

ROCKBRIDGE REPORTER

A Newsletter for Rockbridge Academy

November 2001

WHERE THE BOYS ARE

by Michael J. McKenna

The War Against Boys: How Misguided Feminism is Harming Our Young Men,

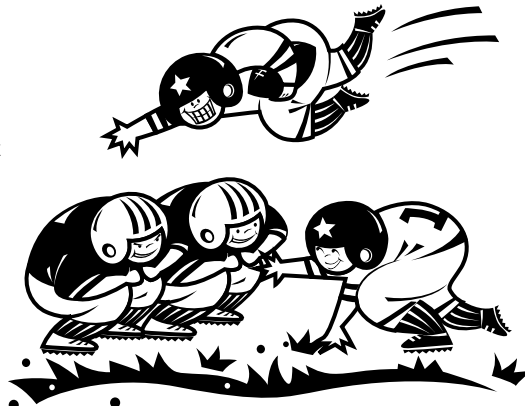
by Christina Hoff Sommers

(Simon & Schuster, 213 pp.)

This month's article is the first of a two-part series examining the anti-male culture in much of today's academia. Next month, Mr. McKenna will review Douglas Wilson's recent book, *Future Men*, for a look at the same topic, but from a distinctly Christian perspective.

A couple of kindergarten boys were recently suspended from school in New Jersey after being caught red-handed playing cops and robbers at recess. Finger-pointing, shouting "bang," running, playing dead—the incident involved all the accompanying elements of playground mock aggression, seen today by many school officials as training for potential violence against women. School officials were enforcing a Columbine-inspired "zero tolerance" policy against firearms at school, even the thumb-and-forefinger variety (where are the trigger locks?). But they were also acting on another trend afoot in American education: a disapproval of all the things boys do during recess. The Atlanta schools have since eliminated recess altogether. Another New Jersey Kindergartener was expelled from school for sexual harassment. His crime? He gave his best friend, a girl, a kiss on the cheek.

Snips and snails and puppy dogs' tails have fallen on tough times. In fact, as Christina Hoff Sommers demonstrates in *The War Against Boys*, they have powerful



ONE GOAL FOR CHRISTIAN
EDUCATORS SHOULD BE KEEPING
SCHOOLS SAFE FOR RECESS,
WRESTLING, AND
A BIBLICALLY REASONED
UNDERSTANDING OF FEMININITY
AND MASCULINITY.

enemies. The book is a stinging indictment of an anti-male movement that has had an insidious influence on the nation's schools and government educational institutions, as well as institutions of higher learning where tomorrow's teachers are currently being trained. It seeks, at bottom, nothing less than to eliminate the need for exasperated women ever again to feel compelled to

mutter, "Boys will be boys." Sommers, a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, D.C., and an expert at debunking shoddy and trendy research, exposes the "crisis of young girls" as the creation of feminists armed with dubious studies and savvy PR skills.

Girls, the story goes, are supposedly ignored by teachers who call only on boys in the classroom and otherwise neglect and abuse them, catastrophically undermining their self-esteem. "Just as planes and ships disappear mysteriously into the Bermuda Triangle, so do the selves of girls go down in droves," Mary Pipher argued in her hit girl-crisis book *Reviving Ophelia*. "They crash and burn." Sommers catches Pipher in a typical bit of statistical dishonesty. Pipher cites the fact that suicide rates among children aged 10 to 14 rose 57 percent between 1979 and 1988 as evidence that "something dramatic is happening to adolescent girls." Actually, the suicide rate for boys had increased 71 percent, and for girls 27 percent; 61 girls killed themselves in 1988, 176 boys.

When it comes to girls in school, Sommers carefully demonstrates that girls get better grades, do more homework, engage in more extracurricular activities, enroll in more advanced-placement classes and fewer special-education classes, go to college in greater numbers, and so on. This doesn't mean that girls are academically superior to boys, just that the special needs of boys are being neglected. As competitiveness and individual initiative are discouraged, classroom discipline loosened, and outlets for

continued on page 2

WHERE THE BOYS ARE...continued

natural rambunctiousness — e.g., recess — discouraged or eliminated, schoolboys tend to tune out or turn on . . . to Ritalin and other psychotropic drugs.

While approaching the subject from a purely secular perspective, Sommers traces the fundamental problem to the secular, progressive, “child-centered” educational theories dominant in American schools. “Education and instruction should from the very first be passive, observant, protective, rather than prescribing, determining, interfering.” This is how Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852), the inventor of Kindergarten, summed up what would become the tenets of progressive education. But boys need their “prescribing” in strong doses. In addition, Sommers also demonstrates that boys benefit from competition, a good dose of rough-and-tumble play, and clear moral direction. If they don’t get it, they drift into their own little worlds of inattention and underachievement. Sommers points for evidence to Britain, which has addressed lagging boys by re-emphasizing teacher-led work, structured classrooms, frequent tests, and strict homework checks, sometimes in all-male classes led by male instructors. Early results suggest that in Britain, Johnny now finds it easier to learn how to read.

If American boys are trailing girls, why all the focus on Ophelia? The career of feminist Harvard psychologist Carol Gilligan is central to the answer. In her best-selling, shabbily researched 1982 book, *In a Different Voice*, Gilligan argued that women have a moral psychology distinct from that of men. But other scholars haven’t been able to confirm her findings and the three studies on which Gilligan supposedly based her work are suspiciously under wraps, and unavailable for peer review “for the foreseeable future.” As Sommers writes, all of this has led to “serious complaints of a type that have been known to lead to censure—or worse.” In two books since, Gilligan explored the way adolescent girls are traumatized by a “male-voiced” culture in which “people [do] not want to hear what girls know.” So, according to Gilligan, preteen girls “know” things that they then “forget” in their teens as they are beaten down by the patriarchy. This provocative conclusion is based on small samples (typical samples of no more than 150 girls) and extremely

subjective interpretations. To simplify: anti-social or politically liberal statements from girls are considered “knowing” by Gilligan, while anything polite or accepting of authority is taken as evidence of the suppressive dominant male culture.

If Gilligan’s work had remained on the dusty shelves of academia, no one would have much cared. Unfortunately, *The New York Times Magazine* trumpeted her findings. The Ms. Foundation launched Take Our Daughters to Work Day. The American Association of University Women commissioned two studies meant to pin the blame for girls’ low self-esteem on patriarchal discrimination in schools. Congress passed the “Gender Equity in Education Act.” When the AAUW sponsored a much more scientifically rigorous study in 1995, the results contradicted the earlier dire conclusions. According to Sommers, this third study was not mentioned in a single newspaper article.

In the late ‘90s, Gilligan turned to the subject of boys, whom, she concluded, were also being traumatized by the equal-opportunity oppressor patriarchy. A fellow charlatan named William Pollack won major media attention after Columbine by talking in a similar vein of “Ophelia’s brothers.” Elsewhere, Pollack warned that boys are often pushed to act like men (gasp!). “No boy should be called upon to be the tough one. No boy should be harmed in this way.” (How encouraging boys to be “sturdy oaks” is harming them is never explained.) The idea is that there is nothing wrong with boys that can’t be fixed if they would just stop acting like boys. Or, as Gloria Steinem put it, “We need to raise boys like we raise girls.” This gets to the heart of the matter: feminists simply hate masculinity.

One Department of Education-funded consultant warns against Little League, “where parents and friends sit on the sidelines and encourage aggressive, violent behavior” (stealing bases, sliding home, etc.). The women at Ms. briefly suggested a boys’ equivalent of Take Our Daughters to Work Day, or “Son’s Day” (to be held on a Sunday, so the little tykes wouldn’t even get a day off from school like their sisters). Son’s Day would have included playing sports without scores or competition, laying out clothes for the week ahead, going grocery shopping, and a visit to an abused

women’s shelter — just so the little guys would know what violent creatures men are (Sommers’s dubs it a “Holiday in Hell for Junior”). This is the subtext of Supreme Court-mandated sexual-harassment training in schools. Boys are forbidden to engage in traditional boyish behaviors, and subjected to propaganda about the evils of men. If all this doesn’t bleach the masculinity from them, well, that just shows—in the words of one influential feminist—the “need for [new] materials to defuse male resistance.”

The War Against Boys bristles with examples of the kind that send parents fleeing from government schools. Take Judy Logan, a middle-school teacher in San Francisco who is legendary for her relentlessly feminized classroom. Boys in her class are made to enjoy quilting, and girls encouraged to vent their anger at men. In one project, Logan required each boy to give a presentation in the persona of a woman. After one freckled-faced boy completed his rendition of Anita Hill, a delighted Logan exhorted the class, “Give her a hand, everyone!”

Sommers provides a charming, if slight, example of the incorrigible maleness of men: Her 14-year-old received a gooeey, self-esteem essay exercise at school, asking whether he compared himself to others, whether he made such comparisons to make himself feel better, and whether such comparisons made him feel inferior. His answers, respectively: “Sometimes,” “No, I do not,” and “No.” Academic feminists are scandalized by boys like this, who, despite everything, *just refuse to emote!*

There is also an explicitly political element to the fight over boys. Tocqueville worried that the tender attentions of government would “soften” Americans and make them “timid.” The modern welfare state has that tendency. Government fosters dependency, while feminists seek to rid the national character of precisely those traits that are naturally resistant to the nanny state: independence, self-reliance, and dominion.

This is why Christina Hoff Sommers has written such an indispensable book, and why one goal for Christian educators should be keeping schools safe for recess, wrestling, and a biblically reasoned understanding of femininity and masculinity.

College Night Planned

On Friday, November 30, 2001 we will be sharing information with our parents about preparing our children for college. This meeting will take place at Severna Park Evangelical Presbyterian Church (S.P.E.P.) from 7:00–8:30 p.m. While we are hoping to help our families with children in the dialectic and rhetoric stages, the evening will be open to all who are interested. We will discuss how Rockbridge courses that are being taught to our students now, will be beneficial in their preparation for college courses in the future. We will also share information about how credits are earned and what colleges require for admission. Brochures and booklets for several colleges will be available for browsing. Make it a date and enjoy some refreshments too!



Parents Respond

In response to last month's lead article of the Rockbridge Reporter the Crawford family expressed their appreciation in the following letter:

Dear Mr. McKenna,

Thank you so much for your recap of the events of September 11th in the Rockbridge Reporter. Even though you had already expressed concern for my husband and explained how the administration and faculty dealt with the news at school, I was deeply touched to read about the prayers said by the children and teachers for the fathers that may have been in harm's way. To know that my daughters were comforted by the hymns and prayers of their classmates and teachers was profoundly moving.

Rockbridge Academy is a very special place. Its academics and commitment to the truth of God are matchless. On September 11, 2001, Rockbridge became even more special to our family. Thank you for loving and caring for our daughters on that tragic day.

GIANT AND SAFEWAY SAVINGS CARDS

Thanks to all who have signed up for Giant and Safeway savings cards. If you've signed up in the past, you can still use the same card, however, you must complete a new registration form and put your card

number on it to make it valid toward this year's purchases. Thanks again for your support. If you have any questions, please call our coordinator, Tammy Sheir (410-544-3030).

A NEW BRAVEHEART? BY GAIL BROPHY

Most Americans have seen the movie about William Wallace called Braveheart. I saw his head (on a statue), his highlands, and his homeland. It was part of the course I audited through Westminster Theological Seminary last summer called "The Religious Roots of America," in which I traveled through the United Kingdom.

I touched walls that had been built by the Romans in York. I rode a bike across the island of Iona, where Columba preached the gospel to the Picts in the 5th century. I stood by the abbey of Canterbury, where Augustine (not the author of Confessions) began preaching to the heathen Saxons. I walked through Durham Cathedral, which was built around the time of William the Conqueror. I toured Bury St. Edmund's where the barons supposedly made a pact to force King John to sign the Magna Charta in 1215. I tried on a replica of Robert the Bruce's crown and chain mail at Bannockburn, where he regained Scottish independence from the English. I took a pilgrimage through Canterbury Cathedral where Chaucer's travelers saw the shrine of Thomas a' Becket. I heard a John Knox sermon preached from a pulpit where he had proclaimed God's word. I stood on the spot in the Tower of London where Anne Boleyn, Catherine Howard, and Lady Jane Grey lost their heads. I ate in the dining hall where John Milton sat at Christ's College in Cambridge in the 17th century. I trod on Darwin and other famous men in Westminster Abbey. I stood at the clock in the courtyard of Trinity College as the bell tolled noon, the same place where Harold Abrams supposedly beat the dogs around the courtyard in Chariots of Fire. For you golf fans, I walked on the 18th fairway of the Royal and Ancient Golf course in St. Andrews and ate haggis and high tea in its country club. And of course, I hit every antiquarian bookshop I passed.

Those places were all concrete. They were facts. They were dates. The lectures we heard were of the same genre. Dr. Sinclair Ferguson gave four lectures on the religious history of Scotland from 500-1680. Dr. Sam Logan, president of WTS, gave four lectures on the religious history of England from 600-1700. They were full of the amazing details that lead to the founding of America. As I listened, I had more questions than I learned answers. Was the Magna Charta a solid foundation for the Constitution and the Bill of Rights? Was John Knox right to tell Mary Queen of Scots how she should live? Was Samuel Rutherford's Lex Rex a sound biblical argument for rebelling against the king's authority? Were Oliver Cromwell and his band on firm ground when they tried and beheaded Charles I? Was the United States overtly founded as a Christian nation? I hoped that we would have the time and the forum for debates. Complementing the colorful tales the bards of Britain told, I wanted a rhetorician to try to persuade me as to which side was "right." Since Quintillian did not appear, I was content with grammar.

This trip opened my eyes to a history that is not as black and white as fourth graders would like it to be. It also made me more thankful for Rockbridge Academy. It showed me how crucial dialectic is to understanding our roots. It confirmed our vision of taking these students to Europe so they can touch, see, and taste history. It made me realize how much more there is to read. It gave me new heroes and heroines. It made me hope that God would grant us students with the loyalty of William Wallace, the faithfulness of John Wycliffe, the grace of Lady Jane Grey, and the zeal of John Knox. If you don't know who any of these people are (and I didn't until I started teaching here), pick up a book and find out. Or, better yet, go for yourself when the course is offered in 2003.



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- Nov. 1Daytime Open House—8:30 AM-3:00 PM
- Nov. 2SCHOOL CLOSED—Teacher Work Day
- Nov. 5-16Evening Adult Logic Classes (M,W,F 7:30-9:00)
- Nov. 21-23SCHOOL CLOSED—Parent/Teacher Conf. & Thanksgiving Holiday
- Nov 30.....College Night—7:00-8:30 p.m. @ S.P.E.P. Church
- Dec 12.....Christmas Concert—7:00 p.m. @ S.P.E.P. Church
- Dec 14.....Academic Warning Day
- Dec19-Jan 1SCHOOL CLOSED—Christmas Holiday

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

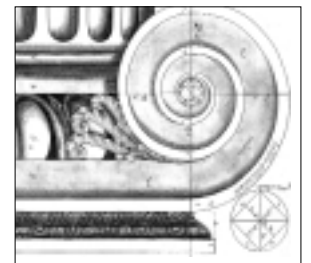
“Every collectivist revolution rides in on a Trojan horse of ‘emergency.’ It was the tactic of Lenin, Hitler, and Mussolini. In the collectivist sweep over a dozen minor countries of Europe, it was the cry of men striving to get on horseback. And ‘emergency’ became the justification of the subsequent steps. This technique of creating emergency is the greatest achievement that demagoguery attains.”

— HERBERT HOOVER

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Internet: www.rockbridge.org
 E-mail: learning@rockbridge.org
 FAX (410) 923-6588
 (410) 923-1171

ROCKBRIDGE ACADEMY



A CLASSICAL &
 CHRISTIAN SCHOOL
 911 Generals Highway
 Millersville, MD 21108