

# HOW WAS SCHOOL TODAY? FINE.

A User-Friendly Discussion Guide for Parents and Their Elementary School-Aged Children

**By Shannon A. White & Peyton White**

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## Author Biographies

### Shannon A. White

Shannon is an author, pastor, speaker and coach to those who want to live with greater integrity, authenticity and compassion. Her training and many professional roles have helped shape who she is.

She received her educational degrees from Auburn University (BA, Business Admin) and Princeton Theological Seminary (M.Div.). In 1991, she was ordained in the Presbyterian Church (USA) and has served as minister and assistant minister of several churches in New York and Connecticut spanning 13 years. Shannon also worked as leader of an interfaith organization in Fairfield County, which brought together over 25 different faith groups and denominations in dialogue and understanding.

Recognizing that many people consider themselves, “more spiritual than religious,” Shannon decided to address spiritual issues on a broader scale. In 2001, She co-hosted “Spirit-Talk,” a radio show with a rabbi colleague, interviewing people of different spiritual backgrounds. Guests included, Tommy Hilfiger and Tom Chappell, founder of Tom’s of Maine, among others. She then brought her interest to television, first behind-the-scenes at CBS News in the Religion Unit. She was production assistant and then associate producer, creating four interfaith documentaries a year. She then pursued on-camera work at News 12 Westchester, a 24-hour cable news station in suburban New York. She has received many awards and an Emmy nomination for her feature reporting on issues such as: alcoholism/addiction and spirituality at Sing Sing Correctional Facility.

Shannon’s most important role, however, is as a mother to her 11-year-old daughter, Peyton. She says, “Nothing is more challenging or rewarding than to support the healthy growth of a child in this world.” Frederick Douglass once said, “It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.” Shannon embraces this daunting task with fear and excitement.

Together, Shannon and her daughter wrote, *How Was School Today? Fine*, as a way to help elementary school-aged children and their parents have real and open conversations. The idea for the book came after she learned her daughter had been asked for sex in the 3rd grade...oh my!

Dealing with her own struggles of divorce, single parenthood and the family dynamics of addiction and recovery, she strives to help others face their truths and to live with compassion among others.

Shannon loves running, cycling and going to good movies. She has traveled extensively in Central and South America, Europe, Turkey, Vietnam and Japan. She looks forward to continuing exploring the world.

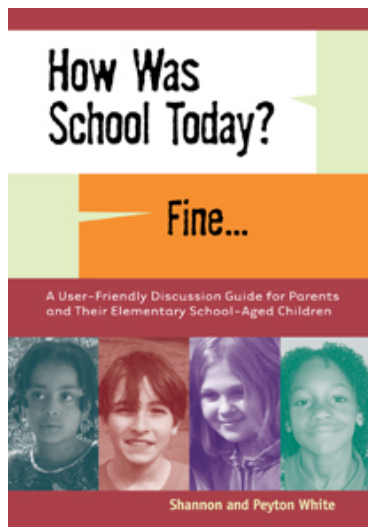
### Peyton White

Peyton White is a 5<sup>th</sup> Grade elementary school student who loves basketball, snowboarding, playing with friends, and her Nintendo DS. She also enjoys travelling with her mom to interesting areas of the world. She loves her brothers and sisters...and her adorable dog, Max.

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Shannon A. White is an author, pastor, speaker and coach to those who want to live with greater integrity, authenticity and compassion. Her training and many professional roles have helped shape who she is. This book was written by Shannon and her daughter Peyton to help families achieve higher levels of communication.

Together, **Shannon and Peyton White** co-authored, **How Was School Today? Fine**, as a guide to help elementary school-aged children and their parents have real and open conversations. The idea for the book came after Shannon learned her daughter had been asked for sex in the 3rd grade...oh my!

Dealing with her own struggles of divorce, single parenthood and the family dynamics of addiction and recovery, Shannon strives to help others face their truths and to live with compassion among others.

Peyton, Shannon and Max live in Westchester County, a suburb of New York.

“How was school today? Fine. Is a uniquely sensitive and practical guide for better problem solving and improved communication with your children and teens, written by an especially insightful mom and her articulate elementary school-aged daughter. Shannon’s powerful Christian ministry, award-winning news and documentary reporting, and her profoundly relatable life story come together with her pre-teen’s candor to provide a uniquely wise, well-organized and pleasantly readable guide to navigating well those ever evolving, challenging life questions we naturally face in parenting. “

**Nancy Gray**

“This book is fascinating, helpful, creative, and very readable. It is both educational and conversational - with vivid anecdotes and a direct link with the human heart. Peyton’s comments along the way punctuate the fresh energy of your thoughts - and all the stories make it come alive.

There is a strong moral fabric throughout the book - without being moralistic. But you make it clear that values matter. Good for you! And there are life lessons here that transcend a parent/child relationship. This book can help create good human beings of all ages.”

**Rev. Susan Andrews**

**former national leader of the Presbyterian Church  
current General Presbyter of The Presbytery of Hudson River**

“Shannon addresses all the difficult and challenging issues of family life in today’s world with candor, honesty, thoughtfulness, and humor. Her personal reflections and revelations resonate in the hearts and souls of everyone who has ever been a parent or a child, a husband or a wife, a brother or a sister.”

**Rabbi Vicki L. Axe, DM, RJE**

## HOW TO ORDER THIS BOOK

**Integrated Life Enterprises LLC**

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Also available on Amazon.com and through Lightning Source

<b>TITLE</b>
How was School Today? Fine.
<b>AUTHORS</b>
Shannon A. and Peyton White
<b>ISBN</b>
978-0-9844204-0-7
<b>PRICE</b>
\$15.95
<b>PUBLICATION DATE</b>
March 1, 2010
<b>GENRE</b>
Parenting, Advice
<b>AUDIENCE</b>
Parents, Guardians, Children, Teachers, Advisors
<b>PAGE COUNT</b>
286
<b>IMAGES</b>
10 interior – 4 front cover
<b>TRIM SIZE</b>
5.83 x 8.27
<b>BINDING</b>
Paperback
<b>WEBSITE</b>
<a href="http://www.HowWasSchoolTodayFine.com">www.HowWasSchoolTodayFine.com</a>
<b>PUBLISHER</b>
Integrated Life Enterprises <a href="http://www.integratedlifeenterprises.com">www.integratedlifeenterprises.com</a>

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## Book Excerpts

“How was school today, honey?”

Kiss, hug...

“Fine...”

My heart sinks every time I hear it. How many parents have been met with these words after anxiously awaiting the return of their children from school only to be met with this monotone response?

The simple “How was school today” answered with a “fine” became so frustrating to me that we went to a therapist to see if we could get help with the deep feelings that must be lurking behind it. I was also curious, and I admit somewhat jealous, to overhear her chatting on the telephone with her father about things she had not told me.

What was I doing wrong? Why was I working so hard with so little results? “You’re not asking me the right questions,” she told me. “What questions should I be asking?” I asked.

This book began as a way to figure that out together. It has become a vehicle through which we have deepened our relationship. Our hope is that it will help you deepen yours too.

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## Three Major Message Points

1. If parents are getting one word responses after school, they may not be asking the right questions.
2. Children want to connect and talk with their parents. They want to know them and be known.
3. When parents change for the better, and continue to grow emotionally, their children will respond. “How was school today, honey?”

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## Questions & Answers

1. What brought you to write this book?

**Shannon:** *When Peyton was at the end of the 3rd grade, I picked her up from a play date. The other mother alerted me to a conversation she heard between our daughters...that two months earlier, a boy at the lunch table had said he had wanted to have sex with my daughter. After recovering from the shock, I asked her why she hadn't told me. She said she didn't want to get him in trouble. I had always prided myself in being on top of things. Yet, I had failed. As a TV news reporter and church minister, I ask people questions for a living, and yet I didn't get to this very important event in her life. So, we started the book as a way to get closer and help our own conversations.*

**Peyton:** *We wrote this to be able to understand each other better and to help parents and children talk.*

2. How has the book affected your relationship?

**Shannon:** *I can honestly say that the writing process, which took place over a year and a half brought us to another level in our relationship. When I asked Peyton, once again, "How was school?" she told me I was asking the wrong questions. "So what questions should I be asking?" Our book starts to ask and answer some of those suggestions.*

*This is not an "everything you ever wanted to know about parenting" book. But we are hoping it will do for others what it did for us.*

**Peyton:** *It has made our relationship better. I feel we can connect more and I can say stuff. We actually talk more after school. I feel I know more about mom and she knows more about me and that's good because maybe when I'm having a hard time we can talk. And when she's having a hard time I understand better what she's going through.*

3. What do you hope others will get from your book?

**Shannon:** *We hope that this will start, restart or continue conversations between parents, grandparents or caregivers and the children in their lives. People who read this will also find that they are already doing many of the things we talk about, but if they are helped by even one or two suggestions which worked for us, then we've succeeded. Shannon "fesses" up to mistakes she has made and how she has tried to make changes.*

*We also hope that adults will be encouraged to reflect on how their own "stuff" easily gets spilled over into the lives of the children for whom they love and care. It's amazing to me that when a parent/guardian changes something within herself, things tend to change in her relationship with her children.*

**Peyton:** *I hope that people will get a better understanding of what their child has to say and have a better connection.*

4. How long did it take you to write this book?

**Shannon:** *I started it two years ago and wrote 70 pages at that time. Then I got distracted and put it down for nine months. In July 2009, I went to a conference which encouraged attendees to “up their game,” whatever it is. We had 90 days in between that point and then next time we met. I was accountable to a woman every day and a group of women every week with my progress. I finished the book in those 90 days (287 pages) ...all while working full-time and raising my daughter. The power of accountability and encouragement is amazing.*

5. Did you enjoy writing it?

**Peyton:** *It was a fun experience because I could spend more time with my mother and learn more about her.*

**Shannon:** *Wow...just hearing that makes the whole experience worthwhile. I work hard, like so many parents to make a living. Being a single mom makes it a bit more challenging. By the time I get home from work, get dinner going and oversee homework, I’m tired and want to connect but don’t have the emotional reserves, at times, to think creatively about how to delve into deeper topics.*

*Writing this book made me “have to” stop and think about many topics....some which we had never addressed together. I saw how easy it is to live on the surface and miss so many of the important moments that happened in Peyton’s life. I thought I was doing a pretty good job, and I suppose at times I have, but I was also missing a lot.*

*The actual process was an experience of “automatic writing” in a sense. It flowed when I put the pen to paper. It was not difficult, but it required time and persistence.*

6. Did you learn anything about each other during the writing process?

**Shannon:** *I can tell you, I fell in love with my daughter on a deeper level and have such great respect for the young woman she is becoming. When I read what she put in her “Peyton’s Point of View,” I heard such wisdom. I know she will be a great encouragement to other children who read her words.*

*In addition, parents don’t often know if their kids are really listening to what they have to say or if they have really accepted their values. When I heard her voice in the book, I knew that I had been heard, and that she had made some of the things which are important to our family, her own. That was a true gift.*

**Peyton:** *I learned that Mom can actually play...I learned that when mom gets cranky, I can actually talk to her about it rather than just stay quiet. We talked a whole lot more while we were writing this book and I got to know my mom better, and that’s a good thing. I also realized how much my mom loves me.*

7. Peyton: How does it feel to be a published author in elementary school?

**Peyton:** *It feels great because I already feel experienced and maybe when I’m older, like say in high school I’ll know what to do then.*

8. What are some of the topics you covered that were easy to write?

**Peyton:** *Pets because I love my dog, Max. Things pop in my head when I think about him! The bully chapter wasn’t hard, because I’ve experienced being bullied. Also the chapters on fun and imagination were easy too!*

**Shannon:** *I am passionate about what is age appropriate and inappropriate at any given time, so that part flowed pretty easily. The gratitude chapter (Glass Half Empty/Glass Half Full) was fun to write and so was the part about the importance of knowing your beginnings.*

9. Which topics were more difficult to write?

**Peyton:** *Divorce, loss, letting stuff go. I don't like to let my things go. Divorce was hard because it's hard for me to talk about my parents' divorce.*

**Shannon:** *As a minister, I have worked with families who have been through much pain in their lives. The issues of alcohol, sexual and physical abuse and others which may be difficult for many to talk about are not difficult for me. There is something freeing about saying the truth.*

*I had to do some deeper digging on areas which are newer for me...cyber safety, and video games, for example. Talking with other parents who are well versed in these areas and doing further research alerted me to areas which I have avoided but need to pay attention to. We are living in a time when our children may surpass us in their knowledge of technology. As a parent, I need to keep up with it.*

10. How did this book affect your relationship with your friends at school? (for Peyton)

**Peyton:** *The kids at school really want to buy it because maybe they have some problems at their houses and they're hoping it will help them and their parents.*

**Shannon:** *I've had numerous parents say they want to buy it, for the title alone! They say, "Oh yeah, I hear that!" I've had grandparents and caregivers say they'd get it too. Since we talk about issues from a multi-faith, multi-cultural viewpoint, I have sought feedback from a diverse pool of readers. A rabbi colleague and the former head of the Presbyterian Church nationwide have signed off on the book as one which they would recommend.*

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## Reader Reviews

"I think most people do not put much thought into parenting; they tend to imitate their parents. Many of the topics you cover used to be the realm of grandmothers. Now grandmothers are too far away to be a daily influence in many situations or just not in touch with current ways of thinking. You have done a terrific job of picking subjects and examples and stepping in for grandma.

You also do a nice job of showing that we are all in this together, that we all have many similar experiences. This is very comforting and encouraging.

This is a perfect book for young parents; I will give it as a baby shower gift going forward."

***Patty Oliveira***

"How was school today? Fine. Is a uniquely sensitive and practical guide for better problem solving and improved communication with your children and teens, written by an especially insightful mom and her articulate middle-school daughter. Shannon's powerful Christian ministry, award-winning news and documentary reporting, and her profoundly relatable life story come together with her pre-teen's candor to provide a uniquely wise, well-organized and pleasantly readable guide to navigating well those ever evolving, challenging life questions we naturally face in parenting. "

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## Author Headshots

(JPEGs available for download on website)



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