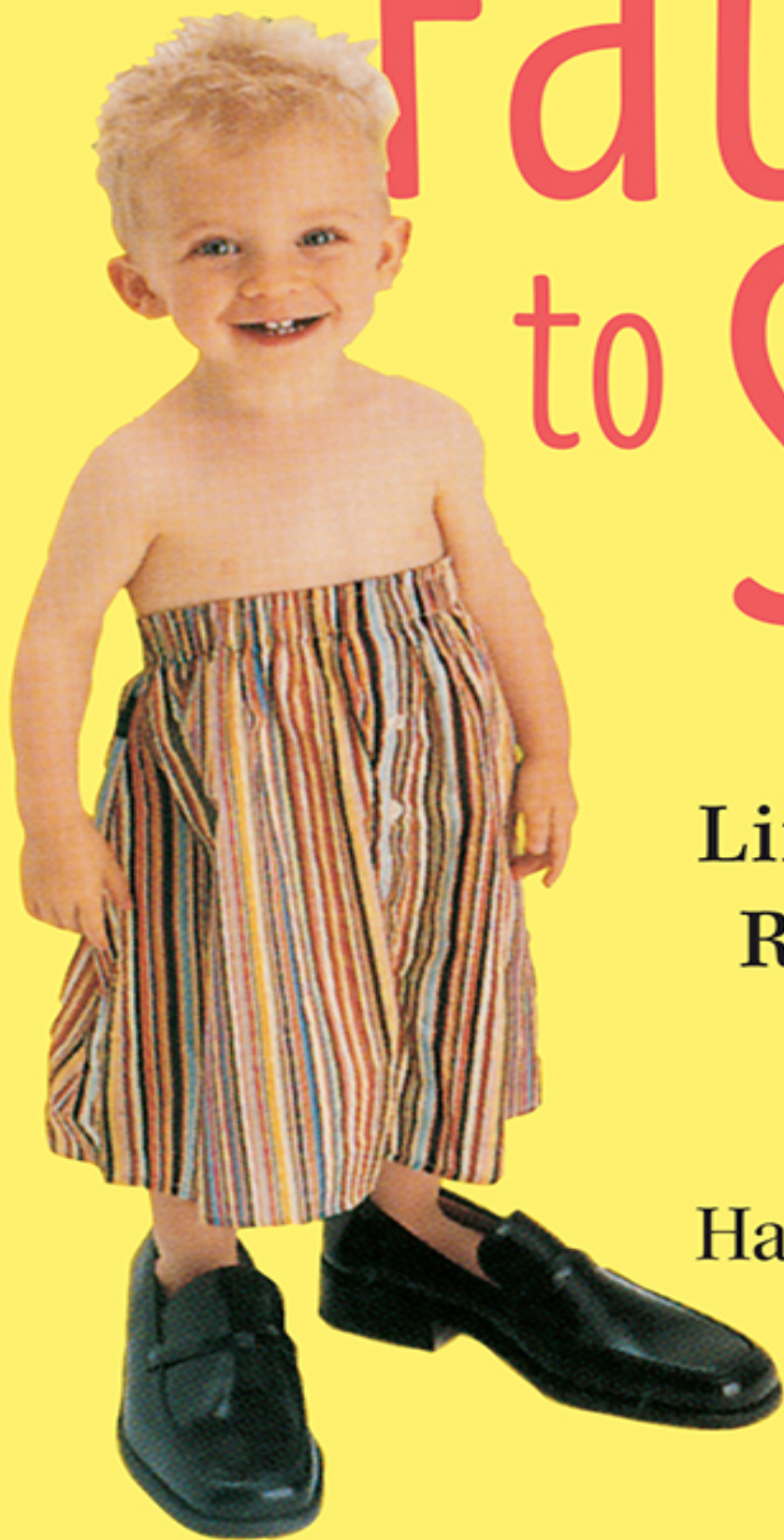


THE MULTIMILLION-COPY SERIES

Father to Son

Life Lessons on
Raising a Boy

Harry H. Harrison Jr.



Dedication

Sage and Field taught me everything I know. Melissa made it all possible.

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The Five Keys

Turning a boy into a man is a man's job. Since the beginning of time, it's been up to a father to make his son responsible. Kind. Courageous. Honorable. A young boy doesn't come with instructions. He just comes with boundless love and an adventurous spirit. But the journey to manhood begins very early . . . the first time he looks at his dad and thinks, "I want to be like him."

1. Be around.
2. Be his father, not his friend. If you don't understand the difference, imagine his confusion when you must discipline him.
3. Be a good husband. Show his mom respect at all times.
4. Be home for dinner.
5. Be his hero.

Little Boys



Treasure your time with your son.

Teach him to keep a secret.

Show him how to eat an Oreo. This is a skill that will serve him for his entire life.

Set strict bedtimes for him as he grows up. Boys need their sleep.

Makes sure he knows his full name, address, and his parents' names and phone numbers. Many four-year-olds only know their father's name is "Daddy."

Take him for walks and introduce him to the world of bugs.

Read to him nightly. He'll love it.

Don't let him sleep in your bed, even if he's scared or sick. Sleep on the floor in his room.

Make an effort to give up drinking and smoking. If he never sees his dad doing those things, they will hold less mystery for him.

Teach him how to plant a flower. It involves three things boys love—dirt, digging, and garden hoses.

Teach him to ride a two-wheel bike. It means freedom. Jog alongside.

Accept the fact that he just might play with dolls. It's no big deal.

Ask him what he did today. Listen.

Show him how to clean his room. Little boys don't just absorb this through osmosis.

Encourage the joy of learning.

Teach him how to dial 911 and when and why.

Buy him something to hang from—a jungle gym or climbing bars.
Something.

Show him how to throw a punch. Then raise him to never start a fight. And teach him to walk away from one.

Take him on hikes and show him how to ford a stream. Let him get wet and dirty.

Display his artwork in your office. Even that weird ashtray thing.

Let him hang out with you. Remember, he has a need to be around you, to learn what being a man is all about.

An unhappy boy is often one who is hungry or tired. Or both.

Turn off the TV, turn off the lights, give him a flashlight, and make up stories at night. He won't be able to get enough.

Meet him for lunch at his school. Talk to him about what he's learned.

Talk to him about drugs and alcohol early, from the time he's about five years old. Because if you don't, somebody else will.

Eat breakfast with him. This is how he learns about getting up and going to work.

Take him to a theme park. Ride the rides his mom wouldn't dream of getting on. (At some point, of course, neither will you. Strike while the heart is healthy.)

If you buy him Superman pajamas, count on him launching himself off counters, chairs, bunk beds—and sometimes onto you.

Make sure he learns your cell phone number. Then take his calls. Forever. Even if you're at work.

Teach him magic.

Teach him not to litter.

Remind him often to put the seat up. Then to put the seat down. Then to flush.

Teach him to throw up in the toilet, not on your bed. Many boys will stagger past two bathrooms only to destroy your bedroom.

Teach him to return what he borrows.

Let him learn the joys of chocolate chip cookie dough.

Reassure him he won't die if he bleeds a little.

Take your son to work with you every now and then. Pay as much attention to him as you do to other people in the office.

Tell him that sometimes you're wrong.

Race him. You'll never forget the day he beats you.

Give him responsibility.

Don't let the TV be a babysitter.

Make sure he knows he's always safe at home.

Buy him a pet only when he's ready to take care of it. It will teach him to care about something other than himself.

Praise him often.

Teach him to compliment others.

Don't tolerate temper tantrums. Not now. Not when he's fifteen. Because the world won't.

Scream at him and you will raise a screamer.

Teach him not to hurt others.

Don't let him quit out of frustration. He won't learn anything.

His favorite game for a long, long time will be playing with you. Be available. Even when you're tired. Even when the presentation went south. Be available.

Encourage him to go barefoot.

Remember that with today's technology, you can still tell him good-night, face-to-face, even if you're on the other side of the world.

Teach him to lock his bike.

Teach him not to be afraid of animals, but to respect them.

Ask him who his heroes are. These are the people he'll copy.

Talk to him about what he wants to be when he grows up. Don't be alarmed by his answer.

Teach him the wonder of gazing at the moon.

Teach him that every life is precious.

Help him to understand that his word is his bond. And remember, he'll learn from you.

Teach him that if he waters grass, it will grow.

It's a fact of life: Some kids—especially boys—have learning disabilities. If he can't read by the time he's five, have him checked out by a doctor.

Buy him a guinea pig or hamster for his first pet, but don't be surprised when he announces he doesn't know where it is.

Remember, little boys love their grandfathers. No one really knows why.

Without scaring him, talk to him about bad people and what he should do if they approach.

Insist he play outside a lot. It's much healthier than watching TV or spending all day in front of the computer.

Show him how to pop a wheelie.

Never forget that it's impossible to hug or cuddle or kiss a young boy too much.

Remember, boys are like lion cubs: They show their affection by hugging, wrestling, and rolling around on top of each other.

Don't fight his fights.

Never tell him boys don't cry. Ask him why he's crying.

Teach him to clean up his own messes. A lot of eighteen-year-olds still have their moms cleaning up after them.

Allow him to believe in Santa Claus. And the Easter Bunny. And the Tooth Fairy. Promote the sense of wonder. He'll never stop looking for it.

Leave the office early to play with him.

Teach him to share with his little brother. (This may take a few years. Well,
a lot of years.)

Give him piano lessons, but realize he may want to switch to guitar one day.
Or drums.

Realize there are some things you can't teach him.

Let him watch you shave. This is when he begins to put two and two
together.

Teach him to respect authority, but not to be in awe of it.

Encourage him to make friends with the white boy, the black boy, and the
Chinese kid who doesn't speak a word of English.

If you spend time with him and his friends when he's young, he won't think
twice about you being around them when he's older.

Teach him the joys of peanut butter and honey.

Show him how to tie a tie and how to polish his shoes.

Remember—the values you teach him now are those he'll hold as a
teenager.

Check his homework nightly. Don't leave this totally up to his mom. He'll see how important his studying is to you.

Even if you can, don't buy him everything.

Remember, bullying him is a guaranteed way to raise a bully.

Teach him how to find his way home.

Don't criticize his mistakes. Criticize his lack of effort.

Teach him to spit. He'll practice it all day.

Take him for doughnuts on Saturday morning. Let his mom sleep late.

Realize that by the time he's ten, he'll be more adept on the computer than you are. And you won't know how it happened.

Share a big plate of ribs. The messier the better.

Teach him never to be afraid to try new things.

Boys & Sports



Don't forget that when you're a kid, the point of sports is to have fun.

Realize that while he's young, one of your son's favorite things about organized sports will be the uniform. Let him wear it to school.

Try not to miss his games. A boy loves playing in front of his dad and hearing him cheer. He'll always ask, "Did you see me?"

Celebrate after every game.

Show him how to put a baseball in a new glove and wrap a belt around it.

Teach him how to throw a curveball.

Take him fishing. If he actually catches something, it will be the thrill of his young life.

Take him to the golf course and teach him to play. Even if he's three. Be patient.

Remember that little boys get distracted by bugs and dirt and lots of other stuff even while a game is happening all around them. Yelling will not change this.

If you find yourself yelling at him or the referee, take a book to the games and go sit far away from everyone else. They'll think you're a bit odd, but your son will appreciate it.

If his coach is a screamer, find another team. If you're the coach, retire.

Teach him how to swim. If you don't know how, send him for lessons.

Show him how to lift weights.

Take him to hockey games. Boys love the fights (totally politically incorrect, but a fact).

Make him carry his own athletic bag.

Take him horseback riding. (It might be a fifteen-year-old, three-legged mare, but he'll remember a white stallion.)

Do not criticize him after his games. He knows exactly what he did. His coach will criticize him. He needs a father to support him.

Practice with him and he will get better. This goes for anything . . . including math.

Don't think he'll turn pro because he scores more often than other kids. On the other hand, don't think he's destined for a life of geekdom just because he's the worst player. Either way, the odds are he'll be exactly average by the time he's seventeen.

Read the sports section with him. (Reading is reading.)

Keep in mind, if his soccer (or baseball or basketball or any sports) team is more important to you than it is to him, something is wrong. With you.

Three things to remember if he brings home a skateboard: Don't laugh at him. Don't criticize him. Don't get on it.

Teach him how to lose without losing it. And how to win without acting like he's never won before.

Do not tolerate poor sportsmanship from him. If you do, the habit will stay with him for the rest of his life.

Tell him "no pass, no play." Even if it means he misses the regional soccer playoff.

Teach him that just because he isn't the best at something, doesn't mean he can't enjoy it.

Accept the fact that he may not be a quarterback. He may be a tuba player. And a fine one at that.

Boys & Spirituality



Remember, your primary duty as a father is to develop your son's spiritual well-being.

Teach him the difference between being lonely and being alone.

Teach him that success in the face of adversity is the greatest success of all.

Teach him that self-esteem can only be achieved by achieving.

Talk to him about God, about Jesus, about Moses, about spiritual leaders often. Start when he's young and he won't be shy talking about them as a teenager.

Remember, if you can't talk to your son about God, then you've never really talked to him.

Take him to Sunday school or Hebrew school or a religious school regularly. He'll say he doesn't like it. But one day you'll notice you have an outstanding teenager who still insists he doesn't like religious school.

Pray together as a family, then teach him to pray on his own.

When he's confronted with a serious problem, encourage him to ask God for help in solving it.

Teach him that God answers every prayer. Sometimes with a no.

Teach him God can be trusted.

Teach him to pray for his enemies.

Teach him to believe that as he gives to the world, so the world will give back to him.

Teach him to give anonymously.

Teach him to treat each day as holy.

Teach him that he can spend an hour complaining about his problems to friends, who can't do a thing about them, or an hour talking to God. Who can.

Teach him that self-pity is a waste of time.

Be prepared for him to come home one day a complete agnostic.

Teach him that forgiving someone isn't a weakness, but the height of selfishness—because it makes you feel so much better.

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Boys & Money



Give your son an allowance based on his age and the chores he performs.
Realize he'll always want more.

Teach him how to negotiate for a raise.

Buy him a wallet. Then tell him that whether it's empty or full is up to him.

Teach him nothing is free.

Never be afraid to say, "We can't afford it."

Teach him that if he wants something badly enough, that is a reason to go to
work.

If he needs it, loan him money. Make him pay you back.

Teach him to save. Help him open a savings account.

Teach him to wait for sales.

A young boy loses things. A teen who loses things and is made to do without them learns not to lose things.

Teach him that people who value expensive brands too much have lost their sense of values.

Teach him that if you can't buy the best, buy the best value.

When he's twelve, help him buy a small amount of stock with his own money. Think of the rewards he'll reap if he keeps that up for fifty years.

Teach him to pay his bills promptly.

Teach him how to read a financial page. If you don't know how, learn with him.

Insist he get a job by age fifteen. The fact that he doesn't like it is the last reason not to make him do it.

Show him how to write a check and balance a checkbook. He'll say he knows how, but he really doesn't.

Teach him not to make a bet that he can't settle.

Give him a credit card and teach him to use it only in emergencies.

Teach him to stay on a budget. If he's not a math genius, there are plenty of free, secure online tools to help him do this.

Teach him to never pay list price for an automobile.

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Boys & Girls



Let your son know you're as confused about women as he is.

Be sure to meet his girlfriends.

Remind him that it doesn't matter if she doesn't have a curfew. He does.

Treat his girlfriends with respect. Make sure he does.

Don't embarrass him when it comes to girls, although often just your being alive will be embarrassing enough. Still, when he goes to parties, have no qualms about calling to see if the parents will be home.

When you drive him on dates, make sure he gets out of the car to get his girlfriend. You'd be amazed how many boys still think they can just honk and she'll come running.

Think before you react to the notes you find on his desk, the text messages on his phone, or the emails in his computer. It could be something—or nothing at all.

Talk to him frankly about sex. And your expectations of him.

Hug and kiss his mother often in front of him. He'll act disgusted, but ignore him.

Never criticize his mother in front of him. Never, never, never.

Teach him to compliment his mother's cooking. Even when it's liver and onions.

Realize you can't mend his broken heart. You can feed it, however.

Encourage him to ask out that blonde.

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Older Boys



Teach him to set goals. Start small. For many teenage boys, just setting the alarm clock is a goal.

Don't let him play Madden NFL for four hours and believe he's been exercising.

Teach him to wash and fold his laundry.

Remind him that school isn't a place for self-expression. It's a place for learning.

Show him your high school yearbook so that both of you will know how goofy you once looked.

Drive him and his friends to the movies. It's a way of learning who his friends are.

Teach him he has to earn people's respect. Starting with yours.

Talk to him about his dreams. And about yours.

Let him fail. He'll never grow up otherwise.

Teach him that he can learn as much from failure as he can from success.

Teach him that there's a direct correlation between studying and good grades.

Teach him that most everything is okay in moderation. Including moderation.

Listen to him when he talks—all evening, if that's what he wants.

Remember, he's watching how you treat your family.

Give him responsibility. It separates boys from men.

Don't defend the stupid things he does. If you do, he'll learn he can get away with stupidity. Hold him accountable.

Teach him respect for books.

Teach him how to barbecue a steak. This is a rite of passage.

Make him laugh. Trade jokes.

Hug him before bedtime every night. Even when he's eighteen.

Tell him often that you love him.

Make sure he spends time around his aunts and uncles, cousins, and grandparents. He may not like all of them, but he'll develop a love for family.

Teach him to channel his anger.

Teach him that the only way to conquer fear is to confront it.

Remind him often that he's capable of changing the world.

Teach him tolerance.

When he's done something wrong, confront him immediately. Don't worry about hurting his feelings. But after you've chewed him out, it's time for you to get over it.

Don't hold a grudge against him.

Teach him the value of wisdom.

Unfailingly, be kind.

Try not to criticize him in front of his friends.

Make sure his friends know that alcohol and drugs are not welcome in your house.

Put his computer in the family room. No matter what he says, he can get his homework done there.

Don't be alarmed at the music on his iPod. Remember, your music terrified your parents.

Swallow your pride and ask him to program the remote. He'll do it faster and better, and you won't wind up in a bad mood.

Teach him to be on time and to call if he's going to be late. Always.

Teach him the secret to solving even the most complicated problems is to just begin.

Realize a smartphone enables him to access all those websites you won't allow in your house. This is when you have to trust that the morals and values you taught him will kick in.

Stress to him that he has more to learn, whether he's going to college or to a trade school.

At dinner, if he won't tell you about his day, tell him about yours.

Sometimes you will just have to talk to your son about things that will upset him: his behavior, friends using drugs, and so on. This is where a father earns his stripes.

Raise him not to tolerate alcohol or drugs at his parties, and to refuse if offered them at friends' parties. Tell him this does not mean he's a loser. It just means he's smart.

Don't dismiss any dream of his as too big.

Teach him that jealousy serves no purpose but to make him feel bad.

Teach him what's important in life—and it's not a car or the right clothing label or any "thing."

Allow him to wear your clothes, your shoes, your socks as soon as they fit him. When you can no longer find any of your clothes, start borrowing his.

Teach him that no possession is worth stealing.

Teach him how to drive. How to drive downtown. How to drive in the rain. How to drive in the snow.

Show him how to pump gas and check his tires. (You would think he knows, but he doesn't.)

Teach him there are times to stay between the lines. Like on highways.

Teach him to put his car windows up and lock his car at night.

Make his use of the car conditional, based on his grades. He'll become an Einstein.

Teach him to always wear a seat belt.

Encourage him to give things away.

Teach him that men do clean up the kitchen and the house. Every day.

Until he graduates, set curfews and stick to them. When he's a senior, make a more lenient curfew that's conditional upon his grades.

Encourage him to participate in some kind of community service. This is where giving back begins.

Teach him to buy his mother holiday gifts and Mother's Day cards—and as he gets older, to buy them with his own money.

Encourage him to run for student government. He could wind up the president.

Teach him how to look someone in the eye and to shake hands firmly.

Teach him patience, kindness, and tolerance. If you don't, many years from now you'll wish you had.

Teach him nothing that he does—or is going to do—is ever worth lying to you about.

Expect excellence.

Teach him to stand up for what's right, even when everyone else thinks he's wrong. Even you.

Let him face the consequences of his actions. They are the best teachers.

Lower the boom on him if he talks back—to you or to his mother. Stop it in grade school and it won't happen in high school.

Teach him to respect his teachers, his elders, the police, even his crazy aunt. Disrespectful kids go nowhere in life.

Monitor his Internet activity and tell him you'll monitor his cell phone, too.

Be prepared to answer difficult questions without editorial comment.

If you've taught him not to get in a car driven by a drunk, he won't.

Lay down strict rules about drinking and driving. Enforce them religiously. If he does wind up in traffic court (and he might), make sure he dresses nicely and respects the judge.

If he's guilty, do not take his side. He deserves what he's about to get. This could be an opportune time for him to learn about apologies and being cool under pressure.

If he does come in smelling of alcohol, throw the book at him. But that's the only thing.

If he cheats and gets caught, let him face appropriate disciplinary action. At school and at home.

Teach him that to get along in the adult world, he has to look and act like one.

Teach him to floss. It will do wonders for his breath.

Buy him deodorant and the whole house will smell better.

Show him how to shave and how to stem the blood from the nicks with wadded-up pieces of tissue. This could save him a fortune in bloodstained shirts.

Don't get freaked out over his hair. Just insist he wash it.

Know the difference between normal teen behavior and questionable teen behavior. Learn to accept and live with your normal teen.

Teach him that trust is like fine china. Once it's broken, it takes a while to put it back together.

Don't issue an ultimatum you can't live with.

Hang a punching bag in the garage . . . it absorbs a lot of sibling rivalry.

Teach him to stand up straight.

Teach him that there's honor in even a minimum-wage job. He'll learn this quickly if you're not giving him any money.

Tell him to call his boss if he's going to miss work or be late.

Believe in him.

Remember, teenage boys like looking at themselves in the mirror. Every now and then ask him what he sees.

Do push-ups together.

Show him how to gargle. If you don't, your bathroom could be irreparably harmed.

Realize that you can't be everything to him.

Teach him the joy of finishing a job.

Teach him that the world will judge him by his actions, not his intentions.

Remind him to be on time. Always. The world doesn't operate on teenager time.

Don't tolerate his moodiness, and you won't have moods to tolerate.

Teach him that rules—even dumb rules—shouldn't be broken.

Make time to hang out together, just the two of you.

Teach him how to apologize. Saying "sorry" is not the same as saying "I'm sorry."

Tell him to chew with his mouth closed and talk with it open.

Show him how to eat with chopsticks. As well as a fork and knife.

If you go on a business trip, call him. Tell him you miss him. He may not respond, but it will make his day.

Show him how to change a tire. If you don't know how, get someone to teach both of you.

Teach him that reckless people usually end up doing more damage to others than to themselves.

Teach him that true independence means he pays.

Assure him that having a clean room doesn't make him a nerd. It just means he can find his underwear.

Encourage him to trust his instincts. If something feels unsafe, it probably is.

Realize that if the two of you do something once, he might think of it as a tradition. (Boys are really weird that way.)

If he's been up late at night and sleeps past noon, wake him up and give him something to do.

Teach him that the only constant thing in life is change.

Teach him not to judge a book by its cover. Or a girl by her looks.

Teach him to read the instructions.

Teach him that it's possible to work too hard.

Teach him that the solution to most problems isn't a pill.

Teach him that there's no harm in failure, only in the failure to try.

Show him how to use a hammer, a screwdriver, and a saw.

Teach him not to burn his bridges.

Teach him to treasure his friends.

Teach him to ask for help.

Show him how to read a map.

Teach him to be kind.

Teach him that he's in charge of his own destiny.

Teach him that there is nothing to fear but fear itself.

Teach him how to iron.

Teach him not to hold on to anything too tightly.

Teach him that appearances do matter.

Teach him to reach for the stars.

Promise you'll always be there for him.

Tell him to never give up.

Teach him to call his mom.

In the end, let him go.

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About the Author

Harry H. Harrison Jr. is also the author of *Father to Son*. He is the coauthor of *Mother to Son* and *Mother to Daughter*, written with his wife, Melissa Harrison. The Harrisons have two children and live in Texas.

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