

Billy and Willy

a letter to young people

By and Based on the Books of Robert J. Cormier (www.thefaithkit.org)
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Billy and Willy

Billy was a mostly normal, mostly happy fifth grader. He was an OK student who was pretty good at math, sort of liked geography, and really liked answering questions. He had a decent bunch of friends and these included Willy.

Things started to get complicated in sixth grade. Billy and his friends started to have a hard time keeping quiet. They started to get in trouble. But this was cool, it seemed; it sure seemed cool to Willy.

It's a good thing that getting in trouble was cool because Billy and his friends started to multiply their troubles. They shot baskets after school, watched TV after supper, and often failed to do their homework. Sometimes Billy didn't have it; sometimes Willy didn't have it; soon enough almost no one ever had it. Now their teachers started to think that they were kids with "problems." But this was cool too—Willy seemed to think so.

By eighth grade, when they were finally the biggest, Billy and his friends went out for basketball, and just about everybody made the team. But Billy was not the best, and the team was not too good, and everybody felt a little nervous being out on the court, and when the season was over somebody said "that league sucks," and Willy agreed, and so did Billy.

Billy and most of his friends went to the same high school. There were a lot of new kids and so they needed to be cool. Mostly this meant that they didn't sit up straight, didn't ask questions, and laughed whenever they could at every little jerk trying to be a student.

Billy had to be careful sometimes. There were a couple of times when he knew the answer but had to keep quiet. There was even a time or two when he had a question but there was no way he was going to ask it. He wasn't always sure this was smart but he didn't see Willy asking any questions and so... forget it.

The new thing now was clothes. Everybody had to have what everybody had. Billy got away with being nasty when his mom didn't want to give him the money to get the clothes... but he got away with it, and he

also got the clothes. It was actually a lot to wear, and a lot of it was not too comfortable, but, hey, you had to have the clothes. Everybody else—who mattered—had them. Willy got them.

Clothes were important if you were gonna get the lay-dies. Most of the guys got lay-dies, and to hear them tell it, they got their lay-dies good.

In his heart, Billy feel a little funny about this. He couldn't really explain it but neither could he talk about it so he just did as much as he could get away with and always made it sound like more.

One day—by now it was sophomore year—everybody had to sit through some stupid assembly about careers. Billy, Willy, and boys didn't sit up straight, and none too quietly they mocked the dork who was giving the talk. Billy was as cool as any of them, but he was also thinking a little bit. "OK, what am I going to do..." he started to think "with my life" but that was too much and so instead he turned to one of the guys and asked, "what are you going do... for money?"

"I'll get job," he said, "and then I'll get a car; and then I'll get my place; and I'll live just fi-i-i-ine."

Billy didn't know exactly what to think about this but Willy seemed to think it was cool and so Billy said, "cool."

Time marched on, as it turned out, the older everybody got, the less they thought about their lives. Life was mostly chillin', music, girls, and, now, they were also getting high. They started getting high with somebody's brother's beer. Then somebody showed up with weed. Billy was actually a little scared when he saw that, but everybody else acted like they had done it before, and it looked like Willy had done it too, and so Billy pretended he had done it too, and he started to get high. When you were high you were happy—sort of. They kept getting high. They even got dumb jobs so they could buy their stuff, and also new clothes.

One night, still light—it was Summer—they were chillin' and somebody said they should grab a car. He said his brother showed him how to do it. Pretty quickly they had a plan. They would walk across town until it got dark and then they would pick off the first Lux (or something like it) they came to—as long as nobody was around.

It took about an hour. There was no alarm. The car started and they took off. Billy was there, and Willy too. They were just cruising around, showing themselves off, when they realized that some cop was now behind them. They took off. The police lights went on. It didn't matter who was behind the wheel because no one was a good driver. They screeched and hit stuff and ran a mess of stop signs. Finally someone was coming the other way. He was somebody's grampa and they killed him. They were not hurt, and tried to get away, but all of them got caught. Some part of Billy knew his life was over, and he looked at Willy, and Willy was looking back.

Flashback to Fifth Grade

Willy was a mostly normal, mostly happy fifth grader. He was an OK student who was pretty good at math, sort of liked geography, and really liked answering questions. He had a decent bunch of friends and these included Billy.

Be A D.O.R.K.

D is for “dream,” as in “have one,” something you want to be or do that is doable and worth your life. Have a plan to get there. Do the work that has to be done. See setbacks in the spirit of the sentence: “The more you put into it, the more you appreciate it.”

O is for “other interests,” as in activities you find fun or at least interesting. Try to get good at something that not everyone can do. Remember: “The more you are interested in, the more you are interesting.”

R is for “right,” as in “right relationships.” This means that you are a friend to your friends, and you are honest and patient in relationships with the opposite sex. Remember, love is great but only when it’s real, and it’s real only when it lasts and it wants to last for life.

K is for “kingdom,” as in kingdom of God, the only thing that really counts because it’s the only thing that lasts. Seek first the kingdom and everything else will fall into place. Have a relationship with God. Pray every day. Practice your faith every week. Make decisions on the basis of your faith and watch as it grows and with it your peace, sense of purpose, and even joy.