

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Yes, introductions in books are usually boring. That's why readers often ignore them. I want you to read this one. That's why I've called it "Chapter 1."

### Who Is This Book For?

If you are a boy who is at least ten years old, and who is beginning to think about who you are and how you fit in, this book is for you.

### Why Only for Boys?

Because I was one for many years – thirteen years, eighteen years, or possibly longer, depending upon what one considers "a man." I have had no experience being a girl and, contrary to today's popular opinions, there are differences between males and females, which go way beyond physical features.

A person's gender has a lot to do with their natural interests, attitudes and emotions. People therefore expect males and females to look different, think differently, and act differently. Some people think this is unfair and wrong, and call it

“sexist,” “sexual stereotyping,” “male chauvinism,” and so on. But, like it or not, this is how things are right now.

Girls who act “boyish” are acceptable to most people. There is a cute name for them – *tomboys*. Boys who act “girl-ish,” however, are likely to be targets for ridicule and abuse by other boys, and even girls. There is no cute name for them. Effeminate boys are called *homos* or *gay*.

I believe that the *gender roles* of men and women are different by nature, rather than nurture. I am therefore sensitive about women who try to teach boys about how men should think and behave. I think it is just as inappropriate for men to think they know what is best for girls. That’s why what I write is intended just for boys.

Girls are certainly welcomed to read this book. It might be well worth their time if they come away with a much better understanding of what makes boys tick.

## Why Ten?

Have you noticed that there are a lot of unpleasant and unhappy people in the world? Have you wondered why they are like that, and how they got that way? That’s what this book is all about. Its purpose is to tell you some things about that, so you will be able to avoid what makes a boy grow up to be an unpleasant and unhappy man.

If you are still a young boy, a pre-teen or even an early teen, you are probably still usually pleasant and happy as long as you get enough sleep and nobody is picking on you. After a boy has entered the second decade of his life, that often begins to change.

It so happens that *puberty*, the physical process that turns a boy into a man (at least physically), also occurs around this time in a boy's life, usually sometime between ages ten and fourteen. But that's not what this book is all about. As you go through that time in your life and begin to become a sexually capable male, there are obvious physical changes. Along with them come changes in the way you think about things. That is a big deal, but that is not what causes the emotional problems that cripple so many unhappy adults.

Kids are usually simple people. As a kid, you accept what you see, hear and feel, without doing much thinking about the significance of events, the meaning of things other people do, or the purpose of your life. It is usually not very hard for others to know what you are thinking. Your behavior usually shows what you are thinking or feeling. You are emotional, rather than intellectual. In other words, how you feel as a kid usually depends upon what is going on around you at that moment, not upon how you think you should feel. Kids are simple minded for a very good reason; the brain is still developing and is not yet capable of doing much deep thinking and reasoning.

Sometime around the age of ten, and this is different for every person, your mind has developed to the point where you become able to think more deeply about things. As a simple example, if you believed in Santa Clause when you were little, you began to sense that certain parts of that story did not really make sense. You eventually realized that it was all made up; that there is no Santa Clause, except in the imaginations of little children. Your thinking might go even beyond that, realizing that your parents fooled you into believing in

Santa Clause, and you might wonder what other tales they've been telling you, and why.

As you begin to think about things this way, your thoughts begin to create feelings. This is different from how you were as a younger child, when your feelings were mostly a result of what was happening to you at the moment.

So I would like to get this book to you around the time this begins to happen, so you can learn how to avoid turning yourself into an unpleasant and unhappy man. If that happens, it can take years to fix. Often it never gets fixed at all, and those men spend the rest of their lives thinking it would have been better if they had never been born.

The late Albert Ellis was a well respected but hard-nosed psychologist famous for saying things like "Neurosis is a high-class word for whining." He believed that the second decade of life is the time when people who are screwed up got screwed up. Lee Iacocca was an engineer, not a psychologist, but during his career, which ended with his being president of two of the biggest auto manufacturers in the world, Ford and Chrysler, he learned a lot about what made people tick. Referring to general education in his book *Where Have All The Leaders Gone?* he said, "I've always believed that the ten-year span from five to fifteen is the make-or-break time."

So that's "why ten?" It is a critical time in every boy's life; a time when every boy has a chance to get the rest of his life started on the right foot.

Not ten? Eighteen, twenty-one or forty-four? Feel free to read this kid stuff anyway. Having been the way you are for a long time does not mean you have to stay that way. It's never too late to become a happy, successful and popular per-

son. Tomorrow can indeed be “the first day of the rest of your life.”

## You’re Just a Boy. What Do You Know?

Most adults think kids are not very smart, especially kids who are still fair complexioned and cute, full of energy, and who still speak in sweet, high-pitched voices.

It’s true; you are obviously much less knowledgeable than an adult. That’s simply because adults have been exposed to many more years of experience, and have had the opportunity to learn all sorts of things the hard way. You will eventually have all those same experiences, and will learn all sorts of things that people usually do not or cannot learn at home or in school. But adults usually make the mistake of judging a book by its cover. Because kids appear to be ignorant and naïve in many ways, adults wrongly assume that kids are totally innocent, and are incapable of serious thought or responsible decision-making.

You and I know that is not true. A ten-year old boy once told me, “We know a whole lot more about a whole lot more than most people think we do.” I knew this boy very well, and I knew what he meant. Knowing him that well helped me remember what I was like when I was ten. I was just like him; I knew a lot of things too. However, many of those things were not things I would have been comfortable discussing with my parents, or any other adult. As a result, most adults probably believed that I was ignorant and naïve. It is easy to understand why they thought so. But they were wrong in thinking that my brain’s capabilities were so limited.

Writers are often advised to adjust their work to the reading level of an average nine-year old. That seemed especially appropriate for this book, and I originally planned to do that. It is not really a big deal, just a matter of using short sentences and avoiding big words.

But I changed my mind. I would rather believe what my young friend said; that kids are a lot smarter than people usually think they are.

The idea of dumbing down my book seemed rather condescending. I am not comfortable doing that. My intention is to tell you what a wonder your mind is, and what great power it has. Writing down to you would not help promote that idea. It would also make the book boring for anyone whose reading level is higher than that.

I would also rather just be myself. My writing usually comes out somewhere between the seventh and eleventh grade levels anyway, corresponding to ages twelve to sixteen. If you are ten and are reading this book, you are probably already at that level anyway. If you find some parts a bit of a struggle, I am sure your wonderful mind will be able to figure things out and learn from the experience.

So, ‘You’re just a boy. What do you know?’ Whatever your age – ten, twelve, sixteen, or twenty-one – I am writing this for you. By the time you are done with this book, you surely will know a whole lot more about a whole lot more than most people expect – or even than most people.

And you are certainly not “just a boy.” One of the best things about being born male is that you get to be a boy for a while. Boys are wonderful.

And you are also a gold mine of potential!

## Who Am I

When you read books written for any purpose other than entertainment, you should ask, “Who is this person? What does he know, and why should I believe anything he says?” If the book has a jacket, you can usually find out about the author on the back inside flap. It will tell about his educational achievements, what he does for a living, what other books he has written, and so on.

I am nobody. I have only a high school education. I have not written any other books of this kind. However, I am over two-thirds of a century old now, and during those sixty-eight years have experienced much of what life will present to you as you continue to grow up.

When I was a boy, between the ages of about six and eighteen, I was growing up in a very unhappy family, so I became a very difficult and unhappy young man. That lasted until I was well into middle age. After the best part of my life was past – “best” in terms of good looks, physical fitness, energy, enthusiasm and opportunity – I finally began to get my head on straight, and became a happy person. During all those earlier years, I spent a lot of time trying to figure out what was the matter with me, and read many books that seemed to promise answers. Because of that, I suppose I could claim to be well studied or self-educated in psychology, neurology and human behavior.

You would probably expect the author of a book like this to be a shrink, or at least someone with a college degree. There are lots of books like that. I have read lots of books like that. Does that make me an expert?

No; of course not. And especially not, because over the years, ever since Sigmund Freud published his fascinating thinking about what makes people behave the way they do, psychological theories and fad therapies have come and gone, one after another. What is hot on the talk shows and bestseller lists is always soon replaced by something else, and usually by something much different. Nevertheless, each new scheme is hyped as the final truth, its inventor is worshiped as the new guru, and newly recruited believers flock to lectures, bookstores and hip therapists with money in hand and high hopes.

Today, most of the ideas previously promoted by “experts” have been discredited and dismissed. That means that in spite of their impressive credentials, their thinking turned out to be incorrect, or at least less useful than whatever came along next.

I suggest you look upon me not as an expert, but as a practical grandfatherly figure who has learned some important things the hard way, and wants to save you from wasting the best years of your life repeating my experience.

## About Your Parents

Do your parents know that you are reading this book? Did they buy it for you? If not, what will they think when they find it hidden under your mattress?

If you are less than eighteen years of age, you are under the age of majority in most U.S. states. The age of majority is the age when the law says you can be considered an independent adult, and are no longer legally under the control of

your parents. If you are underage, your parents have the right, and a legal responsibility, to know what you are up to.

This book contains some rather explicit talk about personal things, like your relationship with your parents and others in your family. It talks about politics and religion. It also talks openly about love and sex. Would your parents approve of your reading this kind of material?

This raises a hard question. It is a classic question of intellectual freedom vs. censorship – your right to read what you wish vs. someone else’s right to control the kind of material you are exposed to.

Here is the rub:

If you are reading this book because you are finding life difficult and you are very unhappy, your parents are probably an important part of your problem. Their problems have become your problem. If they had been able to solve their problems, you might have no need to read this book. If they have not yet been able to do that, then it is important for you to know that their problems are *their problems*. You do not have to inherit them, or otherwise let those problems wreck your life.

Much of what is in this book could be considered “parenting.” Some of it is political, some of it is moral and some of it is religious. If it conflicts with what certain authority figures in your life would have you believe, you will have to decide what the best thing to do is, given the nature of your family, and the feelings you have about yourself. Life is full of decisions like this; situations where you need to think about how what seems best for you might not please someone else. Do-

ing what you want is not always the best answer. Neither is self-sacrifice.

## Why is This Book (Not) So Small?

In the beginning, I thought I would be able to say what I thought I wanted to say in less than a hundred pages. Living life successfully as a happy person is not really complicated or difficult. People who are not happy usually do not believe that. They think their problems and disadvantages are special, and they feel helpless about fixing them. Worse yet, people often know that, but choose not to believe it. Rather than accept the responsibility for their own life – for making themselves happy and successful – they choose the role of “victim,” blaming their situation on others or on circumstances that were beyond their control, and which supposedly left them with deep-seated and highly complex problems.

Thick books have been written for people who think they have big problems. Until recently, those books usually told their readers just what many of them wanted to hear – that their problems were excruciatingly complex, somebody else’s fault, and very likely to prove amenable only to a lifetime of medication and counseling. If you continue reading this book, you will find out that is pure nonsense. Newer ideas, called Cognitive Behavior Theory and Rational Emotive Behavior Theory, greatly simplify things and remove much of the mystery. It would not have taken a lot of pages to explain how anyone who is willing to accept these new ideas could change their mind and swap their problems for happiness and success in life.

In the process of writing, however, I came to realize that there are special challenges that every boy has to come to terms with, and I thought these were worth talking about in more detail – what to do about school, religion and sex, for example. Much has already been written about such things, but most of it represents predictable adult attitudes.

The information age we live in is changing things just as dramatically as other historical paradigm shifts, such as the Renaissance and Industrial Revolution. Many of the ideas cherished by the adult world are proving to have always been invalid, or have become at least significantly less valid for your generation. I thought it would be useful to write about some of these things, showing how new ways of thinking can simplify what have, in the past, often caused lots of headaches and heartaches.

Most people do not like to change their minds after having believed something for a long time. Others have a vested interest in keeping things as they are. I am therefore certain that some of what I have to say in the following pages will be roundly criticized by some, leaving a few others absolutely enraged and furiously angry. That is not my intention, but in anticipating hurt feelings, I have written at length about certain things that you will be challenged to explain, should you decide to accept my point of view.

That is why my book turned out to be (not) so small.



