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LETTER FROM
THE EDITOR:

What’s in a Name?

By Sonya Abrams



Sonya identifies as a mom to three kids, two cats, and one husky, and she’s trying her best to identify as a gym rat again.

“Mommy, why aren’t you a Johnson?” my children asked occasionally during the first half dozen years of their lives, confused about why I didn’t share their last name. I always answered honestly—I was too lazy to do all the paperwork, “Sonya Johnson” didn’t sound particularly melodic, and, most importantly, I’d had my name for more than 30 years. It was comfortable, well-worn, mine.

Our two-name household didn’t cause me much concern when my husband was still alive. I felt deeply connected to my family, despite our different surnames, confident in my identity as wife and mother in one cohesive family unit. But after my husband passed away in 2019, it became clear how important our last names were as signifiers and that our family identity had not only shifted, but might be threatened.

Sometimes the remarks felt innocent, if ignorant. There was the TSA agent who, upon hearing my kids were Johnsons, remarked, “Where’s Dad? Skip out?” Or the hotel that asked for my children’s full names then kept confusing my kids with printouts of my surname added to their first names. But some of the incidents were aggressive. When we were entering Canada last summer, the border agent studied our passports then asked me where Dad was, if these Johnsons were really my children or if I was kidnapping them. He wasn’t amused when I snarkily asked who in their right mind would kidnap

three bickering kids. The loss of the senior name-bearer rocked my sense of family stability, even legitimacy. The gulf between my old life and new life felt wider; the name that had bridged us was slipping out of my control.

This issue explores ways in which we perceive our own identities, and how our identities shape our experiences. H.B. Terrell dispels the negative misconceptions about only children and reveals how in many ways onlies may be better

“[A]fter my husband passed away in 2019, it became clear how important our last names were as signifiers and that our family identity had not only shifted, but might be threatened.”

positioned for success. Alex McCarther shares her reluctant path toward ethical non-monogamy and how opening her marriage revealed surprising new sides of herself. And Yuliya Patsay offers us an excerpt from her memoir about finding her sense of self among a myriad of strong, sometimes seemingly incompatible identities and labels.

Sometimes I regret not taking my husband’s name, not only because of the occasional bureaucratic headaches it still causes, but because it’s one more piece of him that I don’t have, that I’m unable to hold on to. Then again, maybe I don’t need a name to validate my experience as a wife and mother. Just as one word often can’t perfectly describe a feeling, a name can’t create an identity. And maybe that’s OK.

Sonya Abrams

LETTER FROM
THE BOARD:

Creating Community Around Identity

By Connie Lin



Connie and her family relish the occasional spate of sunny warm days while awaiting Karl the Fog for our annual Fogust-fest.

As the child of first-generation American immigrants, navigating multiple cultures and languages is just part of life. Growing up, I knew that I would never be “American” even though I was born in the U.S., and yet, also did not quite fit in in my parents’ homeland. My parents didn’t seem bothered by this, as they had learned from the experiences of their siblings in raising my much older cousins. They knew that they needed to create their own

community when we lived in Alabama and found a tight-knit group of friends from all over Asia, sometimes conversing in Chinese or Taiwanese, and other times just in English. When we moved to a new town, they would gradually find new friends, meeting neighbors down the street or joining a new church. It wasn’t always easy, but we knew it was a necessary part of our lives. Our race, our cultural identity, and our language created challenges sometimes (and more often for my older brother than me), but also something to rally around and celebrate.

While I learned to traverse between two cultures, my kids are familiar with walking between at least three of them, as my husband is also a second-generation American, albeit from Austria. Our extended families are mostly far away, so we’ve found our own community in San Francisco, making new friends from our kids’ school groups and combining them with

old friends from home or college. I’ve been happy to see how having multiple facets of our identities and recognizing and celebrating them is a key part of the diversity curriculum at my kids’ elementary school; this is a big change from when assimilation of the melting pot was the goal.

As you settle into your new lives as parents and possibly in a new home with new neighbors, I hope you find your own

“Our extended families are mostly far away, so we’ve found our own community in San Francisco, making new friends from our kids’ school groups and combining them with old friends from home or college.”

community, one that reflects and accepts the many facets of your identity. Through GGMG’s mommy meetups and stroller walks, you can connect with other moms. Or, if you have something else in mind, talk with new friends to start your own book club, climbing group, SF playground explorers, or other get-togethers with the new parents you meet. Reach out in our online forums for help finding that perfect nanny or babysitter or help navigating toddler conundrums. As you thumb through our magazine, jot down ideas on what you’d like to try next.

I can’t wait to see what’s in store for you. Enjoy this precious longest, yet shortest time with your little ones!

Connie Lin

HOUSEKEEPING

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NEXT ISSUE: Wonder

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

This issue made possible by: Denied boarding on both foreign and domestic soil; Family vacations, chasing warm weather, eating all the stone fruit, and endless packing and unpacking; Fell in love with a cat; East Coast travelling, electrical fires, prepping for a new school; Traipsing through London and Paris and shipping the kiddos off to sleepaway camp; Appreciating our fog, even (especially!) in the summer, and packing so many summer lunches; Golfing again after a 10-year hiatus now that my 9-year-old started playing and loves it; Acting as Director of “Camp Mom” all summer and entertaining out-of-town guests.

COVER OUTTAKES



Only one shot can make it to the cover. Here are some of our other favorites.

Cover photo by Mini Anna Photography
Models: Yuliya Patsay

Cultural Centers

By Christine Chen



Chinese Cultural Center of San Francisco (CCC) remains a cultural destination in Chinatown since its founding in 1965 by Chinese American activists of the civil rights movement, and is focused on transforming dominant and negative narratives about the Chinese community through education and contemporary art. The main location is in the historic building in San Francisco's Portsmouth Square Hilton and in 2014, CCC opened 41 Ross, an experimental community art space on one of the most historic alleyways in Chinatown, with an artists-in-residence program for the neighborhood. The main location has a design store and offers paid tai chi classes, guided tours for kids and schools, individuals, and corporations. An active member of the Chinatown community, CCC also organizes festivals throughout the year such as a free Hungry Ghost Festival (August 26, 2023) with performances, music, art, and parades.

Alliance Française of San Francisco (AFSF) is a must-visit for all Francophiles. The AFSF is dedicated to promoting the French language and francophone cultures offering French classes for adults, children, and teenagers as well as business classes and summer camps. Events include French wine tastings, an annual evening Bastille Day celebration, and free French movie nights.

Italian Cultural Institute of San Francisco (Istituto Italiano di Cultura or IIC) is actually an official branch of the Italian government. It has a library open to the public, though to borrow materials, you must be a member. The IIC hosts events on-site, and under the guidance of trustees at the



Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it fosters cultural exchange between Italy and the United States and is a resource for learning Italian and studying abroad with scholarship opportunities.

Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Northern California (JCCCNC) is located in the heart of Japantown and provides educational, cultural, recreational, and social programs for the community. The JCCCNC offers fun classes both at the center and online embodying Japanese culture including sushi making, mochi workshops, flower arranging, and kabuki theater appreciation in addition to martial arts, arts and crafts, and music and dance.

Russian Center of San Francisco is in a historic architectural building with a 550+ seat ballroom/theater, full gym, dance studio, restaurant space, and meeting rooms. At the center is Teremok, a Russian preschool, a Museum of Russian Culture, and a library. *The Russian Life Newspaper*, Russian Center Opera, Russian American Chamber Orchestra, and Congress of Russian Americans are also in the Center. As a result, the Center produces many operas, dance concerts, folk dance classes, social events, and lectures. The Center holds The Russian Festival every February, a three-day event of food, art, music, and dance.

Sentro Filipino develops and promotes an appreciation of Filipino arts, culture, cuisine, language, and heritage. The location hosts art exhibits, films, book readings, dance, and musical performances, and offers classes in Filipino folkloric dance and art classes taught by Filipino artists.

Mission Cultural Center for Latino Arts (MCCLA) is a multicultural, multidisciplinary organization that promotes, preserves, and develops the arts and traditions of the Chicano, Central and South American, and Caribbean people. MCCLA supports local and established artists. Throughout the year, they offer classes, events, and exhibits as well as a summer camp program in June and July for kids ages 7 to 13.

African American Art & Culture Complex (AAACC) is a space for all to experience Black art and culture. Black artists use the complex to present, gather, and learn. Various grants are available to provide financial assistance for incubator opportunities, guidance on developing an art project, learning experiences, wellness, and self-care.

United Irish Cultural Center of San Francisco is home to all aspects of Irish culture and San Francisco Irish history. On-site is a library and an event space with rooms for small lunches and a room with a capacity for 500 people. The Center hosts a summer camp for kids and Ireland sports events.

Sausalito Portuguese Cultural Center was founded in 1888 as a focal point for Portuguese culture and traditions in Marin County, which has a long history of Portuguese immigration. The Center sponsors family-friendly events, such as the Holy Ghost Festa, a summer barbeque, and the



Christine has always thought that culture is best explored through food and wine.

Festa de Natal (Christmas festival). Portuguese language classes and informal monthly Sip & Savor social events are fun ways to enjoy Portuguese culture. Events are offered with food and wine featuring the gourmand culinary explorations of Manuel Azevedo, the owner and Executive Chef of LaSalette, the renowned Portuguese restaurant in Sonoma.

Oakland Asian Cultural Center (OACC) is in the heart of Oakland's Chinatown, on the second floor of the Pacific Renaissance Plaza, and is dedicated to building a stronger and more vibrant Asian Pacific Islander American (APIA) community. The center has public programs and cultural workshops to celebrate APIA heritage. OACC offers free (though a \$3 to \$5 donation per person is appreciated) 30-minute to 1-hour interactive tours of martial arts or tai chi and hands-on cultural art activities such as Chinese calligraphy that can be customized for school field trips or other groups. There are also free self-guided tours of the exhibitions underway. A wide variety of paid classes are offered on a regular basis: Chinese music, art (Chinese calligraphy, ikebana), dance, and wellness (tai chi, qi gong, and Filipino martial arts) classes. There are also some wellness classes that are free and drop-in with a minimal suggested donation request.



Perimenopause

By Shawna Hedley, MD



Shawna Hedley grew up in Pioneer, California, and attended UCSD for undergrad and Albert Einstein College of Medicine for medical school. After finishing residency at Beth Israel Medical Center, she stayed in private practice in NYC for 11 years before moving home to be near family. She has been at Kaiser, San Francisco for 11 years, and is the menopause champion and cancer survivorship OBGYN for the medical center.

What exactly is perimenopause?

Perimenopause means “around menopause” and refers to your body’s natural transition to menopause, marking the end of the reproductive years. It is the time when our cycles start to change, often getting closer together at first in the few years before menopause transition. Later they start to space out and become more irregular before they finally stop around age 51 to 52 when we enter menopause (median age is 51.4 years). Menopause is defined as one year of no periods. Symptoms of menopause can start prior to this time, with hot flashes (usually during periods), sleep disruption, night sweats, and increased anxiety and/or depression.

According to the Mayo Clinic: “Women start perimenopause at different ages. You may notice signs of progression toward menopause, such as menstrual irregularity, sometime in your 40s. But some women notice changes as early as their mid-30s.

The level of estrogen—the main female hormone—in your body rises and falls unevenly during perimenopause. Your menstrual cycles may lengthen or shorten, and you may begin having menstrual cycles in which your ovaries don’t release an egg (ovulate). You may also experience menopause-like symptoms, such as hot flashes, sleep problems, and vaginal dryness. Treatments are available to help ease these symptoms.”

How does a woman know she has reached perimenopause?

When she starts noticing her cycles shift, become more unpredictable and typically farther apart, and lighter over time until they finally stop. Symptoms can come and go during this time, due to highly variable hormone levels from the ovaries in response to waning numbers of eggs to produce those hormones. Ovaries also don’t function as well so cycles and hormone levels can be much more variable, going from very high to low quickly which can aggravate things like migraines or mood.

How can symptoms differ from one woman to the next?

Some of us have no symptoms other than a lack of menstruation, and barely notice the shift. Others have many more symptoms like hot flashes, night sweats, fatigue, joint aches, dry skin, weight gain, mood changes, breast pain, brain fog, and headaches. Women of African descent have a longer hot flash time, averaging 10 years. Women of Asian or Latina descent are more likely to have hot flashes for about 5 to 6 years and Caucasian women are in the middle, at approximately 7 years. Women with more life stress, lower income, fewer years of education, and who are heavier tend to have worse symptoms. Around 70 percent of women have some type of bothersome symptoms, but many do not seek help.

“We have a lot to offer to help women going through perimenopause or menopause, and it should be a discussion between the woman and her OBGYN about what her symptoms are, what her goals are, and what she can do to be proactive about her health.”

What changes to a woman’s sense of self can happen in this stage?

One may feel a loss of femininity by no longer having periods, a realization of aging, and no longer being fertile. Physical appearance can change too, with dry skin causing wrinkles, and possibly thinning hair and nails. Muscle mass can decrease and body fat increases with resulting “belly fat” accumulation. Moods can change and be more up and down because of hormone shifts. One can have brain fog as well, triggered by hot flashes and night sweats and the resulting lack of sleep. Vulvovaginal dryness may start, and trigger pain with sex and low libido. One can also have more bladder control issues.

What does the media get wrong about perimenopause?

Misinformation on perimenopause is varied: that hormone therapy is dangerous, or that we as OBGYN physicians don’t want to help, or that we do not have bioidentical, FDA-approved medications to offer relief for this transition. We have a lot to offer to help women going through perimenopause or menopause, and it should be a discussion between the woman and her OBGYN about what her symptoms are, what her goals are, and what she can do to be proactive about her health.

ACL Tears: The Long Road to Recovery

By Brian Feeley, MD and Nirav Pandya, MD

Ethan Nakashita, a rising senior at San Francisco’s St. Ignatius College Prep, was 16 years old when he tore his ACL playing football. “I was doing a tackling drill when my cleat got stuck in the turf. My body weight flew forward while my knee stayed in place, causing my knee to bend almost backward,” he said. Nakashita could tell it wasn’t normal but didn’t feel much pain initially. He was always confident he could recover, but said, “The scariest part of the whole process was the surgery and the moments leading up to it.” His parents worried about a different kind of short-term impact. Gene, Ethan’s father, was concerned about Ethan’s mental and physical health as a teenager. He also thought about later-in-life issues: “arthritis, mobility, modification of an active lifestyle, stability, pain management.”

In youth athletes, the ACL is the key ligament connecting the femur (thigh bone) to the tibia (shin bone) when doing cutting and pivoting activities. While it is not critical for walking, hiking, biking, or even jogging, it keeps the knee in place when the foot is planted and a quick change of direction is attempted. Tears happen when this ligament is overloaded and the muscles don’t fire in quite the right way to compensate. Think (1) grabbing a rebound and landing awkwardly, while also thinking about passing the ball, or (2) a ski catching an edge then turning inward through unexpected slushy snow. Tears, when they happen, are followed by knee swelling, but in children under the age of 16, this goes away quickly—sometimes quickly enough that the injury is missed. While these injuries are most common in teens, the incidence of ACL injuries in kids ages 7 to 12 has increased at an alarming rate over the last 10 years, coinciding with the rise of sports specialization in this age group.

While an MRI is helpful to diagnose ACL injuries of children of all ages, a physical exam by an orthopedic surgeon or sports medicine doctor is the gold standard. In fact, just the history of hearing a pop in the knee along with swelling within a few hours is enough to diagnose an ACL injury for 70 percent of kids and adolescents, and the exam is enough to be sure about almost all the rest. MRIs are generally ordered to confirm the diagnosis and inform the plan for surgical reconstruction.

Many parents and athletes are surprised to learn that female athletes, particularly female teens, are at higher risk

for ACL injury. Stephanie Wong, MD, a sports medicine surgeon at UCSF, explains, “Deficits in neuromuscular control and valgus knee collapse (knee going inward) have been shown to increase the risks of ACL tears in females. We have reason to believe that cellular-level differences affecting the biology of the ACL also increase the likelihood of it being injured. Certain sports—such as skiing, basketball, soccer, and volleyball—are riskier for the ACL. These sports put the female athlete at higher risk, especially when they are

fatigued from multiple games or playing for more than one team a season.”

Almost everyone with an ACL tear will need surgery to give them a stable knee and prevent further damage to other parts of the knee, including the meniscus and cartilage, which if injured can lead to early-onset arthritis. In surgery, a piece of either the hamstring, patella tendon or quadriceps is taken to reconstruct the ACL through small incisions. This surgery has proven highly successful, and athletes of all ages are able to return to sports after 7 to 9 months of rehabilitation under the direction of a physical therapist.

What about prevention? While the risk of ACL tears can’t be eliminated, programs such as the FIFA 11+ soccer conditioning program have been shown to decrease injury risk in female youth athletes by up to 50 percent. Christina Allen, MD, chief of sports medicine and vice chair of athletics and outreach at Yale University, says, “I find that one of the predisposing factors to ACL injury is core and lower extremity weakness, which the FIFA 11+ program targets. I think it is critical to incorporate [such a program] into an athlete’s return to sports

regimen as well as for long-term use to reduce the risk of injury and re-injury.”

Nakashita is getting there. After 9 months of hard work and physical

therapy, he is back to playing sports, including football. “I now prioritize my body’s health and safety more than ever,” he said, “in order to prevent any other major injuries to my body.”

Brian Feeley, MD, 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, MD, 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.”



“Many parents and athletes are surprised to learn that female athletes, particularly female teens, are at higher risk for ACL injury.”

Shedding My Corporate Skin

By Elizabeth Neal

To the world, I am unemployed. It’s odd, though—ironic, even—because I have never felt richer or more fulfilled.

I love being a mom. It’s precious, exhausting, sweet, and hard. Despite the sleep deprivation, I wake up each day feeling purposeful, like a calling has been fulfilled.

I love being completely present for every one of my daughter’s milestones—and all the micro-moments in between. Seeing her curious eyes explore the world around her. Watching her learn each of the muscles in her face and explore new expressions. Hearing the wildly odd coos and screeches as she finds her voice.

I made a choice before my daughter was born: I wanted to show up fully and be the best version of myself for her, and to do that, I needed to be free from distractions or competing priorities. I chose to quit my job so I could be home to raise her full-time. The decision was clear and the right one for me and my family.

But I’d be lying if I said it was easy or that I didn’t struggle. For 14 years, I identified myself by my career. Who was I? Easy. A journalist. A marketer. A manager. A corporate career woman. I worked tirelessly for more responsibility, industry recognition, and promotions, keeping the next rung on the career ladder in sight. I always needed more. And I needed to prove myself—my worth. On paper, I was an award-winning, accomplished, seasoned, senior-level leader. But, behind



knew I needed to leave this toxic version of me behind. In my newborn cocoon with my daughter, I felt proud and confident that I made the right call. It was *outside* of that cocoon that I faced doubt, fear, insecurity, and shame.

Something as simple and routine as a credit card income verification sent me into a negative spiral. It was the first time I was forced to call myself *unemployed*. Ugh. The label felt like a failure, and it filled me with shame. It was hard to not contribute financially to my household.

Hell, I didn’t *feel* unemployed. In fact, I felt I had never worked harder in my life. Or felt like the work I was doing had greater value for myself, my family, and society. And yet, I felt dread

announcing my career break to my colleagues on LinkedIn. They were moving forward in their careers, and I was at a standstill, moving backward even. Fear crept in: *Would I be judged? Would I fall too far behind in my career, unable to go back? While my colleagues are receiving promotions and advancing their careers, I’m cleaning up baby spit up. [Insert golf clap].*

While I didn’t come to this conclusion overnight, some soul searching, coaching, and deep reflection helped me understand that I was brainwashed to believe my worth was tied to a job title and a paycheck. I spent my entire career seeking external validation, but how did I actually feel about how I was *truly living*? I fell into the trap of a patriarchal, capitalist society that praises busyness, money, and success measured in materialism. One that undermines mothers’ inherent value (NBD, just raising the next generation).

At a young age, we’re told to answer the question, “What do you want to do when you grow up?” We’re expected to go to school. Pick a major. Get a job. Climb the career ladder. Anything else is perceived as failure. Well, if there’s anything I want my daughter to learn from me, it’s that I choose to live my life on my terms. The question I want to challenge her to answer instead is, “How do you want to live?”

Because when I ask myself that now, I know I’m choosing to live life in a way that fulfills me.

Elizabeth is a free-spirited creative, writer, nature lover, and mother.

“At a young age, we’re told to answer the question, ‘What do you want to do when you grow up?’ We’re expected to go to school . . . Get a job. Climb the career ladder. Anything else is perceived as failure.”

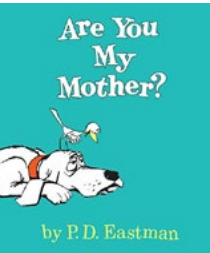
the curtain was a tired and unfulfilled soul stuck in the 70-plus-hours-a-week work grind. The old me donned suit jackets and uncomfortable pencil skirts and had blistered ankles from heels I thought I needed to wear. She drowned her mental exhaustion in a glass (or three) of wine and repeatedly sacrificed her health and happiness. She was making six figures. She should be happy, right? Wrong.

When I thought about the kind of mother I wanted to be, the kind of person I wanted to become for my future child, I

Yearning to Belong

By Laure Latham

Whether they find their identity at school, within their family, or their social circle, kids yearn to belong. By knowing themselves, they begin to love themselves, and thus become better versions of themselves. Identity may seem like it’s a big word and a big concept, but the truth is, it relates to anybody regardless of age. Who are we? These books are sure to open up exciting conversations at home.



Are You My Mother?

Written and illustrated by P.D. Eastman

This 1960 classic children’s book follows a newly hatched chick who is looking for his mother in the big wide world. Confused, the chick asks animals and then vehicles if they are his mother, to no avail. The repetition

makes this a great read-aloud for toddlers who are learning to name animals and objects around them. It is also comforting for young ones who are experiencing separation anxiety, as the parent returns at the end of the book.

Ages: 1 to 4 years



Odd Dog Out

Written and illustrated by Rob Biddulph

It’s not easy being an odd dachshund out. In a city where rows and rows of identical dachshunds dress the same while driving on busy roads or engaging in activities, one dog dares to be different. Can she bring out individuality

in her fellow dachshunds? With its vibrant rainbow colors and positive message, this book is a delightful bedtime read on the importance of being yourself.

Ages: 2 to 6 years



Lou

Written and illustrated by Breanna Carzoo

Meet Lou, a fire hydrant whose most important job, day in and day out, is to serve as the neighborhood toilet for dogs on their walks. Is that really what a fire hydrant’s life is all about? Join Lou in a journey of self-discovery and

empowerment, as he realizes one day that he has a greater purpose in life and becomes an unlikely superhero. After reading this book, you may also look differently at fire hydrants who are waiting for their chance to shine.

Ages: 2 to 6 years



Sulwe

Written by Lupita Nyong'o, illustrated by Vashti Harrison

Sulwe is “the color of midnight,” the darkest in her multihued family. Every day, she prays for lighter skin and the ability to make friends and not be teased. She is unhappy until she dreams of a star who shares the most

beautiful legend about two sisters, Day and Night. The people love Day and hate Night. Tired of being “treated badly for being dark,” Night leaves. Day’s sun becomes overwhelming and the people realize that they need both darkness and light. In this delicate story about colorism, balance and respect, Sulwe realizes that she is beautiful because she chooses to be—regardless of her skin color.

Ages: 3 to 8 years



Dare to Question: Carrie Chapman Catt's Voice for the Vote

Written by by Jasmine A. Stirling, illustrated by Udayana Lugo

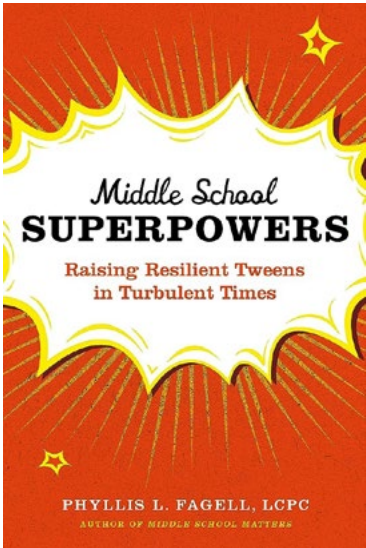
There is no such thing as a society that doesn’t change. As a child in the 19th century, Carrie Chapman Catt questioned why women couldn’t vote. She became a tireless fighter in the battle for women’s suffrage—marching, delivering speeches, and traveling around the United States to promote the cause. She then questioned the movement itself, as other women were excluded from it because of the color of their skin or because of their lack of wealth. Young readers will feel the impact of what it means to be denied equal voting rights and will feel inspired to dare to ask questions and demand answers. **Ages: 6+**

Laure blogs on 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, where she is training to swim the English Channel in 2023. You can find her on social media @frogmomblog.

On Teens and Tweens

By Gail Cornwall

Two educators-turned-writers tackle big questions of identity for today’s tweens and teens.



Middle School Superpowers: Raising Resilient Tweens in Turbulent Times

By Phyllis Fagell

As regular readers will have discerned by now, I read a lot of parenting books. Like, a lot. Many of them cover the same (very important) ground: research about what helps make kids resilient. Phyllis Fagell’s latest book does that, but much more. Because she’s worked with middle schoolers and raised her own, Fagell gives parents not just the concepts we need to help our kids make the most of middle school’s “age of opportunity,” but also the tools. Specific, actionable strategies.

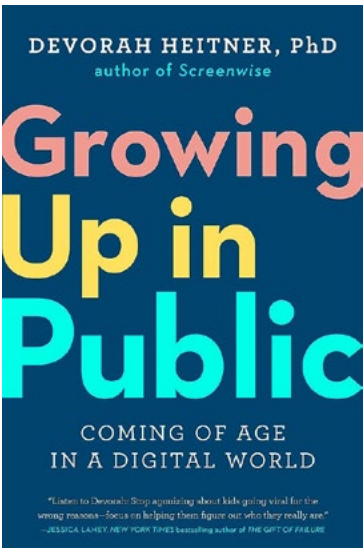
Fagell begins *Middle School Superpowers* by writing, “I don’t subscribe to the usual view of middle school as an inevitably difficult life stage.” Rather, she writes, teens being natural sponges and being sensitive to others’ opinions means “adults wield enormous power to shape their values, boost their self-awareness, and help them learn to experiment, fail, and recover.” Then she covers, in one chapter each, 12 areas of strength our kids need to “persist through frustration, endure uncertainty, see the glass as half full in the face of disappointment, pursue healthy friendships, set good boundaries, be kind to themselves, and come out on the other side of any ordeal with their self-esteem intact.” Sounds great!

So, um, how? Fagell has a rich, nuanced understanding of tweens, accumulated from thousands of the tiny moments she recounts for readers. For example, she writes, “If 10 people tell a kid that they love their haircut but one person says, ‘I see you got a haircut,’ they might spend the rest of the day trying to decipher the one ambiguous comment.” Over the years, she’s honed phrases to react to kids constructively, like, “You must have been pretty upset to toss the contents of Brad’s backpack in the trash. What led to that moment?” or “I noticed you’ve stopped hanging out with Grant and Nick, and I’m wondering if there’s a reason you need more space.” And then there’s her “miracle question.” To help tweens figure out what they want and how they can get it, she asks: “If you could wave this magic wand and make your problem disappear, what would be different in your life?”

Fagell hasn’t just developed dozens more phrases like this to use with our kids, she gives us words to put in their mouths, too. A tween in over their head with a friend can say, “That sounds awful, are you talking with a grown-up about it?” Fagell’s “sentence starters” gently guide them away from self-critical rumination and other forms of stuckness. Coach them to complete the following statements:

- “I’m noticing I’m having the thought that...”
- “I know I can do hard things because...”
- “I had a harder time because...” and
- “It makes sense that....”

These are just a few of the many essential and fairly easily implementable tricks and tips that make Fagell’s book a must-have. If you incorporate just a few into your home life—like asking a kid in fight, flight, or freeze mode to come up with three adjectives to describe a paper clip, or prompting a hurt kid to brainstorm five reasons a peer might have acted like a jerk that has nothing to do with them—the purchase will be well worth it.



Growing Up in Public: Coming of Age in a Digital World

By Devorah Heitner

Devorah Heitner is on a mission “to bridge the gap between adults, parents, educators, and young people [so that they can] adopt a more positive, less fear-based approach to mentoring kids on growing up in the digital world.” She tackles issues from going viral to porn to sharenting to sexting to getting canceled to filters to ClassDojo, grade portals, and college applications, ultimately concluding that we’re quite far from the ideal when it comes to helping our kids deal with a culture of living online. “In our quest to be caring, involved parents, we have been encouraged to surveil our kids: tracking their location, checking up on grades, and scanning their communications with friends. We do this...without realizing we’re interrupting their process of becoming independent.”

Heitner convincingly argues that to move from monitoring to mentoring adolescents, parents must (1) model respect for boundaries, privacy, and consent, (2) help them develop the judgment they need to navigate a sometimes treacherous web of opportunities

and unwritten rules, and (3) trust them to exercise it independently. With helpful analogs drawn from ’90s teenagerhood and an understanding of the “complex social labor” demanded of teens today, Heitner helps

readers get the “tension between freedom and constraint” today’s teen’s experience as they “have more freedom to explore their identity [and] also have less freedom to get away from the identities they have created and ‘start over.’”

“Growing up in public is a lot. A lot of pressure. A lot of distraction. A lot of surveillance. Sometimes, it is a lot of power and influence.” And the mix makes for a lot of missed connections with parents and teachers, a lot of chafing dependence, and a lot of anxiety.

“Growing up in public is a lot. A lot of pressure. A lot of distraction. A lot of surveillance. Sometimes, it is a lot of power and influence.”

- Devorah Heitner

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.



Unlearning Monogamy

Finding a better life through alternative relationship structures and examining the evolution of self.

By Alex McCarther*

“The way I see it you have three options,” my therapist told me. It was Valentine’s Day, 2019. My husband and I hadn’t been intimate in the more than two years since I got pregnant with our second child, and it was crushing my soul.

I first realized we were a libido mismatch on our honeymoon to Greece eight years prior. My expectation was that we would have hot honeymoon sex throughout our time island hopping from Santorini to Mykonos and back to Athens. Our dating sex had been great. The reality on our honeymoon was that while we had

a blast, we barely touched each other, and I started to resent his lack of physical affection and denial of intimacy. This lasted throughout our marriage, with a slight uptick in action when we were trying for our babies.

“You can go to couples counseling, hire a sex worker, or open your marriage,” the therapist continued. *Only in San Francisco!* I thought to myself. The first two options seemed most interesting to me—couples counseling was a given and I had actually always been curious about sex work. “Sex work is the oldest profession and doesn’t need to be so taboo,” my therapist explained. The

last option—opening my marriage—sounded terrible.

I went home that Valentine’s evening and cried as I shared with my husband the conversation with the therapist and the hurt I felt from his constant physical rejection. For him, physical intimacy just wasn’t important. Given the options, he agreed that I could look into finding a sex worker and set up couples counseling.

“What I thought was my future as a picture-perfect nuclear family—mom, dad, two kids—was now morphing into another timeline, one where my husband and I slept in separate rooms and I carried on a relationship with my gender-queer co-worker.”

Evolution

Upon relaying this conversation over wine at a mom’s night out I realized, as it turns out, I’m not 100 percent straight. “Oh, you don’t have fantasies of having sex with women?” I asked my mom friends, confused. In my explanation of the process of hiring a sex worker as described to me by my therapist, I had assumed that “sex worker” meant a woman, whereas my friends assumed I was talking about a male gigolo.

A mixed orientation marriage is one where the partners do not share the same sexual orientation. This typically means one partner has same-sex attraction and the other is heterosexual. A mixed orientation marriage or as the acronym goes, MOM, could also mean that one partner is asexual and the other is not. In my case, both meanings applied. Joe Kort, a board-certified sexologist and the founder of The Center for Relationship and Sexual Health, writes, “Statistics from the Straight Spouse Network contend that up to two million gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals in the United States are or have been heterosexually married.”

Fast forward to a year later: I had tried sleeping with female sex workers, which was exciting and fun, but also expensive and unsustainable. We also tried couples counseling, with zero progress on our “homework” to have sex (of any kind) in between sessions. I was terribly dejected from not feeling desired by my husband. It was the worst emotional pain I had ever

felt and hurt me at my core. So I did what many before me have done when in a similar situation: I cheated on my husband with a male co-worker. Then I cheated again with a transgender queer co-worker. Then I got caught.

“Seventy percent of women will engage in an affair of some kind at some point,” according to Susan Shapiro Barash in the book, *A Passion for More*. “For some, the

lover is a bridge to another life, for others he is a method of renegotiating their commitment. For still others, both lover and husband/partner will co-exist.” For me, it was all of the above.

The affairs were a catalyst for fundamental change in my marriage. Back in couples counseling, after confessing my sins, my husband agreed to the nuclear option—we could open our marriage. The caveat was that it was under one condition: that he never had to have sex with me ever again. Ouch. I accepted the deal.

Unraveling

So began the unraveling of my identity as I knew it. What I thought was my future as a picture-perfect nuclear family—mom, dad,

two kids—was now morphing into another timeline, one where my husband and I slept in separate rooms and I carried on a relationship with my gender-queer co-worker. One where I grieved the loss of my marriage, all the while recommitting to staying together for the kids under this new arrangement. One where I was a brand-new baby gay out in the world, going to the one lesbian bar in San Francisco and getting to blush over the smoking-hot women I was finally allowed to be attracted to.

As of September 2020, about 4 percent of Americans, nearly 16 million people, are “practicing a non-monogamous style of relationship”, according to Jessica Fern, a psychotherapist and the author of *Polysecure: Attachment, Trauma and Consensual Nonmonogamy*. A 2016 study in the *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy* found that over 21 percent of Americans engaged in consensual non-monogamy at “some point in their lifetime.”

Veronica Westwood, who opened her marriage up in the last year, states: “Non-monogamy was an exciting new plane to step onto that offered so much introspection. It allowed me the space to truly examine my desires and feel like I could finally give myself license to not hold back who I was. I found people who could meet me in a place to foster uncharted, novel, and—most important—powerful pieces of myself, and I could do the same for them in a way my 15-year monogamous relationship simply could not.”



Non-monogamous relationships can take many forms, including what my girlfriend practices: relationship anarchy. In the bible for open relationships, *The Ethical Slut*, Janet Hardy and Dossie Easton write, “Relationship anarchy refers to a lifestyle decision not to take one partner as a ‘primary’ and others as ‘secondary’ (or any hierarchy of that kind) but instead maintain each relationship as separate and to make as few rules as possible. Anarchists seek to avoid hierarchies in all areas of life...We benefit from questioning boundaries and structures that our society may take for granted, so anarchists are a rich source of exploring ‘outside the box’ and looking at what life and love might be like when we avoid imposing structure on it.”

Prehistory

Thinking back to my college days, I realize my own questioning nature started when I decided to leave the high-demand religion I was born into (some might call it a cult). This initial identity unraveling was a gateway drug to deconstructing the heteronormative narrative I married into. *Psychotherapy Networker Magazine* defines a high-demand religion as “a faith community that requires obedience; discourages its members from questioning its rules, principles, and practices; expects subservience and loyalty; discourages trusting relationships outside the group; perpetuates the notion that those within the group are right and superior to those outside of it; promotes extreme or polarizing beliefs; and expects its members to suppress their authentic selves in exchange for the sense of belonging and security the group offers.” It’s no wonder I didn’t realize I was attracted to women until my 30s.

Ultra orthodox or not, religion, for many, forms an integral part of our early identity. Half of U.S. adults say they attended church weekly as children, while only 22 percent continue church attendance at the same rate today, according to a 2022 Gallup poll. “Everyone isn’t born into a high-control group but everyone has been conditioned by culture and ideology and ideas about how things ‘should’ be or how things ARE that aren’t actually the core truths we often take them as,” says Sam Shelly, half of the online post-religion comedy duo Zelfh on



the Shelf. “That’s the gift a faith crisis can give people—the chance to deconstruct everything and rebuild for themselves. People whose cultural conditioning works well enough to not cause a massive stir may not get this chance.”

Paths less traveled

With this unexpected gift of unlearning monogamy and rebuilding my identity as a wife and partner also came an opportunity to introduce a new normal for love and relationships to my children. Our kids are growing up with parents who are platonic partners and they get to see us getting along better than ever. Prior to opening our marriage, the resentment I held from my involuntary celibacy resulted in constant bickering and sometimes full-out screaming matches. Now that I’m getting my sexual and romantic needs fulfilled elsewhere and the pressure is off of my husband, we hardly ever have disagreements and when we do, we can maturely and calmly talk through them.

Another contributing factor to our improved relationship has been in updating our childcare logistics. Previously we were both “on” for the kids’ morning routine and bedtime routine everyday, which was exhausting as dual full-time working parents. Now we split childcare duties as if we were separated, even though we are living in the same house. My husband is in charge of all things childcare Monday, Wednesday and Friday—making breakfast,

the school run, and bedtime routine. Then I’m “on-duty” Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. And we hang together as a family on Sunday. This agreement has proven to work out phenomenally for our mutual benefit. He gets time to work on his hobbies and recharge, and I get overnight dates with my lover.

“The way many of us, especially in the West, are living by so-called ‘traditional family models’ is not working for anyone. Folks are tired and broke, and loneliness and burnout are on the rise,” said Jessica Daylover, cofounder of Remodeled Love, a unique project and social media platform whose goal is to expand the cultural narrative on open relationships and its intersection with parenting. She has found a beautiful version of non-monogamy that includes her husband’s girlfriend, whom she calls her co-mother. She writes in a Mother’s Day Instagram post: “The experience of co-mothering with my husband’s other partner has profoundly changed me and has begun to heal my complicated relationship to motherhood. And although we are still learning how to design our ship in a way that works for everyone, it’s safe to say that what has healed my relationship with motherhood is simply being in a community of mothers/sisters.”

Unexpected destination

You might think, *If your marriage isn’t working, why not get divorced like a normal person?* In my situation, the option was not really on the table. We have two neurodivergent, high-needs kids and we need to stay together for them and our sanity. Also, my husband and I actually like each other, we just don’t have the same values around sex and intimacy.

Being in an open marriage was not the life I had projected for myself when getting married almost a decade ago. But now I’ve found a deep and meaningful relationship to this new identity and a better life—for myself and my kids—through this alternative relationship structure. It’s the best thing that’s ever happened to me.

Alex is a devoted mom, lover of books, and burgeoning social anarchist.

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One Is Enough

Having a single child can be a good thing.

By H.B. Terrell



After World War II, the number of children in the average family increased steadily until the 1960s, when the number of children in households began to decline. The norm was for families to include at least two children to promote socialization and well-being. Recent research has demonstrated that children without siblings are just as well-adjusted as their counterparts with one or more siblings, and that they often have an even stronger bond with their parents. Having two or more children

doesn't necessarily ensure a child's well-being, and having an only child doesn't doom a child to grow up lacking social skills. One-child families are becoming more common and their unique structure has many benefits.

My daughter is 3 years old, and I have started fielding the same question from acquaintances lately: "When are you having another?" Not, "Are you having another?" but "*when*," as if it's a foregone conclusion. When I tell them I'm not, they often seem sad, confused, and/or shocked,

despite the fact that single-child households are not uncommon, with a national average of 23 percent and, in urban areas, 30 percent. According to the 2022 Census, the average number of San Franciscans per household is 2.34.

Pew Research Center's most recent American Family study shows that the number of mothers who reached the end of their childbearing years with one child doubled between 1976 and 2015. "Baked into our culture is the idea that the ideal family is a mom, dad, and two kids. At least

since the '50s, any deviation from that ideal jars people," says Susan Newman, social psychologist, parenting expert, and author. From urban to rural communities coast to coast, this heteronormative post-war ideal is perceptibly shifting to a more inclusive model of family, particularly in the past decade.

Myriad factors might go into the decision for a single-child family, including the prohibitive costs of childrearing in America; health considerations—including healthcare coverage; and the logistics of personal and work-related satisfaction.

Exorbitant costs

"The fact is that modern motherhood and a working life are often incompatible," writes Chiara Dello Joio in "Why Are People Weird About Only Children?" (*The Atlantic*, Nov 2022). Housing costs rise year to year, some people struggle to repay college loans, while others are caregiving for both children and aging parents at the same time. The dearth of healthcare coverage for third-party reproduction can result in prohibitive costs for donor-assisted reproduction, surrogacy, and adoption processes. Furthermore, the costs of childcare can discourage parents from having more children than they might wish to.

Health concerns

Infertility, miscarriages, and dangerous pregnancies may mean that women who carry one child to term decide against more, either under medical recommendation or as a personal decision. Postpartum depression affects nearly 20 percent of women, according to a 2022 NIH study. Women who suffer from preeclampsia or gestational diabetes can have difficult prenatal experiences and tend to undergo more emergency C-sections. Even without complications, childbirth is an exhausting process and new parenthood can be isolating.

The logistics of satisfaction

Not all of the reasons for single-child families are rooted in restraint. Women's higher rates of educational attainment and workforce involvement can mean that they defer childbearing; for some, this delay results in running out of time to have

additional biological children they might wish to have, but for others, they find that having a single child allows them to maintain a balance between a satisfying family life and a satisfying personal life. Many parents cherish the deep relationships and strong support they are able to provide to a single child that they would not be able to provide with multiples. Lauren Sandler reports in *One and Only: The Freedom of Having an Only Child and the Joy of Being One*, that parental happiness declines with every child. In a Danish study, women with one child scored far happier than women with no children or women with more than one. Raising a single child often means that parents have the ability to pursue their own interests while building a deeper relationship with their offspring.

Unexamined beliefs about "lonely onlies" and "little emperors"

Child psychologist G. Stanley Hall helped establish psychology as applicable to childrearing through his concerted efforts to engage educators and parents on the lecture circuit. In his 1896 study, "Of Peculiar and Exceptional Children," he wrote that being an only child is a "disease." The misconception of the doting parents who coddle and indulge their only children and turn them into hypersensitive and narcissistic adults has persisted for 120 years, in part because they were reinforced throughout the twentieth

the Stereotypes About Only Children: A Review of the Literature and Implications for Practice."

Parents who worry about raising single children are typically concerned about whether their child will be lonely, and whether it will be too big a burden for one child to care for aging parents. Dr. Newman receives "endless queries" on these topics. Hall and his acolytes fostered the thinking that children without siblings are self-absorbed, lonely, spoiled, antisocial, maladjusted, lacking in empathy, controlling, etc. These stereotypes are deeply ingrained in the popular imagination, but how accurate are they? Research shows, not very.

Reality check: who are only children?

Toni Falbo, professor of Educational Psychology at University of Texas, Austin has conducted extensive research on sibling-free children. "I think the belief in the 'lonely-only,' or the 'maladjusted-only,' persists because of the stereotypes," Dr. Falbo says. "These [stereotypes] have been around for thousands of years, and there's the benefit of thinking that all couples should have children, and that's plural."

The question driving Dello Joio's piece in *The Atlantic* was, "How do singleton children view their childhoods from the distance of adulthood?" This has been an ongoing question from as far back as the 1970s, when Kenneth Terhune concluded

"The one-child family is the fastest-growing family unit in the United States, with only children on the verge of becoming the new normal. Could this finally quash the stereotypes about single children and their parents?"

century by Hall's protégées. Alfred Adler, a Freudian psychologist, developed the debunked personality theory, which states that personalities are immutable and developed based on sibling order or the lack of siblings. "[Adler] asserted that only children were not only pampered, but that parents who chose not to have more children were inflicting psychological harm on their one child," says Adriean Mancillas, psychologist and author of "Challenging

from his study of the social and interpersonal adjustment of onlies and siblings, "The Paradoxical Status of the Only Child," that only children were "more maligned than maladjusted."

So who are these maligned only children? Research shows that singletons tend to be closer to their parents, regarding them with more warmth and respect than people with siblings do. Writer and comedian John Hodgman—who refers

fondly to his “weird only child” adventures on his eponymous podcast—states, “A family of three is as stable as a triangle, unlikely to collapse, each point strengthening and relying on the other. There are no favorites, no alliances but to the triangle itself.”

They may feel more at ease interacting with teachers than siblings do, likely because they speak mostly with adults at home. Dr. Newman’s adult research subjects report that they are comfortable with solitude and leadership, feel a strong sense of independence and confidence, and have more solid communication skills than some of their peers.

Whether singleton or one of a brood—between school, playdates, and extracurricular activities—the majority of kids today spend most of their waking hours acquiring social skills with their peers. “The reality doesn’t conform to the stereotypes of being over-indulged or lonely little emperors,” says Jing Xu, an affiliate assistant professor in anthropology at the University of Washington and author of *The Good Child: Moral Development in a Chinese Preschool*. During her study of a preschool in an urban middle-class environment in Shanghai where most students were only children, Xu says the flexibility of the only children struck her: “They were quite savvy in figuring out who their friends were, who they wanted to make friends with and how to build their own small interpersonal networks.”

Hodgman writes of being asked, “What is it like being an only child?” He came to the conclusion that “being an only child was much, much better [than having a sibling]. Probably the best thing in the world... Assured of love and sustenance and space and time, the only child is free to cultivate idiosyncrasy.”

Certainly, only children can be tiny demagogues who grow up to be unpleasant people, but so can children with siblings. The research demonstrates that there is no discernible difference between only children and those with siblings. For instance, in “Playing Well with Others in Kindergarten: The Benefits of Siblings at Home,” researcher Douglas Downey found only modest differences in interpersonal relationships and self-control amongst kindergarteners with and without siblings,



differences which disappear by middle school. Studies have been conducted on topics such as academic achievement, social adjustment, self-perception, and even the prevalence of narcissism. The results are in. There are no discernable developmental differences between children with and without siblings.

The “burden” of solitude

As a sister, one consideration that I have worried about is that when my spouse and I die, our daughter will be “alone in the world,” but I see every day how she makes family amongst our friends, her school-mates and teachers, and random children on the playground. The research-driven counterpoint to this idea is that a sibling isn’t a guaranteed friend. The University of Michigan Medical School reports that violence between siblings is the most prevalent form of child abuse. According to research conducted by Dr. Murray Straus, 74 percent of siblings regularly shove their siblings and 85 percent regularly engage in verbal aggression. Siblings: Kids will be kids? Or *The Hunger Games*?

Dr. Newman’s study of adult children without siblings suggests that they have a more nuanced view of this “burden model” that parents feel. Only children discover

that when they face adversity or challenges, such as when a parent needs care, others step up to help—friends, partners, colleagues—the family they create. Parenting expert Michael Grose points out, “Only children have great ability to make and maintain friends, and to resolve conflict, because they have to be nimble about learning [peer-to-peer] skills outside the home.”

The perfect family

Only children receive more of their parents’ focused attention and material resources than they would as siblings. Before credible studies were performed in the 1970s, it was assumed that this brought negative consequences for children, making them spoiled and maladjusted. The research does not bear this out. According to a National Institute of Child Health and Human Development study, only children and children with siblings ultimately have the same employment rates, marriage outcomes, levels of mobility, and average number of kids.

The taboo around choosing to have one child is deeply rooted in the misogyny of the “selfishness” of the childbearing parent who “refuses” to give their child a sibling—a problematic motivation for family growth in itself. As more families opt for a single child, the stigma may dissolve, hewing a path for those who come after: parents whose circumstances make this decision on their behalf, families that prefer a one-child family, and children without siblings who might no longer have to prove that they can be social, generous, and well-adjusted!

There is no such thing as the perfect family size. The most important factor contributing to children’s well-being and development is the love and care provided by families. Some might have the resources to provide for multiple children, others might be content with one, and some may face circumstances that are outside their control. The next time someone asks me when I plan to have another child, I’ll flip the script and ask, “What makes you think that I’m planning to have another?”

H.B.’s family consists of a spouse, a child, and several wonderful friends.



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Who Do You Think You Are?

Re-examining past identities helps one woman find comfort in who she is today.

By Yuliya Patsay
Photograph by Mini Anna Photography

This feature is an excerpt from Yuliya Patsay’s memoir *Until the Last Pickle*, where she reflects on her Soviet-born, San Francisco-raised upbringing while trying to answer the question: *Who am I and how do I fit into this world?*

If someone has just finished fumbling through pronouncing my name—it’s Yuliya, like Goo-lia (remember *The Wedding Singer*?)—the next question is inevitable.

“So, where are you from?”
Gulp.

I never know how to answer this. I’m from...the Soviet Union, a place that exists only in the past. I was born in the town of Khmelnytskyi (which is now in Western Ukraine) and immigrated to San Francisco in 1991 when I was just about eight years old and the Soviet Union was collapsing.

From the moment that plane touched down on American soil, I began living in different worlds—speaking a language, living by a set of values, and adopting a particular way of being in the (American) world while embodying a fairly different persona at home. It was not exactly that I felt I had one foot in two countries. It was more like three toes in the old world and the rest of me in America, but with my soul forever divided.

“I still straddle two or more different cultures—that of my home country and my family of origin, and that of my adopted country and the family I am building.”

Over 30 years later, I still straddle two or more different cultures—that of my home country and my family of origin, and that of my adopted country and the family I am building. Mix in some confusion over my religion (my mom’s family is Jewish, and my dad’s had me baptized into Russian Orthodoxy in secret, so...yeah...#awkward), and I feel like I’m always adapting to fit in and never quite belonging.

I guess you can see how an innocent question like “Where are you from?” can leave me reeling. Because at the core of that question is the bigger question: “Who are you, and how do you fit into this world?”

Answering those questions has been a lifelong journey.

My rapidly transforming identity

One day I’m the girl who doesn’t speak a word of English, with a gap tooth and a shy smile that everyone is charmed by. Five

months later I have the wrong clothes, invisible cooties, and no one will sit with me at lunch. Two years later I’m suddenly accepted by the popular crowd and invited to my first slumber party. And just a short 24 hours after that, I’m the 10-year-old who couldn’t sleep after watching *The Exorcist* and am banned from ever going to slumber parties again. I’m great at math. I’m terrible at math. I talk too much. I should participate in a more meaningful way in class discussions. No, scratch that—I definitely talk too much. Stop talking so much please. I love “*Star Trek: The Next Generation*”—no one else watches it so I guess I’m a closet nerd. I get kicked out of math class for talking back. I’m tall and thin! I’m really starting to fill out so maybe I ought to eat a little less dessert. I speak Russian, I’m learning to speak American English, and I can speak a little bit of Spanish. I find it harder and harder to speak Russian, I’m obsessed with all things American (according to my parents), my Spanish accent is a little too good and

native speakers start talking to me at 20 million words an hour but I still can’t conjugate any of my verbs correctly. I get kicked out of English class for talking back. I’m in love. I’m someone’s girlfriend! I’m heartbroken. I’m someone else’s girlfriend. And now his, and his, and his, and his, and wait—who even am I?

I’m a daughter, and all of a sudden a blink and a half later I’m about to be a mother.

Becoming a mother meant taking all of the things I know about myself, throwing them in a blender, and pressing blend while attempting to rescue the chunks that remain with my bare hands while the blades are still spinning (yes kids, mommy still loves you, go watch TV while I finish writing this).

And like most who are about to become parents, I began to question a lot of what makes me **me** and evaluate what I (consciously) planned to pass on to my

kids—food, language, religion (or lack thereof), traditions, a love of stories, my continued affinity for “*Star Trek*” and so on. Going through my pregnancy triggered in me a need to explore one of the most (if not the most) important aspect of my identity: my Jewishness. The fun/confusing thing about being Jewish is that it is a religion, a culture (think art, music, literature, food, and language), and an ethnic identity (think shared ancestry).

So how did a secretly baptized Jewish girl evolve her understanding of her Jewish identity? Well, I present to you a timeline of my emerging Jewish identity:

Step one: finding out

I’ve been confused about Jewishness and Judaism since preschool. You would be too if this happened to you—a preschool classmate called me a “zhydovka.” When I ask my parents what this is, I find out three things. One, that “zhydovka” is a racial slur for a Jewish woman. Two, that (great news!) **I am** a Jewish woman. And three, our country has a long history of anti-semitism (not liking Jewish people, to put it mildly). Finding out I’m Jewish is particularly confusing news as I am 4 years old and obviously I already have a firm belief system that has nothing to do with a formal religious identity. (I later find out that my beliefs most closely resemble animism—the attribution of a soul to plants, inanimate objects, and natural phenomena.)

Step two: confusion, aka my secret baptism

My dad’s mom, who was already less than thrilled that my dad had knocked up a “Jewess” (see above antisemitism), is legitimately concerned for my soul when one summer I have not one, but two major bike accidents back-to-back. She decides for the safety of my soul to baptize me into Russian Orthodoxy. This is a secret twice over. One, because of communism and the government ban on religion of any kind, and two, because even though there’s no religion, I thought I was supposed to be Jewish. Isn’t that what my classmate accused me of?

Step three: exploration

After we immigrate to America, we are offered a free year of tuition at Hebrew



Every Soviet child has this portrait.



Festivities in preschool.



My "Jew-ish" wedding day.

Academy through the endless generosity of Jewish Family and Children's Services. I visit and find out that Hebrew school means wearing long skirts. Hard pass.

My best friend and I strike out to embrace Judaism and attend high holidays services at the local Chabad house. She's shamed for wearing a low-cut shirt and told to cover up. We never go back.

College friends visiting me at UC Davis convince me to go check out the Jewish interest sorority rush because MTV is filming it. I turn down my chance at stardom by living in "the pledge house" supplied by production (to tape our every move) but I do experience my first meaningful connections to Judaism and Jewishness through this unexpected sisterhood: the Sigma Alpha Epsilon Pi sorority. Singing Lech Lecha, standing in the Havdalah circle and being surrounded by incredible Jewish (and non-Jewish) women who are living by an ancient set of values speaks deeply to me.

My final year at UC Davis, I'm the program coordinator for the UC Davis Hillel House, a Jewish organization on college campuses. I don't know how I ended up getting this job being as clueless about Judaism as I was, but here I start to get a sense of some of the rules and practices of Judaism: *kashrut*, prayers, holidays. One particular Hillel House attendee makes it his job to follow me around to ensure I kept strict kosher by using separate dishes and cutlery for the meat and dairy. It's more than a little overwhelming.

Step four: adrift

Without a post-college tether to Jewishness, I'm floating off into space

again until it's time for my wedding. My equally "Jew-ish" husband-to-be and I debate how theoretically Jewish our wedding will actually be and which Jewish traditions we might actually include. We do things to appease our families or because our wedding is theater-themed and so this feels like another piece of the performance. But on some level I am connected; I feel an explicable attraction to these traditions, perhaps anticipating that a moment may come in the future where this wedding will become the Jewish foundation we can build our lives on. The *ketubah* (or marriage contract), in particular, is quite meaningful for us, and once we (finally) find our perfect egalitarian modern *ketubah*, we divide up its text and speak its words as our wedding vows. (Fun fact, we accidentally served our Rabbi *tref*—non-kosher food, in this case smoked eel—at our wedding banquet. Oops!).

When I am pregnant with my first daughter, I experience a brief return to formal religious practice. She is breech, and in my desperation to have a natural birth, I attempt everything to get this baby to turn, including attending Shabbat services at synagogue. This is a bit like suddenly turning to prayer on the eve of a big school exam, and so it doesn't exactly stick.

Step five: acceptance

As my firstborn gets older and approaches the age of maturity (from a Jewish perspective), I insist on her studying and having a bat mitzvah ceremony. This is an easier sell once I also explain about the bat mitzvah party she'll get to have. I figure if she's going to reject who she is one day, she can at least have a clearer sense of what she's rejecting.

On the day of her bat mitzvah, in Sherith Israel, arguably the most beautiful synagogue in the world, my daughter confidently recites her Torah portion in front of friends and family. Her great-grandmother—my grandmother Baba Liliya, who was born on the day Nazis invaded our country—responds to my daughter's prayers in Hebrew, a distant linguistic cousin of the Yiddish Liliya heard her own parents speaking in childhood. During this call and response between my grandmother and my daughter, some of the confusion inside of me settles into place. My frequent questions of *Who am I and how do I fit into this world?* have a new answer. I am many things: Soviet-born, storyteller, speaker, but in this moment, I am also the torch bearer passing down pieces of our past to the next generation. And my fire blazes bright with pride.

Yuliya (rhymes with Goo-lia) grew up in a small town in the former Soviet Union and learned English by watching "Star Trek." At the core of everything she does is storytelling and as a voice actor, she lends her voice to tell the stories of brands and characters of all kinds.



My daughter's bat mitzvah with Baba Liliya.

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GGMG members receive 15% off groceries in-store by showing your GGMG monthly member perks email and mentioning the code 'GGMG2023'. The discount also applies to the Luke's Local App using the code 'GOLDENMOTHER15'.

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 the month: September 2 or 3

Time: Typically 10 a.m. to noon

Place: TBD

Cost: FREE for members

Contact: Email Dy Nguyen for details (dy.nguyen@gmail.com)

South of Golden Gate Park Monthly Mom's Happy Hour

Join us every fourth Thursday for drinks and appetizers at a neighborhood restaurant and meet some new moms in your community! Details for each month's venue will be posted/announced through our website.

- Date:** The fourth Thursday of every month: September 28, October 26

Time: 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. (drop in anytime)

Place: TBD

Cost: \$5 for members, \$10 for non-members

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! You'll meet at a coffee shop before you go for an hour of fresh air, light exercise, and great conversation!

- Date:** The first Wednesday of every month: September 6, October 4

Time: 9 a.m. to 11 a.m.

Place: Bosworth and Diamond side lot by Pono Skincare in Glen Park and 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, come enjoy a drink and some appetizers with other moms. Details for each month's venue will be posted/announced through our website.

- Date:** The second Thursday of every month: September 14, October 12

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: August 18, September 15

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. Must RSVP and PREPAY. Limited spots available.

Moms Happy Hour

Join us the third Thursday of every month for drinks and appetizers at a local restaurant to meet new moms in San Francisco. Appetizers will be provided while moms meet and connect.

All parties, feel free to take a COVID test in advance.

- Date:** The third Thursday of every month: September 21, October 19

Time: 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Place: TBD (a different venue in a different SF neighborhood each month). Info will be announced two weeks before the event.

Cost: \$5

Contact: Text or email Jessie Lee for details (Leejessiesf@gmail.com) or 415.518.6402

Monthly Kids Playdate

Do you want your kids to run off their energy? Meet fellow GGMG moms and kids! The location will be the Panhandle Playground (unless noted otherwise). Sign up now!

- Date:** The second Sunday of every month: September 10, October 8

Time: 10 a.m. to noon

Place: TBD

Cost: Free for members

Contact: Text or email Jessie Lee for details (Leejessiesf@gmail.com) or 415.518.6402

Happy Hour in the Richmond

Meet other GGMG moms! GGMG will cover a happy hour drink and appetizers.

- Date:** September 5, October 3

Time: 5:15 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

Place: Violet's, 2301 Clement St.

Cost: \$5

Family Playdate in the Richmond

Families—including dads—are welcome! For the first play date, GGMG will provide bagels and coffee.

- Date:** Last Sunday every month: August 27, September 24

Place: TBD

Cost: FREE for members

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: September 7, October 5

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.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, & INCLUSION

Celebrating Artistic and Cultural Diversity in the City

San Francisco has long been famous for its art and music scene as well as indie film festivals. Its multitude of events, from street festivals to theater fairs, reflect wide-ranging diversity. This summer is the perfect time to immerse ourselves in the many ways San Francisco celebrates cultural, ethnic, and gender diversity. Below are a number of events to check out between summer and fall.

Chinatown Autumn Moon Festival

September 23 and 24, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Grant Avenue (between California Street and Broadway Street)

Free admission; moonfestival.org

The Autumn Moon Festival was originally started in 1989 to bring support to Chinatown after that year’s devastating earthquake. The festival is a celebration of the female principle, or *yin*, in Chinese celestial cosmology. In ancient times, women were the primary focus of this ritual, as the moon is considered feminine, as opposed to the masculine principle, *yang*. The event is typically scheduled at the time of the year when the moon is most bright. This year will feature a parade, live entertainment, arts and crafts, and a variety of food and drinks.

San Francisco Latino Film Festival

September 29 to October 15, Roxie Theater, 3117 16th St.

filmfreeway.com/SanFranciscoLatinoFilmFest

The San Francisco Latino Film Festival provides a platform for works from filmmakers from the U.S., Latin America, Spain, and Portugal, highlighting films made by and for Latinos. The event is presented by Cine+Más SF, an organization that offers year-round programming and special events centered on Latino arts, including the visual, performance, and literary arts.

New Roots Theatre Festival

November 10 to 12, Brava Theater Center, 2781 24th St.

Early bird tickets are available on August 7; regular tickets are available on September 1; sfbatco.org/nrtf-2023

“New Roots Theatre Festival is a three-day arts festival that unearths artistic voices in the Bay Area, celebrates the development of new work, and centers BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ voices.” After a successful inauguration in 2021, this relatively new festival is guaranteed to be a yearly event. This year’s festival will feature original projects that celebrate Black and queer performers.



The DEI Committee Needs Volunteers!

The mission of GGMG’s Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion (DEI) Committee is to build a safe and supportive atmosphere for all GGMG members through education and community outreach. We organize events and share resources that enhance equity and inclusion within the organization. **We are currently seeking a new Co-chair as well as Committee Members.**

Examples of Co-chair and Committee Member duties include:

- Write and/or edit articles for GGMG magazine six times per year (every two months).
- Plan and execute webinars, including speaker outreach, that enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion within the organization. Past examples of themes have included: talking to your kids about race, land acknowledgement, and a spotlight on diverse kids entertainment.

- Coordinate and execute drives for non-profit organizations that bring awareness to diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Represent the DEI Committee at GGMG events, such as Spring Fling and Fall Fest.
- Additionally, for the Co-chair role only:
 - Serve as a liaison with the GGMG Board and Committees
 - Coordinate allocation of tasks among DEI Committee members
 - Recruit and onboard new DEI volunteers

See page 33 for volunteering benefits. Please contact us at diversity@ggmg.org if you are interested in volunteering.

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 assists members experiencing challenging times or 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 with questions, suggestions for new resources to add to the list, or to learn more about the assistance we provide to members.



VOLUNTEER BENEFITS

We know that when you volunteer for GGMG, you are giving up precious time you could be spending with your family or splurging on yourself. We thank our volunteers in the following ways:

- Extra special extended benefits from our partners
- Professional development opportunities
- Social time at every general volunteer meeting
- Annual Volunteer Appreciation Dinner
- Annual membership reimbursement after one year of service

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.



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Reflections on Mixed-race Belonging

By Colleen Morgan

"While some people feel that mixed heritage gives you the ability to feel at home in more than one culture, others note that you can feel just as alienated in those spaces—that for the person of mixed belonging, racial and cultural differences come into the most intimate parts of life."

- Samira K. Mehta

As a mixed-race Asian child and daughter of a first-generation immigrant, growing up in a small white suburb, I was given lessons on race from a very young age. The first I can remember was when a classmate pointed at me and shouted, "My mom said you're adopted!" It was the start of an entire childhood—from pre-K through high school—full of loud proclamations that my family and I did not belong:

"She's not your mom, she's your nanny."

"You're not white enough."

"But...you're not *really* white."

But "othering" was experienced in quieter ways too. Not a single child in Chinese school would talk to me or be my friend—no greetings, no eye contact—for months. I was marooned at my desk while conversations in Cantonese buzzed around me. Miserable, I asked my mother if I could drop out. She agreed with little hesitation. Of course, this didn't help my relationship with my Chinese family, who almost always spoke in their native tongue around me despite my lack of understanding (and their general fluency in English).

After high school, I went to a big school in Boston and traveled a bit, trying to find a sense of belonging. While college was the first time my mixedness was celebrated rather than scorned, I found the act of explaining myself to curious people exhausting, especially considering my Chinese mother had died of cancer, leaving the story of my mixedness forever intertwined with the story of her death.

When I took an internship in San Francisco, part of me expected just another quick stop on my journey of self discovery. But imagine my surprise at finding the embrace of acceptance I'd been looking for my entire life. Here, when my friend described me to her mother as "half" in Cantonese, she smiled wide and nodded while admiring the jade necklace my mother gifted me as a teenager. I can order certain foods in Cantonese with perfect pronunciation and am met with a quick look of shock followed by a flicker of recognition in the waiter's eyes. It's a silent acknowledgement—a sense of belonging without having to explain the details.



Portrait from *Mixed Blood* by Jason Sutherland Hsu

These moments of feeling seen became more frequent after moving to the Richmond district, a mere five blocks from my maternal grandparents' old house. I often see my younger self as I walk through my neighborhood, transported back to childhood summers with my mother. I smell the rice that's been cooking in the same restaurant at 19th and Balboa. I overhear elderly folks speaking in Taishanese, the language of my elders, which I have an ear for, but cannot understand or speak. And I see so many young families that look like mine did growing up—Asian mom, white dad, mixed children—and it always makes me smile.

Except the family I created doesn't look like that anymore. My husband is white, and so by appearances (especially our blond-haired, blue-eyed daughter), our family is automatically sorted into the category of white.

My young children still get lessons on race, but it's from their mother, sharing lived experiences of racial identity and racism that they can only imagine.

"I still ask myself: *Where do I belong?* Nowhere and everywhere."

My stories are vast and varied—from how the Siamese cats in Disney's *Lady and The Tramp* made me feel sick as a child due to their anti-Asian stereotype, to the elation of finally owning a Chinese Barbie doll, who looks stunning in her red dragon gown. No, I don't look like these characters, but I feel deeply connected to them.

My children will certainly experience the world differently than I did, but my mixedness is theirs too. I still ask myself: *Where do I belong?* Nowhere and everywhere. *Is there a place for mixed folks to feel seen and heard?* Perhaps, but I don't think it's a physical space like a city, school, or church. It's the rare moments when the prying questions cease, the curious stares soften, and the room goes quiet. When we're allowed to tell our stories—on our own terms—and people listen. That's when I am most myself. And it's the only place where I truly belong.

Colleen is an American of Irish, German, and Chinese descent. She lives in San Francisco with her husband and two children.



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statement of purpose:

*nurture ourselves, our children,
our partners, and our community;
create an environment of support,
information sharing, and connection;
learn, teach, create, have fun, and
provide balance in our lives and in
the lives of our growing families.*



SAN FRANCISCO

Birthday Party Venue Indoor - Outdoor in 2 locations

**Financial
District**

**North
Beach**

reservations: Admin@SeabirdPreschool.com

