



Ed Vela

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Male Bonding

COLLECTION. Manhood. The great outdoors. Sounds like an idyllic opportunity for male bonding, but in this collection of wilderness adventures, the men find their manhood easily squashed by the forces of Mother Nature. In “Male Bonding,” a mother—afraid her teenage son is in danger of becoming an interior decorator—sends her husband and son out into the wilds of Texas to do some male bonding. But after being sprayed by a skunk, suffering a bout of diarrhea, running out of toilet paper, getting eaten alive by mosquitoes, contracting poison ivy, and then being trapped in a tent in a rainstorm after eating too many baked beans, the two find a trip to the mall and some pizza preferable to enduring the horrors and hardships of nature. In “Loathe Letters,” Mel, an Italian deli owner, sends his son, Kip, to summer camp to toughen him up. Stir-crazy, stressed-out, damp, and suffering, Kip begins sending desperate letters to his dad begging to come home, but Mel, glad to have his son gone for the summer, is determined to keep Mel at camp. And in “Lying to Mom as an Art Form,” a father recounts his first camping trip as a boy and vows never to inflict the same torture on his sons.

Performance Time: Approximately 30 minutes.

Characters

Male Bonding

SAM: Father.

MAX: Sam's son; unathletic computer geek.

Loathe Letters

MEL: Father; Italian deli owner.

KIP: Mel's son, who has been sent off to summer camp.

Lying to Mom as an Art Form

TEDDY: Father who recalls his first camping trip.

Setting

Male Bonding

Bedroom and den. At SL there is a bedroom with a computer desk. At SR there is a den with a desk. At CS there is a blanket, plant mister, three-piece fishing rod, pile of sticks set up like a campfire, and two small stones.

Loathe Letters

Living room and the interior of a camp cabin. On one side of the stage is a living room set—a large armchair, ottoman, reading lamp, etc. On the other side of the stage is a cot, stool, and assorted camping equipment.

Lying To Mom As An Art Form

Bare stage.

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Props

Male Bonding

Desk
Computer desk
Computer
Blanket

Plant mister
3-piece fishing rod
Pile of sticks
2 small stones

Loathe Letters

Armchair
Ottoman
Reading lamp
Cot

Stool
Camping equipment,
assorted
2 Letters

“How was I supposed
to tell the difference
between a skunk
and a ferret?”

—Sam

Male Bonding

(AT RISE: Sam, 35, sits at a desk in the den SR. Max, 12, is in his bedroom SL. Max is sitting at a computer desk, punching on the keyboard. At CS there is a blanket, plant mister, three-piece fishing rod, pile of sticks set up like a campfire, and two small stones. Both Sam and Max address the audience.)

SAM: It started out as a good idea...Max and I had never really done anything together without Sheila and the girls before...

MAX: Mom decided a week alone with Dad in the Texas wilderness would do us both a lot of good. I was soooo excited...not!

SAM: Truth is, I didn't really want to go. The great outdoors was never my thing. But Sheila kept pushing...about quality time, and the father-son thing... It was, "Sam, you don't spend enough time with the boy. Sam, the boy's starved for attention. Sam, the boy could go funny on us..." Just yak, yak, yak, yak, yak, yak, yak...

MAX: See, Mom had this idea that just because I'm no good at sports, like to play on the computer, and don't drool over girls yet, that I'm in danger of becoming an interior decorator. Mom's weird, but I still didn't have the heart to tell her I didn't want to go.

SAM: So, despite my misgivings, and with Sheila's fingerprints all over my back...we went...we were going to be near some river...

MAX: He camped us near the rapids...

SAM: The water was supposed to be pretty calm that time of year...

MAX: I tried to wash my clothes in it one morning...they're in Mexico now!

SAM: But the current was a little strong...

MAX: Some kid who sounds like the Taco Bell Chihuahua is wearing my Reebok shirt and my Nike socks... *(Sighs.)* And it got worse...

SAM: It got worse when we realized we had left the repellent at home.

MAX: Mosquitoes the size of a [Suburban]!

SAM: Every night we slapped ourselves silly trying to kill those little bloodsuckers!

MAX: By the second night, I'd given about a pint of blood.

SAM: I felt like their personal Red Cross. I figured at that point we could try to take our minds off the fact that we were losing only slightly less hemoglobin than they did in Vietnam by engaging in a little father-son dialogue. *(Sam and Max cross to CS. Sam picks up two pieces of the three-piece fishing rod. Max picks up the two rocks and begins striking them together trying to get a spark.)* But since Max is on the edge of puberty and in the middle of the "know your body" section in health class, the conversation was a little...one dimensional...

(Sam begins to struggle with putting the fishing rod together. Max methodically and rhythmically continues to strike the stones together.)

MAX: *(Matter-of-factly, to Sam.)* You ever get involuntary erections?

(Sam stops fooling with the rod, looks askance at Max, then back forward.)

SAM: Son, I live with your mother. I'm lucky if I get voluntary erections, anymore.

MAX: *(Still striking stones, and never looking up at Sam.)* You ever get nocturnal emissions?

SAM: Only when your mom cooks. Why do you think we have separate bedrooms?

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MAX: *(Still striking stones.)* 'Cause you snore louder than a heavy metal concert? Ow! *(Drops the stones and slaps his left forearm with his right hand.)*

SAM: Mosquito? *(Max nods.)* Big?

(Max looks under his hand to see his forearm.)

MAX: This one could have his own zip code!

SAM: *(To audience.)* And, so it went...

(Sam and Max cross back to their respective sides of the stage.)

MAX: *(To audience.)* There wasn't a place on my body that didn't itch... *(Sighs.)* ...and it got worse...

SAM: On the third day, Max found what he thought was a ferret...

MAX: I'm colorblind, and it was dark out. How was I supposed to tell the difference between a skunk and a ferret?

SAM: Now I realize Max is colorblind, but a skunk is black and white. How could he miss it? Well, it sure didn't miss him.

MAX: The smell was pretty bad...

SAM: *(Holding nose.)* The smell was awful...

MAX: But Dad was really overreacting...

SAM: I couldn't take him in the tent, so I made him sleep outside. At that point, I wanted to hermetically seal him for the next four days!

MAX: So Dad was pissed off...and I smelled like Limburger... *(Sighs.)* ...and it got worse...

SAM: Sheila hadn't packed much food. She figured we could fish. I figured we could fish...even though neither one of us had ever done it before, how hard could it be, right...?

MAX: Dad had this live-off-the-land idea...he thought we could fish the rapids...

SAM: But it wasn't working out...

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MAX: The fish were moving 90 miles an hour. We couldn't have caught them in a Porsche!

SAM: By the fourth night, we were down to canned pork and beans...

MAX: That's all the campsite needed...more smell...

SAM: I can't help it, pork and beans always gives me more natural gas than the country of Kuwait! Sheila should've remembered that...we had beans at our wedding reception. Whew! Bad wedding night.

MAX: Later that night, it started to rain pretty hard...Dad had to let me in the tent. *(Max grins and moves his eyebrows up and down. Sam crosses to CS and covers his head and body with the blanket. Max crosses to him. To Sam.)* Dad...it's starting to rain...

SAM: *(To Max.)* So, who am I? [Al Roker]? *[Or insert the name of another weatherman.]*

MAX: Dad, I'm getting soaked out here!

(Sam sticks his arm out from under the blanket, grabs the plant mister and begins spraying it over Max's head.)

SAM: Really...?

(Max deadpans to audience for a moment as he's being drenched.)

MAX: Dad!

SAM: O-kay! *(Sam puts down the plant mister and lets Max in under blanket. They sit there for a moment, then Sam begins to shudder under the blanket.)* Ugh! *(Sam jumps out from under the blanket and crosses to his desk SR. To audience.)* It smelled like something had crawled into the tent, and died.

MAX: *(Writhing under the blanket. To audience.)* Dad was cutting some major, Jurassic farts... *(Comes out from under the blanket and crosses to his desk SL.)*

SAM: Max smelled like a week-old gym bag.

MAX: Dad made the whole tent smell like the bathroom at a bus station.

SAM: What could we do?

MAX: We couldn't sleep.

SAM: We couldn't breathe.

MAX: An entire night...

SAM: Gasping and farting!

MAX: (*Whining.*) The next morning I just wanted to go home!

SAM: I kept hoping Max would ask to go home.

MAX: But I was afraid of what Mom would say.

SAM: But I sure didn't want to face Sheila with this story.

MAX: But then it got really bad.

SAM: Beans also give me the...runs...sometimes...

MAX: We'd run out of toilet paper the day before.

SAM: I used some leaves I found nearby.

MAX: He got a hold of some poison ivy.

SAM: What am I? A botanist?! How was I supposed to know what the damn stuff was? (*Winces.*) Oh my *butt*...

[END OF FREEVIEW]

“Today we learned how
to make a necklace
using animal teeth and rawhide.

This will come in real handy
if I’m ever kidnapped
by the Apache!”

—Kip

Load the Letters

(AT RISE: *Living room and camp cabin. On one side of the stage is a living room set, a large armchair, ottoman, reading lamp, etc. On the other side of the stage is a cot, stool, and assorted camping equipment. Mel is sitting in an arm chair in the living room, and Kip is sitting on a cot on the opposite side of the stage. Mel opens a letter.*)

MEL: *(Reads.)* Dear Dad...

KIP: Camp sucks! The food sucks! The activities suck! The counselors suck! *(Slaps a mosquito on his neck.)* And, oh God, do the mosquitoes suck! I want to come home. Quickly! Your suffering son, Kip.

(Kip opens a letter.)

KIP: *(Reads.)* Dear Son...

MEL: The camp, the food, the activities, and the counselors were paid for in advance. And the money is non-refundable. The mosquitoes are a bonus. Enjoy. Love, Dad.

(Mel opens a letter.)

MEL: *(Reads.)* Dear Dad...

KIP: I hate it when you get cutesy on me. *(Mockingly.)* The mosquitoes are a bonus. Enjoy, enjoy! Give me a break! The food here is revolting. You oughta appreciate that. You own a deli—Mel's Mostly Meat—you can appreciate the fact that the chipped beef here looks like it was chipped off the cow while it was still struggling. And the green Jell-O doesn't just jiggle, it walks. I want to, need to, have to, come home immediately, if not sooner. Your stressed-out son, Kip.

(Kip opens a letter.)

KIP: *(Reads.)* Dear Kip...

MEL: Look, my little gumba, I know your idea of roughing it is drinking Ozarka instead of Evian, but to some, the idea of living in cabins, drinking well water, and eating Jell-O you have to catch, isn't all that bad. Your mother and I sent you off to Camp Killawatga to toughen you up. So, get tough, and quit wasting your money on stamps. Your Dad.

(Mel opens a letter.)

MEL: *(Reads.)* Dear Dad...

KIP: Tough?! Tough?!! You mean like the brisket we had last night, which was laughingly referred to as "Ironsides"! And the only thing I hate worse than when you get cutesy on me is when you get ethnic on me, Paganini. You know what all the kids call this place? Camp Kill-a-White-Guy. I mean, at least thanks to you and your Italian blood I can tan, some of these little vanilla kids are melting. Listen, Dad, if you ever loved me, if you ever cared, you have got to come up here and get me. *Please!* Kip. P.S. The reason the ink on this letter is a little runny is because I'm writing it during one of the several rainstorms that we've had this week!

(Kip opens a letter.)

KIP: *(Reads.)* Dear Kip...

MEL: Well, in everyone's life a little rain must fall—you're just getting yours a little early. Just be happy that my relatives managed to bribe their way out of Sicily to make sure you can tan. Dad. P.S. Ask your camp director if he could use a coupla hundred pounds of lunchmeat? I got some salami that's goin' bad on me in the cooler. And you'd better hurry, it's startin' to smell.

[END OF FREEVIEW]

“I guess there are some things
men just have to stick together on.”

— Teddy

Lying to Mom as an Art Form

(Spot up on Teddy. Bare stage. He addresses the audience.)

TEDDY: I was six when my dad took me on my first camping trip. All my older brothers had been on them before, but six was the magic age. I was excited. I'd been waiting for what seemed like forever. But my dad would just say, "Don't worry, Teddy, you'll get to go soon." You see, Stan, Jeff, and Barry had all told me how much fun it was...how many adventures they had had...how there was nothing like it...how much I was missing out on. But the summer I finally turned six was my summer of discovery. And it was that summer I realized...that my brothers...were lying sacks of shit! My dad made them say how great it was so my mom wouldn't say, "I told you so." And they did. Oh, how they did! First, Stan lied. Then Jeff broke the Eighth Commandment. Finally, it was Barry's turn to look my mother in eyes and tell her camping was terrific. None of them told her about the hard cold ground, the hard cold food, getting rained on, getting bitten by every kind of insect known to mankind, and having to squat down to take a crap, like you were a basset hound or something.

[END OF FREEVIEW]