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LETTER FROM
THE EDITOR:

Let the Light In

By Sonya Abrams



Sonya is a mom to three humans and three animals and lives in Cole Valley. This year she boldly put up her holiday decorations before Thanksgiving.

placement and pondering how far my bedroom wing should be from my parents’ wing, filling up notebooks with my work. My mom shared and encouraged my interest in houses, often

“From orange wallpaper to a giant rainbow Jell-O-mold photo print to a jewel-tone Morocco-inspired primary bedroom (complete with a magenta leopard rug), I’ve tried to turn my home into a bright and whimsical space, a refuge from the darkness that can creep in from the greater world.”

taking me on walks to homes under construction. We’d scan a property for people, and if it looked deserted, we’d step inside and walk around, trying to figure out which half-completed room served what purpose, shaking our heads at features we didn’t like. These outings were both an

As a child, I was obsessed with houses I’d never live in. I was probably the only 7-year-old who subscribed to a home-architecture magazine, and when it arrived each month I’d excitedly flip to the back section, which contained sample floor plans for mansions, and run my fingers over the designs, imagining my life in these grand structures. I drew my own floor plans as well, carefully considering guest bathroom

opportunity to bond and a chance for my mom to impart her tastes on me. She loathed McMansions and ostentatious details, such as columns. She found garage doors that faced the street ugly. She was drawn to quirky art and historic details. She loved exposed beams. And color. She loved homes exploding with color. Big, bold colors, soft, inviting colors, warm tones and cool tones, patterns and prints. She believed color gave character to a space, a personality to a place. She didn’t believe in playing it safe. I embedded her words deep within me.

Over the past couple of decades I’ve noticed homes increasingly stripped of color. I witnessed the rise of the all-white kitchen. Neutrals dominate my Instagram feed. And gauging by the homes on HGTV, I suspect that 50 shades of gray is an undercount. But with my mom’s voice in the back of my head, I’ve increasingly found the courage to swim against the tide and fill my home with color. From orange wallpaper to a giant rainbow Jell-O-mold photo print to a jewel-tone Morocco-inspired primary bedroom (complete with a magenta leopard rug), I’ve tried to turn my home into a bright and whimsical space, a refuge from the darkness that can creep in from the greater world.

Our writers this issue peer inside the walls of our own homes, both literal and figurative. Alyson La guides us through the not-so-fun but important process of creating an estate plan. H.B. Terrell explores our dissatisfaction with our homes and the culture of rabid home improvement, sharing ways to change our outlook instead of draining our wallets. And Vi Huynh-Dvorak looks inward to our interior scaffolding and the ways in which trauma can crack the foundation of the homes within us all.

The day after Daylight Savings ended in November and when we all faced a 5 p.m. sunset, I purchased bright yellow dining chairs. The timing wasn’t a coincidence. Sometimes we need to create sunshine from within.

Sonya Abrams

HOUSEKEEPING

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NEXT ISSUE: Introspection

Have an idea for an issue theme or article? Please email editor@ggmg.org.

This issue made possible by: Drowning in high school applications for my 8th grader; Soaking up the November sun after an extra gloomy fog season; Discovering all the things I can do with my free time now that I’ve outsourced pureeing my baby’s food.

LETTER FROM
THE BOARD:

Celebrations and Homecoming

By Connie Lin



Connie and her family relished the warm late autumn days that magically stretched into November this year, painting the sky with vivid pinks and purples during sunset.

everywhere, help bring the holiday season to life for me and create that wonderful sense of warmth, coziness, and being right at home.

But this year, we’re doing something a little different. As my husband and I have extended family in both Europe and Asia, it’s important for us to travel to see at least one side of the family each year. This year will be the first year in many years that we’ll fly to Taiwan, where my parents were born. We missed the last couple trips when my son was born and COVID canceled travel plans. The last time we visited, my daughter wasn’t yet 2 years old (she’s nearly 10 now), and just learning to walk backwards. My second-grade son has never set foot in Taipei, where the hustle and bustle of city life, my many relatives, the delicious food, and the gorgeous sights all contribute to a rich and heartwarming homecoming.

I can’t wait for him to get to know this place that is the heart of who I am. It won’t be the Taipei I remember from long ago

The week before fall break, my children’s elementary school was getting ready for Thanksgiving celebrations. It’s one of the few times that parents are allowed to converge en masse upon the classroom, and it’s refreshing to get to catch up with other adults I don’t see often enough and share stories about what’s happening in our lives. These community gatherings, along with the family get-togethers my cousin hosts each year and the copious abundance of holiday decorations

college visits, nor the one my dad grew up in. Instead, our new shared experiences and memories from this trip will remind us that home is not just a physical place but that feeling I’ve been wanting to capture and prolong—of belonging, of connection to my family’s values and cultural traditions.

“[O]ur new shared experiences and memories from this trip will remind us that home is not just a physical place but that feeling I’ve been wanting to capture and prolong—of belonging, of connection to my family’s values and cultural traditions.”

As we welcome the new year, I feel gratitude for my heritage and so many fond memories, optimistic for what’s to come, and certain in the knowledge that I’m right where I’m supposed to be, surrounded by my loved ones. I wish you the same love, peace, and happiness.

Just as GGMG continues to connect moms all over San Francisco, we’re actively seeking individuals with a passion for making a difference to join our team. Help us organize events, manage communications, and expand our reach! We have a variety of exciting opportunities available, from board positions to volunteer roles, where you can utilize your skills and talents to help us shape the future of GGMG. Please email recruiting@ggmg.org to learn more.

Here’s to a new year filled with new beginnings, new connections, and new opportunities! We hope to see you online in our GGMG forums and at our upcoming events!

Connie Lin

FAVORITE COVERS OF 2023



This issue cover photo by Kaley Ann Photography

Wonder photo by Natasha Saravanja Photography

Discovery photo by Mini Anna Photography

Stand Up photo by Mini Anna Photography

Let It Go!

By Yuliya Patsay

If it makes you happy to look out at a sea of your belongings and the phrase “less is more” causes you anxiety, then this list isn’t for you. But if you feel your clutter is out of control and are worried your piles might eat you, then here are three decluttering systems to consider:

The KonMari Method: Developed by Marie Kondo, the KonMari Method encourages you to ask yourself: *Does this spark joy?* If an item doesn’t bring you joy or happiness, it’s time to let it go. The KonMari process involves going through your belongings by category such as clothing, books, papers, or sentimental items rather than decluttering room by room. For inspiration, check out Netflix’s “Tidying Up With Marie Kondo.”

Swedish Death Cleaning (Döstädning): Popularized by Margareta Magnusson, Swedish Death Cleaning is decluttering to ease the burden on loved ones after you pass away. It involves systematically going through your possessions, keeping only what truly matters, and letting go of the rest.

The Home Edit: Clea Shearer and Joanna Teplin started The Home Edit to “reinvent traditional organizing, and merge it with design and interior styling.” Their process is to categorize like with like, then edit—remove all items that no longer serve you, contain the rest in a beautiful and easy-to-maintain way. Catch their eye-catching transformations on Netflix’s “Get Organized: The Home Edit.”



Carmen Dunham Photography

If you don’t want to commit to a system but you are looking to have a more simplified life where you are maintaining fewer belongings, you will need to go through what you own and decide what stays and what goes. Here are some basic steps to help you:

- Acknowledge that the hardest aspect of decluttering is psychological. Pro organizers Jessica Kasimatis and Lyndsie Rae of Rae of Light Organizing explain that there is a lot of guilt—around getting rid of things people have spent money on, that others gave as gifts, or items that may be used in the future. Separate from feelings of guilt and shame by asking: *Is this something I would buy again today?*
- If it’s overwhelming to start, you can tackle decluttering in small bites. Choose a section that brings you the most stress, like your closet, and try two approaches. You can try the 90/90 Rule: if you haven’t used it in the last 90 days and can’t see yourself using it in the next 90, then it’s time to say goodbye. Or if that’s too stressful, Rae of Light recommends creating a purgatory, putting items into a box, removing the box from the space, and setting a date on the calendar to revisit the items.
- Keep what holds the most value for you. Just make sure that everything has a home. Assign specific places for your belongings. If an item doesn’t have a designated spot, it’s more likely to become clutter. If you’re not naturally organized, having a home for everything can help you maintain order in the long run.
- Once you have created a home for every belonging, you need a plan for maintenance. It’s much easier to control what comes into your environment, so follow the One-In, One-Out Rule: every time you bring in something new, make it a habit to get rid of something old. This simple rule prevents accumulation and encourages mindful consumption.

What to do with items you no longer need

Items that no longer serve you may be valuable to others. You can donate clothing, household items, and books to local charities or shelters such as:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| • The Salvation Army | • Community Thrift Store |
| • Larkin Street Youth Services | • Goodwill |
| • Compass Family Services | • Dress for Success |

You can sell your unwanted belongings. Turn your unwanted items into cash by hosting a garage sale, selling online, or working with a consignment shop. It’s a win-win—you declutter your space while providing others with the opportunity to find treasures at affordable prices. If selling is too much of a hassle or you want to do a good deed, consider posting your item on a local Buy Nothing group or Nextdoor.

Lil’ Kid, Big City: Treasure Island

By Sonya Abrams

Craving a taste of island life? Then look no further than the San Francisco Bay, where you can find Treasure Island, 400 acres of engineered land created for the 1939 Golden Gate International Exposition and now a hub of new development and places to explore. Accessible by car, ferry, and Muni from San Francisco as well as a bike path from Oakland, Treasure Island is home to restaurants, historical sites, and unparalleled city views. February 24 and 25 mark the first of the island’s monthly TreasureFests for 2024, weekend-long celebrations featuring hundreds of creators and vendors, food trucks, live music, and kids activities. On the food front, Mersea offers fine fare for the whole family (including a dog menu!) from brunch time until the late afternoon, and features bocce on site. The Treasure Island Museum is free to all and showcases exhibits on the island’s rich history, also hosting cultural events. Or perhaps you’d like to butter your kids up with a beach adventure at Clipper Cove Beach and then take them along on a boozy tour of the island. Indulge yourself with stops at Woods Island Club, open on weekends and offering up home-crafted beers and wine, as well as sodas and empanadas for the little ones, and a visit to Treasure Island Wines, where children are not allowed in the tasting room, but grownups can grab a bottle and then picnic with little ones on the lawn. It’s important to check the websites for all Treasure Island destinations before visiting, as construction and development activities frequently impact business hours.

Sonya is a mom to three kids living in Cole Valley and hopes that this is the year she finally ventures out to Treasure Island with three kids who are confident on bicycles.



Archiving Your Child’s Artwork in Style

By Yuliya Patsay



Artkive offers a service where you can mail your child’s artwork to them and they will professionally photograph and scan it. They will then create a hardcover book filled with the images. There is an option for them to mail back the original artwork and a USB drive containing the high-resolution images.

Keepy offers a similar service to Artkive, but in addition to creating books, they also offer a variety of other products, such as calendars, greeting cards, and home décor items, that can be customized with your child’s artwork.

Plum Print sends you a prepaid box that you fill with your child’s artwork. They will then professionally photograph, categorize, and create a custom coffee table book for you. They specialize in creating custom books from your child’s artwork, family photos, and recipes. They offer a variety of book sizes and styles to choose from, and you can even customize the cover with your child’s name.



Yuliya (it rhymes with Goo-lya) is Soviet born and San Francisco raised. She is a storyteller and voice actor. Her debut memoir, Until the Last Pickle, will be published January 2024.

Gardening in the City

By Yana Gorin

Originally published in the December 2021/January 2022 Roots issue.



Yana Gorin is a San Francisco native who enjoys working locally as a freelance landscape designer and consultant. She is passionate about art, horticulture, education, and providing services for people in the community. Contact her by email at atattnyana@gmail.com or by phone at 415.722.4429.

What is your advice for novices just getting into plant cultivation?

The word “garden” conjures up distinct images in people’s minds—perhaps neatly trimmed hedges and rows of fragrant roses, or cleverly arranged planter boxes teeming with herbs and colorful veggies. Few urban moms have the space, time, money, and know-how to create the gardens of our dreams—but don’t let that deter you from making something happen!

“[S]tart somewhere, anywhere—even if that means just identifying a wall outside or inside your home that gets sun.”

Start small with your projects and approach them as creative, experimental endeavors where you get to transform a space using plants. The etymological origin of the word “garden” comes from the term “enclosed space,” traditionally meaning outdoors, but indoor gardening can be just as fulfilling and better suited for city dwellers.

The bottom line is to start somewhere, anywhere—even if that means just identifying a wall outside or inside your home that gets sun. I recommend using Pinterest, with its wealth of tutorials, as a resource where you can pull from different sources of inspiration and information. Chances are someone out there has already experimented with the limitations of a space like yours and the Internet is filled with people getting creative.

I live in San Francisco and travel frequently. How can I spruce up my front stoop with the lowest maintenance plants possible?



Silver Jade by Sabina Bajracharya

If your stoop or deck gets partial to full sun, I strongly recommend succulents. Some kinds will even survive outdoors with little to no human interference.

The jade plant is, in my opinion, the best for variable light conditions and is extremely hardy overall.

If you get more sun than shade, aeonium is an attractive and fast-growing type of native succulent that can really thrive with occasional waterings.

The key to keeping your succulents happy is growing them in well-draining soil to allow them to dry out quickly between waterings. Root rot is the enemy and can occur easily when your soil holds too much moisture. Adding sand/gravel to regular potting soil (50/50 mix) will greatly improve your odds of success, especially if you are afraid of overwatering.



Aeonium Leucoblepharum by Stephen Boisvert

What’s a good indoor plant for a small apartment with limited light?

The snake plant (aka *Sansevieria*, aka *Dracaena trifasciata*, aka Mother-in-Law’s Tongue) is a common go-to for low-lit rooms but can also tolerate bright light and doesn’t require much water.



Snake Plant by Martin Olsson

Snake plants can also reduce levels of the airborne pollutants trichloroethylene (TCE), benzene, and formaldehyde. However, a serious downside is that they are moderately toxic to pets and should be kept out of their reach.

Which other common houseplants are toxic to pets?

Lilies of any kind are extremely toxic to cats. Sago palm, ivy, and aloe vera are also known to be toxic for both cats and dogs. If you really want to have any of these, consider placing them in locations that are out of reach for your pets.

What are some ways to get kids interested?

I’ve found that kids, especially the younger ones, get more interested in plants when they can incorporate them into play activities. Terrariums are great fun when kids can introduce small toys and rocks to create scenes and ecosystems. I will take a glass bowl, put in some small stones or gravel, then add patches of moss (easily scraped off cement sidewalk steps during the rainy season) to create the base or “ground.” You might want to combine different types of mosses/lichen for more texture and depth. Add rocks, miniature figurines, or anything else you can imagine and display it in a kitchen or bathroom where you can remember to sprinkle it with water regularly.

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What to Expect When You’re Expecting a Sibling

By Juli Fraga

Originally published in the October 2016 Tough Talks issue. This piece has been updated for accuracy and edited for length.

“Is the baby still in your tummy?” Kelly’s curious 3-year-old daughter asked her just days after the new baby arrived. “No, the baby is here—this is your brother!” Kelly replied. In a fit of disappointment, her daughter Chloe threw her doll across the room as she shouted, “I no like baby!”

This scenario is not unusual. While the addition of a new sibling is a joyful family event, it is often stressful for other children in the family. Oftentimes, children feel jealous of a new baby’s arrival, but are unable to articulate their feelings, resulting in throwing things, yelling, or testing household rules and limits.

Parents should not despair; just as you prepare for a new baby’s arrival, you can also prepare your older child for a new sibling. Here are some tips and tricks that will help you welcome baby brother or sister with greater ease.

Help your child embrace a new family role

In the months leading up to the baby’s arrival, one of the ways to prepare your child for a new sibling is to help them understand and embrace a new role in the family.

There are various resources that deal with the subject of a new sibling. Daniel Tiger offers *The Baby is Here* and *Big Brother Daniel*, books and an animated series for kids expecting a sibling. Kaiser Permanente offers members a monthly class to prepare for a baby’s arrival through discussion, play, and a tour of the maternity area for children ages 3 to 6. California Pacific Medical Center offers a virtual sibling preparation class for \$40.

Something as simple as a baby doll can be useful as well, allowing the child to practice caring for a baby during playtime. Use the doll to show your child how they should be gentle and care for the baby. Once the baby arrives, your older child can care for their baby doll too, when you are changing or feeding the new baby, to feel like part of the process.

If your doctor or midwife allows it, bring your child to an ultrasound to “see” the baby growing inside mommy’s tummy. By engaging your child in the process, you are starting a conversation that will help to prepare them for this family transition in the months to come.

It’s also important to help your older child feel proud of their new family role. Something as simple as buying them a



t-shirt that reads “I am a Big Brother/Sister” can help create a feeling of excitement, rather than jealousy or trepidation.

A sibling gift exchange

Sometimes choosing a small gift that the baby can “give” to the older child can help smooth new sibling waters. If your older child visits the baby at the hospital, many parents have a gift waiting for big brother or big sister upon arrival. Additionally, the older sibling can pick out a gift for the

baby and bring this present to the hospital.

The first hello

“When children meet their younger sibling, I always encourage Mom to have her hands free so that she can hug the older child,” says Pediatrician Dr. Steve Martel.

This technique can help abate feelings of jealousy that are bound to emerge once mom and baby return from the hospital. Keep in mind that many factors affect how a child may feel about a new sibling, such as your child’s age and individual temperament.

Explain new feelings

A few days after her newborn daughter came home from the hospital, San Francisco mother

Natalie Ryan taught her 3-year-old daughter Hannah about a new feeling called jealousy. She told Hannah that feeling jealous is a bit like feeling mad or frustrated, but it’s when you are upset because you want something that someone else has. Natalie explained that having a sibling means that you have to share Mommy with baby sister, even if you don’t prefer to. By talking openly and naming these feelings, you can foster an emotional vocabulary that will help children express how they feel about the newest addition to the family.

As with any family change, adjustment will take some time. Try to carve out one-on-one time with your older child and keep schedules the same to provide predictable structure in their daily routines. Preschoolers (ages 3 to 5) and older children are more likely to comprehend the addition of a new sibling. For younger toddlers, you can introduce the concept with some picture books, such as *What to Expect When Mommy’s Having a Baby* by Heidi Murkoff and *The Berenstain Bears’ New Baby* by Stan and Jan Berenstain.

Juli is a psychologist and a freelance writer. She’s written for National Public Radio (NPR), The Washington Post, and The New York Times.

“Parents should not despair; just as you prepare for a new baby’s arrival, you can also prepare your older children for a new sibling.”

What Questions to Ask When Choosing a Pediatrician

By Brian Feeley, MD, and Nirav Pandya, MD

You’ve heard Dr. Smith is amazing, but she’s full. Dr. Garcia accepts newborns, but he’s fresh out of residency. Dr. Wegner’s front desk staff is curt, but they return calls quickly. Dr. Young has space and your sister-in-law loves her, but she doesn’t have privileges at the children’s hospital. The question is—what matters for your child in choosing a pediatrician?

Mistaken assumptions

We tend to assume senior doctors will be more skilled, but recent research* shows that younger doctors are safe, and may be more up-to-date on new data and theories to keep your child healthy. Similarly, while degrees from fancy Ivy League medical schools can seem impressive, the care received is essentially the same no matter where your pediatrician went to school. In a similar study*, there was little or no relation found between the U.S. News ranking of the medical school where a doctor trained and metrics such as hospital readmissions. So if age and pedigree aren’t important, what is? What questions should you ask a pediatrician to find the right fit for you and your family?

Communication style

Doctors fall into two general communication styles. One is the Shared Decision Making (SDM) model where a pediatrician works collaboratively to help patients reach evidence-informed and value-aligned medical decisions. This process is especially relevant in screening for conditions that carry a lot of close trade-offs between harms and benefits. The other, where a doctor dictates the care, can be helpful in an emergency. Research shows that SDM increases patient satisfaction, and it helps empower parents to make good decisions for their child.

Questions to ask : “Do you typically follow a SDM model? When would you deviate?”

Another form of communication, contact through the electronic medical record (EMR), is important as well. The access these messages bring, however, comes at a cost. According to A. Jay Holmgren, a researcher at UCSF, “Since the onset of the COVID pandemic, the volume of messaging has increased dramatically—with 50 percent more messages per week beginning in March 2020—and volume has not decreased as the pandemic has receded. The burden is most acute for primary care physicians, who at UCSF Health each week receive an average of 66 messages from patients and spend 7.3 hours working on their computer outside of clinic hours.” That these messages may be billed as consultations can come as a surprise to parents. Anne Elise Lansdown, a mother of



three, said, “While I appreciate how convenient it is to be able to email our pediatrician, I was at first surprised to be billed because it was not discussed and felt out of the blue.”

Questions to ask: “How often do you check your EMR messages? How often do you or an assistant reply? Will I be charged for these messages?”

Setting

Academic practices are ideal for patients with potentially complex medical care, who need doctors steeped in the most recent research. But you may spend the bulk of your time with a medical student or doctor in training (a resident or fellow), with your doctor popping in or only seeing your child at frequent, low-stakes appointments like weight-checks. Private practice groups

provide easy access to care from your pediatrician. They may not have an affiliation with a major academic center, but that’s usually not needed anyway.

Question to ask: “What would you do when a patient requires admission or care from a specialist?”

Volume

Doctors who are busy tend to make fewer mistakes. Especially in primary care and pediatric practices, being busy is both a sign of being good and a sign that the physician is seeing enough to know what is and isn’t alarming.

Question to ask: “Do you see patients 3 days or more per week?”

Reviews and ratings

While it’s hard to say there is a real difference between a doctor rated 5 stars (Nirav) and one rated 4.8 stars (Brian), it is worth reading the comments to get a sense about the office atmosphere, front desk, communication style, and overall professionalism of your doctor and their office. Some lower ratings are from things unrelated to the doctor (i.e. the parking situation), but frequent comments about being late or poor communication style are a red flag. And since many reviews are solicited, beware of doctors rated lower than a 4.0.

In the end, there are many great pediatricians, and most will be a great fit for you and your family. Every family has varying priorities and needs, so don’t be afraid to ask the questions to get the best care for your child!

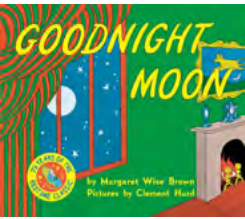
Brian Feeley, M.D., is the Chief of the Sports Medicine Service at UCSF. He has five children, four in San Francisco schools and one at UCLA. Nirav Pandya, M.D., is the Chief of the Pediatric Orthopedic Surgery Service at UCSF and is a father to two children in Oakland. You can find them on Twitter or listen to their podcast, “6-8 Weeks: Perspectives on Sports Medicine.”

*from the Harvard School of Public Health

The Comforts of Home

By Laure Latham

“There’s no place like home!” said Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*. She was right, too. As much as we love to explore and travel, home is the one place where we find comfort, a respite from the world, and loving arms to cuddle with as we read books together. Let’s celebrate the many meanings of home with a few wonderful books!



Goodnight Moon

Written and illustrated by Margaret Wise Brown

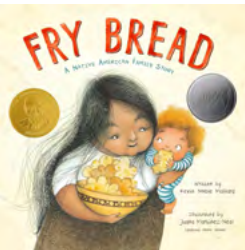
This timeless classic shows a rabbit bidding goodnight to each familiar thing in a moonlit room. Saying goodnight to each item in turn, the book’s words have a gentle, rhythmic cadence that sets a soothing scene before any bedtime. Alternating black and white with color spreads, the book feels like an invitation into a different world where everything seems simple and cozy. **Ages: 1 to 4 years**



The Dark

Written by Lemony Snicket, illustrated by Jon Klassen

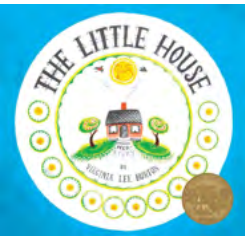
As far as little Laszlo is concerned, the Dark only lives in the basement of his house—that is, during daytime. At night, the Dark is usually kept at bay by a handy nightlight in Laszlo’s bedroom, until one day the nightlight fails. What will Laszlo do? Young children will relate to being afraid of the dark and will be relieved to find out that the dark is not so scary after all. **Ages: 2 to 6 years**



Fry Bread

Written by Kevin Noble Maillard, illustrated by Juana Martinez-Neal

Food can be as evocative of home as solid walls. In *Fry Bread*, several generations of Native American families get together to make fry bread, a food staple that’s part of their culture but that, depending on their circumstances, can have different ingredients. Told in verse, the book’s message is one of food as Native American pride and the sharing of traditions. **Ages: 2 to 6 years**



The Little House

Written and illustrated by Virginia Lee Burton

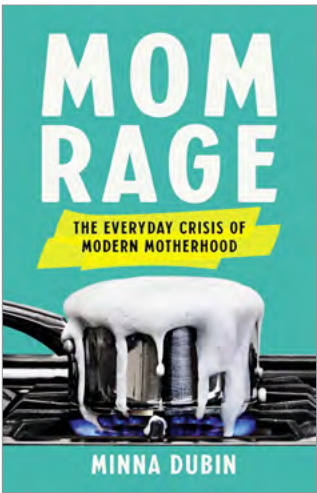
The little house first stood in the country, but gradually the city moved closer and closer. American folk artist Virginia Lee Burton based this book on her family’s own little house, which they moved from the street into a field of daisies with apple trees growing all around. Gradually, the house that used to be in the countryside finds itself part of suburbia and eventually, becomes an integral part of the city. Kids will love the story of this little house getting old through the seasons, as much as the beautiful illustrations. **Ages: 5 to 8 years**

Laure writes on marathon swimming, healthy living, and adventure travel at Frog Mom (frogmom.com), and is the author of Best Hikes with Kids: San Francisco Bay Area. She is the founder of a tech startup and lives with her teenage girls in London. She swam the English Channel in 2023. You can find her on social media @frogmomblog.

Motherhood Unleashed

By Gail Cornwall

What could be more related to our homes than the way societal expectations negatively impact mothers?



Mom Rage: The Everyday Crisis of Modern Motherhood

After experiencing rage as “a constant low-grade buzzing” under her skin, Minna Dubin decided to dig into “what mom rage is, why we have it, and what we can do about it.” Those are essentially the three parts of her book, with the first chunk making the case that “the broader societal landscape ... sets up today’s mothers for despair and fury.” Here, Dubin skillfully recounts important phenomena, like invisible labor, and says hard truths, such as, “[s]tuck inside the scam of ‘the best job a woman can have,’ we do not know where or at whom to direct our shamed fury.” Skipping forward to the third part of the book, Dubin covers more familiar ground, including “how mothers can be better cared for by societal systems.” (Think paternity leave and heavily subsidized child care.) Again, essential territory, but well-trodden.

It is the middle where Dubin shines and shows why bedside tables and bookstore shelves needed yet another book. You don’t have to rage to find the intricacies of the “Mom Rage Cycle” both relatable and illuminating. Think of the phenomenon of rising frustration as a volcano, with even the dormant among us subject to magma churning below: “Before a mom reaches rage, irritation and stress have been slowly building inside of her, possibly for hours, days, or even weeks.” So vividly does Dubin describe one undermining interaction with her son and partner that the scene had the feel of my own memory: “This sort of thing became such a trigger that the thousandth time it happened I shouted at Paul loud enough for the neighbors to hear, ‘NO ONE IS TALKING TO YOU!!!’ Then I had to grovel for my inappropriate outburst.”

She follows description with super helpful “strategies to better understand our rage, identify personal rage triggers, and make allies of our partners.” Maybe you, like me, are far more easily provoked when your bladder is full. Maybe your impulse to rage, like Dubin’s, is “tangled up with” perfectionism and feeling disrespected, unappreciated, powerless, alone, invalidated, afraid (particularly if something sacred is on the line), and robbed of time.

Dubin writes, “I hope *Mom Rage* provides mothers respite from the shame, the loneliness, and the mean voices — both internal and external,” and I want that too. Very much so.

But I worry Dubin’s message will be misconstrued. Once or twice, she mentions the distinction between “rage” and abuse, which is “never okay.” And yet, I know parents who perpetrate emotional and psychological abuse. And I know they are likely to find not just absolution but also justification in Dubin’s pages, despite her best intentions: “By raging, we’re calling bullshit on the scam of Motherhood,” she writes, “we signal our refusal to be mistreated, undervalued, and uncared for.”

I wish *Mom Rage* had delved into what distinguishes abusive from non-abusive rage at the same time that I recommend parents click “add to cart” or “place hold” on this important contribution to the motherhood canon.

Gail works as a mom and writer in San Francisco. Read about parenting and education from the perspective of a former teacher and lawyer at gailcornwall.com or by finding her on Facebook and Twitter.



Home Sweet Home in an Age of Discontent

Why are we so persistently dissatisfied with our living spaces?

By H.B. Terrell

If you haven't seen the home renovation shows, you have probably heard of them. Homes that seem inhospitable all end up looking polished in the same mode, with tiny accents that nod to the homeowner's self-described style. So much Dove Grey. So many pot fillers extending over stovetops. Renters, homeowners, and those hunting for homes both in the U.S. and internationally—each has at least one program directed at them. But why?

In a 2023 study of home dissatisfaction published in *Housing, Theory, and Society*, 39 percent of participants expressed dissatisfaction with their homes. Those who expressed satisfaction with their homes were statistically more likely to be in an affordable living situation and have a self-reported strong internal compass as to what home represented to them. Results also showed correlations between home satisfaction and general well-being, as well as correlations between media consumption and anxiety.

The homogenized home

In an article published in *Journal of Consumer Research* in February 2023, Anetta Grant and Jay Handelman shared their research on the cultural understanding of the place we call home. They found that traditionally, the home was a place that reflected the occupant's unique identity. It was "a site where we define ourselves around our relationships to each other rather than by our autonomy," as Richard White, Professor of American History at Stanford University, wrote in an essay on home for pre-WWII Americans. In essence, the character of your home reflected the character of your community collectives—families, churches, community groups, social circles, and volunteer organizations.

Today, home is more often understood as a marketplace asset, particularly if it is owned by the occupant. Still, more than a third of American households are renters, according to the 2022 American Community Survey, so 45 million residences aren't thinking about resale value or return on investment. For renters, there are stick-on tiles and wallpaper, "renter-friendly hacks," and guides on negotiating rent breaks in exchange for minor renovations all over the Internet. Housekeeping and design content have become a hotbed of

dissatisfaction with our current living spaces, whether we own or rent.

The pandemic may have exacerbated an obsession with our homes, but this persistent feeling of inadequacy when it comes to our abodes predates stay-at-home orders by at least 200 years. The Smithsonian Library contains Victorian-era books such as *Home Dissertations*, *The Woman's Book*, and *Five Thousand Receipts in all Useful and Domestic Arts*, which detail housekeeping, gardening, home crafts, and architecture trends. Grant and Handelman's research suggests that standardization of home features and designs leads to a disconnect between inhabitants and their living spaces, which ultimately have little to do with their true preferences or practical needs. In other words, "style" is a signifier for one of a few

stereotypical lifestyle markers—think: boho, maximalist, farmhouse, etc.

Today we see this lineage in influencer culture, home design magazines, online publishers of home décor content, apps that show renovations and connect us to architects and contractors, articles about "no-demo renos," and image grids of the kinds of bland, inoffensive interiors that drive us to keep clicking to find something that looks mildly different from all the subway-tiled, vinyl-planked, open-plan kitchen/living areas.

Home is big business.

Applying a critical lens to our assumptions

Paolo Boccagni and Jan Willem Duyvendak completed a 2021 study of homemaking in the public sphere, finding that while home

"Accepting present circumstances without judgment can help us let go of the expectations we've internalized around what it means to sustain a happy home."





has traditionally been understood as a private and domestic matter, it carries increasing public significance.

Without delving into the dire complexities of the housing crisis, gentrification and displacement, or people experiencing homelessness—these are other subjects that deserve their own articles—what is it that those of us fortunate enough to have a stable living situation actually *need* in a home? How can we break the cycle of wanting more, less, better, different...in a word, “perfection”?

Satisfaction, or, you get what you need

What does it feel like to be satisfied with one’s living space?

Adriana Sandu performed a study of identity and belonging as related to homemaking practices. She says that geographic ties with families of origin traditionally provide a link between place and identity, and as more people break those geographic ties, “their homes can help construct a narrative of personal history and continuity that provides a connection to place.” When we leave our families of origin, we recreate ourselves by forming homes that help us bond with those in our social circles.

Psychotherapist Michael Formica points out that the problem isn’t really “the stuff.” He says, “It’s the desire for the stuff and the anxiety that desire provokes when unmet, creating dissatisfaction.” He

suggests that we identify the desire at the root of our dissatisfaction, and frame it as a sense of incompleteness. Once we understand the desire, we can consider what motivates that feeling of deficiency, and what we would need to feel whole. This, Formica says, is the starting point of change.

What hole might we be filling with our desire for the perfect home?

Parity and disparity on the home front

A few possible areas of incompleteness might be rooted in desires related to gender parity, wealth, or even general well-being. Certainly, being at home for extended periods of time over the past few years forced those of us in the Bay Area to take a good look at the functionality and feelings our homes offered. In “The Post-COVID Home: How the Pandemic Has Made Us Rethink Everything,” Elizabeth Yuko says, “When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in the spring of 2020, the function of our homes as a place of protection became evident in a way that it hadn’t yet been in our lifetime... There was so little people could control, with the exception of what went on inside their own homes.” The collective trauma of being homebound trained us to equate remaking our living spaces with physical safety and mental health. As a result, online markets exploded with offers for luxury items geared towards self-care.



Women continue to be the primary household managers in cis-het relationships. Frustration with gendered roles can inform dissatisfaction with the home, especially if it is not functionally ideal. Surely, gone are the days of the “Good Wife’s Guide” published in *Housekeeping Monthly* (1955), wherein women are admonished to have dinner on the table, offer to remove their husband’s shoes, keep the kids quiet, and let him talk first because “what he has to say is more important” than what the wife wants to discuss. Still, there are often unspoken and therefore unacknowledged expectations that wives maintain a tidy, beautiful home while working full time and often acting as primary caregiver for elders and/or children in the household.

“Home Truths,” a recent article in *House Beautiful* on making a home that “tells a story,” begins with a quote from a woman who converted her family’s vicarage-turned-B&B into her family residence: “I like things to look as if they’ve been collected and considered over time.” The operative phrase here is “to look as if.” Applying a critical lens to this article, which is representative of “creative homemaking” articles that abound on the web, we are accepting advice from moneyed folks who “source” antiques and engage in a kind of faux-creativity, i.e., the kinds of projects that require someone’s time—often paid labor—and money to pull off. Speaking for the commoner, some have money, some have

time, but few outside the 1 percent have the luxury of both.

Renters face another level of disparity. Mercury Stardust, known online as “the trans handy-ma’am,” points out, “When someone else owns the house [where] you live ... it’s hard to feel safe.” She suggests that renters take the knowledge-is-power approach to home upkeep in her book *Safe and Sound: A Renter-Friendly Guide to Home Repair*.

Que sera, sera, or, let it go

How do we achieve a laissez-faire approach to our homes, letting them evolve with us rather than aching to make them conform to an idealized and often impractical lifestyle of unblemished order and an unlivin aesthetic?

Psychologists have much to say about dissatisfaction in a general sense. Adapting these principles to how we view our homes might be a way to heal the plague of discontent spurred by media, social

expectations, and our own feelings of rootlessness.

Introspection

Identify the root causes of dissatisfaction. Accepting present circumstances without judgment can help us let go of the expectations we’ve internalized around what it means to sustain a happy home. It’s important to remember that this too shall pass. Whether it’s a jumble of blocks in the living room or a pile of books in the office, clutter is temporary, and home embodies a state of flux. Things change, growing and contracting with circumstances.

Reframing

Set realistic expectations and question the dominant narrative about what makes a happy home. Does a pristine kitchen make you feel that at least this is settled, helping you manage the chaos in other parts of your life? Is it important to you to maintain a kitchen that shows evidence of cooking,

eating, and the care that a family meal can provide? Does it matter to you if your cupboards are organized with bins and labels and beautiful receptacles? Prioritizing what we need helps us feel comfortable, relaxed, and happy in our living spaces.

Gratitude

We can practice gratitude by appreciating the positive aspects of our homes. In a Kondo vein, acknowledge small pleasures. Noticing the things that make us feel as if our homes are a place of refuge can foster a shift in perspective towards what is right with our living spaces rather than a continuous focus on what is “wrong” with them.

H.B. has never been a minimalist but thinks she should be based on all the serene museum-like spaces featured on her favorite homeware websites. She’s learning how to live with chaos, at least until her daughter finishes preschool.



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COMPASS

The Home Within

Trauma can damage our interior support structures, but there are ways to repair ourselves.

By Vi Huynh-Dvorak

One of the first words we learn as children and in turn teach our own children is “home,” usually as we gesticulate to the structure in which we reside. “Home” was one of the first sign language words I taught my kids. Some of us—I know I did—later learned and taught that home is not a place; rather, it’s a feeling.

I’ve come to an understanding of a different kind of home—the home within, the place inside of us where we are separate from any and all external concepts of a higher power. In this home, we are the higher power. We are as we were meant to be, complete with love, compassion, understanding, and kindness. I am aware that my words are bordering on New-age philosophy, a concept I

personally loathe. There are a number of religions and philosophies which refer to “home.” The home I speak of is above it all. This is not to declare that this is a place where no pain, no trauma exists. In our home lives the person who feels everything and is able to self-regulate when faced with things that can make us fight, fly, or fawn. We are able to process difficult and uncomfortable emotions in healthy ways, we interact with others with empathy, and are able to communicate our needs.

We are born with a blueprint of a foundation. This foundation is set before we are born and cemented in childhood. That foundation is the start of the home we build, and no two homes are alike, nor are there any rules. Parents are the foundation builders of

children’s homes within. Just as homes with weak foundations, built upon sand with no anchor into bedrock, give way to the slightest tremor, our home inside, if built upon trauma and shame, too will crumble when faced with anything which disrupts our current state of survival.

In the spring of 2020, I faced an existential crisis so great that the state of disassociation, dysregulation, and latent anxiety that was my inner landscape halted and I felt thrust into a blinding light that felt like hell. My husband, the person whom I poured all my unmet needs into, the person in whose home I just moved into because I didn’t have one within, played a part in my crisis. It’s like the only home I knew went nuclear.

I clued into this concept of home in therapy. I couldn’t understand why I felt so bad when my life in the present was no doubt a vast improvement from childhood. I came to understand that what I was doing was a reenactment. The characters, the scene, the context were all different—what my reenactment did was reinforce the familiar feelings: I am not lovable, I don’t matter, I feel ashamed. I have a good memory, but what my mind doesn’t remember, my body does. My somatic system sought the familiar. It sought the reenactment.

Guided by therapy, I taught myself how to build a new home; or rather, build the home that should have been. As I built this home, there have been doors that felt like walls. Where windows should be, I found concrete. The rooms were ones where there was no escape. Some rooms had black holes in them. These were the rooms that terrified me the most. Inside were abandonment, consummate aloneness, neglect, abuse—emotional and sexual. Inside, I was 4 or 5 years old. I was hungry. I was dirty. I was alone and no one was coming to save me.

So, how did I get here? How did I go from a perfect little baby to an adult who appeared to be full on the outside but emotionally empty inside? Trauma. Trauma is not what happens to you, but how it lives in you.

Trauma

Bessel Van Der Kolk is a scientific researcher and a therapist who specializes

in trauma and how its terror and isolation literally rewire our brain and deeply affect our bodies. His book, *The Body Keeps The Score*, is paramount for understanding trauma for clinicians and therapists alike.

Van Der Kolk’s research shows that trauma causes us to default to fear responses, regardless of the information in front of us. The rational parts of our brain are offline when we are triggered. He asserts that there’s an actual place inside our brains where trauma resides and it is unable to decipher when a threat is over, because it is not based in logic or reason. “This part of

“Trauma is not what happens to you, but how it lives in you.”

the brain is by definition unreasonable—you do not stop being hungry by reminding yourself how fat you are, and it’s pretty difficult to talk yourself out of being angry, shut down, or in love.” His research goes on to suggest that our intrinsic reward system—things and people we’re attracted to—changes. The part that feels pride in accomplishing something, for instance, changes. Rather than feel relaxed in our bodies, we are hyper-vigilant. It’s hard to be in the present and enjoy the moment. We are disassociated and dysregulated. As a consequence, we fail to have healthy and reciprocal relationships.

Van Der Kolk’s work is primarily focused on war veterans, but he maintains that, in fact “the vast majority of traumas occur within families, schools, and neighborhoods, the very people whom they depend on for safety and security... Another

important issue is that trauma has a different impact, depending on the age and relative maturity of the affected individual. The brains of traumatized kids develop in a ‘use-dependent’ manner—they become experts in dealing with threat, and have problems with self-regulation, play, and the sort of imaginative creativity that is necessary to become productive members of society.”

In our “home,” when we are small, the gods of our home are our parents. Every child has a need for love, connection, and safety. A child with unmet needs will, as Van Der Kolk puts it, develop “use-dependent” coping mechanisms. An abused child may develop approval-seeking behavior and an innate understanding to keep quiet about the event. In addition to physical abuse, emotional neglect, manipulation, shaming are equally damaging forms of abuse.

Adults with unhealed trauma tend to disconnect from themselves. I, for one, am deeply conditioned to abandon myself when I am triggered. I can’t remember a day when I did not perceive a threat. My unmet needs attracted me to people who I felt could fill the empty space where love should live. My desire was that my partner would fill all those unmet needs. When the illusion eventually wore off (this could take years), I would feel resentment, but then my pattern of self-abandonment would kick in and I’d stay. Healthy relationships, self-regulation, communication, and the ability to self-soothe when triggered are all skills a home within enables us to do. I had no skills. Today, I have all the aforementioned skills, to varying degrees of success. I am still building my home, but my foundation is



solid, which ensures that I can give my children a solid foundation.

The emotionally immature parent

Dr. Lindsay Gibson, a clinical psychologist in Virginia, focuses on the impacts of people raised by parents who don't have the ability to regulate, self-soothe, or communicate. Gibson calls this the "emotionally immature parent." Keep in mind that emotionally immature parents were most likely raised by emotionally immature parents themselves, ad infinitum. As my therapist puts it, "Everyone is to blame, no one is at fault."

Gibson writes, "Most people know about the fight, flight or freeze reactions to fear. But few people realize there is also a social engagement branch of our nervous system—the ventral vagus nerve—that soothes and restores us to a feeling of safety after we've had a scare. This positive part of our nervous system prompts us to turn to others for comfort, guiding us toward physical proximity, touch, a soothing voice, and warm facial expressions. These welcoming behaviors from other people don't just tell us we're physically safe; they also tell us we are emotionally safe around them."

To understand this, look at your kids. What all kids want and need is validation, to feel physically and emotionally safe, compassion—this all defines love. When my kids come home from school, they are a giant ball of energy and it's usually not positive or "happy." They get in the car and proceed to unleash, not with events of the day, but emotions. The events act only as a catalyst. My kids are releasing. Before I understood the importance of this, my excitement at seeing my kids after school quickly devolved into dread and impatience. The emotional dump they took on me felt like a burden. It was yet one more thing I had to deal with and talk them out of. It was exhausting.

I now know why I reacted the way I did to my kids after school. They needed validation, they needed a safe space (me) where they could feel whatever they feel and to feel unconditionally accepted and loved. My kids were turning to me because they needed welcoming behaviors. What they needed was everything I was not and did not have within.



But how does one learn how to be different despite the conditions that governed their upbringing?

Changing the script

I had to unplug from the generational trauma matrix passed down from one emotionally immature, traumatized parent to another. I would wake up hundreds of times, one understanding leading to another and then constant reminders on top of that.

I reviewed a list of house rules I once posted on a forum. I thought with my "awakening," they would be different. They were not. I am the same parent. My baseline remains, and what is different is I am learning how to be really good at the art of repair. This mode of parenting helped me recognize that my "home," proverbial and literal, was an absolute shit-hole. For years, I parented the way I was parented, to a lesser degree.

So, how did this happen? How did I go from angry mom to relatively gentle mom? There are a litany of steps, like instead of fixing our kids' strong emotions, let them feel what they feel. Personally, I think that no one step is more important than awareness. Awareness allows us to wake up and clears the way for self-trust. Awareness reminds us of what we needed to feel from our parents when we were the

same age as our children. Awareness is the key that unlocks the door to the home within.

The word "healed" bothers me. I don't think healing should be the goal when it comes to trauma. It feels unattainable. The home within is not without emotional pain. But we can learn to make room for it so that we make space to feel other emotions, like joy and safety.

I went to a workshop this year. On day one, I presented myself as I present normally to the world: together, guarded, clever. Inside, I wanted to weep, but I feared that if I started crying, I would not stop. On day two, I did just that. I wept until my lungs gave up. The pain, neglect, and abuse refused to stay quiet. I tried to stop weeping. I beat my chest to stop, but I could not stop. I didn't just cry—I wailed. I cried long after my tears ran out. I wept for everything that hurt inside. My life had been devoured by emptiness. This release was a catharsis that helped to reveal a door inside where it was once a wall.

My home used to resemble a shack with no foundation. Any wind or storm would bring with it the possibility of destruction until the whole thing disintegrated with the elements. Now my home is a warm cottage in a valley. Its climate is like the weather on the East Coast. Spring brings re-birth and winter brings unseen growth. There is a stream which runs all year, but time does not exist here. It's only a changing of the seasons. In the cottage is my past, and my present. I walk into the rooms and sometimes I weep, sometimes I feel joy. The biggest change are the rooms I once feared—I no longer feel trapped inside. In those rooms, which used to paralyze me, I know that even though no one is coming to save me, I do not feel scared because I can and will save myself.

The dictionary defines home as: the place where one lives permanently, especially as a member of a family or household. This feels incomplete. There is one other definition of home I found: a place where something flourishes, is most typically found, or from which it originates. This one feels spot on.

Vi lives in SF with her family, dog and guinea pig. In her spare time, she sources banned books for her children, and collects rare houseplants. She is anti-social and strives to be ungovernable.



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Getting Your Barbie House in Order Through Estate Planning



Protect your assets, maintain your privacy, and provide clear instructions for the loved ones you leave behind.

By Alyson La

“Do you guys ever think about dying?” is the classic question Barbie asks in the blockbuster movie that came out earlier this year. There are two things certain in life: death and taxes. While many of us prefer not to think about the impending death of ourselves or

our loved ones, it is something we can plan for, and by doing so, ensure a smoother transition for ourselves, our belongings, and the people we are leaving behind. But why does planning for the inevitable create such a mental block? According to

a survey by *Caring.com*, more than half of people don’t have a will or living trust. “The emotional hurdles are real,” says Patricia De Fonte, a San Francisco-based estate planning attorney with De Fonte Law PC practicing Estate Planning With Heart™. “It’s a misconception to think you

need to know everything about your finances before coming in for a meeting. That is what an estate planning attorney is for, to walk you through each area of the planning process.”

What is estate planning?

While an estate planning attorney can help hold your hand through the process, the sheer amount of legalese and jargon can be overwhelming. So let’s simplify it. An estate plan is a set of legal documents that help individuals manage and distribute their assets and property upon their death. Within the set of documents can be a will, trust, financial power of attorney, medical power of attorney, and other documents, depending on your unique situation.

“In estate planning there are different words that mean the same thing,” explains Abe Zuckerman of Zuckerman and McQuiller LLP. “A living trust is the same as a revocable trust—you’re alive and the trust is changeable or amendable while you are alive.” A trust is a contract, he says, to hold assets. He goes on to say, “You can bucket any given trust into two categories: a revocable living trust, which is subject to change. The people that created it can change who the beneficiaries are and the things in the trust are taxable. Then there is an irrevocable trust, which is not subject to change. It has to get its own EIN and file its own tax return every year on all the future income. Once you make the gift in the trust, you cannot take that gift back. It’s often used as a form of lifetime giving.” A critical factor to bear in mind is that establishing a trust is only the first step. It must also be funded. To fund a trust involves the transfer of assets to the trust, achieved by either transferring ownership to the trust or, in certain situations, designating the trust as a beneficiary.

Financial obstacles

Another obvious hurdle in estate planning is the cost. Hiring an estate planning attorney can cost several thousands of dollars, which is financially prohibitive for many people. However, in San Francisco, there are resources available through the Assessor-Recorder Office for free estate planning for lower-income San Francisco residents located in the southeast and Western Addition neighborhoods. Some

insurance plans also offer free or significantly discounted legal services. Additionally, some companies offer legal insurance as a benefit that includes estate planning.

“Estate Planning is a social justice issue,” says De Fonte. “There is no financial threshold to an estate plan. For example, I have several clients that are single moms that have a life insurance policy that pays into an irrevocable trust on behalf of their minor children.” Some might consider doing an online will or estate plan in order to have something in place. While something might seem better than nothing, De Fonte says a DIY approach can lead to a false sense of well-being. For example, setting up a trust but not moving any assets into the trust, making it essentially pointless.

Knowledge is power in financial and end-of-life planning. Zuckerman suggests that one low-cost way to make headway in getting an estate plan started is checking out Nolo Press books, such as *Estate Planning Basics*, which explains in detail how wills work, how to provide protection for your kids, what probate is, and how to avoid it. Another education option is finding a local estate planning workshop. De Fonte leads estate planning foundation workshops specifically for parents of minor children, which can be found on her website, *defontelaw.com*, and are free for the community.

Choosing an attorney

Finding a good fit and doing some due diligence prior to hiring an estate planning attorney can go a long way in making sure your assets are covered. When picking an attorney to work with, Zuckerman suggests, “Have a conversation with them and ascertain whether they seem competent and trustworthy. Ask them what documents they prepare for you. Have a call with a couple and see which you find to be most agreeable.” It’s also an opportunity to broach the taboo topic of death and money with your friends. Ask friends or the GGMG community for suggestions for estate planning attorneys they have worked with and recommend.

Revisiting your plan

If you are among the half of Americans who have a will or estate plan in place, well

Key components of an estate plan:

Last Will and Testament
outlines how your assets and property should be distributed after your death. It allows you to specify beneficiaries and an executor to manage the distribution process.

Trusts
hold and manage your assets for the benefit of specific individuals or purposes. Trusts can provide more control and flexibility in asset distribution and can be used to avoid probate.

Financial Power of Attorney
allows you to designate someone to make financial and legal decisions on your behalf if you become incapacitated.

Medical Power of Attorney
designates someone to make medical decisions for you if you are unable to do so. This document can also specify an individual’s medical preferences.

Nomination of Guardians for Minor Children
is effective in the event of incapacity or death and allows you to name emergency contacts as well as identify who you want as guardians and backup guardians.

Memorial Instructions
state your personal wishes as to burial or cremation services.

Personal Effect Instructions
direct your trustee in the disposition of your personal effects.



done. So when do you need to update their estate once it is done? De Fonte recommends seeing your estate planning attorney every three years. “You don’t know if the law has changed,” she says. Real estate and retirement laws have changed in the last several years, which could impact end-of-life financial plans. Also, if you have had major life changes like a divorce, have come into a large amount of money, buy or sell a home, or start a business, it’s important to update estate planning documents. Additionally, if you have moved states you should revisit your estate planning with an attorney based in your new state of residence.

“Despite the emotional hurdles and perceived costs, estate planning is an important aspect of financial and end-of-life preparedness.”

A celebrity example of a will gone wrong is R&B singer Whitney Houston, who tragically died in 2012. As reported in *Forbes*, “The fact that Whitney relied on a will—signed back in 1993 no less—instead of a living trust is troubling. If anyone should have thorough estate planning, including a living trust, it was Whitney.” Because her assets weren’t in a living trust, her will was submitted to the courts, which makes them public record. *Forbes* and other news outlets were able to report on the details of the will that made her daughter Bobbi Kristina Brown the only heir

to her estate and named her mother, Cissy Houston, the executor. It also made her estate subject to the dreaded and expensive probate process, which can typically cost between 3 and 8 percent of the value of the estate.

Other considerations

Perhaps as important or more important than getting our financial house in order through estate planning is knowing where our parents and aging relatives stand with their end-of-life plans. As GGMG member Rachel relates, “When my father passed away unexpectedly in 2021, there were a million things to do. He did have a will, thankfully, but I wish that he would have had his finances more organized and had a proper estate plan set up through an attorney.” As her father’s executor, Rachel was responsible for filing his final tax return for the year of his passing. However, she didn’t have some answers for the questions the accountant was asking. She encourages others to talk to their parents and aging relatives about their estate plans. “If he would have planned better, it would have been better for everyone. It’s been almost two years and the estate is still not finished,” she said. “There are still bills and taxes to be paid and accounts to close before the assets can be distributed to myself and my siblings.”

Despite being an attorney herself, Rachel hired an estate planning attorney for her own family’s estate plan. Her relatively simple estate plan includes: a revocable living trust, a will, power of attorney for finances and health care, and a health care

directive. Utilizing this set of documents with their assets titled in the living trust allows family members to avoid probate fees, keep their assets private, choose who will make financial health care decisions in the event they are incapacitated, and importantly, names legal guardians and backup guardians for their minor children. Knowing that organizing her finances in her estate is a gift to her family in the event of an unexpected passing, she emailed her chosen guardians a copy of the estate plan. Included with it is a Google doc of all their accounts for their reference, and she also shared the location of the fire safe box in which the printed estate plan is located within their home. And she is on top of keeping it updated. “We are in the process of buying a new house, so we will be listing the trust as the owner on the title of the new home and updating our estate docs accordingly,” she shares.

Getting your Barbie house in order through estate planning is not just a matter of preparing for the inevitable; it’s a critical step in ensuring a smoother transition for both yourself and the loved ones you leave behind. Despite the emotional hurdles and perceived costs, estate planning is an important aspect of financial and end-of-life preparedness. It’s a social justice issue, accessible to all, and knowledge is indeed power in this domain. Just as Whitney Houston’s case demonstrates the importance of proper estate planning, your estate plan can protect your assets, maintain your privacy, and provide clear instructions for your family and loved ones. So, seize the opportunity to have those difficult conversations with your parents and aging relatives about their end-of-life plans, and consider consulting with an estate planning attorney to help you navigate this essential process. In the end, getting your financial house in order through estate planning is a gift to yourself and your family, offering peace of mind so you can dance the night away (as Dua Lipa sings in the Barbie movie), knowing your health care, heirs, and assets are cared for.

Alyson is a former data scientist and accountant, turned full time mom of two neurodivergent kids. As her family’s default CFO, she has a passion for financial organization and channels this enthusiasm into sharing insights about personal finance through writing.



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NEIGHBORHOOD MEETUPS

Monthly Queer Family Hike

Join queer families for a walk/hike, which includes casually mingling/chatting, discussions on agreed-upon topics, and just sharing unique experiences and issues we have encountered as queer families. All queer families are welcome!

- Date:** First Saturday or Sunday of each month
- Time:** Typically 10 a.m. to noon
- Place:** TBD
- Cost:** Free for members
- Contact:** Email Dy Nguyen for details (*dy.nguyen@gmail.com*)



Moms Supper Club

Explore new restaurants in the city, enjoy dinner and drinks, and meet new moms in your community! Details for each venue will be announced through *ggmg.org*.

- Date:** Quarterly on Thursdays
- Time:** 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.
- Place:** TBD
- Cost:** \$10 for members, \$20 for non-members
- Contact:** Email Lydia Weiss for details (*Weiss.lydiab@gmail.com*)

Glen Park Coffee + Stroller Walk for Mommies (and Babies)

Would you like to meet neighborhood moms, grab a coffee and enjoy a stroller walk together? We’re organizing this Coffee + Stroller walk for you! We’ll meet at a coffee shop before we go for an hour of fresh air, light exercise, and great conversation!

- Date:** The first Wednesday of every month (January 3, February 7)
- Time:** 9 a.m. to 11 a.m.
- Place:** Bosworth and Diamond Street side lot by Pono Skincare in Glen Park. We can figure out which coffee shop to stroll to.
- Cost:** Free for members

South of Glen Park and Bernal Monthly Moms Night Out

Each month we will visit a different venue in our neighborhood, moms only! After kiddo bedtime, enjoy a drink and some appetizers with other mothers.

- Date:** The second Thursday of every month (January 11, February 8)
- Time:** 8 p.m. to 10 p.m.
- Place:** TBD (different place each month)
- Cost:** Free for members

Little Oceanauts \$7 Playdate

Looking for an afternoon playdate for your kiddos? Little Oceanauts in Ingleside is open and is the perfect place for children to run off their energy before dinner time! Meet fellow GGMG moms and enjoy a fun afternoon together.

- Date:** The third Friday of every month (January 19, February 16)
- Time:** 3 p.m. to 5 p.m.
- Place:** 1917 Ocean Ave.
- Cost:** GGMG members pay a special rate of \$7 per child. Infants 6 months and under are free. Parents/caretakers are free. Limited spots available. Must prepay at *ggmg.org*.

Monthly Moms Happy Hour

Join us for drinks and appetizers at a local restaurant to meet and connect with other moms in San Francisco. There will be a different venue in neighborhoods all around the city each month. Info will be announced two weeks before the event. All parties, feel free to take a COVID test in advance.

- Date:** The third Thursday of every month (January 18, February 15)
- Time:** 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m.
- Place:** TBD
- Cost:** \$5 for members, \$10 for non-members
- Contact:** Text or email Jessie Lee for details (*Leejessiesf@gmail.com*) or 415.518.6402

Marina/Pac Heights/North Beach Monthly Moms Happy Hour

Drop in anytime for drinks and appetizers with other moms!

- Date:** First Thursday of every month (January 4, February 1)
- Time:** 5 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.
- Place:** Wildseed, 2000 Union St.
- Cost:** \$5 for members, \$10 for non-members

Register for events at *ggmg.org/calendar* unless otherwise noted.

MEMBER SUPPORT

The mission of the Member Support Committee is to change a member’s life for the better and to create a sense of community among our members through support, drives, and special events. The Member Support Committee provides assistance to members who are experiencing challenging times or are in crisis.

The Member Support Committee also maintains the Community Resource List, a list of resources for members in several issue areas, including crisis, grief and loss, and child therapy. The list includes medical professionals, support groups, and other services, many of which are owned or recommended by GGMG members. The list is available on the GGMG website at *ggmg.org/community-resources*.

We encourage all members to review the Community Resource List, particularly if you need support in any of these areas:

- Adult therapy
- Child therapy
- Crisis resources
- Domestic abuse
- Emergency preparedness
- Fertility and adoption
- Grief and loss
- Illness and caregiving
- Legal resources
- New mothers
- Postpartum depression
- Pregnancy

Please contact us at *member.support@ggmg.org* if you have any questions, or if you would like to suggest any new resources to add to the list. Please also contact us if you would like to learn more about the assistance that the Member Support Committee can provide to members.

MAGAZINE

Are you seeking a rewarding volunteer opportunity that helps you connect with other moms?

Come join the *Golden Gate Mothers Group Magazine* staff!

We currently have open positions for copy editors, designers, photographers, and writers. No formal experience is required.

All staff members are invited to join the monthly magazine planning meeting, where we flesh out and problem-solve the current issue and brainstorm for the upcoming issue. Brainstorming includes collaborating on the upcoming issue’s theme, cover art, and articles.

Copy Editor: Edits and proofreads articles and helps finalize content. Reviews design proofs.

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Photographer: Holds photo shoots for magazine cover and feature articles as needed. Photographers need to provide their own high-quality DSLR camera.

Writers: Compose feature-length articles and/or shorter columns.

Have questions? Contact us at *editor@ggmg.org*.

PARTNERSHIPS

The Friends branch of the Partnerships Committee collaborates with local organizations and businesses to provide substantial discounts and resources for our members. We aim to develop mutually beneficial relationships with businesses in the Bay Area that provide useful services to mothers. Our goal is to work preferentially with small local businesses run by women and/or people of color in an effort to promote their professional advancements in our society.

The Partners branch of the Partnerships Committee manages our relationships with our large Partners including the Jewish Community Center of San Francisco (JCCSF), Luke’s Local grocery, and UrbanSitter.

Committee duties in Friends:

- Input new offers by local businesses (Friends) looking to provide substantial (20 percent or more) discounts to GGMG members
- Maintain our relationships with our current Friends
- Seek out potential new Friends who provide services useful to our members
- Negotiate new business discounts
- Update members on new discounts

Committee duties in Partners:

- Maintain relationships with current Partners and seek out new Partners
- Negotiate new business discounts to expand the discount offerings for GGMG members
- Outreach for new Partners of interest with preference to small local businesses run by women and/or people of color

Open Roles: Committee Co-chair in Friends (one hour per week) and Committee Co-chair in Partnerships (one to two hours per week)

To volunteer, email *partnerships@ggmg.org*.

VOLUNTEER BENEFITS

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Where the Heart Is

By Sandy Woo

N*i hui lai le?* Literally, you've come back [home] in Mandarin. This is how my family greets me as I enter from wherever and whatever stage of my life. "Like, duh, obviously," my teenage self would say. Those four words are said so much and yet not enough.

Chinese parents are not known to be emotionally expressive. Love is not spoken, it is shown—through actions. Sometimes, these actions included willing the bladder to calm the @!*\$ down so as to not walk into another fight about me or finances in the middle of the night. But there were always elaborate breakfasts with fresh-squeezed orange juice, and saucy noodles with poached eggs waiting in the morning. Friends were unwelcome at the house because I placed "too much" importance on friendship and not enough on family.

My friends were frankly a little nervous to come over as we were never sure if my "stepmonster" would be Dr. Jekyll or Mr. Hyde. I spent copious amounts of time (whenever I could steal away) at my best friend's house, a cacophonous, multi-generational Vietnamese family on three levels that swirled with chaos, laughter, food, and children, while my favorite braised meat and tofu balls waited for me back at our cramped apartment.

One Thanksgiving I didn't come back [home]. My parents had requested that I move all my belongings with me to graduate school in Chicago. *Everything*. And to return their house keys to them. Then, as a filial daughter, I was also expected to move back after graduation. So when my boyfriend (and source of melodrama) at the time invited me to Houston for the holiday, I happily and spitefully accepted. It was a glorious four days. We lived "in sin" in his father's home alongside his very religious second wife and 12-year-old daughter. Immigrants themselves, his family also placed emotional wellness one rung above the bottom, yet they nevertheless made me feel more welcome and "at home" than I had ever felt in my parents' house. To say my parents blew a gasket when they found out might have been an understatement.

Of course I knew my parents loved me, in their own flawed and distorted way, but I couldn't forget not feeling that deep



Sketch of my son and cousin in Wichita

sensation of belonging, of acceptance. I wanted it—that feeling. Grandma made me feel cherished, but I no longer lived with her and, briefly, was banned from seeing her. My mother had disappeared. My stepmom and father were working through their own demons. And I was hooked on a feeling.

I giggled at my husband's wedding vows: "When I see your dinged-up car waiting for me at the airport and smell the garlic on your skin, I know I'm home." That simple, huh? Yes and no. My 10-year-old son accused me recently of "always being cranky, [I'm] never happy." Sucker

punch. His OCD has reared its ugly head, this time bordering on an eating disorder. Favorite foods that once brought him joy now give him anxiety. Panic attacks over any oil in his food

"Of course I knew my parents loved me in their own flawed and distorted way, but I couldn't forget not feeling that deep sensation of belonging, of acceptance. I wanted it—that feeling."

overwhelm mealtimes. Absurd obsessions about good and bad foods try my patience and amp my despair. He tells me I don't "accept" him. He sides with his beast this

time—believing it—exactly what eating disorders and OCD trick their victims into doing. More tears. I spiral. He spirals. My even-keeled husband spirals. We walk on pins and needles in our house.

My father tells me I am "too hard" on my son, that I should be more "soft" and accepting. *How ironic*. He's right, of course. I'm more emotionally expressive than they were (not hard) but I, too, channel all my love and concern into actions. Like reminding him of the importance of fighting his beast; of washing, at a minimum, tits, pits, soles, and holes; of being responsible; of being kind. All of my grief about the world he'll inherit, how he'll turn out, and if he'll make it manifests as Ms. Crabbypants. It's easier to do things and nag, if you will, than to feel all the heartbreak, anger, and frustration, and deal with my own anxiety.

We recently visited my cousin for the weekend, my son and I. He had multiple desserts, one slice of buttered bread, and a beignet, and only mildly panicked. Upon returning to the hotel after an excursion with her, I greeted him with, "Hi bubba, *ni hui lai le?*" Welcome home, my little love. I've missed you.

Sandy is grateful her cousin made her feel that there's no place like home in Wichita on a getaway with her son.



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