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Mentoring — it works both ways

By Jack Shea

When Bill Randol retired and moved full time to Chilmark 10 years ago, he decided to become a Big Brother to an Island kid. "I had just retired and wanted be involved rather than just twiddling my thumbs," the former financial consultant and energy executive said. "My motivation? I don't know that I can describe it other than I was drawn to the idea," he said.

"I believe that we have received far more than we have given as a result of our part of Gordon's life," he said Monday at home with Marcia, his wife of 43 years.

"Joyful," said Ms. Randol of her husband's mentoring experience, which became a family affair. "I would describe it as joyful."

Mr. Randol is not a thumb-twiddler by nature, it would seem. Among other projects he has served for seven years on the Chilmark housing committee, which was instrumental in creating the Middle Line Road affordable housing complex that opened earlier this month.

The Randols are a snapshot of what is possible when people open their hearts. They are parents of two sons and grandparents of four, soon to be five, grandchildren. They have a healthy share of life's material goods. A good life.

But as they described the entrance of a bright eight-year old into their lives and the subsequent unfolding of his development and life, one observes a delightful sense of awe and gratitude in their voices, the result of Mr. Randol's simple decision to share

his life with a kid who could use a role model.

"He is a great kid — smart, funny. He got 100 in chemistry — which I barely passed in school," said Mr. Randol who holds two engineering degrees from Rice University in San Antonio, Texas, and an MBA from the Harvard Business School in Cambridge.

Mr. Randol protects his Little's full identity but notes the high school senior is getting ready to head for college and both Randols exhibit a hint of empty-nest syndrome. "I hope he'll write from time to time," Mr. Randol says.

Yet while the Randols see Gordon as an extension of their own family, they are clear that Gordon's birth family is primary and a nourishing part of his life. "I can't say enough about his mother," Mr. Randol said. "She is a hard-working woman who is completely focused on her kids. An amazing woman."

"I remember interviewing for the (Big Brother) job," Mr. Randol said. "His mom and the Big Brother Big Sister (BBBS) representative on the Island met with me for coffee in Edgartown. BBBS is very thorough, they do background checks and all candidates are CORI-ed (Criminal Offender Record Information)."

Mr. Randol provided a supplementary benefit to his little brother's life experience. "He learned to navigate our boat on Chilmark Pond," he said. "We played chess — I can't beat him anymore — and Scrabble, which is a great vocabulary builder.

"Baseball is his favorite

sport, but we worked on his golf swing in the backyard. Now he hits it too far. There are a lot of golf balls out there," Mr. Randol smiled, gesturing outdoors.

Mr. Randol described a relationship built on consistency. "We often have dinner here, but we've gone out to dinner once a week," he said. "I got to learn the Friday roast beef special at The Wharf in Edgartown. That was new.

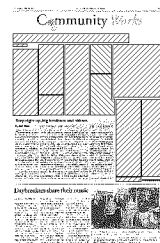
"We're lucky to have a good fit with Gordon. Sometimes the relationship is tricky and doesn't work. But like every relationship, you have to work at it and stay with it. That's important."

The Randols' thoughts on Gordon are described incisively in a recommendation letter that Gordon asked them to write.

"We have come to know Gordon very, very well," the letter reads in part. "Bill spends an afternoon a week with him... He is very mature... and he has done very well at school... He is especially gifted in quantitative or strategic endeavors and routinely beats Bill at chess, checkers, or Scrabble... In short he is a kid who would fit in very well in a college environment. He also makes friends very easily and has a great sense of humor.

"We are very proud of the fine young man he has become, and will continue our relationship with him through college and beyond. He has truly become part of our family...."

The Randols describe the Big Brother experience as en-



larging their family sphere in a relationship extending to Gordon's family, and between Gordon and their own kids and grand kids.

So what's the trick to Big Brothering successfully? "It's important not to do this as a 'charitable' enterprise, but as a relationship with a young person you wouldn't ordinary have," said Ms. Randol who has spent nearly a decade observing her husband and his little brother interacting. "It's not about what you're giving and it's not about someone you can mold, but about someone you can have a trusting relationship with, a child who feels safe and happy in your home.

"Gordon is a forthcoming young man. He'll talk about things that are bothering him. We're friends. Bill doesn't talk down to him and he doesn't talk down to us as nerdy old folks."

For Mr. Randol, the relationship with Gordon has benefitted both of them. "He has said we've made a difference," he said. "Certainly, he's kept me young. I'll miss him when he goes off to college." ♦

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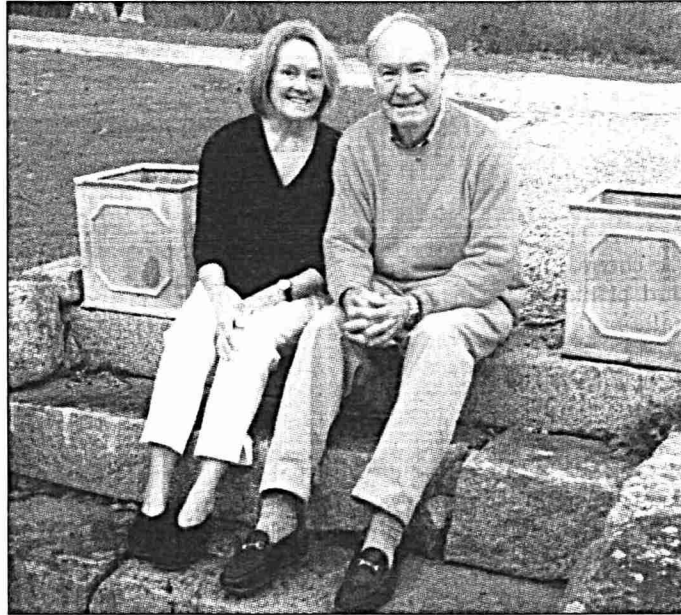


PHOTO BY RALPH STEWART

Marcia and Bill Randol, in front of their home in Chilmark.

Step right up, big brothers and sisters

By Jack Shea

About 40 Island residents are currently participating as Big Brothers and Big Sisters. It sounds like a lot, but it fills less than half the need for role models and **mentors** in the lives of Island boys and girls, according to Connie Alexander, chairman of the advisory board for the Island affiliate of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Cape Cod and the Islands (BBBSCCI).

A science teacher for 17 years at the Tisbury School, Ms. Alexander has seen the impact of "Bigs," as big sisters and brothers are called, not only on their "Littles," as their young friends are called, but also on themselves.

"I've seen how precious that mentorship can be to kids," Ms. Alexander said. "They just thrive on the undivided one-on-one attention and it provides stability and enriches their lives. It enriches the lives of the Bigs as well."

Hadley Luddy, executive director of the Cape and Islands branch said the national organization tracks the benefits of mentorship on young lives. "Kids with big brothers and big sisters are 46 per cent less likely to use drugs and 52 per cent less likely to skip school than their peers nationally," Ms. Luddy said.

Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) is a high-profile national organization and has benefited in its 107-year history from corporate contributions, but they have dwindled in recent years. As a result, BBBS has scaled back outreach staff recently. For the Island, that has meant the loss of a full-time staffer drumming up and matching volunteer big sisters and brothers with Island kids.

"We had 70 matches on the Island a few years ago and I believe there are at least 100 kids who could benefit from this program," said Ms. Alexander, who has been

chairman of the BBBS advisory board here for the past six years. "I see the benefit of mentoring and I see the difference in those who have had it.

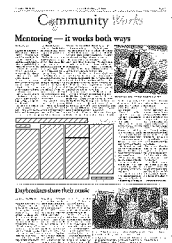
"In fact, the reason I got involved was watching a Big Brother relationship a friend of my son had years ago. When my kids went off to college, I just thought, 'this is something I want to do.'"

Island residents interested in participating in BBBS can help in several ways. "Financial donations are always welcome," Ms. Alexander said. "We have several openings on the Island advisory board and we really need more people to step up as Big Sisters and Big Brothers. We have plenty of kids who could use their help."

Advisory board members also help coordinate the Blooming Bids for Kids auction fundraiser each summer. The Island BBBS has launched a holiday gift-giving partnership with Bunch of Grapes bookstore in Vineyard Haven, according to Ms. Alexander. "Our kids will be encouraged to go to Bunch of Grapes and make a wish list of books they are interested in and we hope Island residents will purchase a book or two as a holiday gift."

Ms. Alexander can be contacted at 508-693-0101 and donations may be sent to BBBS, P.O. Box 605, Vineyard Haven, MA 02568. ♦

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Mazie Mentoring Program matches 23rd Waltham High student

At an event held on Sunday, Oct. 23, six students, recommended by school staff as capable of higher achievements in school and beyond, were paired with volunteer adult mentors from the Elephant Walk restaurant, Massachusetts Medical Society, National Grid, ThermoFisher Scientific and others from the community. Two additional pairs, who were unable to be at the event, will be matched next week.

The event was hosted by Embassy Suites Hotel, who donated the ballroom space. Linda Mazie, daughter of Barbara and Lowell Mazie, all co-founders of the John Andrew Mazie Memorial Foundation, facilitated the four hours of activities designed to jump-start the mentor/mentee relationship. Also participating were Ethel Williams, Program Director, and Soledad Valenciano, Program Case Manager. Present from the school, as observers were Christopher Gelinis, Housemaster, and Brenda Ortiz, Student Adjustment Counselor.

Ethel Williams stated that establishing a trusting relationship with their mentee is the top priority for the mentors. The Mazie Mentoring Program's Goal Achievement and Award component is the framework within which this relationship can start and flourish. In the three months after the matchup, mentees and their mentors are required to participate in two community service activities. In the six months after matchup, the mentee must select a school subject and develop an action plan to improve their grade. In the first year, mentees are required to research the admission requirements of three colleges and write an essay that could be used in a college application. In their senior year mentees are asked to write

a vision statement outlining what they want to be true about their lives five years into the future, and a mission statement spelling out the habits and characteristics they now have, must change, and must acquire to make their vision a reality.

Mentees receive awards for their accomplishments, including a laptop computer for the college research goal, and a \$2,000 scholarship upon completing the program and graduating from high school.

Mentors are needed for a March 2012 matchup. Those interested should contact Ethel Williams at wmaziedir@gmail.com or visit the foundation at www.mazie.org.



Waltham High students and their new mentors met Oct. 23 in the Waltham Embassy Suites ballroom. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



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A gender achievement gap has males lagging behind females at every level from elementary school to college graduation rates. In an economy where education is now the key to a good job, that doesn't just spell trouble for men. It's creating a steeper climb for families to reach the middle class

BY:Michael Jonas

Issue:Fall 2011/The American Dream Special Issue

November 03, 2011

each spring, the Boston Globe salutes the city (TM)s valedictorians by publishing photographs of the top-achieving student in each of Boston (TM)s 40 public high schools and describing their college plans. Many of the students come from lower-income families, and it (TM)s hard not to be inspired by the persistence they had to demonstrate in the face of tough odds. But something else also jumps out when scanning the portraits filling the newspaper page: Three out of every four faces belong to young women.

Girls are regularly outpacing **boys** when it comes to grabbing the prized honor for academic achievement at the city (TM)s high schools. But that female advantage extends far beyond competition at the very top level. **Girls** are achieving at higher levels across the board in Boston "and in schools throughout the country "opening a pronounced gender achievement gap that has grown wider in recent years. The female advantage extends into higher education, where women now collect 60 percent of all college degrees. It (TM)s an astonishing reversal from 50 years ago, when men were 65 percent of all college graduates.

What makes today (TM)s gender achievement gap so alarming is that it is coinciding with huge changes in the economy that are placing an ever greater premium on education. Young men who have not obtained a college credential or, in too many cases, even a high school diploma, are tumbling out into a labor market that is punishing harshly those with low educational attainment. Manufacturing jobs, which once provided a ticket into the middle class for those without college education, have been disappearing for several decades. The recession has taken a further huge toll on sectors where men make up the lion (TM)s share of the workforce. "Traditional male employment got killed, " says Mark Erlich, executive secretary-treasurer of the New England Regional Council of Carpenters, 25 to 30 percent of whose members are out of work.

"Men have been left behind, " says Ira Rubenzahl, president of Springfield Technical Community College. But lagging male achievement is not leaving only men behind. Men without steady earnings also do a poor job at making family commitments. What (TM)s more, women are reluctant to marry men of lower educational attainment, so the gender gap is threatening the social fabric of entire communities, holding back the formation of strong families and entry to the middle class.

In the 1970s, marriage rates were comparable among males with and without college degrees. Today there is a gap of about 20 percentage points in marriage rates between those groups. One thing that has changed over this period is the ability of men without post-secondary education to earn a middle-class wage. "A man (TM)s ability to be a good breadwinner is probably the strongest predictor of when marriage occurs, " says Sara McLanahan, a Princeton University sociologist who has studied the retreat from marriage in low-income communities.

"We (TM)re losing guy employment, " says Tom Mortenson of the Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education, a Washington, DC, policy organization. "And if our identity is found in the work we do,

we can (TM)t be fathers or providers or protectors or much of anything else unless we have jobs. "

Girl gumption

Nothing has come easy to Tameika Heathman. The 22-year-old Springfield resident spent her teens in foster homes following the death of both of her parents. At 17, she got pregnant and dropped out of high school.

She ended up on welfare with her daughter, but was able to complete her high school requirements. "They went back to my high school records and my MCAS scores and said, 'Oh, you (TM)re really smart, you got good grades for the most part, (TM) " she says.

Today, Heathman is a psychology major at Holyoke Community College whose goal is to work as a clinician with *children* in the state foster care system. "There (TM)s probably lots of *kids* who could use help from somebody who knows what (TM)s going on, not just somebody who (TM)s pretending to care, " she says. "I have to go for my bachelor (TM)s and my master (TM)s, so HCC is just a start, " she says of the two-year college.

Her daughter (TM)s father, with whom Heathman is still involved "on and off, " has been on a very different path. He dropped out of high school, never returned to it, and has no job. He takes care of their daughter these days when Heathman is at school. "He (TM)s been trying to go back and get his GED, " she says, though he has been hampered by a reading learning disability.

Heathman (TM)s determination to get her life back on track, combined with the ability she already showed in high school before getting pregnant, reflect the edge in academic achievement "and in the drive to channel it to productive use "that females are showing throughout the K-12 and higher ed systems. Her boy friend (TM)s story, meanwhile, sadly mirrors the experience of far too many young men.

On the 2010 MCAS exam, there was an 8 percentage point gap separating Massachusetts third-grade *girls* from *boys* in English language arts proficiency. Sixty-seven percent of all *girls* statewide scored proficient while just 59 percent of *boys* reached that level. For seventh graders, there was an even larger 11 percentage point gap in English proficiency. Math had been an area where *boys* retained an edge, but even here *girls* are now moving into the lead.

A 2006 report from the Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy found that the gender gap favoring *girls* was more pronounced in Massachusetts than the country as a whole. The same report pointed to other areas where males are struggling. More than two-thirds of those in special education are *boys*, and the dropout rate for *boys* is higher than for *girls*.

The higher high school graduation rates for *girls*, then, play out in college attendance rates. About 60 percent of college students nationally are women, a figure that has been rising steadily for several decades. "Not only are women attending more, they (TM)re doing better across the board, " says William Messner, president of Holyoke Community College. "Men are more prevalent in our developmental courses (remedial classes required of those whose skills aren (TM)t up to college standards), they have higher drop-out rates, and lower graduation rates. "

Clint Bilodeau of Belchertown took a buyout from his manufacturing job

and got training to drive trucks. Photo by Brian McDermott.

The Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University tracked the experience over seven years of all of those graduating from the Boston public schools in 2000 to see how students were faring in their pursuit of post-secondary education. The overall finding was sobering: Of those who enrolled in college, only 35 percent had obtained a two- or four-year degree within seven years. But the study also showed an enormous gender gap in degree attainment. For every 100 men in the Class of 2000 who had obtained a four-year

college degree, 146 women had done so. There were very big differences in the gender gap according to race. The gender differences among whites and Asians were minimal, but for every 100 black males who obtained degrees, 220 black women did. For Hispanics, 214 women received four-year degrees for every 100 men who did so.

"These are disastrous numbers," says Jeff Howard, a member of the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. "We know the association between any kind of post-high school degree and family income. If you (TM)ve got a 2-to-1 disparity, you (TM)re just not going to have the solid middle-class family formation that you (TM)re looking for, that you need."

Running in place

There is no single explanation for the gender disparities in education. Brian Jacob, an economist at the University of Michigan, has suggested that women (TM)s superior "non-cognitive" abilities "attentiveness, organizational skills, and a willingness to seek out help when needed" play a significant role in their greater college attendance rates.

Some have zeroed in on the idea of innate differences between **boys** and **girls**. It is a line of thinking that has been made popular by Leonard Sax, a Pennsylvania physician whose book *Why Gender Matters* has become a popular guide for advocates of single-gender classrooms.

Whether or not there are important "hardwired" differences between **boys** and **girls** that affect learning, those who work most closely with students invariably make the same observation when trying to explain why **boys** are having so much more trouble in school: They have a much harder time sitting still.

"**Boys** typically are much more active, they just need to move more," says Josh Zoia, founder of the KIPP Academy charter school in Lynn.

That urge for kinetic movement, some say, has run head-on into the standards-and-accountability era in US schools, which has ratcheted up the focus on academics and led to more in-your-seat instruction and testing. "I (TM)m a high standards guy," says Neil Sullivan, executive director of the Boston Private Industry Council, a nonprofit that directs school-to-career training programs. But he says we need to figure out approaches to classroom learning that will raise achievement without relying on relentless desk-based testing. "It (TM)s certainly not effective on one side of the gender gap, where we know more active engagement works better with **boys**," says Sullivan. School is difficult for **boys** because they have a harder time sitting still. Richard Whitmire, author of *Why Boys Fail*, thinks the reason **girls** are outpacing **boys** "a phenomenon occurring across most developed countries" has to do with an overall heightened emphasis on verbal skills in education and in society and the work world more generally. He says schools have failed to adjust to take account of **boys** (TM) slower development of these skills in the early grades, setting **boys** on a downward spiral. "The whole school reform movement inadvertently disadvantaged **boys** by pushing verbal skills at the earliest grades, where **boys** are not able to keep up," he says. "What happens is **boys** get discouraged, and they think school is for **girls**."

Keith Motley, chancellor of the University of Massachusetts Boston, is chairing Success Boston, an initiative formed in the wake of the 2008 Northeastern University study that is aimed at improving the dismal college graduation rates of Boston public schools graduates who go on to higher education. Thirty-eight area colleges have joined together and pledged to provide more aggressive advising and support for Boston students who enroll at their institutions.

But like Whitmire, Motley, an African-American who has long championed **mentoring** programs for young minority males, sees the difficulties for **boys** starting well before college. "Around third or fourth grade, students, particularly males, become a little disinterested and a little disorganized around traditional schooling," he says. **Boys** who are "a little anxious or won (TM)t sit still are labeled problems," says Motley, and soon "the new norm is that you (TM)re someone who can (TM)t perform."

Overshadowing various theories about learning differences is a factor that has obvious implications for **boys**: the absence of fathers in many low-income households. Nearly two-thirds of black **children** and 38 percent of Hispanic **children** in the US live in a household headed by a single-parent, overwhelmingly a female. The comparable figures for white and Asian **children** are 23 percent and 16 percent, respectively.

"Unfortunately, for far too many of our young **boys** there is not a father figure in their life," Zoia says of the KIPP school in Lynn, where 80 percent of the students are black or Hispanic. "I think that (TM)s one of the reasons **boys** in urban areas are falling behind. "

The impact of fatherlessness also predicts poor performance for those males who do reach college. Thomas DiPrete, a sociologist at Columbia University, tracked the outcomes of college students and found that males who grew up in a home without a father were significantly less likely to complete their studies and obtain a degree.

Looking for answers

KIPP Academy Lynn, a 5–8 grade charter school, has delivered impressive results since opening its doors in 2004. KIPP has an extended school day and longer school year, so its 390 students have 50 percent more time in school than district public school students. On the most recent MCAS exam, its eighth-grade students reached proficiency in math and English at rates substantially higher than those in the Lynn district schools and even slightly above the statewide average. Despite the strong overall results, the school has a persistent gender achievement gap.

The KIPP philosophy emphasizes a willingness to adapt to do whatever it takes to help students succeed. "If there a problem, we look for a better way. If there is a better way, we find it," reads a list of KIPP mottos.

In that spirit, the school took a dramatic step last year in an effort to close the gender achievement gap: it formed single-gender classrooms for two-thirds of the school (TM)s sixth graders. The school created one all-**boys** class and one all-**girls** class, while a third class was a conventional, mixed gender room. "It was very apparent to us that the way we (TM)ve been teaching the **boys** wasn (TM)t effective," says Zoia.

Ricardo Pinto, a seventh grader at KIPP who was in last year (TM)s all-**boys** classroom, says despite some initial reservations among students, the experiment proved popular, and he thinks it helped the **boys** move forward. "Instead of having **girls** in the class answering all the questions, it was just us," he says. "We were going to have to do the work by ourselves. "

Teachers in the single-gender classrooms were also able to tailor readings toward the interests of **boys** or **girls**. And they incorporated more active elements into the **boys** (TM) class, such as a game using flash cards placed around an outdoor running track. "It (TM)s not about lowering the standard," says sixth grade teacher Beth McPhail. "Academic achievement is of course the end game. "

"The idea isn (TM)t to make excuses," says Zoia. "It (TM)s to say, **kids** learn in all sorts of different ways. "

The KIPP experiment with single-gender classes was in no way a rigorously designed research study. The results were nonetheless encouraging, with those in the all-**boys** (TM) class showing more growth in English and math scores than **boys** in the mixed gender classroom. KIPP has broken its sixth grade into single-gender classrooms again this year, and school leaders say they may consider extending the model to other grades.

Research on single-gender schooling has not shown a clear-cut benefit, but there is growing interest in trying the approach as educators search for strategies that might close the gender gap. In 2008, Boston school superintendent Carol Johnson announced that she wanted to experiment with single-gender schools, but she abandoned the plan last year when it was concluded that state law prevents districts from setting up entire schools as single-gender academies.

"They (TM)ve been very successful academically " in other cities, Johnson says of single–gender schools. "We (TM)d like to try it. "

Paul Reville, the state secretary of education, says he would support efforts to permit single–gender schools, and Boston officials have submitted legislation each of the last several years to change state law to allow single–gender schools. However, the measure hasn (TM)t advanced in the Legislature.

Other efforts to address the gender gap involve *mentoring* programs that give added attention to *boys* and more intensive advising systems for young men in college to keep them on track toward a degree.

In 2007, Boston launched a program called 10 *Boys* Clubs. The initiative, which is in place in about a third of the city (TM)s schools, identifies 10 black or Latino *boys* at each school who scored in the "needs improvement " category on the MCAS test, one level short of proficient, and assigns them extra tutoring, and regular meetings as a group where they hear guest speakers, who are often successful black and Latino professional men.

Community colleges are also making an extra effort to reach out to minority male students, who are at particularly high risk of dropping out. Three years ago, Springfield Technical Community College started a *mentoring* program for black and Latino male students, which also offers drop–in hours for students who are having any school–related problem. Male students "tend to have a lower tolerance for frustration, " says Rubenzahl, the college (TM)s president. "So if they don (TM)t get the issue resolved, they often just leave. "

Not a man (TM)s world

There was a time not that long ago when an education achievement gap that had men lagging behind women would not have been particular cause for alarm. In the heyday of US manufacturing in the decades after World War II, factories were hiring high school graduates and union contracts delivered the sort of wages and benefits that put workers, if not exactly on easy street, solidly within a broadly defined middle class.

Those days, however, are gone, which is why the plight of *boys* who fall behind now is so dire and why the urgency of dealing with the gender achievement gap is so great.

The recession has only put an exclamation mark on the trend. The heavy concentration of job losses in the male–dominated manufacturing and construction sectors led some to dub the downturn a "mancecession. " In Massachusetts, male job losses have been among the worst in the country, with men accounting for all of the net loss of positions during the recession.

Nobody needs to tell that to Clint Bilodeau. The 53–year–old Belchertown resident went straight to work after high school, and spent 34 years at the Callaway sporting goods manufacturing plant in Chicopee, the only job Bilodeau ever had. Last November, it all ended. The plant, which was once bustling with 1,200 workers, is now down to about 150 employees, as the company has shifted most of its manufacturing to plants in Mexico and China. Bilodeau, who thinks it (TM)s only a matter of time before the factory is closed entirely, took a buy–out package that gave him 21 weeks of severance pay.

"I lost 34 years of my life for nothing, " says Bilodeau, who bitterly recalls assurances from management over the years that they wouldn (TM)t move jobs out of the country.

Bilodeau falls in the demographic of those men out of work who may be facing the toughest challenge: He has no post–secondary education to fall back on and feels he (TM)s too old and far removed from classroom days to think about college now. Instead, tapping into federal job training funds available to workers whose jobs have moved out of the country, Bilodeau obtained a Class 1 license qualifying him to drive semi trucks.

Bilodeau (TM)s hope is to land a truck–driving job, "do this for another 13, 14 years, then retire. "

Cleveland Cumby, 33, didn't complete a college degree after high school but

now he's back studying computer systems engineering. Photo by Brian McDermott.

Cleveland Cumby, a 33-year-old Springfield native, spent 13 years at Callaway before he also took the buy-out last fall. After graduating from high school, he spent a semester each at Holyoke Community College and Salem State College, but then became another statistic in the tally of male college dropouts. "I got that credit card my mom told me not to get," says Cumby. With bills to pay, his horizon turned short-term and he dropped out of school for a job at the plant, which was still hiring then. "The money sounded good," he says of the \$17 an hour one could work up to at Callaway.

Today, he (TM)s back in school, this time at Springfield Technical Community College in a computer systems engineering program. He says he (TM)s determined to see it through and get a two-year associate (TM)s degree, and he hopes to push on and get a four-year degree. Cumby, who is not married and has no *children* to support, thinks getting dislodged from his factory job will, in the long run, be a blessing. "I (TM)m rejuvenated," he says. "I was mad I didn't (TM)t stay with it at the time," he says of his earlier stint in higher ed.

Cumby is hoping to climb out of the shaky world of blue-collar employment and onto the firmer footing that comes with a college degree. Notwithstanding all the stories of college grads unable to land jobs, the US unemployment rate in September was 4.2 percent for those with at least a four-year degree and 9.7 percent for those who only completed high school. It stood at 14 percent for those with no high school diploma. What (TM)s more, the financial returns on college education have increased significantly. Three decades ago, the typical college graduate earned 50 percent more than a typical high school graduate. By 2009, this "wage premium" had increased to nearly 100 percent.

MIT economist David Autor says two big forces have been working in tandem to deliver a devastating blow to US men. First, huge impacts from globalization have hollowed out the US economy of many mid-level jobs, making a much bigger share of jobs either high-wage jobs that require more formal education or low-skill, low-wage jobs, many of them service-sector positions that can (TM)t be shipped offshore. The second factor has been the education gender gap, which has put men and women on very different paths as these mid-level jobs disappeared.

"Females primarily moved upward in the distribution as they departed the center," Autor wrote in a paper last year. "Male employment instead moved in roughly equal measures" toward the top and bottom, to the "high-wage, high-skill and low-wage, low-skill jobs." Men are being "squeezed between declining demand and not increasing supply," Autor says in an interview. "The demand for the typical employment in which they (TM)re engaged is declining, and the supply of skills among men that would offset that is not increasing."

A drag on middle-class hopes

"It (TM)s tempting in one sense to say *boys* are falling behind *girls*. I think the bigger issue is that *boys* are falling behind in the changes that are occurring in the economy," says Mortenson of the Pell Institute. "The *girls* are getting ready for the jobs the economy is producing, and you have to wonder, what are the *boys* doing?"

"The rising educational attainment of women is great," says Autor. "I (TM)m not implying that men (TM)s losses are their gains. It (TM)s simply the case that men are not rising as fast, and it has many ill consequences "and not just for men. "

It means incomes are not keeping pace in families that rely on male earnings. What (TM)s more, because research shows women are inclined to want to marry someone of comparable educational background, the

gender education gap is both a cause and consequence of the increasingly fragile state of families in lower-income and minority communities.

"It (TM)s sort of a vicious cycle, " says McLanahan, the Prince ton sociologist who specializes in family studies. "The men aren (TM)t doing well so the women don (TM)t want to marry them. But then by not marrying them and giving them the responsibility of family and **children**, it takes away a motivator that might make them work harder. "

Meanwhile, the downward spiral continues with **boys** born into the increasing number of households headed by a single mother. With no father in their home, they are less likely to make it through college to a place where they (TM)ll be both a more solid wage-earner and more attractive marriage partner.

Social historian Barbara Dafoe Whitehead has spent years connecting the dots between family-structure dynamics and changes in the American economy and labor market. "Two things that continue to define the middle-class American Dream are some level of financial security and some level of competence and success in **child** rearing, " she says. "So when men drop out of education and when they drop out of marriage, you have a huge threat to the American Dream, especially the American Dream as it (TM)s lived by what we hope is a broad and expanding middle class. "

Illustration by Shout.

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rgreif

Says on 11.03.2011

at 3:41 PM

Great in-depth look at this important issue in our state. To add to the mix, **Mass Mentoring** has found that **boys** spend a significantly longer amount of time on waiting lists for **mentors**. A **mentor** can help provide the consistency and social and emotional support that is often lacking from the lives of youth. So while we need to continually find ways to improve the academic environment for **boys**, we simultaneously need to provide **mentors** and other support services that **boys** need to succeed in school and in life.

Back to top

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Highlights: Girls, boys, children, kids, girls, Boys, mentoring, child, Mass Mentoring, mentors, mentor