

# Mt. Kisco Mom Takes Action, Pens Parenting Book

By Martin Wilbur

Shannon White realized about two years ago that she needed to take action before it was too late.

One day White learned from another mother that her daughter, Peyton, was the subject of an alarming lunchtime conversation at school. Other third-graders in her class had asked a boy who was sitting next to Peyton whether he would like to have sex with her. The boy responded yes.

As disturbing as it was to find out that such a discussion could occur among eight-year-olds, what was more frustrating for White was Peyton's inability, like millions of other children, to openly communicate her problems or feelings to her parents.

"I realized that even though I'm in a profession that asks people questions all the time, I couldn't get this important information out of my own child," recalled White, a single mother who lives with Peyton in



MARTIN WILBUR PHOTO

Shannon White and her 10-year-old daughter, Peyton, co-wrote "How Was School Today? Fine..." a guide to help parents with elementary school children improve communication on difficult topics.

Mount Kisco. "So I thought, oh my goodness, if we don't get this down now, forget middle school or high school. So we started talking and I realized I needed to set more of a framework up where we could get beyond this."

That was the impetus for White and her daughter to sit down and write "How Was School Today? Fine..." a book that parents and their elementary school-aged children can use as a guide to help them discuss a wide variety of issues. Although White, a 20-year Presbyterian minister and a part-time on-air reporter for News 12 Westchester, has had plenty of experience talking about difficult topics with others, when it was time for her and her daughter to be open and honest with each other, the task proved as difficult as it would in any other household.

Following the incident in third grade, Peyton said she was afraid her mother wouldn't understand if she brought up what

had happened.

"I started to want to tell you my feelings but didn't feel like you were open to it," Peyton acknowledged to her mother. "I didn't want to get into trouble and I didn't want to know what it meant."

White said she doesn't pretend to know everything there is about parenting but was determined to put pen to paper to outline some of the approaches she and Peyton took to help their communication. Late at night, for about 15 months, White pieced together the book, section by section, exploring serious topics like sex, divorce and when "Mommy or Daddy Drink Too Much." Many others are more lighthearted, such as how to handle "Farts, Burps and Barf."

It also addresses adoption, since Peyton, who was born in Moscow, was adopted by White on her first birthday.

The book is divided into six main sections comprising about 75 small chapters.

Its beauty, White said, is that it doesn't have to be read from start to finish but can be absorbed on a piecemeal basis, almost as a reference guide when needed. Parents and children can read it together or separately.

"We hope that it'll help other parents and their kids to connect on a different level, even if it's for one conversation," White said.

When she was done writing, White would ask Peyton her thoughts on each one of the topics and tape her responses, which appear verbatim. Each small section includes "Peyton's Point of View," which is from the child's perspective. Despite schoolwork and an assortment of activities such as basketball, playing with friends and Nintendo, Peyton said it wasn't hard to focus and find time to help her mom complete the book.

"It wasn't that hard because in school I just focused on school," said Peyton, now a fifth-grader at Bedford's West Patent Elementary School. "When I got home I focused on everything else."

But the experience has proved therapeutic for both mother and daughter. Born in Dallas and having spent part of her childhood in Chappaqua, White grew up in a rather strict Christian fundamentalist household where having fun was not a priority. White said there were plenty of her own issues and inhibitions she has had to address as an adult. So it was to Peyton's surprise when her mom let loose one day.

"She took out the whipped cream bottle and she pretended to put it on my ice cream and squirted it at me and then I grabbed it and squirted it all over her," Peyton laughed. "It helps my mother and me relax more."

The book was self-published and is available at Barnes & Noble and Borders as well as on Amazon.com. The co-authors will have a book signing this Saturday at Borders in Mount Kisco, 162 Main St., at 2 p.m. For more information log on to [www.HowWasSchoolTodayFine.com](http://www.HowWasSchoolTodayFine.com).

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