Chapter 1.
Comparing Generations

A Generational Difference: The Issue of Independence

Jody Woodruff

I was born in 1930, the eighth generation on our family farm in the flatlands of Southern New Jersey. Four, then three generations shared the farmhouse – an extended family with an ever-changing cast of characters. Now, at age 83, my life couldn't be more different.

My mother lived ninety-three years, her adult life in that same farmhouse, her life alternately devoted to husband, community and children, husband always first. Our differences started early in life, beginning with personalities – outgoing and charming (her), shy, introverted and introspective (me).

Far from my origins, I live alone in the foothills of the Southern Oregon mountains, widowed from my second marriage. My mother also lived her later years as a widow, but there the comparison ends. Mother lived alone, occupied with church, clubs and nearby family members. Nevertheless, her sons handled all her financial affairs, any issue with house, car, medical. She remained well cared for. Consequently, the most significant generational difference between my mother and me is that of independence.

Although Mother taught elementary school at ages 19 to 21, it would not have occurred to her to work outside the home once she married. On the other hand, I had two professions: social work while raising three sons, then free-lance writing. First in my large extended family to divorce, I needed a profession, needed to be able to take care of myself. I had been programed to believe that marriage and children were the ultimate goal, but the reality for many women is that they must be as self-sufficient as possible. And, in my experience, all people of both genders find personal satisfaction in developing their potentials and talents.

At age 50, burned out on social work and all my sons out on their own, I sold my house, quit my very secure job and traveled west with a man who became my second husband. After some exploring, we settled in Oregon. Courses in film at the local University led me to writing

educational film scripts. In turn, this developed into free-lance writing in general. I last published an article at age 82 and may try again, although I find ambition waning.

As elders, my mother and I would have shared few interests. I don't choose to attend church or belong to social clubs. I am happiest in nature, which is not far from my childhood preference, but the activities differ. Loading my little flat-water kayak in my car and meeting friends at a mountain lake is joyful; a second pleasure, walking on the nearby Pacific Crest Trail or other local nature trails, observing wild flowers and wild life. Always physically active in many sports, at age 83 I still attempt to camp, cross-country ski, snorkel. I say attempt, because my physical abilities diminish along with each birthday. I cannot lift as much, walk or swim as far, but I know that I will persist so long as any body part works.

My mother began going to the gym at age 79 when she discovered she couldn't keep up with others in her group when walking the Great Wall of China. I admired her for taking the initiative to improve her health. Proud of herself, she continued until the year before her death, but going to the gym was uncommon among her peers. Usually she and her friends participated in very few physical activities. People of all generations enjoy and need friends and that is something I expect we will always have in common, but I note that my friends and I have more varied interests, and are, in general, better educated, read more widely. Obviously, I'm making generalizations, basing my opinions on my experiences with my older relatives and their friends.

I believe generational differences begin at birth. People can change and grow, but patterns and preferences are often rooted in early life and influenced by the culture in which they live. Each generation, however, has more opportunities, more options, perhaps better health. My mother had a happy life, but she wouldn't have chosen mine, nor I hers.

After a previous life on the east coast, Jody Woodruff moved to Oregon in 1980 with a friend who became her second husband. Leaving her social work career behind, she began writing educational film scripts throughout the 1980s, then free-lanced with news magazines and newspapers. She has published two books: Genes of Determination*, a family history, and* One Way Or Another*, a childhood memoir. In 2004, Jody won second place in the PNWA (Pacific Northwest Writers Association) contest for short memoir.*

Jody's mother, Anne S. Woodruff, and Jody (1938)

Jody Woodruff in 2014

[Photos by permission]

Alone

Susan Segal

My wonderful father died a year ago, a few months shy of what would have been my parents' seventieth anniversary. Four months later, my mother suffered a fractured vertebra, and needed help at home. She recently cut back on that care, leaving her alone for a few hours every day.

Not long ago, I asked my mother how things were going. She said she was able to get around and do many things for herself, but that she felt lonely during those four hours each day that she was alone in her house. That got me thinking about one of the biggest differences in the way she and I have led our lives. She has never learned to enjoy and appreciate solitude. Until my father died, she had never slept alone, sharing a bed in her childhood with either her mother or sister, and marrying my father when she was just eighteen. Since the time he came back from the war, they were inseparable.

My mother was not a stay at home mom. She had an impressive career in special education within the Berkeley Public Schools. She was at times active in left politics, marching and going door-to-door leafleting for causes she cared about. Many of the beliefs I hold today come from the seeds planted by my mother and father when I was a child.

She lunched on occasion with a group of women friends, or took my sister and me out for an afternoon of shopping. She went to work every day until she retired. But evenings, travel, plays, concerts, dining, socializing, most other shopping, and everything else was done in tandem with my father.

I, on the other hand, have always enjoyed my time alone. As a child I loved to take long walks into the Berkeley hills by myself. Since getting married, I have traveled to New York, New Mexico, North Carolina, Massachusetts, Washington DC, Iowa, Nevada, Mexico, Scotland, Tassajara, Sacramento, Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, San Diego and other parts of California either alone or with friends or family other than my husband. He has traveled to several South American countries, Cuba, Mexico, and throughout the U.S. without me.

My husband and I often have dates with our kids that don't include each other. Unless we are buying a major appliance, we never shop together. I have season tickets to the theater with my best friend, and often go out to dinner with friends or with the kids at restaurants I know my husband would not enjoy. I eat out by myself, and have on occasion sat at a bar by myself and had a drink and a plate of oysters, something I can't imagine my mother ever doing.

I love my husband, maybe in a different way, but just as much as my mother loved my father. But when he has work that takes him out of town, I bask in the luxury of having the house to myself. I can eat what I want, when and where I want, watch corny movies, and do the kind of projects which make huge messes as things get sorted through. I'm glad to see him when he returns, but I can't honestly say I miss him when he's gone.

This generational difference in my mother's and my lifestyles is not dramatic. Unlike many of my peers, I never had to rebel against my mother's basic values, or had to overcome a stereotyped model in which a woman's place was in the home. And yet this subtle difference is in its own way huge. For better or for worse, my husband and I have lives which, while intertwined, are independent of one another. We have many shared interests and friendships, but we each have friendships and interests that are ours alone.

I used to worry about what would happen to whichever of my parents outlived the other. When two people are joined at the hip, how do they survive without their other half? I anticipated a long period of deep sorrow and depression. And I imagined that when my time came, or my husband's, depending on who survived the other, we would feel sad, but not so lost.
My mother has shown herself to be stronger and more resilient than I had imagined. But she is for the first time in her life alone. And lonely.

Susan Segal was born in New York City in 1949, and in 1954 her family drove across the country and settled in Berkeley, California. Now living in Oakland, in addition to being a daughter, a wife, and a mother, Susan is a registered nurse, a union activist, a writer, an artist, a baker, and a knitter. Her favorite holiday is Mayday, and for almost forty years she has gathered with friends and family to celebrate the rites of Spring and the rights of workers.

Susan's parents, Lottie and Paul Rosen (1943 and 2008)

Susan Segal and her husband, Louis Segal in 2008 [Photos by permission]

Old War Limits and New World Opportunity
Deborah Shefler

My mom Florence Lieberman, born in 1910 in lower Manhattan, grew up as the beloved tenth and final child of an Eastern European Jewish immigrant family. Five of the siblings, including mom, were born in this country and went to college, Hunter in my mom's case. She and her seven sisters married teachers, doctors, accountants, engineers and small businessmen, but tended not to work outside the home themselves. Her two brothers went into their father's fur business, Alex branching out to Chicago. Sister Jenny followed her husband to Washington, D.C. Everyone else stayed in NY, spreading out from SoHo into the boroughs. All chipped in to support widowed sister Bessie in The Bronx.

All ten married for life and raised one, two or three children. In my mom's case, there was just me. To my knowledge, virtually all my first cousins attended college, and several of that generation, including me, obtained advanced degrees. My first cousins are an eclectic, widely disbursed bunch largely unknown to me, but including many who can claim impressive academic and/or professional achievements.

While my mom was able to attend college, she graduated in 1932, a time similar to our own in terms of limited employment opportunity. She dreamed of becoming a teacher, but was lucky to get work as a substitute. When she reached her early thirties and was still unmarried, the family sent her to live with her D.C. sister, who immediately introduced her to my father, Nathan, who owned a small business. I was born in 1945, eleven months after they married.

But there were to be no more children because my mom had a damaged heart, the result of childhood rheumatic fever. Despite heroic 1960s era surgeries at Johns Hopkins, she died at fifty-four when her beta version pacemaker stopped working. As an adult she did not drive, did not travel outside the United States, loved books and films, kept a spotless house, never thought about exercise, and tried hard to keep her diabetic husband on a reasonable diet.

The generational trajectory of my mother's assimilationist family is typical of that of many whose American experience began on Ellis Island in the early twentieth century. The dramatic differences between her life and my own are also typical, if somewhat idiosyncratic.

I know only through books and films what it might be like to be part of a large family in which your sister Anna was almost old enough to be your mom. Or what it was like to live in congested tenement housing where no amount of fastidiousness was sufficient to discourage your neighbors' invasive cockroaches. I grew up an only child in a spacious, orderly suburban home with rose bushes and a swing set in the back yard.

My mom suffered from a terrible chronic disease that hardly exists here now, which sapped her energy, narrowed her world, and shortened her life. I have been healthy all my adult life.

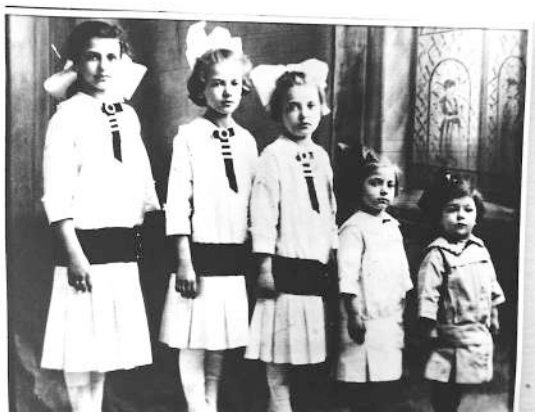
She was frustrated in her quest for a fulfilling career. I graduated from college into a robust job market, was able to go to law school, enjoyed a rewarding practice for 37 years, and a few years ago moved on to a new stage of life full of opportunity. Younger women have had even more vocational choice than I did.

My mom lived a circumscribed life, in large part because of her illness and reluctance to drive, but also due to internalized social stereotypes that limited her options and vision. By contrast, I have traveled widely since my first trip to Israel in 1961; I have worked in government, private practice, and for a large corporation; I participate in a variety of volunteer activities in my community and internationally; I exercise daily (Marge Lasky* and I met in a hiking group); my

husband and I have many friends whom we see regularly; we routinely enjoy cuisines unknown to my mom; my reading extends far beyond Book of the Month Club selections; I have embraced technology that was science fiction to mom's generation; and my reluctance to drive has nothing to do with phobia, everything to do with Bay Area traffic.

* Marge Lasky, Professor Emerita at Diablo Valley College, and originator of the Older Women's Narratives project.

Deborah and her husband Stephen Shefler are thirty-year residents of Oakland, CA. They have no children but dote on their three grandnephews and brand new grandniece. Deborah practiced law for almost four decades, in the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice, the U.S. Attorney Office in San Francisco, private practice, and in Pacific Gas and Electric's Law Department, from which she retired in 2010. She is a hiker, reader and traveller, and serves on the boards of Preventing Cervical Cancer and the Oakland League of Women Voters.



Deborah's mother, Florence Lieberman, on the right with some of her siblings (1914) [Photo by permission]

Deborah Shefler in 2014 (Photo credit: Nancy Rubin)

One Generation Away And Yet…

Carol Hoffman

As an older woman what am I doing that my mother's generation might never have considered?

Preface: I was born in 1940, and my mother was born in 1907. The span of time – now a full century since she was born, has seen innovations that have enabled each separate generation opportunities and challenges that former generations did not have. My late mother, in her own way, was an independent, strong and adventurous woman. She drove at the age of fifteen, she worked full time from the age of fourteen until her marriage at the age of thirty; she flew a plane at the age of twenty-five; and she was an independent philanthropist particularly for anything regarding the sovereign state of Israel.

Were my mother to live long enough to experience the microcomputer, she would have been hooked on eBay, Amazon, the Giant Eagle (a chain of grocery stores serving Pennsylvania, Iowa, West Virginia, and Maryland), and online shopping. She loved to shop for gifts for her grandchildren, nieces and nephews and for anyone else she could think of; and if she could shop 24/7, she would. She would have been addicted to email because letter writing was one of her specialties. Had she lived to use a mobile phone, she would have been the first to buy a smart phone, use every application of which she could conceivably think, and be constantly attached to instant messaging, WhatsApp, etc. My mother would have been one of the first to buy a tablet – would take it with her everywhere – she'd sync between her various electronic devices, photograph stills and video endlessly, sharing with everyone on her list. That was my mother had she lived through my time.

What did I do as an older woman that she didn't do regardless of innovations made in my time? I've done nothing extraordinary in my life. I am a product of time, place and person. I am an electronic gadget freak and spare the reader of the technicalities. I travel to countries at times when they are out of range for either American or Israeli citizens and explore their cultures and politics. I backpack on occasion. I travel the world to find relatives. I am fiercely and demonstratively political. I have passionate love affairs – yes even at my age. I am an extreme volunteer using my computer/information skills – building databases, online cataloging in libraries and archives. I am a webmistress of three sites. I walk – I walk – I walk, observe, mosey, sometimes initiate conversations with strangers, and generally smile at people. The list continues to grow, change and modify on an ongoing basis.

I can do the things today that my mother as an older woman couldn't due to the following reasons: innovations in my time, having been raised in a free democratic society and hearing a different drummer.

Carol Hoffman was born and raised in the U.S. and has spent the past forty-six years in Israel.

She is a mother of three, grandmother of nine and professionally worked as a librarian and university lecturer. Currently she volunteers building databases, maintaining web sites, on line cataloging for special libraries and genealogy assistance.

Carol's mother, Gertrude (1978)
[Photos by permission]

Carol Hoffman in 2015.

Fulfilling My Mother's Wishes
Lenore Light

In thinking about my mother and her generation in relation to life at seventy-eight, I have opened thoughts locked away. There are differences and similarities, often difficult to put into words.

My mother died of breast cancer in 1955. She was forty-seven; I was almost nineteen; my brother was two. My father died twenty years later; my brother at thirty-four. I try to imagine her life had she lived into her seventies. Today's medicine may have lengthened her life, and my father and brother may have lived longer had she lived. After the loss of my mother, my closest aunt called daily and taught me how to keep house, shop, cook and take care of my brother and father. She gave me the gifts of support and self-assurance, for which I will always be grateful.

I never regretted leaving my first semester at the University of Pittsburgh, because my intention was to help my family. I always found ways to enjoy life, kept up with friends, had dates. My father bought me a convertible; a boyfriend taught me to drive. My mother's generation rarely had such privileges; my mother never learned to drive.

I married in 1962 and eleven years later graduated from Pitt with my husband's encouragement and support. My father, husband, and children were present. It was a proud moment for me, one my mother had never considered.

I remember sitting by her bedside not long before my mother died. She said that if she could be well again, she "would never worry about the trivial things in life." As years passed, I realized this was my guiding principle: to fulfill her wish.

There are similarities and differences in what is important or not in my life, I believe, much as in my mother's.

At forty-seven, I was married with a devoted husband and mother-in-law, three beautiful, healthy teenagers. It was the late 1970s, a time when I was involved in female issues of self and identity. Life was full, with family, pets, friends, my business, travel, entertainment, parties and holidays. I was running 10K races, doing yoga, tai chi, Qi Gong (movement and meditation through gentle exercise), all so different from my mother's life. She was not in a culture of female issues or liberation. She never exercised except to walk to the grocery store, though she was slim. She was a stay-at-home mom. An only child until sixteen, I remember trips downtown for shoes and clothes. We dressed up. She wore a hat; we wore white gloves, had lunch, rode the streetcar and had fun.

My mother enjoyed organizational work for our new synagogue, not unlike women today, though I have never been interested in that work. We were different personalities but had certain qualities in common. It feels right for me to try to be kind, caring and generous, as my mother was. I believe she would have enjoyed, as I did, rocking newborn babies in a transitional hospital setting. I am fortunate to belong to two support groups and have learned much from them. In her generation, there were only family and friends for support.

In 1989, at fifty-three, I had an experience that defined my quest. At Bandelier National Monument in New Mexico, I was with my husband and daughter. Climbing to the top of an ancient pueblo cave, I fainted at the twelfth of thirteen ladders. Ten years later, in a meditation group, I had a clear vision. Standing at a cave opening, I watched six old women in buckskin chanting and rocking around a fire. Over years, I wondered if they were praying to help me develop wisdom. I returned with my daughter ten years later and easily completed the climb. That became a symbolic guiding principle.

I am grateful and blessed to have had choices and experiences my mother never had, including forty-eight years of marriage to the father of our three children, who provided our family home and one in the countryside nearby. My mother never dreamed of these blessings or of the future, as I do, with my four grandchildren.

My mother left her legacy for me to fulfill: a meaningful life filled with love and joy and gratitude. I cherish it.

Lenore Leon Light, b. 1936, Pittsburgh PA, attended Taylor Allderdice High School, Class of 1954, received her B.A. from University of Pittsburgh in 1973, and owned and operated The Yogurt Experience, the first soft frozen yogurt store in Pittsburgh, 1977-1989. She was a Certified Infant Massage teacher from 1998-2008.

Lenore's mother,
Dora Leon (1940)

Lenore Light in 2014
[Photos by permission]

If We Could Have
Joyce Lombard

We would have been best friends: two young girls, both eldest daughters who sought out rugged hills and waterways of our small towns. As we grew older we both took to design and sewing, studied it in college when we weren't outside, she climbing trees in striped leggings under knickers, me pulling myself along an abandoned railroad trestle hung over a ravine. We, mother and daughter, shared the adventure gene. Thirty years separated our experiences.

I see her in the Hastings College yearbook Chemistry Club photo, a young flapper woman of the 1920s, serious expression, bobbed hair, full heavy apron like the other women and men. I later ripped that page out, framed it, and gave it to my daughter graduating college as she entered medical school. We are three generations of women: my mother, myself, and two daughters, whose lives are tempered by our generations' expectations and allowances. The question I didn't ask her*: Did those other female chem students, like you, get directed into Home*

Economics? As a young unmarried female teacher you drove your own car which was proudly photographed with friends in fine attire. Yet, when you married, you were denied a teaching job so that maiden ladies, who had to work, could.

I was one of a generation of a woman of the 1950s had that college education which was expected to put us into careers, married or not -- careers in nursing and teaching were recommended, and indeed, teach is what I initially did.

Besides the differing cultures mother and I grew up in, there is another definitive marker that separates us: her health. I only knew her as a woman who developed symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis shortly after college. *If you have your health, you have everything* was her oft- repeated phrase. In my post-graduate work on chronic illness, I researched the connection between early childhood loss and chronic illness. I found mixed messages. I wanted to know what part the death of her pregnant mother when my mother was nine might have contributed to stress and autoimmune disease. Although I heard about and saw photos of a young woman of promise, what I experienced as a child was a mother in and out of hospital, lying in bed with an infrared heat lamp on her swollen knee, with pain her constant companion.

That young professional woman married an equally young divinity student, and some of my favorite photos of them were taken as they left Nebraska for California, he with rolled-up white shirt sleeves, she in cotton sleeveless print dress, both with summer hats when photographed along the route west. When did she lose her voice? Was she under the duress of being a proper minister's wife getting the roast into the oven before church and wrangling two young daughters? She did not keep a diary and seldom talked about herself. Father once said*, she seems to be content to be in the background.*

Perhaps this is why I found my voice and follow Emily Dickinson's adage to *tell all the truth but tell it slant*. As an artist and poet, I use image and narrative to digest, assimilate and communicate both common and unsettling experiences of my life. I have a Memoir in 3D series in which I tell stories of death and grief in both mother's life and my own. In a three-story assemblage house with five generations of maternal lineage, there is my young grandmother, red paint dripping off her body onto the floor. Mother at nine, rigid wrist gripping her younger sister's chair. Photos of myself, two daughters and granddaughters surround them. In a corner, my poem *if we could we would tamp down the tall grass, float a worn quilt on stipple of green, morph reality…*

There are other milestones processed through art and writing. The death of an ex-husband is digested through journal writing painted over, chopped and woven. Daughter's letters thirty years later are carefully cut and folded into origami boats. I continue to find my voice not just for myself, but to take subjects out of the closet of isolation through sharing in workshops, at readings, and in exhibits.

When you have the creative process and community, you have everything…

Joyce Lombard is a psychotherapist, artist and poet whose form of memoir is 3D art and poetry, and an occasional essay. She seeks out anthologies to contribute her voice to the collective on a chosen subject. Recent publications are a poem in Holy Cow! Press *issue on Home and essay "Postmortem" in* The Disenfranchised: Stories of Life & Grief When an Ex-Spouse Dies*.*

Joyce's parents, Thelma Almeda Olson and Russell van Alen (1930)

[All photos courtesy of Joyce Lombard]

Joyce Lombard (2007)

Assemblage, Five Generations, Maternal Lineage (Memoir in 3D series)

We Had No Life Together

Julie Freestone

My mother was born on July 24, 1906 in Sasov – part of the Austro-Hungarian empire. She emigrated to the United States as a small child, growing up on the Lower East Side in New York City, where her father had a grocery store.

She met my father at the law firm where she was a secretary and he, a newly- minted attorney, an émigré from London. They married, had my sister and eleven years later, after many miscarriages, I was born in the Bronx. My mother was thirty-eight years old.

Six years later, she was hospitalized with leukemia. She died after two years without ever coming home again. I was eight years old.

When my son Michael was born, I was nineteen years old. I worried that I would die before he celebrated his eighth birthday. Then I realized that if I were comparing myself to my mother, I still had more than a decade to go before my superstition would be set to rest.

I have photos of my mother reading to me, pushing me in a carriage, frolicking in the park with me. I have no memories of her. We had no life together. We didn't fight the way she reportedly did with my sister – viciously, loudly, regularly. She didn't dance at my weddings, give me advice about men or cooking or raising children. As I grew older, I never talked to her silently; I don't remember talking to her aloud.

Michael and I have breakfast together once a month – a holiday gift from him several years ago that has continued today. He and his wife live five minutes away. We camp together, go on hikes, celebrate holidays and are planning a trip to Alaska to celebrate his fiftieth and my seventieth birthdays. We've had rocky times, but I've helped him prepare for job interviews, found dates for him, lent him money and danced at his wedding.

My mother never went to college. I have what I thought was her birth certificate in Hungarian but is actually her first grade report card. I don't know if she finished high school. She was a closet writer – I have manuscripts she wrote and hundreds of letters she sent to her sister when I was a small child. She worked for a while and then became a stay-at-home mother. Then she died.

I have a Master's degree and worked nearly every year of my adult life until I retired at age sixty-six. The breadth of jobs I've had has gratified me. I've changed jobs nearly at will. I changed life partners and geographical bases as well. Benefiting from the sexual revolution after birth control availability and before AIDS, I had many enjoyable sexual experiences with different partners. I don't know what my mother's sexuality was. I really don't know who she was.

Michael knows my friends. He knows more about me – especially in the bad old days when I smoked dope with him and was less than discreet about having men around – than I ever could possibly have known about my mother.

Yet when people comment on how I managed to become a fairly sane and "normal" adult, I have to assume that my mother must have been a much more conscious, even-handed and thoughtful parent than I ever was.

Things I Never Knew About You

I have your letters,
the ones you wrote from Germany, after the war
when I was four.
They tell me so much more of you,
things I never knew.

You danced all night and drank champagne
and often seemed to like to complain.
I think you flirted with other men
and fancied yourself a Bohemian.

You are gone and so long silent.
And now there's no one left to ask.
The letters stand alone for me
to take custody as my memory.

In 1949, when she was in her forties, my mother wrote "Maybe I'm deluding myself, but I don't feel old, although I am, chronologically. Everything about me is so vital, so absorbing, so filled with tension and newness, I can't feel old having to gain impressions and be on my toes always to establish relationships and keep them. Perhaps getting out of a rut really goes toward keeping one alive."

Julie Freestone was born in 1944 in the Bronx and moved to California in 1979. She and her life partner Rudi Raab have recently published Stumbling Stone*, a historical novel based on their true life stories. Julie's mother's letters are used in the novel. More information on http://stumbling-stone.com.*

Julie and her mother,
Mathilda Gruber Conan (1950)
[Photo by permission]

Julie Freestone (2014)
[Photo credit: Nancy Rubin]