

Boys Will Be ... Boys!

It's no different than parenting girls—or is it?

By Suzanne Pearson

I grew up like most little girls in America, dreaming of motherhood and playing with dolls. I had dolls that cried, dolls whose eyes opened and shut, even dolls that wet themselves. My dolls all had one thing in common—they were female.

I'm not sure how this impacted my developing psyche, but sometime after I married and was expecting our first baby, it hit me that some babies did, in reality, appear to be male. I reconciled this information with my imagined motherhood scenarios with little consternation. After all, as best as I could tell, the only difference between male and female infants was that their onesies had footballs on them instead of pink dancing ballerina elephants.

Besides, the chance of actually giving birth to a boy is just 50/50, right? And the odds of being blessed with *all* boys—now that's just silly!

Doesn't the Lord have a wonderful sense of humor?

During my first pregnancy, my husband, Barry, and I elected not to know the gender of our baby until the birth. Nonetheless, we were amazed to discover that roughly 76 percent of the general population secretly possesses the talent of gender prophecy and will not hesitate to use this gift. Incidentally, this figure rises to 93 percent in grocery-store checkout lines. But what struck me most were the determining factors for their predictions:

"You're hungry all the time? BOY."

"The baby kicks you a lot? BOY."

"You have [fill in any persistent health ailment here]? BOY."

"You're experiencing a wonderful, easy, enjoyable pregnancy? GIRL."

Then I gave birth to Boy Number One. We named him Caleb, and he was perfect. We dressed him in clothing adorned with various pictures of sporting goods. And he cried, opened and shut his eyes, and wet himself almost exactly like my doll babies. Except with quite a bit more velocity and projection.

It didn't take long for bigger differences to creep in. When Caleb was 18 months old, I gave him a baby doll to play with. I thought he might like to "put baby to bed" or "give baby a bottle."

My son took the baby in his arms. He smiled. He looked sweetly at me and said, "Baby?"

"Yes, Caleb, it's a baby. Can you give the baby a kiss?"

Caleb looked at the doll, then looked at me. Then he flung the baby to the ground and stomped on her head.

So much for nature vs. nurture.

Another little delusion I had was that we would have a "no gun" rule with our children. No toy guns, no cap guns, no semi-automatic rifles. By the time I'd birthed Boy Number Two, Jonah, we were living quite sufficiently in our "no gun" household. My friend Shellie, however, had boys older than mine. When I told her about our enlightened stance on gunplay, she smiled knowingly and said, "Just let me know when you get over that."

I scoffed. Get *over* it? It's a *rule*. If we say "no guns," we mean "no guns." What's the problem?

The problem was, before long, my boys began making guns out of *everything*. Duplo blocks. Sticks. Tinker Toys. Play-Doh. My son Jonah once actually made a pistol out of a Pop-Tart.

Finally, Barry and I relented. We told the boys they could "play guns," but only if they pretended to shoot deer instead of people (sorry, Bambi!). Unfortunately, the term "people" ended up being a bit ambiguous. One day I caught Caleb shooting Jonah with a gun fashioned from Legos.

"Caleb, is Jonah pretending to be a deer or is he a person?" I asked.

"I'm Darth Vader!" Jonah announced proudly.

"Yeah, and Vader's not a person. He's a Sith," said Caleb.

"But he was a person when he was Anakin Skywalker," replied Jonah.

Hmmm. Interesting loophole. I looked to my husband for advice on the moral dilemma of shooting Darth Vader. Barry looked up absently from his newspaper.

"Of course you can't shoot Darth Vader," he stated confidently. "You have to whack him in half with a light saber."

A couple of years and about 80,000 homemade weapons later, I had Boy Number Three, Silas. I began to hear with astounding frequency the words that haunt all mothers of boys: "You sure have your hands full!"

What is it that possesses people to say this? Would I have my hands *less* full if I had three girls? (Don't answer that!) It's as if mothers of girls lie on the couch all day painting their toenails. I happen to know this isn't true because I have a friend with three girls, and she really doesn't get

any more couch time than I do. It's just that there's significantly less chance she'll be laying on the sharp edges of a Tonka truck.

Honestly, please don't ever say this to a mother with several boys. I mean, maybe it's true, and maybe it's not. Okay, let's face it, it's true, but *she already knows it!* Try to think of something encouraging to say such as, "Hey, nice light saber."

The morals of my story are as follows:

1. At least 50 percent of all dolls should be male. And they should pee straight up in the air like a fountain.
2. A "no gun" rule may be a bit optimistic in a boy-inhabited household. Perhaps a 30-day waiting period would be an option. Light sabers, however, can be obtained without a permit.
3. Boys are different. They break stuff. They jump on each other for no apparent reason. They believe nothing in the world is funnier than bodily noises. And I wouldn't have it any other way.

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