

Let's hear it for the boys

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Boys will tell you what they think whether you want to hear it or not.

Boys will present you with a snake, a frog or a nightcrawler of record proportions and expect you to enjoy the experience.

Boys will ask: "If you had to get killed, would you rather be shot, stabbed or hung?"

Boys will get antsy in school, church or anyplace where they're expected to sit quietly and act like girls.

And that's the problem: too many adults expect boys to act like girls. Why would they want them to do that? Boys are fine just the way they are.

Sure, when my age was in single digits, I thought boys were a pain ... mainly because of two boys in third grade who consistently made naughty body parts out of modeling clay during art class. Yet those boys grew up to be successful in their professional and family lives. I suppose it is possible they may be wearing women's lingerie under their three-piece suits, but who cares? Not I!

Even the boy in high school who put a snake in the teacher's desk — causing him (yes, the teacher was a him) to jump up in his chair and yell, "I hate snakes!" — managed to stay out of jail in adulthood. And the boy who actually caught said snake on an FFA field trip and provided it to the perpetrator, grew up to be a great husband and father. I know, because I married him.

As the mother of sons, I routinely instructed my boys not to hit girls. Unfortunately, I forgot that girls can be a lot bigger than boys in elementary school. Greg, then a second-grader, frequently came home bruised and battered by an Amazon in his class who was a head-and-a-half taller than he. Finally, a kick to his shin resulting in a purple goose egg caused me to amend my instructions. The next time she hit him, he retaliated. The girl tattled and the teacher told Greg that little boys were not supposed to hit little girls.

"Little boys don't hit little ladies," Greg said, "because little ladies don't hit little boys first."

"Did your mother tell you to say that?" asked the teacher.

"Yes."

"Well, okay."

And the girl never hit, kicked or scratched Greg again.

When my friend Rho had trouble with her two sons hitting their younger sister, she sat them down and explained the difference between boys and girls in more specificity than I thought necessary. Nonetheless, Rho's talk was successful. Later, as her older son

sat on his sister in the yard, pulling back his fist for a punch, his younger brother cautioned, “Don’t hit her in the stomach. You’ll break all her eggs!”

I once believed that boys were less interested than girls in hairstyles and clothes, but that was before Greg, at age 15, tried to straighten his naturally curly hair with a hot-comb. The resulting pageboy style made him look like Prince Valiant, but he seemed happy with it.

At 17, Ray, Jr. (aka Butch) had a penchant for cool clothes. I was recently given an old letter I’d sent to my aunt in which I mentioned his new bikini swim trunks. I wrote that his girlfriend was going on vacation and expressed the opinion that we’d get to see more of Butch while she was gone. I then added that his new bikini already let us see quite a lot of him.

Sadly, boys are now in crisis and no lesser a personage than First Lady Laura Bush is trying to do something about it. More girls than boys go to college. More boys suffer from depression (who knew, when girls can be such drama queens?) and many more boys are diagnosed with ADHD (were Tom Sawyer alive today — or ever, I suppose — he would be prescribed Ritalin in less time than it would take him to talk someone into whitewashing a fence).

When I first saw girls wearing T-shirts that proclaimed GIRLS RULE, I thought the phrase was pretty novel. But yesterday, while looking at some cute socks for granddaughter Sammi, I saw a pair that said GIRLS KICK BOY BUTT. Call me prudish, but I think that message crosses the line and I’m pretty sure that my great-great-grandmother, an avid Suffragette, would agree. She wanted equality, not superiority.

It’s time to celebrate boys. For the most part, they are honest, enthusiastic, helpful and generous. And if they are occasionally loud, awkward, rambunctious and rude ... well, cut them some slack, please. They’re just boys and they’ll grow out of it.