



ON CATHOLIC EDUCATION SEX ED HUMILIATION

By Meegan Thompson

It was pretty clear to us seventh-graders that Mr. Wright was a virgin. Tall and lanky, he resembled some of the pimply teenagers who had been placed in his charge. As a 22-year-old graduate of a Catholic university, Mr. Wright had returned with his bachelor's degree and a teaching certificate to St. Pat's, where he had spent eight years as a student less than a decade earlier. His appearance could at best be described as "unfortunate." But we weren't concerned with social decorum or being polite. To us, Mr. Wright – with his un-hemmed pants, vinyl jackets, and perpetually botched shaving job – was a "dork," a "total nerd," and someone who "like, so obviously never had a girlfriend."

He must be a virgin, we decided. He had acne *and* he was Catholic, neither of which could have helped him get laid. But then again, he was also a full-

grown man, one who had been to college. We had seen *Animal House*. Lots of beer drinking and premarital sex took place on university campuses.

There were thirty of us in seventh grade, the boys in navy slacks, the girls in green plaid skirts. My friends and I spent our lunchtimes discussing topics such as who had and had not gotten her period yet, and whether Emily and Scott had *really* French kissed behind the hedge. Kate sometimes snuck her mother's copy of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* to school, and we read aloud certain passages, imagining what it would be like to be grown up and to go all the way (preferably with someone who looked like Christian Slater). It was during one of the readings of this book that we discovered what oral sex really was; Emily had once whispered to me in math class that it referred to people who talked a lot while they were doing it, and I had

accepted that definition without question.

The topic of “doing it” was a prized one for us. Sexual intercourse was so foreign, so veiled in euphemisms and brush-offs by our parents that it was hard to know what to think. The limited knowledge I possessed had been obtained through teen girl magazines and weekly doses of *Beverly Hills, 90210*. In seventh grade, though, the fact that we were no longer little kids was acknowledged even by the school. Seventh graders were deemed mature enough to take sex ed.

To our disappointment, the majority of our sex ed class consisted of lessons about testosterone and estrogen and age-appropriate dating etiquette. When we started, I was certain that I knew more about sex than Mr. Wright – I did subscribe to *YM*, after all – even though he was a grown man and I was a twelve-year-old girl whose experience was limited to games of Spin the Bottle.

Our sex ed textbook was a thin paperback that focused mainly on describing different kinds of love as defined by the ancient Greeks, and how beautiful sexual intercourse within a marriage was when used for procreation. Sexual desire was likened to “an itch that you want to scratch” – but which we humans are able to resist because we are different from animals. The good stuff – diagrams of the male and female reproductive systems and a description of the sex act itself – was at the end of the book. Each week, the topics we studied became more and more titillating, building up to the thrilling finale.

That day finally came.

We took out our books and looked at Mr. Wright eagerly.

He cleared his throat several times and glanced at the clock. Just as he did when teaching fractions or parts of speech, he used an overhead projector.

We started with the female anatomy.

“These are the fallopian tubes,” he mumbled, with a tap of his red pen, “and these are the ovaries,” he continued, as if we couldn’t read the labels ourselves.

I saw Conner pass a note to Carson, out of the corner of my eye.

“A new egg is released every twenty-eight days,” continued Mr. Wright, quietly. He stared straight ahead, through the windows overlooking the

playground. “Unfertilized eggs result in menstruation.”

Carson snickered. The boys in our class thought menstruation was a big joke. Mr. Wright ignored him.

“This pear-shaped object is the uterus.”

Carson raised his hand.

“It is also sometimes referred to as the womb.”

Mr. Wright glanced at Carson, and then quickly looked back at the overhead projector. Carson waved his hand.

“The uterus is several centimeters in diameter but expands during pregnancy.” He paused as he reached for the next slide.

“Mr. Wright!” said Carson, giving up on the hand. “Can I ask you a quick question?”

Mr. Wright looked at Carson in defeat.

“Go ahead,” he said, nervously. His eyebrow twitched.

“I was just wondering if you could tell us how it feels,” he said. “You know, when intercourse happens. Like what it *feels* like inside there.”

We froze. On the one hand, it was a perfectly valid question about the topic being discussed. But there was something about the way it had been phrased. Carson had just asked Mr. Wright what could be construed as a very personal question, a question we desperately wanted to know if he was qualified to answer. Mr. Wright

c o u g h e d . He opened his mouth and closed it. His eyes darted around the room. “That’s a good question,

Carson,” he said, finally. “And the answer is...well, the answer is that, uh, it’s just kind of, well. Basically it’s just kind of dark and wet up there.”

No one moved.

Then it was Carson who broke the silence. “Ewww!” he groaned, revolted. “That is really *sick!*”

The rest of the boys, concurring with Carson’s judgment of the female anatomy, joined in with their expressions of contempt, laughing and pointing at the girls. We sat there uncomfortably, fidgeting with our pens and inspecting our fingernails, feeling their stares. Mr. Wright told the boys to pipe down, that there was nothing funny about what he had just said. But nobody ever listened to Mr. Wright.

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