

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

mother eating her first banana in Toronto in 1926, just after her arrival in Canada from a Polish village.

“Firstborn,” wherein the father is redeemed and blessed through the birth of his grandson, brought to mind that there were no grandfathers to greet my own sons and daughters at their births. But a great-grandfather welcomed my first-born daughter with a blessing recited in Hebrew, and a blessing upon himself—so privileged was he to have been granted a great-grandchild at the age of sixty-seven.

*Lifeline* limns the landscape of a woman’s life. It evokes a life shaped by the vicissitudes of childhood, imperfect parents, and the gift of an infant’s trusting, clinging fist curled around a mother’s reaching finger. And this trust is complicated by a tapestry of knots and loose threads. A son with Tourette Syndrome, soon no longer a sweet-smelling babe in swaddling, interjects a note of harsh reality that threatens to unravel the stitches of a life.

In *Lifeline*, Ruth Panofsky travels back to the past of her childhood, links past and present, and portrays the life of a woman—as daughter, wife, and mother—in spare, beautiful poetry. The volume is brief enough to be read in one sitting, but profound enough to make a lasting impression. Panofsky’s poems may revive memories that have blurred into the grayness of forgotten time.

## **Bearing Life: Women’s Writings on Childlessness**

Ratner, Rochelle, ed.  
New York: Feminist Press, 2000

### **Reviewed by Monika Elbert**

Luckily, I came of age in the 1970s when women did not seem to need excuses for not wanting or not having children. I went to Douglass College, an all-women’s college, in the heyday of feminism, when most of my peers looked ahead to lives unlike those of our mothers, when many of us did not have the urge to have a baby. At that time, a book like Rochelle Ratner’s collection – an apology for childlessness—would have seemed superfluous. I think it is a sad testament to the present, conservative times that a book like Ratner’s has to exist at all – to explain away the phenomenon of childlessness, to make it seem less aberrant in the face of the witch-hunting advertising and consumerist media which pressure women to reproduce and which place as much value on “the baby” as it does on the husband, the house, and the car. Ratner’s book is meant for “the next childless woman not to feel so alone.”

Fortunately, Rochelle Ratner has put together a fine collection of essays,