

and '80s sitcoms such as *The Brady Bunch*, *Family Ties*, and *The Cosby Show*, ideologies that falsely led women to believe they could have it all and be it all. In fact, effective mothering is neither easy, nor natural; raising healthy, happy children without losing one's own identity and sanity requires systems of social support.

From Grandmother to Granddaughter: Salvadoran Women's Stories

Michael Gorkin, Marta Pineda, and Gloria Leal
Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000

Reviewed by Kathleen L. Ward

From Grandmother to Granddaughter offers more than life stories of nine Salvadoran women. Embedded in the narratives are cultural traditions and values characteristic of El Salvador. In addition, the stories give evidence of the changing roles and status of women in a strongly patriarchal society and insight into the civil turmoil of El Salvador's recent past. These are ample reasons to read this rich collection of oral histories. But the primary reason to read this volume is for the opportunity to meet the women themselves: worth knowing and akin to the carefully constructed characters of good fiction, they tell us far more than we might realize.

Featuring three generations of women from three different family lines, the book conveys each woman's perspective on her life experiences: childhood, marriage, virginity, birthing, feminism, machismo, motherhood, war, and opportunities (both realized and lost). The book records the complex interplay of generations and, although intergenerational tensions exist and are discussed openly, affectionate respect connects the women across generations, particularly granddaughters and grandmothers: "You've been talking to her, right?" says Sara Gutierrez Rivas of her grandmother, Niña Julia. "So you know how hard her life was ... Others devalued her, but she never lost a sense of her own worth. I can feel this when she talks. She has this composure, this understanding about things."

Paulina Solares Nuñez, also a granddaughter, claims, "Actually, the one adult I can talk to about these things is my grandmother. She's cool. She's sort of modern.... I've asked her whether she was a virgin when she got married, and she said yes. But she didn't stop there and refuse to answer any other questions. She told me how she felt, how it was for her."

Class standing is central to the lives of these women. Niña Cecilia Nuñez's

life of relative ease, and the subsequent ease of her progeny, differs markedly from the struggles of campesina Niña Delores García who “went without eating so there’d be enough for the kids.” The Rivas family is an example of the emerging middle class who, at times, expresses greater affinity with the peasant population than the landed gentry. Each woman views the nation’s Civil War (and the United States involvement) largely in terms of economics, her own sympathies determined by access to or lack of opportunity and resources.

While women’s lives are the focus of this fine ethnography, another relevant narrative emerges, that of the interviewing team, all psychologists with their own backgrounds, motives, and political leanings. Their unique collaboration—a working-out of gringo and local, female and male, socialist and conservative intersectings that inevitably complicate and enliven the text—is a story of its own. Fortunately, the authors were persuaded early on to include a dialogic addendum in which they speak candidly of their undertaking. Michael Gorkin also provides introductory commentary on the ethical dilemmas inherent in the gathering of life stories across national, class, and gender borders. In the case of *From Grandmothers to Granddaughters*, the border crossings are successful and serve to open the lives of nine women and their ordinary, yet quite remarkable, lives.

Lifeline

Ruth Panofsky
Toronto: Guernica Editions, 2001

Reviewed by Marion Gold

My writing had come to a halt. A proverbial brick wall over which I could not clamber had erected itself. Then Ruth Panofsky’s *Lifeline* arrived as a welcome diversion and an excuse to avoid writing. I would read another woman’s words, perhaps derive inspiration, and be moved to fill the blank computer screen with words of my own.

Lifeline records experiences of family, of parenting, and of being parented. Panofsky’s poems cover a range of subjects, from the mundane to the sacred. The curve of the poet’s words rising and falling on the page communicate meaning so strong that it erased the sense of nothingness I had been confronting in my own attempt to describe decades of family life and imbue them with significance.

“Curbside Embrace” brought to life an old photograph of me as a sturdy two-year-old standing amidst a bed of flowers, barely visible through the encircling, protective arms of my late father. Panofsky’s Bolshevik grandfather eating a banana—peel and all—is an exact replica of my fifteen-year-old