

{CONTENT WARNING}

Please note that the following article deals with potentially sensitive material including adolescent sexuality and parental sexual abuse. For your convenience, this is also the *last* piece in the issue, so if you'd prefer not to engage with this subject matter, feel free to close the magazine at this page!

-Sincerely, the Editorial Team

THE BIRDS AND THE BEES

BARBARA LEIGH COONEY

My prepubescent siblings and I were roughhousing with our stepfather when he suddenly whimpered off to the bedroom. Apparently my sister had inadvertently 'kicked him in the balls'. My parents thought this was an opportune moment to introduce human anatomy and sex, AKA the Birds and the Bees. So the five of us gathered around to have our imaginations thoroughly blown by my mother's loving explanation of male erection and its magical, perfect fit inside the female vagina. A beautiful, poetic expression of love. Of course, our incredulous response was a resounding Eeewwwww!

Fast forward a few years to age 14. I fell for a guy, Danny, I'd met at a dance, and we had one date. Someone's parents were out of town and we used a vacant bedroom. He was 16, the same age as my best friend who had grossed me out with descriptions of 'French' kissing where tongues probed inside one another's mouths. Alongside Danny in the vacant bed, I was apprehensive but hopelessly swooned. We spent endless hours blissfully hugging, tentatively touching

fingers, closing eyes, and enjoying intensely electrifying kisses with closed lips. Pure ecstasy! So this was what love was all about...

Moving forward one week later, I traveled to rural Delaware to visit my birthfather and his new family comprising two daughters: an infant and 3-year old. I adored my stepmother, but feared my unpredictable, often inappropriate, alcoholic father. The highlight of visits was traversing local estuaries on his boat, presumably to fish, as the soothing waterways allowed my spirit to soar. This time he asked me to refinish the wood on his small fishing boat as it sat on a trailer in the field. Sanding and varnishing throughout the day, my heart was overflowing as I basked in fond memories and hopeful expectations, dreaming of again softly touching lips with my new love.

Did I mention my father was an alcoholic? Then no surprise that he was drinking and beginning to taunt me. In the past, my stepmother could diffuse most of my discomfort, but now she was occupied by an

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infant and a toddler. By the time we'd eaten dinner, he was predictably obnoxious, totally smashed and sloppy. Sitting on the sofa, he plopped down beside me, leaned in close and slurred, "Has your mother taught you about the Birds and the Bees?"

I was never comfortable communicating with this father, but THIS topic was waaay beyond my comfort level. In fear, I barely nodded yes. "Well, I'm going to show you!" And he quickly thrust his raunchy, stale, disgusting tongue into my mouth! His hands were all over my body, aggressively pinching my breasts and poking into my crotch. I couldn't squirm away. I got some reprieve when he paused to dictate his plan for the evening: he would teach me all I needed to know, but we had to keep it all top secret. Since my sleeping space was the sofa, he would pretend to fall asleep as I went to put on my PJs. My stepmother would grow weary of trying to awaken him, and would resign to leave him on the sofa. Then we would have all night for lewd lessons...

I waited in a small, darkened dressing room, terrified, sickened from his aggressive violations to my body. Crying and shaking, I longed to fade away, totally disappear. I contemplated running away into the surrounding fields.

Thankfully, my loyal and loving stepmother did not give up. She continued to call him,

telling him that I was waiting for him to get off the sofa so I could go to sleep. He finally did stagger his way to bed, and my stepmother made sure I safely returned to the sofa. I lay trembling, reeling from the sting of his Bees and Birds. Needless to say, I didn't sleep much, fearing his return, fully dressed and shoed, plotting my escape route if I heard him approach.

He did return in the pre-dawn light, awakening me for our scheduled boating adventure to fish. I silently, begrudgingly followed him into the car. He noticed my fear and apprehension and actually sheepishly apologized for his behavior the prior night. So he was sorry. Is this what love is all about?

I never spoke to Danny again. I suppose I felt too tainted, or simply my bubble was burst, my psyche stung. I was definitely confused about love and wished his tongue had been the first to probe my virgin lips, not my father's (may he rest in peace).
