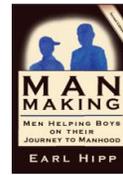


Man-Making

Men Helping Boys on Their Journey to Manhood



A Young Man's Rite Of Passage by Earl Hipp

Recently a good friend of mine, Gary, was preparing to send his son off to college. In our conversations, he spoke of his awe at how fast his son, Ben, had grown up and how quickly this time of departure had arrived. He also spoke about his lingering sadness about his son leaving home and the enormously empty place it would leave. In the mix of these complicated feelings, there was also the pride he felt that his son was moving toward this next phase of his life.

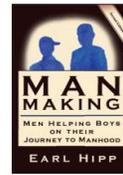
What really caught my attention were Gary's fears about his son's ability to handle the social pressures of college life, his worries about his son's lack of academic discipline, and many other concerns about whether his son was really ready for the experience. While his joy, pride, and anxiety were all pretty normal, like all fathers who face this transition in their son's life, he was still seeing so much of the boy in the young man, and he was holding on.

As a man who had also watched Ben grow up, and as his surrogate uncle, I realized I was hearing the call to be an elder and man-maker in the lives of this father and son. I took a risk and suggested to Gary a Rite-of-Passage ceremony might help both father and son to launch into this new adventure together. I also shared my belief, based on my research, that Ben and the men who would be involved, possessed all the natural and necessary hardwiring for this experience to have a profound effect. Gary considered the idea for a while and eventually decided to go along. In a moment I'll tell you what actually happened, but here are some of my suggestions to Gary on how to set up this Rite-of-Passage event.

- Ask the women to leave the house for this "male only" event.
- For everyone's comfort, promote it as a "brief" experience of thirty to sixty minutes.
- Draw the attendees from the pool of men in your community who have touched Ben's life. Male relatives, teachers, coaches, neighbors, and Gary's friends who had witnessed Ben's growing up. These men, in their very presence and with their stories, will bring a powerful sense of the flow of Ben's life from boyhood to the present.
- Without over-scripting what happens, ask men to come prepared to tell a story that comes out of their history with Ben. Then, if it's comfortable for them, ask them to be ready to tell a story about a personal transition they faced, read lines of scripture, share a poem, or offer any advice they think would be important for a young man at this juncture.

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A Young Man's Rite Of Passage - Continued

- Ask each man to bring a talisman which will be given to Ben during the ceremony. This can be any small object that symbolizes their wishes, hopes, and dreams for him. On placing this token in the center of the circle, a man can tell a short story about this "sacred object" to give it power and meaning.
- Explain to the men that during the ceremony they will have a chance to offer Ben whatever form of on-going commitment of support they can comfortably make and honor.
- Men have gathered in this way, for this purpose, for millennia. When the ceremony begins, it will feel natural and the impact will be increased considerably if Ben and the others sit in a circle with "fire" at the center (candles are fine).
- To further ritualize the event, Gary could choose a man to formally open and close the circle. This man would set the tone at the beginning with a statement or reading, and again at the closing when, after a final blessing from Gary, he will officially mark the point in time when Ben is launched into the next part of his life.
- It can never hurt to feed the guys after the doings.

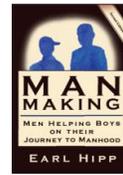
The actual event came off pretty much as it was planned, with a few modifications. The dozen or so men arrived, a circle was made, candles were lit, and I offered a context reading to set the tone and purpose. Gary welcomed the gathered men and thanked them for their support of Ben. Then each man took a turn speaking about and to Ben and offering up his talisman as a gift.

As the experience unfolded, all of us were drawn into each other's stories where feelings of fear, courage, sadness, loss, regret, and joy flowed freely. Tears came and went, laughter emerged, and blessings were proffered. I think that because of the men's hunger for this kind of sweetness and intimacy, the experience became timeless. I don't even remember how long it went on, just that time wasn't important. We were all being transformed by the process and liked it.

Toward the end, Gary took all of the gifted objects, put them in a bag of deerskin, and gave them to Ben. Like the rest of us with considerably softened hearts, Gary gave his son a powerful blessing by acknowledging his manhood. He stated that going forward he would walk alongside of him in unconditional love and as his most powerful ally. I don't remember the exact words, and all I could think about was how much I would have loved that blessing from my father.

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A Young Man's Rite Of Passage - Continued

After his father's blessing, Ben was given his first opportunity to speak. In that moment, as he tried to find the right response, he started with tears and then collapsed into sobbing. He was, for the first time in his life, surrounded by men who had loved him in a thousand small and large ways. These were good men who had stepped out of their lives again to gift him with wonderful, intimate pieces of themselves. To honor him and let him know he was not alone as his life moved forward. I think it was just too much for Ben to handle . . . initially.

With our full permission, he sobbed his fears and failings looking down at the floor. In barely coherent voice, it appeared he was struggling to justify his life to this point, to get our forgiveness, and deserve all of the offered blessings. As I was able to confirm later, it wasn't easy for the men to witness this bittersweet and too familiar struggle to feel deserving of the love being offered.

And then a strange thing started to happen. The sobbing slowly began to subside. There were moments of laughter in his remarks, he began to raise his glance and make occasional eye contact with the men in the circle. Gradually, his breathing eased and he started to thank us, generally, and spoke to some of us individually. As this was happening he sat up straighter in his chair, looked at more of us, and I think, allowed himself to join the circle.

When Ben was done, Gary again thanked the men and asked us to stand and make a circle around the "fire." He took out a picture of Ben as a little boy and put the edge of the photo into the fire. As it burned slowly, Gary spoke to Ben saying that he would always love, cherish, and remember the wonderful boy he had been, but from today forward he would honor, cherish, love, and unconditionally support the man he is now and the man he is becoming. When the picture was no more than ash, he dropped it and extinguished the candles. Wordlessly, father and son's eyes met, they reached out and held one another in a long, sweet, and loving hug. Men cried, applause rang out, and men who didn't know each other at the beginning swapped sincere embraces. There was a lot of backslapping, laughter, and energy bouncing off the walls.

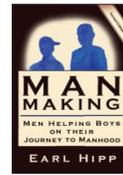
Finally someone announced that the food was ready, and in a tired but happy retreat, we headed for the kitchen. Almost as a counterpoint to the potency of the circle, our conversations moved to guy talk about sports, computers, families, work, and a lot of "why when I was going to school" conversation.

It was unspoken, but clear, that a good and powerful thing had been accomplished. In a number of ways the day's events had changed many male lives for the better. Standing in the kitchen with my beans and bratwurst, I found myself talking to other men, but also noticing the goings on around me. There were the sounds of camaraderie all around, Ben's smiles and proud voice as he got individual attention from one man after another. It was also sweet to notice Gary's large smile and the occasional and proud glances at his son.

For me this experience, again, validated the importance, and maybe the absolute necessity, of intentional man-making, and rites of passages in the lives of boys and men.

Man-Making

Men Helping Boys on Their Journey to Manhood



The Author - Earl Hipp

Earl Hipp knows a lot about man-making!



Earl Hipp is an author, publisher, trainer, organizational adviser, and community consultant. Since 1982, he has consistently been involved with groups and organizations that focus on men's issues and development. His most [recent book](#) is for men, titled, ***Man-Making – Men Helping Boys on Their Journey to Manhood.***

Earl speaks at national conferences and delivers workshops across the country, teaching organizations how to call men to mentoring. He has worked with communities on violence prevention by developing initiatives to get adult men involved with boys and community life. He has led and participated in many rites of passage initiations and group mentoring activities for men and boys.

As a direct result of his interest in man-making, Earl works with boys who are or have been incarcerated, maintains a number of ongoing mentoring relationships, offers coaching to mentors, and personally sponsors boys-and-men events. Today he is involved with a variety of groups and organizations who are calling men into service to boys.

Earl describes himself as a man who was under-fathered and under-male-mentored in adolescence – a man who was “left with the women and children to figure out manhood on his own.” Today he is using his instructional and motivational skills to do something about what he calls the “**epidemic of under-male-nourished boys**” in the world. His personal mission is to do whatever he can to ensure fewer boys and men will be left to wander alone in the dangerous never-never land between boyhood and manhood.

Since 2005 Earl has published the [Man-Making Blog](#). It discusses manhood, male culture, mentoring, and men's rites of passage. He has written seven [books about and for adolescents](#), which together have sold almost half a million copies. The books are on themes such as coping with the stresses in their lives, moving through grief and loss, and understanding and preventing violence in our communities.

Earl has a bachelor's degree in Psychology, a Master's Degree in Applied Psychophysiology, and a background as a clinical psychotherapist.

If you're planning a meeting and feel his *Man-Making* content would be appropriate, Earl will be happy to create a [customized keynote, training program, or workshop](#) program for your group.