independent soul. I disliked playing in team sports and I got annoyed at group projects. Even more embarrassing about the defeat was that I was going to a counsellor! Going to the counsellor meant that I must have massive problems.

So, I reluctantly sat down and talked about my bullying problem. The counsellor told me that I cannot look like a victim; next time I walk past the bully, look him straight in the eye and keep walking.

I didn't believe that it would work. I gave it a shot anyway. To my surprise it bloody worked! I was so surprised that I ran back to the counsellor's office and recounted the event.

From that week on, I started rocking up at the school counsellor every week. He was a sounding board for all my thoughts.

I never thought anyone would be able to help me with my personal problems.

I thought — as men — we were meant to be able to deal with all that emotional stuff by ourselves.

I thought that my problems were too small. I was wrong.



Today, I worry that a lot of men still think that asking for help with personal problems is a sign of weakness. To me an attribute of a modern man is someone who is not scared of their feelings and understands when they have a problem and is not afraid to ask for help.

I cannot recommend seeing a counsellor enough. Counsellors are great because they are not involved with your life so their advice is always impartial. If you have kids, make sure to let them know that they can talk to a school counsellor about anything they like.

**[www.adspace-pioneers.blogspot.com](http://www.adspace-pioneers.blogspot.com)**

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# Monkeys with underpants

Joel Connolly

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My Dad left when I was pretty young. My Mum, my sister and I were living in Darwin and he called up one day and said that he was in Sydney. Won't be coming back. At the time I didn't think this meant he was gone from my life completely, he just wouldn't be living with us anymore.

"But he can still come over, can't he, Mum?"

From then on it was pretty much just me, Mum and my sister.

It's true that growing up without a father figure denies you direct, everyday contact with a role model, but that doesn't mean that you're not surrounded by the proposition of masculinity in just about every part of your life.

If you can't look within your own family you can turn to chaps like Jason Bourne or Tom Hanks from *Sleepless in Seattle*, or Dr Karl. Culturally we're almost drowned in artefacts that define masculinity and it's not hard to get some cookie-cutter idea of what a man is, or should be.

In some ways, growing up without a dad can make life less confusing. Instead of learning from someone else, trying to follow your dad's massive footprints on the beach, you become more independent and you have to take everything that is being thrown at you and make some kind of sense of it by yourself.



You're forced to decide what to take stock of, what to discard and in the process you get some kind of idea of what a man is meant to be and what kind of man you would like to become.

When you grow up with women, your idea of masculinity comes from the female perspective, which I think, is a good thing given that the female is the counterpoint to the male and as a young man I can say that just about everything I've done in my life, stupid or otherwise, has been the result of female influence. And I don't mean this in some macho "I lead with my dick" way, but in more of a holistic Yin and Yang kind of way.

A big part of my journey into manhood was defined by the struggle I had with my ego. Ego is central to masculinity and, in my opinion, is one of the big barriers men have to overcome when trying to live up to this ideal of a decent man. It's a personal journey and you have to learn what ego is, how to control it and when to let it run amok.

My journey began in my teenage years and lasted all the way through until I was about 24 and in my third year of university. I'm not willing to say I've overcome all the negativity of ego, but I'm much further

along than I used to be and I don't think it rules me in the way it used to.

The story is partly chronicled in an online journal I kept, one that I hope never sees the light of day. When I look back on some of the things I wrote about — uni, life away from home, girls, love, mateship — I cringe. But, in a weird way, writing down and sharing my experience with strangers really helped me. I'm in the place I am because of that journal.

Having one bad role model is also important. This sounds a bit nuts, but my Dad was shit. He wasn't around and he didn't live up to this idea of what a man should be and having that kind of bad role model in your life really helps you to understand what it is to actually be a man. I knew that he didn't feel any sense of responsibility for his family. He wasn't brave and his values were all out of shape.

A bad role model can be a counterpoint and sometimes, if you want to solve a problem, you have to start with the solution. I knew that if I wanted to be a decent man all I had to do was start with a bad man and work backwards from there.

Having such a strong desire to be a good man was always kind of a “fuck you” to my Dad: “I can be a good person, a man, and successful and I can do it without you.” Some of this anger is still there but I've mostly let it go. One of the things writing has taught me is that it is OK to not only speak your mind (something most men can do aggravatingly well) but to speak your feelings. Try saying that last sentence aloud. It isn't easy to do and that's the challenge we all face: finding a balance between what we know instinctually and what the modern world requires of us.

We're monkeys with underpants, after all.

**[www.popmedium.com](http://www.popmedium.com)**

Image by Justin Williams



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# By bike or by box

Stephen Crombie

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My parents separated when I was 14. I sat my Dad on a grand pedestal. He didn't smoke, drink or do drugs. But one day, he left. I was angry, but accepted the outcome. Not every relationship can last forever. Within a few weeks, I replaced him with drugs. I escaped into this world for four years, as I could not find happiness in my own. I felt more comfortable inside my mind than dealing with everyday reality.

I hunted for answers through books, videos, the internet, psychologists, friends and family; hoping to find a tool that would change me. At 16, I had a serious bout with depression, and another year filling my veins. In the end I realised only I could help myself. I stopped.

Teenage years are tumultuous times. I watched various friends during that period and the years following commit suicide, become addicted to heroin, get committed to mental institutions, and literally disappear off the face of the planet. I didn't have anyone to look up to or anyone I really trusted. I needed to get out of my backyard and discover what the world had to offer so I could make peace with my everyday existence.

I left. A few weeks after finishing school I turned to adventure as my new life support and chased it in whatever form I found it — from joining the circus and cruising around Australia, to floating down the Amazon River in a leaky, homemade canoe. These initial journeys taught me that the road less travelled hid landmines of experience and pleasure, all of which needed to be soaked up before I was propelled

off the face of the Earth. I didn't know why, but with each new experience, I grew stronger.

At 21, one of my most amiable and inspired friends unexpectedly jumped from a cliff on one of our camping trips. He was dealing with drug-induced schizophrenia. I never knew if he slipped, thought he could fly, or wanted to end his life. I still don't know. He was a bohemian traveller and the ultimate of all dreamers who connected with everyone who came in contact with him. He believed in himself, even if others didn't. If he dreamed something, he would turn it into reality even if others thought it impossible.

His death created a primordial shift in my perception and direction; it was the manner in which he lived his life that made me challenge how I was to live mine. I was working in finance and doing a job that would earn me serious dollars — but would it make me happy? I was doing it because my Dad encouraged me to chase security, not because I enjoyed it. I was not following my own dreams or aspirations — but those of people I admired. From that moment on, I decided that it was time to squeeze the soul out of life. I wanted to know what was possible. I wanted to understand my capabilities and arrest my future, which lay in the palm of my hands. The only person with the ability to change my life was me — so I did.

I made plans to be the youngest person to circumnavigate the world by land and sea on a motorbike. When I first discussed the idea, even my closest friends didn't think it was conceivable. But if you really believe in something, and attune yourself to that goal, vision or idea, it will eventually become reality. I needed to prove something to myself. I knew it was possible, but I had no idea at what cost — nor did I care. I read books on survival, filled my veins with the recommended immunisations and built a bike capable of taking on the planet.

After three years of preparation, I saved my pennies, sold my apartment and hit the road.



“The only way I am coming home is by bike or by box.” This is the first line I wrote in a notebook I had designated for my adventure, and as soon as I wrote it I decided this was to be a trip from which I would never return the same. Initially, it was about breaking a record, but that soon changed. I became a part of the road and there was no longer anything which separated me from my home, regardless of which side of the road I found myself on. The fundamental philosophy of the trip was to turn a dream into reality and that is exactly what happened.

Before I left, I thought I knew myself, but I had only just scratched the surface. I travelled 90,000 kilometres from Australia to the Arctic Circle. It took me two years. I suffered from dehydration, starvation and disease — contracting *Guardia*, dysenteric amoebas and a few little parasites running through my bloodstream. I rebuilt my engine four times — due to my lack of mechanical ability. I crossed the Andes three times, travelled the full length of the Amazon River and finally made it to the Arctic Circle.

Throughout the trip, various characters shared their visions with me, fed me, put a roof over my malnourished head, slapped me around, and chased me out of town, when I needed it. A Dutch Headhunter on business in Ecuador shared his soul, the former Panamanian President lit my path in the Caribbean, and the street kids in every country taught me how to overcome adversity in exchange for a breath of fresh air and a good meal. My trip comprised of making and breaking unimaginable friendships. As with every journey, it is the people that you share your days with that make the trip. They taught me about what life was like outside the box I was made in.

I learnt what makes me happy, what makes me sad and what satisfies my desires as a human being. Most important of all was learning to be content with my own company and express my feelings and emotions, instead of tailoring them in a way deemed appropriate by whoever I was with at the time. Some people may not be attracted to that mentality, but if you do not truly express yourself in a way that fits

with your perspective on life, then it is hard to free yourself of the confines that society can place on you. The pressure to succeed in something that may not make you happy is commonplace. The sphere of influence that surrounds you can often shift your focus to a goal that does not truly reflect your attitude or morals. So I learnt to stand alone, and be happy being me.

I started to welcome discomfort and misfortune, assured that I would bounce back wiser and less vulnerable to the elements that surrounded me. As Dr Norman Vincent Peel says, “The more problems you’ve got, the more life you’ve got. If you’ve got no problems, you’ve got no life.” A life without challenges is like being a man without balls. If you’ve got them, you may as well use them to your advantage.

Test your mettle, understand your capabilities, assert your beliefs, stop chasing your tail, and instead — follow your heart. Your heart usually knows what is good for you. Being a man is about sharing your soul, opening up your mind, removing your blinkers, pursuing what you believe in and helping others to learn from your mistakes.

Each man ticks to his own clock — different strokes for different folks. My Dad struggled to understand my path for a long time as I struggled to understand his. But he always believed in me — for this I am eternally grateful. He is proud of my achievements, and I am proud to be his son.

I will be a happy man — because I have lived each day like it is my last — and my Father will die a happy man, as he brought someone into this world, encouraged him to live out his dreams and turn them into reality. One day, thanks to his inspiration, I will do the same for my own children.

**[www.loston.com](http://www.loston.com)**

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# Watching my brother struggle to find himself

Karalee Evans

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When he was born — ten years younger than me — I remember a feeling of great importance and clarity. I was a big sister, and my responsibility was now to watch out for my little baby brother who was so innocent and raw, he needed to be wrapped in cotton wool by me.

This was my job.

I remember when he was ten and he came home from school with a bruise on his face. “What happened, who did this to you?” I remember demanding. “The kids down the street,” he meekly replied. I hugged him, put him in my car and drove him down the street to the house at the end of the road. The bully’s house.

There they were, smirking and laughing as my brother got out of the car, his spangly legs and tall, thin body cowering in fear. “I understand you have hit my brother. For this, I shall hit you and let you never forget your mistake of picking on him,” and I hit him. A twelve year old was hit by my brother’s sister and the lesson was learnt. Until the next time.

This systematic bullying continued until my baby brother couldn’t take it any longer. He was fourteen and struggling to find who he was, and what he was. He was always such a passionate and empathetic young man and people used to comment on his timidness and femininity. I have spent nearly eighteen years defending my brother to taunts of “queer” and “gay” and I will never stop defending him. At fourteen he gave up.

High school is cruel at the best of times. I remember my own terrible experiences. But for a young, gay man, living in outer suburban mediocrity, where to be different is to be ridiculed, my brother couldn't take it anymore.

He left school and started his rapid downward spiral.

I watched my brother abuse drugs — he moved from soft drugs through to hard, numbing drugs and alcohol. Oh, the alcohol abuse. And the people he chose to rely on did not include me, but older, much more street-wise, adult men.

My brother was looking for something and I couldn't give it to him.

After suicide attempts, a move to the city living with strangers and the substance abuse taking hold, it was enough. I was watching my baby brother slip into a world where I wasn't welcome.

The realisation that I had failed in my job of being his protector hit me hard. This was a boy who had spent the best part of his life trying to understand why he felt things that other people didn't feel, why he felt he looked differently and most of all, he wasn't happy in his own skin.

I know this because he spent a year changing his skin. He punished himself with self-harm as well as piercings all over his body. The tattoos grew, with new ones seeming to appear every month. This was my brother's way of trying to find himself, by hurting himself.

Enough was enough.

The intervention was the hardest thing I have ever done. My mother and I had sought support from a specialist youth mental health service, and we were going to get my brother the help he desperately needed. But he wasn't ready yet and the clock was ticking.

Every minute my phone rang in those last months I thought it was the police calling the next of kin to tell me my brother had died.

Then, when my brother hit the bottom, he asked me for help.

He asked me.

This was it.

A cyclone of activity followed immediately. I took him to see a counsellor. He was swept into the system and an army of youth-friendly carers and support staff took him under their wings.

I remember the day he smiled at me just a few months ago. He hugged me — the first hug in years — and thanked me for being there.

He is now undertaking his VCE after being accepted on academic merit. Not bad being a man out of school for three years. He is back home and smiling. He still drinks and has those moments of terrible teens but those moments of terrible teens are the best thing I have in my life. Because my brother is still here, and he is becoming a man not just in my eyes, but his own.

**[www.justanotherprblog.wordpress.com](http://www.justanotherprblog.wordpress.com)**



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# At a loss for words

Ann Handley

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On Thursday, my son finished up his junior year of high school, and today his Dad, little sister and I drove him 75 miles to the Rhode Island School of Design, where he'll spend the next six weeks immersed in Art. He'll spend much of that time muddying his clothes in the ceramics studio, with his hands elbow-deep in clay that turns magical in his two hands — hands that have turned sinewy and strong from all his time at the potter's wheel.

He hugged me and patted my back with those hands when we left to drive back home. He's gone to summer camps before. But this was the first time that he didn't push me toward the exit with impatience, counting the seconds before I would stop embarrassing him, or smothering him, or fretting too much, or whatever it is that I do that usually drives him absolutely crazy. "Thanks, Mom," he said instead.

We were standing in his dorm room, the place that will be his home for the next six weeks. I don't think he was talking about the twin-sized bed I had just made up for him, with the freshly purchased extra-long sheets and the fleece blanket from his bed at home. He seemed to be talking about something else entirely, and it was that other thing that caused a sudden lump to rise in my throat.

I had noticed it earlier: He walked with ease with the three of us around the campus, getting the lay of the land, taking it all in like he always does — like he always has since his newborn eyes focused so intently that as a new and nervous mother I was convinced it was the sign of a vision problem.

As we walked around the campus, and checked him in, and picked up his ID card, and visited the health office, and the housing office,

and all that, he didn't say much, really. But it was more what wasn't there that I noticed: the way he didn't walk two steps ahead of us or loiter behind us. The way he didn't look away — seemingly mortified at being caught red-handed with the ridiculous people who spawned him — when we passed another student on the brick sidewalks near the school. The way that he didn't roll his eyes when I clarified with the kitchen attendant some specifics of his meal plan, or got the exact coordinates of the laundry facility. And when I relayed it back, he actually listened, and he didn't cut me off with an impatient, "OK! I know!"

In other words, he didn't act one bit like he'd rather be anywhere else except where he was at that very moment, interacting with anyone else except me. If you have a teenager, or you've ever been one, you can recognise that behaviour.

His "thank you" in the dorm room was for help with all of that, I think. But also for putting him there at all. By that I mean writing the check, of course. But more than that: for racing in the pouring rain to the post office to make the application deadline. For slogging through the confusing reams of paperwork the college sent. For the marathon seven loads of laundry just the day before. The desperate run for deodorant. The last-ditch stop on the way because I was worried he wouldn't have enough cash for supplies. For the opportunity he seemed suddenly awed to realize he had been given.

I could fool myself into thinking that his thank you meant more than that: that he was grateful for all the stuff that fell into place in the 17 years leading up to today, too: All of the mostly thankless and unacknowledged stuff that I do, and any parent does, just to keep our kids healthy and happy and safely out of the path of a moving bus, those that are actual as well as metaphorical. But he probably wasn't thinking of that, of course. Love rolls down hill. It'll be years and years (I hope) before he has his own family and he'll come close to understanding any of it.

All afternoon, in the back of my mind, while we zipped around the campus on foot on a hot, muggy day, I tried to think of a word that might describe how completely happy he was to be there, how excited, how amazed at the possibilities, how completely turned on he felt.

And then I tried to think of how it felt, as a parent, to see him so happy and alive. Most parents might describe it as pride, I guess. But pride doesn't come close, because it's not about me. It's about him. What's a word that describes how you feel when one of the people you love most in the world, one of the very few people you would gladly suffer deeply for, would do just about anything for just because they asked — no questions asked, no strings attached, no payment required — without resentment, or anything even close to anger or complaint, and in fact would see it as a kind of duty and honour? What's the word for a kind of love that fills you up to the point that it overflows the brim?

Whatever you call it, that's what rose in my throat today, and rendered me unable to tell him, right then, that I was happy for him. That I loved him.

I hoped he'd have the time of his life, and goodbye.

**[www.annhandley.com](http://www.annhandley.com)**

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# Flower

## Craig Kirchner

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### *Verse 1*

The screen goes black and the day's work ends.  
Is it another slice of some grand design?  
Ego is not a dirty word, so they said.  
If that's so, why's it screwin' my mind?

### *Chorus*

Open myself to the sun.  
Hang around for a while.  
Be there when I'm needed.  
Happy just to make you smile.

### *Verse 2*

The Buddhists, they know a thing or two,  
You can lose yourself with desire.  
But I think, therefore I am confused.  
Should be happy just to be like the flower.

### *Chorus / Middle 8*

And the days they go. And the days they go. And the days they go by.  
And the days they go. And the days they go. And the days they go by.

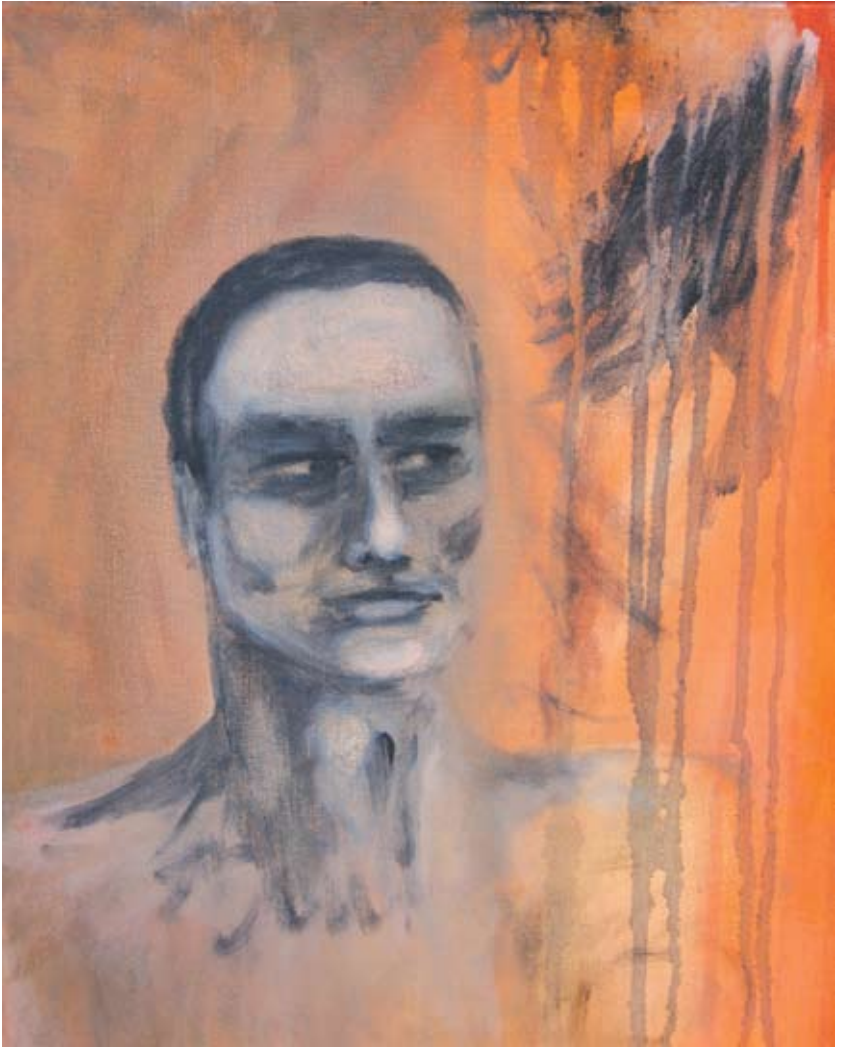
### *Verse 3*

He says, "I know I'm gonna be someone famous."  
She says, "Yeah, I'll be famous too."  
Work, marriage, babies, supermarkets and school.  
These are the things that they do.

### *Chorus twice*

Lyrics/music: craig kirchner - © 2008 renegade penguin pty ltd. all rights reserved.

**[www.renegadepenguin.com](http://www.renegadepenguin.com)**



By Genevieve Robey

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# The journey of a young man

**Scott Middleton**

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To me, becoming a Man (as opposed to a man) is an endless journey where there is always something new to learn. A Man aligns his actions with his dreams, takes responsibility for himself and others, and moves forward.

A Man grows beyond just an awareness and understanding of himself and comes to an awareness and understanding of others; not as things in his world to possess or use, but free individuals in their own world with their own dreams and pursuits. A Man gives the world everything he has got and gives those around him the freedom he hopes to receive.

I am lucky to have supportive parents who challenge me and encourage me to make my own decisions. When I was younger they were worried that I would burn myself on the stove, so Dad turned to my Grandfather who said, "Let him burn his hand, he'll learn his lesson and be more careful next time." I did end up burning myself and I certainly learnt an important lesson.

That's the thing about Dad, he makes sure I consider each option (even though he tends to bend his advice towards his preferred outcome) but will always let me burn my hand even if it means picking up the pieces afterwards. I believe this approach has helped me make the first steps to becoming a Man.

That isn't to say I make the right decisions. Boy, have I made some bad decisions! When I was 18 my family moved to Adelaide and I decided to stay in Sydney and move out with my girlfriend with whom I had a chaotic relationship. It was both the best and the worst

decision I've made. It enabled me to pursue the opportunities Sydney offered, however, it accentuated the problems in our relationship.

Moving out with my girlfriend was a mistake I had to make to learn about people, what I wanted from life (or didn't want), how to handle myself (or not handle myself), and that it's important not to let things linger when a decision has to be made.

The morning after my parents left I was driving up to my new house to go to work and my journey took me under the Sydney Harbour Bridge. It was HUGE. It struck me for the first time that my decision to move out was HUGE. I started crying. To this day, the bridge, to me, is symbolic of tough decisions. It is such an inspirational, yet intimidating, structure. I love it.

I guess I've been lucky because of my parent's guidance and because I've always had a sense of direction. As a kid I learnt how to write software for computers and soon began to believe that my purpose in life was to be a great software developer. I relentlessly pursued my dream and developed a globally available mobile game when I was fifteen.

It wasn't until I took a job as a software developer straight out of school that I realised it wasn't for me; I enjoyed creating things I believed in. I still believe this and am relentlessly pursuing my dream by running my own business.

Whether my dream will change again, I don't know. What I am sure of is that the pursuit of each dream will lead me to discover if it's right for me. It's win-win. It's all part of the journey.

I've had a couple of failures along the way and these have forced me to push my boundaries. I don't see failure as a negative thing; it forces me to closely evaluate myself and the way I do things. A mentor of mine who was teaching me about sales once said to me, "You need to work out what's in it for them." This has had a profound effect on me and I've learned that when you have an idea but no money, your

ability to inspire others is your only currency. It has also opened my eyes to an alternative way of dealing with people in general; I think more about what's in it for them.

The other night another mentor and friend advised me to “accept that people will always act in their own self interest.” Whilst it might seem like he undervalues the good in people, simply accepting this as fact has led me to form better relationships with people. For years I've failed to realise that everyone around me is just trying to get the best out of life, just like me.

Once I realised this, I came to see that behaviour that I might consider to be negative (friends not returning calls, people pushing in queues) might be my misinterpretation of people who are just like me and caught up in their own world. Life overwhelms everyone. Coming to accept this has given me a greater sense of freedom.

Just recently I've met a fantastic girl who has given me an even greater understanding of others and myself. She has helped me transcend me and my ego. She challenges my world view and some of the beliefs I didn't even know I had.

Recently, she poked so hard that I came to realise that whenever something goes wrong in my life, I use a coping mechanism where I turn negatives into positives to inflate my ego.

For example, I recently failed an assignment and my immediate reaction was “What idiots! They clearly aren't as intelligent as I am!” and literally felt larger: my ego + 10. It was only thanks to my girl that I came to notice my habit. By acknowledging it I can now choose to apply it or not.

I'm actually having difficulty writing this next bit. All of these little events along my journey to being a Man have led to one moment. The moment my Dad said, “I really think you've become a Man.” I don't think this is the end though.

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# Why some men are so lost

Mark Pollard

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I'm really interested in manhood stuff. Hopefully, before I leave this life, I'll have made an impact in the area. But I'm still working out how personal to get 'in public' about it all.

Here's why:

My parents split when I was young. I grew up mostly with a mum and a sister. Things often got hectic. I went to a good school but grew up in inner city Sydney — Glebe, when it was less pretty. I got shuffled a little bit between homes an hour away from each other. Few kids from my school lived in either area.

I disappeared into sport, music and words (then, as a young adult, martial arts and publishing a magazine). I was mostly transient with groups of mates — I'd hang with the Asian kids, kids from Glebe, the intelligent kids, hip hop kids, North Shore kids ... but, mostly, I walked to my own beat.

My parents are good people. I've learnt since having kids that being an adult isn't simple. But I felt hollow about two particular things a lot of the time as a young guy.

## **The first was a feeling of permanent vulnerability**

Maybe, it's something that as a teenager I romanticised (I could have been listening to too much hip hop): being a latchkey kid in Glebe was something I felt so adult about at the time (mind you, I walked myself to school as a 5 year old) but I always had this underlying sense of vulnerability. I had no male backup. No brothers, no dad in the area, few lifelong mates nearby.

Getting searched and threatened by local police was a badge of honour. Kids always carried weapons — if only a screwdriver. We enjoyed the randomness because it felt like we had control of not having control. Everything else, we had no say in. It was twisted.

### **The second thing I felt hollow about was trust**

I didn't trust anyone. I'm still learning to deal with this. I guess being moved around a bit between houses, having a lot of adults come in and out of your life when you're young (parents' new friends, partners, dates), you just ... turn off.

You stop giving new people attention because you think they won't be there a week later. You get used to people not living up to their promises so you become cynical and don't think anyone will hold true to their promises.

You have this idea that every time your parent ends a new relationship, it's your fault. Because your parents have kids. Sometimes, they even accidentally say this.

### ***So what are some of the issues facing male-dom?***

#### **i. Being a man is intrinsically about physicality**

Being a teenager and a young man is almost entirely about physicality. Sport defines organised social hierarchy. Physical appearance determines which group you become part of, and whether someone thinks you're worth picking a fight with. As a kid, I was pretty. But as soon as I was spending more time roaming the streets I had two ear-rings (early 90s!), I shaved my head, I wore baggy pants, tracksuits, Air Max, bandanas, caps ... all the corny stuff.

In all honesty, I did this to project someone tougher than I was because I felt so vulnerable and insecure. I see photos now and cringe. I wasn't big but I needed to feel big.

## **2. Many men don't know any better**

I've had a lot of occasions in my life when I felt really alone. When I was 17, one of my ex-girlfriends passed away from cystic fibrosis. I felt so bad — not only because she was a wonderful person, but also because I couldn't handle the idea of where her condition would inevitably lead when I was dating her. I nearly crashed the car on Birkenhead Bridge when I drove to the hospital to try to see her for the last time — I was so panicked. She wanted us to remember her as she was, so I didn't get to apologise. I wish I had her strength.

Still, my mates pretty much just left me alone for two weeks. None came to the funeral because it was O-Week at their respective unis or they had lectures. No one wanted to talk to me about it. I think one of my parents asked me how the funeral was. I was just ... out there ... alone. So I wrote about it like I always did.

## **3. Testosterone and the Neanderthal**

I think one of the real challenges facing the conversation about young adults is the fact that, biologically, men are bred for action, for violence, for dumb stuff. From what I've read (and I'm not pretending to be an expert), our brains are wired for the hunt.

Doing martial arts, we got to talk a bit about fight psychology and the way the brain works. Next time you see an altercation, you'll probably notice a few phases. When there is distance between the people the talk is longer — full sentences (“What are you looking at? I said, what are you looking at?”). As they get closer, the chat becomes more monosyllabic (“What? Yeah? You!”), sight becomes more tunnel visioned, the adrenaline dump happens and you either fight or flee. They say the best way to diffuse these situations is to ask a question back and give distance to the antagonist; and the best way to avoid them — advice I will definitely pass on to my son — is to not hang out with morons in stupid places. Your ego heals faster than your body.

Anyway, men need different coping mechanisms. It's not just about getting them to talk. They need to understand that they are wired for certain behaviour and that there are things they can do about it. But they also shouldn't feel ashamed of this fact.

#### **4. It takes a real dad**

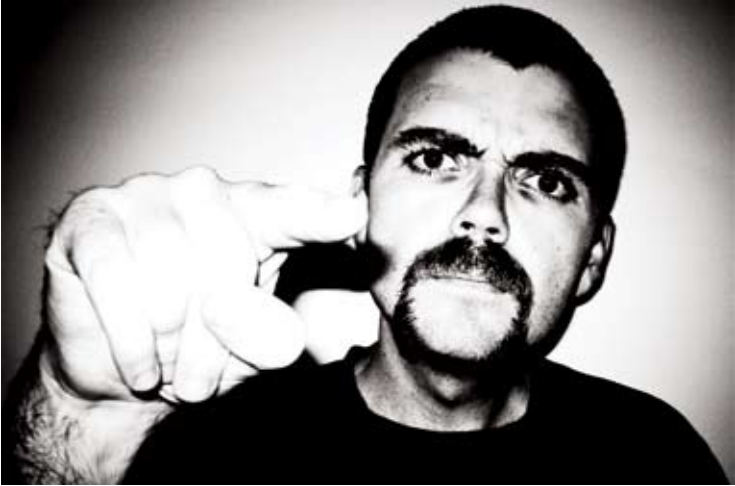
I have two kids. I want to be a great dad. I'm at work too much. Sometimes, I'm distracted or half-asleep when I'm at home. I fear over-compensating for all of the above. But all I want for my kids is for them to find their own rhythm in life. I don't know what a real dad is. But, I know that when my son randomly kisses my daughter on the head, we're doing the right thing.

#### **5. It also takes a village**

This is something I truly believe our society has lost sight of: it takes a village to raise a child. Everyone's so busy. Everyone's looking out for themselves. I recently read research in *The Australian* that said that today's grandparents don't want to mind their grandchildren. What's going on?

I'm wrestling with this one a bit ... I'm not contributing enough to the "village" for starters. Thing is, I don't know where it is, either. We're all over the place.

**[www.markpollard.net](http://www.markpollard.net)**



# Respect

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**“I was twenty one before I realised that my Father had become the standard by which I measured all men.” Annik Skelton**

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# Mi raccomando

Age Conte

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My Dad came to Australia when he was 16. He came alone on the boat from Italy, leaving his parents, brothers and sister back home. Three months on a boat. Sixteen years old. No English at all. Completely alone. I sometimes wonder if I could have done that.

He arrived and slept on a bed at his uncle Vittorio's house. Vittorio had arrived years earlier and had found work on the railways. All my Father knew about was cars, so he tried his hand at being a mechanic. Soon, another Italian migrant who had successfully been running a service station and workshop in Fitzroy took him on board.

My Dad was hard. He grew up on the dodgy streets of Brunswick/Fitzroy through the 60s and 70s (apparently his nickname was Tony TuffBoy), and spent most of his days on his back under greasy cars, his nights at coffee bars and pool halls. He fought with the boss constantly, but in true Italian style, this only earned him the old man's respect. He married the boss's daughter, and ended up taking over the business. The rest is, as they say ...

Since boarding that boat so long ago, he has always been at it. Even when the diabetes started fucking up his life, he still got under the cars, he still built gardens and retaining walls, or helped mates pave their driveways or paint their houses on the weekends.

Never stopping working ... never.

I might be the only ad planner on the planet that can serve you up a strat deck, replace your brake pads and grout your bathroom all at once.



You should know though that my old man and I rarely see eye to eye. I think, at times, he fails to understand that I chose to live in a world polar opposite to his. One of travel, ideas, ambitions, hopes and chasing desires ... a disconnection exacerbated by my older brother who chooses a more traditional “save, invest, and settle” lifestyle. But even still ... in him (the good, the bad and even the, at times, despicable) I have learned everything about what my journey to manhood has to involve.

It's a little bit about how physically tough you are. It's a little bit about how mentally tough you are. It's a little bit how you “act” in certain situations, even how you don't act in situations.

Getting on the boat. Choosing your career. Arguing with the boss. Sticking up for what you believe in. Taking over the business. Relishing a sense of ownership and responsibility.

It's not about bravery or any of that macho bullshit. For me ... being a man is about pride. Pride that when it's all done and dusted, you can know you did the best thing for you and the ones you love.

I can't argue with that about Papa, and he'd be proud to know that.

**[www.inmyatmosphere.blogspot.com](http://www.inmyatmosphere.blogspot.com)**

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# **Romeo & Juliet:** **circa 2009**

**James Duthie**

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It wasn't quite love at first sight. But that's probably only because I believe the concept is one of fantasy. How can the fiercest of human emotions emerge instantly based solely on appearance? No; that would be to trivialize the very essence of love. But it wasn't far off ...

I sensed it. It may sound cliché, but after our very first date I was convinced of it. I knew. She was the one. My immediate thoughts were of how deeply we were going to fall in love. And for a while the script went exactly to plan.

We did fall in love.

Just as deeply as I had imagined, if not more so. Indeed, it was not uncommon for friends and family to comment on how outwardly obvious our love for each other was. For twelve months, we lived a fairy tale. Yet in the background lingered a problem. The type of problem that simply doesn't disappear ...

She was Vietnamese. An immigrant to the country at the age of four. Her parents fled the war torn country after the Viet Cong murdered and ravaged her father's family. He was next in line. The outlook was simple — flee or die.

The boat ride to Australia proved to be almost as tumultuous as the war itself. Half way into the journey they ran out of food and water. Children perished. Yet her family emerged on Australian shores hungry, but unscathed. A testament to their will. I can and never will be able to conceive the courage it took for her parents to leave



everything they knew in the hope of a better future. To me, they are the truest definition of modern day heroes.

Of course, race was never the problem. Rather; it was culture. In Vietnamese culture, nothing trumps family ties. Nothing. And you can imagine the strength of that bond when a family is cut off from their homeland. If blood is thicker than water, theirs would be coarser than mud. Thus, choice of partner was critical to the family dynamics. There was no question. Partners simply had to integrate into their family life — which is where the problem lay.

As uneducated villagers, her parents were always going to struggle to pick up the English language. Even after 25 years in the country, their English is next to non-existent. More than anything, her parents wanted to love their children's partners. Embrace them. But how could they love a person with whom they couldn't communicate? How could a bond prosper? It couldn't.

Her three siblings fell into line. Whether by luck or circles of association, they all partnered with fellow Vietnamese. She was the black sheep. Or more to the point, I was. As the relationship became more serious, the issue gradually snowballed. It was not so much her parent's disapproval as her paranoia about their true wishes.

The tipping point was inevitable. To this day it's difficult to describe my emotions after that fateful phone call. I'd never been dumped. Indeed, I'd only had one long-term relationship of significance, and that ended in bitterness and resentment.

This was different. The relationship seemed perfect. I didn't see it coming.

Bewildered is probably the best way to describe it. And helpless. Truly helpless. Because this wasn't my fault. It wasn't her fault. It was unfair. Victims of circumstance. But there was little I could do.

While it may not be in my nature to surrender meekly, sometimes being a man entails knowing when you are defeated. You can't fight family. And you can't fight culture. Full stop. But that didn't make it hurt any less.

Distressed and despondent, I turned straight to the bottle. I'm intelligent enough to know that it held no answers, but temporary pain relief was necessary. I gathered a few friends to help commiserate my loss. Predictably, my night ended in a drunken stupor. In an act of even greater stupidity, I drove home at the end of it. I was fortunate to make it home.

The knock on my door the next morning awoke me from the haze. My head was throbbing. My teeth felt like carpet. How on earth could I have driven? I tried to ignore it but the knocking persisted. It was her. If the events of the previous evening had been a shock, seeing her on my doorstep was pure astonishment!

She couldn't do it. She couldn't end the relationship. Elation! The situation hadn't changed. But nor had her feelings. Love was the winner. And I swore to myself at that moment to never let that change.

Fast forward three more years and we are now engaged to be married. I am perhaps no closer to her parents than before, but I decided that actions speak infinitely louder than words. A real man lives by his actions.

So I provide for her. I put a roof over her head. I bond with her siblings in the absence of a true parental relationship. I learn what Vietnamese I can. I promise to be a caring father.

But more than anything, I love her like no one else could. Because that's what a real man does.

**[www.onlinemarketingbanter.com](http://www.onlinemarketingbanter.com)**

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# The legacy of manhood

Jeremy LeBard

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Dear Grandpa,

What can I say to someone who has lived four times as long as myself?

I'll tell you my first impressions of you. I'll hold a mirror for you to see what a young boy sees in your towering figure. You were scary and cuddly. That's probably the best way to describe it and you gave several distinct lessons without words to my young and impressionable mind:

- cooking food is a sacred experience;
- being open and hospitable to strangers is a rewarding experience;
- special events are worth hours, nay months of preparation;
- storytelling is an artform worthy of honour and untold respect;
- music's voice is not heard but felt.

Let me expound ...

Food was always exciting at your house. Most of the time Grandma would painstakingly show us how to kneed dough, preserve fruit, cut apples, mix spices, roll piecrusts and bake and cook all manner of food. When you took to the kitchen, all manner of fidgeting children were expelled for Grandfather to brood and simmer and cook. Anything with that amount of energy and emotion invested must command respect.

**Hospitality was a way of life.** I've had many strangers approach and ask the lineage of my last name and then proceed to tell me they

have eaten in your house. Their recounting is accompanied by wistful and longing looks as they describe their experiences. You always made extra food and there was always someone there to eat it. You gave more than you received and I respect that.

**Events**, particularly Christmas, were so worth attending that most years we would drive around 13 hours from California to Washington for a few-days visit, my parents enduring profoundly bored children and we (my sister Angie and I), enduring it all for Christmas.

Having grown up in the woods, you knew the best specimen of tree (not the inferior farmed trees seen today) with the aroma and look alone to fill mind and soul with a great, fantastical, holiday feeling. Then your pain-staking decoration with each tinsel strand placed singly on its own until the tree was sparkling. The decorations carefully collected over decades each with a story granting mystical powers over the mind and the lights placed ever so perfectly.

The tree combined with food and hospitality set the stage for Christmas Eve. A parade of Christmas gifts to the tinkling and jangling of sleigh bells. Young and old participated as equals. Starting from the youngest, at times not quite steady on feet, we would signal with bells for all to shut eyes which gave us freedom to manoeuvre our child bodies around the room placing gifts under the tree. The bell gave us control. We were important, we could take away everyone's sight as long as we rang those bells. And then we would stop ... the adoration and excitement expressed in "Ooohs" and "Aaahs" was thrilling.

Christmas was a group effort. We all had to play our part. Then Santa would come, reindeer on the roof with hooves clopping and the scrapping of antlers. The HO-HO-ing first outside, then inside with magnificent rustling and jostling of packages and, finally, then all was quiet. Not a creature stirring, not even a mouse.

Then in the morning, there were all manner of delays like waiting for you to shave before we could proceed to the mountain of Christmas loot. There were always a few items left unwrapped, creating wonder

as to whom they belonged. And the smell of coffee and the taste of candy ... a perfect day.

**Storytelling** is in your genes, the heritage in the name: LeBard. Let me try and pinpoint what you give to stories.

You build expectation with fear of a betrayal in the story line often with an inbuilt moral. Like the time my Father was walking on the path ahead of you and the family, and you shouted “STOP.” We all thought, how controlling, how unreasonable, why? “JUMP TO YOUR LEFT”. And he does it. “NOW TAKE TWO STEPS BACK” and he does that too. In the end we find you stopped him from stepping on a rattlesnake that he didn’t see. Not only were the stories so intriguing, but your voice and manner all contributed. You could hear a pin drop in the rooms while you spoke. And if there wasn’t quiet, you were the loudest.

By the way, your signature “Boy, you better listen to me” look is very effective. Piercing eye tilted, slight preference to one side, face stern as rock, almost vibrating with intensity and lips thinly drawn. No doubt perfected through years of teaching and serving in the military.

**Music.** As a child I loved telling everyone I knew that you could play *The Flight of the Bumble Bee* on the tuba. Also, that we were somehow related to the Juilliard School and you could have taken a free scholarship. I remember your exploits with high school kids and being daring enough to teach them Handel’s *Messiah* and having the skill, fortitude, strength and inspiration to be very successful and then receive accolades for it. You gave me the hope that I could play music. By example, you encouraged me on my ventures from singing in the high school choir, to playing the trumpet and French horn in the band. As well as later, learning to drum in a band with my friends, which formed strong relationships that last to this day.

You are a building block in my life. You’re a scholar and a poet and tough as nails. I love you.

**[www.lechicgeek.net](http://www.lechicgeek.net)**

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# Grandad still worth gold to me

**Ben O'Mara**

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Back in the 1940s, my grandad could lift 100kg in the clean and jerk.

Three nights a week, and on Saturday afternoons, he would jump on the tram at St Georges Road in Preston and make his way down to Frank Findlay's gym on Little Collins Street in the city to lift weights.

The gym was ultra-modern and filled with squash courts, weights rooms and elite athletes. The walls were covered in mirrors. Big, stocky body builders, muscles rippling and glistening with sweat, used to preen themselves in front of these walls of glass, showing off for the female squash players.

"I never had the best kind of body for weightlifting," Grandad told me as he held his walking stick high above his head, re-enacting his glory days. "But I was always good with timing and technique."

Grandad reckons his arms were too skinny, his legs not strong enough. He never fancied himself as the winning type. His coaches had faith though. He trained with Vern Barberis, a bronze medal winner at the 1952 Helsinki Olympics, and after a just few years working on his craft, the guy with no "real muscles" won the Australian Junior and Victorian Senior championships in the bantamweight division. If he played his cards right, he could have had a shot at the Olympics.

"The problem was there was this one time where I had a bit of a lapse in judgment," Grandad said, grinning.

The night before a major competition, he was in Healesville for “a bit of country air” with his new girlfriend, my Grandmother. He’d spent a long three months on a strict diet, with no booze, and no shenanigans. When the people in the hotel room next door invited them over for a drink, he didn’t want to be impolite, so they popped in for a bit of fun. Unfortunately, Grandad had a few too many.

At the competition the next day, he walked on stage in front of a packed town hall, the bulbs of photographers flashing, sweat running down his forehead, and realised he’d made a big mistake.

“I couldn’t even lift my training weights in the championship,” he said. “So I lost the competition. And that was it.”

He didn’t go back to the gym for more than 50 years. When my Mum and Dad asked me to look after Grandad for a few weeks, I had no idea he was back into lifting weights. He lives with my parents after having a stroke eight years ago. As it turns out, Grandad is one of the key members of Pryme Movers, a bunch of older gym members who work out together.

“I knew I had to do something to get moving again. Lifting weights gives me something to look forward to. I feel like I’m part of a whole community, like I’m wanted.”

I’ll never be able to lift weights like Grandad. I’m a runner. Of course, I’m in no danger of being picked up by the Olympics squad. But as I dropped Grandad off to the gym one morning, and watched him amble up the path into the sports centre, I hoped that I too would be hitting the pavement for my runs when I’m 84 years old.

And knocking back a few pints of the bubbly amber.

\* Story first published by *Herald Sun*, August 2008

**[www.benomara.com](http://www.benomara.com)**



By Genevieve Robey



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# Growing up with Petey Pops

**Annik Skelton**

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I was probably twenty one before I realised that my Father had become the standard by which I measured all men. Of course, I had been doing this my whole life — rejecting teachers, youth group leaders, friends' fathers and potential boyfriends as substandard — but it took me a while to figure out exactly why the other men I came across in life were never good enough.

My Father has never been what you would describe as a “manly” man.

Dad is very gentle. He is soft-spoken, compassionate, and peaceful. When he holds babies, they immediately grow quiet. Animals and children have always seemed to be drawn to him. As a kid, Dad spent every afternoon after school at either of his grandmothers' houses, where they taught him to bake, sew, and stay away from black people. Their feminine influence has strongly shaped him today, and people usually ask me whether he's gay when they first meet him.

When I was in high school, my friends would often frown at my Father as he swayed around the kitchen in his apron, stirring frantically and humming to Rick Wakeman. “I've got to get these muffins in the oven before my aerobics class starts,” he would explain, giving me a wink.

When I was very young, I sometimes felt cheated that my Father wasn't like all my friends' fathers. I'd never been to a football game or watched a car race or a boxing match. I'd never been fishing or turned up at the dinner table covered in grease or stolen sips from my Dad's

beer, because he didn't fish or fix cars or drink. Instead he played Gershwin for hours on the piano and made his own trail mix.

I felt like I was missing out on certain childhood experiences because my dad worked too much and didn't have enough time to take me through what my friends and the media told me were mandatory steps in life.

However, I needn't have worried, because what he did teach me turned out to be richer in the end: a love of reading, how to bake, an appreciation for history and music, impeccable manners (which I have chosen to ignore as an adult, but the ability and knowledge is still there), reverse parallel parking, and how to resolve conflict without violence.

Dad taught me to question, observe and note details. He taught me that the very act of learning itself is a gift.

My father is a GP, which meant I witnessed some grisly stuff as a kid. I'd seen dead bodies before I turned five, because Dad often got called out to certify deceased patients, and he couldn't leave me at home by myself.

I read about gory accidents and sexually transmitted diseases in medical journals I found lying around the house. I watched Dad stitch neighbours, relatives and friends back together on our kitchen floor. I developed a strong stomach and learned to keep my cool during emergencies. "It's just blood," Dad would assure me, and I remembered this later in life as I pulled splinters, picked shards of glass out of friends' feet, and wrapped split limbs in beach towels.

Dad often went the extra mile with his patients — picking up dinner on his way to a housecall or driving someone home after a dizzy spell.

One of his patients, a green grocer who never had enough spare cash for medical bills, always paid Dad in fresh fruit. And a tiny Vietnamese lady with severe diabetes dropped off home-cooked meals

to us when she couldn't afford medical insurance. Dad showed me the beauty in helping others; in listening and serving.

As an adult, I still don't really care about sports or cars, and the same things that were important to me as a child are the qualities I believe real men should have.

I despise violence and prejudice of any sort. I respect men who are generous and compassionate. Men who can hold their shit together when they're angry, then wear a nightie without being embarrassed. Men who can cry openly, then amputate gangrenous limbs when necessary. I think that in an ever-evolving society where physical prowess is becoming less crucial to daily survival, men often struggle to find the balance.

But if my Dad has shown me anything, it's that 'being a man' simply comes through being the best person you can be.

**[www.anniskelton.com](http://www.anniskelton.com)**



# Fragility

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**“Going home to an empty house was just a reminder of my failures on all fronts.”**

Alan Long

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# The change

Stephen Collins

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## Beginnings

I never had what you could describe as an especially close relationship with my Dad. I still don't know why, and I still am not especially close to him. But today, we have a relationship that fits, even if, at times, we neglect it more than we ought.

Back in 1985, at just 43, my dad had a serious heart attack. Followed by months of hospitalisation and ribs-cracked-apart open heart surgery, his road to recovery was long. Just a year later, he had a stroke. The aftermath of that left him, for a time, unable to communicate and resulted in years of physical and occupational therapy for him to recover to where he is today — pretty good, but not the man he was.

In fact, the heart attack, the stroke, and the changes both physical and mental that those events wrought upon my Dad destroyed his career and marriage. Previously a dedicated educator and assistant principal of the high school my sister and I both attended, Dad was compulsorily retired. He was no longer the man he used to be, and the powers that be didn't consider him capable of doing that job any more. All of this drove my Mum and him apart. No blame, it just was.

A lot of water has passed under the bridge since then. Dad's not too bad and he's reasonably happy in himself. He lives interstate. We talk a few times a year and see each other at Christmas. It's all good. He even talks to Mum.

But I believe my history with my Dad, his illness, its consequences, and the things that have happened between us have not all been helpful to me as a man. They have predisposed me to certain behaviours and beliefs. And those predispositions have not necessarily been helpful.

## Transitions

So what has that all got to do with me, except for it being history?

Well, it's this. In two days, I turn 41. That's just two years younger than when my Dad got sick. And if I keep doing what I'm doing, I'll end up like him. Or worse. So I need to get fit again.

I've never been either a particularly talented athlete, nor found it easy to be especially fit and lean. I've said on more than one occasion that I can walk past a patisserie and osmose the calories. My adult life has been a series of yo-yo cycles where I have a handle on my weight and fitness to one extent or another.

But not today. Today, I'm heavier and less fit than I've ever been. I'm 20 kilograms heavier than when I met Alli and 15 kilograms heavier than my fittest ever condition. I haven't exercised seriously in at least three years. Maybe longer. I keep blaming events and circumstances — none of them particularly valid excuses, but certainly valid reasons (at least in my mind). I'm busy. I broke my leg (and wrecked a knee and ankle at the same time) two years ago. Blah-de-blah-blah.

And it affects everything. Deeply.

I don't, and can't, give enough of myself to my wife, Alli, and our daughter, Hannah. I don't focus on them nearly enough. And it has knock-on effects. Despite being together nearly 15 years, we've had our ups and downs. The downs have mostly been attributable to stupidity, arrogance or ignorance on my part. And I keep making these mistakes. They've come close to destroying my marriage at times.

The most important things I have ever done as a man were to meet, fall in love with, and marry Alli and to create our incredible daughter, Hannah, with her. But I haven't always done right by them. And that lessens me as a man and as a human being generally.

Far less importantly, but still noteworthy, I also sometimes struggle with the business I started nearly three years ago now. And that's

incredibly foolish. It's my livelihood. It supports me and my family. I should be giving it my all (within reason).

### **The change**

So it's time to change. Everything.

It's time to get fit again. Because I know when I'm fit that I cope much better with everything — life, relationships, business, the inside of my head. That needed tenuous balance is infinitely easier to achieve.

It's time to focus — on family, on friends, on life and on work. Far, far better than I do now.

I used to do triathlons. In fact, in 2001, I completed a Half Ironman triathlon (that's a 1.9 kilometre swim, 90 kilometre cycle and a 21.1 kilometre run). I've never been especially good at them. Rather, I was a back-of-the-pack enthusiast. I'm cool with that.

Chatting to my friend, Derek Featherstone on Twitter over the weekend, I committed to doing the Canberra Half Ironman with him in 2010. That gives me a little over a year to prepare for the event.

Like me, Feather has made the transition from fat bloke to fit bloke. Only difference is I fell off the wagon and got fat again. And it's made a difference to my ability to do anything and everything.

### **The finish**

So, it's time to focus. To get fit. To give a shit about things and to care properly for the people and things in my life. And, since I'm going very public on this, I'll be looking to my friends and family to help me out here. To be my watchers. To keep me on the straight and narrow. Can you help me out?

**[www.stephencollins.org](http://www.stephencollins.org)**

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# Another word for father

Gavin Heaton

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I found a small urn today  
it held the conversations which  
for you  
fell from my mouth like riddles

The story of my disappointment carries the  
weight of broken doors  
and YOU?

You wait on the other side  
All conflict aside  
All affection left at the doorstep  
Was that what it WAS all for?

You were never there, never there  
I searched for a trace, for even the smell  
of where you had been  
Finding instead  
the anger in me in me



I have never shown this poem to anyone else. I had kept it hidden in a notepad, all the while knowing that it was burning its ink deep into the pages.

It was written over 12 years ago, but its fury still takes my breath. I am only sharing it with you because of the astounding bravery of others who have written so eloquently in this collection.

In fact, it was Age Conte's story [*Mi raccomando*] that tipped me over the edge.

My relationship with my Father is non-existent. We have not spoken for a decade — and I can honestly say, now, that I am not bitter about this. In fact, it was a conscious decision on my part.

And while we often hear about the importance of fathers and the often difficult relationship that men have with their dads, I can also tell you that they do not define the person you become (unless you allow it to).

Now, I am not saying that my Father was a bad man — but perhaps he was just a man, with all the attendant weaknesses, honours, fears and hopes that we are all prone to.

Perhaps he wasn't the father that I wanted, but like Age, in my Dad I did learn "everything about what my journey to manhood has to involve".

And this is the point.

It is MY journey. No one can do this for me. No one can take away the pain or embarrassment or own the joy and excitement that comes our way. The best we can do is the best that we can do. And the worst we must learn to live with — and maybe, just maybe, forgive.

**[www.servantofchaos.com](http://www.servantofchaos.com)**

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# The path back

Alan Long

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This is a story I have intended to share since I first started my personal journey through SavingAlan. In fact, it was one of the key reasons for starting it, not just to share my weight loss journey or raise money for charity.

Recently I agreed to an interview with Richard Stubbs on ABC Radio in Melbourne and I said that I would now open up and talk about how I became obese, as I firmly believe it is what is between my ears that caused it, not simply what I chose to eat.

It's not about discipline, about routine, about knowledge, about skills, about self-worth/esteem, about family, about belonging, about expectations or a hundred other things. It's about all those things and more.

I have suffered and battled with depression/melancholy on and off for all my adult life but it has taken until my mid-forties to realise that was what I was experiencing. It took a second marriage breakdown for me to get to the crisis point, the feeling of absolute hopelessness, of desperation, of sadness so heavy it was physical.

But as a man I'm expected to be able to handle these things, to continue to function at work, socially, as a parent, as a mentor, as a son and all the other roles we fulfil in our daily lives.

During the two years it took to battle for some custody of my son, during the time when I needed friends and family close by, I ostracised them all. I literally couldn't function and I didn't want anyone to know. I couldn't let the veneer crack. The odd thing is they could see it clearer than I could!

There were many times when I tried to have a conversation about how I was feeling and the other person took over the conversation and it became about them, when I just really needed someone to listen even if they didn't understand, just to listen to me so I could hear myself. Instead, it stayed bottled up inside.

As men, we need to be aware of each other's need to talk, we need to make sure we are active listeners with our friends and family.

Three moments are so clear in my mind, and I never want to revisit those feelings again:

1. Not long after my marriage broke down, I was sitting in the courtyard just feeling helpless and hopeless. Thinking about how my life had turned pear-shaped. This wasn't how it was supposed to be. I was supposed to have the happy marriage, awesome job and beautiful house, yet I couldn't find one good thing in my life. All would be better off without me, but I don't have the balls to do that. But I know how people can get to that point and feel that desperation and hopelessness to take their own lives.
2. Some months later, at home, I was walking around the backyard — bawling my eyes out, my whole body heaving. For no specific reason, I had this incredibly heavy, sad feeling. It was just a build up of everything I had experienced — I had screwed my marriages (yep there was an earlier one), my work life, my friendships and here I was fighting alone to not screw up again by being an absent father.
3. Driving home from work during this time was a battle — going home to an empty house was just a reminder of my failures on all fronts. It was my destination, not just a small part of the eventual journey. I cried all the way home.

I remember seeing the Beyond Blue TV ads and was horrified that I was looking at myself. It was me in those ads ... it couldn't be.

I connected with Beyond Blue and then through my GP I started to see a psychologist. After ten sessions I felt I was getting nothing out

of it. It would have been so easy to just give up, accept my lot and maintain the survival mode, even though I longed to feel alive again, to feel loved, to love and to laugh.

Over the following months I had given up the idea of how I could find someone I could connect with. So I started to think of the times when I had a strong sense of self value, when I was passionate about what I was doing and felt really alive. I realised that two common themes kept emerging — music and charity.

So I started to formulate SavingAlan and having discussions with people when I got the chance to test the waters, to see if they would drag me down or dismiss it as a stupid idea.

At dinner with two colleagues, the discussion was very open and there was a strong resonance in each of our stories, but most importantly one of the women gave me an introduction to a counsellor/psychologist.

This has been a serendipitous introduction; my time with Jan Beames (counsellor, coach, psychologist) has been incredibly positive. The level of understanding is growing and the insight I am gaining is helping me every day to get my life back on track.

She challenges me to be honest and to get to the underlying belief systems that I have built up over the years, to see its madness and how this has shaped so many things in my life — and how this has turned one, with so much energy and enthusiasm for life, into just a survivor.

The good news is I am on the path back. I don't need to be perfect. I don't need a perfect life. I just need my life to be full of my passions. After all, that's all any of us need.

I teach my son to have the courage to walk to the beat of his own drum and, now it's time for me to walk the talk!

**[www.savingalan.com](http://www.savingalan.com)**



**Dicks and Balls** by Ashley Ringrose

A key part to becoming a man is... drawings like these

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# Second time lucky

David Phillips

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When I was twenty one, entering my last semester of uni, and having just moved out of home, I had a phone call that really upset me. I managed to keep my composure over the phone, but afterwards I was pretty shaken up: I think I may even have cried. I turned to some friends, who helped me think things through a little, but ultimately I realised I was out of my depth dealing with the aftermath.

I asked around a few people, and someone mentioned a counselling service that might be some help. I dutifully went along for a number of weeks, and we worked through a few methods that he thought might be useful: sitting in one chair, and having an honest conversation with the person you imagine to be in the other, empty chair.

It was a big deal going to counselling: to spend money on something that really just signified being a failure as a man: not being able to handle yourself, and needing someone else's help to deal with things that — let's face it — you should be able to deal with.

The problem, though: it didn't actually work. In my last counselling session, there were some awkward pauses as the counsellor realised that he didn't actually know what to say to progress any further.

So I stopped going. I toughened up, internalised whatever else was going on, and everything was fine. For about ten years.

Another incident occurred — this time face-to-face, and more severe.

I was married now, and had a mortgage. Generally, a face-to-face situation is even harder to deal with than one over the phone, but for the first time in the history of these things I kept my cool, outlasting the other side of the argument.

As it turned out, I'd kept my cool too much: I'd managed to shut down my emotions so successfully that I couldn't even tell how upset my wife was from the argument. I felt a sense of pride that I'd finally mastered my emotions. At the same time, I felt like something wasn't right: this wasn't how I wanted to be able to handle these things, and it certainly wasn't the kind of thing that I wanted to pass on to any kids I might have.

A few more conversations with a trusted friend, and I found myself booked in to see a psychologist. If you ever find yourself in this situation, be prepared to wait — it was a few weeks before I made it to the end of her waiting list!

I'd always assumed that counsellors and psychologists were pretty much the same thing: in fact, that's what I told the psychologist in the first session. She explained that a counsellor can be qualified in as little as a few weeks, but to become a psychologist requires years of study. I found this a little reassuring, but better yet was that the things she would ask me made sense.

After a few sessions, I had some ways to deal with the way that I processed emotions. After a few more, I even felt confident enough to talk to my GP about getting the government subsidy for a few more sessions.

I preferred to pay for the sessions in full, up front, than admit, even to the GP, that I might need help thinking things through. The high price of male pride.

In the end I've reached a point where I seem to be handling things better. I have a better framework for understanding my relationships with the people involved in these incidents, and a somewhat healthier relationship with my emotions. For nearly a year, I haven't seen a psychologist.

Though there's a long way to go, it's comforting to know that there's help out there, and it's worth swallowing your pride to ask for it when you need to.

**[www.cafedave.net](http://www.cafedave.net)**

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# Contradictory bliss

Dave Relf

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The idea of being a man is something that I grew up being revolted by to a certain extent.

From my perspective, it meant talking about sport, acting like you were appreciating hot chicks, belittling other people and getting angry when your power trip didn't quite make you feel how you wanted it to.

It wasn't until I actually grew up that I realised that I was a man. Those perceptions I'd been holding onto were simply my way of stereotyping something I never understood, something from which I always felt separated.

I'm gay and have felt that way inclined since I was very young. Probably since I got my first erection to be honest, so what's that? Seven years old?

The idea of homosexuality was never encouraged in my moderately Catholic household, so much of what I was feeling was suppressed for many years.

It wasn't until I was around nineteen that I truly came out to myself, my family and my friends. And I remember thinking, does me accepting that I am this person mean that I need to become more effeminate, mean that I need to act like less of a man? On that day, I decided it didn't and have lived by that principle ever since. But this is not about how I feel about being gay. This is about how I feel about being a man.



For me, being a man is about being honest with myself and with those I love. It's about comforting a friend and giving whatever advice I can give.

It's about being strong within myself and trying to live my life in a way that is real, that makes sense and that I can be proud of.

It's about not being afraid of people seeing my weaker side, my insecurities, and my sadness.

I have spent years working on my tendency to be submissive, especially in my relationships.

I've spent years trying to overcome my need to drink alcohol to feel socially accepted.

I've spent years trying not to worry about how other people see me.

At the end of the day, I can't see a great deal of difference between trying to be a good man and trying to be a good human. Both genders are ultimately out to achieve the same goals.

It's our childhood, our adolescence, the sibling rivalry, the parental influence, our pre-conditioning and life experience in general that truly shapes our opinions of what type of man we should be. Of what type of human we should be.

And after all of that, we're still a thousand different perceptions of the person we think we are.

I'd like to share a poem about what it meant to me to become aware of who I was becoming and the anxiety that went with it.

I wrote it when I was seventeen.

## **Contradictory Bliss**

Lathered in soap and ridden with guilt.  
My fortress of conscience, so poorly built.  
The walls cave in, I gasp, not to drown.  
Tears well in my mind just to think of their frown.

Promises burned, yet dreams are fulfilled.  
My spirit is freed, my emotions are grilled.  
Contradictions flourish in this world of insanity.  
Escaping from freedom to a blissful calamity.

Around the corner an expected dead end.  
Whose reasoning dictates this choice to defend.  
Live life without reason and fuck those who care.  
Why chase happiness? Why run from despair?

Initial direction overpowered by distrust.  
Temporal enthusiasm blistered by lust.  
The spawning of secrets, entwining of lies.  
The outer self laughs whilst the inner self cries.

Society's ethics have strangled my soul.  
Maybe its me, have I dug my own hole?  
I am but drift wood soaked in water and salt.  
I can't dry out my essence and that's not my fault.

Dave Relf – 2 October, 2002



# Fatherhood

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**“My Father was a perfectionist and a workaholic. When he wasn’t working, he was doing things (hobbies) which looked like work. I can already see the resemblance.”** Gavin Bollard

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# The dream & the reality

Mitch Andrews

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Fatherhood is not meeting my expectations. In fact the same could be said of many aspects of my life as I become increasingly contemplative in my early forties.

As a young adult, I held a strong and unwavering conviction that being a father was the one thing I was clear on in my future. It did not eventuate for a long time but it was there as an important driver. In fact, I even asked my wife to “marry me and create a family together.”

I was on such a high when my son was born. I took months off work in order to fully experience him as a baby.

I think parents often find ways to unintentionally screw up their children’s lives. Twenty years ago as a young adult I had a LOT of parental anger issues which I explored (and thought I resolved) through “new age” and pop psychology workshops and books.

I wanted to be a father with a fierce determination not to make the same mistakes that my Father made with me ... now, reflecting on the first seven years of my son’s life, I’m feeling an overwhelming sadness that I’ve screwed my son’s life just as thoroughly as my Father screwed mine.

As they say, the fruit never falls far from the tree.

My Father (an only son of an only son) was intellectually arrogant, impatient, highly critical, emotionally distant, occasionally violent (in punishment), often angry, and sometimes depressed (although I had little awareness of that at the time).

I’m now beginning to own up to the unpleasant realisation that I am pretty much the same with my son. The exception being that I may

have a stronger emotional connection with my son than my Father had with me.

There, I said it finally, I am violent towards my son and I hate myself for it. Sometimes physically — I have hit him about half a dozen times and, each time, I'm filled with remorse and I ask for his forgiveness. But I don't think he really knows what he is forgiving. Often verbally — speaking over the top of him and shouting at him in my need to be heard and to be in control. I won't make any excuses. Nor will I try to balance this harsh reality with any positives.

I am without close friends and I would not describe my marriage as close and intimate. Over-intellectualising and “thinking things through” is my modus operandi and I find it almost impossible to take significant on-going positive action about important matters in my life.

I hate the way things are but I have a vast fear of decisions “being wrong” and actions failing. Likewise, my son is very risk-averse, lives in his head, has a constant need to control, has no close friends, daydreams, and is difficult to engage in learning.

I constantly worry about his future and push him harder as a result. I think he will need therapy when he grows up and I wonder how I might provide for that.

This is the first time I've finally admitted much of this to myself, although I have been aware of it often throughout the years.

I THINK this is the most important thing but the reality (where I spend my time) is quite different — work, school council, club, Twitter, reading, podcasts, computer games, and even the daily grind at work are all easier to face and they all tell a different story about my priorities.

What's next? I don't know. The thought of getting help is abhorrent to me — time-consuming, expensive, bruisingly difficult and ultimately of questionable value given my prior experiences.

I'm scared and worried.

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# From two perspectives

Gavin Bollard

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## Part 1: The Son

We're still not sure where Aspergers comes from (genetically) in our family but I guess the money is probably on my dad.

When I was younger, my Dad was so different from me that I'd often wonder if perhaps my parents had picked up the wrong baby.

Now that I'm older, I'm able to see the resemblance (I'm starting to look like my Dad — and he, like his). I'm also acting like him in some ways — some beneficial, some not.

My father was a perfectionist and a workaholic. When he wasn't working, he was doing things (hobbies) which looked like work. I can already see the resemblance.

My Dad came from a poor background but was a hard worker and put himself through TAFE at night. He worked Monday to Friday, left before I got up for school and generally returned after I was in bed. Some of his late nights were drinking nights, some were studying, some were sports and training and some were meetings — regardless of the excuses, he wasn't there.

On weekends in summer, he would be out sailing. In winter, he'd be in the garage building his next boat for the coming sailing season. We still found time to squeeze activities into his busy schedule (he managed our soccer team for years) but it wasn't enough and our relationship in those years barely scratched the surface.

I remember that when I'd learn some new dance routine or song at school, I'd show it to my Mother but would fall silent as soon as my Dad walked into the room. Pokes and prods would not incite me to continue the performance. He'd always frowned at those "poofter" (gay) type activities and to do one in front of him was to invite negative comments.

My Dad was also into sports. He liked to watch them and play them and he always encouraged me to get involved too. The trouble was, I didn't like sports and I was hopeless at them.

In any case, my low muscle tone and hyperflexibility didn't lend itself to hard sports like soccer and football. I liked reading, watching movies and *Star Wars*. My obsession with *Star Wars* figures was almost a breaking point for him and he often used to rant and rave about those ... "dolls."

When I left school, I'd originally intended to do an Information Science degree but my father "encouraged" me towards the more masculine degree of Civil Engineering. I failed — and eventually I did go back and do that Information Science degree, though not without a great deal of heartache.

Then, there were the cars. I didn't care about them. I drove them without water and without oil and with flat tyres. I had no interest in repairing them myself — I'd rather pay someone to do it. I didn't even like the feel of grease on my hands. I copped years of "nagging" over my lack of interest and ability in this area.

My first job, in a public library, really set the cat amongst the pigeons. In fact, I was told by my employers that there were two reasons why I got the job. Firstly, because I obviously loved and cared for books but secondly, because my Father had apparently contacted them and told them that he didn't want his son working in a "poofy" library.

While I was working there, my dad told his friends that I was unemployed. Somehow that was easier for him than the truth.

If all this makes it seem that I have problems with my Father, then I've given the wrong impression.

I love him — though I could never use that wording to his face. He just had a lot of issues with my failure to fit into the Australian male stereotype.

When I changed jobs into computing my Father was overjoyed. Similarly, he was pretty happy when I announced my engagement, mainly I think because it involved a member of the opposite sex.

Having male grandchildren and knowing that I did in fact turn out OK, seems to have calmed the whole situation down.

Over the years, he's come to accept that I'm not the normal male stereotype and that men today are quite different from the men of his time. My Father wasn't alone in his views and they seem to be shared by many of his peers.

He's mellowed over time and I've stopped checking over my shoulder whenever I do something less than masculine. Years of non-acceptance can have an impact on your self-confidence.

In recent times, I've actually seen my Father express emotions other than the male ones of anger and amusement but they're still few and far between. He's not "cured" and every now and then I'll catch a disapproving glance, when I cry at a funeral or when I let my wife boss me around but he's certainly more settled and more tolerant.

In his retirement, he frequently says things which shock me and challenge all of my beliefs about him. There's definitely an emotionally repressed person inside him struggling to get out. It makes me wonder if, when I get to his age, I'll experience the same feelings of letting go.

Perhaps I'm repressing more than I realise. Perhaps we all are.



## **Part 2: The Father**

Fast forward 20 years and suddenly I find myself standing in my Father's shoes.

I find that I'm facing the same sorts of challenges that he must have faced as a father. Sure, I'm not judging my children as closet gays; I'm determined to accept them as they are regardless of who or what they grow up to be. An admirable sentiment, but I wonder if I can really keep it.

What if they grow up to be criminals?

I started fatherhood with a whole bunch of promises to myself, one of which was to make sure that I was there for my children. I was going to make time and I wasn't going to be sidetracked by work or leisure issues. I have seen too many of those movies where the father ruins his son's life by missing that all-important ballgame or concert and I was determined that this was not going to be me.

For the most part, I have succeeded but there have been a few embarrassing misses.

One of the first things I've noticed about fatherhood is that the pressure never ever lets up. There is never enough time in the day to do the things you need to do, much less the things you want to do. Everything is a choice. Everything involves cutting out something else, often something you'd personally much rather do.

My daily journey into work had been getting slower and more frustrating for years as the traffic began to build up. The later I go in, the longer the journey. Consequently, I now leave home very early — too early to see my kids before I go.

You would think this could mean that I could get home early but being in the IT industry, you leave when the system is stable and the users are happy, never before.

Unfortunately, this seriously restricts my home hours during the week and it ramps up the tension in the house to almost intolerable levels in that last expectant hour before I arrive home. Most days, I arrive home to a battlefield. Sometimes there is a battle still raging and sometimes it is a Cold War. Sometimes it's one child versus another but just as often it's both children versus my wife. The cause of this war can be anything from an unwillingness to do homework or refusal to change into pyjamas to simple frustration over a spaceship that keeps crashing in a game.

There is always something for dad to do when he gets home. Sometimes it's practical, like bringing in heavy items from the car, sometimes it's fixing some lego structure, landing that spaceship intact or simply getting the DVD player to work properly.

Dads are expected to be magic, we're expected to be able to fix anything and we're expected to be able to do it with almost no sleep and after a ten-hour working day.

The worst times though are when I'm expected to dish out "discipline" for events I didn't witness. My own dad would have responded to those calls with appropriate force because that's how things were done in those days. I tried that in my early days of fatherhood and learned the truth about the phrase, "this is going to hurt me more than it hurts you." Forget the emotional wounding; smacking makes my hand hurt.

These days, my punishments are more like backwards rewards. For example; "The boy who is naughty doesn't get to ride in the front seat of the car." Surprisingly, it works.

It takes a lot to be there for your kids. Those father-son moments seem so fleeting when you're the younger half of the relationship but the view from the other side tells a completely different story. It's only now, when I'm a dad myself, that I can truly appreciate how much my Father did for me.

**[www.life-with-aspergers.blogspot.com](http://www.life-with-aspergers.blogspot.com)**

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# Becoming a dad and more of a man

**Trent Collins**

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When I first heard that I was going to be a dad I was in New York. I had just arrived after a 20 hour flight from Sydney to meet my wife who had been travelling on business.

Earlier that day she had decided to get a pregnancy test kit from a pharmacy in New York. Not knowing where to look in the store, she approached a very large female shop assistant to ask for help. After the woman calmed down from her surprise at meeting an Australian, she promptly shouted across the store, “Hey, this Aussie needs a pregnancy test!”

After enjoying an amazing holiday, we arrived back in Sydney and I got down to the business of doing what a man does when he finds out he is going to be a dad — I cried like a little girl. Yeah, that’s right — I waited until I had some private time and just had a good cry. I am not sure why, but it just seemed like the thing to do, and brought me back to earth a little for the realisation that being a father was going to be filled with highs and lows.

Simone’s pregnancy was, as they say, reasonably text book. There was no morning sickness and all the scans were on target for a healthy birth. We decided not to find out the gender as a friend put it — “it’s the only true surprise you will ever get.”

When the big day finally came it was not at all what we expected.

We had done a few courses during the pregnancy and were hoping for as natural a labour as possible.

As a man you can try to help as much as possible on the day, but it is just gut-wrenching to watch the person you love be in so much pain and know there is nothing you can really do to minimise it, apart from be there for support.

Coming up to 18 hours after her waters first broke, they informed us that the best solution would be a Caesar due to the position of the baby and how tired my wife was. This is the part that really tests you as a man, when you realise that now there is even less that you have control over.

Fifteen minutes later we were in the operating room and about another 20 minutes later our little boy, Liam, was born.

As he had been stuck in the birth canal he came out with a cone shaped head which is very common and disappears within the first few hours. The really scary part was that he wasn't breathing when he first came out and needed a little help and some oxygen before he was breathing on his own.

With all of the commotion of becoming a father and worrying if I was getting the good shot with the video camera in one hand and digital camera in the other, no one really told me how serious a situation it could have been.

Once out of the operating room, I was informed that he would be taken up to the Special Care Unit for observation and some further testing.

I remember rushing into the small locker room to change out of the scrubs and back to my clothes so I could get up to the Special Care Unit to be with Liam. Seeing him in that huge trolley (actually just a normal size one) and being so small there was nothing but cables and tubes all around him and nurses telling me it was totally fine and not

to worry. Reassuring words for a time when I hardly felt like a man at all.

Only hours ago I was watching my wife in incredible pain knowing there was nothing that I could do, and now I was looking at my son, not even an hour old, and already I was helpless. I was at the mercy of the nurses and paediatrician to tell me what was going on.

The hardest part was watching them place a feeding tube up his nose and down his throat to get some food into him. Simone was still in recovery at this time and they knew that breastfeeding could take a few days to kick in.

Later in the day he was showing very good signs of progress and was released from the Special Care Unit and was in our room for the first night. The rest of the week was trying, as it is for many new parents, but much more along the normal lines than the first day.

Becoming a father is the single most amazing thing I have ever done (actually done twice). From the dirty nappies to the middle of the night feeds and endless rocking of the bassinet, it's all worth it when you see their smiles and they first call you "Dad." When you go into their rooms to check on them before you go to sleep, to hugging them when they hurt themselves, there is nothing that comes even close.

The announcement of an impending pregnancy and the birth itself so often focuses on the mother, that many men think that it will not be as crazy a ride for them.

Some prepare for it in different ways (like researching every online review of every pram available) whilst others enjoy putting their head in the proverbial sand. All I can say to other would be dads out there is be ready for an emotional roller coaster for both yourself and your partner, and most of all being a man is often more about doing and feeling unmanly things that you might think.

**[www.thenowbutton.com](http://www.thenowbutton.com)**

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# **The joys and challenges of being a man, father & husband**

**Tony Hollingsworth**

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Today I am a husband and father to three primary school-aged daughters and have been happily married for 15 years. I had a fantastic childhood growing up in Sydney's eastern beaches in the 1970s. There are so many great memories.

The 1980s were my formative years, completing high school and university. The school years were so much fun — I was the class clown, always able to get a laugh from my classmates. Very cheeky, I never did anything seriously wrong but was often distracted from my studies. I realised I just enjoyed sharing and communicating with people, was often bored with the formalised class structure and preferred a more creative approach to learning.

During the 1990s, I travelled the world, fell in love and got married. My career in the information and data industry blossomed — you can imagine my excitement at discovering the power of the internet.

I revelled in the ability to discover and disseminate information so quickly and being able to help people do the same.

In the 2000s, our children were growing from toddlers to school-starters, and the responsibility of being a man, husband and father began to dawn on me. We had to build a home for our family, I had to get more serious about my career and the cost of living just kept increasing. It made me realise what my own parents went through to

raise me — they worked so hard and gave up so much so that we could receive a good education and happy childhood.

Today, I do not find it easy to carry the burden of this responsibility for my own family. I can feel the pressures of life building on me. It can even be frightening.

Fortunately, I have the most amazing community around me. My dear, hard-working wife, who inspires me; my children, who amaze me with their growth, optimism and speed of learning; my family, who provide love and support; my friends and professional network, who provide love, support, mentoring and inspiration.

This community gives me reason to live, to give and press on.

I am reminded of the Simon & Garfunkel song *I am a Rock* — for this teaches me how I should NOT be living my life. It says “a rock feels no pain” and “an island never cries” — without those emotions I don’t believe we can live a full and happy life.

**[www.tonyhollingsworth.wordpress.com](http://www.tonyhollingsworth.wordpress.com)**

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# A letter to my boys

**Darryl King**

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I have two sons, 11 and 13. I love them dearly and know they are already going through a raft of things I can only observe.

What sort of men would I want them to be?

To be honest I can't be exact. I cannot draw a blueprint for them.

I know I want them to be beautiful human beings, and so far they are, or definitely seem to be. I want them to care for the lives of all, and promote good in the world. I want them to undo all harm they might create and learn from it. To be honest and true to themselves. I believe if they do then no real harm can come of them or from them.

I want them to live. To really live.

I wonder whether I need to be tougher or softer. Should I prepare them to be like the world is today or what I want it to be? Is my role purely to just be there?

Do they need to know about how I felt when I was a teenager and the despair that ran through me? I came from a good family, a "normal family." Why then did I wish to die some days, why did I feel so weird and lost in the world? Why did I run away overseas when everything behind me seemed so normal? Why did I want to escape normality and be different, when ultimately I ended up so normal?

I wasn't normal — not to me anyway. I couldn't find anything wrong with where I was I just didn't want to be there. In a room full of friends I felt like a stranger. How do I make sense of that for them?



No one made sense of it for me. Is it something you just need to go through?

How do you really explain that inside your head and body things wage a war for which there is no victor? That there is no right and wrong way to think about what is happening inside, only what you do with it that has to be managed. That fitting into society is fine as long as you don't become lost within it. That being different is actually an asset.

What sort of man do my boys see me as?

Now they see me being the Dad-man, the boss-man, and the coach-man. They see me as a man of cuddles, a man who gets grumpy and yells.

They wonder why I stay up worrying about making sure my business is still running. They see my inner spark dulled by stress and worry and other times alight with huge intensity with inspiration. They see me awake all night with them when they're sick, or arguing with their mother over silly stuff when we've all been up all night.

Do they feel guilty when they shouldn't? Do they know they are the centre of our beings? Or do they take words said by me without thinking the wrong way?

Do the wiser words I tell them reach down deep where their worries are?

That's the man I want to be. I want to matter to their life so the bumpy road they encounter has a shock absorber. I want to fill some of that space where men did in my life. Men who helped me get through.

I don't want my boys to be any particular type of man, but I don't want them to be afraid to be men. At times the crazy testosterone feelings inside have real value, as do the quiet reflective moments that make the contrast.

While we all stood around pretending to be OK yet deep down feeling so much more; I want my boys to talk it through, to feel it, to meditate on it, to struggle with it, and to hopefully see light at the end of any tunnels they feel stuck in.

To my boys, I wish I had all the answers. I don't.

Know that I have been through some stuff, my stuff; it will be quite different from yours. I'll try and understand that. I won't always get it. I have aged you see, and at times I behave like my father even when I swore I wouldn't.

Just always look into your heart. In there lives goodness, honesty and truth. Step away from the BS you'll hear and see in this world and learn to be guided by what truly matters to you. That's being a man.

Don't feel you have to be like anyone else, not me, not the bone headed bloke next to you, or some perceived bloke to impress someone else, or what you see on TV or the net, or hear on the radio or in songs. See all those things, sense them all, get things from them but be you — whoever that is. It won't always feel so good; sometimes it will feel absolutely unbelievable. That is the ride we're on.

Ride gently where you can! And remember sometimes you just have to ask for help, older men forget to offer it in the right way.

**[www.darrylking.com.au](http://www.darrylking.com.au)**



# Loss

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**“As the great sun light slowly will fade.  
We will forever remember how bright it  
shone.” Jye Smith**

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# Before it began

Scott Abbot

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Son, I think I've had about enough.  
Through it all  
I've kept my chin up and our  
heads above the waterline

but I think that the world has called my bluff.  
I spent all  
these years pretending that I  
didn't care my life was ending

up in this lonely place.  
I'll never kiss your mother's face again.  
Now I'm an old man  
life was over before it began.  
I love you and your sister  
but I know you two don't need me now  
to be brave.  
I sit here like a bird locked in a cage.

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# On being a man and losing a loved one

Scott Drummond

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On 3 February, 2009, my Mum died. What happened to me during her final days and after her death has taught me a lot and I'm still learning: about asking for help, about confronting my emotions, about my priorities in life, and about acceptance.

Being a man means: knowing where you came from

I was a pretty intense, bookish kid, sensitive and a little introverted. Mum understood my anxiety and always made me feel better when I was stressed. We would spend hours together, watching television (*Twin Peaks*), solving crosswords (we shared a love of words) and talking about current affairs.

Mum never treated me like a kid, always listened intently as I formed opinions about whatever it was that we were discussing. She was fascinated by ideas and incredibly compassionate. I have her and Dad to thank for my abiding sense of curiosity but the perfectionist streak is all Mum — we both set ourselves extremely high standards and often struggled to meet them.

**Being a man means: knowing it's OK to feel terrified  
sometimes**

Dad's voice was gentle and quite calm on the phone but I knew straight away that there was something wrong. It was past midnight in the UK and I wasn't expecting a call. But more than that, and it's hard

to explain exactly, when your Mum has had Multiple Sclerosis for twenty years you live with an almost imperceptible, yet deep-seated fear, that one day the creeping degenerative disease might win the fight.

Mum had struggled to overcome a nagging chest infection, which had in turn given her breathing difficulties. We'd later find out that she had contracted pneumonia. I was struggling to take it all in but I could hear Dad's voice trembling so I said goodbye and within four hours I was on a flight to London, Heathrow.

The last thing Dad said was that I should hurry. Time wasn't on my side and I was absolutely terrified I wouldn't get the chance to say a proper goodbye.

### **Being a man means: accepting when it's time to say goodbye**

Over the next three days we all sat with Mum by her hospital bed, holding her hands, talking to her, reassuring her about what lay ahead. She had always been terrified of death and it was heartbreaking seeing her so scared. When she repeatedly said "Ich habe angst" (German for "I'm scared") all I could say was "Ich auch Mutti" ("Me too, Mum"). It was true and I'd like to think the honesty helped us both a little.

Mum's strength faded day after day but she seemed unwilling to let go. The doctors had advised us that it can be hard for the terminally ill to pass away when their loved ones are still so close. As she had been in some pain we all decided to leave Mum alone for one night.

Hearing Dad speak softly to Mum, letting her know that it was alright for her to let go and to be free from her pain, is still one of the most beautiful things I will ever experience.

I watched my Dad, a husband of thirty six years, give his soulmate permission to die and find the peace she was searching for. I hope one day I can be that brave, that selfless, that accepting.



## **Being a man means: taking those first difficult steps**

When I got back to Sydney I realised I was mentally, physically and emotionally exhausted. I took some more time off work but it didn't seem to be helping. I actually couldn't cope with basic tasks and although I was trying I felt completely helpless and at the mercy of my emotions, which were all over the place.

Karla was amazing, comforting me, but I could tell she felt helpless too and was worried about me. As much for her as for me I went and spoke to the St Vincent's Mental Health Service in Darlinghurst. I felt totally broken and I knew I couldn't fix myself alone.

The triage nurse at St Vincent's was incredible. We just sat and talked for over an hour and she let me unravel emotionally. I don't think I'll really ever be able to thank her enough for listening so sensitively, and at the end she suggested I visit a psychologist to help me to deal with my depression and to start processing the grief I was feeling. It was just the beginning but knowing that I had professionals who cared about me and were going to help me to feel better gave me hope, something that had been in short supply.

## **Being a man means: sharing your feelings and embracing weakness as a strength**

Seeing Jon, my psychologist, has allowed me to dedicate serious time on a regular basis to thinking about my emotions, the grief I am feeling, the sense of unending loss, and about how my I want my life to go on without my mum.

It's the biggest challenge I've faced, but I feel like, in Jon, I have a professional guide through the often messy world of the mind. Maybe I could do it on my own but I'm happy to have the support.

A massive part of this journey has been my close friends. Early on, when I was still really suffering and feeling heavily depressed, I



reached out to a small number of them and explained how I was doing.

It was really hard — despite everything that had happened I still felt that somehow my admission of weakness, of being broken and unable to fix myself, was something to be ashamed of. But they were there for me in the truest sense of the phrase. I think men are often expected to fix problems, not have them. But I learned it's natural and OK to feel helpless sometimes and that there's a lot of truth in the saying "a problem shared is a problem halved."

You know who you are and I hope you know how much it means to me that you were there for me. I'm very lucky to have friends like you.

### **Being a man means: being a man**

If I've learned anything through all this it is that there aren't any hard-and-fast rules for how to be a man in this crazy and unpredictable emotional tornado we call life. The only thing we can really be assured of is that life will continue to change for us all, regardless of how much we wish it wouldn't.

All I know is that how you grow and evolve as a man to meet the challenges that life will inevitably throw at you is what really counts. I've learned that no matter how alone or broken you feel there are men and women who care enough to be there for you, to help you feel less broken and alone.

**[www.scottdrummond.org](http://www.scottdrummond.org)**

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# An open letter to my dad

Edward Harran

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Dear Dad,

This is confronting. But I owe it to you, and myself, to write it.

I wonder what you are doing right now. What your day-to-day routine is like? I know you are a university professor, but I still have no idea what exactly you do. Of course, I could pick up the phone, but we know where that leads. That awkward and forced conversation followed by “I have to go,” which afterwards leaves me with this uncanny sense of rejection. Resentment. Disappointment.

Remember, the last time I visited you in Japan? Was it two or three years ago now? It ended messy, as per usual. I lasted a week, didn't I? I ran off to go my Grandmother's house in southern Japan, before returning back to Shanghai where I was living at the time. Since then, I have buried the anger and frustration deep within the dormant recesses of my mind. It is easier to leave things than confront them. Easier, however, not does necessarily mean better.

Every kid whose parents are divorced experiences similar issues. Which one loves me more? Which parent is more like me? Who am I? I always felt like I had two families to deal with: Mum's side and yours.

Since you were half way across the world, divided by distance, age, and culture, I remember, as a teenager, trying so hard to bridge that gap. I wanted to make you proud. I wanted to admire you, not constantly be disappointed.

I wanted a Dad.

I wish I understood you. I tried on countless occasions: to forgive, to forget, to get close to you; but, alas, it seemed like I always hit a brick wall and I eventually just gave up.

I wish you understood me. You know plenty about me, yeah; but, I feel like you only know the filtered version. Phone calls and trips to Japan cannot fill the void.

I wish you had seen me grow up.

Sure, I saw you intermittently over the years, but that is different. Time is irreplaceable, a non-renewable resource. Experiences become memories. Memories play such a significant part in building our character. It fills me with this peculiar sadness to think how much of my character — is not you.

In the journey through manhood, we typically ask our fathers for guidance, to aid us in our challenges, to share their wisdom as we transition from boy to man.

The great paradox is that in your absence, in my unfulfilled attempts to get guidance from you, I have learnt a lot about what it is to become a man.

### **Lesson 1: Accept what is, is**

When you are a boy, you are influenced by your surroundings. You are reliant on your parents and often don't have a choice in a lot of matters. You need guidance: sometimes you get it, other times you don't. As you grow up though, you eventually reach a crossroad where you get to decide. The ball is thrown into your court. You can either accept your past - or not. Life happens.

So, Dad, sure, our relationship was rocky, but we had good times nevertheless.

A lot of my positive qualities are your influence: my inability to hide my emotions, my optimism, my intelligence. You have been supportive, understanding and kind, even if you couldn't show it the way I liked.

I have a father. I am lucky: some people don't even get that.

## **Lesson 2: Step into someone else's shoes. Have empathy**

When you are a boy, you retain a degree of egocentricity. Without control, you become the victim. When you are a man, you move beyond and retain a self-awareness that allows you to step into someone else's shoes.

Dad, I am sorry I could not understand your perspective.

It must have been hard having a son live so far away. A son who you didn't get to see grow up. A son who harboured ill feelings, when all you tried to do was make amends. I know you suffered from the same abandonment issues with your father, and so it is bitterly ironic that the cycle repeated with us.

You get nervous when you talk with me on the phone, I know, so don't feel guilty if you don't call.

Talking is over-rated, anyway.

## **Lesson 3: Rise above your ego dramas and align with your true self**

Harbouring anger is futile. Negativity does nothing for you — your ego feeds off it. Dad, perhaps I will never understand you. Maybe you will never understand me. There is no rewind button in life — I cannot insert you into the past. But, alas, I have stopped holding onto those ill feelings: rejection, resentment, disappointment. In every human's quest for self-realisation, we must rise above and beyond such pity things.

I know how much you adore The Beatles, Dad, so I will put it in their words, “All you need is love.”

Everyone in Japan keeps reminding me how proud you are, how much you talk about me. What validation am I looking for?

I finally realise, now at age twenty five, that sometimes the truth does not need to be spoken. Love is all that matters. Everything else is secondary.

We have had a strange relationship, you and me. But life is like that: unpredictable, mysterious — and strange. It actually makes me laugh thinking how bizarre, comical, the whole thing is. The great fallacy of our era is that we humans think we have control over our lives. But you don't sometimes. You just have to let it flow and allow the Tao to do its thing.

I doubt you will ever read this letter, but if you happen to stumble across this book, for what it is worth, Happy Father's Day.

I love you mate.

Eddie

**[www.edwardharran.posterous.com](http://www.edwardharran.posterous.com)**

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# Your clarity was alarming

Michael Ryan

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February the third — today you would be sixty-five  
But alas the mortal coil let you down  
Your last years racked with pain;  
Passing all too quickly for those of us  
Praying for a miracle  
I thank the divine “whoever” for getting  
Me to your bedside for that last goodbye  
Your clarity was alarming  
As we laughed and cried and hugged in silence  
I sobbed uncontrollably and told you I was sorry  
You had nothing to forgive you said,  
And your glowing face bathed me  
In a father’s gentle knowing love

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# My current (and greatest) life challenge

**Joel Pearson**

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On Monday the 15th of June, 2009, I received a call that changed everything. It was my Mum on the phone, calling from the hospital.

My Dad had been diagnosed with leukaemia.

The news hit me like a piano falling from a building. My Dad has always been healthy. At fifty years old he is fitter than I am and plays hockey at a second grade competitive level. He's never smoked and doesn't drink to excess.

Since then, a lot of information has been thrown at me. As new facts emerge as to the type of leukaemia and the specifics of my Dad's condition becomes clearer, it seems that everything has happened very quickly, but also that life has moved very slowly.

My Dad's particular type of leukaemia is called Acute Lymphoblastic Leukaemia. It is a very aggressive type of leukaemia, especially for older males. In addition, my Father has what is called the Philadelphia chromosome which puts him in the poor prognosis category. All of this means that while he may make it into remission, his chances of recovery (statistically) are very low.

With all of this in mind I have found myself doing the very thing Manweek is designed to prevent. I have been bottling all my feelings inside.

As the eldest male within my family I have felt that I need to be the strong person and bear the burden of the rest of my family's sadness and grief. I know in my conscious mind that this is not necessary, that my family is strong and we will all support each other. Yet a part of me cannot help but feel the need to fill this role.

Holding my feelings in has been taking its toll lately.

I haven't been sleeping (more so than usual), I have been snappy and generally a dick to my gorgeous girlfriend, and I have just felt generally unmotivated.

Talking to Jessica (girlfriend) and reading the posts people have written for Manweek has encouraged me to go forwards and speak to a counsellor or psychologist to get some outside perspective on the situation and to find better ways of dealing with the feelings I am having.

This was not easy for me to write, and as I sit here, my hands are shaking more than slightly. But I feel, already, like a weight has been lifted.

Writing this has been my first step on the path to unravelling the ball of emotions I'm currently dealing with.

**[www.joelyrighteous.com](http://www.joelyrighteous.com)**



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# Saying goodbye to the light of the sun

**Jye Smith**

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I never thought today would be the day I wore my new suit for the first time. But I'm glad it is.

Today is my Grandfather's funeral. The funeral of Ernest Charles Smith.

My mother rang on Friday morning, and before she said a word I just asked, "Is everything OK?" It wasn't some feeling, it was pure impulse. I didn't think anything would be wrong, my instinct just leapt out of my mouth before I had time to think about it. She told me he had died through the night, and I instantly thought of my Father, losing his father.

As the eldest grandson present on the day, I was asked, just like I was last year, to say something. Eleven months ago it was my Grandmother, and today it is her husband of sixty years. Sixty years of marriage. Sixty years of love, trust and companionship. Sixty years of being a father, to my father. Twenty three years of being my Grandfather.

I feel small. Tiny. Microscopic. I know nothing. I am on the threshold of what I consider life, while he has just finished eighty six years of his. Imagine the world of 1923 — imagine living through the age of the 20th Century.

And while we all talk about the next five years of the industry, I can't help but think that the next thirty years of human history will quash whatever insight we might have.

Growing up I never consciously considered my Grandfather a role model. But he was. He was the head of a very close family. He was a generous, kind and loyal husband. He was a devoted and loving father. And a quick-witted and passionate grandfather.

Through his life he demonstrated and valued what was truly important: family, love and life.

It might take me the next 40 years to learn anything like this, or become half the man he was. But for this moment, for this glimpse, I am so grateful.

As I put on my new suit and have that final shave — the things that so lightly make a man — I stare straight into the mirror and hope that one day I might share the same joy that he did.

This is to celebrate, to commemorate and to forever remember Ernest.

A great man.

As the great sun light slowly will fade  
We will forever remember how bright it shone  
How it resonates and how it was made  
Through your life, marriage and your son.

**[www.jyesmith.com](http://www.jyesmith.com)**

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# Afterword

**Jack Heath**

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In the early days of the Inspire Foundation we learnt a valuable lesson in connecting with young men. As we toured rural and regional communities across Australia, we discovered that who told the story about our ReachOut.com service was critical in terms of which young people volunteered to help us. When our presenters were both female, or even one male and one female, for every young man applying to join our youth advisory boards there were three young women. But when we had two guys out there presenting the ratio shifted to 1:1. Young men model the behaviour of older men and that is why this collection of stories about and by men is such an important contribution to men's health and wellbeing but particularly to young men's health and wellbeing. The fact that women have also spoken of their experience with the men in their lives adds to the richness of this collection.

There is something truly special and life enhancing in the telling of story. Through story we discover a narrative in our lives that can give perspective to strong emotions which can so easily feel all encompassing and overwhelming. In reading the stories of others we realise that we not alone which brings hope in and of itself.

As stories morph into reflective journeys from a tough space to a better place, and as we begin to share those stories with others, we start to build a sense of hope and inspiration in those immersed in what can feel like a landless sea of suffering. In my own life, I found writing a transformational process in dealing with the consequences of the sexual abuse as a teenager when I had felt so utterly alone.

There is a lot of love in this book. The generous letters to sons by Jorge Albinagorta and Darryl King are an inspiration for other fathers and we learn about the power of affirming our sons through Scott Middleton. Jeremy LeBard and Ben O'Mara show the legacy a grandfather can leave. We witness Age Conte's respect for his immigrant father and what comes from doing the best for yourself and those you love while James Duthie speaks of the joy of a love regained. I loved the deadpan directness of Mitch Andrews' opening line "Fatherhood is not meeting my expectations."

There is a heart-warming humility in Mark Pollard's aspiration to be a better Dad. In Jye Smith's eulogy of his grandfather you somehow get the sense Jye will share the same joy with others as his grandfather did. Craig Kirchener sings to us loudly of opening to the sun and being happy just to make you smile.

Undoubtedly, we are nurtured by those who are kind and love us deeply but we also learn from those who present us with challenges and difficulty. There is a healthy refusal of victimhood in Julian Cole summoning the courage to look his bully in the eye. In Eddie Harran's open letter to his Dad he chooses to learn from an absent father, exhorting us to accept what is, to be empathetic and to rise above and beyond the pity things. Joel Connolly is able to see the benefits in having a poor role model and Stephen Collin makes a public commitment to care properly for the people in his life including himself. Gavin Heaton shares a young man's anger for an absent father which has moved on to a place where no one can take away our pain or own our joy.

Steve Crombie's powerful story reminds us how important it is to not only follow our passion but learn how to be content with our own company. Peaceful men who have been through particularly hard times invariably create a sense of hope for those of us feeling victims of injustices or what life may have just thrown our way. Annik Skelton shows the impact that compassionate and peaceful men can have on their daughters. And Ann Handy's beautiful piece on her son's "thank

you” shows what being appreciative and comfortable in our own skin can do for our mothers. We are reminded by Dave Relf of our common humanity that extends beyond gender and sexual orientation and Scott Middleton shares the wonderful insight that when you have an idea but no money your ability to inspire others is your only currency.

The stories of loss are particularly uplifting be it Michael Ryan being bathed in the light of his father’s gentle knowing love or Scott Drummond’s poignant description of his father telling his mother it was OK to let go. Gavin Bollard reveals that like good wine we mellow over time but that it often takes becoming a father to appreciate what our fathers did for us. Trent Collins takes on the rollercoaster of becoming a Dad and Scott Abbot touches on the cutting sense of isolation some fathers experience.

Throughout this book there is a clear and consistent message about the importance of putting your hand up when you need help and the practical benefits that flow from it. Alan Long starts off through making contact with Beyond Blue. For Joel Pearson, the Manweek stories lead him to seek help and he feels a burden suddenly lift. David Phillips shares that though there’s a long way to go, it’s comforting to know that there’s help out there, and it’s worth swallowing your pride to ask for it when you need to.

The fact that so many men have been inspired to come forward with their own help-seeking stories will inspire others including young men. At the same time, Karalee Evans reinforces the importance of being there for the men in your life and creating an environment that supports them to seek help when they are ready. Tony Hollingsworth reveals how he draws support through his community of family and friends.

Inspire’s work with young people depends on our community of supporters and I offer our heartfelt thanks to Gavin Heaton, Mark Pollard and everyone behind this Perfect Gift, the proceeds of which

will be directed to our work with young men. I wish for men who read these stories to write their own stories of love, courage and hope and share them with the men and women in their lives.

Thank you.

*Jack Heath founded Inspire Australia in 1996 to address Australia's then escalating rates of youth suicide.*









*the perfect gift for a*  
**Man**

In Australia, young men commit suicide at more than three times the rate of women of the same age.

Further, mental illness and drug and alcohol dependency is severely affecting men aged 16–24.

In mid-2009, The Inspire Foundation launched the #Manweek campaign to raise awareness of these issues. A number of Australian bloggers supported this campaign, sharing their thoughts, challenges and experiences with their readers.

Each of these stories was a gift - sometimes painful to write, always astounding to read. They got under our skin, and as the campaign ended, we felt that the campaign had only just scratched the surface. We wanted to take these stories and share them with others - with our brothers, fathers and uncles.

With our friends and families.

This book is the result. Please buy it for the men in your life.  
All proceeds go to The Inspire Foundation.

We think it is the perfect gift.

[www.thepperfectgiftforaman.com.au](http://www.thepperfectgiftforaman.com.au)  
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