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ROOTS







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# Letter from the Editor: The Root of It All

By Sonya Abrams



Sonya is an editor and photographer living in Cole Valley with her three children.

far avoided dental work, and though I've never had any specific fear of the dentist myself, I was unsettled by the thought that I was subjecting my child to an unpredictable amount of pain and discomfort. My uncomfortable feelings followed me home.

“At the root of many of my parenting decisions is an interior negotiation between my desire to protect my children from uncomfortable feelings and my desire to teach them how to navigate challenging situations on their own.”

My son's dental woes tapped into a fundamental anxiety shared by parents everywhere: the knowledge that we can't shelter our children from suffering and that much in life is out

Recently, at my fourth grader's semi-annual checkup, his pediatric dentist informed us that he had cracked a baby tooth and would need it pulled. Startled by this announcement, I asked if my son would be in pain afterward. “Depends on the length of the root,” the dentist said.

I left the appointment anxious, wringing my hands. Besides a couple shallow cavities, my children have so

of our control. At the root of many of my parenting decisions is an internal negotiation between my desire to protect my children from uncomfortable feelings and my desire to teach them how to navigate challenging situations on their own. This struggle is continuous and often fraught with worry and self-doubt, and when I encounter situations I have no control over, my anxiety goes into overdrive. Needless to say, I spent the weeks after that appointment worrying about the day my son would have the tooth yanked.

In this issue, our writers take us back to basics to explore several topics at their foundational levels, playing off the idea of roots of all types. Clare Deignan tackles the emotionally complicated process of going gray, delving into the science behind aging hair and giving tips for people who are considering letting their roots shine through. I present a brief history of the Indigenous people of the Bay Area and share suggestions on places to visit to enrich your family's connection with Native history and current culture. We are also republishing Sandy Woo's article on DNA testing, which offers a primer on how these tests work, concerns about accuracy, and points to consider if you're looking to use one.

On the day of my son's tooth extraction, he was cheerful about the whole affair, until he started receiving Novocaine injections, at which point he yelped in pain a few times. My chest tightened as I watched him squirm, but the rest of the extraction proceeded smoothly, and a trip to the ice cream store further improved his spirits. As he ate his bowl, I squeezed his hand and reminded him that although I can't always control what happens to him, I'll always

be there to pick up the pieces, cover the wound, or smooth over life's rough edges with a sweet treat.

Sonya Abrams

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**NEXT ISSUE:** Occupation

Have an idea for an issue theme or article? Please email [editor@ggmog.org](mailto:editor@ggmog.org).

**THIS ISSUE MADE POSSIBLE BY:** Getting into my groove—running, weight training, improving my nutrition, journaling; COVID booster shots (and ensuing side effects); Enjoying the return of some of our favorite holiday traditions; Thanksgiving by the sea in England; Reading Charlotte Bronte's book *Villette*; Puppy training, navigating family illness, and deep gratitude for being able to spend time in-person with friends and family.

**CONTEST:** The winner of our last contest is Katie Fones, who has won four tickets to the Filoli Santa Weekend.

Thanks to our generous prize donors; Please patronize their services!

# Letter from the Board: Creating and Choosing Your Family's Traditions

By Connie Lin



Connie is blessed to live with her husband and two kids in a 1915 home near West Portal, having conceded that a backyard would be great to have.

so that we could celebrate the holiday with my in-laws too.

Later, after our first child was born, my husband and I realized that our Christmas traditions were not the same. My Taiwanese parents had adopted American traditions when they emigrated here, so I have many fond memories of my brother and I dashing to our tree early Christmas morning to discover what presents Santa had left for us and peering into our stockings to see what goodies were there. My husband's family, on the other hand, came from Austria and their European traditions mandate that Christmas dinner should be on Christmas Eve. Presents are opened that night after the family fondue or raclette.

While I adore the oh-so-delicious European chocolate Santas my in-laws share, I was dismayed to learn that my beloved Christmas morning present rush was not something

“We always open presents on Christmas morning!”

“No, you're supposed to open them on Christmas Eve. Are you crazy?”

For many years, my husband and I enjoyed celebrating the holiday season with both his family and mine. We spent the week before Christmas with my parents in Florida. On Christmas morning, we'd open presents and then dash to the airport to fly to Arizona

my husband looked forward to. And he wouldn't budge on NOT opening presents on Christmas Eve, which felt like blasphemy to me.

Now that my husband and I are the parents we've started to create our own traditions. Some of them are ones that we've chosen—like going to GGMG's Spring Festival or listening to Handel's Messiah for Christmas—and others we've created just for us, like our family snuggle time right before the kids go to bed. We are lucky to have more resources and opportunities than our parents did, and we've been able to incorporate the best of what we love, in the hopes of creating magical moments for our kids.

As we've put down roots in San Francisco, I look to our community for guidance and inspiration. How can we live our values? How can we build community—and as mamas, better support each other? I leaned into this by becoming a GGMG volunteer some years ago, and we could use your help. We are looking to fill GGMG Board positions, committee chairs, and more flexible volunteer and member support opportunities. Please reach out to me at [board@ggmog.org](mailto:board@ggmog.org) for more information.

How did our Christmas present dilemma work out? My husband and I found a good middle ground. We each open a

“How can we live our values? How can we build community—and as mamas, better support each other?”

coveted gift or two on Christmas Eve, set out the milk and cookies for Santa, tuck the kids in bed, and save the rest of the presents to tear open on Christmas morning.

Happy Holidays to you and yours! See you in 2022!

Connie Lin

## Cover Outtakes



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

Cover photo by Mini Anna Photography



# Winter Activities and Events

By Christine Chen

1.

**Mark Foehringer’s Nutcracker Sweets**, held December 5 through 19 at Fort Mason, is a sweet 50-minute version of the classic ballet at more affordable prices than the SF Ballet. It is magical, zany, and fun, which can be a great way to introduce young children with shorter attention spans to the story.
2.

**Fairmont Hotel San Francisco’s Lifesize Gingerbread House** is back this year and on display the entire holiday season. It’s 22 feet high, 23 feet wide, and a favorite with kids. For those who want to splurge, private dining can be arranged inside the house!
3.

**Macy’s Annual Great Tree 2021: Union Square**: As always, Macy’s is gifting the tree, which will be up and lit from November 19 through January 1. For the protection of visitors, locals, and shoppers, there will not be a Tree Lighting Ceremony and Event, but view the lavishly decorated tree during your downtown shopping trip.
4.

**Sing You a Merry Christmas**: a family sing-along at Grace Cathedral. Music performances are back and a favorite is this one-hour performance that has the toys of Saint Nicholas leading the audience in a sing-along to Christmas carol favorites. December 11 and 18 at 11 a.m. and December 21 through 23 at 3 p.m.
5.

**Lemos Farm in Half Moon Bay** turns from Pumpkin Patch into a Christmas tree farm with a mini amusement park experience for kids with pony and train rides, Playtown, a Dig Zone, and a free petting zoo. Hop on a hayride to cut down your own tree or select a pre-cut one.
6.

**Drive Thru Dickens London**: This year, The Great Dickens Christmas Fair at the Cow Palace can be experienced from the comfort of your car. Enjoy street scenes and enchanting tableaux from *A Christmas Carol*, lively music, an enticing selection of hearty English foods, and handcrafted holiday gifts available for purchase as you drive through an outdoor version of the Fair’s Grand Concourse. Weekends though December 19.
7.

**San Mateo’s CuriOdyssey’s IlluminOdyssey** is a dazzling winter light experience for the entire family and goes through January 9 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. with late hours until 8 p.m. in January.
8.

**Oakland Zoo Glowfari Lights** (Previously Zoolights), November 12 through January 30. An unforgettable experience featuring hundreds of larger-than-life glowing animal lanterns throughout the Zoo with all-new animal displays for this season. The illuminated stroll goes through the desert with camels and bighorn sheep, an African safari adventure with elephants, giraffes, and an 8-foot crocodile head, the forests of Asia with red and giant pandas—and includes a gondola ride to the land of bugs featuring a 65-foot Queen Ant tunnel. End the evening with a visit with Santa. Every night December 1 through 23 from 6 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.

Christine is mom of two kids, aged 5 and 7, who wish Christmas was year-round. While she is excited that holiday events are back, she is still not sure of her comfort level of big indoor gatherings, even though her kids, by the time you read this, will be fully vaxxed.

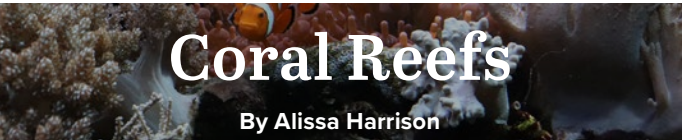


## San Francisco History

By Colleen Morgan

The San Francisco Historical Society provides a free **Gold Rush Walk for Kids** for students in grades 3 to 6. The **Fort Point National Historic Site**, alongside the Golden Gate Bridge, has connections to the Gold Rush, Civil War, and WWII, in addition to amazing architecture and spectacular views. Spanning many blocks in the Castro, the **Rainbow Honor Walk** commemorates those who made a significant impact on the LGBTQ+ community. The 36 bronze plaques are an educational and inspirational walk of fame, celebrating activists, authors, scientists, and athletes. The **Inspiration Murals at the Ella Hill Hutch Community Center** in the Western Addition celebrate 95 San Francisco-based African Americans. Read about each inspiring person in *Changemakers: Biographies of African Americans in San Francisco Who Made a Difference*. This book, available at the public library or [usfblogs.usfca.edu/sfchangemakers](https://usfblogs.usfca.edu/sfchangemakers), was written by students at the University of San Francisco from 2015 to 2019. Browse the **History of San Francisco Place Names** website ([sfstreets.noahveltman.com](https://sfstreets.noahveltman.com)) where an interactive map explains the history of street and landmark names. Learn about some lesser known San Franciscans who shaped the community by selecting Leidesdorff Street, Walter U Lum Place, Terry A Francois Boulevard, Cameron Way, and Dr Carlton B Goodlett Place, to name a few.

As a child, Colleen was dragged along to many boring historical sites. She hopes to share more diverse, exciting history lessons with her two small children.



Coral reefs are integral to our global ecosystem. No matter how busy our daily lives are, we can contribute, learn, and make mindful decisions to help heal and maintain an area that has nurtured, protected, and sustained our families throughout the years, and hopefully for many years to come.

### Did you know that coral reefs:

- prevent \$1.8 billion in flood damage annually<sup>1</sup>
- house 25 percent of our world’s marine life (over 4,000 species of fish, which feed 500 million humans worldwide annually)<sup>2</sup>
- provide \$2.7 trillion value of goods and services annually (US\$36 billion coral reef tourism)<sup>3</sup>
- are predicted to become obsolete by the end of this century if humans continue to emit greenhouse gases under a business-as-usual scenario<sup>4</sup>

### What Can We Do to Help?

- Recycle and dispose of our trash properly
- Minimize fertilizer use
- Utilize environmentally-friendly transportation
- Reduce stormwater runoff
- Save energy at home and work
- Use coral reef-friendly sunscreen
- Volunteer in local beach or reef cleanups
- Spread the word

Learn and grow with awareness. **National Network for Ocean and Climate Change Interpretation (NNOCCI)** provides a free online course on ocean acidification. Additionally, **California Academy of Sciences** provides videos and articles on climate impacts on coral and a “Coral Bleaching for Kids” demonstration.

Connect with local resources who monitor, assess, and restore coral reefs. **Coral Reef Alliance (CORAL)** works at local, regional, and global levels to keep coral reefs healthy, so they can adapt to climate change and survive for generations to come.

Adopt a piece of coral. **Coral Gardeners** has an **Adopt A Coral** program whereby you can adopt a piece of coral growing in their coral nursery, later affixed onto a decaying coral reef.

- [www.nature.com/articles/s41893-021-00706-6](https://www.nature.com/articles/s41893-021-00706-6)
- [reef-world.org/blog/surprising-coral-facts](https://reef-world.org/blog/surprising-coral-facts)
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Alissa is an inspired water sports newbie (recently acquired wetsuit and boards)—facing her fears of large bodies of water, exploring healthy outlets, and letting go through our local waters!







# Gardening in the City

With Yana Gorin



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](mailto: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!

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?

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.



Silver Jade by Sabina Bajracharya

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.



Aeonium Leucoblepharum by Stephen Boisvert

Adding sand/gravel to regular potting soil (50/50 mix) will greatly improve your odds of success, especially if you are afraid of overwatering.

For those of us who frequently travel, are forgetful and/or busy, self-watering pots can be lifesavers (literally). A reservoir of water below the soil keeps roots growing steadily toward a constant source of moisture, keeping the soil itself clear of rot from water buildup.

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

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

Snake plants can also reduce levels of the toxins 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.



Snake Plant by Martin Olsson

## 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 water regularly.

Again, Pinterest is a great place to get ideas for terrariums, fairy gardens, and anything else that might tickle your child’s imagination.

# Suzette Lin

Photograph by Linli Boutique, Taiwan

GGMG Co-managing Editor, Sandy Woo, sat down with Suzette Lin, current co-chair of the Careers & Entrepreneurs Committee and managing principal of Substantia Law Group. She is also a member of BALIF (Bay Area Lawyers for Individual Freedom, an LGBTQI Bar Association) and the Asian American Bar Association.

## What was your childhood like?

I was born in Taipei, Taiwan, and we lived in the bustling city center. We always had a lot of family and guests visiting (I have over 50 cousins on my mother’s side) so there were always a lot of activities. Our family immigrated to Westchester, New York, permanently in 1981. It was a very abrupt change. At first it felt very surreal since not only was the language different, we were in a suburban setting, and didn’t know anyone.

Fortunately, there was a next door neighbor who also happened to be Hakka (a minority ethnic group with its own spoken dialect, estimated to be 15 to 20 percent of the Taiwanese population) and three other Chinese families. Due to their kindness and my mother’s penchant for hosting guests and cooking gourmet meals, we soon had a tight network of friends.

It wasn’t easy at school in the beginning, where I was first introduced to the notion that being “cool” and “popular” might be different from being “academic.” When I was 16 though, my father’s job relocated him to Hong Kong and I attended the international school there. The more diverse backgrounds of the students made it a lot more open and inclusive.

## How did you decide to have a child?

It was primarily due to the gentle persuasion of my wife and my late mother! My wife (born in Bulgaria but educated and worked in London and Beijing) always wanted to have a child. I was more reluctant since I had a superhuman mom who set the bar so high. I also loved to move around, and didn’t have enough confidence that I possessed the maturity or tenacity to bring up a child. But once we settled down and purchased a home in the Bay Area in 2015, we jointly embarked on the long frustrating path of IVF and were finally successful after 4 years.

## How did your parents’ upbringing shape your parenting ideals?

Both my parents came from a very humble background. Dad was the only son of a widowed street vendor selling meatballs. He went on to win top scholarships to universities in Taiwan and also in the U.S. Mom was the seventh daughter of a farmer in a remote mountainous area and was the only daughter to have attended college. They always emphasized the value of education and hard work, and would encourage us to participate in extracurricular activities in order to fully discover our interests. Mom was very involved in communicating with our teachers and later on would become a headmistress of a boarding school with hundreds of students in Southern China.

After the birth of my son, Aiden, mom told me the most important thing is to focus on raising him. We made a conscious decision last year to move to the city from the suburbs. Although San Francisco school choices might be more challenging than on the peninsula, we also wish to provide him with a wider mix of friends and be able to educate him first-hand on various societal issues, such as challenging stereotypes, early on.

## What part of your work would you want your son to know about and why?

I’m incredibly proud of my volunteer nonprofit work in Beijing with HIV/AIDS, LGBTQ+, and Uighur organizations from 2005 to 2010. Supporting and understanding marginalized populations is meaningful work. I believe that active ongoing social discourse results in more dynamic communities everywhere. I hope that one day he can find meaning and purpose in the places he decides to reside in.

## What is your motto for parenting?

“Encourage compassion and curiosity.”

Know a mom you want to spotlight in the next issue? Email [editor@ggm.org](mailto:editor@ggm.org) with her name, email, and a few sentences about what makes her an awesome mom for our next Member Profile.





# Flip-Flopping With a 1.5 Generation Refugee

by L. Nguyễn

“**W**here are you from?”  
My response is simply, “I’m from Massachusetts.”

“I mean, where are you really from?”

Am I not from Massachusetts? Obviously, I have Asian features and a Vietnamese last name. When I was younger, this question would perplex me (but let’s leave out the racist implications). I was raised in New England; however, I was not born in the United States. We were often reminded we came to the U.S. from Vietnam. My roots were constantly flip-flopping between Vietnam and Massachusetts.

I was 3 years old when I came to the U.S. as a refugee of the Vietnam War with my parents, two of three siblings, and a few young uncles. We left Vietnam in 1975 during the fall of Saigon. I have no memories as a toddler in Vietnam, only stories. My parents worked hard and opened a Vietnamese restaurant in a small town in the Berkshires of Western Massachusetts that had less than 2,000 residents. Imagine a Norman Rockwell painting of a New England town and add a Vietnamese restaurant.

In 1981, my brother was reunited with us in the U.S. after 6 years apart. Afterwards, we sponsored another family of relatives, then another, and another... They lived with us and worked at the restaurant before moving on. We had a purpose to assist them. I recall meeting a newly immigrated uncle. He referred to my siblings and me as having *mất gốc* (loosely: “lost roots to Vietnam”). This really stung. He must be mistaken. We were raised culturally Vietnamese, without abashment. I spoke Vietnamese at home, ate Vietnamese meals, went to temples, and followed customs and traditions. Although my brother and relatives were new to this country, I was the one wanting to prove that I belonged through our “common roots” to Vietnam.

Outside the home, I was the only Asian in my grade for years through no fault of the schools. My best friends were not Asian. Neither was my first crush. College was outside Boston, where I was introduced to diversity and the term “Asian American”; specifically, “Vietnamese American.” My family proudly referred to us as Vietnamese. The community recognized us as Asians. Ironically, I was comfortable being Vietnamese or Asian yet didn’t know how to identify as Asian



American since I wasn’t born in the U.S. I met peers with similar and different stories from me. Shaping a stronger understanding of myself, I gained confidence in who I was and where I came from. The flip-flopping decreased.

After college was my first trip to Vietnam, my birth country. I was embraced and praised for speaking the Vietnamese language as well (or as poorly) as I could. Mostly, I was referred to as a *Việt Kiều* (“overseas

Vietnamese”), affirming I was still a foreigner. My eldest brother now resides in Vietnam. My parents go every year to escape the New England winters. I accepted Vietnam might be their roots, but not mine. My roots are in a small town of Western Massachusetts, values grounded in its soil and fed nutrients through personal experiences.

I am now transplanted to the San Francisco Bay Area, quite different from my small town. I married a beautiful woman from the Bay Area, into her beautiful Vietnamese family, with two teenage children. Similarly, they are exposed to Vietnamese

culture, constantly hearing stories of Vietnam from family members, particularly their elders. We have traveled to Vietnam together, including once to scatter my father’s ashes. They have even experienced life in my small town,

working summers with their grandparents at our Vietnamese restaurant. By sharing my experiences, am I shaping their roots to be the same as mine? I truly don’t want that.

Our children are fortunate to grow up in the SF Bay Area, with all its diversity. We hope they embrace their own experiences, appreciate those of others, and consider their own roots. We share family values, traditions, and culture but they will plant their own roots when they recognize who they are. My roots may not be theirs, though their roots could reshape mine. There should be less flip-flopping along the way. We consciously try not to influence our children this way, but if they ever need direction, they can look to their very own Vietnamese names we purposely gave them.

Where are YOU really, really from?

*L. Nguyễn is a Vietnamese American who enjoys over-thinking just about anything.*

“My roots are in a small town of Western Massachusetts, values grounded in its soil and fed nutrients through personal experiences.”



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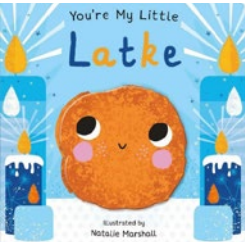


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Winter & Holidays

By Laure Latham

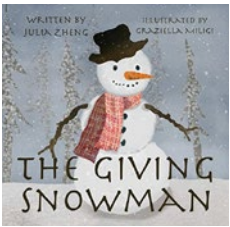
Celebrating the end of the year and colder temperatures, these books will make children look forward to wintry traditions, road trips, food, and folklore.



You're My Little Latke

Illustrated by Natalie Marshall

Introduce your little ones to the joy of Hanukkah with this book featuring adorable latkes, dreidels, gelt, jelly donuts, and menorahs paired with sweet, rhyming text. Nimble small fingers will relish the opportunity to play with cut-outs and raised elements. **Ages: 0 to 2 years**



The Giving Snowman: A Children's Bedtime Story about Gratitude

Written by Julia Zheng, illustrated by Graziella Miligi

On a snowy night, a snowman in a field helps various friends when they are in need. Rabbit is desperate for his hungry family, so Snowman gives him his nose. Farmer's family is cold, so Snowman gives him his stick branches. Reminiscent of *The Giving Tree*, this heartwarming story illustrates simple life lessons that will stay with your children a long time. **Ages: 3 to 7 years**



The Christmas Mitzvah

Written by Jeff Gottesfeld, illustrated by Michelle Laurentia Agatha

A mitzvah is a good deed and on Christmas Eve, also Hanukkah, Al Rosen decides to work another man's job so that the man can spend Christmas Eve with his family. He calls it a Christmas Mitzvah. A loving blend of Hanukkah and Christmas traditions, *The Christmas Mitzvah* encapsulates the generous spirit of both holidays and doing good for others. **Ages: 4 to 8 years**



A Thousand White Butterflies

Written by Jessica Betancourt-Perez and Karen Lynn Williams, illustrated by Gina Maldonado

How does a first snow day help a young girl make new friends? Isabella, who recently immigrated to the U.S. from Colombia, is a little more nervous than usual about starting school. She doesn't speak the same language and people do things differently than she is used to. When a snowstorm cancels school altogether, she finds another opportunity to make new connections in an unfamiliar land. Told in English and Spanish, this delightful book blends serious topics with fun snow activities. **Ages: 5 to 8 years**



The Legend of the Christmas Witch

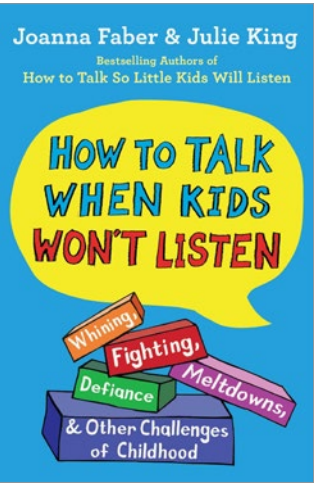
Written by Dan Murphy and Aubrey Plaza, illustrated by Julia Iredale

Who knew Kris Kringle had an evil twin sister named Kristtörn? Written by "Parks & Rec" star Aubrey Plaza, this folktale starts in the eerie forests of Denmark where the twins live completely in tune with nature. When Kris meets a couple in the forest and gets adopted by them, young Kristtörn takes shelter at a witch's house which helps her grow her magical powers. Now, who do you think leaves strange gifts on Christmas night? This tale, rich in folklore and beautifully illustrated, will get your teens in the holiday spirit. **Ages 8 to 12 years**

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 works in legal marketing and lives in London, where she peppers adventures with her two teenage daughters with wild swims, foraging and cream teas. You can find her on social media @frogmomblog.

Parenting Books

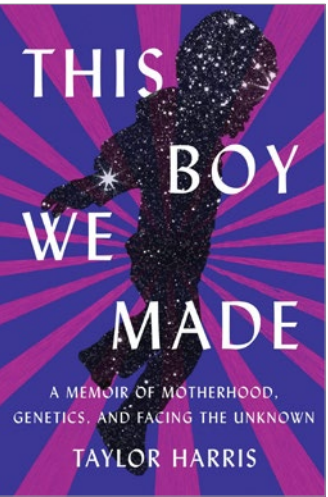
By Gail Cornwall



How to Talk When Kids Won't Listen: Whining, Fighting, Meltdowns, Defiance & Other Challenges of Childhood

When I received a copy of *How To Talk When Kids Won't Listen*, the odds of it being worth reviewing seemed close to zero, since Joanna Faber and Julie King's subject matter—the challenges of childhood—has been covered, and covered well, many times over. But they nailed it. Part one includes tools for dealing with feelings, strategies for getting kids to cooperate, a problem-solving process to replace punishment, and ways to inspire without corrosive praise. They present the basics of research-backed child wrangling adeptly, with clever shorthand terms, comics that help break up the data dump, end-of-chapter summaries, and prose that's relatable, practical, and even anticipates common objections (e.g., "Not every situation calls for acknowledging feelings!").

Part two uses real-life scenarios from letters, emails, and workshop conversations to demonstrate how the tools of part one can be applied in specific situations. You could skip it, but then you'd miss gems like, "When kids complain over nothing, just to get attention, we can just give them attention, because that's what they need" and "If your child continues to whine, we give you permission to tell them 'I can't listen anymore,' and leave the room!" I highly recommend it as a primer for parents of young kids and a reminder for the more seasoned looking to connect with tweens and teens.



This Boy We Made: A Memoir of Motherhood, Genetics, and Facing the Unknown

"When I have to make a quick parenting decision, I put my motherhood on trial," Taylor Harris writes, inviting the reader to tag along as she advocates, in hospitals and schools, for her medically complex yet undiagnosed Black son, all while managing her own anxiety.

*This Boy We Made* is much more than an ode to her husband and son, though it serves that role well, capturing their strengths like bugs in amber. We get to know the self-assured, reliable husband, Paul, "who'd bought a pair of Rockports in his twenties because they were comfortable." It's difficult for any father to navigate a pediatric hospital, but Harris skillfully describes how racism makes it worse: "A Black male, even one with a crisp goatee and blazer, must inquire in the most peculiar way, his nonverbal cues and tone alternating between calm and concern. He must not offend. He must show his spine. He must not offend." If Paul's quiet dignity oozes from the pages, her son Tophs's imperfect perfection jumps out of them. Harris writes, "[S]ometimes Tophs's search for a word reminded me of computer coding. Instead of train, he might say, 'What is that box thing that moves with those other boxes?'" She describes his tendency to quote movie lines like "I'm not an orphan. I'm a

foster kid!" from the movie *Annie* as a clever way to communicate his emotions indirectly: "Tophs's version of texting a GIF."

Harris's story is eminently relatable. A lactation consultant blames her nursing technique. Harris worries that her Zoloft or an early missed feeding somehow "damaged a pathway, a circuit, that never quite repaired itself." Her rumination feels as familiar as it is uniquely illustrative: "*It may be a fluke. He might drop dead.*" She describes the betrayal one can feel having grown up "with a deep belief that if I made the right choices; if I finished my homework and studied for tests; if I followed the syllabus, or the Ten Commandments," all would be well. It wasn't.

Not everyone will love Harris's figurative language, pacing, and invocation of God. And yet, an older Tophs said, "*A lot of things have happened to me and I am perfectly made.*" It's an apt description for *This Boy We Made*.

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.



# What’s in a Name?

By Anna Gracia

Naming a baby feels like the first real test of parenthood—you’re literally deciding how your little one will present himself to the world! Will they go by a nickname? What about middle names? And of course, there’s the worry that you’ll stumble upon one of the “popular” names of the year, relegating your little Sophie or Ethan to being one of six in her or his kindergarten class.

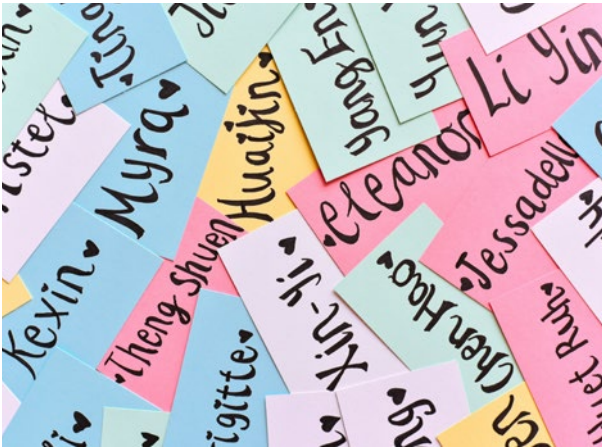
If you come from a non-white and/or non-American culture, the name you choose carries additional anxieties. Will others be able to pronounce your child’s name? How about spelling it? What if she gets made fun of because of an unfortunate English translation? If the name you choose is distinctly non-white, will she be discriminated against in the future because of it?

Studies have shown, again and again, that culturally non-white names are routinely given lower marks in school, more heavily scrutinized on job applications, and often considered less attractive in dating pools. But as a parent, are

“After changing my last name to match my husband’s when we were married, I was adamantly opposed to giving our children any names that might imply they were only Mexican.”

you willing to wipe away a large portion of your child’s cultural existence before they’ve even said their first word? And that’s before getting into possible family obligations or community considerations.

For my family in particular, this complicated balancing game became even more fraught with the introduction of more than one culture into the mix. After changing my last name to match my husband’s when we were married, I was adamantly opposed to giving our children any names that might imply they were only Mexican. After all, his genes would ultimately dominate in the looks department—my kids are recognizably Latino, with no hint of my background anywhere. But at the



same time, it seemed disjointed to pair a traditionally Taiwanese name with such a noticeably Latino last name. Not to mention the fact that I, myself, didn’t even have that.

So we did what couples are supposed to do in these situations—we split the difference. We brainstormed a million and one first names, making sure they sounded ethnically ambiguous enough to suit our brown children without leaning one way or the

other, then each chose a middle name from our own cultures. The Taiwanese one first, as a concession from my husband for already getting the advantage with his last name, and the Mexican one second—leaving our kids with four names in traditional Hispanic fashion.

It might seem like overkill to some. After all, how many times have you ever actually mentioned your middle name in your life? My husband, for his part, doesn’t even have one. And mine, being in another language, was so difficult for non-Chinese-speaking people to pronounce that I eventually gave up telling it to them altogether. So why were we so intent on it?

They say it takes three generations to lose a language. My husband is a first generation immigrant, and I am a second gen. So conceivably, my kids are already on track to lose their Taiwanese side. Giving them a name that irrevocably ties them to it was my way of making sure they would always have at least one Chinese word they’d remember. It was also like a passport of sorts—proof that regardless of the way they grew up to live their lives, they’d always be considered a part of that culture.

Identity is a complicated thing, especially for a multi-racial person. I’ve spent my entire life sorting out my own, and my kids will probably do the same. The least I could do was make sure they had all the pieces to do so. So now, when people ask how my husband and I came up with the names that we did, I just say: we gave them a little bit of both of us.

*Anna is a children’s book author and mom to three wildly named children: Tigerlily, Bear, and Sitka. Her forthcoming young adult novel, Boys I Know, deals with the complicated identity of being a second generation Asian American. You can find out more on her website, [www.anna-gracia.com](http://www.anna-gracia.com).*



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# The Native People of the Bay Area: Reconnecting with Their Legacy

Educating our children and ourselves about the  
past and present history of Native communities

By Sonya Abrams      Photographs by Sonya Abrams Photography

“This land was made for you and me,” sang Woody Guthrie in a song whose lyrics capture the prevailing American sentiment passed down through the centuries, from the landing of the Pilgrims through the age of Manifest Destiny. This message was crystallized with the opening of the American West and California in particular. For hundreds of years waves of invaders and missionaries and colonizers and entrepreneurs and wanderers and

refugees have come here, adding layers of complexity and diversity and shaping the land into the place that many of us think we know. But in the frenzy of harnessing the region’s resources and carving out our place in it, we’ve muffled the lives and history of the Indigenous people who have called this place home for thousands of years. As parents, we have the opportunity and responsibility to educate ourselves and our children about the Native peoples on whose land we reside. And lucky for us,

there are many places in the Bay Area to explore the history and culture of the thousands of Indigenous people still living here today.

## A brief history of Native people of the Bay

Though there is some disagreement about whether the Bay Area was first settled as far back as 20,000 years or as recently as 3,000 years ago, it’s clear that for thousands of years a network of tribes

inhabited the coastal Northern California region, with several dozen loosely affiliated groups living from Mendocino down to the Central Coast and inland toward the Sacramento region. Anthropologists often use the umbrella term “Ohlone” to encapsulate many of the local communities in San Francisco and regions to the near south and east, while the Miwok people lived in the hills and along the coast of present-day Marin County and areas to the northeast. Canadian nonprofit Native Land Digital houses an interactive map that allows visitors to take a nuanced look at Native communities large and small

California, but death, assimilation, and U.S. government-led relocation efforts meant that by the end of the 1800s, the Indigenous people of the Bay Area faced near eradication.

## The Native experience in the 20th century

Though the 20th century witnessed the further marginalization of the Bay’s Native populations, it also set the stage for Indigenous people to band together to seek rights and recognition through legal channels and public actions. The Urban Relocation program in the 1950s encouraged Native people to move off reservations and into major urban areas, which brought members of different tribes across the country into Oakland, San Francisco, and other parts of California. This

“As parents, we have the opportunity and responsibility to educate ourselves and our children about the Native peoples on whose land we reside.”

throughout North America, including their languages and relevant treaties ([native-land.ca](http://native-land.ca)). These local Indigenous populations were largely hunter-gatherers and skilled artisans, moving seasonally to take advantage of local food sources and utilizing thoughtful sustainability practices, including old-growth burning, to keep the land rich and fertile for flora and fauna alike. They spoke dozens of languages and generally interacted with each other peacefully.

By the late 1700s, there were thought to be as many as 20,000 Ohlone and 11,000 Miwok in the region. But the arrival of Spanish missionaries and colonizers in 1769 proved catastrophic for local Native populations. As missionaries rounded up tens of thousands of Indigenous people and brought them to the seven regional missions to live, work, and be converted to Christianity, diseases like smallpox decimated the population, with malnutrition and low birth rates further culling numbers. By the mid-1800s, when secularization took hold, Native populations had dwindled to perhaps less than a thousand, and as the white frenzy to settle California gained steam, Gold Rush-era slaughters killed even more Indigenous people.

Some surviving Ohlone peoples formed new communities in rancherias throughout

contributed to assimilation and cultural loss, but it also spurred Native people to band together and demand rights and recognition. Among the most famous of these efforts was the Occupation of Alcatraz in 1969 by a group called the Indians of All Tribes, inspired by the youth-led Red Power Movement that spearheaded self-determination efforts throughout the 1960s and ‘70s. The Occupation lasted 19 months and helped influence government policies protecting

Native autonomy and land rights. The 20th century also saw Native people begin to use the legal system to demand recognition, form land trusts, and spearhead efforts to protect their historic lands and practices. As of the 2010 U.S. census, more than 48,000 people in the Bay Area identify as American Indian or Alaska Native, a 5,000 person increase from the previous census.

## Historical sites to visit

Though campaigns of cultural erasure and the atrophy of time have largely eradicated the sites and artifacts of the Bay’s Native peoples, there are still places where your family can learn about the Native way of life. Here are just a few places to check out.

### Kule Loklo, Point Reyes National

**Seashore:** Visit a replica of a Coastal Miwok village, just a short walk from the Bear Valley parking lot, and learn about the day-to-day lives of the people who lived along the coast. Gatherings still occur at Kule Loklo today, including an annual festival.

### Ring Mountain Preserve, Tiburon/Corte

**Madera:** This 367-acre preserve has 360-degree views of the Bay Area and numerous hiking trails gentle enough for little legs. Toward the top of the mountain you can visit Petroglyph Rock, a large boulder covered in curved petroglyphs, thought to be created by the Coastal Miwok 2,400 years ago.

**Mission Dolores, San Francisco:** This Spanish mission dates back to 1776 and is the oldest surviving structure in the city. By the early 1800s, as many as 1,100 Native people were living and working at the Mission. The Mission contains an Ohlone ethno-botanic garden as well as Native plants and artifacts.

## Family-friendly events

It’s important to teach our children that Native cultures aren’t relegated to the past. There are events throughout the Bay Area where you can deepen your family’s experience with the Indigenous community in a meaningful way.

### Indigenous Peoples Sunrise Ceremony,

**Alcatraz:** Also known as Un-Thanksgiving Day, this event arose in the wake of the 1969 Occupation of Alcatraz and has been held since 1975. Spectators can purchase tickets to watch the sun rise over the Bay





and take in Native dancing, drumming, and cultural presentations.

**Indigenous Peoples Day Commemoration, San Francisco:** The push to rename Columbus Day came from the Bay Area, with Berkeley leading the way in 1992, and there are celebrations each year throughout the region on the second Monday in October. In San Francisco, Yerba Buena Gardens hosts the largest daylong event, featuring Native American art, music, and vendors.

**Indigenous Red Market, Oakland.** Held on the first Sunday of every month in Fruitvale, this event features art, dancing, vendors, and Native food, including offerings from the new Indigenous restaurant Wahpepah’s Kitchen, founded by Kickapoo nation member and Oakland native Crystal Wahpepah.

*Sonya is an editor and photographer living in Cole Valley with her three children*



Local Native mother Nizhoni Ellenwood, who belongs to the Nimiipuu/Nez Perce and Apache tribes, shared some thoughts with GGMG Magazine on living as an Indigenous person in the Bay Area. Her statement has been condensed and edited for clarity.

“Our family was brought to San Francisco during the Relocation Act of the 1950s and ’60s. Many Native American families were brought to San Francisco because of the Relocation Act, and many are still in the Bay Area to this day. The Relocation Act was a way that the government was trying to assimilate the Indigenous people into mainstream society; it was another form of trying to strip the Native person from their traditional homeland and culture. In some senses, the government succeeded, but what they did not foresee is that our people came together to build a vibrant and strong community within the urban setting. Growing up in San Francisco, I remember when we had a Native American Indian Community Center and we would have feasts and gatherings there. We also had Title 5, which would teach kids about culture and different traditions. We had pow wows at Civic Center and at the different colleges in SF and around the Bay Area. Every year I take my son to the Sunrise Ceremony on Alcatraz to honor those who occupied Alcatraz in 1969 to 1971. My family was there during the Occupation and the Sunrise Ceremony has grown to be a strong, large gathering that many people

attend every year. We go on Indigenous People’s Day and Thanksgiving, or Un-Thanksgiving as some say. There is now a small part of Alcatraz that has set up a museum portion dedicated to the Occupation. These past years they also have repainted the original paintings and sayings throughout Alcatraz that the original people who occupied it wrote on the walls and different areas of Alcatraz. For example, when you first get off the ferry you will see a large sign painted on the wall saying “Indians Welcome. United’s Indian Property... INDIAN LAND!” We go to many pow wows all over the Bay Area and country (once the pandemic settles down again). We attend ceremonies when able to and participate in the Native American Health Center and Friendship House in SF events as well. They just had a pow wow where my son was Head Tiny Tot! We also take online Nimiipuu/Nez Perce language classes through our tribe in Idaho where we talk and learn from our elders and language speakers in Idaho and the Northwest. It is how we stay connected to our community and family back on the reservation and our people’s traditional territory. It helps my son and me learn more

about our language, homelands, and traditional practices and foods for all are connected. Our language is connected to our traditional homelands and this is something people don’t often realize, but the government did. Forcing our people on to reservations, often taking us away from our traditional territories, then forcing our children into boarding schools and residential schools and forcing them to stop speaking our languages was just another form of the genocide of our people. By stripping the language and the culture away was one way of trying to “kill the Native, save the man.” So for us to regain our language and refine that connection is a huge way for us to continue to build on our people’s resilience and strength. Our ancestors all fought for us to still be here and every day I see the beauty in the vibrance of our communities and the strength that we all have to continue to share and build our culture, traditions and ways. Even if someone doesn’t know much about their culture and their history there are ways to find out and to connect more through these different communities and organizations in the Bay Area.”

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# Seeking Answers in Ancestry May Yield More Questions

It's never been easier to trace your heritage via DNA testing, but what does that actually mean? Does it really work? And is it worth it?

By Sandy Woo

Originally published in the December 2019/January 2020 Connections issue.



On an otherwise prosaic ride home the other day, my 6-year-old son sang-hummed Lizzo's Truth Hurts, complete with "I just took a DNA test, turns out I'm 100 percent that [*unintelligible*]..." Fortunately it was the kid version (yes, there is one), and I didn't have to explain anything. It's official: DNA testing is pop-culture cool.

According to *MIT Technology Review*, more than 26 million people have taken at-home DNA tests by 2019. That's a lot of saliva—about 67 thousand gallons, if that's a better visual. Approximately 80 percent of these tests were done on U.S. citizens,

estimates The International Society of Genetic Genealogy (ISOGG). Or, as a new Pew Research Center Survey found, about one in seven U.S. adults (15 percent) say they have used a mail-in DNA testing service from a company such as AncestryDNA or 23andMe. The popularity of these tests is only growing, particularly as the holidays arrive and people buy and receive these kits as gifts.

As a genetics geek, I am alternately fascinated and repelled by such testing, particularly since these tests are often packaged with mostly recreational health information. In researching this article, I

hovered over a 14-day free trial, wavering and waffling. After all, what would I find anyway? And could I trust the results? Ultimately, would I want this information?

## Why do it?

The answer to this question seems fairly obvious. Any Google search yields a plethora of reasons. Many people unofficially report at cocktail parties that they did the test "for fun." Based upon the above cited Pew Research study, about 87 percent of mail-in DNA testers report wanting to know about where their families came from, 36 percent wish to know due to

medical or health history, and 36 percent also say they want to connect with relatives they didn't know about (numbers not meant to add up to 100).

Julia Becker, a genetic counseling student who received an ancestry kit as a birthday present, muses that she "held on to it for almost a year and finally sent in my DNA. I think it was just out of curiosity, but maybe also because I was sick of looking at it on my bookshelf."

Local mom Karla (not her real name) was a "sympathy" tester. "I did the ancestry test mostly to support my husband in doing it," she says. "My mother-in-law had been trying for more than 20 years to find the child she had given up for adoption. She asked my husband and his brothers to do the test with her to try to find her adopted-out son. For myself, I was curious about the process of testing, and I thought it might be interesting to see my ancestry results. My grandfather was an orphan, and he had no information about his background—not even where he was born."

The drive for wanting to know where we come from is strong. Possessing this knowledge may have a therapeutic effect as well. A 2010 Emory University study showed that when children know stories about relatives who came before, they demonstrate higher levels of emotional well-being. This study is often used to promote DNA testing even though it doesn't specifically look at the psychological benefits of DNA testing to gain information about family. The benefits found in this study were gained the "old-fashioned"

way—from conversations and family research through genealogy. Ancestry testing hadn't even really taken off yet then.

## Is the testing reliable?

People often ask how DNA test results can be wrong—it's a code after all. Answering this question is complicated and "the devil is in the details."

The DNA testing used by ancestry testing companies uses SNPs (single nucleotide polymorphisms), which are natural DNA spelling variations. A nucleotide is a chemical base that makes the backbone of DNA. The SNPs are chosen due to their frequencies in a specific geographical population. Once a SNP is established as common in a population, it may have some significance or importance. It becomes an ancestry informative marker (AIM) if it exhibits substantially different frequencies between different populations. The proportion of ancestry derived from each population can be estimated from a group of AIMs.

Using SNPs allows for quicker and more cost effective testing, but that also means large amounts of DNA are not being used by the services. Each company has its own proprietary platform and algorithm for interpreting the data. Unlike DNA sequencing, mail-in DNA tests are only looking at certain variants across an entire genome. Variants first need to be identified prior to any interpretation. To use a simplistic

analogy, it would be like just checking the spelling of five out of the 10 words in a sentence. Perhaps there are errors in other non-checked words as well. This type of DNA testing is different from clinical gene sequencing, which spells out every letter of each word in the sentence, after which the results still need to be interpreted for significance. This is also one of the reasons why health information from such testing can be wrong.

**"It is best to take percentages with a grain of salt, especially if they don't match up to traceable family history."**

The testing companies compare your DNA to a sample population, which is derived from a current population in a specific region that self-reports the length of time their families have lived there. This is based on the assumption that people living in the area thousands of years ago would have the same DNA. The probability of DNA being from a certain country is based upon comparing your DNA to their private database. The larger the company's database, the more likely the results will be accurate. On a related note, to find the most number of relatives, it is best to also test with multiple companies.

Camille Penrod, Senior Public Relations Specialist of Ancestry, says, "Determining AncestryDNA ethnicity estimates is not a guessing game. The estimate is based on shared DNA, probability, statistics, and ongoing research and science. AncestryDNA calculates your ethnicity estimate by comparing your DNA to a reference panel made up of over 40,000 samples from people with a long family history in one place or as part of one group."

## Can the results be believed?

Many testing companies report that their estimates are 99.9 percent accurate, which simply means true. For example, a test is accurate if it reports someone's ancestry is European. Precise is the exact determination of ethnicity. (Some companies may list several hundred regions on their reports, but have only tested 20 to 30 regions, and then list the countries in the regions without actually testing each country's







DNA). This means that determination of ethnicity can be imprecise—Spanish versus Portuguese, for example.

An algorithm essentially takes a best guess at ancestral makeup as populations are deeply connected to one another. Since some places have very little genetic variation (Irish versus English), these percentages can vary from test to test, sometimes wildly so. It is best to take percentages with a grain of salt, especially if they don't match up to traceable family history.

Karla's results somewhat surprised her. "For the most part, my ancestry results matched what my parents had always told me. I was quite surprised, though, to discover that I am [about] 20 percent Spanish/Portuguese. This surprising information prompted my daughter to do a deep genealogy search over a summer... she found no evidence of any Spanish/Portuguese ancestry in her eight generation search. A year or two later, I got an update from the ancestry service saying that I was no longer 20 percent Spanish/Portuguese. That 20 percent is now German."

Most DNA testing companies provide more detailed results for people of European ancestry since this testing was initially only available in the United States. Understandably, the lowest concordance is with individuals of South Asian, East Asian, African and Hispanic descent. In certain populations such as Ashkenazi Jewish, values less than 2 percent are very unreliable. These companies recognize this racial bias and have goals to increase collection of samples from these regions.

This incomplete information is one of the reasons Emily Chen, clinical geneticist and

co-director at the Regional Genetics Molecular Laboratory at Kaiser Permanente has expressed hesitation with testing. "The data is incomplete and biased due to insufficient data, so the results may not be accurate, and the results are dependent on what the testing platforms are."

### Other concerns about testing

Privacy is often a given reason for hesitation on such testing. The fine print details what each company does with your data. This data is a valuable asset and is sold to other companies, which can then do what they wish to your data. Data privacy, such as HIPAA, doesn't apply to direct-to-consumer testing. The scope of what each company can do with your data is broad, and it would be wise to carefully read the privacy policy of each company. Some companies may allow law enforcement to search the database while others don't allow it without a warrant. Recently, a judge ruled that these databases could be searched without consent. Data breaches are a real concern as well.

Julia expresses this sentiment. "To be honest, after doing the testing I immediately had a tinge of regret. For one, it didn't give me any information I didn't already

Family Tree DNA (Gene by)		
Middle Eastern		0%
Asia Minor		< 2%
East Middle East		0%
North Africa		0%
West Middle East		< 1%
European		96%
British Isles		51%
East Europe		18%
Finland		0%
Scandinavia		24%
Southeast Europe		< 2%
Iberia		3%
West and Central Europe		0%
Jewish Diaspora		0%

know, so its value to me was pretty minimal. I've also realized that I didn't fully consider the potential repercussions of giving my DNA to a profit-driven business like 23andMe. I'd like to think that they have de-identified my DNA and that it couldn't be used in a detrimental way either to me or anyone else, but I really have no way of ever knowing that now."

Another major area of potential surprises is finding long lost relatives. "Family matches are incredibly reliable. If you and another person are matches, it means that you both share DNA from one or more recent common ancestors and are related in some way," says Penrod of Ancestry. People can opt out as Karla did. "The test results and new family connections can have an impact on your identity. And whatever you discover, it is not just your information, it also ripples out to other people. I think we learned it is important to be mindful about these issues, before choosing to do the test and after."

### Turns out, I am 100 percent...

Unconvinced. After all that research, I'm fairly certain that my results would be "boring." My ancestry is Chinese as far back as I can tell. I suppose it would be fun for me to discover that I'm a descendant of an emperor, but it's doubtful there is enough reference data for that. The potential for finding unknown family members was far too anxiety producing so that was never a draw. (My mother disappeared from my life at age 10.) I am ultimately ambivalent about my DNA resting in some company's database; this feeling is my own personal discomfort, curiosity be damned. On the other hand, my husband has ordered a DNA testing kit, under a pseudonym. Unfortunately, the kit was returned because his company didn't recognize the said name. We are still waiting for the test laboratory to resend it so he can donate his spit. My curiosity remains unquelled at this time. \*Update\* My husband is also 100 percent boring (German and some smidgeon of English, French, and Italian).

*Sandy is a sometimes genetics junkie who is still intrigued by all the ancillary information obtained from ancestry testing.*

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# Embracing Gray Gracefully

When gray hairs spring forth, it might be time to embrace it.

By Clare Deignan



“Don’t tell me if you see any gray,” is one request I usually make of my hairdresser.

Having dyed my hair since my teens, I’m not even sure what my natural hair color is, and I’m not ready to add gray to the possible palette. My hair is the one area of my life where I think it’s healthy to allow a bit of denial.

My stylist pleasantly accommodated this denial—that is, until COVID-19. Maybe it had been too long? Maybe she forgot our agreement? Maybe it was just too obvious?

But, after parting my hair and taking a closer look at my roots, she *tsk-tsked* me.

“So much gray,” she said. “Too much stress.” I thought to myself, *Yes, there’s a pandemic, and I’ve been locked inside with my husband and small children for months.* I’m also in my 40s. It’s normal to start seeing grays. After my anger abated, I realized I was hurt. She broke our deal: “ixnay” on the gray. It’s not my fault. What can I do about it? Just cover it, thank you very much.

*Embrace it or color it* seems to be the

two choices we have when considering hair color and going gray. Skin cells that produce melanin, called melanocytes, determine our hair color. Melanin is the pigment that decides hair color, and aging causes the pigment to diminish, leading to you becoming either a silver fox or dyeing those gray strays as quickly as they grow in. According to the Library of Congress’s *Everyday Mysteries*, each decade after the age of 30, the likelihood of sprouting gray hairs goes up 10 to 20 percent.

Being COVID times, we can easily blame



those silver strands on stress, and there’s research to back up those claims. A 2020 Harvard Department of Stem Cell and Regenerative Biology study suggests there is a link between stress and graying hair. The experiment put a mouse “under conditions of stress,” and within days, the mouse had noticeable large gray patches. This stark change is similar to the unproven phenomenon known as “Marie Antoinette Syndrome.” During the French Revolution, the queen’s hair purportedly lost all pigment and went white the night before her execution. Although the new study out of Harvard suggests stress could lead to premature graying hair, conventional medical research argues it could be more accurate to look at your genetics and family history to gauge when your grays will appear.

Whether the cause is stress or DNA, those of us noticing a few more grays are in luck. Currently, silver locks are in fashion. Although I may still want to deny my ashen roots, many people, young and old alike, are embracing their gray and finding empowerment in its many shades.

## Celebrating silver

“During the pandemic, we saw even more people wanting to go gray. They liked the

color of the gray shades coming in and didn’t want to be confined to hair color anymore,” says Dimitri Cornet, hair stylist, owner of Werk Salon in San Francisco and a Kérastase hair educator—teaching in the United States, the Caribbean, and South America. Originally from the Caribbean, Cornet came to the United States as a teenager, landing in San Francisco about 18 years ago. Following his lifelong passion, he chose a career in hair. After 14 years as a stylist, Cornet thinks gray is beautiful at any age.

For those considering a transition away from color, Cornet lays out three predominant ways to go gray gracefully:

1. The full grow-out: patiently welcoming your gray.
2. The partial grow-out: baring your gray roots and then rocking a pixie cut to speed up the process.
3. Lifting the hair: using bleach and toner to achieve a gentler transition from color to gray.

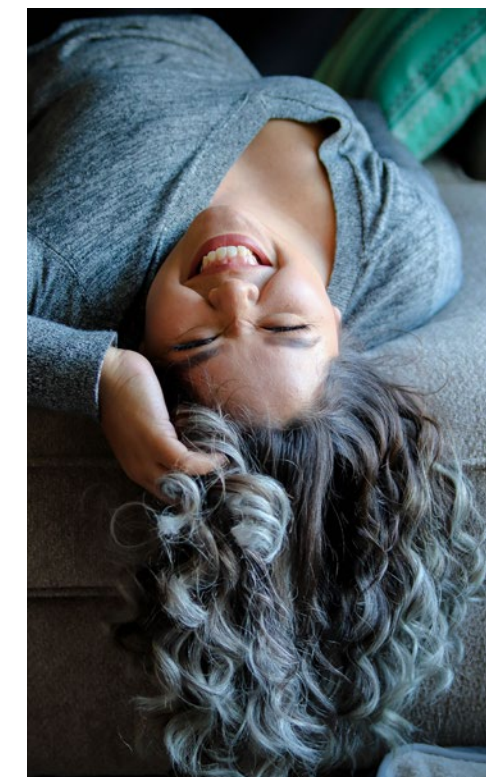
For clients naturally going gray, Cornet emphasizes there are pros and cons to the process. The benefits are saving money and time spent at the salon. There are also environmental benefits from quitting the chemicals used to color hair. Considering

the cons, Cornet points to the time it takes to transition to gray and the ensuing change in color palette. “It’s such a cool tone and can tend to make the skin tone change, a little bit more drab,” he explains. To brighten the face, Cornet recommends a contouring haircut. “It’s about playing with the shadows around the face. I definitely encourage clients to make sure they have a cut that would really allow the light to hit the face in certain angles,” he suggests.

But no matter the path chosen, patience is needed. Even for young people vying for a silver look, any gray transformation takes time. Cornet is excited about the beauty industry developing safer chemicals and technologies to achieve his clients’ hair dreams. He still wants his clients to take into account what the style entails, the cost, and the maintenance long term, but most importantly, his goal is to see them with a “pep in their step and happy.”

“Hair is a statement, how you want to express yourself and what you want to put out there. With younger people going gray as more of a fashion statement—just have fun with it,” he encourages.

In his salon, Cornet sees more and more clients, whether young or old, “owning their gray.” He elaborates, “A different energy is given off, and it’s an energy of





empowerment. You can literally feel it.” Cornet says with this vibrancy, people, especially women, can find pride in their gray hair.

Why did she wait so long?

South Bay registered nurse and mom of three Pamela Radgowski wasn’t surprised when she started to gray in her late teens. Some of Radgowski’s close family members went gray in their 30s. She says, “I knew it was coming. By the time I was in my early 20s, I was getting my hair dyed regularly.”

By her 30s, Radgowski frequented the salon every five to six weeks, spending approximately \$250 and three hours on each visit. “The line was really obvious. I always had thick, dark brown, wavy hair, so it was like this white line of demarcation,” she recalls.

Over the years, Radgowski developed an allergy to the hair dye. The hairdressers used a trick of adding the sugar substitute Sweet’N Low to the dye to reduce the reaction and then even tried natural dyes, which triggered her allergy worse.

“I would have this crazy stinging on my scalp while they were dying my hair. And, then over the course of the next week or so, my entire scalp would peel off. It was really painful and gross.”

Radgowski had thought of going gray but was unsure. “I saw a few people that had really cool, natural gray streaks in their hair. But I knew it would take so long to grow out and my hair would look so weird in the interim,” she explains. To make her graying less obvious, she attempted lightening her hair, “But it looked really bad with my complexion, brownish-blondish, and really orangey.”

In September 2019, she finally gave up and picked a date for her last hair coloring. After 20 weeks of no dye, Radgowski chopped her hair to a pixie cut and said goodbye to most of her dyed ends. The complete growth process took a year and a half. But more than two years later, Radgowski questions why she waited so long.

“I never really stopped to think about it too much. And now it just seems so silly, that I did that for so long just for something so trivial,” she admits.



After years wearing her hair long, she now keeps it shoulder length. “It’s liberating—time and moneywise. I think as a mom I did not have time to take care of my hair or to sit in a chair for hours on end. I mean, it’s just ridiculous to think about it now.”

“Hair is a statement, how you want to express yourself and what you want to put out there... just have fun with it.”

But, Radgowski does have one regret. “I mostly just feel sad that I didn’t get to see the transition and patterns.” She continues, “Right now, I have some really cool streaks in my hair and I wish I could have seen it come along.”

Radgowski offers a fashion suggestion to those contemplating a gray change—add

more color but not to your hair. “Update your wardrobe,” she advises. “I used to just wear a lot of black, neutral tones, and a lot of gray. I don’t wear any gray now.” Radgowski dons vivid colors and bright lipstick. If you don’t have the time or money for a stylist, her recommendation is, “Just go brighter.”

Cool to go gray

To older women unsure if they can “pull off gray,” Radgowski encourages them, “I tell them, you totally can.”

Radgowski admits it’s been easier because gray hair is the style. “I get questions and compliments now constantly on my hair from young people thinking about coloring their hair gray—which is hysterical.” She has to explain to them, “No, this is my hair. I didn’t do anything to it.”

Since a portion of her gray transition was during shelter-in-place, no one could go to the hairdresser. Radgowski wasn’t alone with her gray grow-out. But, she’s not sure what it would have been like in the “real world.”

“It’s scary. I didn’t think about it that much, but it was embarrassing, a big line on my head with two very different colors.”

Grateful to the youths’ gray exuberance, Radgowski elaborates, “I’m glad it’s *en vogue* right now. I think that it’s really

helpful for people who are wanting to take the jump but were nervous to do it. If the youngsters are making it cool then it makes it easier for the rest of us.”

Clare is a freelance journalist and mother of two.



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DIVERSITY, EQUITY, & INCLUSION

Celebrating Chinese New Year, 2022

Chinese New Year (CNY) will fall on Tuesday, February 1, 2022. The traditional CNY festival, also known as the Spring Festival, is celebrated in many Asian countries and the Chinese diaspora all over the world. While the general rituals and customs are the same, there are varied ways of celebrating the festivities. CNY lasts for 15 days, culminating in the Lantern Festival Day, which is the first full moon after CNY. The Lantern Festival promotes reconciliation, peace, and forgiveness and it honors deceased ancestors. CNY is an extremely festive time of year in San Francisco’s Chinatown; in 2022 especially, we will be welcoming the return of the popular CNY parade after a year-long hiatus due to the pandemic



History of the San Francisco Chinatown Parade: An American Invention

The Chinese don’t traditionally hold parades, but the San Francisco Chinese community began a small procession in the 1860s during the Gold Rush in an attempt to combat xenophobic hostility. After the Great Earthquake in 1906, the community rallied around the rebuilding of Chinatown and the parade became an integral part of Chinatown’s attraction to tourists and locals alike. The modern parade came to be in 1953 when the first Miss Chinatown was crowned and a procession went through the neighborhood. The Chinese Chamber of Commerce officially took charge of the parade in 1958, and used the parade as a platform for portraying Chinese Americans in a positive light. The CNY parade route then grew beyond Chinatown. Beginning in the ’80s, the Chamber garnered major sponsors and was broadcasted via television with more diverse cultural organizations, including LGBTQ organizations, joining the parade. The roughly two-hour parade always ends with a massive 300-foot long golden dragon with the alumni and kids from Leung’s White Crane Dragon and Lion Dance Association returning from all over the U.S. to carry the dragon each year.

**Highlights:** Floats, elementary school groups in costume, stilt walkers, Chinese acrobats, and at least 600,000 firecrackers.

**Route:** Begins on Market Street and ends in Chinatown.

2022 CNY Events in San Francisco

- The San Francisco Chinese Chamber of Commerce will hold the **CNY Parade–Year of the Tiger** on Saturday, February 19. The Flower Fair and the Miss Chinatown Pageant are held the weekends prior.
- In past years, the **Asian Art Museum** has held a series of events celebrating Lunar New Year, including art, storytelling and books. Not yet announced for 2022.
- The **San Francisco Symphony’s Lunar New Year Performance** will be held Saturday, February 5 at 5 p.m. A reception and banquet are also scheduled.
- In the past, the **Bay Area Discovery Museum** has hosted an annual CNY celebration.
- Check with the **San Francisco Public Library’s** Chinatown and/or Main Branch for events in January.
- The **Chinese Cultural Center** has exhibitions that are free and open to the public.

SOCIAL EVENTS

Thank you to all our members and their families for joining us at this year’s GGMG Fall Festival held at the Randall Museum. It was wonderful to see everyone exploring the museum, making it through the obstacle course, checking out the fire truck, getting their face painted, and enjoying so many other fun-filled activities! We really appreciate all the volunteers who work tirelessly to make this fun event possible, and we would especially like to thank all of our amazing sponsors who contributed so generously. Please be sure to check them out.



EVENTS

Monthly Queer Family Hike

Join queer families for a COVID-safe 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!

- The safety requirements are:
- Socially-distanced families
  - Adults and kids (age 2+) able to wear masks the whole time.

**DATE:** First Saturday of the month  
**TIME:** 1 p.m.  
**PLACE:** TBD  
**COST:** FREE for members

Virtual Moms Night In: Every Last Wednesday of the Month

Looking to keep social connections alive as we continue to face a public-health crisis? Come hang every month at our Virtual Moms Night In via Zoom! Wine, pajamas, messy bun—all are accepted. There is no agenda, just hanging out and connecting with each other. This event will take place the last Wednesday of every month.

**DATE:** Every Last Wednesday of the month (December 29, 2021 and Jan 26, 2022)  
**TIME:** 8 p.m. to 9 p.m.  
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**COST:** FREE for members

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# Roots Grow Where You Plant Them

By Jessica Perry



The Golden Gate and Mount Tamalpais in 1900 from Telegraph Hill in San Francisco.

I am a sixth-generation Marin County resident, something that happens rarely here. The roots of my father's family in Marin run very deep, all the way back to the Gold Rush. My great-great-great-grandfather James Ross purchased Rancho Punta De Quentin (now comprising the towns of San Anselmo and Ross) in Marin County in 1857 after moving to the U.S. from Australia as an original '49er. The site of the family ancestral home would later become what is now the Marin Art and Garden Center. My husband and I got married there and had pictures taken under the magnolia tree that my ancestors had planted more than a century before.

In 1940, my great-grandfather opened Sunnyside Nursery in downtown San Anselmo. It was built next to the site of his own parents' home and was named after the family homestead. Sunnyside Nursery stayed open for more than 70 years, first with my great-grandpa at the helm, and then with my dad and uncle taking up the reins until its closure in 2015. It employed four generations of our family and countless friends. So many of my vivid childhood memories originated at the nursery. The smell of warm potting soil and freshly watered plants are two of my strongest and most comforting memories from childhood and are the scents that grounded me most during the chaos of the pandemic.

During my childhood in Marin, I took many magical visits to San Francisco, staying in my beloved great-aunt MJ's home. It had been in her husband's family since it was built in 1922, when most of the Richmond neighborhood was still sand dunes. Driving through the fog on the bridge always signified a weekend ahead filled with adventure. The memories of these many special weekends away were part of what drew me back to San Francisco years later when I graduated from college. Towards the end of my senior year in college, my

great-aunt lost a tough battle with cancer. I moved into her house, staying there for 19 years, through my single years as well as a married woman with a young family, loving it fiercely through every stage. More than a place to live, the house itself was also a cherished family member with a unique character of its own. Our house cradled me all the way from my own childhood to the very beginning of middle age.

Family memories were scattered throughout our house, revealing themselves through quirky "architectural" (see "giant dent") features, and forged my connection with my family every time I walked past them. The giant dent in the wall down the stairs to the basement was the souvenir of a particularly wild party in the 1960s that my great-aunt and great-uncle threw—one of their friends tumbled backwards and dented the stucco with her butt. The view out of the sun room looking towards Golden Gate Park served as the first thing my grandma, my mom, my second daughter, and I all saw every morning at some point during our residencies. The

original chimney in the living room howled even in mild winds because it had no flue cap. Over the years, it served as the comforting background noise to five generations of our family.

And yet, when the pandemic hit in 2020, I wanted nothing more than to be back with my parents and to have my kids be able to run free in the hills where I grew up. Even though as a teenager I had dreamed of living in the city, nature called me to in a way that it hadn't for the previous two decades.

In the fall of 2020, my husband and I decided to take the big leap and move to Marin—a homecoming for me and a first foray into the suburbs for him and our daughters. As I handed over the keys to our San Francisco house in April 2021, I wondered what the hell I was doing. Leaving the familiarity of our house was one of the hardest things I've ever done.



The author's daughters, seated on the front steps of their family home in San Francisco

But the first morning we spent in our new home in San Anselmo, I got up with the sunrise and breathed in that familiar scent of earth on our new hillside. I looked past the turkeys who often peer through our window at breakfast and out toward Mount Tam, finally feeling the tranquility I had craved since lockdown began. I knew we had made the right decision.

Recently, I was back in our old San Francisco neighborhood for the first time in four months and was pleased to feel just as at home as I had before our move. The house now belongs to another young family who live there with their two young boys, who were the same age as my girls when we moved back into it after renovating. We are not related to them.

I had asked the realtor if I could meet the new family because I couldn't bear the idea of the house belonging to an ungrateful family. When I handed over the keys we ended up talking for 45 minutes with each other. They heard many stories about the house and their realtor said to me, "My God! Are you okay with doing this?" and then she started crying sympathetic tears for me. I burst into tears and the new owners started to get misty as I walked out of the garage for the last time. The new family had been shut out of new houses for about as long as we had been looking in Marin. They were so grateful to move in, and I really believe they'll love the house just as much as I did.

The truth of the matter is that, while I used to insist that I was a "city person" or someone from Marin, I realize that my heart is in both places and my roots grow across the whole Bay Area.

*Jessica Perry is a sixth generation Bay Area resident and an editor, writer, and mother.*



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