

# UP

## One Man's Journey to Feminism

**Peter W. Pruyn**

he / him / his\*

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Cover photo: 7,500 feet over Galveston Bay early on a Saturday morning. ©2020 Peter W. Pruyne.

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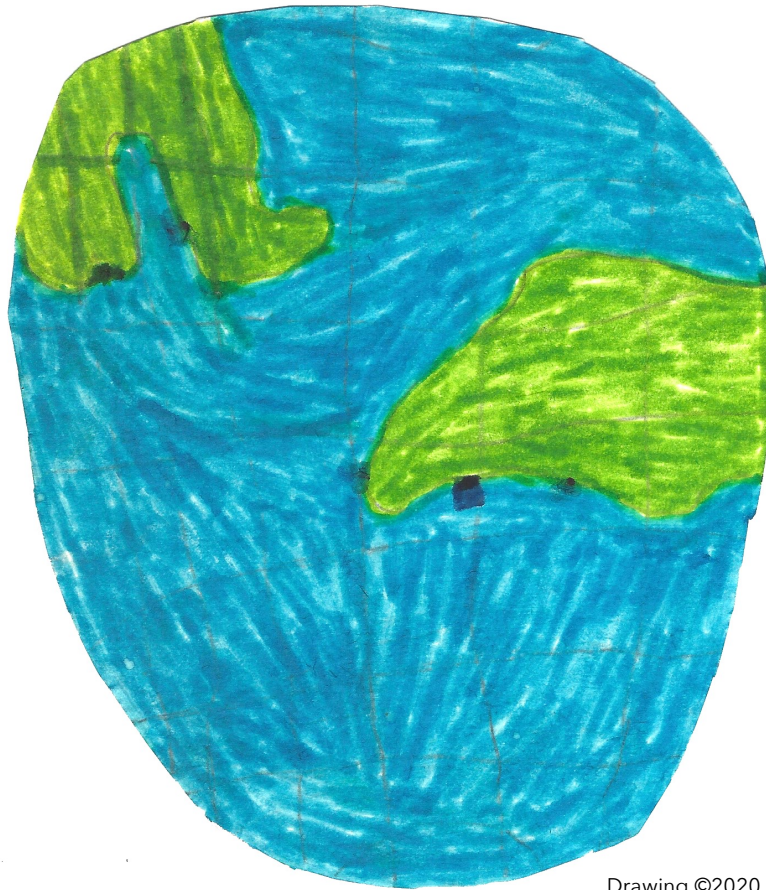
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he / him / his\*

Content warning:  
Contains descriptions of physical and emotional violence

\* Pronounced "prine". He/him/his: This is the set of pronouns I ask others to use when referring to me. People who identify as transgender or gender nonconforming may use pronouns that do not conform to binary male/female gender categorizations, such as "they, them, theirs."



Drawing ©2020 Peter W. Pruy

Figure 3: How I drew the world at about age 5. That's the boot of Italy in the upper left. The small black square on the bottom of the continent on the right is meant to be a dock.

## Prologue

*“We can’t control what happens, but we can use what happens.”*

— Gloria Steinem

*The following occurred in either first or second grade. I know it’s one of the two because the gym teacher was Mr. Fox, and we only had him for those two years. That would make me about 6 years old.*

We are playing dodgeball. At our school, we play dodgeball in the following way. Two opposing teams each occupy half of a full-sized basketball court. In this case, the teams are made up of our two homerooms of about 20 boys, each. Approximately a dozen 6-inch maroon inflatable rubber balls are then distributed equally between the two teams. The object of the game is to tag members of the opposing team out by throwing a ball and hitting them. This leaves you with two tactics to avoid being hit: either dodging any ball thrown at you or—much harder—catching the ball. If you catch the ball, the thrower on the opposite team is out. The reason catching the balls is difficult is that these rubber balls are inflated to a high enough pressure that they are very hard, and little boys *love* to throw them as hard as they can for two reasons: first, to inflict as much stinging pain on, ideally, the bare skin of their victims as possible; and, second, to minimize the chances that anyone would be able to catch the ball, thereby sending them out.

The team that survives longest, wins.

Because I can’t catch or throw very well, the dodgeball strategy I’ve developed is to focus all of my attention on dodging. By never participating in picking-up balls and throwing them back, I never stop watching for incoming missiles and typically stay alive a long time.

In this particular game, our team gradually begins to lose. To maintain approximately equal population density as our herd gets thinned, Mr. Fox periodically shifts the centerline of the game towards the losing side. As a result, the court area in which our shrinking team can move gets smaller and smaller. With less territory for our side to run in, this has the effect of accelerating our slaughter.

And then something remarkable happens. There comes a moment when, because of my extremely successful dodging strategy, I am the only member of my team remaining. In short order, this causes something else interesting to happen. Because I am not participating in the act of throwing the balls back, very soon all the balls accumulate on my side of the court, which is now only about 15 or 20 feet deep. Not only that, I corral them on the back line to ensure that they don’t roll back to the other side. Suddenly, just when I have become a lone sitting duck, I have caused the opposing team to run out of ammunition. Apparently, this predicament is unprecedented in the History of Dodgeball. My enemy lets me know this by complaining loudly to Mr. Fox that what I’m doing is “Not allowed!” and “No fair!”

By this point, I am delaying the end of class so much that Mr. Fox wants to leave and signals this by starting to turn out the lights in the gym. I get the message: “Hurry up and die already so we can all go home!”

Meanwhile, with no rule that I'm aware of being broken, I stand with all the balls behind me and shrug. A part of me feels like I have, in my own way, "won".

At this point the angry mob does what angry mobs do under the thumb of a rule-driven despot when a trouble-maker gets in their way: they petition for a new rule. "You have to return the balls!", they shout. King Fox ratifies the requested amendment to the rulebook with a tired nod.

*O.K., I'll return the balls*, I say to myself, but knowing that I can't throw hard, I add one more delay to the inevitable. Instead of throwing the balls back to the other team, I slowly roll them back, one by one. In this way, I eliminate the risk of someone catching one of my less-than-lethal throws.

Eventually, all the balls end up in the hands of sharpshooters at the same time, and, with my turf reduced to mere feet in depth, the firing squad takes aim and launches a coordinated salvo. I wrap my arms around my head to shield me from the dozen red rubber missiles that rain down upon me.

I succumb. The victors parade their feelings with cheers of glee at my demise.

Finally, class is over.