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Boy in the Ivy: The Inner Child of a Buried Man

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*For Gracia  
and the kids*

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[INTRODUCTION:  
WHY YOU JUST MIGHT WANT TO READ THIS BOOK](#)

*Boy in the Ivy: The Inner Child of a Buried Man* is a reflection on the suicide of my brother David in 2009. In the aftermath of that *Boy in the Ivy: The Inner Child of a Buried Man* tragedy, I found myself asking why I hadn't killed myself as well. Like my brother, I'd buried the emotional pain of my childhood in layers of rage, escapism, and disconnection. For years I had lived what Thoreau called a life of silent desperation, a *Boy in the Ivy: The Inner Child of a Buried Man* life characterized by secret worlds, self-loathing, and hopelessness. I had often contemplated suicide as the best way out. In the months that followed my brother's death, however, I came to realize I had taken a further step my brother couldn't or wouldn't: I had asked for help.

And now I know that taking this step is not as easy as it sounds.

According to figures compiled by the Center for Disease Control and the American Association of Suicidology, between thirty thousand and forty thousand Americans kill themselves every year. Roughly three-quarters of American suicides are male; in this country, men kill themselves at a rate of one every twenty *Boy in the Ivy: The Inner Child of a Buried Man* minutes. Further, some experts estimate that for every suicide there are twenty-five attempts. This means that every year more than half a million American men may give some serious thought to killing themselves. For many years, this figure included both my brother and *Boy in the Ivy: The Inner Child of a Buried Man* me.

Predictably, major depression plays a decisive role in suicide. According to [clinical-depression.co.uk](http://clinical-depression.co.uk), major depression is the number one psychological disorder in the Western

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world. One man in ten develops major depression at some point in his life, often experiencing recurring symptoms over a period of years. Some estimates say as many as sixty percent of suicides are a direct result of major depression. A clinical diagnosis of depression is beside the point; feelings of hopelessness were found to be more predictive of suicide risk than a diagnosis of depression *per se*.

In all likelihood, these estimates are far too low. Suicide attempts often go unreported, and many suicides are mistaken for accidents. If depression affects roughly six million American men each year, the vast majority of these will endure their pain in silence. This has implications far beyond these men alone. Suicidologists estimate that for every completed suicide there are six survivors – family members and friends directly impacted by the death of their loved one. Even the most conservative calculus would place the number of suicide survivors in the United States at between four and five million, with more than 200,000 added every year.

Gender is a major factor in suicide. While women attempt suicide three times more often than men, men succeed nearly four times more often than women. There are a variety of reasons for this. Women are most likely to use poison, which is far less efficient than the handguns preferred by men. But most experts agree that a far greater factor is that women are more likely to seek help when dealing with depression and the suicidal thoughts that accompany that mental illness than men.

A great deal has been written about how men are taught to overvalue self-control and that it is 'unmanly' to discuss emotional pain. Mental illness in particular is often treated as a threat to one's masculinity, and most men wait until a partner's insistence or a catastrophic event forces them to seek treatment. Men are more likely to perceive disclosing their pain as creating a stigma that will damage their careers, friendships, and family ties. So they bury their pain in rage, escapist behavior, substance abuse, and disconnection. Every Boy in the Ivy: The Inner Child of a Buried Man single expert on depression asserts that the key to recovery is asking for help. *Ask for help*. But most American men who suffer from depression seem wired to resist this essential first step, often to the Boy in the Ivy: The Inner Child of a Buried Man death.

*Boy in the Ivy* is the memoir of my own struggle with major depression and my journey to a place where Boy in the Ivy: The Inner Child of a Buried Man I could finally ask for help. My own turning point came nine years before my brother's death, when my wife and I bought and rehabbed a house in McLean, Virginia. Sifting through the literal rubble of the previous owners' broken lives forced me to confront and grapple with my own sad past and its impact on my family, my work, and my own mental health. As a result of that experience, I discovered what had obviously eluded my brother and so many men like him: I could find hope and muster the will to make a change. *Boy Boy in the Ivy: The Inner Child of a Buried Man in the Ivy* tells the story of how I reached that decision. My hope is that it will inspire other buried men to do the same.

["Chapter One: Buried"](#) describes my brother's suicide and its aftermath. It introduces the essential concepts of the book: the notion of a "buried man" interred in layers of pain and denial, the difficulties men in particular encounter when trying to discuss or even acknowledge their pain, and how most of us resist even the idea of asking for a way off the path of

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hopelessness and self-destruction. Finally, it asserts the essential premise of the book: in order to overturn his core beliefs that he is somehow broken and undeserving of joy, love, or happiness, a man must confront the pain of his childhood. He must, in other words, seek out and connect to his inner child.

[Chapters two](#) through [five](#) outline some key events of my childhood and the decisions I made about myself in response. These decisions include Boy in the Ivy: The Inner Child of a Buried Man forming the core beliefs that I was unwanted, an essentially bad person, and ultimately the cause of my family's disintegration. These pages also detail the strategies I adopted to conceal my essential worthlessness: my escape into secret worlds, disconnection, and barely contained rage. Through the specific details of my own childhood, I describe a pattern that is virtually universal: the self-interment of the buried man.

[Chapters six](#) through [eleven](#) tell Boy in the Ivy: The Inner Child of a Buried Man Boy in the Ivy: The Inner Child of a Buried Man the story of rehabbing the house in McLean, Virginia. This place had a singularly sad history of its own, including alcoholism, abandonment, and divorce. The detritus of this collapse was conveyed to us, and my wife and I spent the summer of 2000 sifting through the rubble in an effort to transform this house into a home. As I worked, the parallels between the previous family and my own became too obvious to ignore. The patterns of their decline matched my own almost perfectly, and I was surrounded by triggers that brought back my own painful childhood with stunning clarity.

Further, the house offered an astonishing array of metaphors for my own buried state. One of these, a garden statue of a boy I found broken and buried under a deep layer of English ivy, gives the book its title. Before long, I was conscious of my plight, and I realized that unless I made some major changes to my emotional landscape, my own family would be doomed as well. I resisted this knowledge for as long as I could, believing I could insulate my wife and two small children from the poison I carried within, until a rapid succession of events finally gave me the opportunity and impetus to overcome the male code Boy in the Ivy: The Inner Child of a Buried Man of silence and ask for help.

Finally, "[Chapter Twelve](#): Boy in the Ivy: The Inner Child of a Buried Man Digging Out" describes the subsequent steps I took to address the Boy in the Ivy: The Inner Child of a Buried Man root causes of my depression. In order to dismantle my core beliefs about myself, I entered therapy, joined a men's group, and began writing a narrative outline along the lines recommended by Julia Cameron in her book *The Vein Boy in the Ivy: The Inner Child of a Buried Man of Gold*. Finally, I attended a workshop with Terry Real, the relational therapist and bestselling author of *I Don't Want to Talk About It*. There he helped me connect to my inner child and empowered me to write this memoir. It is my hope that my story will serve as an inspiration to men as buried and unconscious as I was, as well as to the people who love them.

Any book that takes ten years to write needs a lot of help. I would like to particularly thank Dr.

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Terry Real, who gave me permission to write this book in the first place. I Boy in the Ivy: The Inner Child of a Buried Man am profoundly grateful to my allies and friendly readers: Annie Klawiter, Scott Grave, and Tim Goodwin. Caroline Leavitt helped with editing and gave me invaluable insights into structure and tone. The Last Monday book club here in Northfield, Minnesota, read a draft and provided crucial feedback and generous encouragement. Finally, this project could never have happened without the constant, loving support of my wife, Gracia and our two children, Rayna and Boy in the Ivy: The Inner Child of a Buried Man Oen, to whom this book is dedicated. They lived much of this stuff with me and, I hope, this may give them some small idea of exactly what the hell was going through my head all those years.

## **Boy In The Ivy The Inner Child Of A Buried Man**

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