



Man Made: A Stupid Quest for Masculinity

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The smudge looked suspiciously penis- like. The doctor confirmed: "That's the baby's penis!" which caused not celebration, but panic. Joel pictured having to go camping and fix a car and use a hammer and throw a football and watch professionals throw footballs and figure out whether to be sad or happy about the results of said football throwing.

So begins his quest to confront his effete nature whether he likes it or not (he doesn't), by doing a twenty-four-hour shift with L.A. firefighters, going hunting, rebuilding a house, driving a Lamborghini, enduring three days of boot camp with the U.S. Army, day-trading with \$100,000, and going into the ring with UFC Hall of Famer Randy Couture. Seeking help from a panel of experts, including his manly father-in-law, Boy Scouts, former NFL star Warren Sapp, former MLB All-Star Shawn Green, Adam Carolla, and a pit bull named Hercules, he expects to learn that masculinity is defined not by the size of his muscles, but by the size of his heart (also, technically, a muscle). This is not at all what he learns.

Man Made: A Stupid Quest for Masculinity Details

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Author : Joel Stein

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J.v. Petretta says

I knew well in advance that I would enjoy this book, mostly because I, in my younger years, had sought my own quest for masculinity.

I will not give any spoilers, because this book needs to be read, but I will encourage readers my own way:

First, women, if your man has confidence issues, suggest he read this. It will help. If he doesn't, but has something I would call "tough-man syndrome", suggest he read this; it may make him re-think what being a man is all about. Read it yourself first, and tell them it's a book about "fathering", in order to be a better father, or at a minimum, to understand his.

Straight men of all makes and models, you will appreciate more, the importance of all qualities you possess by the time you finish this book, and it may entice you to search out others on your own.

Gay men, you will find this to be the gayest non-gay book you ever read, while re-thinking the entire "what does it mean to be a man..or what does it mean to be gay?" You may be surprised to learn (as I have done, without the author stating as much) that being gay and being a man are not at all in opposition. Femininity and homosexuality are not necessarily hand in hand. Gay men, like their straight counterparts, can indeed learn to be more manly.

Lastly, I recommend this book for it's insights, intelligence, wisdom and pure comedy. I had my own personal tiffs with the author over his view of dogs and dog-owners, but that is why I rated it a 4 over 5 stars...can't please everyone...at least entirely. But I'm thinking it's worth your time, and that you'll be glad you read this.

Thegirlintheafternoon says

Read for the Book Riot Read Harder Challenge, Task #6 - a book by a person whose gender is different from your own

For this task, I really wanted to pick a book that was about the *idea* of its author being a different gender than me. On the one hand, this book was funny and engaging and even moving at times, and Joel Stein's performance on the audiobook was great - I loved hearing his voice saying his words. On the other hand, the book ultimately let masculinity be complex and multi-faceted, while women and/or femininity were never allowed to be anything other than one-dimensional. I don't think Stein was required to address that part of his quest, but I think it would have been a stronger book if he had. Still, interesting and often hilarious. 3/5 stars.

Ed Bernard says

I generally have mixed feelings about the current crop of experiential reporting books – like AJ Jacobs living biblically, inspired by the George Plimpton classics. Sometimes, they just take the conceit so literally that it's no fun any more. I felt like this one was going to end up that way as well, but a funny thing happened – the author discovered that his premise was flawed and discovered many new things about being a man. Some of the chapters were real stunners too – having a catch with Shawn Green was very revealing, and the parts on the military were extremely insightful. I laughed aloud at parts of the Boy Scout chapter, but the kind of manhood he actually discovered was not the traditional macho-type, but more of a quiet leader-type, which was nice to see (and personally highly redemptive!). I ended up liking the book a great deal more than I thought I would initially. Funny and wise.

Michael says

What a funny, poignant and well-written tale. Recommended.

Jonathan Lu says

The brilliance that I have come to expect from Joel Stein having been a follower of his "The Awesome Column" in TIME Magazine for years. To develop a more masculine framework after a life of passiveness in order to instill such behaviors on his toddler son, Stein embarks on a quest to undergo numerous "manly" adventures akin to the spirit of his fellow just as brilliantly humorous self-deprecating white Jewish guy author friend AJ Jacobs. Here in this story, he pursues all of the manly activities that he has thus far shunned in life: spending a night camping with the Boy Scouts, a stint with the fire department, drinking 18yr Macallans, hunting turkeys, day-trading with \$100,000, driving a Ferrari, adopting a dog, attending Marine and Army boot camp, and even going 5mins in the Octagon with Randy Couture, you learn not only from Stein why we men behave the way we do and why that is a good thing, but what really are the deep down sentiments to manhood – the character, mentality, and choices that are completely independent of actions that are most often superficially associate as manhood. I think not a surprise to most who realize that those most manly men with whom he engages: while fighting fires, learning how to fight, fire a rifle, firing a tank, etc? really are not the arrogant assholes that typically get associated with masculinity. But it is such men who possess such confidence of self as to behave honorably and respectfully at all times without need to peacock or enforce their own will/desires upon others. I guess it's fair to say that most men in politics are really just a bunch of major league pussies. That in itself is the essence of manhood which Stein will undoubtedly do well to instill upon his own son as a clearly great father with a lot to teach, with the clear realization of how important it is for you to let your children develop their own passions and interests themselves, and learn for themselves that it's ok to love what they love no matter who tries to tell them what should be.

I won't ruin any more of the plot to deprive you of the joy of reading this book, other than to say that AJ Jacobs would be proud, and it did bring a smile to my face to see him credited under the acknowledgements section as a friend of Stein. I just can't imagine what hilarity ensues when you put those 2 guys in a room together. Not only do you get to really know Stein and his family on a deeply personal level, essentially every page somewhere within will contain a memorable one-liner that will make you crack up. Read this. Read this now. Then follow Stein's column

Stewart says

Joel Stein took on the quest that I have contemplated myself since my son was born 6 years ago. There were actually times when I felt like he had somehow gotten inside my head and found all of my insecurities and decided to go test them. I don't know if this is a challenge that all new fathers face but the lack of confidence in our manliness is definitely something that both Joel and I have in common.

From the moment I read the first paragraph, I knew I was going to love this book. I laughed, cried, laughed some more and got inspired along the way while he desperately grasped for any bit of rugged toughness he could find to fill in his own gaps in masculinity. Just like him, I want the best for my son and have often wondered if I am man enough to teach him how he should be. How can I teach him to kill a bear with his bare hands if I spent my childhood playing with Carebears with my sisters?

I'm glad that Joel Stein fought an MMA fighter so that I didn't have to. Maybe we're just fine as fathers after all. All I know is that this is one of the best memoirs I have read. I'm sure that not everyone will feel as connected as I was to the story but it is a laugh-out-loud adventure that is definitely worth the read!

Sarah says

Man Made is an awesome audio book. Joel Stein not only wrote this book, he also narrates it. I love how his inflection mimics the way a friend would talk to me about his various misadventures. I am familiar with Stein's writing and his sense of humor from his "Awesome Column" in Time magazine, which is what drew me to this book.

The premise of the book is that Stein is about to have a son and he panics at his lack of manlihood. How will he teach his son to be a man when Stein spent his college years learning how to make wine coolers to impress women? So begins his journey in hanging out with groups he considers to be "real men". His first experience is spending the night in the woods with a boy scout troop, as he has never before camped in his life. An early dilemma of his was whether he could borrow a sleeping bag from a friend, or was that too personal, like borrowing underwear. He is quickly embraced by the group, where he becomes a "Master Exploder" and learns about the blood circle and hunting snipes.

Stein then hangs out with firemen, sports casters, UFC fighters; he makes it through bootcamp (my personal favorite part); and he drives a Ferrari and drinks very high-end scotch without throwing up, but almost starts a fight.

I felt like I gained some insight into how men act around each other, but I'm sure there are still some highly guarded secrets not revealed by Stein, although the men he was hanging out with might have hidden these secrets from Stein as well. Fun read!

Brad Wojak says

I have long been a fan of "immersion journalism", and as the father of a newborn boy I understand the fear of not being "man enough"; So, I am a little surprised that I did not love this more. Mr. Stein's attempts to experience more of the manly art- Fast cars, fighting, soldiering, fighting fires, mixed martial arts.. are all

good reads. But, it just does not sustain itself. The book felt long, and in some parts the jokes did not work. I would recommend this, but go to your local library, or wait for paperback.

J.R. Forasteros says

Fans of A. J. Jacobs and Matt Mikalatos, rejoice! When journalist Joel Stein (Los Angeles Times, TIME) found out he and his wife were having a boy, he had a massive panic attack. Joe, it turns out, didn't consider himself much of a man. The thought of trying to raise a boy terrified him. So he set out on a quest to become more masculine... whatever that means.

I have no idea how women keep score of who is doing best, but I get the feeling it's complicated and involves shoes and delivering compliments that are actually insults. When men graduate from school, we switch from being judged on athletic ability to being judged on how much money we make.

Joel earned a Boy Scout merit badge. He spent a weekend with firefighters. He took on home-improvement projects with his ultra-handy father-in-law. He joined the Marines. He fought UFC champ Randy Couture.

Joel learns that being a man is a lot harder to define than traditionalists would have us believe. Manhood is more a function of character than roles.

Joel would not let his wife come with him to the firestation. For some reason.
As Joel's fire chief told him,

Not to dismiss your entire premise, but none of the activities or skills you plan on doing define becoming a man. A man is honest, kind, and courageous, protects women, is humble, bold, moral, seeks truth, loves children, and fights for what is right.

If you've ever read a Joel Stein column, you know the sort of wit and self-deprecation you're in for in *Man Made*. And in that regard, the book certainly doesn't disappoint.

But it's more than just jokes. *Man Made* is a trove of manhood-wisdom. Here are five attributes of manhood Joel brought back from his quest. They're not the only five, but they're what really resonated with me:

1. Nerdiness is a big part of manliness.

At the end of his boy scout campout, Joel observes

All I need to do is take my natural nerdiness and apply it to stuff I'm not interested in. The happiest thing I learned this weekend is that nerdiness is a big part of manliness: learning battle dates, perfecting martial arts moves, memorizing NFL passing percentages, knowing a lot of knots even though the only one you really need is the "shoelace knot."

2. Men control their emotions.

Controlling your emotions separates children from adults, and all of us from the British... Repression isn't simply civilized; it's the mechanism to express dignity, honor, respect, and self-discipline. It's not that you shouldn't let people know how you feel; it's that you should decide how and when you express it.

3. Men appreciate and pursue beauty.

Possibly my favorite section of the book.

In the midst of his (hilarious) attempts to restore an ancient, dilapidated house with his father-in-law, Joel gains a new appreciation for Ken's manliness:

I thought Ken was just clueless, taking on projects without thinking them through. But that's not it. Ken knows this house isn't going to make him any money. He knows he's never going to live here. He's doing this because he sees something ugly that he can turn into something beautiful. It is, structurally, a great old house. That's what Ken sees, not value or practicality. He sees beauty everywhere.

4. Men put others first.

I thought it was just good leadership, making others feel important. But it's more than that: It's humility. It's not needing to express everything you feel immediately, because you're not the most important person.

Initially, Joel couldn't wrap his head around the self-sacrificial ethic embodied by the firefighters and marines he befriended. But he came to understand the value of living for something bigger than yourself.

5. Men contribute, they don't complain.

Joel learned more than he expected in Boot Camp

While they were discussing Joel's quest, a marine who lost a day of leave to someone else's mistake observed,

If you want to be a man, you have to be thankful for what you have.

This attitude of contentedness, of working hard and getting a job done, not complaining when things don't go your way, feeds into that same self-sacrificial attitude that had baffled Joel. But the more men he surrounded himself with, the more he saw the value of the code – even one that was largely unspoken.

There are ideals far more valuable than personal success. Our culture might celebrate power, money, and fame, but that's not what they talk about at your funeral. Honorable conduct, even unrecognized, is its own reward.

Joel, Lazlo and the Lambo

This drive to contribute, to make the world a better place in your own small way, resonated with Joel. It resonates with me. While so many in our culture pursue the American Dream, personal fulfillment at any cost, Joel learns that some things – like virtue and character – are more important.

Happiness is overrated. Most of the experiences that have made my life better have been hard and unpleasant.

What I found fascinating is that none of the qualities of manhood Joel outlines is an explicitly masculine virtue.

What we really witness in *Man Made* is a devastating critique of our culture masked by Joel's self-deprecation and wit. He exposes the adolescence of our selfish, self-possessed life. We're tempted to miss the maturity that lies at the heart of much that is traditionally masculine. It's easier to write it all off as old-

fashioned.

But we'd do better to learn with Joel and grow up a bit.

Bottom Line: *Man Made* by Joel Stein is a fun, hilarious read that peppers in enough poignant observations on character to be worth your time.

Ryan says

In *Man Made*, Stein decides to try traditionally masculine things like camping and fire fighting so that he can be a better father, husband, and man.

Because the book is so episodic in nature, readers are likely to find at least some of the book interesting. My favorite sequences may have been the discussions of fire fighting and drinking scotch. I haven't taken up drinking scotch, but I guess I'll put it on my to-do list. And I also like the idea of joining a volunteer fire department. Oh -- I also thought the day trading chapter was pretty good.

For the most part, the discussions and the experiments are pretty lite. To experience the outdoors, Stein goes camping with boy scouts for one weekend. So this book lacks the credibility of Bryson's *A Walk in the Woods* or Strayed's *Wild* -- both of which, I know, have been mocked by some hardcore hikers.

Joel Stein's *Quest for Masculinity* is pretty stupid, and it would have been better if Stein had ditched the fratboy humor. I listened to the audiobook (read by the author) while on a road trip, and it was good often enough that I never thought I should abandon it.

Amy says

Exponentially better--funnier and more touching--than I expected. Stein undermines stereotypes about American men as he rides with L.A. firefighters, goes turkey hunting in Vermont, joins a Chicago day-trading firm, drives a Lamborghini around Beverly Hills, helps his father-in-law take the roof off a house, etc.

"Real men" aren't the obnoxious, hyper-competitive loudmouths I'd expected him to be spending time with. Over and over Stein meets "real men" who have a calm self-confidence, a comfort in their own skin. He first sees this in Wiggles, an 11-year-old fellow camper on a Boy Scout trip.

Stein describes the funny things people do without making fun of the people themselves. He mocks himself without mercy, but I really didn't see anything "snide" in his humor. Sure, he's witty and sharp, but his tone is warm and affectionate.

This is really a book about being a new father. Stein's quest to be a good father is the book's framework. Funny when he seems to feel out-manned by his toddler, who turns every object, even a jar of mustard, into a truck. Humbling when he realizes that, when he's unsure of what to do, he adopts his own father's body language, so he'd better literally stand like the man he wants his son to be.

A very funny read for anyone age 30+, and could be an especially nice gift for a new parent.

Alexander Matyasko says

The idea behind this book is quite unique and interesting - the guy about to become a dad and wants to be a better man for his son. In his adventure, he explores male stereotypes. However, there are not much on content or things and more on his personality. If anything this book made me feel much more manly and confident, as this guy is a total "wimp". Let me explain. It is hard to sympathize him as he is almost 38 and he gets an itch that his new-born son has a bigger penis and already more manly than him. Yeah, satire, but repeating this joke throughout make this guy so insecure.

The idea as it says in the title is quite stupid. And after getting more in mainly stuff he finally finds out about what really makes men men. It is not about what things we are doing - firefighter, boy-scouting, army - and more about qualities and principles we have in life. I like this second part of the book.

Summing up, it is hard for me to rate this book and understand people who just couldn't finish it. I wanted to give up on it at the beginning which I would rate 2 stars. The author recovers towards the end of the book with 4 stars. So on average, I would rate this book 3 stars.

Shawn Stone says

Anyone who's read Peter McCallister's Manthropology would be well acquainted with the science behind the physical degeneration of the modern male. For those with lingering doubts, they need only look at the depiction of males in contemporary pop culture to truly see how far the bar has been lowered as to what it means to be male. That or read this book.

Joel Stein is the personification and a walking, self deprecating punch line for the joke that western men have devolved to. Stein, learning that he's going to become a father embarks on a quest to discover the lost art of being a man in a society hell bent on the suppression of traditional masculinity.

Like surviving pockets of manhood in a post-apocalyptic world of feminists and gender studies graduates, Stein seeks out various subcultures of men in the hope that some of their masculine energy will transfer to him via imitation and osmosis. He embeds himself in week long stints with firefighters, corporate day traders; he goes turkey hunting, drills with the US army, drives a Lamborghini and spars with UFC legend, Randy Couture.

It's a book that's supposed to be funny, but it's written in that bumbling, self deprecating shtick popular with noone else in the world except Americans. Instead it made me physically sick to realise that people in the world like this aren't just stock caricatures created for the purpose of humour, but they actually exist and even worse, reproduce. I weep for the future.

Malin Friess says

After Joel Stein (humor columnist for Time Magazine) finds out he is having a son he goes through a crisis of gender identity. How can I raise a son? How am I going to teach him how to throw a football, put up a tent, catch a fish, fix a car, roof a house.

Joel begins his quest to become a man by spending a weekend camping with Boy Scouts, renting a Lamborghini, trading 100,000 dollars on the stock market, roofing a house with his father-in law, going through boot camp with the US army, doing a 24 hour shift with the NY Fire Department, and getting into the ring with IFC Hall of Kick boxer. Randy Couture.

After recently having my first son (after 2 previous girls)..Joel's comical musings hit home. What if Oliver wants to learn to fish? What if Oliver wants to hunt deer with a gun? What if Oliver wants to change the oil on my car? I can't teach him any of these things.

In the end Joel discovers that he couldn't shoot a Turkey even if he had a bead on it, he'd rather turn the channel during the superbowl, he could never run into a burning building like a fireman, he could not go 2 rounds with a cage fighter, and if there were a military draft he would rather go to jail. Joel finds out he will really never be a man..but that's Ok. His son Lazlo seems to like reading, going to Starbucks, and avoiding conflict with other kids at all costs.

5 stars. Joel Stein is one of the funniest writers I have ever read! Expect some salty language and a lot of sexual jokes.

Mark says

"These are precisely the conversatoins I wanted to have as a man. Ones in which my wife cowers in fear and I lean over, put my arms around her, and taunt her for her fears."

Full of rape jokes, reinforcing gender stereotypes, and painfully stupid content. Offensive and not worth your time. I was hoping this would be a book humorously poking fun at stereotypes and expectations of masculinity, but instead it was a book written by a man who aspires to fit into every one of those stupid stereotypes possible, where the jokes are at the expense of women and anyone who doesn't fit into society's expectations for traditional masculine behavior. Anyone who has done any kind of gender studies will find this book painful to read and will want to throw it at a wall before they even get to page 20.

Mark says

Joel Stein has accomplished a rare feat: hilariously skewering almost every tired trope, every caricaturish trait, every predictably macho activity — and coming away from his experiences with a profound, humbled appreciation for every honorable aspect of being a man, a husband, and a father. Self-deprecatingly playing down the courage it took to do everything he did to prove himself "masculine", he comes to find a peaceful harmony between stereotypes and individualism. He even comes to renewed love and appreciation for his father, for whom he'd always assumed he'd been a disappointing son. Highly recommended.

Heather says

I have long been a sort of casual fan of Joel Stein, as in whenever I would come across his articles/visage I would be reminded that I thought he was both funny and cute. But I never went on a proper Joel Stein search in a way where I would reliably realize, oh he writes a weekly column for X and then follow that, or find him on fB or twitter or whatever. But you get the point.

Anyhow, heard/saw somewhere he had a book out, so I put it on my list and finally just downloaded the audio and was reminded again, 'This guy is funny.' As in, so funny and such a good write that he consistently exceeds my expectations. He is really someone to be lauded. He's very talented.

Man Made is a memoir about how when he found out his wife was having a boy he freaked out that he wasn't manly enough to be someone's dad and went on a quest to learn some of the man skills he thought he might need in order to properly teach/bond with his son. It's sort of similar to the concepts behind the AJ Jacobs type of books, except this one didn't have the rigid 'in a year' type framework Jacobs often uses. And it's 1000xs funnier and better and more interesting. Except for that.

First, as I said, Stein is really just a terrific writer. Really easily humorous, with sort of a slightly less showy Nora Ephron quality about him (not that she was showy; she was fabulous). And unlike Jacobs, he has less of a whiny nerdy quality, and more of a Jewish Bill Bryson thing where the stuff he is horrified by is funny and not like, Jesus grow a pair! I think this is due to his strong ability with the self-deprecating humor, which I find a good salve for a lot of flaws. And his aforementioned cuteness.

My fave part might have been the bit where he tried to learn how to do household chores from his father in law. My least fave (being the adamant dog owner that I am) is where he had a dog for a couple of weeks -- not surprisingly I have a thinner skin when people want to go into detail about every which way that animals are disgusting. And I was weirdly disappointed in his family that they all decided not to even think about keeping the dog, even though he weirdly seemed to actually like her - the walking/hiking part with her especially. But this is no shock if you know me.

Anyhow, great, fun book. Terrific if you have any interest in humor memoirs, issues of what or what doesn't define manliness, or just listening to reading to fun things that will soar by like candy.

Also: I did the audiobook, which I highly recommend. He read it and did a fantastic job, and I think definitely it contributed to my enjoyment. I basically just listened to it straight for a few days until it was done.

Kristine says

Joel Stein's book is a humorous recounting of his quest to become a masculine man by taking on in small trials boy-scouting, hunting, mixed martial arts, and the Army and Marines among other adventures. In a book like this it either works or it doesn't depending on how funny you find it. It's not going to be about the writing or the style. Maybe about how interesting you find the subject matter too, but basically it's successful only if you find it funny. It's completely subjective. Well I found the first chapter about camping with scouts

laugh-out-loud, tears-in-my-eyes funny, but the rest? Well. . . not so funny, but sometimes interesting and just as often boring and frequently repulsive. I don't know how that translates into a starred rating for the book.

Joshua Allman says

I laughed out loud at least ten times reading this book. And then Stein made me think a lot about male spaces and what it means to be a man in modern America. As a reader, I enjoyed every minute of Stein's humor, his honesty, and his vulnerability. Highly recommended.

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