

Mama don't want me to get killed!

Valentine Joe Strudwick joined the Army when he was 15 years old and went off to France to fight in World War I. Valentine was killed by an artillery shell just one month before his 16th birthday. His mother grieved.

Percy Columbus Albritton joined the Marines in 1943 when he was 15 and went off to fight in World War II. By happenstance, it was discovered that PC was underage and his orders to the battlefield were cancelled. Young PC was angry about that. He wanted to go and fight in the war and have great adventures. He was not afraid.

I remember the age of 15. Like Valentine Joe and Cousin PC, I dreamed of having adventures too. I was not afraid. When I was 15 I got into a fist-fight with my pal Guy Dennis. Guy was a big boy, at least 50 pounds heavier than me. He later played college and professional football. In 1959, however, Guy and I were just two young boys playing tag football who got angry with one another while pushing and shoving during play. I went at Guy swinging wildly, time after time. Each time I attacked him, he knocked me to the ground. I was so angry, but I was not afraid. After a while one of the older boys on campus named Tommy Godwin came over and stopped the fight. I was glad to see Tommy show up before Guy killed me, but I wasn't afraid of him.

"I AIN'T AFRAID OF HIM!" I screamed to Tommy through tears of anger.

Tommy examined my busted lips and bruised eyes and swollen cheeks and quipped facetiously, "Yes, I can see from looking at your face that you aren't afraid of him."

That summer I ran away from home with a pal and we hitch-hiked to Houston, Texas with the idea of getting a summer job in the big city and having some adventures before school started the next year. My pal had an aunt who lived in Houston and he said his aunt would welcome us to stay at her house for a couple of months. I knew my parents would never allow me to do such a foolish thing, so I didn't bother to ask them. We just did it! We had about \$5.00 in our pockets between us, but what the heck! We weren't afraid. Fifteen-year-old boys are not afraid of too much.

We had some adventures alright; enough for a whole nother story, to be sure. We stayed gone for two weeks before my father finally lost his patience and ordered me to come home before he had to come to Texas and get me. He promised that his plan would not be any kind of fun for me. I was not afraid of too much at 15, but I was afraid of my father. I was also homesick for my own bed and my Mama's cooking. When Daddy's letter arrived with my bus ticket in it, and when that Greyhound Bus cruised into the city limits of Atmore a few days later, I was oh so happy to be home again. I thought about the "whupping" I was surely going to get from my father for running off to Texas to start with, but it would all be worth it, I thought, just to be home again in my own bed and eating Mama's cooking again. As it turned out, my father was so glad to see me safely back home again that he completely forgot to punish me at all. In fact, I became something of a family legend for a period of time after that. Whenever family visitors came round they would always demand, "GIT THAT ONE OUT HERE WHO RAN OFF TO TEXAS. WE WANT TO HEAR ALL ABOUT THAT." Daddy would trot me out and sit there grinning broadly as I rehearsed my tale of adventure.

Boys tend to love adventure and, when left to their own devices, are not afraid of too many things, including snakes and insects. Fathers love their sons and do not want them to get killed or injured when they are away from home, but fathers are inherently different than mothers. It is a father's job to toughen a boy up and teach him how to become a man and who can face the dangers and challenges of life. A mother's overwhelming nature, however, is to protect her little boys from danger. If left to mothers, no young man would ever go off to wear a military uniform and to fight and die for his country. Perhaps world history would be without wars at all if women had been in charge down through the generations. It is men and boys who like to fight, not women and little girls. Statistical reports tell us that 70-80 percent of American households these days are single-parent households headed by women, mothers and grandmothers. Is it no wonder that governments, still dominated by men, are having a hard time filling their military ranks with young fighting men? Time and time again I hear young boys express their lack of interest in a military career by saying, "My Mama says she don't want me to go off and get killed in no war."

Well, of course not! I think most Mama's inherently do what Mama's do. They instill into their little boys and young men a fear of all things which might hurt them: snakes, lizards, wildcats, bull frogs, bullies, jumping off roofs and tree limbs, etc. And, of course, WARS!

Fathers, on the other hand, teach boys to fight back against bullies, to learn to enjoy the thrill of danger and adventure, the thrill of diving off a tree limb into a shallow creek bed, the thrill of the hunt and the thrill of the kill, the thrill of war.

I am not suggesting that mothers are to blame for society's conspicuous absence of manly presence. Men and men alone are responsible for their absence of influence from American society. Women can only be what they are: kind, compassionate, nurturing, protective of their children, etc.

We wonder why so many little boys these days want to be little girls. We wonder why our little boys want dollies for Christmas instead of guns and knives. Is it not because they are emulating strong, dominate mothers who struggle to raise families by themselves. I think if men do not straighten up and come home to their families and start teaching their little boys how to be boys and men instead of little girls, our society is in trouble. I think there will always be wars. It is simply a question of who will fight them, if anyone.

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