

Origin Stories: A Lyrical Essay An Excerpt

by Tomas Moriz

A friend sends me a Facebook Message about a project called *Indigenous Masculinities*, a book about male identity prepatrarchy. I wonder if that's a word: prepatrarchy. I wonder if that's a beginning or an ending. To get back to what once already was. People always tell me about other "men or project exploring what it means to be a man or to be father. In 2015, I organize a reading called *Not Your Bro*. I tell all my friends but the one person I am nervous to share it with: my 24 year old son. Why the fear?

Any time I got a bloody nose as a young boy, I would let it bleed, let the blood run into my mouth, turn my teeth red, drip down my chin, savor the strange metallic taste, the oily consistency, the way it would dry on my skin. "Blood," my father always threatened. "Blood is what matters, blood is what makes you who you are." He'd hug me deep, whisper like a warning, "Mijo, you are my blood," squeezing me till I hurt. "You my blood." In the mirror, alone I'd repeat, "My blood, my blood," over & over until the words lost meaning.

I often say fathering made me a feminist but I should also add that I grew into manhood through fathering as well & so had to somehow balance the two things together. Surprisingly, it wasn't that hard because I actually think the two go hand

in hand, that they closely entwined with each other. At least they are for me.

But there were some key moments that highlighted how masculinity under patriarchy set me up to fail, to internalize misogyny as natural, to embody male privilege. It feels like I'm constantly trying to unpack all this.

Here's a story as example: as I young father I loved roughhousing with my son tickling & tackling & rolling around despite what he said when we were doing it. A little later on as I roughoused with my daughter (&, of course, I made sure to roughhouse equally with both of them) but when she said, "Stop," through her laughter, I immediately did, knowing how crucial it was that I listened to her words, that I stopped. It hit me then: when my son said, "No," I didn't immediately listen to him. It haunts me to this day, the lesson that his words didn't matter, that I could ignore his expressed desire to stop. It's a failure on my part. What did he learn about consent, about boundaries?

What I taught him was exactly what my father had taught me.

I remember the day about 20 years ago, I read an article about how science is not neutral, that it's been shaped by social

values such as racism & patriarchy. I sat in a waiting room ignoring my young son, my pregnant but sick BabyMama next to me. We were made to wait, unable to schedule an appointment because we were on Medi-Cal, told that priority was given to insured patients. We were 23 & 24. We didn't argue. While we waited, I read the article wondering where does knowledge come from? At some point in my life I learned or came to believe that sperm actively hustled their little tails off to plunder the fallopian tubes chasing down wary passive eggs to penetrate, to impregnate. The article argued that that narrative depended on gendered assumptions about male, about female. My son meanwhile running wild in the waiting room. My BabyMama looking irritated trying to nap. The article declared that the egg, in fact, had its own hustle, its own agency, embodied its own will to find sperm, to become fertilized. Can egg choose sperm? By default, I wondered can egg reject sperm or sperm, egg. My son now crying on the floor. I let him. Loud & angry. We were seen almost immediately. I can't remember what for or why, but I do remember learning two things:

1: Screaming kids get you seen quicker.

2: How little I truly knew.

I remember wondering what else I may not know. Or worse, not know what I think I already know.

I need role models of other men doing the difficult work of reclaiming masculinity, reconsidering their own relationship to manhood, to share & explore how we all learned (sometimes painfully, sometimes humorously) what being a man means despite what society wants us to believe. I need more than Facebook notifications. I need flesh & sweat & nervousness & reassurance. I need real bodies. I need action. Like handholding. Like diaper changing. Dish washing. Sharing. Listening.

I tell my son about the workshop over coffee & pie. He says he already heard about it. Someone told him. He says, Sounds cool, pops.. I say, Thanks. I think it is. He goes on to tell me about helping some young kid fix up his skateboard. I can't help but tell him how much I love him.