

PADMAN

A Dad's
Guide to
Buying...
Those
and other
tales

**Mark
Elswick**



From the Reflections of America Series

Modern History Press

Padman: A Dad's Guide to Buying...Those and Other Tales
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Dedication

This book is dedicated to two groups of people:

First, to Traumatic Brain Injury caregivers who face an unimaginable amount of stress every day.

Second, to the numerous military personnel who put their lives in harm's way so every one of us at home can feel safe and do what we do.

I salute all of you!

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Finally, thank you to the U.S. Military. America salutes you for allowing us to do what we do. **THANK YOU!**

Preface

The reason I have written this book is twofold. First, it is because becoming an author has been a dream of mine for some time. However, due to uncontrollable circumstances, it is obvious that I wasn't able to do it for a long, long time. Now, I feel I am really able to put 100 percent into this, with my 100 percent finally being good enough. Next, and more importantly, this book is about giving back to Traumatic Brain Injury research, patients, and treatment. Answers and treatment plans for this quiet crippler often remain a mystery. Considering the onslaught of TBI cases we are about to see with our returning troops, shouldn't we better understand this injury and be more prepared?

I hope in these pages to entertain you with humorous stories taken from my life, but also to sprinkle in some more serious stories about my traumatic brain incident and other survivor stories. I'll use the humor to keep it light in hopes that you will read both the funny and the serious stories, laugh a lot and also learn a little.

A broken bone can heal *over time*. A cut scabs over and heals *over time*. A brain injury, traumatic or otherwise, can become psychologically, biologically, physically, emotionally, and even violently *worse over time*. The ramifications of such injuries, which range from mild to severe, leave one wondering how a small damaged area of a human brain can completely render the entire body defenseless and helpless.

With TBI patients' caregivers in mind, I have completed this mostly-humorous short story collection because I have witnessed how time-consuming, frustrating, and heartbreaking it can be for a caregiver to watch the life of a loved one be completely slowed or taken away. Obviously, smiles are much-needed and welcome necessities in the daily lives of these people. Therefore, the goal of my first book, leading to 2012's TBI-focused book, is simple: Mostly with humor, I want to alleviate some of the daily stress these caregivers face, while also providing more ammunition for researchers.

So, read this book and feel good about yourself, knowing that you bought a book that entertains you while you contributed much-needed finances to a growing problem in America, brain injury. You're being part of the solution!

“The U.S. Constitution doesn’t guarantee happiness, only the pursuit of it. You have to catch up with it yourself.”

—Benjamin Franklin

Padman: A Dad's Guide to Buying...Those

From the moment the words woke me, I was sure the mission I faced would be my most difficult to date. At 8:51 a.m., I was unexpectedly stirred in my comfortable bed by words every man dreads to hear from his daughter, girlfriend, or spouse. As unplanned and unfortunate as it was, today was my day, the day I realized that all men, albeit unknowingly, have a bit of Padman inside them.

The morning started with sheer shock. My daughter's first words to me were followed by complete silence as I gave an eye-opening response. As if we were both acting on the big screen, *007's* suspenseful movie music began pulsating between my ears. Immediately, I shot her a glare—constant, almost piercing, and never before witnessed by her eyes. My inability to move—due to a combination of blinding sun beaming through the window and my daughter's words—forced a hypnotic glare from me that must have frightened her. Her words, however, were far more ferocious.

Just as James Bond himself has done on numerous occasions, I darted into action following that silent, momentary pause. However, let it be known that even though I compared my situation with all of *007's* dangerous missions, having seen every Bond flick, I can assure my readers that the larger-than-life ladies man never faced the life-altering experience I was about to encounter for the first time. It, my

friends, was man's greatest fear—coming face-to-face with feminine hygiene (FH).

“Dad, please go to the store for me,” were my daughter's exact words on that not-so-memorable morning. But it was her subsequent words that truly shocked me, froze me, and nearly pierced my heart.

“I need pads—BAD!”

As those startling words awoke me, a slow, sinister, penetrating freeze began at my ears and continued to flow through my body to the tips of my toes. I felt cemented to my bed by an eerie feeling. Like a demonic possession, it consumed me. As I lay silently in my suddenly not-so-comfortable bed, trying to exhale, I realized I had become completely statuesque. After what must have been a forty-five second mesmerized state, my eyes finally blinked. Then, as if I had been shot out of a cannon, I sprang into action.

There I was, a single dad, about to do what virtually every man would agree was “the unthinkable.” But like a trooper, I jumped out of bed almost instantly—well, instantly once I was able to move—when I heard the urgency in my little girl's voice. Without even showering and with no idea how to go about the task before me, I hurriedly got dressed, brushed my teeth, grabbed my coat, donned a baseball cap, and put on my sunglasses, hoping thereby to hide my identity, and away I went—off to face this heinous challenge.

As with any unenviable event Fate decrees, people usually remember exactly where they were when an unexpected crisis arose. For example, my aunts, uncles, and parents can all recite exactly where they were when they heard President Kennedy was assassinated. Still others, including myself, can pinpoint their exact locations when the media broadcast that President Reagan had been shot. I would even go so far as to say that my fifth grade teacher, Mrs. Board, could recall how cloudy it was while Noah was busy building his boat. In fact, as a detailed example of cemented memory, I was an eight-year old playing

at Granddad's when Channel 5 broke the news that The King had permanently left the building. I can remember the precise channel and television location in his small living room as I rushed into the house at the sound of my mother's scream on that dark, August day in 1977.

Now with a twelve-year-old daughter, today would prove to be yet another example of cemented memory. As much as I wish I could, I will never be able to forget my exact location, the scenery, and the spine-tingling feeling that I endured during my inaugural FH Day. The sun was shining brightly, but as is common in Michigan, the wind was extremely brisk. It looked like spring, but it felt like January in Alaska. Being covered from head-to-toe was the only thing shielding me from possible frostbite, windburn, and sunburn on this all-too-familiar morning of Michigan's eight-month-season we call winter. As brutal as it appeared to be, not even the elements could stand in my way as I *courageously*—I felt, anyhow—accepted and embarked upon this mission. Displaying nothing short of sheer determination to go along with a ruggedly resilient scowl, I sped to the nearest drugstore and waltzed right in, demanding what I needed. Looking back, though, I am not so sure that “demand” is absolutely the most appropriate term I could use. To be honest, whimper or murmur would be more accurate.

The mood quickly shifted from confident to flat out bleak once I was inside the all too “obscene” merchandise dealer. Trying to go unnoticed (even though I was the only shopper in the store), I tiptoed down every aisle, searching for the oldest working male I could find to help me locate the nasty quicker-picker-upper items, which shall remain nameless for the time being. Unquestionably, I was overcome with fear, not to mention a newfound insecurity I felt increase with every minute of my incognito navigation of the premises on quest for this “mythical” older, male pharmacist. I did not have a mirror, but I am quite positive that a growing look of despair was replacing my once-confident stare. Furthermore, I could

feel my hard, stoic chin turning to quivering jelly as I slowly and quietly scanned each aisle. Out of nowhere, at that very instant of my helplessness, I felt the tiniest amount of Man Fluid build up in my eye and roll down my left nostril. In that woeful hour, I must have, somehow, sprung a leak. That was the precise moment when it occurred to me that “demand” had left my vocabulary. Right then and right there, I knew I would be forced to “beg” for assistance.

In sheer desperation, as I continued to scour the vicinity for this phar-*man*-acist, my sneaky suspicion was adding to my already bewildered state. I was mortified to discover there was, in reality, no older man working behind the counter. In fact, there was no male working in the store at all. Instead, four women were on the time clock. Working behind the counter were the manager (it said so on her name tag) and assistant manager (same thing). Then, working on the floor in aisles one and six were two extremely attractive sales clerks who appeared to be in their mid-twenties. Since the managers were obviously “too busy,” engrossed in what appeared to be empty boxes behind the counter, remaining oblivious to my world of pain and embarrassment, you know who I was forced to question.

Then, an image of Mike Tyson sprang into my mind. At that very instant—like the ringing of the bell for the opening round—I stomped my feet with each step and prepared to battle the inevitable. After all, every—and I do mean *every*—Padman virgin has faced the same decision. If you are a man who has yet to experience his initial run-in with buying feminine hygiene products, the following three alternatives are what will cross your mind, just as they crossed mine:

A) Leave the store and hurry to another where a fellow superior-species member can help.

The true reality of alternative A follows:

This course of action would be cowardly, despite it being one to which many members of the “stronger gender” often succumb.

B) Return home, get my daughter, and make her go in to buy “them.”

The harsh reality of alternative B follows:

As demoralizing as it might be, I knew this option was not a real alternative. Between my teeth brushing and coat grabbing, I had asked her to go with me. Her response had almost made me hurl:

“Dadddddddddd????? I can't go! The toilet paper I'm using is already leaking.”

To this day, those words and the expression she gave me still make me shiver.

C) Seek help right then, right there, from whatever female is available to assist; buy the pads, and become a “heroic” dad (at least in my own eyes).

The unfortunate reality of alternative C follows:

Though it was the most difficult, it was the *right* thing to do.

Basically, we men can stand, answer the bell, and come out swinging, or remain seated on the stool and throw in the towel. Since I had no Pad Cave to hide in, I chose the former of the two. Like the strong-willed man I was—or had thought myself to be—I decided to man-up, stick out my chest, hold my head high, and in the deepest voice I could muster, “demand” what I needed from an Eva Longoria look-alike.

“Excuse me, ma’am, but I...ummmmmmm...pads some need for my aaaah twelve-year-old so... DAUGHTER! See, she... ummmmm... just... (not-so intelligent pause)... started and (fake two coughs)...I was stuck with coming to them buy (huge, yet not-so-subtle sigh, not realizing how ignorant and babyish I must have sounded to ‘Eva’).”

Probably because she detected my naivety, ignorance, and obvious insecurity, she had a hearty laugh at my expense. (You know the ones people try to disguise as a smiling cough?) Or, it could have even possibly been how my beet-red face went hand-in-hand with my futile masculine voiceover attempt. Undoubtedly, at that moment, I must have sounded like an amazing movie star, playing a nervous and shy fifteen-year old who was buying a condom from a grumpy, elderly female pharmacist.

“No problem. It’s okay,” she giggled before assuring me that my frightening mission was “normal” and proceeding to guide me to the grotesquely un-masculine boxes of... those... those... unmentionables.

As we turned the corner at the end of the aisle, I heard 007’s music playing again—only louder this time. For the first time since I had entered that God-awful place, to which I will never return—not even for milk—my straight and stiff lips were beginning to form an upside-down frown while my jelly-like chin was quickly returning to its manly state. My independent solo mission was almost complete; I could sense it in my bones. I was back.

Feeling the confidence returning, I finally unzipped my coat on this short aisle-to-aisle jaunt. A quick glance out the window reminded me of just how gorgeous Michigan’s winter sunshine was when it reflected off the beautiful, pure white snow. Also, outside the window, I could see rather large icicles hanging, yet slowly melting away as water dripped innocently below the window and out of sight. The beautiful icy water was fading from my vision ever-so sweetly, just like my fears.