

Father and Sons

Written by Ryan Copeland

Tuesday, 10 March 2015 10:09 - Last Updated Wednesday, 11 March 2015 07:10



"Did you ever think you'd have another boy?"

That's what my wife asked me in the quiet aftermath of receiving the genetic results of blood tests for our baby due in July.

I knew exactly what she meant. Yes – there was always a 50/50 chance I would, in fact, have another boy. But she meant did I – not the most natural fit to have sons – think of myself as capable of producing two?

No, probably not.

My grandfather was my role model early on, and though he died when I was a teenager he somehow is still a measuring stick. Funny thing though, as much as masculinity and femininity are still defined by activities and personalities, it was my grandparents who went against the stereotypes. He was the one who put the damp rag on my head when I was sick. He made my lunches and let me sit on his lap to watch cartoons. He was perpetually slow to anger, and was every bit as gentle as my grandmother was tough.

Still, I wonder if I have the necessary skills and authority to create the right environment to raise

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two southern boys today.

You see, I'm not exactly Bruce Jenner, but I'm not the most masculine of men. I'm Mister Rogers sans cardigan. Chuck Norris minus everything that makes him Chuck Norris and with better hair. I'm less of the straightforward, gun-toting Sean Connery version of James Bond and more of the "let me make a joke before I attempt an awkward escape" Roger Moore 007.

Don't get me wrong – I see no point in drinking light beer or eating salad for lunch, and I genuinely enjoy a good mountain hike and an afternoon of playing or watching football. My wife can tell you how active I am during "vacations" to western North Carolina and how *inactive* I am on fall Saturdays at home.

But I will never take my boys with me to sit in a deer stand for hours on a Saturday. I will never show them how to skin a hog or make a wilderness survival kit. I enjoy fishing but don't own a boat and have no plans to purchase one. The only thing I know about cars is how to drive them in the right lane except when passing. I will not be able to take them out into a woodshop that doesn't exist and teach them carpentry skills that I don't have.

With this second son I can, at the very least, teach him the kind of things I've begun with my 6-year-old boy:

How to give and receive hugs.

How to tell someone you love them first.

How to choke up on the bat to get around quicker on the fastball.

How to find middle C and make it into a full chord.

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How it's okay to laugh out loud at "Pee-Wee's Big Adventure," and sing-along with musicals like "Annie."

How to submit to defeat when tied in a Figure-Four Leglock, and how to expertly apply a Cobra Clutch when necessary.

How to rock a seersucker suit.

The importance of "yes ma'am" and "thank you."

Later, as they both get older and their understanding of the world becomes clearer, I'll try to impart a few more things:

How to respect women (because they're probably smarter than you).

How to never ask someone to do something for you that you're not willing to do for yourself.

How some of the smartest people you'll ever meet don't have a fancy diploma hanging on their wall.

How to shave with an electric razor (saving time and pain in the morning).

That taking out the trash, sweeping the kitchen, vacuuming, washing the dishes and doing your own laundry is part of a bigger partnership with someone, not something divided by gender roles.

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How giving and receiving hugs never goes out of style.

How to tip your barber.

How to be kind to people on your way up in the world, because those same folks might be there to greet you on the way down.

Meekness is not weakness.

That last one is one I can only teach by example and even that only by default. I heard a preacher give a sermon about that principle once, and I try to remember it when I feel bad about not being able to show my sons how to operate a forklift.

If warm hugs count for anything, they'll at least have that. They'll have to look to their mother for guidance on everything else.

I think my grandparents would approve.

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