

Hot Air

When we were boys and summer vacation yawned before us with unending days of perfect idleness, life beckoned like a circus of wonderful possibilities. Back To School was a jail sentence coming in September, but we'd handle it when it arrived, settling down and doing the time. And though school might be like a purgatory, it wasn't as bad as Father McDiddle's version of that frightening hereafter, where we'd be forced to stand too close to a bonfire fed with old Playboy magazines. I don't know why sex offended God so much back then, since it produced more of us. Thank God he seems to have become more accepting of it in recent years.

Most summer mornings found my best friend George and I on our way to the public swimming pool, bathing suits tightly rolled in towels and tucked under our arms. You could hear screaming children in the pool from a block away. It's no wonder adults delegated lifeguard duty to teenagers.

We were each eleven, and the important things in life were just beginning to beg our attention. We had been talking about naked girls since Easter ... speculating might be more accurate ... and the topic continued to prove fascinating as the summer began. George's boyhood latency had ended more abruptly than mine, and he seemed obsessed with the topic.

Approaching the pool that morning, I tried to convince George that since he wanted so badly to see a naked girl, he should wrap a towel around his crew-cut head and walk into the girls changing room. I thought he might be crazy enough to try it.

"You could get away with it, George," I said

"They'd throw me out," he replied.

"No, they wouldn't, George," I said. "They'd never guess. All the girls are just as flat as you."

"Then why don't *you* do it?" he asked.

"Because, George," I replied, "I'm going to be a

saint when I grow up, and we're not allowed to look at anything naked."

I said it with a straight face. I did not smile. I wanted George to think me serious and wish me luck, or say anything to indicate he believed me, so I would know I had fooled him. Then I could whoop and shout and fall on the ground and kick my feet up in the air and roll around laughing, telling him over and over and over again that I had gotten one over on him. I could look down on him from that lofty height of superiority. These are important transactions in the business of boyhood, and come to think of it, in the social lives of chimpanzees.

But he only looked at me and didn't say a word while I waited for him to speak. I had to go to the bathroom and the delay was becoming difficult. I needed to whiz, preferably in the pool where it was more fun. But first I wanted to pull this off.

George continued to stare at me in silence. I decided he knew I was kidding, and was attempting to frame just the right answer. Or maybe he wanted me to admit I wasn't serious, so *he* could feel superior. But he was taking his time and I really had to go bad.

I scrunched up everything I had down there. I stood on one leg, then another, slightly bent over. I stopped breathing for a few moments, hoping that might help. Still, George said nothing and continued to stare. Then his eyes suddenly darted off to the horizon and his face lit with a smile as he loudly farted. He'd been waiting for his large intestine to catch up with the dialogue. I laughed so hard I wet myself.

If there's a lesson here, I guess it would be, "Don't wet your pants waiting for wisdom from someone who will only generate a lot of hot air." I should have kept that in mind when I later began my business career. And come to think of it, each time I look in the mirror.

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