

Mucking with Mother Nature
by Joan Nelson
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(From the service “The Well in Your Heart: A Much Needed Perspective”)

On April 27, 1944 at the age of 8, in New Jersey, I met my new next-door neighbor. Pat (yes, her real name) was what my mother called a “Tom Boy.” She was far too strong for me, and would frequently pin me down on the ground and hold me there. I hated the rough play. But we were the only kids our age in the neighborhood. So our mothers kept pushing us together.

In spite of our mothers' mutual encouragement to play house or school, like other girls, Pat refused. Adamantly. So I went along and played mechanic, taking our bikes apart and putting them back together. Indoors in bad weather, we drew pictures of bombers and battleships, like the boys at school.

When we were 13, Pat finally told me that she had been born a boy but that a doctor had cut her penis off. I told her didn't believe her. I told her she was a liar. And I used this “liar” claim as an excuse to not play with her any more. Shortly after that, my family moved to Colorado, which was fine with me.

Thirty years later, while getting my doctorate in human sexuality, I took a class from Johns Hopkins' Dr. John Money, pioneer in the field of gender reassignment surgery for children born with ambiguous genitalia. He thought he remembered Pat and her family, one of his first cases.

Shortly after taking that gender class, I visited my childhood neighborhood, and found an old widow lady who remembered Pat and me playing with our bikes. She said Pat had died strangely and that the neighbors thought she had committed suicide.

Back to age 13, now in Colorado, my first boyfriend used to smell my

hair and tell me he wished I were a boy. Nobody had told either of us about homosexuality. But I did overhear my father telling my mother he thought Bob was a “pansy.” I asked what that meant. He said “sissy.” But Daddy often called me a sissy, so I shrugged my shoulders and kept moving.

Bob begged his mother not to make him go to their priest on Friday afternoons for those hated private religious instruction meetings. His mother forced him to go. He kept telling me he had a deep and horrible secret, but that I wasn't grown-up enough to handle it. He drank himself to death when we were in our 20s. But not until after my mother gave him coaching sessions in how to walk and hold a cigarette like a guy. He had a thing for my mother. He wanted to be like her.

These 2 tragedies had a lot to do with my going back to school for graduate degrees in psychology and sexuality.

Since then, I think I've heard it all. And I can tell you this right now:

In the beginning was nature. The background from which and against which our ideas of sex, and everything else were formed. (Including Love. Including God)

Ever since the serpent got to Eve and Adam, sexuality and eroticism have been caught in a clash between nature and culture.

We cannot hope to understand gender identity and orientation until we clarify the distinction between nature and civilized society.

Civilized society is an artificial construct, created to subdue the forces of nature. But it doesn't always work. When will we learn: No amount of social disapproval will ever change nature.