

'dangerous' book

It smelled like something was burning as I brushed the weeds off myself. I had crashed our homemade go-kart that was being pulled behind a motorcycle through the field at my grandparent's farm. The rate of speed, obviously, broke the normal bounds of safety along with the rickety contraption, which sported iron back wheels that bent in at a striking angle. I rubbed my rear and discovered the source of the smell: The back wheels of the go-kart had eaten into my jeans, leaving two nicely-angled burn marks right on my seat.

Such memories from my adolescence came flooding back as I sat down with Conn and Hal Iggulden's wildly informative "The Dangerous Book for Boys," a veritable field guide, almanac and encyclopedia for how to be a boy of adventure and learning. Leafing through pages filled with astronomy, tales of peril, paper airplanes, dinosaurs and famous stories, I recalled cleaning fish, shooting BB guns, reading "Hardy Boys," tossing firecrackers, cutting firewood and the pungent smell of my Grandpa Decker's Captain Black Royal. In a way, this compendium of things that boys need to know, penned by two British brothers, reminded me how many things — working, hunting, fishing, building, joke telling, cards, cooking and farming, to name but a



A HANDY MANUAL FOR BEING A KID,
NO MATTER WHAT AGE YOU ARE

BY MARK LUCE

few — I learned from all three of my grandfathers and how badly, in fact, I miss them.

But the wonderful thing about reading through "The Dangerous Book for Boys" is that those thoughts of the past turned rather cheerful because grandpas Decker, Kimball and Luce would have devoured this book. Hell, they could have written entire sections of it.

Merlin Decker, a strapping chiropractor turned farmer, could build damn near anything, be it a makeshift battery (page 16) or go-karts (page 79). He knew his cloud formations (page 112), stars (page 182) and how to choose the right stone for skipping (page 171). Technically, he was my stepgrandfather, but he treated and considered me as family.

Eugene Luce, who taught flyboys how to be pilots down in the Big Easy in World War II, was a carpenter extraordinaire who could knock out a treehouse (page 21) or a workbench (page 141) with grace and ease. He could also make sticks of gum appear

from my ear or make coins mysteriously vanish (page 191).

George Kimball, an Air Force mechanic and raconteur par excellence, spent winters in the bush in Canada with an Indian tribe. "Shorty" could play a mean hand of poker (page 198), tie any type of knot (page 9), knew his trees (page 226) and his artillery (page 209), and certainly could tan a skin (page 241). I can't be sure, but I wouldn't be surprised if Grandpa George knew Navajo code talking (page 100) as well.

These men influenced me profoundly, and although I started this column wanting only to tell you all what a great gift this book would make for the holidays, I am more than happy to thank George, Merlin and Gene for helping me to learn how to be a dangerous boy.

Mark Luce lives in Kansas City, Mo., where his son is almost ready to make a bow and arrow (page 35). He can be reached at msluce@everestkc.net.

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