

Bullies on the Bus

by P. Donohue Shortridge

How to understand the boys who bullied the old woman on the school bus?

First, to the incident itself: where was the bus driver? Why did the only other adult on the bus allow this abuse to continue? One wonders if the driver was constrained by union or school district rules to do nothing but drive. Perhaps the driver didn't see or hear anything; nevertheless, the driver should be trained to serve as a second pair of eyes and ears on a school bus full of young teens.

Second, this lady was the bus monitor? Obviously, there was no monitoring happening. Further why was a monitor needed? Is this typical on school buses these days to have a monitor? If so, then this woman obviously was poorly matched to the task.

OK, some further analysis - looking at the bigger picture: Young people, especially boys coming into adolescence are understandably uncivilized. So many changes are happening to them at such a rapid yet uneven pace that they cannot possibly understand what is happening to them. They awaken sexually, intellectually and in other areas too; they begin to develop their moral code and also embark on their search for the purpose of their life. During this third plane of development (12 - 18 year olds), they will have to propel themselves out of childhood and into adulthood. This is no easy feat and is scary as hell. For boys especially, one of the primary ways they propel themselves out of childhood is by taking risks. (Girls engage in risk taking too, and they can get in trouble if that risk taking involves the area of sexual activity.)

Boys of this age wonder how smart, how strong, how powerful am I? What is my code and where do I fit in? To address these questions, they need to have had lots of experience gaining personal competencies in the second plane of development (from 6-12 years old) learning how to do

everything, especially using the hands and body in three-dimensional work (screen time does not count.) If they arrive at puberty equipped with skills and knowledge, then when the questions of who am I and how will I use my new power come up, they can access all the competencies they gained in the second plane to help them answer that question for themselves. We are missing the boat big time in our culture today with the 6-12 year olds, which is part of the problem - they don't know how to DO anything.

What the young adolescent boy needs in the third plane is lot of adult guidance especially from men. Indeed, once the boy reaches puberty, the mom and other women need to step way back into a more support and modeling role, while all the men step forward and grab the boy by the scruff of the neck, so to speak, and show him how to be a man. Boys can only be stewarded into manhood by men. We are sorely lacking this piece in our culture today, sad to say.

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Middle schools are an abomination. A kindergarten-through-eighth-grade school is much better because the boy in budding puberty is the leader, tacitly taking on the role of hero to the younger children which in turn influences his behavior. Middle schools on the other hand, run by (mostly) women put a group of wild children all together and expect them to take tests. There are no heroes here, only the *Lord of the Flies*. Girls usually comply and excel at test taking. Boys on the other hand (generally speaking) have no use for complying with some woman at the front of the room telling him what to do especially when the avenue for reaching them is pencil and paper - they're not having any of it. Public school middle school is incredibly boring for boys. So naturally, many boys look for trouble (risk-taking devolving into risky behavior).

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Sadly, these very bully-boys, put in an appropriate circumstance would be leaders for good; instead, look at what happened. They traveled in a pack, they preyed on a vulnerable old lady who never should have been there in the first place, and later when asked individually why they did it, they couldn't give a good answer. Of course they couldn't. When they preyed on this old lady, they disengaged their individual frontal lobes, allowing the mid-brain to run wild, and in a pack mentality.

It would take an extraordinary boy to rise up against his boy pals. Young adolescent boys do not yet have internal governors to guide them in their behavior; the internal code for good judgment is not yet fixed in place especially without any adults around who, by their very presence represent the expected decorum. Again, this is why they need chaperones, supervision and guidance from caring competent men whom these boys can be a little afraid of and yet admire and from whom they can learn the lessons they need. Boys also need heroes, real life heroes and heroes in literature, so they can say to themselves, I could be like that, I want to be like that.

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I do not agree with the district's decision to pull them out of school, the boys need to go back to that school and face their peers and adults. They will have to live with this incident the rest of their lives. It is a lesson they will not soon forget.

One consequence would be for the boys to have to stand up at a school assembly and answer

questions from the other students. Another consequence might include these boys being put on some kind of one-time work detail or service project with older boys and men, where these boys would be the youngest and the least knowledgeable, finding themselves in a vulnerable position. That experience would hopefully propel them on a hero's journey.

I could go into a very, very long rant on the state of our public schools today, but the punch line is that this incident shocks us, but it probably happens more than we can imagine. Until we as a country are willing to admit that the public school system in our country with its post-modern dumbed-down curriculum is a major factor in turning out the ill-equipped, ignorant, ill-educated uncivilized future citizens, then we will continue as we are, losing ground every day. The schools are getting worse, and we continue to close our eyes, hoping all is well at our peril.

As to the parents, I could go into a rant on the state of the family in America today, where everybody is working, rushing around, over-scheduling the children, too much screen time, not enough sleep, way too much eating out and not enough slow family time when everyone gets to speak and is valued and held responsible for their actions. Too many parents don't teach their children chores nor hold them responsible for contributing to the family. So the children end up at 12 or 13 years old being entitled, incompetent, boring people who can't even look you in the eye. I watched a 14 year-old boy the other day attempting to sweep and I almost wept observing his incompetence at this fundamental task.

We are in trouble in this culture and this bullying incident holds up the mirror to us if we have the courage to look at ourselves and make the changes needed to help our young people thrive.

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