

Chapter 6.
I Never Thought I'd Ever Do This

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Cops and Robbers: The Senior Version

Annette Langer

Okay, I'd retired. So, now what? I traveled a bit and dabbled in a few hobbies. But I was looking for something more stimulating, something I could really sink my teeth into – while I still had teeth.

An article appearing in my local newspaper one day advertised an offering at the police department called the Citizens Police Academy. Various facets of police work would be covered during the fourteen-week course, from patrol functions to investigations, crime prevention, narcotics, SWAT team duties and, in general, the importance of public involvement in the policing process. I signed up for it and never missed a class. Each week various police officers, an assistant district attorney, and even a superior court judge instructed us. At the conclusion, I decided to find out how I could get more involved.

I completed an application, got interviewed and fingerprinted, underwent a background check and was accepted into the VIPS (Volunteer in Police Service) program. Although I'm committed to volunteering twelve to sixteen hours each month, I've worked as many as 110 hours. Assignments range from administrative tasks inside the police station to actual street duty in full uniform with another volunteer in a marked police car.

We communicate with the police dispatchers using our on-board computer and two-way radio while patrolling the city. We direct traffic at accident scenes and cruise the shopping malls to spot visible or potential problems. We issue parking citations and patrol the neighborhoods of homeowners away on vacation or for complaints of vandalism, loitering or other matters not requiring officers' immediate involvement.

At SWAT team training exercises, VIPS role-play in various simulated rescue and assault situations. We provide security, guarding the perimeter to keep out the looky-loos curious about "what's goin' on with all the cop cars?" as many of them put it. Sometimes I role-play the part of the suspect and other times, the victim. During some of these training scenarios, we use

handguns containing simulated ammunition (marking cartridges). We wear bulletproof vests like the rest of the SWAT team and protective headgear since they'd be shooting back at us as well.

One of my favorite duties inside the police station involves assisting detectives in the Criminal Investigations Unit. I have created elaborate spreadsheets documenting financial fraud, viewed store video surveillance to find suspected shoplifters, listened to recorded phone calls of jailed prisoners for incriminating admissions, and transcribed recorded victim and suspect interviews.

In a process called the Juvenile Diversion Program, I verify if first-time juvenile offenders arrested for minor nonviolent crimes are eligible to participate. I schedule their hearings presided over by the juvenile crimes detective and a marriage and family therapist and attend the hearings myself. I follow up to ensure that juveniles complete their mandated assignments—working a specified number of community service hours and submitting a written essay on such topics as what they've learned from getting arrested. Successful participants in this program avoid the judicial process and placement into the juvenile justice system.

I also work in the Crime Prevention Unit tracking all false burglar alarms triggered. I counsel the offenders by telephone regarding excessive false alarms, warning them of possible fines if the false alarms continue. Finally, I assist the Property and Evidence Technician in research and disposal of evidence in closed cases—everything from personal items to weapons and drugs. I research case files to determine rightful ownership of non-evidentiary property in situations where it is unclear, notifying and then releasing the items to their proper owners.

As the “eyes and ears” of the police, we perform a vital role in the community policing process. It goes beyond volunteering. By increasing public awareness and helping to reduce crime, this partnership instills a sense of wellbeing, improving not only my life but the quality of life within the whole community.

See? It's not just kids anymore who can play cops and robbers!



Annette Langer (2014)
[Photo by permission]

Annette Langer combines humor with storytelling of her sometimes serious topics, from brain injury to breast cancer to traveling to all seven continents, using personal examples and poking

good-natured fun at herself to augment her points. Visit www.annettelanger.com to learn more about her two published nonfiction books and the many anthologies to which she has contributed.

“Even Grandmas Need a Sisterhood”

Donne Davis

In 2003, I reached two significant milestones: 1) I retired from my fifteen-year career as a college outreach counselor and, 2) I became a grandma. On April 26, 2003, I experienced the most miraculous moment of my life -- I witnessed the birth of my first granddaughter. That was the moment I went completely “gaga!”

When I came back down to earth, I realized I wasn’t the only grandma who felt totally over the moon about her grandchild. As I spoke with other grandmas, I recognized that they were also crazy about their grandchildren. I felt as if I was part of a new “community” and we all spoke the same joyful language.

Then I realized something even more important: being a grandma is complicated. I had so many concerns I wondered if I was “normal.” I didn’t understand my daughter’s new parenting philosophies. I was terrified I might drop the baby. I needed to talk to some other grandmas for reassurance.

There were plenty of Mother’s Clubs, but there were no groups for grandmas. So I created my *own* group for grandmas and named it the “GaGa Sisterhood.” I invited all the grandmas I knew to come to my home and start a conversation about what it means to be a modern grandma.

On December 7, 2003, fifteen grandmas sat in a circle in my living room. We told stories about what our grandchildren call us, how we got those names, the great lengths we go to see them, how we juggle all our roles to make time for them, and most importantly, how we get along with their parents.

As our conversation got juicier, I began to see there were many layers to being a grandma. It was exhilarating to feel the energy of other grandmas excited about this stage of life. I realized we could figure out how to navigate this new journey together.

Initially, I founded the GaGa Sisterhood for my own needs but as more and more grandmas have joined our circle, I realize there is a hunger for connection at this phase of our lives. The women who are drawn to our Sisterhood want to continue growing; they are conscious about the part they play in the grandparent relationship; they want to share stories and vent about their frustrations; and they want to make new friends.

The GaGa Sisterhood tagline is: *Where grandmas bond, brag, and benefit.* I've kept that three-fold purpose in mind when planning our programs. We meet every other month in members' homes averaging about twenty-five members at a meeting. I invite speakers from a variety of disciplines so that our meetings provide ideas for our own well-being, for deepening the bonds with our grandchildren, and for getting along with our grandchildren's parents.

One of our most popular meetings was a conversation titled: "When being a grandma isn't so grand." From that discussion, I realized three common challenges we face as grandmas: understanding today's modern parenting methods; building satisfying relationships with our grandchild's parents; and coping with feelings of being unappreciated.

Those challenges became the core of my book, which I published in 2012. *When Being a Grandma Isn't So Grand: 4 Keys to L.O.V.E. Your Grandchild's Parents* is a practical guide for grandmas that includes the mom's perspective on the grandparent relationship.

When I first conceived of the GaGa Sisterhood, I never dreamed it would flourish for over a decade and become my life's work. It's the most interesting and creatively productive time in my life. Nurturing this community of "grandma sisters" has helped me become more conscious in my relationships with my adult children, a better listener, and a more fun and engaged grandma. I'm truly grateful for all of the wisdom I've gleaned from the GaGa Sisterhood.

Donne Davis and her husband live in the San Francisco Bay Area. They have two grown children and three granddaughters. Eleven years ago, after witnessing the birth of her first grandchild, Donne founded the GaGa Sisterhood, a social network for enthusiastic grandmas. Her book, When Being a Grandma Isn't So Grand, is available on Amazon. You can read her award-winning blog at <http://gagasisterhood.com> or email her at donnedavis@gagasisterhood.com.



Donne Davis (second from right) at a meeting of the GaGa Sisterhood (2014)
[Photo by permission]

Dragonboat Racing

Kay Licina

In my twenties and thirties, my husband, Michel, and I would spend most summers near the sea; somewhere in the world. Since we were both teaching at the time, we usually had a few months off. I especially remember the beauty of Baja California forty years ago. We dove at Cabo San Lucas when there was nothing there but a tuna fish processing plant. We didn't use tanks; we "free" dove, or sometimes it was called "skin diving." We liked the freedom of going to very isolated places; alone together.

When Michel died that stopped excursions into solitary places. I am not interested in tours, so I missed the water very much.

I have a friend who lives at K dock at the Berkeley Marina. Often when I visited her, I would see the Dragonboats leave for practice at dock M. The people looked so happy. But I knew nothing about them and thought they might be a private club. My friend said that she thought it was open to anyone. I still hung back, until one day when I just went down and took a trial paddle. I was hooked.

The history of Dragonboating started in China. The earliest boat races were rooted in training for naval warfare. The earliest evidence of boat racing as a sport comes from around 550 A.D. The boats vary in length, but they are usually around forty feet long with ten rows of two paddlers sitting side-by-side. In addition, a drummer sits in front and a steersperson in back.

Being a member of the Dragonmax team combined camaraderie and being near the water again. Seeing the beautiful shades, tones and hues of the water under many different conditions is a pleasure. At times, the water is like silk; at others, a steely gray choppy expanse. When we go out into the Bay at night on the calm waters of winter, we see the city lights come on and the dazzle of the Eastern span of the new bridge. Enough has already been said about the beautiful sunsets. I don't want this to sound like all moonlight and roses, because on cold and damp nights I have to be firm with myself about getting to practice. Sometimes, I just ache.

So I am going into my second year, and we qualified to go to the World Dragonboat Races in Ravenna, Italy on September 1st, 2014! This was through the hard work of the coach, Roger Garfinkle, and his wife, Linda Lee, and, of course, the team itself. He has been encouraging to me as an older women team member, but is never reticent about critiquing my technique, which is the only way to improve.

The reactions of friends have been interesting. They run from, "How great", to "Why would you ever want to do that?" I just say, "It is never too late for a mid-life crisis!"

Women in their seventies, eighties, and even nineties are doing very challenging and exciting things these days. When I think back to my mother, I know she wouldn't have done this. But I have never lost the mental image of her breaking ice in the creek for the horses on the farm when six months pregnant! So she did set a precedent.

Kay Licina was born on a Midwestern farm. She moved to California in the '60s and went to U.C. Berkeley graduate school. She met Michel Mathieu and spent the next forty years with him. Art has been a life-long joy for Kay; she practiced ceramics for forty years and taught.



Dragonboaters [Photo credit: Nancy Rubin]



Kay Licina in 2014 [Photo credit: Nancy Rubin]