Okay, it seems like a no-brainer to say that boys and girls are different. But aside from the obvious naughty bits business, the differences between the male and female of the species are staggering. Now, I have three children; my firstborn Ellie, my middle child and only son William, and my youngest, Allison, whom we call ‘Big Al’ because she’s so tiny. The girls are interesting. Ellie is a married college student now with a new baby, my first grandson whom I call Benjamin Alexander the Great. Allison is a sixth grader, a cheerleader, straight A student and all around goody two shoes, but with a streak of evil in her a mile wide, especially when it comes to tormenting her brother. And then there’s my boy, William.

Poor Will. He’s the rose between the two thorns that are his sisters, and believe me; they love to harass him to no end. But it’s hard sometimes to feel sorry for him because frankly, boys are weird. Now, don’t get me wrong. I love my boy just as much as I love my girls. He is funny, smart, a handsome young man of thirteen. But from day one, he was just a strange kid, and the more I’m around boys, the more I realize they are all the same.

When my girls were little, they rarely if ever put anything in their mouths that didn’t belong there. Will’s first solid food was a spider he found crawling along the baseboard of the living room floor. We lived near the beach in California when he was a baby, and for days after an afternoon on the shore I’d be changing sand-filled diapers. Cigarette butts buried in the sand went right into his mouth. Cat food had to be put up on a high surface or the cat would have starved to death. In fact, after catching him eating a crayon one day I began to worry that he had that weird disease that causes people to crave dirt, detergent, paint chips and plaster.

And it’s not just the weird “I’ll eat anything” syndrome. He and his friends speak a language that I don’t get. At all. In fact, this is a standard thirteen-year-old boy conversation:

“Dude!”

“Dude!”

“Duuuuude!”

“Duuuuude!”

“Oh, duuuuude!”

See? Nonsensical perhaps, yet they completely understand every subtle nuance of this conversation. And this weird conversational style extends to our family as well. Every day, I’d ask my girls how school was, and I’d receive a litany of complaints about Bethany doing something heinous to Brittany while Morgan was stabbing Ashton in the back and Megan complained about it to Stephanie and now everyone was mad at Emily! When I ask Will about his day, it goes a little something like this:

Me: “So, how was your day buddy?”

Him: “Mmm.”

Me: “Anything exciting happen?”

Him: “Mmm.”

Me: “We’re having your favorite: spiders and sand for dinner tonight!”

Him: “Mmm.”

But I go to school conferences and the teachers all say the same thing:

Teacher: “Oh, Mrs. Yoder, Will is such a pleasure to have in class! He’s an outspoken classroom leader, full of creativity and thought. He just exudes personality! But I’m sure you know all this already.”

Me: “Mmm.”

So mothering a son is definitely not as easy as I’d thought. Yet for all his quirks and boy weirdness, there is something about little boys (because let’s face it, no matter how big they get, they’re always our little boys, right?) He and I can sit and play cards for hours and just smile at each other and not talk much and I know he’s enjoying our time together. Even though hugs and kisses are becoming fewer and farther between, every once in a while he will come up to me and lay his head on my shoulder, very briefly, and I’ll smell that boy-smell that is outdoorsy and sporty and puppy-doggy and my heart just about melts. And even though his voice is deeper now and on the rare occasion I get a kiss on the cheek I can feel a little wisp on fine baby mustache, he will always be the little boy who used to sing along with me to “Foxy Lady” by Jimi Hendrix, pronouncing it FOKFEE. He will be the boy who pulled the neighbors flowers out of the ground to present me with a bouquet when he was 4. He’s the boy who cried and let only me hold him when he fell off the bed and busted his head open, requiring 10 stitches and ice cream sandwiches daily for a week.

And no matter how much he grows or what he accomplishes in his life, he will always be my sweet baby boy. But I swear he still has spider breath sometimes.