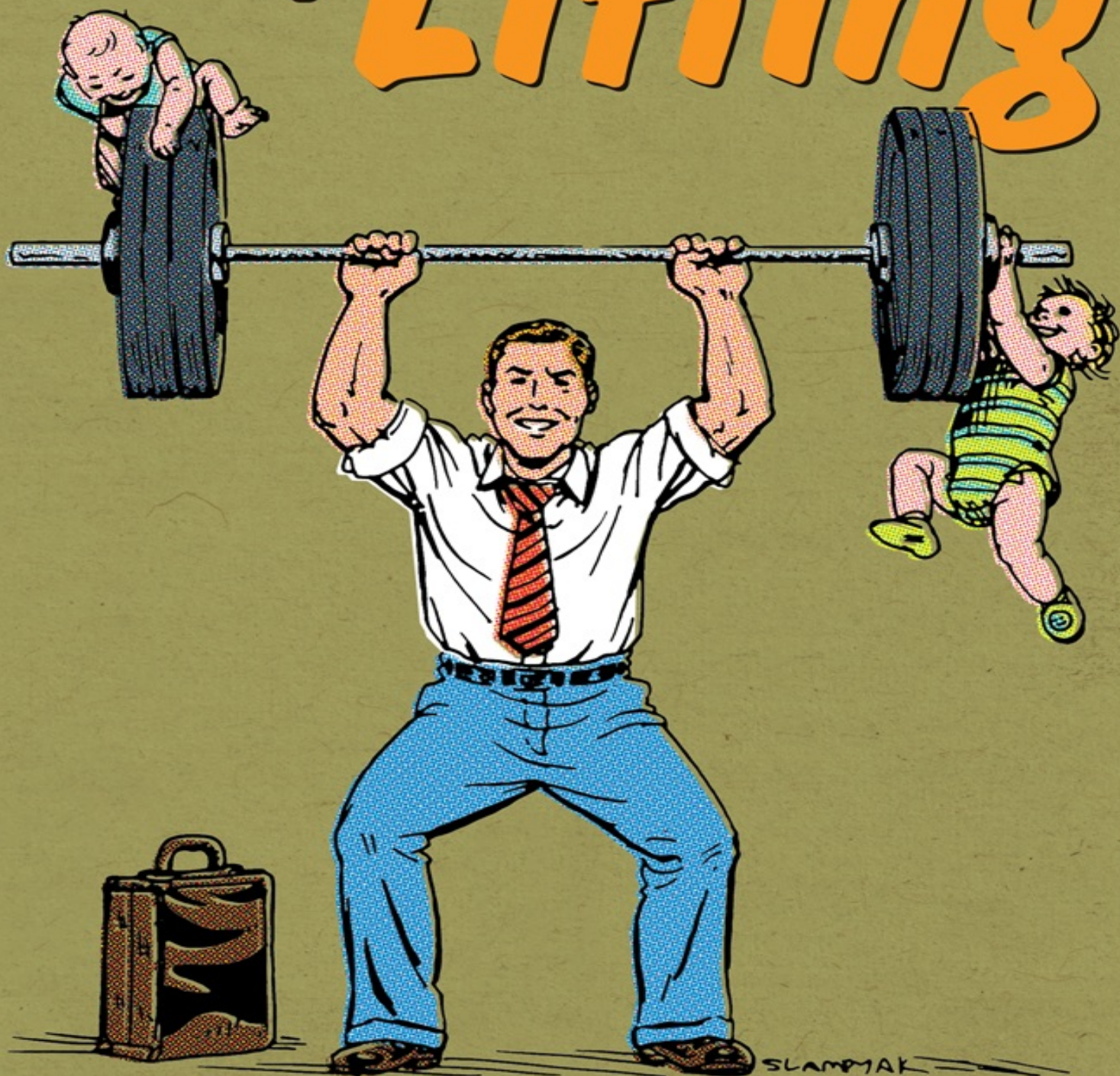


Heavy *Lifting*



*Grow Up, Get a Job, Start a Family,
and Other Manly Advice*

JIM GERAGHTY & CAM EDWARDS

PRAISE FOR
Heavy Lifting

“Finally! Just what we were waiting for: a couple of rightwing gun nuts who married above the station ask, ‘What Would Ward Cleaver Do?’ The American family will never be the same.”

—**JONAH GOLDBERG**, senior editor of *National Review* and nationally syndicated columnist

“Jim and Cam are, as this book shows, very funny. And their wit packs wisdom. In describing what a good father looks like, they tell readers how to be one, and why they might *want* be one. I certainly never expected Geraghty to perform a public service, and yet he has. I have to go lie down now.”

—**PEGGY NOONAN**, columnist for the *Wall Street Journal* and former speechwriter for Ronald Reagan

“Tough problem. Fun reading! Geraghty and Edwards tackle rampant Peter Pan syndrome with fast-paced writing, goofy recollections, and plenty of self deprecation. Bottom line: growing up is not the end of life, folks, but the stuff of life! Suffused with gratitude for their own wives and children, the whole book is a heartfelt pep talk for young men who’ve gotten the message that taking the plunge means walking the plank. Come on in, the water’s fine, say Geraghty and Edwards! Now, if they just take their own advice and move out of my basement . . .”

—**MARY KATHARINE HAM**, editor-at-large of *Hot Air*, contributing editor to *Townhall Magazine* and Fox News contributor

“We live in a time where growing up and becoming a real man is laughed at, but the authors of *Heavy Lifting* get it; it’s not our accomplishments in this life that become our defining moments, it’s what we pass on to our children. Being a father means leaving a legacy, and one that goes on long after we are gone.”

—**STAFF SERGEANT CLINTON ROMESHA**, U.S. Army (Ret.), Medal of Honor recipient

“Boys, it’s time to man up. *Heavy Lifting* is a hilarious, sound advice book every man should have. Cam Edwards and Jim Geraghty prove that growing up and taking responsibility is not only awesome, but the best way to go through life. There comes a time to buy real clothes, learn life skills, hold your alcohol, properly date one woman at a time (and no, Tinder does not count), make serious commitments, and get a job that can turn into a career. That time is now. Don’t fight the man, be the man, and for God’s sake, get your own place!”

—**KATIE PAVLICH**, Townhall.com editor and Fox News contributor

“The thing about being a man that few will tell you, but that comes through like the *Rocky* theme in *Heavy Lifting*, is that being a real man is a hell of a good time. You get to be the man of the moment. The cando man. The man of action. The man who knows a drink should refine a man, but never define a man. There is a lot more to it, of course, but that is why Cam Edwards and Jim Geraghty

wrote this book.”

—**FRANK MINITER**, author of the *New York Times* bestseller *The Ultimate Man’s Survival Guide*

“If ever a man was made better by marriage and fatherhood it was Jim Geraghty. He and his coauthor Cam Edwards prove that growing up, getting a job, and starting a family aren’t the beginning of your life, but really the end of it. No—wait. Other way around, right? You’ll have to read the book to find out.”

—**JAMES LILEKS**, author, columnist, radio personality, and blogger at lileks.com

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*Grow Up, Get a Job, Start a Family,
and Other Manly Advice*



JIM GERAGHTY & CAM EDWARDS

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*To my sons,
You are my most important work.*

—Jim Geraghty, September 8, 2015

*To E., for everything.
And to my children, with all my love.*

—Cam Edwards, September 8, 2015

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Meet Your Guides to Manhood



Jim Geraghty

Raconteur, man-about-the-house, father, journalist, world traveler. You can *trust* him.



Cam Edwards

A man with his own national radio show actually named after him (*how cool is that!*). Father of five, man-about-the-farm, armchair historian, and avid gun owner—you *better trust him!*



Ward Cleaver

Remember the sort of men who could fix anything (from a lawn mower to a martini), dress for success (and achieve it), never complain, make everything look effortless, marry a perfect wife, lead a moral life, and be a great dad? That's Ward Cleaver—he's not just a man, but *the man* and our ultimate channeled authority.

PART I
Breaking Away



It takes courage to grow up and become who you really are.

—E. E. Cummings

Ward Cleaver Was a Stud



Now that I have your attention—and your skeptical cackling—let me tell you why.

Inevitably, when you make the assertion that Ward Cleaver was a stud—I know this from experience—people are going to accuse you of wanting to go back to the 1950s.

And that's not quite what Cam and I are advocating. Let's skip over all of the accusations that we're archaic, stodgy curmudgeons with hopelessly outdated thinking and nostalgia masquerading as advice and ideas. If you really think we're advocating for a return to docile housewives submitting their husbands, you need to meet Mrs. Edwards and Mrs. Geraghty.

A loud corner of American culture has been rebelling against the image of the 1950s since, oh, the 1950s, so this marks our sixth or seventh decade of national cultural insurrection against the Ozzie and-Harriet image of American suburban bliss. It's almost as if the rebellious counterculture—which has been the mainstream culture for at least a decade or two—needs the 1950s as an opponent to define itself in opposition.

So here's the first step: Can we at least acknowledge that in the two generations of rebellion and rejection of that archetypical 1950s suburban dad image, we threw some metaphorical babies out with that bathwater? Can we recognize that for all of his flaws, if today's men emulated some of Ward Cleaver's traits, the world would be a better place?

Even if Ward Cleaver comes across as boring and buttoned-down compared to today's pop icon, he's a man who takes care of business inside and outside the home. He's responsible, a man everyone can count on. We can quibble about whether his methods of fatherhood and being a good husband are an *ideal*, but it's indisputable that he loves his wife and kids and tries to take care of them. He works hard, and we don't hear him complaining. His offered wisdom and guidance to the kids might seem corny or saccharine to today's ears, but it's rarely bad advice.*

There's more sly cynicism than our memories might suggest. From the opening narration of one show: “You know, it's only natural for parents to feel proud of their children. And there's nothing so fascinating as your own offspring. But when another parent raves about his children, it's amazing how you can lose interest.”

He's not rebelling against anything. He's the *man*, and he wears that title with pride.

Even if you don't remember or care to remember Ward Cleaver of the show *Leave It to Beaver*, his name is now synonymous with the image of the 1950s dads—an image also shaped by Ozzie Nelson

~~The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet, Jim Anderson from *Father Knows Best*, and, one could argue, George Bailey in the 1946 film *It's a Wonderful Life*. They were grown-ups who had already been through a Great Depression and in many cases were veterans of World War II or, later, the Korean War.~~

Their archetype outlasted the 1950s—Steve Douglas of *My Three Sons*, Mike Brady of *The Brady Bunch*, Howard Cunningham in *Happy Days*, Alan Thicke's Jason Seaver in *Growing Pains*, Cliff Huxtable in *The Cosby Show*. (Let's just skip over the recent controversies of Bill Cosby.) Today DVR offers a handful of somewhat bumbling successors like Phil Dunphy on *Modern Family* and Andre Johnson of *Black-ish*.

These men all had flaws, but in the end, they were solid and dependable. The word that probably best summarizes the Ward Cleavers of the world and their successors is “responsible,” and maybe they seem like such throwbacks because the rest of our culture has so thoroughly embraced irresponsibility.

Ask women what they really want to see in a man—well, women who have grown out of their adolescent fascination with bad boys—and they won't say Ward Cleaver, but they'll describe at least some of his traits: Reliable. Trustworthy. Smart. Confident, but not smug. Funny and capable of laughing at himself. Successful at work, but not a workaholic. Likes kids, but is not a kid.

It's an indisputably masculine figure. It's alpha male, but a particular brand of alpha status. It's not a Gordon Gekko “Greed Is Good” alpha male. There's not much chest-pounding; the Ward Cleavers of the world don't constantly remind people of *what* they want to be; they already *are* what they want to be.

A man who's constantly telling other people what a nice guy he is isn't really all that nice. A guy who insists he's funny isn't all that funny. And a guy who constantly feels the need to showcase his confidence in himself probably has deep-rooted, hidden anxieties. If you feel the need to flaunt something, you don't really have it.

Ward Cleaver knows it's *not* a sign of weakness to admit he's wrong, when he is, and to make amends. He considers that natural honesty and courtesy. He's respectful to those who rank above him but isn't afraid to respectfully speak his mind.

And make no mistake, most women like, appreciate, and prefer an indisputably masculine man who takes earned, quiet pride in who he is.*

A bit of perfect irony: back in 1999, Vice President Al Gore hired feminist commentator and author Naomi Wolf to advise him on shaking the “beta male” image.

Ward Cleaver isn't flamboyant, and he wouldn't have much respect for the transformation of the word “drama.” Somewhere along the line, the word “drama” stopped meaning just a type of performance and came to mean a consistent aura of controversies, disputes, spats, hurt feelings, miscommunications, rivalries, and other emotionally fraught headaches. If you know people with a lot of “drama,” well, I'm sorry. They're often exhausting to be around, pulling you onto their own internal psychic hamster wheel of perpetual outrage, usually relating to their infinite capacity for indignation over someone else's lack of respect for them.

Ward Cleaver ain't got time for that. In fact, there's a remarkable *lack* of drama around a Ward Cleaver type. He can act quickly, but he's not impulsive; he makes the best decision he can with the information he has at the time and acts, and accepts the consequences.

Perhaps most important, he takes responsibility—for himself and for those who depend on him. He

doesn't make excuses. He doesn't whine, fume, or brood in defeat; he knows that his hard work and persistence will eventually win the day, if not this day.

And there's a lot he's simply outgrown. He never had any interest in perpetuating his own adolescence. He's a grown-up who accepts marriage and fatherhood as the life of an adult.

Now, we're not saying that Ward Cleavers of the world are off-limits to criticism, mockery, or lampooning. We're just pointing out that there was a time not that long ago when men were expected to work hard, make a good living, be good husbands and neighbors and friends, and raise and be the role models for the next generation of young men. Sure, laugh at them, but remember they're what the world is built on. If all the slackers in the world disappeared tomorrow, the video game industry would collapse. If all the Ward Cleavers of the world disappeared tomorrow, civilization would collapse.

Deadbeat dads, slacker ManChildren "failing to launch," commitment-phobic boyfriends stringing along their girlfriends as the biological clock ticks louder and louder—Cam and I aren't going to be able to solve every problem in the world in this book.

But what we can do is tell every guy out there that "growing up"—a career, a wife, kids—is *not* a trap. Working your way to a mortgage, getting married, being a father, are probably the best things that will ever happen to you. Our culture snickers at Ward Cleaver types, but it is propagating a myth when it paints them as boring, stifled, miserable, hollowed-out men, yearning for their carefree bachelor days and regretting all their commitments. What leaves a man depressed and hollow inside is not attachments but the lack of them.

Come on: gainfully employed, married, a dad—you have no idea how great your life can be. But we're about to show you.

College Does Not Prepare You for the Real World



If you don't know this already, you should.

Don't get us wrong. We're all in favor of education, but college today, for many people, is really just one last (and increasingly lingering) avoidance of the real world. High school actually does a lot more to prepare you for adulthood, particularly in terms of how you'll be spending most of your days at work.

In college, you can structure your schedule to fit your desires for the most part.* Want to have all of your classes over by noon? Don't want to take a class before noon? No problem. Hey, what about scheduling all of your class times on Tuesdays and Thursdays? Then you've got five days a week free to work, study, and drink until your liver pleads for mercy!

We realize that this isn't always the case. In Cam's first semester of college, he got saddled with a journalism lab that started at 7 a.m. on a Friday morning.

High school was all about the schedule. You might have been able to pick an elective or two, but you knew where you were going to be from 7:50 a.m. until 3:35 p.m. Monday through Friday. It didn't matter if you were not a morning person, or if you thought you'd do better academically with a four-day weekend.

Just like in high school, in the real world most people don't get to pick their work schedule, nor do they get to change it up every four months. Even in the gig economy, your schedule is much more likely to depend on the needs of the person paying you than on your own wants and desires. You may tell potential employers that you only work on Tuesdays and Thursdays, but you're not likely to get a job that will allow you to live anywhere other than the bedroom you slept in as a kid.

In college, skipping class isn't really a big deal. Some professors don't take attendance, and it's rare that your instructor (who's more likely to be an overworked teaching assistant than a professor) is going to give you a hard time when you show up for your next class. In many classrooms, you're expected to know the material when it comes time to take the test, but attendance isn't mandatory.

Professor Kelli Marshall doesn't have a mandatory attendance policy in her media and film courses at DePaul University, and she told *USA Today* in 2012 that while it's not completely sure she's doing the right thing, she "would hope it is since it suggests I'm treating them as adults." Actually, she's not treating them as adults; she's treating them like irresponsible college students.

Rachel Osman, "Should Class Attendance Be Mandatory? Students,

Professors Say No,” *USA Today*, March 25, 2012,

<http://college.usatoday.com/2012/03/25/should-class-attendance-be-mandatory-students-professors-say-no/>.

In high school, skipping class is a pretty big deal. Between the two authors, not a single class was skipped in our high school years (at least as long as you don't count Senior Skip Day). The closest either of us ever got to truly skipping school was the day Cam tried to go off campus for lunch and got busted.

In the real world, skipping out on work usually doesn't end well either. We don't know of any jobs where attendance isn't mandatory.

We're pretty sure that even professors at DePaul have to turn up to teach their classes—one of the few ways academia resembles the real world, though we imagine it won't be long before professors are protesting that attendance should be voluntary for faculty as well as students.

The reason so many college students party to excess is because they can—their schedules allow it, and they have few responsibilities and no parents to ground them. In high school, your social life revolves around the hours between the time school lets out on Friday afternoon and whenever your curfew is on Saturday night. Sunday is probably homework day, and then you're back to the grind early Monday morning.

Once again, when you're out of college your social life looks a lot more like your experience in high school. With the exception of a happy hour or two, you're not likely to be doing much carousing when you have to get up at 6 a.m. to get ready for work.

“College was, and probably will be,” Katie Brennan wrote at the website thoughtcatalog.com, “the only time in our lives we were truly a part of something greater than ourselves; a rare and wonderful time we were a part of a true community. A community in which we did everything together at a place we all learned to love and call home.”

That actually describes high school better than college. You don't do “everything together” on college campus, except perhaps the mandatory sensitivity training. And more important, when it comes to being “part of something greater than ourselves . . . a place we all learned to love and call home,” getting married and having kids is a lot more real and profound version of that than going to Vassar or Party U.

Brennan muses that “While college didn't prepare me for soul-crushing Excel spreadsheets . . . , it taught me the most important lesson: People can be crappy to one another, but when it comes right down to it, we are all basically good.”

If that's the most important thing she learned in four or five years of college, she wasted a lot of money. Maybe she should spend more time on her Excel spreadsheets. The average college graduate of the class of 2015 owes about \$35,000 in student loan debt, and with interest rates between 4 and 6 percent, that's more than \$300 a month in student loan payments.* That's a lot of money to spend to learn that people are basically good except when they're not. You don't need a college classroom to teach you about human nature.

Jeffrey Sparshott, “Congratulations, Class of 2015. You're the Most Indebted Ever (For Now),” *Wall Street Journal*, May 8, 2015,

<http://blogs.wsj.com/economics/2015/05/08/congratulations-class-of-2015-youre-the-most-indebted-ever-for-now/>.

High school, on the other hand, imposes no student debt while teaching a lot about human nature for anyone with their eyes open. It's true that many high school students these days can't put the Civil War in the right century or even name the founders of our country, but they should leave high school knowing the importance of showing up, doing your work, and enjoying your free time when you can.

College isn't always a mistake—but the dirty little secret is that for a lot of people it is; it comes down to stacking up lots of debt and putting off responsibility, while not learning much at all. There are obvious exceptions, especially if you've graduated with a degree in science, technology, engineering, or mathematics. But let's stop pretending that the "college experience" is a necessary or beneficial one for everybody. It isn't.

What Would Ward Cleaver Do?



He went to college, but he did it the old-fashioned way, studying a real academic discipline (philosophy), belonging to a fraternity, and dating the woman who would soon be his wife—and then getting on with the business of being an adult.

Getting Your Own Place



Dear God, you've got to get out of your parents' house.

Yes, I know it's easier than finding and paying for your own place. Yes, in many places, the rent seems too darn high.

Yes, living at home with Mom and Dad can often include perks like laundry service and the freedom to raid the fridge and a cable package you probably couldn't afford if you were living on your own.

But you've got to get out of there. I want you to imagine my voice as one of the supporting characters calling the protagonist in a horror movie, informing him that the condemned old chainsaw factory that they're wandering around was built upon a Native American graveyard, then used by the government for secret bioweapon mind control experiments before a UFO crashed into it and made the nesting ground for cursed gypsy werewolves. *You've got to get out of there, do you hear me? Get out of there now!*

Living at home, in the same circumstances you did as a teenager, inhibits growth, even under the best of circumstances and with parents with the best of intentions.

Behold the one critical tale of my parents I'm willing to share publicly:

After freshman year, I needed a summer job, and got one working the late shift in a warehouse for Baxter Healthcare Supply. My job was to stock shipping pallets from 4 p.m. to whenever the work was done, which was midnight on a good night and 4 a.m. on the much more frequent bad nights. The rest of the staff was *not* college kids working for a few months. Sweaty, grunt-inducing warehouse work wasn't a summer job to these guys; this was their job, and you can probably imagine the wariness they gave the college kid. (In their defense, "insufferably smug" came pretty naturally to me then . . . and some would probably say I never lost it.) But the upside was that I was working fifty-five to sixty hours a week, and making lots of overtime money. I calculated that in about eight weeks, I'd have all the spending money I needed for the coming year in college, and plenty extra for the rest of the summer, too.

As you can probably imagine, working the night shift is hellacious for your body clock. I remember trying, and failing, to fall asleep as the sun came up and my room got brighter and brighter even with the shades drawn. It was a brutal schedule: clock in at 4 p.m. Monday, work until 3 a.m. on Tuesday, come home and collapse in bed, sleep until early afternoon, eat, go back, and do it again for another four days. The weekends were my lone respite.

At the end of each night/morning, I'd dump my clothes on the floor. Finally, after a few weekends, my parents observed the obvious: if my room looked like any more of a disaster area, it would qualify

for FEMA relief funds. My parents told me I wouldn't be allowed to go out Saturday night if my room wasn't cleaned. ~~Brimming with the unearned confidence that comes from living for an entire eight months away from home, I refused.~~ They told me I was grounded.

My contention that I was too old to be grounded was probably deeply undermined by my response, which was the most spectacularly childish tantrum you've ever seen from an eighteen-year-old. Yelling, screaming, stomping, pounding the walls with my fists. I am embarrassed just writing this. Later I made the more mature observation that had there been a military draft, my parents would have told the Pentagon that I couldn't go because my eighteen-year-old butt was grounded.

It's hard for parents to accept that their child, even if over eighteen, is a grown adult, capable of making his or her own decisions. Don't blame them; they can remember the day they brought you home from the hospital like it was yesterday—and some part of them is always going to perceive a sense of supreme vulnerability around you that cannot be explained rationally. No matter how big you get, you are their baby.

My parents expected that their child would have a clean room (although I seem to recall this rule getting less strictly enforced for my younger brother). I expected that as I had been living away from college for a year, and was working long hours now, that I was entitled to leniency from such rules.

That was the last summer I lived at home. I love my parents, but I greatly prefer living under my own roof, setting my own rules.*

This is not to say that the conscious or subconscious battles over household supremacy will end in later adulthood. When you get your own place, and your parents visit, you will find that little objects—potholders, corkscrews, spatulas, etc.—tend to get put back where your parents think the objects should go, not where you keep them.

Don't Kid Yourself, Your Parents Want You to Grow Up

The freedom and responsibility of making your own rules under your own roof—or even negotiating the rules with a roommate(s) or housemates is an increasingly rare one for young men. The Census Bureau calculated in 2012 that 59 percent of guys ages eighteen to twenty-four and 10 percent of twenty-five- to thirty-four-year-olds live at home.**

Sandy Hingston, "The Sorry Lives and Confusing Times of Today's Young Men," *Philadelphia*, February 20, 2012,

<http://www.phillymag.com/articles/the-sorry-lives-and-confusing-times-of-today-s-young-men/#bihq9fHB4JivFVU1.99>.

The good news is that steep drop from twenty-four to twenty-five. The bad news is the length of that latter period, meaning some significant portion of grown men in their early thirties are still saying "goodnight, mom" before bed.

What's fascinating is that some of these guys are convinced that this arrangement is good for them and good for their parents, as a *Philadelphia* magazine interview depicts:

Now, life with his parents is wearing on him. "If you want to watch TV, there's just the den,"

he says. “And they’re in there.” I ask whether he thinks his parents might have imagined themselves doing something at this point in their lives other than sharing their home with him. “They’re not really doing anything,” he says, sounding a little surprised. “They enjoy me being there.”

James is 31. He always figured he’d be married at 31. He certainly thought he’d have a place of his own. He doesn’t have a plan for the future: “Plans change, and the plan has to change really quick.”*

Ibid.

Don’t be so certain that your folks are enjoying you sitting in the den with them every night. James. Most parents are quick to say to their children that they’re always welcome, and that they would never turn their kids away. But most parents also want to see their adult children thriving—successful, happy—and that includes some elements of independence, financial and psychological. A big part of being a parent is teaching a child to become an adult capable of taking care of himself—and, someday, raising his own children. A guy who has to be dragged, kicking and screaming, into adulthood that no longer resembles adolescence is announcing to the world that his parents didn’t do something right.

When should a young man get out of the house? As soon as he can—and it’s okay if he stumbles a bit on that road away from home. Yes, by leaving the nest he’s facing all kinds of risks and things that could go wrong: a bad roommate experience, a bad housemate experience, insufficient hot water, clogged toilets and drains, the need to fumigate, a broken air conditioning unit in the middle of summer, and so on. But leaving the nest is necessary to create your own nest.

(Separately, there is nothing quite like the feeling of confronting one of those minor household crises and managing to fix it by yourself.)

A guy who puts off leaving his parents’ house is putting off the rest of his life, and trying to dodge a date with destiny.

We hope your parents are wonderful. They are irreplaceable. They are your safety net. They will always love you and always forgive you. But they are also not representative of life.

Landlords, with their immovable deadlines, skeptical glares, and unforgiving demeanor are much more representative of what the “real world” holds. And eventually, everyone needs to learn how to deal with the real world.

What Would Ward Cleaver Do?



Ward Cleaver was a Seabee in World War II and got married not long after college to his high school sweetheart. He knew how to take care of himself. He didn’t stay at home, he made a home.

Don't Buy a "Tiny House"



Don't be tempted by fashionable "tiny houses" just so you can say you're a "homeowner." In case you haven't heard of them, "tiny houses" are portable tiny homes you can tow around (or plunk down on a tiny patch of land to live in tiny style).

NPR had a segment in 2015 on tiny houses in the course of which the host of the show, Tom Ashbrook, interviewed a caller from Nashville named Kevin.* He was a recent college grad and a freelance cellist and loved the idea of a "tiny house."

"Big Potential for Tiny Houses," *On Point with Tom Ashbrook*, March 4, 2015, <http://onpoint.wbur.org/2015/03/04/tiny-houses-micro-apartments>.

"I just love how perfect it is for my age and for enterprising young people that don't want to get lost in that culture . . ."

"When you say 'that culture,'" Ashbrook interjected, "you mean sort of that McMansion suburbia?"

"I think I mean more generally when you get through college you realize I gotta get a job to make money that I'm not necessarily going to be keeping or putting towards something, I guess really investing in something that makes you happy, I guess. I mean, you get a job to go straight to a car payment, or you get a job to go straight to a house payment. . . ."

What Kevin was saying in fact was "I have no interest in being an adult by the traditional definition of the word, and you need to respect my desire to be a ManChild." But the fact is, adulthood, unlike a tiny house, actually IS awesome. Even with car payments. Even with a mortgage. Even with unexpected bills. And you can't become a serious cellist/brewmaster/IT professional/professional of any kind, especially with a wife and kids, if you live in a tiny house. Tiny houses only have enough room for you and your baggage.

Tiny houses tell the world, "Stay Away!" Are you going to invite some friends over for a tiny barbeque? A cozy night of playing games? ("Steve, we're gonna need you to sit on the toilet. Sorry, but we ran out of chair space.")

Tiny houses have always been with us. They used to be called hovels or shacks. Then we figured out how to market them to people concerned about their environmental footprint. Yes, sure, tiny houses may appeal to other demographics (agoraphobics, perhaps), but many people who purchase a tiny home are looking to discard their worldly possessions and to live more simply, more honestly, without all of the trappings of our materialistic postmodern society. Most of the time they're fooling themselves—you notice they prefer a \$60,000 tiny house to a \$34,000 double-wide trailer or a used RV. One is way cooler than the other. So much for being post-material.

And it seems that many owners of tiny houses don't limit themselves to a couple hundred

square feet. They store some of their stuff at grandma's house or build more tiny houses for teenage children or guests. When you've got multiple tiny houses, you're kind of defeating the purpose.

Don't get a tiny house. Get an apartment—or rent a real house—with some friends.

Living with Roommates

Living with someone is quite different from being friends with them. Cohabitation means you will be exposed to just about every little quirk and flaw they have. Snoring, bathroom habits, bathroom maintenance, shower duration, messiness vs. cleanliness, whether they leave food out, whether they allow the dust bunnies under their bed to grow in size until they belong in Jurassic Park. Cohabitation means you get exposed to all those little things they hide from the outside world. Sometimes it's easier to negotiate all of those issues with a stranger, with no emotional baggage or delicate friendship to maintain, than with a best friend.

Of course, there's always the chance that the stranger you're moving in with is an axe murderer. It's a trade-off.



I must begin this chapter by openly declaring I was a terrible roommate. Sorry, Chris. I don't know if my friendship with Chris grew stronger after I moved out, but it definitely ran smoother.

We were a good Oscar-and-Felix combination. He was neat and organized; I was . . . not. I was basically the antimatter to neat and organized.

Probably my worst trait as a roommate was that, fairly regularly, the bacteria in my dirty laundry pile would evolve into an advanced civilization. Bacterial cities, trade routes, advanced societal specialization of roles—everything you played in Sid Meier's *Civilization* was developing in my pile of sweaty shirts. The moment you could see the little bacteria developing a space program to colonize other laundry piles, it was game over.

In my defense, washing laundry in our building was an epic hassle, particularly from my current perspective of comfortable near-middle-aged suburban married life. We lived in an apartment building with several hundred people, and our only option was the washers and dryers in the basement (I don't think there was a neighborhood laundromat.) Each washer and dryer needed, if I recall correctly, seventy-five cents, payable only in quarters. So if you were going to wash your whites and your coloreds, you had to have at least three dollars in quarters. Of course, if your loads were too big, the machine wouldn't work properly, the load would get imbalanced, and/or the detergent wouldn't reach certain parts of the laundry. Even in my twenties, I was roughly the size of a house, so my clothes were always big and my laundry piles were always gargantuan Dagwood sandwich-piles of scientifically groundbreaking stink. Yes, I let the laundry pile up until it was about one step away from being compost.

There were four washers and four dryers in our apartment building's laundry room, presuming

none of them were out of order. Of course, most nights, at least one of them was. And equal predictably, most of the several hundred renters in the building had the same thought of doing laundry on Sunday nights, to be ready for the week ahead, resulting in extraordinary demand and extremely limited supply. A standard drying cycle was maybe, on a good night, enough to get your clothes to only slightly damp. Wait, it gets worse; I think they locked the door to the laundry room at midnight. At about 11:30, that last dryer was the laundry equivalent of the last helicopter out of Saigon.

Early-twenty-something Jim was really not good at coordinating (A) having at least three dollars in quarters, and probably ideally six dollars, (B) laundry detergent, (C) fabric softener, (D) a washing machine open when I needed it, and (E) a dryer open when I needed it. It was like a rare astrological planetary alignment.

So Sunday night's laundry effort—let's not call it "doing" laundry, let's call it "trying" laundry—was to prioritize the five shirts, five pants, five pair of underwear, five pair of undershirts, and ten socks that I needed for class or work. Everything else was a luxury. Did my workout clothes require a hazmat team yet? Eh, they can wait until next week. Okay, that sock has so much dried sweat in it that it looks and feels fossilized—put him in the priority pile. The armpits of that undershirt were yellow you would think I sweated lemons. Put him in the "must-do" pile.

All the stuff that was deprioritized? "Eh, I'll wash them next Saturday!" (SPOILER ALERT: I didn't.)

You want to talk about married, suburban luxury? Today I can throw something in the washer whenever I want. I'm Henry VIII, baby.

I was late with the rent check a couple of times, and that's a thoroughly awful feeling. I'm sure Chris felt that his credit score would be irrevocably damaged by my inability to turn in a check on time. He's now a successful consultant, living in Florida, with a beautiful wife and child. But just think of where he would be if I hadn't been late with the rent check those times! He'd probably be wealthy and powerful enough to fire Donald Trump!



Your Room Should Not Be a Roach Motel

Unfortunately for my past roommates, my story is much like Jim's. Okay, I was never, to the best of my recollection, short on rent, but I was equally slobbish in my behavior and lack of cleaning habits. It was worse, of course, when I lived with someone who was almost as messy as I was.

At one time I lived in a serviceable two bedroom apartment in a not-quite-yet-gentrified neighborhood in Oklahoma City. Even with our scavenged couch, vintage 1970s floor lamps found at Goodwill, and bookshelves made from milk carton crates and 2x4s, it was a cool place.

I suppose the best roommates might be two neat freaks, but even then there might be arguments over which brand of disinfectant to use, who puts on the hazardous waste suit to take out the trash, and so on. Two slob presents their own problems: stacks of dishes piled high out of the sink and overflowing onto the counter, the bugs that come with the filth, picking your wardrobe by smell instead of sight, and did I mention the freaking BUGS? Bugs are *not* desirable house guests.

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