PARENTS AND CHILDREN

Dear Mother, keep up your mind. Pray to Buddha silently. We will have a future and I hope it will be soon.

We want to swim in our own pond.
Clear or stinky, still it is ours.
Letter to My Mother,
tran thi nga

Then I looked again at this thief, this “Loaf-of-bread gunman” as the papers had tagged him. He had taken five loaves of bread, along with twelve dollars. Suddenly I could not stay there condemning this man, my father. It seemed such a waste, this magnificently strong man sitting there, his tremendous chest barely moving, hands
resting quietly, talking to me, his whole being showering torrents of words about me.
I Remember Papa,
harry dolan

Today at the beach my chubby-legged, brown-skinned daughter ran laughing into the water as fast as she could. My wife and I laughed watching her, until we heard behind us a low guttural curse and then an unpleasant voice raised in an imitation war whoop.
For My Indian Daughter,
lewis p. johnson

After the service at the funeral home, after we had moved outside, a woman
I didn’t know came over to me and said, “He’s happier where he is now.” I stared at this woman until she moved away. I still remember the little knob of a hat she was wearing. Then one of my dad’s cousins—I didn’t know the man’s name—reached out and took my hand. “We all miss him,” he said, and I knew he wasn’t saying it just to be polite.
I began to weep for the first time since receiving the news. I hadn’t been able to before. I hadn’t had the time, for one thing. Now, suddenly, I couldn’t stop. I held my wife and wept while she said and did what she could do to comfort me there in the middle of that summer afternoon.
My Father’s Life,
raymond carver

TRAN THI NGA

Letter to My Mother

Tran Thi Nga, who was born in China in 1927, was a social worker in Vietnam. In addition, she has worked as a journalist in both Asia and the United States. This letter, written in the early 1970s, suggests the connections she feels to her mother as well as the differences she sees between their lives and the places they live.

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.

Write a tribute to an older relative in your family. In this tribute, describe what you admire most about this person. What have you learned from observing and hearing about this person's life experiences and everyday values?

2.
At this point in your life, what is the greatest sacrifice you have made? What is the greatest sacrifice someone else has made for you? Write a descriptive narrative responding to either of these questions.

3.
If you could make one wish for either one, or both, of your parents, what would be your wish? Explain the significance of your response.

———

Dear Mother,
I do not know if you are receiving my letters, but I will keep writing to you as you are always in my mind.
We have been here three years now. I have moved from Greenwich and have a wooden shingled house in Cos Cob. We have a garden in the back where we plant vegetables, flowers in the front the way we used to when we were together. I have a pink dogwood tree that blooms in spring. It looks like the Hoa dai tree, but has no leaves, only flowers. We worked for months to clear away the poison ivy, a plant that turns your skin red and makes you itch.
We are near a beach, a school and a shopping center. Green lawns go down to the streets and there are many cars and garages. I am even learning to drive.
5
When we got our new house, people from the church came and took us to "Friendly's" for ice cream. Americans celebrate with ice cream. They have so many kinds—red like watermelon, green for pistachio, orange sherbet like Buddha's robes, mint chocolate chip. You buy it fast and take it away to eat. Our house is small, but a place to be together and discuss our daily life. At every meal we stare at the dishes you used to fix for us and think about you. We are sorry for you and for ourselves.
If we work hard here, we have everything, but we fear you are hungry and cold and lonesome. Last week we made up a package of clothes. We all tried to figure out how thin you must be now. I do not know if you will ever receive that package wrapped with all our thoughts.
I remember the last days when you encouraged us to leave the country and refused to go yourself. You said you were too old, did not want to leave your home and would be a burden to us. We realize now that you sacrificed yourself for our well-being.
You have a new grandson born in the United States. Thanh looked beautiful at her wedding in a red velvet dress and white veil, a yellow turban in her dark hair. She carried the chrysanthemums you love.
10
You always loved the fall in Hanoi. You liked the cold. We don't. We have just had the worst winter in a century, snow piled everywhere. I must wear a heavy coat, boots, fur

gloves, and a hat. I look like a ball running to the train station. I feel that if I fell down, I could never get up.
Your grandson is three, in nursery school. He speaks English so well that we are sad. We made a rule. We must speak Vietnamese at home so that the children will not forget their mother tongue.
We have made an altar to Father. We try to keep up our traditions so that we can look forward to the day we can return to our country, although we do not know when that will be.
Here we are materially well off, but spiritually deprived. We miss our country. Most of all we miss you. Should Buddha exist, we should keep praying to be reunited.
Dear Mother, keep up your mind. Pray to Buddha silently. We will have a future and I hope it will be soon.
We want to swim in our own pond.
Clear or stinky, still it is ours.
Your daughter,
Nga

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.
Describe the tone of Tran Thi Nga's letter to her mother. From the words and images she chooses to use, explain how you think she feels about the United States and about her homeland.

2.
In much of this letter, Nga writes about common, everyday scenes and events. She describes flowers, her neighborhood, ice cream, the clothing she wears, and even the weather. Why do you think she spends so much time explaining these simple things? What do you surmise she wants to convey to her mother?

3.
Look again at the parts of her life Nga chooses to share with her mother. Can you speculate on parts of her life she does not mention? What are possible explanations for these omissions?

4.
From reading this letter, do you think Nga believes that she will see her mother someday? Do you believe she will return to her homeland? Support your response with specific evidence or well-founded inferences from the text itself.

5.
In her last two lines, Nga writes: "We want to swim in our own pond/ Clear or stinky, still it is ours." Stop and think about this metaphor. What exactly is she comparing to a pond—her old way of life, her homeland, her neighborhood, her yard, or something else? What does the metaphor of the pond imply about her life now?

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Research

1.

Assume the part of Nga's mother. Write to your daughter responding to the letter from her that you have just read.

2.
What was China like in 1927? Research this time and place in history to get a feel of what life was like the year Nga's mother gave birth to her daughter.

3.
Read (or reread) Pearl S. Buck's *The Good Earth*. Examine the values and hierarchy within the Chinese family as suggested by the relationships among Wang Lung, O-'lan, their families, and their children. Write an essay discussing the roles and values of each member of Wang Lung and O-'lan's family.
HARRY DOLAN

I Remember Papa
In this essay, which first appeared in From the Ashes: Voices of Watts, *edited by Budd Schulberg, Harry Dolan shows the pitfalls his parents faced as they struggled with poverty, illness, and negative racial stereotypes. By explaining his father's life, Dolan urges readers to examine and, perhaps, reconsider their own views of families like his and, particularly, of the choices made by the men who are the fathers of those families.*
Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing
1.
Describe the earliest memories you have of your father (or grandfather, uncle, older brother, stepfather). Try to focus on specific, vivid images: eyes, hands, gestures, facial expressions, bits of conversation.

2.
If you were in charge of writing a manual that defined a "good" father, what would you include? List the top ten qualifications, in order of their importance to you, that you believe all fathers should possess. Then reflect on the reasons for your choices and for the order in which you arranged your choices.

3.
Describe a time when someone in your family embarrassed you; explain what happened and why you responded as you did.
———

The other night after attending a gratifying function which had been initiated to help the black man, specifically to help build a nursery for children of working mothers, and after seeing and hearing white people make speeches professing their understanding and desire to go to any length to help, I found myself suddenly cornered and forced to defend the fabled laziness of the black man.
What was especially surprising was the fact that I assumed this white acquaintance—since he had paid thirty dollars to attend this dinner held for the purpose of helping the black man—did, at least in part, have some sympathy with what his, the white people, had tried to accomplish.

As I stood there watching his eyes I became suspect of my own sincerity, for I stood attentively nodding my head and smiling. I lit a cigarette, raised an eyebrow, performed all of the white man's laws of etiquette, and all the while I knew if it had been others of my black brothers, they would have cursed him for his smugness and invited him outside to test his theory of black man's courage and laziness. Of course I did none of these things. I grinned as he indicated in no uncertain terms that as soon as the black man got off his lazy butt and took advantage of all the blessings that had been offered him for the last two hundred years, then he, the white man, would indeed be willing to help.

I could have answered him—and was tempted to, for he was obviously sincere. Instead, I found an excuse to slip away and let a white man fight my battle, a friend, even a close friend. I went to a far corner and blindly played a game of pool by myself as the voices of this man and my friend dissected me. I stacked the pool balls, leaned over the table, and remembered a black man I had known.

5

It was said of him later in his life that he had let his family down. He'd been lazy, no-account, a troublemaker. Maybe so, maybe so, but I can't help remembering nights of his pacing the squeaking floor muttering to himself, coming back across the floor, sitting down, his legs trembling as he listened to the woman plead for him not to do anything bad.

"I'll go to hell first before I'll let you and the children starve." God, how many times had I heard him say that! How many other men standing bunched in helpless stagnation have I heard vow to take a gun and get some food for their children! Yes, they were planning to commit a crime; yes, they were potential criminals. Then. They are usually black too—another crime, it seems.

I remember that man, but more I remember his woman, my mother. Curiously though, I never remember her dancing, running, playing; always lying down, the smell of disinfectant strong, the deep continuous coughing, the brown paper bag filled with the toilet paper red with bubbly spit and blood, lying half concealed under the bed.

I never remember her eating food such as bread, meat, potatoes; only apples and only Delicious apples. In those days five cents apiece. She was a small woman, barely five foot.

"Junior," she would say softly. She never spoke above a whisper. "Go to the store and get me an apple." The thin trembling hand would reverse itself and slide up and under the covers and under the pillow and then return as though of its own volition, the weight almost too much, and as I'd start out the door, she would always smile and say, "Hurry, Junior."

10

I'd nod, and always, always there seemed to be a need to hurry. Those trips were always made with a feeling of breathless fear. I didn't know why then, only that for some reason I must always come back as soon as possible.

I was returning with an especially large apple, walking along, tempted to bite just a tiny piece, when I turned the corner and saw the black police ambulance standing in front of my door. Suddenly I had to go to the bathroom so bad I couldn't move. I stood watching as two uniformed men came out with the stretcher, and then the sound of my sister's shrill voice hit me.

"Mama, Mama," she was screaming. I could see her twisting and swinging at the lady next door as she was held back. I stood there feeling the hot piss run down my trembling legs, feeling cold chills spatter through my body, causing frozen limbs to spasmodically begin to move. I forced myself toward the police wagon as the men opened the doors and slid the stretcher along the bare metal. I saw my mother's head bounce on the floor.
"Wait," I moaned, "don't hurt her." Then I was running, screaming, "Please don't hurt her."
I looked down at her pain-filled face, and she smiled, even then she smiled. I showed her the apple. The effort to nod seemed a terrible effort but she did, her eyes so very bright, so very shiny.
15
"You eat it, Junior, you and sis."
"What's wrong, Mama?" I asked softly. "You really, really sick now?"
She nodded.
"Your father will be home soon. Tell him I'm at the General Hospital. Tell him to—to hurry."
"I'll tell him, Mama," I promised. "I'll tell him to hurry, Mama." She nodded sadly and puckered her lips as she always did since we weren't allowed to kiss her.
20
That was the last time I saw my mother except at the grave. My father came to the funeral with two white men who stood on each side of him all the time. There were people crying all around us. My grandmother kept squeezing me and moaning. I saw my father try to cover his face but one of the men said something and he stood up stiffly after that. I didn't cry, because my mother seemed to look happier, more rested than I had ever seen her. For some reason, I was glad she was dead. I think maybe, except for us, she was too.
I was nine, my sister five. It was not until ten years later that I saw my father again.
We sat on opposite sides of a screen and talked into telephones. I had come there to tell him that in spite of my beginning, I had made it. I was nineteen, and a radioman in the U.S. Coast Guard, ready to fight and die for my country. There had been something mysterious about his smile.
"I'm proud of you, boy," he said. "You're a real man. You know I volunteered for the front lines too, but they turned me down."
We don't want you, I thought, we're not criminals, we're honest, strong. Then I looked again at this thief, this "Loaf-of-bread gunman" as the papers had tagged him. He had taken five loaves of bread, along with twelve dollars. Suddenly I could not stay there condemning this man, my father. It seemed such a waste, this magnificently strong man sitting there, his tremendous chest barely moving, hands resting quietly, talking to me, his whole being showering torrents of words about me.
25
"Be careful, boy, there are so many ways to fail, the pitfall sometimes seems to be the easiest way out. Beware of my future, for you must continue, you must live. You must, for in you are all the dreams of my nights, all the ambitions of my days."
A bell rang and we stood up and a man pointed me toward a heavy door. I looked back, and saw him standing easy, hands at his side, so very calm, yet my mind filled to overflowing with the many things he had not said. It was to be ten years before he walked again as a free man, that is, as a physically free man.

I remember an earlier time, an earlier chapter of my growing up. I remember the first time my mother said we were taking lunch to my father's job. We had been down to the welfare line and I had stood with her, our feet burning against the hot pavement, and slowly moved forward in the sun. Years later I stood in chow lines over half of the world, but no desert, no burning deck was as hot as that day.
At last we reached the man sitting at the desk and my mother handed him the book of stamps. She smiled, a weak almost timid smile, as he checked her name and thumbed her to the food line.
As we headed home, my wagon was loaded with cans of corned beef, powdered milk, powdered eggs, and white margarine that she would later color yellow to look like butter.
30
At home we made sandwiches and off we went to my father's job, to take him his lunch. I pulled my sister along in my wagon, a Red Flyer.
It was to be a picnic, a celebration really, my father's new job.
I remember the wagon did not have a tongue or handle but only a rope with which I pulled it wobbling along. We were excited, my sister and I, as we left our district of dirt streets and unpaved sidewalks and began to make our way along roads called boulevards and malls we had never had occasion to travel. The streets themselves were fascinating, so different. They were twice as wide, and there were exotic trees along the sidewalks and lo and behold trees down the center of the street as far as I could see and then we turned the corner and before us stretched an overwhelming sight. An overhead highway was being built. Columns rose to staggering heights, bulldozers thrust what seemed to me mountains of dirt before them, and hundreds, no thousands of men seemed to be crawling like ants hurrying from one point to another. Cranes lifted nets of steel and laid them in rows on the crushed rock.
I stared in awe at important-looking white men in metal hats, carrying rolls of papers which they intermittently studied, then pointing into space at what to me seemed only emptiness.
And then I saw my father. He sat among fifty other black men, all surrounded by great boulders marked with red paint. They all held steel chisels with which they cut along the marked lines. They would strike a certain point and the boulder would split into smaller pieces and as we approached there was a silence around them except for the pinging of the hammer against the chisel. In all the noise it was a lonely sound, futile, lost, oppressive. My father seemed to be concentrating, his tremendous arm whipping the air. He was stripped to the waist, black muscles popping sweat, goggled eyes for the metal and stone only. We stood there, the three of us, my mother, my sister, and I, and watched my father work for us, and as he conquered the huge boulder my chest filled with pride. Each stroke shouted for all the world to hear: This is my family and I love them! No one can tell me this was the act of a lazy man.
35
Suddenly a white man walked up and blew a whistle and the black men all looked up and stopped working. My father glanced over at me, grinned and winked. He was glistening with sweat, the smell strong and powerful. He dropped his big hand on my shoulder and guided me to a large boulder. "Hey, boy, you see me beat that thing to bits? This one's next," he said, indicating the one that shaded us from the sun. "I'll pound it to gravel by

nightfall.” It was a challenge he expected, he welcomed. That was my lazy, shiftless father.

And then one day they brought him home, his thumb, index, and middle finger gone from his left hand. They sat him in the kitchen chair and mumbled something about carelessness. He sat there for two hours before he answered our pleadings.

“Chain broke, I—I was guiding boulder. I couldn’t, I just couldn’t get my hand out from under in time—I, goddam it, Jean, they took my fingers off. I layed right there, my hand under the rock, and they nipped them like butchering a hog. Look at my goddam hand.”

My mother held him in her arms and talked to him. She spoke softly, so softly my sister and I, standing in the corner, couldn’t hear the words, only the soothing softness of her voice.

40

“Joe, Joe, we can.” And then he began to cry like—like I sometimes did when I was hurt deep inside and couldn’t do anything about it.

After that there was a change in him. My father had been a fighter. He had feared no man white or black. I remember the time we were sitting on a streetcar and a woman had forgotten her fare—or maybe she never had any in the first place. Anyway, the driver slammed the doors on her and held her squeezed between them.

My father jumped up, snatched the driver out of the seat, and let the woman out. He and the driver had words that led to battle and Pop knocked the driver down just as a patrolman arrived. The patrolman didn’t listen to any of the people that tried to explain what had happened. He just began to swing his night stick at my father’s head. It was a mistake. My father hit him once and even today I can see all the people laughing at the funny look on the policeman’s face as he staggered back all the way across the street and up against a building, slowly sagging down.

The police wagon arrived with four other policemen and one told him they were going to beat his brains in when they got him down town.

My pop had laughed then and backed against the building.

45

“I guess ain’t no sense me going peaceable then.”

They knocked out all his upper front teeth that day, but as he said later, “Them four white boys will think of me every time they shave.”

They finally overpowered him and dragged him, still struggling, to the wagon. One of them kept muttering, “He’s one fighting son of a black bitch, he’s a fighting son of a bitch.”

All the time I hadn’t said a word or cried or yelled as they stomped and kicked him. I had shut my eyes and held my lips tightly pressed together and I had done just as he’d always told me.

“You stay out of it, boy, stay real quiet, and when that wagon leaves, you run behind and keep it in sight. If they lose you, you ask someone where the closest police station is—that’s where I’ll be. You go home and tell your mother.”

50

That’s the way he had been before losing his left hand. Afterwards, well, it took a lot from him. He told me one day, laughing and shaking the nub as he called it, “If I’d only had the thumb, just the lousy thumb, I’d have it made.”

Gradually he lost the ability to see humor in the nub. I think the whole thing came to a head the night I killed the kitten.
We hadn't had meat or potatoes for over two weeks. Even the grease drippings were gone and my mother was too sick to raise her head from the pillow. So I had gotten the skillet and put it in the open grate. We had two cups of flour so I mixed water with it and poured it into the greasy skillet. I can still recall the coldness of the room on my back and the warmth from the grate on my face as my sister and I knelt and hungrily watched the flour brown.
You know, today my wife marvels at how, no matter what she puts before me, I eat with relish. My children say that I eat very fast. I pray to God they never have to experience the causes of my obsession. But back to the story—the flour finally hardened and I broke a piece for my sister and a piece for my mother and left mine in the skillet on the table.
I took my mother's piece over to the bed and put it in her hand. She didn't move so I raised her hand to her mouth and she began to suck on it. Then I heard my sister scream, "Topsy is eating your food, Junior, Topsy's eating your food!" I turned around to see the cat tearing at my tiny piece of hard dough. I went wild. I leaped across the room and grabbed the kitten by the tail and began slamming her against the wall.

"That's my food," I kept yelling, "my food!" At last I heard my sister screaming, "She's bleeding, you're killing Topsy. Here, here, eat my bread. Please don't kill her."
I stopped, horrified, staring at the limp nothing I now held. It was two weeks later that they got me to speak and that same night my father left the house for the last time. I don't say that what he did was right. No, it most assuredly was wrong. But what I do ask is, what else could he have done? I need an answer quickly now, today, right away, for I tell you this, my children will not starve, not here, not in this time of millions to foreign countries and fountains to throw tons of water upward to the sky, and nothing to the hungry, thirsty multitudes a stone's throw away.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.
How does Dolan feel about white people? Give specific evidence from the essay to support your response.

2.
Dolan entitles this piece, "I Remember Papa." However, he writes that "I remember that man, but more I remember his woman, my mother." Why then, doesn't he include the word "Mama" in his title? In your opinion, is this title a contradiction or an apt phrase that reflects his central idea?

3.
Describe Dolan's mother. What type of a person was she? How does Dolan's father compare or contrast to her? Why do you think he would remember her more than he remembers his father?

4.

Imagine you are a rider on the bus when Dolan's father frees the woman from the bus door and then fights with four policemen. What is your response? Is he heroic? Foolish? Wise? Noble? Headstrong? Or something else? Explain your answer.

5.
Dolan provides close-up, detailed views of several events in which his father plays a role. Examine these events and make inferences about how Dolan, as an adult writing this piece, feels about his father. How does this adult view compare with his views as a young boy and as a young man?

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Research

1.
By examining Dolan's childhood and adult views of his father, and by examining your own childhood and adult views of parents or other authority figures, think about how we try to discover what is true in our lives. How do our past memories embellish, cloud, tint, or taint our present perceptions? To what extent should we pay heed to our memories, and to what extent should we disregard them?

2.
Argue for or against the following proposition: It is acceptable to commit a crime when your family's survival is on the line.

3.
Dolan's father leaves his sick wife and two small children for the last time after his son frantically flings a kitten against the wall. Dolan says, "I don't say what he did was right. No, it most assuredly was wrong. But what I do ask is, what else could he have done?" Write an essay responding to Dolan's question. Did his father have any other options? What were the roadblocks in his way? Did he have anything or anyone who could have helped him out?

GRACE MING-YEE WAI

Chinese Puzzle

Grace Ming-Yee Wai, a first-generation Chinese-American, grew up in Memphis, Tennessee. When she was ten years old, her father was shot to death during a robbery that netted the killer twenty-six dollars in change. In the following essay, Wai offers a collage of episodes from her childhood as a way of describing her father and of suggesting how both his life and his death affected the values she developed.

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.
Describe what you would consider to be the ideal family. In what ways is your own family similar to or different from this ideal?

2.
Take twenty minutes today to write about your father in your journal. After you do this freewriting, come to some conclusions about what you know and don't know about your father.

———

I am a first generation Chinese-American woman educated in both private and public American schools. I grew up in the mid-South city of Memphis, Tennessee, where there were very few other Asian families. We lived in the South, I realized after my teens, primarily for economic reasons. Although there were more Asians in cities such as New York, Los Angeles, or San Francisco, it would have been very expensive to live in those cities, and our grocery store would have had much more competition. My parents immigrated to the United States from Hong Kong before I was born, for a better life for themselves and their children. Neither had a college education, but both emphasized hard work and the importance of education. Like all parents, they hoped their children would be fortunate enough to receive a quality education that would provide future opportunity and financial security.

My sister, brother, and I have been lucky to receive an education and all of us have reached or are near our goals, but not without pain and sacrifices. When I was 10 years old, my father was shot and killed while being robbed for $26 in change. He was the favorite son of seven living children. He took in one of my cousins from Hong Kong so she could study nursing. My youngest uncle was the only one of their generation to become a professional, primarily because he was lucky enough to have the opportunity to go to dental school at the University of Tennessee in Memphis.

Dad owned a small grocery store in a poor neighborhood. My parents worked more than 12 hours a day, seven days a week. We lived above the store in five rooms and one bathroom. At different times, my grandmother, three uncles, an aunt and her two sons also lived with us. My brother, sister and I had a maid who came six days a week to take care of us. I became very attached to her and cried on her day off. I still send Willie Christmas cards every year. My father had a fierce temper. Whenever something upset him a little, he yelled a lot, so my brother, sister, and I shuddered at the thought of angering him. His bark was worse than his bite, however. He was also very fair. He loved us all very much. He and Mom worked hard for us, for the family. Family meant everything.

Since Mom and Dad worked so much, there was not much time for us kids. We occasionally went to Shoney's for a hamburger. It was a big treat to pat the statue of Big Boy on the stomach upon entering and exiting the restaurant. Dad took me to the dog track once because I wanted to go with him. I think I just wanted very much to have him for myself since he was always helping other people and working in the store with Mom.

I was the first to go to school because I was the oldest child. When I was four years old, I went to prekindergarten at a small, private, Episcopal school. On my first day, Dad drove me to the door, but he would not take me to my class. I knew where my class was located because we visited earlier to meet my teachers. My heart was pounding with a force I did not know my little body had when I jumped out of the car, and I know fear was evident on my face, but Dad didn't budge. I asked, "Daddy, aren't you coming with me?" He replied, "No, Grace, you know where your class is and who your teachers are. You can go by yourself." He was teaching me to be self-sufficient at four. Still, it must have been difficult for him to watch his firstborn walk alone into a world of which he would not have a part. It was my first day of independence.

I clearly remember my sixth birthday because Dad was in the hospital with pneumonia. He was working so hard he paid very little attention to his health. As a result, he spent almost the entire summer before I entered first grade in the hospital. Mom visited him nightly. On my birthday I was allowed to see him. I have memories of sitting happily in the lobby of the hospital talking to the nurses, telling them with a big smile that I was going to see my dad because it was my birthday. I couldn't wait to see him because children under 12 were not allowed to visit patients, so I had not seen him in a long time. When I entered his hospital room, I saw tubes inserted into his nose and needles stuck in his arm. He was very, very thin. I was frightened and wanted to cry, but I was determined to have a good visit. So I stayed for a while, and he wished me a happy birthday. When it was time to go, I kissed him good-bye and waited until I left his room to cry.

In first grade, I lived with my grandparents because a public elementary school was just across the street. My father bought the house for my grandparents with plans for us three children to attend Levi Elementary School since it was close and convenient. My brother and sister stayed with my parents because Nancy was only four, and Robert was in kindergarten at my old school which was near the store. I felt very isolated and alone in that great big house away from my immediate family.

I learned from my father while in first grade one valuable lesson that still affects me now: never be afraid to ask questions. I was very self-conscious and timid in school. My grades were falling. My father asked me: "How are you going to learn if you don't ask questions?" Even then, when I was six years of age, he tried to make me realize the importance of taking initiative in school. He made me realize improving in school was up to me because he could not be with me all the time.

In those days, my grandmother took care of me. She had moved to America when I was three years old to be with my youngest uncle when he came to go to college. My grandfather joined us three years later. Every morning my grandmother got me dressed and made my breakfast. While I sat at the dining room table, she combed and brushed my hair to prepare me for school. She spoke no English, so we conversed in Cantonese.

Every day after school, I called the store to talk to my mother. I really missed being with my parents, brother, and sister and looked forward to their weekly visits. Of course, only one parent visited at a time because someone had to be at the store. I was very jealous that Robert and Nancy were able to stay with my parents.

After school, my grandfather liked to see what I learned that day. It was always a treat to show him the new words I was taught to write in school. Every night I rewrote all the new words for him. He always smiled with approval. Sometimes he helped me with my mathematics. My grandfather played with numbers a lot and actually had an abacus on his desk, which he used daily.

My grandmother did not read or write English. I was learning material she would never understand. She was my caretaker. She cooked and cleaned the house. She fed and bathed me. Neither of my grandparents worked. At that time, they were in their mid-sixties. They had no desire to learn the culture of the new land. Their livelihood depended upon my father, and they were happy merely to be near their children's families.

In the summer, my sister and brother joined me at our grandparents' house. We played a lot more since we had a yard. At the store, we stayed upstairs mostly. When summer was over, I was alone with my grandparents again. That year, in second grade, I was often

chased around by Albert, a little black boy in my class. He would try to kiss me. Other children were fascinated by my straight black hair, and would constantly try to touch it. I was jeered at by other children for being Chinese, for having squinty eyes and a flat nose. I was almost ashamed of being Chinese, and being so young I did not understand it at all. I had grown up around other blacks who had frequented our store. Many were my friends, but in school I was having trouble—with black and white children. There were no other Chinese children in my school.

I refrained from telling my parents about Albert because earlier in the school year, I had been hit on the head during recess by a classmate with a baseball bat and had to have stitches. My father told me I should not have been playing so recklessly in school. But one day, in my attempt to hide from Albert, I fell and scraped both knees badly. The principal found me and told me that I should tell my teacher if he did it again. After the next episode, I told my teacher, but made the mistake of embarrassing myself by telling in front of the class. What hurt even more was the fact that my teacher did not do anything about it. Finally, I decided I must tell my parents. I think I feared they would think I had done something wrong, that it was my fault—that perhaps I provoked the boy. I also feared my father's temper.

First I told my mother, and she encouraged me to tell my dad about it. He would make the final decision. I sighed and then proceeded to creep upstairs where he was taking a nap and sat outside their bedroom. When my father awoke, fearfully, I told him about what was happening to me in school. Dad was so understanding. To my relief, he was calm and collected, not angry. He asked me what I wanted to do. He asked if I would like to go to the private school my brother and sister attended. Would I! I was so happy. Yes! I wanted to go back to school with Robert and Nancy! That meant, also, that I would be moving back to the store to live with my parents.

I realize now that Dad was very angry. Not at me, but angry with the teachers and the principal of my elementary school for ignoring my distress. He took me out of Levi in the middle of the year. I feel for the people Dad dealt with to get me out of school. I imagine he probably went there red-faced and smoking with anger to fill out the necessary paperwork. It is funny, though, how Dad let me feel I made the decision to leave Levi.

My father was a loving and devoted son to my grandparents. He made sure they were happy and comfortable. He wanted them with us so he was assured of their well-being. My grandfather had fallen ill when I was around seven years old. The doctors thought he had cancer. Twenty years ago, that meant certain death. The night the diagnosis was given, I was alone with my parents after the store was closed. Dad was crying. I was frightened because I had never before seen him cry. Taking off his glasses and looking at me with red, teary eyes and unmistakable pain, he asked me, "Do you love your YeYe?" It was difficult to speak to him when he seemed so vulnerable, but with all the courage I could muster and tears welling up in my eyes, I answered, "Yes." Mom was behind Dad comforting him. At seven years of age, I was learning what it is to love your parents, and I was learning even Dads cry. Thankfully, my grandfather's cancer went into remission after treatment.

When Dad caught wind of the fact that I was doing poorly on my multiplication tables in third grade, he drilled me nightly in the back of the store where he stood behind the meat

counter. I remember sweating and feeling extremely apprehensive and fearful of his wrath if I answered incorrectly. I quickly learned my multiplication tables inside out.
On the day he died, Dad came to my grandparents' house where my brother, sister, and I were staying for Thanksgiving weekend. He planned to go car-shopping with his older brother. I went along with them. We had lunch at Shoney's afterward, at my suggestion, of course. I did not care about car-shopping. I just wanted to spend time with Dad, even if we were with my uncle. I chattered away while we had lunch. When we returned to my grandparents' house, he took a nap in my bedroom before going back to work at the store. I was to wake him in an hour. Upon leaving, he picked me up for a big hug and kiss good-bye. I had my arms around his neck and my head on his shoulder. He told me to be good before putting me down. I did not know it would be the last time I would see him alive.
20
Later, in the afternoon, I heard my grandfather making dozens of phone calls, saying with grief and shock: "Ah, Davey say joh loh, Davey say joh loh!" meaning, "Davey's dead, Davey's dead!" I couldn't believe his words and rushed to tell my sister and brother, who responded with disbelief and dismay. They thought I was lying to them, playing a cruel trick on them. Later, when we had heard the grown-ups talking and were in fact sure Dad was killed, the three of us went up to our favorite spot in the attic where we cried and cried and hugged one another. We were in the way of the adults. They did not know how to talk to us, nor would they answer our questions. We only had each other for comfort.
My aunts and uncles from various parts of the country left their families to rush to Memphis the day Dad was shot. We had a full house of people who came by to bring food, to pay respects. It was very late in the evening before all but family were left in our house. It seemed peaceful once again. My best friend brought a plant the next day. We were both at a loss for words—we did not need them. It was enough just to see her.
The next day, there was an article in the newspaper about what happened. My aunt said it did not do my father justice. The robber was never caught by the police. In fact, the police later found the bag of change lying in an alley nearby. My mom's reaction was calm as she told me, "Even if they find him, it won't bring your daddy back, Grace."
The day of my father's funeral was rainy and cold. There was a long procession of cars on the way to the cemetery. My father was well respected by others in the community and had many friends. My grandmother did not attend the funeral. As long as I knew her, she never once set foot in a hospital, nor did she go to funerals. My grandfather also elected not to attend, but as the hearse passed by their house, he ran out, down the long walkway to the gate with a black raincoat held above his head. He wished to open the coffin to see his son one more time, but it was nailed shut. It was only possible for him to touch the casket.
All my teachers and the principal of our school attended Dad's funeral. Willie was there too. We were all crying when they came to see us. Later, my best friend told me the teachers didn't think we would be returning to school for a while. They were surprised to find us in class the following day. My friends did not know how to react to me, and in homeroom, my teacher asked, in front of everyone, if I was okay. I was not okay. I was in pain, but what could I do? I lost my father. He was never coming back. I tried to be strong, and looking down at my desk, I said, "Yes, I'm okay."
25

We were so young: Robert eight, and Nancy seven. Now we are grown adults. I wonder what it would have been like if Dad were living during our developing years. I suspect I would be a very different person. I am very much a feminist and a professional now. I don't think he would have allowed me to move 1,000 miles from home to live on my own after college. I probably would not have been allowed to participate in many things such as dating, parties, and school activities if he were alive during my adolescence, for he was extremely strict.

We visited his gravesite every year on his birthday, on the anniversary of his death, and on holidays such as New Year's and Christmas. Following my grandmother's Asian traditions, we brought incense to burn at the gravesite, and food: a bowl of rice, fruit, a main dish for his spirit to eat. We also burned special paper, which my grandmother stated represented money for Dad to spend in the afterlife. We did these things for her since she would not go to the cemetery. Following American tradition, we also brought flowers. When the incense was lit, the money burning, and the food set out with chopsticks along with tea and sometimes scotch (he had to have something to drink as well as utensils!), we took turns paying our respects by bowing to the headstone three times and silently told his spirit whatever we wanted to tell him, whatever was on our minds. When done, we bowed again three times to bid farewell until the next time.

I write this now because it is more than 14 years since my father's death. I think about how fast those 14 years have gone by and all the changes and growing that have taken place. I wonder if he is proud of me now. I wonder what I would be like today if he were alive. Even though I only had him in the first 10 years of my life, I know there is much of him in me. I have his temperament, his strictness, and his self-righteous nature. I have his sense of fairness, generosity, and loyalty. He taught me much in those first 10 years. There are also scars from his death because my family did not talk about our loss. We took the blow and went on with life.

In the last four years, I have also lost both grandparents. They are buried with my father. One day, my mother and uncles will join them. Whenever I return to Memphis to visit family and friends, I also go to the cemetery to visit my father and grandparents. I don't follow all the traditions my grandmother so treasured, but I do carry incense and flowers with me. I still bow and have my talk with each. Those are always peaceful and contemplative moments. Sometimes I drive by the old store, the old house, and the private elementary school to relive some of my past.

Death does not get easier. The people I love will not be with me forever. That hurts. Death, however, is a part of life we all face at some point. Nevertheless, it is a comfort to me to believe that after death, those I love go somewhere nice and comfortable. My grandmother always wished to return as a bird—to fly over the earth—soaring and free. I hope she made it.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.

Describe the relationship between Wai and her father. Were they close? Distant? Comfortable with one another? Something else?

2.

Compare and contrast the values held within Wai's Chinese family with the values held within a typical American family today. How do you account for any differences?

3.
Why might Wai have had trouble with some of the children in school but not with the same children in her neighborhood?

4.
In paragraph 17, Wai writes that she “was learning what it is to love your parents.” What does she mean by this statement?

5.
What do the events surrounding the father’s funeral signify about the relationship between Wai’s family and the surrounding community?

6.
In paragraph 27, Wai muses, “I wonder if he is proud of me now.” What do you think? From his expectations for his young daughter, would he be proud of this grown one? Explain.

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Research

1.
Interview a Chinese American person in order to discover his or her view on how one goes about “blending” cultures.

2.
Research the Chinese beliefs regarding the meaning of death. Report to the class on your findings.

LEWIS P. JOHNSON

For My Indian Daughter

Born in 1935, Lewis Johnson grew up in Harbor Springs, Michigan, where his great-grandfather lived out his final days as the last recognized chief of the Potawatomi Ottawas. A surveyor by profession, Johnson has done extensive research on Indian approaches to interpretive dreams. He has written many essays, like “For My Indian Daughter,” that suggest the complexities raised by the modern juxtaposition of Native American culture and values with traditional Western European culture and values.

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.
Choose one story from your family’s past—one in which you take a great deal of pride. After describing the incident, explain what you think it reveals about your family’s values.

2.
Write about a time someone ridiculed or belittled you. How did you react? How do you evaluate the episode now that you can look back at it?

3.

In three minutes, list all the words, phrases, and images that come to your mind when you hear the word *Indian*. Then read over your list and reflect on what you have written. What is first on your list? What words did you end with? Can you see any groups of words or phrases that go together?

———

My little girl is singing herself to sleep upstairs, her voice mingling with the sounds of the birds outside in the old maple trees. She is two and I am nearly 50, and I am very taken with her. She came along late in my life, unexpected and unbidden, a startling gift. Today at the beach my chubby-legged, brown-skinned daughter ran laughing into the water as fast as she could. My wife and I laughed watching her, until we heard behind us a low guttural curse and then an unpleasant voice raised in an imitation war whoop.

I turned to see a fat man in a bathing suit, white and soft as a grub, as he covered his mouth and prepared to make the Indian war cry again. He was middle-aged, younger than I, and had three little children lined up next to him, grinning foolishly. My wife suggested we leave the beach, and I agreed. I knew the man was not unusual in his feelings against Indians. His beach behavior might have been socially unacceptable to more civilized whites, but his basic view of Indians is expressed daily in our small town, frequently on the editorial pages of the county newspaper, as white people speak out against Indian fishing rights and land rights, saying in essence, "Those Indians are taking our fish, our land." It doesn't matter to them that we were here first, that the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled in our favor. It matters to them that we have something they want, and they hate us for it. Backlash is the common explanation of the attacks on Indians, the bumper stickers that say, "Spear an Indian, Save a Fish," but I know better. The hatred of Indians goes back to the beginning when white people came to this country. For me it goes back to my childhood in Harbor Springs, Michigan.

Harbor Springs is now a summer resort for the very affluent, but a hundred years ago it was the Indian village of my Ottawa ancestors. My grandmother, Anna Showanessy, and other Indians like her, had their land there taken by treaty, by fraud, by violence, by theft. They remembered how whites had burned down the village at Burt Lake in 1900 and pushed the Indians out. These were the stories in my family.

When I was a boy my mother told me to walk down the alleys in Harbor Springs and not to wear my orange football sweater out of the house. This way I would not stand out, not be noticed, and not be a target.

I wore my orange sweater anyway and deliberately avoided the alleys. I was the biggest person I knew and wasn't really afraid. But I met my comeuppance when I enlisted in the U.S. Army. One night all the men in my barracks gathered together and, gang-fashion, pulled me into the shower and scrubbed me down with rough brushes used for floors, saying, "We won't have any dirty Indians in our outfit." It is a point of irony that I was cleaner than any of them. Later in Korea I learned how to kill, how to bully, how to hate Koreans. I came out of the war tougher than ever and, strangely, white.

I went to college, got married, lived in La Porte, Indiana, worked as a surveyor and raised three boys. I headed Boy Scout groups, never thinking it odd when the Scouts did imitation Indian dances, imitation Indian lore.
One day when I was 35 or thereabouts I heard about an Indian powwow. My father used to attend them and so with great curiosity and a strange joy at discovering a part of my heritage, I decided the thing to do to get ready for this big event was to have my friend make me a spear in his forge. The steel was fine and blue and iridescent. The feathers on the shaft were bright and proud.
10
In a dusty state fairground in southern Indiana, I found white people dressed as Indians. I learned they were "hobbyists," that is, it was their hobby and leisure pastime to masquerade as Indians on weekends. I felt ridiculous with my spear, and I left.
It was years before I could tell anyone of the embarrassment of this weekend and see any humor in it. But in a way it was that weekend, for all its silliness, that was my awakening. I realized I didn't know who I was. I didn't have an Indian name. I didn't speak the Indian language. I didn't know the Indian customs. Dimly I remembered the Ottawa word for dog, but it was a baby word, *kahgee,* not the full word, *muhkahgee,* which I was later to learn. Even more hazily I remembered a naming ceremony (my own). I remembered legs dancing around me, dust. Where had that been? Who had I been? "Suwaukquat," my mother told me when I asked, "where the tree begins to grow."
That was 1968, and I was not the only Indian in the country who was feeling the need to remember who he or she was. There were others. They had powwows, real ones, and eventually I found them. Together we researched our past, a search that for me culminated in the Longest Walk, a march on Washington in 1978. Maybe because I now know what it means to be Indian, it surprises me that others don't. Of course there aren't very many of us left. The chances of an average person knowing an average Indian in an average lifetime are pretty slim.
Circle
Still, I was amused one day when my small, four-year-old neighbor looked at me as I was hoeing in my garden and said, "You aren't a real Indian, are you?" Scotty is little, talkative, likable. Finally I said, "I'm a real Indian." He looked at me for a moment and then said, squinting into the sun, "Then where's your horse and feathers?" The child was simply a smaller, whiter version of my own ignorant self years before. We'd both seen too much TV, that's all. He was not to be blamed. And so, in a way, the moronic man on the beach today is blameless. We come full circle to realize other people are like ourselves, as discomfiting as that may be sometimes.
As I sit in my old chair on my porch, in a light that is fading so the leaves are barely distinguishable against the sky, I can picture my girl asleep upstairs. I would like to prepare her for what's to come, take her each step of the way saying, there's a place to avoid, here's what I know about this, but much of what's before her she must go through alone. She must pass through pain and joy and solitude and community to discover her own inner self that is unlike any other and come through that passage to the place where she sees all people are one, and in so seeing may live her life in a brighter future.
Suggestions for Writing and Discussion
1.

Why do you think Johnson wrote this piece? Who might his intended audience be? Primarily his daughter? Other Indians? Non-Indians? All Americans? Himself ?

2.
What inferences does Johnson make about the middle-aged man on the beach? On what evidence does he base these inferences? What do you think of Johnson's reaction? Was it appropriate, cowardly, overreacting, something else? Explain.

3.
Do you agree with Johnson's claim that the feelings suggested by the man's actions are not "unusual"? Explain.

4.
Why is the middle section of this piece called "Theft" and the final section entitled "Circle"?

5.
Describe and evaluate Johnson's feelings and reactions when he attends the powwow.
Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Research
1.
In the last paragraph of the section called "Theft," Johnson says, "That was 1968, and I was not the only Indian in the country who was feeling the need to remember who he or she was." Research the mood and events in America in 1968 by using the *New York Times Index* or by skimming several 1968 issues of popular magazines such as *Newsweek, Time,* and *Life*. What conclusions can you draw about the attitudes and concerns during this year in U.S. history?

2.
Find accounts of the Longest Walk on Washington in 1978 (mentioned by Johnson in the final paragraph of the "Theft" section). You might use the *New York Times Index* or the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* to aid your research. After locating several sources, write a detailed account of one moment during the walk. Before you begin to write, adopt the point of view of someone who was on the scene, perhaps a participant, a conservative U.S. senator, a reporter, or a police officer who is on duty.

3.
Find information on the Native Americans who live (or lived) in or near your part of the country. Write an essay describing beliefs, rituals, family life, and actions of these people.
RAYMOND CARVER

My Father's Life
Born in Clatskanie, a logging town in Oregon, Raymond Carver (1938–1988) graduated from California State University at Humboldt. Following a year at the Writer's Workshop at the University of Iowa, he taught writing at the University of California, the University of Texas, and Syracuse University. When he was not teaching, he worked at a series of

jobs, including truck driver, custodian, and deliveryman, to support himself while he wrote poetry and fiction. In this memoir of his father, Carver evaluates the effects of the hardships his father faced as a laborer during the Great Depression of the 1930s. He also examines the impact of his father's psychological depression on his family.

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.
It's a fact: Most people don't even come close to developing their full potential and talents. Freewrite about what your talents are and whether or not you're making the most of these talents today.

2.
What is your definition of success? Keeping this definition in mind, what do you believe a person needs to do to succeed? In answering this question, think about people you know who have, according to your definition, achieved some degree of success. Also think about those who have failed to achieve what you see as success.

My dad's name was Clevie Raymond Carver. His family called him Raymond and friends called him C.R. I was named Raymond Clevie Carver Jr. I hated the "Junior" part. When I was little my dad called me Frog, which was okay. But later, like everybody else in the family, he began calling me Junior. He went on calling me this until I was thirteen or fourteen and announced that I wouldn't answer to that name any longer. So he began calling me Doc. From then until his death, on June 17, 1967, he called me Doc, or else Son.

When he died, my mother telephoned my wife with the news. I was away from my family at the time, between lives, trying to enroll in the School of Library Science at the University of Iowa. When my wife answered the phone, my mother blurted out, "Raymond's dead!" For a moment, my wife thought my mother was telling her that I was dead. Then my mother made it clear *which* Raymond she was talking about and my wife said, "Thank God. I thought you meant *my* Raymond."

My dad walked, hitched rides, and rode in empty boxcars when he went from Arkansas to Washington State in 1934, looking for work. I don't know whether he was pursuing a dream when he went out to Washington. I doubt it. I don't think he dreamed much. I believe he was simply looking for steady work at decent pay. Steady work was meaningful work. He picked apples for a time and then landed a construction laborer's job on the Grand Coulee Dam. After he'd put aside a little money, he bought a car and drove back to Arkansas to help his folks, my grandparents, pack up for the move west. He said later that they were about to starve down there, and this wasn't meant as a figure of speech. It was during that short while in Arkansas, in a town called Leola, that my mother met my dad on the sidewalk as he came out of a tavern.

"He was drunk," she said. "I don't know why I let him talk to me. His eyes were glittery. I wish I'd had a crystal ball." They'd met once, a year or so before, at a dance. He'd had girlfriends before her, my mother told me. "Your dad always had a girlfriend, even after we married. He was my first and last. I never had another man. But I didn't miss anything."

5

They were married by a justice of the peace on the day they left for Washington, this big, tall country girl and a farmhand-turned-construction worker. My mother spent her wedding night with my dad and his folks, all of them camped beside the road in Arkansas.

In Omak, Washington, my dad and mother lived in a little place not much bigger than a cabin. My grandparents lived next door. My dad was still working on the dam, and later, with the huge turbines producing electricity and the water backed up for a hundred miles into Canada, he stood in the crowd and heard Franklin D. Roosevelt when he spoke at the construction site. “He never mentioned those guys who died building that dam,” my dad said. Some of his friends had died there, men from Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Missouri.

He then took a job in a sawmill in Clatskanie, Oregon, a little town alongside the Columbia River. I was born there, and my mother has a picture of my dad standing in front of the gate to the mill, proudly holding me up to face the camera. My bonnet is on crooked and about to come untied. His hat is pushed back on his forehead, and he’s wearing a big grin. Was he going in to work or just finishing his shift? It doesn’t matter. In either case, he had a job and a family. These were his salad days.

In 1941 we moved to Yakima, Washington, where my dad went to work as a saw filer, a skilled trade he’d learned in Clatskanie. When war broke out, he was given a deferment because his work was considered necessary to the war effort. Finished lumber was in demand by the armed services, and he kept his saws so sharp they could shave the hair off your arm.

After my dad had moved us to Yakima, he moved his folks into the same neighborhood. By the mid-1940s the rest of my dad’s family—his brother, his sister, and her husband, as well as uncles, cousins, nephews, and most of their extended family and friends—had come out from Arkansas. All because my dad came out first. The men went to work at Boise Cascade, where my dad worked, and the women packed apples in the canneries. And in just a little while, it seemed—according to my mother—everybody was better off than my dad. “Your dad couldn’t keep money,” my mother said. “Money burned a hole in his pocket. He was always doing for others.”

10

The first house I clearly remember living in, at 1515 South Fifteenth Street, in Yakima, had an outdoor toilet. On Halloween night, or just any night, for the hell of it, neighbor kids, kids in their early teens, would carry our toilet away and leave it next to the road. My dad would have to get somebody to help him bring it home. Or these kids would take the toilet and stand it in somebody else’s backyard. Once they actually set it on fire. But ours wasn’t the only house that had an outdoor toilet. When I was old enough to know what I was doing, I threw rocks at the other toilets when I’d see someone go inside. This was called bombing the toilets. After a while, though, everyone went to indoor plumbing until, suddenly, our toilet was the last outdoor one in the neighborhood. I remember the shame I felt when my third-grade teacher, Mr. Wise, drove me home from school one day. I asked him to stop at the house just before ours, claiming I lived there.

I can recall what happened one night when my dad came home late to find that my mother had locked all the doors on him from the inside. He was drunk, and we could feel the house shudder as he rattled the door. When he’d managed to force open a window, she hit him between the eyes with a colander and knocked him out. We could see him down there on the grass. For years afterward, I used to pick up this colander—it was as

heavy as a rolling pin—and imagine what it would feel like to be hit in the head with something like that. It was during this period that I remember my dad taking me into the bedroom, sitting me down on the bed, and telling me that I might have to go live with my Aunt LaVon for a while. I couldn't understand what I'd done that meant I'd have to go away from home to live. But this, too—whatever prompted it—must have blown over, more or less, anyway, because we stayed together, and I didn't have to go live with her or anyone else.

I remember my mother pouring his whiskey down the sink. Sometimes she'd pour it all out and sometimes, if she was afraid of getting caught, she'd only pour half of it out and then add water to the rest. I tasted some of his whiskey once myself. It was terrible stuff, and I don't see how anybody could drink it.

After a long time without one, we finally got a car, in 1949 or 1950, a 1938 Ford. But it threw a rod the first week we had it, and my dad had to have the motor rebuilt.

15

"We drove the oldest car in town," my mother said. "We could have had a Cadillac for all he spent on car repairs." One time she found someone else's tube of lipstick on the floorboard, along with a lacy handkerchief. "See this?" she said to me. "Some floozy left this in the car."

Once I saw her take a pan of warm water into the bedroom where my dad was sleeping. She took his hand from under the covers and held it in the water. I stood in the doorway and watched. I wanted to know what was going on. This would make him talk in his sleep, she told me. There were things she needed to know, things she was sure he was keeping from her.

Every year or so, when I was little, we would take the North Coast Limited across the Cascade Range from Yakima to Seattle and stay in the Vance Hotel and eat, I remember, at a place called the Dinner Bell Cafe. Once we went to Ivar's Acres of Clams and drank glasses of warm clam broth.

In 1956, the year I was to graduate from high school, my dad quit his job at the mill in Yakima and took a job in Chester, a little sawmill town in northern California. The reasons given at the time for his taking the job had to do with a higher hourly wage and the vague promise that he might, in a few years' time, succeed to the job of head filer in this new mill. But I think, in the main, that my dad had grown restless and simply wanted to try his luck elsewhere. Things had gotten a little too predictable for him in Yakima. Also, the year before, there had been the deaths, within six months of each other, of both his parents.

But just a few days after graduation, when my mother and I were packed to move to Chester, my dad penciled a letter to say he'd been sick for a while. He didn't want us to worry, he said, but he'd cut himself on a saw. Maybe he'd got a tiny sliver of steel in his blood. Anyway, something had happened and he'd had to miss work, he said. In the same mail was an unsigned postcard from somebody down there telling my mother that my dad was about to die and that he was drinking "raw whiskey."

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When we arrived in Chester, my dad was living in a trailer that belonged to the company. I didn't recognize him immediately. I guess for a moment I didn't want to recognize him. He was skinny and pale and looked bewildered. His pants wouldn't stay up. He didn't look like my dad. My mother began to cry. My dad put his arm around her and patted her

shoulder vaguely, like he didn't know what this was all about, either. The three of us took up life together in the trailer, and we looked after him as best we could. But my dad was sick, and he couldn't get any better. I worked with him in the mill that summer and part of the fall. We'd get up in the mornings and eat eggs and toast while we listened to the radio, and then go out the door with our lunch pails. We'd pass through the gate together at eight in the morning, and I wouldn't see him again until quitting time. In November I went back to Yakima to be closer to my girlfriend, the girl I'd made up my mind I was going to marry.

He worked at the mill in Chester until the following February, when he collapsed on the job and was taken to the hospital. My mother asked if I would come down there and help. I caught a bus from Yakima to Chester, intending to drive them back to Yakima. But now, in addition to being physically sick, my dad was in the midst of a nervous breakdown, though none of us knew to call it that at the time. During the entire trip back to Yakima, he didn't speak, not even when asked a direct question. ("How do you feel, Raymond?" "You okay, Dad?") He'd communicate if he communicated at all, by moving his head or by turning his palms up as if to say he didn't know or care. The only time he said anything on the trip, and for nearly a month afterward, was when I was speeding down a gravel road in Oregon and the car muffler came loose. "You were going too fast," he said.

Back in Yakima a doctor saw to it that my dad went to a psychiatrist. My mother and dad had to go on relief, as it was called, and the county paid for the psychiatrist. The psychiatrist asked my dad, "Who is the President?" He'd had a question put to him that he could answer. "Ike," my dad said. Nevertheless, they put him on the fifth floor of Valley Memorial Hospital and began giving him electroshock treatments. I was married by then and about to start my own family. My dad was still locked up when my wife went into this same hospital, just one floor down, to have our first baby. After she had delivered, I went upstairs to give my dad the news. They let me in through a steel door and showed me where I could find him. He was sitting on a couch with a blanket over his lap. *Hey,* I thought. *What in hell is happening to my dad?* I sat down next to him and told him he was a grandfather. He waited a minute and then he said, "I feel like a grandfather." That's all he said. He didn't smile or move. He was in a big room with a lot of other people. Then I hugged him, and he began to cry. Somehow he got out of there. But now came the years when he couldn't work and just sat around the house trying to figure what next and what he'd done wrong in his life that he'd wound up like this. My mother went from job to crummy job. Much later she referred to that time he was in the hospital, and those years just afterward, as "when Raymond was sick." The word *sick* was never the same for me again.

In 1964, through the help of a friend, he was lucky enough to be hired on at a mill in Klamath, California. He moved down there by himself to see if he could hack it. He lived not far from the mill, in a one-room cabin not much different from the place he and my mother had started out living in when they went west. He scrawled letters to my mother, and if I called she'd read them aloud to me over the phone. In the letters, he said it was touch and go. Every day that he went to work, he felt like it was the most important day of his life. But every day, he told her, made the next day that much easier. He said for her to tell me he said hello. If he couldn't sleep at night, he said, he thought about me and the good times we used to have. Finally, after a couple of months, he regained some of his

confidence. He could do the work and didn't think he had to worry that he'd let anybody down ever again. When he was sure, he sent for my mother.
25
He'd been off from work for six years and had lost everything in that time—home, car, furniture, and appliances, including the big freezer that had been my mother's pride and joy. He'd lost his good name too—Raymond Carver was someone who couldn't pay his bills—and his self-respect was gone. He'd even lost his virility. My mother told my wife, "All during that time Raymond was sick we slept together in the same bed, but we didn't have relations. He wanted to a few times, but nothing happened. I didn't miss it, but I think he wanted to, you know."

During those years I was trying to raise my own family and earn a living. But, one thing and another, we found ourselves having to move a lot. I couldn't keep track of what was going down in my dad's life. But I did have a chance one Christmas to tell him I wanted to be a writer. I might as well have told him I wanted to become a plastic surgeon. "What are you going to write about?" he wanted to know. Then, as if to help me out, he said, "Write about stuff you know about. Write about some of those fishing trips we took." I said I would, but I knew I wouldn't. "Send me what you write," he said. I said I'd do that, but then I didn't. I wasn't writing anything about fishing, and I didn't think he'd particularly care about, or even necessarily understand, what I was writing in those days. Besides, he wasn't a reader. Not the sort, anyway, I imagined I was writing for.

Then he died. I was a long way off, in Iowa City, with things still to say to him. I didn't have the chance to tell him goodbye, or that I thought he was doing great at his new job. That I was proud of him for making a comeback. My mother said he came in from work that night and ate a big supper. Then he sat at the table by himself and finished what was left of a bottle of whiskey, a bottle she found hidden in the bottom of the garbage under some coffee grounds a day or so later. Then he got up and went to bed, where my mother joined him a little later. But in the night she had to get up and make a bed for herself on the couch. "He was snoring so loud I couldn't sleep," she said. The next morning when she looked in on him, he was on his back with his mouth open, his cheeks caved in. *Graylooking,* she said. She knew he was dead—she didn't need a doctor to tell her that. But she called one anyway, and then she called my wife.

Among the pictures my mother kept of my dad and herself during those early days in Washington was a photograph of him standing in front of a car, holding a beer and a stringer of fish. In the photograph he is wearing his hat back on his forehead and has this awkward grin on his face. I asked her for it and she gave it to me, along with some others. I put it up on my wall, and each time we moved, I took the picture along and put it up on another wall. I looked at it carefully from time to time, trying to figure out some things about my dad, and maybe myself in the process. But I couldn't. My dad just kept moving further and further away from me and back into time. Finally, in the course of another move, I lost the photograph. It was then that I tried to recall it, and at the same time make an attempt to say something about my dad, and how I thought that in some important ways we might be alike. I wrote the poem when I was living in an apartment house in an urban area south of San Francisco, at a time when I found myself, like my dad, having trouble with alcohol. The poem was a way of trying to connect up with him.

Photograph of My Father in His Twenty-Second Year

October. Here in this dank, unfamiliar kitchen
I study my father's embarrassed young man's face.
Sheepish grin, he holds in one hand a string
of spiny yellow perch, in the other
a bottle of Carlsberg beer.

In jeans and flannel shirt, he leans
against the front fender of a 1934 Ford.
He would like to pose brave and hearty for his posterity,
wear his old hat cocked over his ear.
All his life my father wanted to be bold.

But the eyes give him away, and the hands
that limply offer the string of dead perch
and the bottle of beer. Father, I love you,
yet how can I say thank you, I who can't hold my liquor either
and don't even know the places to fish.

30

The poem is true in its particulars, except that my dad died in June and not October, as the first word of the poem says. I wanted a word with more than one syllable to it to make it linger a little. But more than that, I wanted a month appropriate to what I felt at the time I wrote the poem—a month of short days and failing light, smoke in the air, things perishing. June was summer nights and days, graduations, my wedding anniversary, the birthday of one of my children. June wasn't a month your father died in.

After the service at the funeral home, after we had moved outside, a woman I didn't know came over to me and said, "He's happier where he is now." I stared at this woman until she moved away. I still remember the little knob of a hat she was wearing. Then one of my dad's cousins—I didn't know the man's name—reached out and took my hand. "We all miss him," he said, and I knew he wasn't saying it just to be polite.

I began to weep for the first time since receiving the news. I hadn't been able to before. I hadn't had the time, for one thing. Now, suddenly, I couldn't stop. I held my wife and wept while she said and did what she could do to comfort me there in the middle of that summer afternoon.

I listened to people saying consoling things to my mother, and I was glad that my dad's family had turned up, had come to where he was. I thought I'd remember everything that was said and done that day and maybe find a way to tell it sometime. But I didn't. I forgot it all, or nearly. What I do remember is that I heard our name used a lot that afternoon, my dad's name and mine. But I knew they were talking about my dad. *Raymond,* these people kept saying in their beautiful voices out of my childhood. *Raymond*.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.
From the opening paragraph alone, what do you know about Carver, his father, and their relationship?

2.
Why do you think Carver's mother continued to stay on with her husband despite all his apparent failings as a husband? If you could have given her advice at any time during her life, would you have urged her to stay or to leave? Explain.

3.
What do you think about the father's advice to his son regarding writing (paragraph 26)? Why doesn't Carver initially take his father's advice? Why does he finally decide to follow this advice?

4.
What forces, both external and internal, contribute to the downfall of Carver's father?

5.
Describe Carver's relationship with his father and also with his mother. With whom was he closest? Explain.

6.
In the poem, Carver shows a picture of his father with a string of fish in one hand and a beer in the other. Why does he choose these two particular images?

7.
In his poem, Carver writes that he loved his dad but he couldn't thank him. From the details in the poem, explain what he loved about his father, and explain why he cannot thank him.

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Research

1.
Write a personal narrative describing your relationship with your father or your mother. Refrain from telling the reader too much about your feelings or the depth of this relationship. Instead, focus on specific events and specific details in order to show the reader (and perhaps yourself) what the relationship was all about.

2.
Model Carver's poem by writing a poem of your own, for either your father or your mother.

3.
Research the causes and effects of alcoholism.

4.
Was Carver's father a good father or a poor one? Write a paper in which you argue for either one of these positions. To write this paper, you'll need to develop a definition of either a good father or a poor father (or, perhaps, of both).

VIRGINIA A. HUIE

Mom's in Prison: Where Are the Kids?

Following her graduation from Stanford University with an M.A. in communications, Virginia A. Huie began her career as a freelance investigative journalist and, in addition, accepted a position as Leo Beranek fellow at WCVB, a television station in Boston, Massachusetts. "Mom's in Prison: Where Are the Kids?" was originally published in The Progressive *magazine in 1992.*

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.

Explore the many things children often need from their parents and then answer this question: What do you believe is the single most important thing a child needs to receive from a parent? Explain your conclusion.

2.

What was your greatest fear when you were younger? Do you think most children share this same fear? Explain.

3.

Reflect what life might be like for children whose mothers are in prison.

———

One morning nine years ago, Jennifer Anderson, a twenty-five-year-old mother of two in Ohio, gave her son Tommy a reassuring kiss and hug. "Mommy always comes back," she told him. "Don't worry."

The next time two-year-old Tommy (the names in this story have been changed) heard from his mother, she was 2,000 miles away. "Tommy, I'm going to be here for a long time," Anderson said as she tried to stop her voice from trembling. "I won't be able to come home for a long, long time."

Anderson was calling Tommy from the California Institution for Women at Frontera. After a month-long trial in Concord, California, she was convicted of shooting and killing her husband.

Tommy did not know what "killed" or "prison" meant. Nor did he have a clear understanding of how long a six-year sentence was. But he could sense that his world had turned upside down.

5

Tommy's plight is not unique. A growing number of children are separated each year from their mothers by jail and prison bars. Approximately 80 per cent of imprisoned women are mothers of dependent children under the age of eighteen. Between 70 and 90 per cent are single parents, most of them unemployed and relying on public assistance. Prior to imprisonment, 85 per cent of these women had legal custody of their children and were the primary caregivers.

According to the Center for Children of Incarcerated Parents at Pacific Oaks College in Pasadena, the population of children of imprisoned parents has soared from 21,000 in 1978 to one million in 1990 and could reach two million by the year 2000.

These children suffer traumatic loss, guilt, fear, and a sense of failure. For the infant, maternal separation may spell a sudden end to the only secure, continuous bond she knows. A toddler feels bewildered and becomes anxious and fearful that she will be abandoned again by other caregivers. The school-age child is tormented by the fear that

she is to blame; she thinks she was “bad” and that’s why Mommy’s in jail. The adolescent feels rejection and bitterness.
The children are innocent victims of their parents’ crimes, prisoners’ advocates say, sidelined by a penal system which emphasizes punishment over rehabilitation. Since the focus of corrections systems has been on individual punishment, inmates’ family ties and the special needs of their children have been treated as a marginal concern. Consequently, when a parent is “doing time” on the inside through imprisonment, the children are “doing time” on the outside. The children are, in effect, punished along with the parent—by shock of sudden migration through revolving care arrangements, and by the possible permanent loss of the parent-child bond.
“They shouldn’t be punished,” says Marilyn Nystrom, an instructor from Las Positas College in Livermore who teaches the TALK (Teaching and Loving Kids) program at Santa Rita County Jail. “We have a responsibility to these children. Once you arrest somebody, you’re responsible for their physical well-being. That makes us responsible, in turn, for the children who are not being taken care of.”
10
The plight of children of imprisoned parents is one of the major unaddressed issues in our country. “These kids are really a forgotten population,” says Ellen Barry, director of Legal Services for Prisoners with Children, a national, San Francisco-based advocacy group. “They haven’t done anything wrong. . . . It’s very likely that they could end up with very serious problems in the school system, possibly end up in jail themselves as juveniles.”
Barry stresses the immediate need to confront the devastating and prolonged effects on children when a mother lands behind bars. “It’s important to do something now to make sure these kids are not forgotten,” says Barry, “and that they get the kind of attention and love they need now so that they don’t feel they have to perpetuate a damaging cycle.”

Given the nation’s burgeoning prison population, the plight of such children is becoming more apparent, their needs more pressing. More women than ever before are entering the Federal, state, and local lockups. In the last decade, the female prison population jumped 300 per cent—from 13,482 to more than 40,000. The Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that most women are behind bars for nonviolent offenses, which include larceny, petty theft, forgery, welfare fraud, prostitution, and drug abuse. Hard economic times and stressful home lives underlie many of these women’s crimes. And the nation’s tough-on-crime policy and stiffer sentencing laws are ensnaring increasing numbers of women.
“If a woman has an eighth-grade education, she can’t afford child care, she’s got three kids, and her old man split on her, what in the world is she going to do besides sell her body at night while her kids are sleeping, or write a bad check?” says the Reverend Deborah Haffner, director of the Elizabeth Fry Center, a San Francisco-based halfway house for inmate mothers and their young children.
A majority of children of female prisoners are cared for by extended family members, usually grandparents, fathers, or other relatives. Others are placed in foster homes. In the mother’s absence, children are uprooted and shuttled from one home to another, pulled out of schools, separated from siblings, taunted by peers, and left alone to cope with uncertainties of disrupted lives.
15

Studies of early childhood development show that individualized nurturing and continuous attachment with a primary caregiver are required to ensure the physical and emotional well-being of an infant or young child. Because incarcerated women are usually primary caregivers, the loss of a mother is particularly acute for these children. Erosion of this vital family tie seriously injures a child's ability to receive and give love, establish meaningful interpersonal relationships, form a set of values, and exercise his or her intellectual abilities.

Children who lack affection may manifest a greater tendency to develop self-destructive and delinquent behavior that imperils not only the child, but other people as well. "The children who fail to bond have a much higher risk of growing up without a conscience," warns Nystrom, who is also a marriage, family, and child therapist. These children are ideal candidates for the next generation of offenders, Nystrom says.

"I call it a hereditary stretch of incarceration," says Deputy Lin Otey of Santa Rita County Jail, "We've had whole families in jail at the same time." Otey says familial cellmates are commonplace at the jail, which currently houses 2,400 male and female inmates.

In recognition of the social costs incurred by putting prison walls between parent and child, a growing number of correctional institutions nationwide are adopting innovative programs to address the needs of families in crisis. These programs take into consideration the deleterious effects of parent-child separation of children, and the importance of consistent care during childhood. The Prison MATCH (Mothers and Their Children) program in San Bruno, California, provides a child-centered environment for contact visits between inmates and their children. Established thirteen years ago, Prison MATCH is a national model for prison children's centers throughout the country.

Across the Bay, the TALK program at Santa Rita County Jail offers a similar setting in the jail's gymnasium to facilitate bonding between mother and child. TALK, modeled after a program at the Sybil Brand Institution in Los Angeles, marked its first anniversary last May. Both Prison MATCH and TALK programs were founded on the premise that frequent contact between an inmate and her child is vital in preserving and strengthening the mother-child tie and in alleviating the child's emotional distress. The programs try to help inmate parents enhance childrearing skills through parenting classes, self-esteem workshops, and counseling services.

Since most female offenders are imprisoned for nonviolent crimes, correctional halfway houses for these women and their children are often a more suitable and cost-effective alternative than incarceration. California sponsors the Community Prisoner Mother-Infant Care Program, a network of seven community-based halfway houses for low-risk female prisoners and their children. In this approach, young children live with their mothers while the mothers serve their sentences. Job training and rehabilitative services are also provided to prepare the mothers for reintegration into the community.

Community groups also provide assistance. Friends Outside, a prisoner outreach enterprise, drives children to facilities to visit their inmate parents, and takes the children on outings to the circus, fairs, and beaches. With eighteen chapters throughout California, Friends Outside also provides referrals for food, shelter, and jobs for prisoners about to be released. Grandparents' support networks, ex-offender family groups, and substance-

abuse programs are also appearing across the nation as more families deal with the stress of imprisonment.

As politicians authorize plans to build more walled compounds ringed with barbed wire to warehouse the nation's mushrooming inmate population, they might consider the advice of Elizabeth Fry, a Quaker who led the prison reform movement in the early Nineteenth Century. In one of her reports to the King of France she wrote:

"When thee builds a prison thee had better build with the thought ever in thy mind that thee and thy children may occupy the cells."

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.
Respond to the style and tone of this piece. How would you characterize it, and do you find it effective? Why or why not?

2.
Reflect back to your journal response to what children need most from their parents. Based on your reaction, which of Huie's solutions address this need? Which do not?

3.
In paragraph 11, Huie includes a source who claims that children suffer devastating and prolonged effects when their mothers are in prison. What data does Huie include in this essay to support this statement?

4.
In paragraph 14, Huie reveals that the majority of children whose mothers are in prison are taken care of by grandparents, fathers, or other relatives. Discuss the ways in which these situations could be nurturing and supportive of children as well as the potential drawbacks to children in these situations.

5.
Throughout this piece, Huie discusses the effects on children when their mothers are in prison. However, she makes little mention of how an imprisoned father might affect children. Why do you think this is, and what's your reaction to her approach?

6.
What's your reaction to the quote at the end of this piece by Elizabeth Fry? Do you agree with it? Disagree? Explain.

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Research

1.
Get in touch with the closest local women's prison in your area and find out if it has any programs like the MATCH and TALK programs mentioned in this article for mothers and children. Write up a report of your findings as well as your recommendations.

2.
Research any other current social problem—welfare reform, alcoholism, spousal abuse, gender roles, poverty, to name a few—and research the effects this problem has on children today.

GRACE PALEY

The Loudest Voice

Born into a family of socialist Russian Jews in 1922, Grace Paley spent hours listening to the tales of her parents, uncles, and aunts. These stories, told alternately in Russian, English, and Yiddish, inspired Paley, as she explained in an interview with Shenandoah *magazine (1981). When she first began writing, she found herself too focused on "me—me—me." To get beyond this point, she started listening carefully to "other people's voices" and integrating them into her work by "writing with an accent." In "The Loudest Voice," she offers a fictional picture of a young Jewish girl who learns to listen to the voices around her and to value them all, yet to recognize that her own voice is especially important.*

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.
What is one ability that makes you feel proud of yourself—something you can do better than most others?

2.
If you could play a starring role in any play or film you've seen, which would you choose? Explain.

———

There is a certain place where dumbwaiters boom, doors slam, dishes crash; every window is a mother's mouth bidding the street shut up, go skate somewhere else, come home. My voice is the loudest.

There, my own mother is still as full of breathing as me and the grocer stands up to speak to her. "Mrs. Abramowitz," he says, "people should not be afraid of their children."

"Ah, Mr. Bialik," my mother replies, "if you say to her or her father 'Ssh,' they say, 'In the grave it will be quiet.'"

"From Coney Island to the cemetery," says my papa. "It's the same subway; it's the same fare."

5

I am right next to the pickle barrel. My pinky is making tiny whirlpools in the brine. I stop a moment to announce: "Campbell's Tomato Soup. Campbell's Vegetable Beef Soup. Campbell's S-c-otch Broth . . ."

"Be quiet," the grocer says, "the labels are coming off."

"Please, Shirley, be a little quiet," my mother begs me.

In that place the whole street groans: Be quiet! Be quiet! but steals from the happy chorus of my inside self not a tittle or a jot.

There, too, but just around the corner, is a red brick building that has been old for many years. Every morning the children stand before it in double lines which must be straight. They are not insulted. They are waiting anyway.

10

I am usually among them. I am, in fact, the first, since I begin with "A."

One cold morning the monitor tapped me on the shoulder. "Go to Room 409, Shirley Abramowitz," he said. I did as I was told. I went in a hurry up a down staircase to Room

409, which contained sixth-graders. I had to wait at the desk without wiggling until Mr. Hilton, their teacher, had time to speak.
After five minutes he said, “Shirley?”
“What?” I whispered.
He said, “My! My! Shirley Abramowitz! They told me you had a particularly loud, clear voice and read with lots of expression. Could that be true?” 15
“Oh, yes,” I whispered.
“In that case, don’t be silly; I might very well be your teacher someday. Speak up, speak up.”
“Yes,” I shouted.
“More like it,” he said. “Now, Shirley, can you put a ribbon in your hair or a bobby pin? It’s too messy.”
“Yes!” I bawled.
20
“Now, now, calm down.” He turned to the class. “Children, not a sound. Open at page 39. Read till 52. When you finish, start again.” He looked me over once more. “Now, Shirley, you know, I suppose, that Christmas is coming. We are preparing a beautiful play. Most of the parts have been given out. But I still need a child with a strong voice, lots of stamina. Do you know what stamina is? You do? Smart kid. You know, I heard you read ‘The Lord is my shepherd’ in Assembly yesterday. I was very impressed. Wonderful delivery. Mrs. Jordan, your teacher, speaks highly of you. Now listen to me, Shirley Abramowitz, if you want to take the part and be in the play, repeat after me, ‘I swear to work harder than I ever did before.’”
I looked to heaven and said at once, “Oh, I swear.” I kissed my pinky and looked at God.
“That is an actor’s life, my dear,” he explained. “Like a soldier’s, never tardy or disobedient to his general, the director. Everything,” he said, “absolutely everything will depend on you.”
That afternoon, all over the building, children scraped and scrubbed the turkeys and the sheaves of corn off the schoolroom windows. Goodbye Thanksgiving. The next morning a monitor brought red paper and green paper from the office. We made new shapes and hung them on the walls and glued them to the doors.
The teachers became happier and happier. Their heads were ringing like the bells of childhood. My best friend Evie was prone to evil, but she did not get a single demerit for whispering. We learned “Holy Night” without an error. “How wonderful!” said Miss Glacé, the student teacher. “To think that some of you don’t even speak the language!” We learned “Deck the Halls” and “Hark! The Herald Angels.” . . . They weren’t ashamed and we weren’t embarrassed.
25
Oh, but when my mother heard about it all, she said to my father: “Misha, you don’t know what’s going on there. Cramer is the head of the Tickets Committee.”
“Who?” asked my father. “Cramer? Oh yes, an active woman.”
“Active? Active has to have a reason. Listen,” she said sadly, “I’m surprised to see my neighbors making tra-la-la for Christmas.”
My father couldn’t think of what to say to that. Then he decided: “You’re in America! Clara, you wanted to come here. In Palestine the Arabs would be eating you alive. Europe

you had pogroms. Argentina is full of Indians. Here you got Christmas. . . . Some joke, ha?"
"Very funny, Misha. What is becoming of you? If we came to a new country a long time ago to run away from tyrants, and instead we fall into a creeping pogrom, that our children learn a lot of lies, so what's the joke? Ach, Misha, your idealism is going away."
30
"So is your sense of humor."
"That I never had, but idealism you had a lot of."
"I'm the same Misha Abramovitch, I didn't change an iota. Ask anyone."
"Only ask me," says my mama, may she rest in peace. "I got the answer."
Meanwhile the neighbors had to think of what to say too.
35
Marty's father said: "You know, he has a very important part, my boy."
"Mine also," said Mr. Sauerfeld.
"Not my boy!" said Mrs. Klieg. "I said to him no. The answer is no. When I say no! I mean no!"
The rabbi's wife said, "It's disgusting!" But no one listened to her. Under the narrow sky of God's great wisdom she wore a strawberry-blond wig.
Every day was noisy and full of experience. I was Right-hand Man. Mr. Hilton said: "How could I get along without you, Shirley?"
40
He said: "Your mother and father ought to get down on their knees every night and thank God for giving them a child like you."
He also said: "You're absolutely a pleasure to work with, my dear, dear child."
Sometimes he said: "For God's sakes, what did I do with the script? Shirley! Shirley! Find it."
Then I answered quietly: "Here it is, Mr. Hilton."
Once in a while, when he was very tired, he would cry out: "Shirley, I'm just tired of screaming at those kids. Will you tell Ira Pushkov not to come in till Lester points to that star the second time?"
45
Then I roared: "Ira Pushkov, what's the matter with you? Dope! Mr. Hilton told you five times already, don't come in till Lester points to that star the second time."
"Ach, Clara," my father asked, "what does she do there till six o'clock she can't even put the plates on the table?"
"Christmas," said my mother coldly.
"Ho! Ho!" my father said. "Christmas. What's the harm? After all, history teaches everyone. We learn from reading this is a holiday from pagan times also, candles, lights, even Chanukah. So we learn it's not altogether Christian. So if they think it's a private holiday, they're only ignorant, not patriotic. What belongs to history, belongs to all men. You want to go back to the Middle Ages? Is it better to shave your head with a secondhand razor? Does it hurt Shirley to learn to speak up? It does not. So maybe someday she won't live between the kitchen and the shop. She's not a fool."
I thank you, Papa, for your kindness. It is true about me to this day. I am foolish but I am not a fool.
50

That night my father kissed me and said with great interest in my career, “Shirley, tomorrow’s your big day. Congrats.”
“Save it,” my mother said. Then she shut all the windows in order to prevent tonsillitis.
In the morning it snowed. On the street corner a tree had been decorated for us by a kind city administration. In order to miss its chilly shadow our neighbors walked three blocks east to buy a loaf of bread. The butcher pulled down black window shades to keep the colored lights from shining on his chickens. Oh, not me. On the way to school, with both my hands I tossed it a kiss of tolerance. Poor thing, it was a stranger in Egypt.
I walked straight into the auditorium past the staring children. “Go ahead, Shirley!” said the monitors. Four boys, big for their age, had already started work as propmen and stagehands.
Mr. Hilton was very nervous. He was not even happy. Whatever he started to say ended in a sideward look of sadness. He sat slumped in the middle of the first row and asked me to help Miss Glacé. I did this, although she thought my voice too resonant and said, “Show-off !”
55
Parents began to arrive long before we were ready. They wanted to make a good impression. From among the yards of drapes I peeked out at the audience. I saw my embarrassed mother.
Ira, Lester, and Meyer were pasted to their beards by Miss Glacé. She almost forgot to thread the star on its wire, but I reminded her. I coughed a few times to clear my throat. Miss Glacé looked around and saw that everyone was in costume and on line waiting to play his part. She whispered, “All right . . .” Then:
Jackie Sauerfeld, the prettiest boy in first grade, parted the curtains with his skinny elbow and in a high voice sang out:

“Parents dear
We are here
To make a Christmas play in time.
It we give
In narrative
And illustrate with pantomime.”

He disappeared.
My voice burst immediately from the wings to the great shock of Ira, Lester, and Meyer, who were waiting for it but were surprised all the same.
60
“I remember, I remember, the house where I was born . . .”
Miss Glacé yanked the curtain open and there it was, the house—an old hayloft, where Celia Kornbluh lay in the straw with Cindy Lou, her favorite doll. Ira, Lester, and Meyer moved slowly from the wings toward her, sometimes pointing to a moving star and sometimes ahead to Cindy Lou.
It was a long story and it was a sad story. I carefully pronounced all the words about my lonesome childhood, while little Eddie Braunstein wandered upstage and down with his shepherd’s stick, looking for sheep. I brought up lonesomeness again, and not being understood at all except by some women everybody hated. Eddie was too small for that

and Marty Groff took his place, wearing his father's prayer shawl. I announced twelve friends, and half the boys in the fourth grade gathered round Marty, who stood on an orange crate while my voice harangued. Sorrowful and loud, I declaimed about love and God and Man, but because of the terrible deceit of Abie Stock we came suddenly to a famous moment. Marty, whose remembering tongue I was, waited at the foot of the cross. He stared desperately at the audience. I groaned, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The soldiers who were sheiks grabbed poor Marty to pin him up to die, but he wrenched free, turned again to the audience, and spread his arms aloft to show despair and the end. I murmured at the top of my voice, "The rest is silence, but as everyone in this room, in this city—in this world—now knows, I shall have life eternal."

That night Mrs. Kornbluh visited our kitchen for a glass of tea.

"How's the virgin?" asked my father with a look of concern.

65

"For a man with a daughter, you got a fresh mouth, Abramovitch."

"Here," said my father kindly, "have some lemon, it'll sweeten your disposition."

They debated a little in Yiddish, then fell in a puddle of Russian and Polish. What I understood next was my father, who said, "Still and all, it was certainly a beautiful affair, you have to admit, introducing us to the beliefs of a different culture."

"Well, yes," said Mrs. Kornbluh. "The only thing . . . you know Charlie Turner—that cute boy in Celia's class—a couple others? They got very small parts or no part at all. In very bad taste, it seemed to me. After all, it's their religion."

"Ach," explained my mother, "what could Mr. Hilton do? They got very small voices; after all, why should they holler? The English language they know from the beginning by heart. They're blond like angels. You think it's so important they should get in the play? Christmas . . . the whole piece of goods . . . they own it."

70

I listened and listened until I couldn't listen any more. Too sleepy, I climbed out of bed and kneeled. I made a little church of my hands and said, "Hear, O Israel . . ." Then I called out in Yiddish, "Please, good night, good night. Ssh." My father said, "Ssh yourself," and slammed the kitchen door. I was happy. I fell asleep at once. I had prayed for everybody: my talking family, cousins far away, passersby, and all the lonesome Christians. I expected to be heard. My voice was certainly the loudest.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1. What kind of a person is Shirley Abramowitz? If you were in sixth grade with her, do you think you two would be friends? Explain.

2. Shirley has a reputation for a "loud, clear voice." When you were in sixth grade, were you known for any outstanding characteristic?

3. Mr. Hilton tells Shirley that an actor's life is much like a soldier's: She cannot be late, and she must always listen to the general (the director). Create an analogy that explains what your life as a student is like. Develop and explain the comparison you make.

4.
Although both are practicing Jews, Shirley's parents find themselves divided on the issue of letting her participate in the Christmas program. Describe each parent's reactions. Do you sympathize equally with each position, or do you find yourself favoring one or the other? Explain.

5.
Only Mrs. Klieg won't allow her son to be in the Christmas play. In your opinion, when most parents are under pressure related to a controversial issue, do they give in so as to please their children? So as to please the school? Explain your answer.

6.
What does the Christmas tree on the corner symbolize to the Jewish residents who live nearby?

7.
Shirley's mother comes to the performance even though she is embarrassed and opposed to her daughter's performing. Why, then, does she come? What does her action say about her?

8.
What point does Mrs. Kornbluh make when she expresses her concern with the children who got such small parts in the play? How does her view of the selection of the cast differ from Mr. Hilton's? What are his primary concerns as he casts the play?

9.
Why, in the end, does Shirley see the Christians as "lonesome"? What is your response to this observation?
Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Research
1.
This story is told from Shirley's point of view. Rewrite any episode in the story through the eyes of another character.

2.
If you (or one of your children) were asked to take part in a religious celebration that was contrary to your own religious beliefs, would you do it? Would you allow your child to do it? Why or why not?

3.
Research the holy days and special observances of several different religions. Write an essay discussing significant similarities and differences you discovered.
SEAMUS HEANEY

Digging
Born in 1939 in Northern Ireland, Seamus Heaney grew up on his family's farm. Following graduation from Queen's University at Belfast, he became a professor of

English and, in 1966, published his first collection of poems, Death of a Naturalist. *Many of his poems are rooted in his experience of life as an Irish Catholic and in his response to the traditions that have shaped him. In addition to several volumes of poetry, Heaney has also published* Preoccupations *(1980), a collection of critical and autobiographical prose pieces.*

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.
When you think back on a grandparent or any of your other ancestors, what one object comes to mind? Explain.

2.
Reflect on the ways in which you are both like and unlike your parents and your grandparents.

———

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests; snug as a gun.

Under my window, a clean rasping sound
When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:
5
My father, digging. I look down

Till his straining rump among the flowerbeds
Bends low, comes up twenty years away
Stooping in rhythm through potato drills
Where he was digging.

10
The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft
Against the inside knee was levered firmly.
He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep
To scatter new potatoes that we picked
Loving their cool hardness in our hands.

15
By God, the old man could handle a spade.
Just like his old man.

My grandfather cut more turf in a day
Than any other man on Toner's bog.
Once I carried him milk in a bottle
20
Corked sloppily with paper. He straightened up
To drink it, then fell to right away

Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods
Over his shoulder, going down and down
For the good turf. Digging.

25
The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap
Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge
Through living roots awaken in my head.
But I've no spade to follow men like them.

Between my finger and my thumb
30
The squat pen rests.
I'll dig with it.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.
Make a list of the words and images that caught your attention while you were reading this poem, and come to some conclusion as to why these particular words and images might be so powerful.

2.
What common thread unites the generations in this poem?

3.
Reflect on the verbs, metaphors, and verbals Heaney uses to describe the work of his ancestors. Now look at the verbs that describe the work he does. Based on these contrasts, what conclusions can you draw as to how the speaker might view his father's work compared to his own?

4.
Based on this poem, would you be drawn to other poems by this author? Why or why not?

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Research

1.
Read another poem by Heaney that is also often anthologized—"Midterm Break." Write an essay in which you compare or contrast it to "Digging."

2.
Memorize and give an oral presentation of this poem. Before doing this, however, first write a reflection about this poem. Then, after memorizing it, write an essay in which you reflect on how you now see the poem. Compared to your initial reading, do you appreciate, enjoy, or understand the poem any better because of memorizing it? Can you make any conclusions as to how one comes to meaning in poetry?

TOPICS FOR MAKING CONNECTIONS:
PARENTS AND CHILDREN

1.
Referring to at least three of the selections in this chapter, write an essay comparing different approaches to parenting. As part of the comparison, evaluate these approaches and explain which you most admire.

2.
What do children contribute to their parents' lives? Refer to at least three selections in this chapter as you respond to this question.

3.
Are parents to blame for how children turn out? Write an essay that takes a stand on this issue. For support, use reference sources you have consulted, your own experience, and several selections from this chapter.

4.
Analyze the inequalities and pressures that men and women experience at certain ages. Choose one specific age period (childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, middle age, old age). As you write on this topic, use reference sources (including interviews with people currently in the age group you chose) and, in addition, refer to examples in this chapter.

5.
Choose an author or a person described in one of the selections in this chapter. Write a letter from that individual's point of view to the author or to a person described in one of the other selections. To complete this task, you'll need to consider what the writer might want to say to the recipient of the letter. What advice, consolation, or observations might he or she offer? (For example, what advice might Harry Dolan give to Raymond Carver as he looks back at his father's life?)

RAYMOND CARVER

My Father's Life

Born in Clatskanie, a logging town in Oregon, Raymond Carver (1938–1988) graduated from California State University at Humboldt. Following a year at the Writer's Workshop at the University of Iowa, he taught writing at the University of California, the University of Texas, and Syracuse University. When he was not teaching, he worked at a series of jobs, including truck driver, custodian, and deliveryman, to support himself while he wrote poetry and fiction. In this memoir of his father, Carver evaluates the effects of the hardships his father faced as a laborer during the Great Depression of the 1930s. He also examines the impact of his father's psychological depression on his family.

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.
It's a fact: Most people don't even come close to developing their full potential and talents. Freewrite about what your talents are and whether or not you're making the most of these talents today.

2.
What is your definition of success? Keeping this definition in mind, what do you believe a person needs to do to succeed? In answering this question, think about people you know who have, according to your definition, achieved some degree of success. Also think about those who have failed to achieve what you see as success.

My dad's name was Clevie Raymond Carver. His family called him Raymond and friends called him C.R. I was named Raymond Clevie Carver Jr. I hated the "Junior" part. When I was little my dad called me Frog, which was okay. But later, like everybody else in the family, he began calling me Junior. He went on calling me this until I was thirteen or fourteen and announced that I wouldn't answer to that name any longer. So he began calling me Doc. From then until his death, on June 17, 1967, he called me Doc, or else Son.

When he died, my mother telephoned my wife with the news. I was away from my family at the time, between lives, trying to enroll in the School of Library Science at the University of Iowa. When my wife answered the phone, my mother blurted out, "Raymond's dead!" For a moment, my wife thought my mother was telling her that I was dead. Then my mother made it clear *which* Raymond she was talking about and my wife said, "Thank God. I thought you meant *my* Raymond."

My dad walked, hitched rides, and rode in empty boxcars when he went from Arkansas to Washington State in 1934, looking for work. I don't know whether he was pursuing a dream when he went out to Washington. I doubt it. I don't think he dreamed much. I believe he was simply looking for steady work at decent pay. Steady work was meaningful work. He picked apples for a time and then landed a construction laborer's job on the Grand Coulee Dam. After he'd put aside a little money, he bought a car and drove back to Arkansas to help his folks, my grandparents, pack up for the move west. He said later that they were about to starve down there, and this wasn't meant as a figure of speech. It was during that short while in Arkansas, in a town called Leola, that my mother met my dad on the sidewalk as he came out of a tavern.

"He was drunk," she said. "I don't know why I let him talk to me. His eyes were glittery. I wish I'd had a crystal ball." They'd met once, a year or so before, at a dance. He'd had girlfriends before her, my mother told me. "Your dad always had a girlfriend, even after we married. He was my first and last. I never had another man. But I didn't miss anything."

5

They were married by a justice of the peace on the day they left for Washington, this big, tall country girl and a farmhand-turned-construction worker. My mother spent her wedding night with my dad and his folks, all of them camped beside the road in Arkansas.

In Omak, Washington, my dad and mother lived in a little place not much bigger than a cabin. My grandparents lived next door. My dad was still working on the dam, and later, with the huge turbines producing electricity and the water backed up for a hundred miles into Canada, he stood in the crowd and heard Franklin D. Roosevelt when he spoke at the construction site. "He never mentioned those guys who died building that dam," my dad said. Some of his friends had died there, men from Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Missouri.

He then took a job in a sawmill in Clatskanie, Oregon, a little town alongside the Columbia River. I was born there, and my mother has a picture of my dad standing in front of the gate to the mill, proudly holding me up to face the camera. My bonnet is on crooked and about to come untied. His hat is pushed back on his forehead, and he's wearing a big grin. Was he going in to work or just finishing his shift? It doesn't matter. In either case, he had a job and a family. These were his salad days.

In 1941 we moved to Yakima, Washington, where my dad went to work as a saw filer, a skilled trade he'd learned in Clatskanie. When war broke out, he was given a deferment because his work was considered necessary to the war effort. Finished lumber was in demand by the armed services, and he kept his saws so sharp they could shave the hair off your arm. After my dad had moved us to Yakima, he moved his folks into the same neighborhood. By the mid-1940s the rest of my dad's family—his brother, his sister, and her husband, as well as uncles, cousins, nephews, and most of their extended family and friends—had come out from Arkansas. All because my dad came out first. The men went to work at Boise Cascade, where my dad worked, and the women packed apples in the canneries. And in just a little while, it seemed—according to my mother—everybody was better off than my dad. "Your dad couldn't keep money," my mother said. "Money burned a hole in his pocket. He was always doing for others."

The first house I clearly remember living in, at 1515 South Fifteenth Street, in Yakima, had an outdoor toilet. On Halloween night, or just any night, for the hell of it, neighbor kids, kids in their early teens, would carry our toilet away and leave it next to the road. My dad would have to get somebody to help him bring it home. Or these kids would take the toilet and stand it in somebody else's backyard. Once they actually set it on fire. But ours wasn't the only house that had an outdoor toilet. When I was old enough to know what I was doing, I threw rocks at the other toilets when I'd see someone go inside. This was called bombing the toilets. After a while, though, everyone went to indoor plumbing until, suddenly, our toilet was the last outdoor one in the neighborhood. I remember the shame I felt when my third-grade teacher, Mr. Wise, drove me home from school one day. I asked him to stop at the house just before ours, claiming I lived there.

I can recall what happened one night when my dad came home late to find that my mother had locked all the doors on him from the inside. He was drunk, and we could feel the house shudder as he rattled the door. When he'd managed to force open a window, she hit him between the eyes with a colander and knocked him out. We could see him down there on the grass. For years afterward, I used to pick up this colander—it was as heavy as a rolling pin—and imagine what it would feel like to be hit in the head with something like that.

It was during this period that I remember my dad taking me into the bedroom, sitting me down on the bed, and telling me that I might have to go live with my Aunt LaVon for a while. I couldn't understand what I'd done that meant I'd have to go away from home to live. But this, too—whatever prompted it—must have blown over, more or less, anyway, because we stayed together, and I didn't have to go live with her or anyone else.

I remember my mother pouring his whiskey down the sink. Sometimes she'd pour it all out and sometimes, if she was afraid of getting caught, she'd only pour half of it out and then add water to the rest. I tasted some of his whiskey once myself. It was terrible stuff, and I don't see how anybody could drink it.

After a long time without one, we finally got a car, in 1949 or 1950, a 1938 Ford. But it threw a rod the first week we had it, and my dad had to have the motor rebuilt.
15
“We drove the oldest car in town,” my mother said. “We could have had a Cadillac for all he spent on car repairs.” One time she found someone else’s tube of lipstick on the floorboard, along with a lacy handkerchief. “See this?” she said to me. “Some floozy left this in the car.”
Once I saw her take a pan of warm water into the bedroom where my dad was sleeping. She took his hand from under the covers and held it in the water. I stood in the doorway and watched. I wanted to know what was going on. This would make him talk in his sleep, she told me. There were things she needed to know, things she was sure he was keeping from her.
Every year or so, when I was little, we would take the North Coast Limited across the Cascade Range from Yakima to Seattle and stay in the Vance Hotel and eat, I remember, at a place called the Dinner Bell Cafe. Once we went to Ivar’s Acres of Clams and drank glasses of warm clam broth.
In 1956, the year I was to graduate from high school, my dad quit his job at the mill in Yakima and took a job in Chester, a little sawmill town in northern California. The reasons given at the time for his taking the job had to do with a higher hourly wage and the vague promise that he might, in a few years’ time, succeed to the job of head filer in this new mill. But I think, in the main, that my dad had grown restless and simply wanted to try his luck elsewhere. Things had gotten a little too predictable for him in Yakima. Also, the year before, there had been the deaths, within six months of each other, of both his parents.
But just a few days after graduation, when my mother and I were packed to move to Chester, my dad penciled a letter to say he’d been sick for a while. He didn’t want us to worry, he said, but he’d cut himself on a saw. Maybe he’d got a tiny sliver of steel in his blood. Anyway, something had happened and he’d had to miss work, he said. In the same mail was an unsigned postcard from somebody down there telling my mother that my dad was about to die and that he was drinking “raw whiskey.”
20
When we arrived in Chester, my dad was living in a trailer that belonged to the company. I didn’t recognize him immediately. I guess for a moment I didn’t want to recognize him. He was skinny and pale and looked bewildered. His pants wouldn’t stay up. He didn’t look like my dad. My mother began to cry. My dad put his arm around her and patted her shoulder vaguely, like he didn’t know what this was all about, either. The three of us took up life together in the trailer, and we looked after him as best we could. But my dad was sick, and he couldn’t get any better. I worked with him in the mill that summer and part of the fall. We’d get up in the mornings and eat eggs and toast while we listened to the radio, and then go out the door with our lunch pails. We’d pass through the gate together at eight in the morning, and I wouldn’t see him again until quitting time. In November I went back to Yakima to be closer to my girlfriend, the girl I’d made up my mind I was going to marry.
He worked at the mill in Chester until the following February, when he collapsed on the job and was taken to the hospital. My mother asked if I would come down there and help. I caught a bus from Yakima to Chester, intending to drive them back to Yakima. But

now, in addition to being physically sick, my dad was in the midst of a nervous breakdown, though none of us knew to call it that at the time. During the entire trip back to Yakima, he didn't speak, not even when asked a direct question. ("How do you feel, Raymond?" "You okay, Dad?") He'd communicate, if he communicated at all, by moving his head or by turning his palms up as if to say he didn't know or care. The only time he said anything on the trip, and for nearly a month afterward, was when I was speeding down a gravel road in Oregon and the car muffler came loose. "You were going too fast," he said.

Back in Yakima a doctor saw to it that my dad went to a psychiatrist. My mother and dad had to go on relief, as it was called, and the county paid for the psychiatrist. The psychiatrist asked my dad, "Who is the President?" He'd had a question put to him that he could answer. "Ike," my dad said. Nevertheless, they put him on the fifth floor of Valley Memorial Hospital and began giving him electroshock treatments. I was married by then and about to start my own family. My dad was still locked up when my wife went into this same hospital, just one floor down, to have our first baby. After she had delivered, I went upstairs to give my dad the news. They let me in through a steel door and showed me where I could find him. He was sitting on a couch with a blanket over his lap. *Hey,* I thought. *What in hell is happening to my dad?* I sat down next to him and told him he was a grandfather. He waited a minute and then he said, "I feel like a grandfather." That's all he said. He didn't smile or move. He was in a big room with a lot of other people. Then I hugged him, and he began to cry.

Somehow he got out of there. But now came the years when he couldn't work and just sat around the house trying to figure what next and what he'd done wrong in his life that he'd wound up like this. My mother went from job to crummy job. Much later she referred to that time he was in the hospital, and those years just afterward, as "when Raymond was sick." The word *sick* was never the same for me again.

In 1964, through the help of a friend, he was lucky enough to be hired on at a mill in Klamath, California. He moved down there by himself to see if he could hack it. He lived not far from the mill, in a one-room cabin not much different from the place he and my mother had started out living in when they went west. He scrawled letters to my mother, and if I called she'd read them aloud to me over the phone. In the letters, he said it was touch and go. Every day that he went to work, he felt like it was the most important day of his life. But every day, he told her, made the next day that much easier. He said for her to tell me he said hello. If he couldn't sleep at night, he said, he thought about me and the good times we used to have. Finally, after a couple of months, he regained some of his confidence. He could do the work and didn't think he had to worry that he'd let anybody down ever again. When he was sure, he sent for my mother.

He'd been off from work for six years and had lost everything in that time—home, car, furniture, and appliances, including the big freezer that had been my mother's pride and joy. He'd lost his good name too—Raymond Carver was someone who couldn't pay his bills—and his self-respect was gone. He'd even lost his virility. My mother told my wife, "All during that time Raymond was sick we slept together in the same bed, but we didn't have relations. He wanted to a few times, but nothing happened. I didn't miss it, but I think he wanted to, you know."

During those years I was trying to raise my own family and earn a living. But, one thing and another, we found ourselves having to move a lot. I couldn't keep track of what was going down in my dad's life. But I did have a chance one Christmas to tell him I wanted to be a writer. I might as well have told him I wanted to become a plastic surgeon. "What are you going to write about?" he wanted to know. Then, as if to help me out, he said, "Write about stuff you know about. Write about some of those fishing trips we took." I said I would, but I knew I wouldn't. "Send me what you write," he said. I said I'd do that, but then I didn't. I wasn't writing anything about fishing, and I didn't think he'd particularly care about, or even necessarily understand, what I was writing in those days. Besides, he wasn't a reader. Not the sort, anyway, I imagined I was writing for.

Then he died. I was a long way off, in Iowa City, with things still to say to him. I didn't have the chance to tell him goodbye, or that I thought he was doing great at his new job. That I was proud of him for making a comeback.

My mother said he came in from work that night and ate a big supper. Then he sat at the table by himself and finished what was left of a bottle of whiskey, a bottle she found hidden in the bottom of the garbage under some coffee grounds a day or so later. Then he got up and went to bed, where my mother joined him a little later. But in the night she had to get up and make a bed for herself on the couch. "He was snoring so loud I couldn't sleep," she said. The next morning when she looked in on him, he was on his back with his mouth open, his cheeks caved in. *Graylooking,* she said. She knew he was dead—she didn't need a doctor to tell her that. But she called one anyway, and then she called my wife.

Among the pictures my mother kept of my dad and herself during those early days in Washington was a photograph of him standing in front of a car, holding a beer and a stringer of fish. In the photograph he is wearing his hat back on his forehead and has this awkward grin on his face. I asked her for it and she gave it to me, along with some others. I put it up on my wall, and each time we moved, I took the picture along and put it up on another wall. I looked at it carefully from time to time, trying to figure out some things about my dad, and maybe myself in the process. But I couldn't. My dad just kept moving further and further away from me and back into time. Finally, in the course of another move, I lost the photograph. It was then that I tried to recall it, and at the same time make an attempt to say something about my dad, and how I thought that in some important ways we might be alike. I wrote the poem when I was living in an apartment house in an urban area south of San Francisco, at a time when I found myself, like my dad, having trouble with alcohol. The poem was a way of trying to connect up with him.

Photograph of My Father in His Twenty-second Year

October. Here in this dank, unfamiliar kitchen
I study my father's embarrassed young man's face.
Sheepish grin, he holds in one hand a string
of spiny yellow perch, in the other
a bottle of Carlsberg beer.
In jeans and flannel shirt, he leans
against the front fender of a 1934 Ford.
He would like to pose brave and hearty for his posterity,
wear his old hat cocked over his ear.
All his life my father wanted to be bold.

But the eyes give him away, and the hands
that limply offer the string of dead perch
and the bottle of beer. Father, I love you,
yet how can I say thank you, I who can't hold my liquor either
and don't even know the places to fish.

30

The poem is true in its particulars, except that my dad died in June and not October, as the first word of the poem says. I wanted a word with more than one syllable to it to make it linger a little. But more than that, I wanted a month appropriate to what I felt at the time I wrote the poem—a month of short days and failing light, smoke in the air, things perishing. June was summer nights and days, graduations, my wedding anniversary, the birthday of one of my children. June wasn't a month your father died in.

After the service at the funeral home, after we had moved outside, a woman I didn't know came over to me and said, "He's happier where he is now." I stared at this woman until she moved away. I still remember the little knob of a hat she was wearing. Then one of my dad's cousins—I didn't know the man's name—reached out and took my hand. "We all miss him," he said, and I knew he wasn't saying it just to be polite.

I began to weep for the first time since receiving the news. I hadn't been able to before. I hadn't had the time, for one thing. Now, suddenly, I couldn't stop. I held my wife and wept while she said and did what she could do to comfort me there in the middle of that summer afternoon.

I listened to people saying consoling things to my mother, and I was glad that my dad's family had turned up, had come to where he was. I thought I'd remember everything that was said and done that day and maybe find a way to tell it sometime. But I didn't. I forgot it all, or nearly. What I do remember is that I heard our name used a lot that afternoon, my dad's name and mine. But I knew they were talking about my dad. *Raymond,* these people kept saying in their beautiful voices out of my childhood. *Raymond.*

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1. From the opening paragraph alone, what do you know about Carver, his father, and their relationship?

2. Why do you think Carver's mother continued to stay on with her husband despite all his apparent failings as a husband? If you could have given her advice at any time during her life, would you have urged her to stay or to leave? Explain.

3. What do you think about the father's advice to his son regarding writing (paragraph 26)? Why doesn't Carver initially take his father's advice? Why does he finally decide to follow this advice?

4. What forces, both external and internal, contribute to the downfall of Carver's father?

5. Describe Carver's relationship with his father and also with his mother. With whom was he closest? Explain.

6.
In the poem, Carver shows a picture of his father with a string of fish in one hand and a beer in the other. Why does he choose these two particular images?
7.
In his poem, Carver writes that he loved his dad but he couldn't thank him. From the details in the poem, explain what he loved about his father, and explain why he cannot thank him.
Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing
1.
Write a personal narrative describing your relationship with your father or your mother. Refrain from telling the reader too much about your feelings or the depth of this relationship. Instead, focus on specific events and specific details in order to show the reader (and perhaps yourself) what the relationship was all about.
2.
Model Carver's poem by writing a poem of your own, for either your father or your mother.
3.
Research the causes and effects of alcoholism.
4.
Was Carver's father a good father or a poor one? Write a paper in which you argue for either one of these positions. To write this paper, you'll need to develop a definition of either a good father or a poor father (or, perhaps, of both).

GRACE MING-YEE WAI
Chinese Puzzle
Grace Ming-Yee Wai, a first-generation Chinese American, grew up in Memphis, Tennessee. When she was ten years old, her father was shot to death during a robbery that netted the killer twenty-six dollars in change. In the following essay, Wai offers a collage of episodes from her childhood as a way of describing her father and of suggesting how both his life and his death affected the values she developed.
Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.
Describe what you would consider to be the ideal family. In what ways is your own family similar to or different from this ideal?
2.
Take twenty minutes today to write about your father in your journal. After you do this freewriting, come to some conclusions about what you know and don't know about your father.

I am a first generation Chinese-American woman educated in both private and public American schools. I grew up in the mid-South city of Memphis, Tennessee, where there were very few other Asian families. We lived in the South, I realized after my teens, primarily for economic reasons. Although there were more Asians in cities such as New York, Los Angeles, or San Francisco, it would have been very expensive to live in those

cities, and our grocery store would have had much more competition. My parents immigrated to the United States from Hong Kong before I was born, for a better life for themselves and their children. Neither had a college education, but both emphasized hard work and the importance of education. Like all parents, they hoped their children would be fortunate enough to receive a quality education that would provide future opportunity and financial security.

My sister, brother, and I have been lucky to receive an education and all of us have reached or are near our goals, but not without pain and sacrifices. When I was 10 years old, my father was shot and killed while being robbed for $26 in change. He was the favorite son of seven living children. He took in one of my cousins from Hong Kong so she could study nursing. My youngest uncle was the only one of their generation to become a professional, primarily because he was lucky enough to have the opportunity to go to dental school at the University of Tennessee in Memphis.

Dad owned a small grocery store in a poor neighborhood. My parents worked more than 12 hours a day, seven days a week. We lived above the store in five rooms and one bathroom. At different times, my grandmother, three uncles, an aunt and her two sons also lived with us. My brother, sister and I had a maid who came six days a week to take care of us. I became very attached to her and cried on her day off. I still send Willie Christmas cards every year.

My father had a fierce temper. Whenever something upset him a little, he yelled a lot, so my brother, sister, and I shuddered at the thought of angering him. His bark was worse than his bite, however. He was also very fair. He loved us all very much. He and Mom worked hard for us, for the family. Family meant everything.

Since Mom and Dad worked so much, there was not much time for us kids. We occasionally went to Shoney's for a hamburger. It was a big treat to pat the statue of Big Boy on the stomach upon entering and exiting the restaurant. Dad took me to the dog track once because I wanted to go with him. I think I just wanted very much to have him for myself since he was always helping other people and working in the store with Mom.

I was the first to go to school because I was the oldest child. When I was four years old, I went to prekindergarten at a small, private, Episcopal school. On my first day, Dad drove me to the door, but he would not take me to my class. I knew where my class was located because we visited earlier to meet my teachers. My heart was pounding with a force I did not know my little body had when I jumped out of the car, and I know fear was evident on my face, but Dad didn't budge. I asked, "Daddy, aren't you coming with me?" He replied, "No, Grace, you know where your class is and who your teachers are. You can go by yourself." He was teaching me to be self-sufficient at four. Still, it must have been difficult for him to watch his firstborn walk alone into a world of which he would not have a part. It was my first day of independence.

I clearly remember my sixth birthday because Dad was in the hospital with pneumonia. He was working so hard he paid very little attention to his health. As a result, he spent almost the entire summer before I entered first grade in the hospital. Mom visited him nightly. On my birthday I was allowed to see him. I have memories of sitting happily in the lobby of the hospital talking to the nurses, telling them with a big smile that I was going to see my dad because it was my birthday. I couldn't wait to see him because children under 12 were not allowed to visit patients, so I had not seen him in a long time.

When I entered his hospital room, I saw tubes inserted into his nose and needles stuck in his arm. He was very, very thin. I was frightened and wanted to cry, but I was determined to have a good visit. So I stayed for a while, and he wished me a happy birthday. When it was time to go, I kissed him good-bye and waited until I left his room to cry.

In first grade, I lived with my grandparents because a public elementary school was just across the street. My father bought the house for my grandparents with plans for us three children to attend Levi Elementary School since it was close and convenient. My brother and sister stayed with my parents because Nancy was only four, and Robert was in kindergarten at my old school which was near the store. I felt very isolated and alone in that great big house away from my immediate family.

I learned from my father while in first grade one valuable lesson that still affects me now: never be afraid to ask questions. I was very self-conscious and timid in school. My grades were falling. My father asked me: “How are you going to learn if you don’t ask questions?” Even then, when I was six years of age, he tried to make me realize the importance of taking initiative in school. He made me realize improving in school was up to me because he could not be with me all the time.

In those days, my grandmother took care of me. She had moved to America when I was three years old to be with my youngest uncle when he came to go to college. My grandfather joined us three years later. Every morning my grandmother got me dressed and made my breakfast. While I sat at the dining room table, she combed and brushed my hair to prepare me for school. She spoke no English, so we conversed in Cantonese.

Every day after school, I called the store to talk to my mother. I really missed being with my parents, brother, and sister and looked forward to their weekly visits. Of course, only one parent visited at a time because someone had to be at the store. I was very jealous that Robert and Nancy were able to stay with my parents.

After school, my grandfather liked to see what I learned that day. It was always a treat to show him the new words I was taught to write in school. Every night I rewrote all the new words for him. He always smiled with approval. Sometimes he helped me with my mathematics. My grandfather played with numbers a lot and actually had an abacus on his desk, which he used daily.

My grandmother did not read or write English. I was learning material she would never understand. She was my caretaker. She cooked and cleaned the house. She fed and bathed me. Neither of my grandparents worked. At that time, they were in their mid-sixties. They had no desire to learn the culture of the new land. Their livelihood depended upon my father, and they were happy merely to be near their children’s families.

In the summer, my sister and brother joined me at our grandparents’ house. We played a lot more since we had a yard. At the store, we stayed upstairs mostly. When summer was over, I was alone with my grandparents again. That year, in second grade, I was often chased around by Albert, a little black boy in my class. He would try to kiss me. Other children were fascinated by my straight black hair, and would constantly try to touch it. I was jeered at by other children for being Chinese, for having squinty eyes and a flat nose. I was almost ashamed of being Chinese, and being so young I did not understand it at all. I had grown up around other blacks who had frequented our store. Many were my friends, but in school I was having trouble—with black and white children. There were no other Chinese children in my school.

I refrained from telling my parents about Albert because earlier in the school year, I had been hit on the head during recess by a classmate with a baseball bat and had to have stitches. My father told me I should not have been playing so recklessly in school. But one day, in my attempt to hide from Albert, I fell and scraped both knees badly. The principal found me and told me that I should tell my teacher if he did it again. After the next episode, I told my teacher, but made the mistake of embarrassing myself by telling in front of the class. What hurt even more was the fact that my teacher did not do anything about it. Finally, I decided I must tell my parents. I think I feared they would think I had done something wrong, that it was my fault—that perhaps I provoked the boy. I also feared my father's temper.

First I told my mother, and she encouraged me to tell my dad about it. He would make the final decision. I sighed and then proceeded to creep upstairs where he was taking a nap and sat outside their bedroom. When my father awoke, fearfully, I told him about what was happening to me in school. Dad was so understanding. To my relief, he was calm and collected, not angry. He asked me what I wanted to do. He asked if I would like to go to the private school my brother and sister attended. Would I! I was so happy. Yes! I wanted to go back to school with Robert and Nancy! That meant, also, that I would be moving back to the store to live with my parents.

I realize now that Dad was very angry. Not at me, but angry with the teachers and the principal of my elementary school for ignoring my distress. He took me out of Levi in the middle of the year. I feel for the people Dad dealt with to get me out of school. I imagine he probably went there red-faced and smoking with anger to fill out the necessary paperwork. It is funny, though, how Dad let me feel I made the decision to leave Levi.

My father was a loving and devoted son to my grandparents. He made sure they were happy and comfortable. He wanted them with us so he was assured of their well-being. My grandfather had fallen ill when I was around seven years old. The doctors thought he had cancer. Twenty years ago, that meant certain death. The night the diagnosis was given, I was alone with my parents after the store was closed. Dad was crying. I was frightened because I had never before seen him cry. Taking off his glasses and looking at me with red, teary eyes and unmistakable pain, he asked me, "Do you love your Ye-Ye?" It was difficult to speak to him when he seemed so vulnerable, but with all the courage I could muster and tears welling up in my eyes, I answered, "Yes." Mom was behind Dad comforting him. At seven years of age, I was learning what it is to love your parents, and I was learning even Dads cry. Thankfully, my grandfather's cancer went into remission after treatment.

When Dad caught wind of the fact that I was doing poorly on my multiplication tables in third grade, he drilled me nightly in the back of the store where he stood behind the meat counter. I remember sweating and feeling extremely apprehensive and fearful of his wrath if I answered incorrectly. I quickly learned my multiplication tables inside out.

On the day he died, Dad came to my grandparents' house where my brother, sister, and I were staying for Thanksgiving weekend. He planned to go car-shopping with his older brother. I went along with them. We had lunch at Shoney's afterward, at my suggestion, of course. I did not care about car-shopping. I just wanted to spend time with Dad, even if we were with my uncle. I chattered away while we had lunch. When we returned to my grandparents' house, he took a nap in my bedroom before going back to work at the store.

I was to wake him in an hour. Upon leaving, he picked me up for a big hug and kiss good-bye. I had my arms around his neck and my head on his shoulder. He told me to be good before putting me down. I did not know it would be the last time I would see him alive.

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Later, in the afternoon, I heard my grandfather making dozens of phone calls, saying with grief and shock: “Ah, Davey say joh loh, Davey say joh loh!” meaning, “Davey’s dead, Davey’s dead!” I couldn’t believe his words and rushed to tell my sister and brother, who responded with disbelief and dismay. They thought I was lying to them, playing a cruel trick on them. Later, when we had heard the grown-ups talking and were in fact sure Dad was killed, the three of us went up to our favorite spot in the attic where we cried and cried and hugged one another. We were in the way of the adults. They did not know how to talk to us, nor would they answer our questions. We only had each other for comfort.

My aunts and uncles from various parts of the country left their families to rush to Memphis the day Dad was shot. We had a full house of people who came by to bring food, to pay respects. It was very late in the evening before all but family were left in our house. It seemed peaceful once again. My best friend brought a plant the next day. We were both at a loss for words—we did not need them. It was enough just to see her.

The next day, there was an article in the newspaper about what happened. My aunt said it did not do my father justice. The robber was never caught by the police. In fact, the police later found the bag of change lying in an alley nearby. My mom’s reaction was calm as she told me, “Even if they find him, it won’t bring your daddy back, Grace.”

The day of my father’s funeral was rainy and cold. There was a long procession of cars on the way to the cemetery. My father was well respected by others in the community and had many friends. My grandmother did not attend the funeral. As long as I knew her, she never once set foot in a hospital, nor did she go to funerals. My grandfather also elected not to attend, but as the hearse passed by their house, he ran out, down the long walkway to the gate with a black raincoat held above his head. He wished to open the coffin to see his son one more time, but it was nailed shut. It was only possible for him to touch the casket.

All my teachers and the principal of our school attended Dad’s funeral. Willie was there too. We were all crying when they came to see us. Later, my best friend told me the teachers didn’t think we would be returning to school for a while. They were surprised to find us in class the following day. My friends did not know how to react to me, and in homeroom, my teacher asked, in front of everyone, if I was okay. I was not okay. I was in pain, but what could I do? I lost my father. He was never coming back. I tried to be strong, and looking down at my desk, I said, “Yes, I’m okay.”

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We were so young: Robert eight, and Nancy seven. Now we are grown adults. I wonder what it would have been like if Dad were living during our developing years. I suspect I would be a very different person. I am very much a feminist and a professional now. I don’t think he would have allowed me to move 1,000 miles from home to live on my own after college. I probably would not have been allowed to participate in many things such as dating, parties, and school activities if he were alive during my adolescence, for he was extremely strict.

We visited his gravesite every year on his birthday, on the anniversary of his death, and on holidays such as New Year's and Christmas. Following my grandmother's Asian traditions, we brought incense to burn at the gravesite, and food: a bowl of rice, fruit, a main dish for his spirit to eat. We also burned special paper, which my grandmother stated represented money for Dad to spend in the afterlife. We did these things for her since she would not go to the cemetery. Following American tradition, we also brought flowers. When the incense was lit, the money burning, and the food set out with chopsticks along with tea and sometimes scotch (he had to have something to drink as well as utensils!), we took turns paying our respects by bowing to the headstone three times and silently told his spirit whatever we wanted to tell him, whatever was on our minds. When done, we bowed again three times to bid farewell until the next time.

I write this now because it is more than 14 years since my father's death. I think about how fast those 14 years have gone by and all the changes and growing that have taken place. I wonder if he is proud of me now. I wonder what I would be like today if he were alive. Even though I only had him in the first 10 years of my life, I know there is much of him in me. I have his temperament, his strictness, and his self-righteous nature. I have his sense of fairness, generosity, and loyalty. He taught me much in those first 10 years. There are also scars from his death because my family did not talk about our loss. We took the blow and went on with life.

In the last four years, I have also lost both grandparents. They are buried with my father. One day, my mother and uncles will join them. Whenever I return to Memphis to visit family and friends, I also go to the cemetery to visit my father and grandparents. I don't follow all the traditions my grandmother so treasured, but I do carry incense and flowers with me. I still bow and have my talk with each. Those are always peaceful and contemplative moments. Sometimes I drive by the old store, the old house, and the private elementary school to relive some of my past.

Death does not get easier. The people I love will not be with me forever. That hurts. Death, however, is a part of life we all face at some point. Nevertheless, it is a comfort to me to believe that after death, those I love go somewhere nice and comfortable. My grandmother always wished to return as a bird—to fly over the earth—soaring and free. I hope she made it.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.
Describe the relationship between Wai and her father. Were they close? Distant? Comfortable with one another? Something else?

2.
Compare and contrast the values held within Wai's Chinese family with the values held within a typical American family today. How do you account for any differences?

3.
Why might Wai have had trouble with some of the children in school but not with the same children in her neighborhood?

4.
In paragraph 17, Wai writes that she "was learning what it is to love your parents." What does she mean by this statement?

5.

What do the events surrounding the father's funeral signify about the relationship between Wai's family and the surrounding community?
6.
In paragraph 27, Wai muses, "I wonder if he is proud of me now." What do you think? From his expectations for his young daughter, would he be proud of this grown one? Explain.
Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing
1.
Interview a Chinese American person in order to discover his or her view on how one goes about "blending" cultures.
2.
Research the Chinese beliefs regarding the meaning of death. Report to the class on your findings.
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JEFFREY GIBSON
Adoption Battles for Gay Prospective Parents
Jeffrey Gibson practices law in San Francisco. He is chair of the Section of Individual Rights and Responsibilities Committee on the Rights of Lesbians and Gay Men. This article first appeared in the spring 1999 issue of >Human Rights: Journal of the Section of Individual Rights and Responsibilities.
Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing
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1.
What is your gut reaction as to whether gay men and lesbians should be allowed to adopt children in a situation where both partners maintain equal parental rights?
2.
What are the five traits most essential to being a good parent? Briefly explain.
3.
Define a "good home."
———
There are many children in the United States in need of the stability of a permanent home with good parents, including large numbers of foster children. Despite this growing need, many prospective parents who are identified as gay or lesbian have been refused as candidates for adopting children solely on the basis of their sexual orientation. The American Bar Association (ABA) has an interest in the laws and policies that will promote the increased permanent placement of children in stable homes with good parents. It also has long been a leader in efforts to eradicate bigotry and prejudice against, among other groups, gay and lesbian Americans. In 1995, the ABA extended policy developments regarding nondiscrimination on the basis of sexual orientation to the field of family law by adopting a policy supporting legislative measures to ensure that child custody or visitation is not denied or restricted on the basis of sexual orientation.
On February 8, 1999, the Association adopted a Resolution sponsored by the Section of Individual Rights and Responsibilities, the Section of Family Law, the Steering

Committee on the Unmet Legal Needs of Children, and the National Gay and Lesbian Law Association, which provides:
RESOLVED, that the American Bar Association supports the enactment of laws and implementation of public policy that provide that sexual orientation shall not be a bar to adoption when the adoption is determined to be in the best interest of the child.
On November 19, 1997, President Clinton signed the Adoption and Safe Families Act(n1) into law, which was intended to promote adoption or other permanent arrangements for foster children who are unable to return home and to make general improvements in the nation's child welfare system. The legislation responded to concerns that children were remaining foster care unnecessarily long, that their adoption rate continued to be low, and that additional safeguards were needed to ensure their safety. In response to this federal legislation, states have begun to revisit their adoption laws. Unfortunately, conservative organizations have made this state review an opportunity to introduce legislation that would prohibit gay or lesbian prospective parents from being eligible to adopt, even though the adoption may be in the best interest of the child. As I was preparing this article, such bills are pending in the legislatures of Texas, Utah, and Indiana. Arkansas has a similar bill pending prohibiting foster parenting only. Hopefully, this newly adopted ABA resolution will provide guidance to courts, legislatures, and legal practitioners who will require guidance on these issues in drafting and reviewing draft laws for the various states.

Barriers faced in preserving and protecting family relationships. Many children are being raised in lesbian and gay parent families in which both partners have parented the child since the child's infancy or birth, and have undertaken all the obligations and responsibilities of equal parenthood. For the great majority of these families, second parent or joint adoptions are the only legal avenue through which both parents can establish a legal parental relationship to the couple's child. In jurisdictions where these forms of adoption are not available, lesbian and gay parents attempt to protect their relationship with their children through a variety of privately executed documents: wills, guardianship agreements, authorization to consent to emergency medical treatments, and the like. While lesbian and gay parents willingly assume these obligations, these documents do not create a legally recognized parental relationship, and they are vastly inferior to the security and protection of legal recognition through adoption. In the absence of a legally protected parental relationship, the child has no right to financial support or inheritance from the second parent, cannot receive Social Security benefits or state workers' compensation benefits if the second parent dies or becomes incapacitated, and cannot receive health insurance or other insurance benefits from the second parent's employer in the majority of cases. The second parent may not be eligible for leave to care for a seriously ill child under the Family and Medical Leave Act. In the event of an emergency in which the legal parent is unavailable, the second parent may be unable to consent to medical treatment for the child—or even to visit the child in a hospital emergency room.
If the parents separate, adoption is critical to protect the child's right to financial support and to maintain a relationship with the second parent. Courts in family law situations generally attempt to ensure ongoing contact between a child and both of his or her

parents, even when the family unit is no longer intact. This is based on the recognition that ongoing contact with the parents is almost invariably in the best interest of the children because “children generally will sustain serious emotional harm when deprived of emotional benefits flowing from a true parent-child relationship.”(n1) In the absence of a legally defined parent-child relationship, children of lesbian and gay parents are routinely deprived of this right.(n3)

Similarly, if the legal parent dies or is incapacitated, the child may become a ward of the state or be placed in foster care or with relatives of the legal parent with whom the child has no bond. The nomination of the second parent in the legal parent’s will as the child’s guardian is merely that—a nomination. Courts are not required to approve the guardianship nomination. Moreover, there is always a risk that relatives of the legal parent can and will challenge such a guardianship nomination. Even if the surviving partner ultimately prevails, the nomination does not prevent expensive and time-consuming litigation, and the concomitant trauma and injury to the child during the intervening period of uncertainty.

The recent case of Victoria Lane demonstrates the critical difference that second parent adoptions can and do make in protecting children in lesbian and gay parent families. Victoria Lane was granted a second parent adoption of Laura Solomon’s biological child, Tessa, and Laura solomon was granted a second parent adoption of Victoria’s biological child, Maya, by a District of Columbia trial court.(n4) Two years later, Victoria Lane was killed in an automobile accident. Due to the second parent adoption, Laura, as the surviving parent, had no need to undergo any court action to protect her relationship with her deceased partner’s child. Both children were eligible for Social Security survivor benefits, and both were permitted to file an action for wrongful death. If a second parent adoption had not been in place, both children’s financial stability would have been seriously impaired, and Maya might well have undergone the additional trauma of being legally separated from her surviving parent.(n5)

Sexual orientation’s irrelevance to parental ability. Social science research has confirmed what experience and common sense have already demonstrated: that a person’s sexual orientation has no baring on his or her capacity to be a good parent. In fact, studies have found “a remarkable absence of distinguishing features between the lifestyles, child-rearing practices, and general demographic data” of lesbian and gay parents and those who are not gay.(n6) The American Psychological Association (APA) reports that “not a single study has found children of gay or lesbian parents to be disadvantaged in any significant respect relative to children of heterosexual parents. Indeed, the evidence to date suggests that home environments provided by gay and lesbian parents as likely as those provided by heterosexual parents to support and enable children’s psychosocial growth.”(n7) In all respects, lesbians and gay men have proven to be just as committed to the parental role and just as capable of being good parents as their heterosexual counterparts.(n8)

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Given this overwhelming evidence, numerous professional organizations have condemned discrimination against lesbian and gay parents. In 1976, the APA affirmed that “[t]he sex, gender identity [transgender], or sexual orientation of natural, or prospective adoptive or foster parents should not be the sole or primary variable considered in custody or placement cases.”(n9) The National Association of Social

Workers (NASW) has long affirmed that gay men and lesbians are capable parents. The NASW policy statement on lesbian and gay issues deplores the fact that lesbians and gay men have been denied custody of children and the right to provide foster and adoptive care.(n10) The policy holds that NASW shall work for the adoption of policies and legislation to end all forms of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.(n11). The code of ethics adopted by the NASW Delegate Assembly further states that “the social worker should not practice, condone, facilitate or collaborate with any form of discrimination on the basis of . . . sexual orientation.”(n12)

Child Custody Cases Involving Lesbian and Gay Parents

(rtxp>To put adoption in context, it is helpful to review judicial decisions regarding child custody decisions are supposed to be based on a case-by-case determination of the “best interests” of each individual child, not on per se rules or categorical presumptions. Until quite recently, however, courts ruling on custody disputes involving a lesbian or gay parent routinely departed from this evidence-based standard in favor of a per se rule against awarding custody to a lesbian or gay parent.

Sadly, these decisions tended to accept at face value, and without empirical support, a host of invidious stereotypes and irrational fears. Some courts, for example, expressed the fear that children of lesbian or gay parents will be subjected to harassment or ostracism by their peers. Other courts have expressed a concern that the child will grow up to be lesbian or gay, or that the child’s moral well-being will be jeopardized, ignoring the overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Still others have refused to accept the overwhelming scientific evidence debunking the myth that lesbians and gay men are more likely to molest children.(n13) More recently, however, the great majority of state courts that have considered the impact of a parent’s sexual orientation in a contested custody case have rejected stereotypical assumptions in favor of the same evidence-based standard used to evaluate the custodial fitness of a heterosexual parent. Widely referred to as the “nexus test,” this standard requires evidence of a clear connection, or nexus, between a parent’s actions and harm to the child before the parent’s sexual orientation (or any other factor) assumes any relevance in the custody determination. States in which appellate courts have adopted this nondiscriminatory standard in cases involving a lesbian or gay parent include Alaska, California, Florida, Iowa, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Vermont, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. However, twelve states—Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, North Dakota, Utah, Virginia, and Wyoming—continue to apply either an explicit or a de facto per se rule against lesbian and gay parents. The remaining states have no reported appellate decisions on the issue.

The nexus approach requires a factual finding of harm to the child before sexual orientation may be used to deny or restrict custody or visitation. Courts must base their custody determination on the evidentiary record and must point to specific evidence that the child has been harmed by the parent’s sexual orientation. In S.N.E. v. R.L.B.,(n14) for example, the Alaska Supreme Court explained that “the scope of judicial inquiry is limited to facts directly affecting the child’s well-being.”(n15) Reversing a trial court removing custody from a lesbian mother, the court held that “[i]n marked contrast to the wealth of evidence that Mother is a lesbian, there is no suggestion that this has or is likely

to affect the child adversely. . . . It is impermissible to rely on any real or imagined social stigma attaching to Mother's status as a lesbian."(n16)

Lesbians and Gay Men as Adoptive Parents

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As in the related area of child custody, the growing visibility of lesbian and gay parent families has contributed to a dramatic decrease in antigay discrimination on the part of adoptive agencies and courts. Despite much progress, however, significant obstacles to equal treatment remain, including efforts to pass new state laws that would categorically prohibit lesbians and gay men from being eligible to adopt.

The following is a brief description of the different types of adoption that are available to lesbian and gay parents and a brief overview of current law.

Individual adoptions. Every state permits unmarried individuals to adopt. Individual adoptions—sometimes called "stranger" adoptions—are adoptions in which a single (i.e., unmarried) person adopts a Child who has been placed for adoption by his or her biological parent or parents, who have agreed to give up all of their parental rights. Individual adoptions may take place through (1) a state child welfare or public adoption agency; (2) a private, state-authorized adoption agency; or (3) consensual arrangements between private parties, including everything from the adoption of the child of a relative, acquaintance, or friend to the adoption of an orphan situated abroad and brought into the Untied States. Like all adoptions, individual adoptions must be reviewed and approved by a court and almost always include a home investigation by the state's child welfare agency.

Currently, Florida and New Hampshire are the only two states that categorically prohibit lesbians and gay men from becoming adoptive parents.(n17) The New Hampshire statute applies to foster parenting as well, and there is currently a bill pending in that state's legislature to revoke the law. In Florida, the law prohibits adoption only; single lesbians and gay men are eligible to be foster parents. The Florida Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of Florida's ban on gay adoption in 1995, pending a remand on the equal protection claim. In New Hampshire, the New Hampshire House of Representatives sought and received he New Hampshire Supreme Court's approval of the prohibition on lesbian and gay adoption and foster parenting before it was adopted in 1987.

In all other states, lesbians and gay men are, at least theoretically, eligible to adopt. The "best interest of the child" is the primary criterion for approving an adoption, although there is considerable flexibility in the factors that may be taken into account in evaluating an adoptive parent's suitability. In practice, judicial reaction to openly lesbian and gay adoptive parents ranges from supportive acceptance to overt hostility. In In re Adoption of Evan, for example, the judge held that "an open lesbian relationship is not a reason to deny adoption" because "a child's best interest is not predicated on or controlled by parental sexual orientation."(n18) In In re Adoption of Charles B.,(n19) the Ohio supreme Court approved the adoption of a disabled child by a gay man, holding that "nonmarital sexual conduct"—including "homosexual activity"—must be shown to have a direct adverse impact on the child before it can be a basis for denying an adoption petition. At the opposite end of the spectrum, the Arizona Court of appeals upheld the denial of an adoption petition brought by a bisexual man on the ground that "he testified that it was possible that he at some future time would have some type of homosexual relationship with another man."(n20)

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Second parent adoptions. "Second parent adoption" is a legal term of art used to describe an adoption in which a lesbian, gay man, or unmarried heterosexual person adopts his or her partner's child, as a means of ensuring that both parents have a legally recognized parental relationship to the child. The concept of second parent adoption was originated by the National Center for lesbian Rights (formerly the Lesbian rights Project) in the mid-1980s, when the first such adoptions were granted in San Francisco. Since that time, a number of high-profile and high-level cases in other states have begun to establish second parent adoption as a formal legal protection for same-sex parent families.

Most state adoption statutes provide that a biological parent who consents to the adoption of a child must give up or "cut off" his or her own parental rights, unless the adopting party is the parent's legal spouse and thus a stepparent to the child. Given that no state currently permits same-sex couples to marry, the key legal question for courts ruling on second parent adoptions has been whether to forgo an overly literal and rigid interpretation of state adoption statutes in order to advance the statute's underlying purpose of promoting the child's best interests.(n21)

To date, state supreme courts in Vermont, Massachusetts, and New York have expressly permitted lesbians and gay men to adopt their partners' children. Intermediate appellate courts have permitted second parent adoptions in Connecticut, the District of Columbia, Illinois, and New Jersey. Many other states have approved second parent adoption petitions at lower court levels, including Alabama, Alaska, California, Indiana, Iowa, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Mexico, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania (where there are conflicting decisions), Rhode Island, Texas, and Washington. The National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws has also endorsed the concept of second parent adoption in the Uniform Adoption Act.(n22)

Only two states have expressly resisted the trend of decisions elsewhere.(n23) In California, Governor Pete Wilson failed in his attempt to block second parent adoptions administratively in 1996, by proposing a regulation that would require public adoption agencies to oppose any "proposed adoption resulting in a child's having two parents who are not legally married to each other."(n24)

Joint adoptions. Joint adoption refers to an adoption in which both partners in a couple simultaneously adopt a child who, at least in the usual case, has no biological or preexisting adoptive relationship to either party. Joint adoption is especially important for gay male couples, for whom adopting a child is often the only viable route to becoming parents. Until very recently, joint adoptions have been restricted to married couples, with the exception of a steady stream of cases granted by lower courts in the San Francisco Bay Area from the mid-1980s to the present.

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On December 21, 1997, however, New Jersey became the focus of national media attention when it announced a formal statewide policy permitting lesbian, gay, and other unmarried couples to jointly adopt. New Jersey adopted the policy in a consent agreement reached in a class action suit brought by the American Civil Liberties Union on behalf of more than 200 lesbian and gay couples, including Jon Holden and Michael Galluccio, the named plaintiffs in the suit, who sought to adopt the two-year-old foster child who had been living with them since he was three months old. Under the terms of the agreement, the New Jersey Division of Youth and Family Services must apply the same standards to

all prospective adoptive parents, without regard to marital status or sexual orientation. As a result of this decision, New Jersey has been widely hailed at "the first state in the nation to allow gay, lesbian and unmarried heterosexual couples to adopt children on an equal basis with married couples."(n25)

A Final Thought

Every child deserves a permanent home and all the love and care that good parents can provide. Each child is entitled to the emotional and financial security that follows from legal recognition of his or her family relationships. For these reasons, courts should evaluate all prospective adoptive parents on the basis of their individual character and ability to parent, not merely on their sexual orientation. In addition, courts should also grant second parent and joint adoptions when they are determined to be in a child's best interest.

Author's note: A more comprehensive version of this article containing extensive documentation of case law and other scholarly research is available from my office. For a copy, please contact me at 415/621-5600.

Endnotes

1.
Pub. L. No. 105-89.
2.
Guardianship of Philip B., 139 Cal. App. 3d 407, 422 (1983).
3.
See Music v. Rachford, 654 So. 2d 1234 (Fla. Dist. Ct. App. 1995) (court has "no inherent authority to award visitation" to a lesbian coparent); Alison D. v. Virginia M., 572 N.E.2d 27 (N.Y. 1991) (lesbian partner has no standing to seek visitation with child she raised with lesbian mother); Nancy S. v. Michele G., 228 Cal. App. 3d 831 (Cal. App. 1991) (same); Kulla v. McNulty, 472 N.W.2d 175 (Minn. Ct. App. 1991) (lesbian coparent was not entitled to visitation, even if visitation would be in the child's best interests).
4.
Matter of Petition of L.S., 119 Daily Wash. L. Rep. 22498 (D.C. Super. Ct. Aug. 30, 1991).
5.
See Deb Price, Girl Would Be Orphan If They'd Lost the Battle, *Minneapolis Star-Tribune,* Jan. 5, 1994, at 4E.
6.
Beverly Hoeffer, Children's Acquisition of Sex-Role Behavior in Lesbian-Mother Families, 51 AM. J. ORTHOPSYCHIATRY 536 (1981).
7.
APA, *Lesbian and Gay Parenting: A Resource for Psychologists* 8 (1995). See also Golombok & Fisher Do parents Influence the Sexual Orientation of Their Children? Findings from a Longitudinal Study of Lesbian Families, 32(1) *Developmental Psychol.* 3, 9 (1996) ("there is no evidence . . . to suggest that parents have a determining influence on the sexual orientation of their children"); and Gold et al., *Children of Gay or Lesbian Parents,* supra, at 357 ("There are no data to suggest that children who have gay or

lesbian parents are different in any aspects of psychological, social, and sexual development from children in heterosexual households.").

8.

Charlotte Patterson, Lesbian and Gay Parenthood, in Handbook of Parenting 255 (M.H. Bornstein, ed., 1996).

9.

APA, Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Council of Representatives, 32 *Am. Psychologist* 408, 432 (1977).

10.

National Association of Social Workers, *Lesbian and Gay Issues in Social Work Speaks: NASW Policy Statements* 93 (1988).

11.

Id. at 162.

12.

Id. at 161.

13.

See generally David K. Flaks, Gay and Lesbian Families: Judicial Assumptions, Scientific Facts, 3 *Wm. & Mary Bill Rts.* J. 345 (1994).

14.

699 P.2d 875 (Alaska 1985).

15.

Id. at 878.

16.

Id. at 879 (citing Palmore v. Sidoti, 466 U.S. 429 (1984)). See also Bezio v. Patenaude, 410 N.E.2d 1207, 1216 (Mass. 1980) ("The state may not deprive parents of custody of their children simply because their households fail to meet the ideals approved by the community . . . [or] simply because the parents embrace ideologies or pursue lifestyles at odds with the average)."

17.

Fla. Stat. ch 63.042(3) (West 1985 & Supp. 1995) ("No person eligible to adopt under this statute may adopt if that person is a homosexual."); N.H. Rev. Stat. Ann. 170-B:4 (1994) ("Any individual not a minor and not a homosexual may adopt.").

18.

583 N.Y.S.2d 997, n.1 (Sur. Ct. 1992).

19.

552 N.E.2d 884 (Ohio 1990).

20.

In re Appeal in Pima County Juvenile Action B-10489, 727 P.2d 830 (Ariz. Ct. app. 1986).

21.

See, e.g., In re Adoption of B.L.V.B., 628 A.2d at 1276 ("[O]ur paramount concern should be with the effect of our laws on the reality of children's lives. . . . [the nonbiological mother] has acted as a parent of [the children] from the moment they were born. To deny legal protection of their relationship, as a matter of law, is inconsistent with the children's best interests and therefore with the public policy of this state."); and Matter of Adoption of Two Children by H.N.R., 666 A.2d 535 (N.J. Super. Ct. App. Div.

1995) ("Where the mother's same-sex partner has, with the mother's consent, participation and cooperation, assumed a full parental role in the life of the mother's child, and where the child is consequently bonded to the partner in a loving, functional parental relationship, the stepparent provision of NJSA 9:3–50 should not be narrowly interpreted so as to defeat an adoption that is clearly in the child's best interests.").
22.
See Unif. Adoption Act 4-102, 9 U.L.A. 1, 67 (West Supp. 1994) (stating that a "de facto stepparent" or "second parent" has standing to adopt a "minor stepchild" with the consent of the child's custodial parent, and citing with approval the Vermont and New York decisions permitting second parent adoptions). See also Susan Chira, Law Proposed to End Adoption Horror Stories, N.Y. TIMES, Aug. 27, 1994, at A9.
23.
See In Interest of Angel Lace M., 516 N.W.2d 678 (Wis. 1994) (Wisconsin's adoption statute does not permit a lesbian coparent to adopt her partner's biological child without terminating the biological mother's parental rights); and In re Adoption of T.K.J. and K.A.K., 931 P.2d 488, 1996 Colo. App. LEXIS 176, rehearing denied (Colo. Ct. App. Aug. 1, 1996) (a biological mother cannot consent to her partner's adoption of the couple's child without giving up her own parental rights).
24.
Jane Gross, Gays, Singles, Also Targets of Adoption Rule, *L.A. Times,* Sept. 8, 1996, at A3.
25.
John Goldman, N.J. Settlement OKs Adoption by Gay Couples, *L.A. Times,* Dec. 18, 1997, at A1.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

<sumh*>0.
1.
What is your assessment of the author's position here? Is it impartial, biased, or something else? Explain.
2.
What is the main problem or issue that this piece is aiming to resolve?
3.
In paragraphs 6–9, list all the statements of fact you find. Then make a list of all the statements of opinion. From your two lists, what conclusions can you draw on the rhetorical techniques the author is using here?
4.
Find two statements you most agree with and two you don't. Briefly explain your reasons in each case.
5.
Check the sources on which the author relied to write this piece. What conclusions can you draw, based on these sources? Are they credible, reliable, unbiased?

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing

<sumh*>0.
1.
Argue for or against the proposal that Gibson sets forth in this piece.
2.

Interview students on campus as well as adults you know in order to understand how some people feel on this topic of gay rights and adoption. Write a report in which you explain your procedures, your data, and your conclusions regarding this topic and those you interviewed.

3.

Research adoption laws and foster parent guidelines in your state, and compare them to the laws presented for gay men and lesbians in this piece.

4.

Write a personal essay about someone you know well, perhaps in your own family, who is gay or lesbian. From what you know, would this person make a good parent if he or she chose to adopt a child?

———

JESSE GREEN

Orbiting the Son

Jesse Green (born in 1958, in Philadelphia) wrote only poetry while a student at Yale. After graduating, however, he became a freelance journalist and a novelist. His first novel, O Beautiful, is about a gay set designer in New York who is obsessed with the external beauty of objects. His second book, a memoir, *The Velveteen Father: An Unexpected Journey to Parenthood* is about a gay 37-year-old man who stumbles into fatherhood by falling in love with a person who has an adopted son. This selection first appeared in the New York Times Magazine on August 8, 1999.

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.

Describe all the "extended" family members in your own family: aunts, uncles, caretakers, cousins, close friends. In what ways have these people contributed to your life?

2.

In your opinion, what's the ideal family structure in terms of relationships between the adults and the children?

———

More literally than most newborns, he was no one's child: just "Baby Boy" in hospital records, the rest of his name obliterated. Erez, as he'd later be named, was tended at first by people who, however kind, would never be his: busy nurses, a foster mother. He only found—or created—a family when he came home, two weeks later, to us.

I say us, but I wasn't there yet. Erez was 14 months old when I met him, and by then he was no longer alone. There was Andy, of course, who had managed, despite being gay and well past 40, to adopt a newborn with surprising ease, perhaps because he did not care whether the child would be white, or perhaps just because he was stubborn and lucky. In any case, he was now as much the American dream of a father as anyone could hope for. To Erez, Andy was the star of the show, the excuse for the show in the first place. To Andy, Erez was the *deus ex machina,* arriving late in the creaky drama to undo the knots of human folly and retie them properly, permanently. Dressing the scene, a company of extras—a fussbudget, a gent, a showgirl of two—hovered upstage, but had no billing.

These “uncles” and “aunts” (actually a collection of Andy’s orbiting exes and friends) took Erez to playgrounds and museums, spent several fortunes in toy trains and onesies, baby-sat free and were but one of Erez’s shadow families. Another consisted of pseudo-grannies Andy collected: women left by their actual families to make the best of their inconvenient longevity. Then there was the network of adoring Haitian housekeepers who had helped andy’s mother through her last years and were now helping Erez through his first. No one in these shadow families made any claim upon the boy; he made his claim upon them.
And so, by the time I started dating his father, Erez seemed to love three dozen people. They made up a family of choice—but who chose whom? In traditional families we easily see how the preexisting structure incorporates the child, but in a family as unusual, as manufactured as this one, the opposite process is also evident. The child creates a structure to suit him. Getting to know Andy and Erez, I had the unfamiliar sensation of being auditioned not by the father but by the son. He scrutinized me for my intentions, or somehow forced me to do so myself. Would I be good for him? If I came into his life, would I stay there? Over time I began to see how people who were not susceptible to his charms, who were unwilling to be answerable to his needs, drifted away. Or were they pushed? In any case, the child succeeded in drawing to him exactly the adults who wanted him most.
5
It may be that he had a more ductile field of candidates to draw from than children in more traditional circumstances. Not every baby lands, as Erez did among people who feel they could love a child but have forgotten, been robbed of or traded away their human right to do so. For some of our nonreplicating friends, being part of Erez’s shadow family has allowed them the moderate contact they seek: one of the “aunts” offers to take our family on vacation not so much to be with the adults, we feel, as to be intensely, if briefly, maternal. For one of the “uncles,” it’s more complicated: he has delayed his own desired parenthood, in part because he does not want to disturb the shadow parenthood he already treasures.
In the past, when society was organized exclusively along bloodlines, paterfamilias down to rug rat, those who broke rank did so at the cost of permanent alienation from the march of generations. Now that social structures are more often radial, with a child at the center, the rebels have any number of chances to reattach themselves to the wheel. Confusing, perhaps—less a nuclear family than a nuclear explosion—but a lucky child may profit by it. He can draw into his circle all the strays, of whatever provenance and generation, our unleashed world puts in his path: the gay uncles, the career-track women, the stranded grannies, the loving if hired hands. Sometimes it seems as if we could not raise Erez (and now, as well, his little brother) without this parade of devotees; Andy and I are the chief adults in our sons’ lives, but we have not perpetuated the familiar fiction that beyond us there can be no others. If our existence thus feels crowded, theirs just seems full. So be it; life is larger than our dinner table, and because we hope our sons will grow to love the world, we have no choice but to let it love them first.
Suggestions for Writing and Discussion
<sumh*>0.
1.

In general, what do you think is the author's purpose in writing this piece? To whom might he be writing this, specifically?
2.
Describe the overall structure and organization of this piece. How effective do you find it? What other options could the author have chosen?
3.
How would you characterize Andy as a parent? What specific details lead you to this conclusion?
4.
Under what circumstance might Andy have been able to adopt his child so quickly and easily?
5.
What information has the author not included that you would find helpful?
Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing
<sumh*>0.
1.
Compare and contrast your own childhood family experiences with those of Erez's. Draw conclusions as to the benefits and drawbacks of these two experiences.
2.
Argue for or against the concept of "child-centered" families.
3.
Search out a credible article written from the child's point of view who has experienced a family situation similar to Erez's. Compare and contrast this article with Green's piece.
———

ANDREW FERGUSON
Inside the Culture of Kids' Sports
Andrew Ferguson is a conservative opinion columnist and senior editor of the Weekly Standard. A collection of thirty-two of his essays for the New Republic, the Wall Street Journal, and other publications has been published as Fools' Names Fools' Faces (1996). This selection first appeared in the July 12, 1999, issue of Time magazine, where his articles regularly appear.
Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing
<prh*>0.

1.
Freewrite about your own experiences or observations of young children and organized sports.
2.
If you were a parent, would you encourage your child to be involved in a sports team? If so, when would you get your child involved in sports? If not, why not?
———

Kelly Donnelly is bright and pretty and lives in Cranford, N.J. She is 13 years old, and she plays soccer. Boy, does she play soccer! Her sister Katie is 15. She plays soccer too. And their dad, Pat—well, Pat drives. He drives one girl or the other to soccer practice

most every day, and to Virginia for the occasional soccer tournament, and even to Canada once in a while, for more soccer. Last week he drove the girls home from soccer camp in Pennsylvania. Not long ago, Pat logged 300 miles in his green 1994 Dodge Caravan so that Kelly could play in three games on Saturday. Katie had two games that day. Then they had five on Sunday.

And how was your weekend.

Pretty much the same, probably, if yours is among the growing number of American families that have succumbed to the mania of kids' athletics as they are conceived in the late 1990s: hyperorganized, hypercompetitive, all consuming and often expensive. Never before have America's soccer fields, baseball diamonds, hockey rinks and basketball courts been so aswarm with children kicking, swinging, checking and pick-and-rolling. Some estimates put the number of American youths participating in various organized sports at 40 million. According to the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association, the number of kids playing basketball now tops 12 million. Not to mention the nearly 7 million playing soccer. Or the 5 million playing baseball. Hockey, originally played on frozen ponds, is now a year-round sport involving more than half a million kids from Maine down through the Sunbelt. The Turcotte Stick-handling Hockey School, based in Ormond Beach, Fla., of all places, expects 6,400 kids to take part in its clinics this summer, up from 2,600 in 1992.

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But it is not just the number of kids playing an organized sport that's unprecedented. It's the way they're playing it—or, to be m ore precise, the way their parents are arranging for them to play it. Kelly Donnelly's team, the SMC Strikers, offers a good illustration of what is happening to kids' athletics. Not so long ago, games were weekly, teams were local and each sport had its own brief season. And now? "I played varsity soccer in high school and college," says Bob Seiple, a coach for Kelly's team. "During that time, I might have played a total of 50 games. Kelly might play 50 games in a single year."

The Strikers are a travel team—sometimes known as a select or club team—comprising kids who have risen through local soccer squads to be selected for more competitive play. They're drawn from a variety of mostly suburban neighborhoods and towns in a given region, and they will make single-day or weekend-long pilgrimages to meet other similarly skilled teams on distant soccer fields. Their coaches are not volunteer dads but traveling professionals, some of them imported from countries like Britain. Kelly's parents will pay roughly $3,000 a year for her soccer experience, including club dues (which cover the coaches' pay), private clinics, summer camps, travel and hotel. For the kids, the commitment sometimes seems almost total. Many have abandoned other organized sports—and sometimes even their school's team—to concentrate on the travel squad. "It's tough to play at this level if you don't do it year round," Seiple says.

To be sure, plenty of kids still participate in sports through lower-intensity recreational leagues. But kids' sports, like other American institutions circa 1999, have succumbed to a cycle of rising expectations. More and more parents and kids want better coaching, more of a challenge and the prestige that comes from playing with the best. All of which fuels the growth in travel teams. Says Judy Young, executive director of the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (a professional coaches' association) in Reston, Va.: "Nobody seems to want to play on a little neighborhood team for more than one season." Kids who want to make the big step up from "rec" sports to a travel team

often take private instruction, at $70 an hour or more, or attend specialized summer sports camps and clinics, where attendance is booming. The governing body of Little League baseball, for example, has seen attendance more than double, to 2,900 kids, at its five summer-camp locations around the country. Kids; athletics today is not a pursuit for dilettantes—even among 1-year-olds, who used to be dilettantes by nature.

Coaches are recruiting talented children as young as eight, whose after-school hours, weekends and summer vacations are occupied by clinics, practices, tournaments and fight-to-the-death competition. The old childhood ideal of goofing off—what the grimmer parenting books term "nonstructured play"—isn't an option. As the kids get older, the more talented rise to ever more selective teams, perhaps representing an entire county, while their less gifted (or less committed) teammates drop away. Family holidays, including Christmas and Thanksgiving, dissolve into long treks to tournaments. Coaches can get caught in bidding wars—recruited and signed to contracts drawn up by team managers and parents, for annual salaries as high as $60,000. If they don't perform according to expectations, they can be dumped with a dispatch that would make George Steinbrenner smile.

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And waiting at the end of the young competitor's rainbow is more than a trophy, more than the thrill of victory, more even than the molding of good character that has been the traditional purpose of children's sports. Now the goal might be a scholarship to defray the stratospheric costs of college, or at least a record of athletic accomplishment that could provide the edge in gaining admission. The dream might be a berth on an Olympic team, or even a career in professional sports.

If all this sounds familiar, it probably should. Throughout the cold war, complacent Americans watched with disdain as promising youngsters behind the Iron Curtain were plucked from home and hearth and sent to spend their childhood in athletic camps where they would be ruthlessly forged into international competitors, exemplars of the totalitarian ideal.

But that was years ago. Watching the crazy culture of kids' sports in America today, a cynic might marvel at how the world has changed. The good news is that the cold war is over. The bad news is that the East Germans won.

That's a harsh view, of course, and it is one not shared by many of the families who crowd the playing fields and gyms. Even in the most intense programs, the kids will tell you this is what they want: the sheer fun of the game, the tribal bond with teammates, the pride of being selected for a team, and the attention from busy parents who might not make as much of a fuss over a triumph in algebra or Spanish.

Any parent knows that few pleasures match the sight of a child who's flushed and beaming after a romp on a stretch of turf. Travel teams in particular can do much to melt away the inhibitions between parents and their teens. "On about the seventh hour of a road trip from western Pennsylvania," says lawyer Robert Luskin of Washington, "you tend to hear things you wouldn't otherwise."

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On the practical side, a child busy with sports is less susceptible to the lure of drugs and gangs and the despair we've lately seen in places like Littleton, Colo. "It keeps kids out of trouble and away from the TV," says Leea Kielpinski, 28, a nurse in Oakland, Calif., whose nine-year-old daughter and seven-year-old son play competitive basketball. Most

sports programs, despite their excesses, manage to promote the old virtues; self-confidence, personal responsibility, teamwork, persistence, the ability to win and lose with grace. “In an organized sport, Danny’s got to learn a little teamwork, some structure and discipline,” says Terrence Straub, a Washington steel executive and father of Daniel, 9, and two older sons.

The benefits can even be measured on the child’s report card. “We now from a lot of research that kids who participate in sports tend to do better academically,” says mark Goldstein, a child clinical psychologist at Roosevelt University in Chicago. “It forces them to be more organized with their time and to prioritize a lot better.”

Of course, the traditional virtues come wrapped in the garb of the less than traditional 19902, when prosperity is at an all-time high and leisure at an all-time low. In the Glennon household in Lake Forest, Ill., parents John and Kathy and their three younger daughters have re-arranged family life around the hockey schedule of son Nick, 10. One week’s lineup: Sunday: practice from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. Monday: power skating from 76 p.m. to 8 p.m. Tuesday: game night. Friday: a fund-raising dinner dance for the team. Sunday: another game. And several days a week, Nick joins a group of kids who take an hour of private instruction from the former speed coach of the Chicago Blackhawks.

Beyond the expense in time, there is the expense of, well, expense. Hockey is easily the most costly of the team sports Nick has been playing since he was five, and this year, says John, 46, an investment banker, the family will spend as much as $4,500 on the boy’s hockey habit: for equipment, gas and hotel rooms, summer training camps and the membership fee to the local hockey association, which covers coaches’ salaries and rink rentals: “It’s worth it,” says Nick’s mom Kathy. “It provides exercise, discipline and camaraderie.” Nick has a slightly different take. “I play to win,” he says, “I don’t play to play. If I find out I have a team that’s going to be 0-8, I’ll go with a different team.

Some parents hope their kids will win a college scholarship. Single mother, Mar Rodriguez of Orlando, for example, is a graduate student at the University of Central Florida. Money is tight. She shuttles her three kids—Virgil, 14; Eva, 13; and Sara, 10—to dozens of youth-basketball events every week, year round. In a recent moth, rodriguez counted only three days without a practice or a game.

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Inspired by her idol, Rebecca Lobo of the women’s National Basketball Association, Eva plays on fie teams at once. Meals are on the fly, and other social activities are rare. Mar can only pray that the sacrifice will pay off in college aid. “By the time I graduate, it’s going to be almost time for the two eldest kids to go do college,” she says. “I’ll need all the help I can get to pay for their education.

The Saunders family, in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla., nurtures the same hope. Every morning at 4 o’clock, 13-year-old Barry rises groggily from bed, pulls on his sweat suit and heads out for a 30-min. run at a nearby golf course. Every afternoon he has two hours of track practice. Barry has followed the same routine five days a week since he was seven—all in hopes of winning a college scholarship and eventually a shot at the Olympics. It’s not a far-fetched dream: already Barry holds the U.s. record for his age in the long jump and 55 meter hurdles.

Barry’s father, Stan, an Olympic alternate in track in 1976, coaches his son’s club track team, the Roosevelt Express. Last year the club spent $60,000—most of it raised from

local companies—to travel to tournaments as far away as Seattle and Antigua. Saunders estimates his out-of-pocket expenses last year at $12,000.
But it's worth it, he says. The kids, the team, many from underprivileged backgrounds, get to go places and meet people they otherwise would not. Also, college coaches are scouting the national competitions for recruits, even among kids as young as Barry. "We just feel very fortunate," Stay says, "that we're able to afford for him to compete at the next level. Because that's where the recruiters are."
For most kids, though, the odds of a scholarship are long. Robert Malina, director of the Institute for the Study of Youth Sports at Michigan State University, says most parents would be better off putting the money they spend on travel teams into a savings account. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, fewer than 1% of the kids participating in organized sports today will qualify for any sort of college athletic scholarship.
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Still, Mar Rodriguez knows parents who have hired private coaches for girls as young as 10. Andrew Roderick, who heads UK-Elite, the company that supplies British coaches for Kelly Donnelly's team, says such parents may be setting up their kids for disappointment. "The big thing is fun," he says. ""If you're not having fun with it, you shouldn't be doing it.
Ah, yes, fun. The primary importance of fun—of sport pursued for sheer exhilaration—is a credo repeated, and often honored, by coaches, kids and parents. At the same time, though, the pushy parent, red-faced and screaming from the sidelines or bleachers at a hapless preteen fumbling on the field, has become an American archetype and a symbol of the unmeasured costs of kids' sports.
Violence is rare but not unheard of. Military police were called in to stop a parents' brawl at a "tinymite" football game in Repton, Ala., last october. A T-ball coach in Wagoner, Okla., was sentenced to 12 days in jail for attacking a 15-year-old umpire. California recently passed a law making it a felony to assault a sports official in an amateur contest.
More common is the low-voltage ugliness of parents who just don't know when to let up, or shut up. Hockey parents in suburban Washington are used to such sights as the dad who ran up to his son after an unexpected loss recently to rage at him, "I'm very, very disappointed." The boy sighed, staring at his scuffed toes. "Yeah, Mom's gonna chew me out too."
Jay George, a Washington biochemist whose son Jason, 12, plays on Washington's Little Caps team, had to summon a referee to remove some parents from the opposing team who were overheard telling their kids, "If you're going to get a penalty, really hurt someone." Then there was the time a Squirt-level tournament match ended in a tie and one of the opposing moms celebrated by clawing two of George's son's teammates as they filed off the ice.
30
And if parents don't spoil the fun, sometimes the coaches will. Bob Bradley, 41, of Chicago tried to suggest quietly to his daughter's soccer instructor that his screaming at the players during a game was inhibiting their play. "Well, you're the parent and I'm the coach," came the reply, "and I'm the one who knows how to play this game." Bradley walked away without mentioning that he had just coached the Chicago fire to the championship of Major League Soccer.

Critics cite such unpleasantness to account for the 73% of kids who quit their childhood sports by age 13, according to studies. “They drop out because it ceases to be fun, and the pressures put on them by coaches and parents don’t make it worthwhile,” says Fred Engh of West Palm Beach, Fla. He’s a professional coach, father of seven and author of the book *Why Johnny Hates Sports.*

Too often, says Engh, “we take Johnny and Mary and push them into sports without knowing whether they’re physically or mentally ready. the travel teams, the all-stars, the championships—they’re what the parents want. There’s nothing wrong with competition. It makes people successful. But children under the age of 10 don’t necessarily want competition. What they want is to have fun, to go out and swing on a swing and go down a sliding board.”

Swings? Slides? How hopelessly retro. Nowadays, if a kid waits till she’s 10 to decide she wants to compete at an advanced level, the travel team will have already left the station. Her peers will be making deft one-touch passes while she’s still learning to dribble. That leaves as her only option the easygoing recreation league, where the coaching is desultory and players often go AWOL. while many parents of kids on “rec” teams equate “keeping it fun” with holding down the level of instruction and competition, the kids often see things differently. Young, of the professional coaches’ association, observes, “It’s not fun for them when they don’t get better.”

You can take the testimony of the kids themselves. “It’s my life,” says Aidan Wolfe, 10, of Portland, Ore., who plays in a recreational league. “I love soccer. If my parents told me I couldn’t play anymore, I’d be devastated.” During the school year, hockey player Jason George wedges homework into recess and lunch breaks to make the grueling Little Caps schedule, but, he says, “if that’s what it takes for me to be good at hockey, I’ll do whatever I have to do.” His sister Sara, 9, also loves travel hockey because, on the road trips, “I get to spend a lot of time with my mom.”

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But other youngsters buckle under the load: whether it’s that of a single, demanding club sport of a whole basketfull of scheduled activiteis. Stephanie Mazzamaro, 10, of Ridgefield, Coll., companied that in additon to homework, piano lessons, Girl Scouts and religion classes, she had Monday soccer practices and Saturday gams. “Mom, I don’t want to do all of this naymore,” she sobbed. “I don’t have time to be a kid.” Her mother Janice, 40, could only agree. “When you live in an area like this, you get caught up in it,” Janice says. “If you don’t do each step, you feel like you’re doing an injustice to your child.”

The intensity of today’s kids’ sports seems to be contributing to an increase in injuries The Consumer Products Safety Commission reports that roughly 4 million children between the ages of 6 and 16 end up in hospital emergency rooms for sports-related injuries each year. Eight million more are treated for some form of medical problem traceable to athletics: for example, shin splints and stress fractures. Some sports physicians point to specialization—a child playing a single sport year round, which many club teams encourage—as one culprit in sports injuries. Kids who alternate different activiteis at different seasons are less likely to overuse the same set of muscles and joints. It’s a very rare thing to see someone playing three sports in high school anymore because of the pressure these clubs put on kids to play in the off season,” says Gary Thran,

director of athletics at Harvard-Westlake School in Studio City, Calif. Gregg Heinzmann, associate director of the Youth Sports Research Council at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, N.J., observes that these players often have become “specialists who face all the stress of a pro.” Why the pressure? According to Thran, college coaches are telling ever younger kids to limit themselves to one sport year round, so they can make the élite traveling clubs.
The Darwinian struggle has gripped girls’ sports with a special intensity. Some college recruiters are bypassing high schools and selecting players directly from the club teams. And some high school recruiters are moving even earlier. Charles Morris, 42, of Berkeley, Calif., a technician for Bay Area Rapid Transit, shakes his head as he recalls the coach who, after watching his daughter play basketball, asked what high school she plans to attend. To be sure, the girl, Casey, is a standout player. But she’s eight years old.
If kids’ sports is undergoing a kind of privatization, with the most talented kids forgoing high school play altogether in favor of the élite travel clubs, the future of high school athletics could be bleak indeed. Dean Crowley, commissioner of athletics at the California Interscholastic Federation, points to the precarious position that sports programs already hold in many cash-strapped schools. “Pretty soon they might say, ‘Why do we need to spend all the money we do on sports? These kids are playing all year round anyway.”’ And then? “Then you don’t have high school athletics.” And then too, the best coaching and the most challenging opportunities would be limited to the kids whose parents can afford private club sports. Which is not what anyone had in mind.
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We Americans are a competitive bunch. It was probably inevitable that the striving impulse would sooner or later reshape kids sports. But the trend has been abetted by other, less predictable changes in American life: the ascendancy of the automobile, the shrinking of open spaces, the ubiquity of the two-earner family and the pervasive fear of crime. Baby-boomer parents may look back wistfully at their own childhood, when playing sports was a matter of heading to the corner sandlot or the neighborhood park after school for a pick-up game. But the sandlot’s been filled in by a four-bedroom Cape code with a two-story atrium. to pay for the Cape Cod, Mom and Dad are both working, and with Mom and Dad both working, the kids are signed up for extended-day sessions at school. And by the time extended-day is over, it’s dusk. And even if Mom and Dad were home, they’d never let the kids wander alone t the neighborhood park. You never know who they’ll find at the neighborhood park.
So what’s a parent to do? We do what Americans have always done. This is, after all, a country that systematizes: we create seminars on how to make friends, teach classes in grieving and make pet walking a profession. In that light, Gregg Heinzmann’s praise of unstructured play seems almost un-American. Any activity, no matter how innocent or trivial or spontaneous, can become specialized in America. So if our children are to have sports, we will make leagues and teams, write schedules and rule books, publish box scores and rankings, hire coaches and refs, buy uniforms and equipment to the limit of our means. We will kiss our weekends goodbye—and maybe more than our weekends.
To most parents involved in kids’ sports, all the criticisms sound like the dreariest party-poopery. There are joys that can’t be organized, pleasures that resist the rigors of systematization. And these remain unextinguished, even in the overwrought world of kids’ sports today. In Morristown, N.J., at the Beard School gym, Kelly Donnelly is

whiling away the last moments before a soccer clinic. Dad Pat has driven her there, of course. He watches as Kelly spends a minute or so keeping a soccer ball suspended by bouncing it lightly off her knees, in a kind of airborne dribble—a bit of magic that only the rarest adult could pull off.
It's quite a commitment from the parents as well as the kids," Pat Donnelly is saying. Suddenly Kelly lets the ball fall to the polish wooden floor and with a deft kick sends it the length of the gym till it narrowly misses a basketball hoop at the far end. The kid's good. Donnelly beams and says, "I think I enjoy it almost as much as she does."
Suggestions for Writing and Discussion
<sumh*>0.
1.
Comment on this article's introduction. How effective do you find it to be? Explain why.
2.
In what places do you find the author's opinion in this piece? Explain.
3.
In your opinion, what are the most effective examples and facts the author uses in this piece? Which ones do you find to be the least effective? Why?
4.
What reasons, either implied or stated, does the author offer to explain the rise of organized sports for kids today? What other reasons can you offer?
5.
What is the author implying when he writes at the end, "We will kiss our weekends goodbye—and maybe more than our weekends." Regarding this implication, do you agree or disagree?
Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing
<sumh*>0.
1.
Examine the pros and cons of another activity in which children are involved today; video games, beauty pageants, Pokeman games Wrestlemania, Odyssey of the Mind, skateboarding, and so on.
2.
Write an essay in which you examine other causes that might have contributed to the rise in children's sports.
3.
Observe an organized sporting activity for kinds—either a practice or an actual game. Write up a detailed report in which you examine the behavior of the adults as well as the children during this observation.

JOHN CLOUD
Tracking Down Mom
John Cloud is a write for Time magazine; this selection originally appeared in the February 22, 1999, issue. Previously he was a senior writer at the Washington City Paper in Washington, D.C., and also wrote for the Wall Street Journal.
Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.

What's your first reaction: Should adopted children have the right to track down their birth parents even if the parents may not want them to?
2.
List all the people, the events, the experiences, and the factors that might go into making you who you are.
———
Cindy is shaking with fear. She tugs at her gold necklace, shifts in her seat, slams down cup after cup of black coffee. She gets this way when she has to tell a stranger why she can't sleep at night, why she and her husband have been fighting, why she can't choke down even half her meal when she goes to a nice restaurant. Two decades ago, when Cindy (a pseudonym) was in college, a man beat and raped her. Devastated and uncertain, she had the baby but surrendered the girl for adoption.
Last summer, after soul-searching, Cindy decided to find out what had become of her child. She gave the state where the girl was born permission to contact her if the daughter asked her whereabouts. The daughter already had, and the two began exchanging letters through the adoption agency. But Cindy held back her identity and location.
A wise move, she now says. After Cindy told her daughter about the rape, the young woman wrote, in her swirly cursive, an oddly jovial response, "Hi, how's everything going?" She said she was glad to learn "about my father's situation"—the only reference to the rape—and wanted to know how to find him. Cindy was horrified. Her daughter obviously hadn't grasped her pain, the nightmares—her whole life. The daughter, with the help of her adoptive mother, persisted in trying to find her father, a man Cindy had helped send to prison. Fearing he might find her and harm her again, Cindy terminated contact.
Cindy now lives in Oregon, where voters last fall approved a two-sentence initiative called Measure 58. If it goes into effect, it will radically change traditional adoption law by allowing adoptees the unfettered right to see their birth certificate when they turn 21. Today those papers are sealed. But since the biological mother's name appears on a birth certificate, the law would mean adoptees like Cindy's daughter could easily find Mom's real name—and perhaps track her down. A group of birth mothers has sued Oregon, arguing that state statutes promise them confidentiality and that breaking these promises would be unconstitutional. The measure is on hold while the suit is pending.
5
More than an hour south of Portland's suburbs, where Cindy has kids in school, lives another woman, Mary Inselman. Mary is angry about adoption law, but for another reason entirely. She turned 77 in December, and has never seen her birth certificate. While everyone else can see such a document without fuss, adoptees must petition a court for their records, and petitions cost money (Inselman is on a fixed income) and, more important, dignity.
Inselman, who says she didn't learn she was adopted until a relative told her just six years ago, feels she should be able to discover her true background, but she has a more urgent reason to seek her records She needs to find out whether any of her biological relatives has a kidney that would be suitable for her granddaughter, who is need of a donor. Inselman has sent letters to a local judge explaining all this, but the judge has thus far refused to release the information, offering a polite recitation of the law. Other judges

across the U.S. routinely overlook the law in such cases. Adoptees cite this capriciousness as a reason for opening all records.
Two women, Cindy and Mary; two lives in turmoil because of adoption laws written in another era. Before the late ’60s, states thought they were doing birth mothers a favor by confining their identities to dusty registrars’ books. At the time, only “bad” girls got pregnant out of wedlock, and they were cloistered with fake names until they gave birth. Today, of course, that attitude seems quaintly outmoded. What’s more, we have become sensitized to the rights of adoptees, who as they grow up want to know what everyone else already knows: who they are: “We are besieged by ghosts,” says Helen Hill, a sculptor, sheep farmer and newborn political impresario, who wrote Oregon’s Measure 58 in her basement and has spent part of her inheritance getting it approved. “We are haunted by questions.”
Several states have tried to devise workable new laws to help answer those questions without treading on the rights of mothers. It’s a tricky legislative game. In 1996, for instance, Tennessee legislators gave adoptees—except those who were the product of rape or incest—access to their birth certificate while also allowing biological mothers to tell the state they never want contact with their kids. As in Oregon, birth mothers have sued to overturn that law, saying they were promised nothing short of lifelong confidentiality (and wondering why, if adoptees can be prevented from contacting their mothers, they would have any use for the name alone). Just last month Delaware lawmakers said the state would give adoptees their birth certificate unless the birth mother explicitly asked to remain anonymous. Yet the moms have only 60 days to file such a request, and the state isn’t planning to hunt them down to ensure that they know they can.
Predictably, the politics of adoption-law change gets very nasty very quickly. Conservative advocates of confidentiality warn that pregnant women faced with the prospect of having their records eventually opened will be more likely to choose abortion over adoption. while most adoption groups support some kind of compromise plan, the National Council for Adoption, a buttoned-up Washington coalition of agencies that arrange confidential adoptions, would require that extraordinary measures be taken by the state to find, counsel and get consent from birth parents before adoptees could even learn their names—to say nothing of meeting them. At the other extreme is the Internet-based Bastard Nation, which wants no exception whatsoever to open records and arouse activists’ ire on its irreverent bastards.org website (“Rush for Our Records!” the site proclaims).
10
With such delicate positions to navigate, it’s not surprising that the initiative process, which encourages simplistic laws like Oregon’s Measure 58, has not provided a solution. It will take more careful legislation to let adoptees feel whole, even as the few Cindys of the nation feel safe.
Suggestions for Writing and Discussion
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1.
The author includes two stories from both sides of the adoption issue. What difference does it make that he begins with the one about Cindy instead of the one about Mary?
2.

What do you believe should be the main goal of any law: to protect the individual or to give the individual rights?
3.
How would you characterize this essay: as one that aims to report information or one that aims to persuade an audience? Explain your answer.
4.
Discuss other issues in which the law must often choose between two individuals' rights. On whose side does the law usually rest?
5.
What reasons can you provide for the author's not mentioning either fathers or sons in this piece?
6.
Overall, which side would you be on if you had to choose?
Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing
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1.
Research another present-day case that deals with conflicting rights of two individuals, and report on how that case was handled.
2.
Write about a time when your rights clashed with someone else's. Explain the ways in which this conflict affected you and how this conflict was resolved.
3.
From either the birth mother's or the adopted child's point of view, write an argument to a judge in order to convince him or her to allow or not allow your mother or child to contact you.

DURANGO MENDOZA
Summer Water and Shirley
Durango Mendoza was born in 1945 near Dustin, Oklahoma, to a Mexican American father and a Creek mother. He has written, "I was not accepted as being either Chicano or Indian, and of course certainly not as white. My situation was as an observer, not a joiner." He earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Missouri and wrote "Summer Water and Shirley" while still a student. This story was originally published in the literary journal Prairie Schooner in 1966.
Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing
<prh*>0.

1.
Write about the fears you had in childhood, and highlight one of your scariest moments.
2.
Write about a belief you held during your childhood that has since changed or left you.

It was in the summer that had burned every stalk of corn and every blade of grass and dried up the creek until it only flowed in trickles across the ford below the house where in the pools the boy could scoop up fish in a dishpan.

The boy lived with his mother and his sister, Shirley, and the three smaller children eleven miles from Weleetka, and near Lthwathlee Indian church where it was Eighth Sunday meeting and everyone was there. The boy and his family stayed at the camp house of his dead father's people.

Shirley and her brother, who was two years older and twelve, had just escaped the deacon and were lying on the brown, sun-scorched grass behind the last camp house. They were out of breath and giggled as they peeped above the slope and saw the figure of the deacon, Hardy Eagle, walking slowly toward the church house.

"Boy, we sure out-fooled him, huh?" Shirley laughed lightly and jabbed her elbow in her brother's shaking side. "Whew!" She ran her slim hand over her eyes and squinted at the sky. They both lay back and watched the cloudless sky until the heat in their blood went down and their breath slowed to normal. They lay there on the hot grass until the sun became too much for them.

5

"Hey, let's go down to the branch and find a pool to wade in, okay?" She had rolled over suddenly and spoke directly into the boy's ear.

"I don't think we better. Mama said to stay around the church grounds."

"Aw, you're just afraid."

"No, it's just that—"

"'Mama said to stay around the church grounds!' Fraidy-cat, I'll go by myself then." She sat up and looked at him. He didn't move and she sighed. Then she nudged him. "Hey." She nudged him again and assumed a stage whisper. "Looky there! See that old man coming out of the woods?"

10

The boy looked and saw the old man shuffling slowly through the high Johnson grass between the woods and the clearing for the church grounds. He was very old and still wore his hair in the old way.

"Who is he?" Shirley whispered. "Who is he?"

"I can't tell yet. The heat makes everything blurry." The boy was looking intently at the old man who was moving slowly in the sweltering heat through the swaying grass that moved with the sound of light tinsel in the dry wind.

"Let's go sneak through the grass and scare him," Shirley suggested. "I bet that'd make him even run." She moved her arms as if she were galloping and broke down into giggles. "Come on," she said, getting to one knee.

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"Wait!" He pulled her back.

"What do you mean, 'wait'? He'll be out of the grass pretty soon and we won't—" She broke off. "What's the matter? What're you doing?"

The boy had started to crawl away on his hands and knees and was motioning for her to follow. "Come on, Shirley," he whispered. "That's old Ansul Middlecreek!"

"Who's *he?*"

"Don't you remember? Mama said he's the one that killed Haskell Day—with witchcraft. He's a *stiginnee!*"

"A *stiginnee?* Aw, you don't believe that, do you? Mama says you can tell them by the way they never have to go to the toilet, and that's where he's been. Look down there." She pointed to the little unpainted house that stood among the trees.

“I don’t care *where* he’s been! Come on, Shirley! Look! Oh my gosh! He saw you pointing!”
“I’m coming,” she said and followed him quickly around the corner of the camp house. They sat on the porch. Almost everyone was in for the afternoon service and they felt alone. The wind was hot and it blew from the southwest. It blew past them across the dry fields of yellow weeds that spread before them up to the low hills that wavered in the heat and distance. They could smell the dry harshness of the grass and they felt the porch boards hot underneath them. Shirley bent over and wiped her face with the skirt of her dress.
“Come on,” she said. “Let’s go down to the creek branch before that deacon comes back.” She pulled at his sleeve and they stood up.
“Okay,” he said and they skirted the outer camp houses and followed the dusty road to the bridge, stepping from tuft to tuft of scorched grass.

25
Toward evening and suppertime they climbed out of the dry bed of the branch, over the huge boulders to the road and started for the camp grounds. The sun was in their eyes as they trudged up the steep road from the bridge. They had found no water in the branch so they had gone on down to the creek. For the most part it was too dry.
Suddenly they saw a shadow move into the dust before them. They looked up and saw old Ansul Middlecreek shuffling toward them. His cracked shoes raised little clouds of dust that rose around his ankles and made whispering sounds as he moved along.
“Don’t look when you go by,” the boy whispered intently, and he pushed her behind him. But as they passed by, Shirley looked up.
“Hey, Ansul Middlecreek,” she said cheerfully. “*Henkschay!*”[1] Then with a swish of her skirt she grabbed her brother and they ran. The old man stopped and the puffs of dust around his feet moved ahead as he grumbled, his face still in shadow because he did not turn around. The two didn’t stop until they had reached the first gate. Then they slowed down and the boy scolded his sister all the way to their camp. And all through supper he looked at the dark opening of the door and then at Shirley who sat beside him, helping herself with childish appetite to the heavy, greasy food that was set before her.
“You better eat some,” she told her brother. “Next meetin’s not ’til next month.”
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Soon after they had left the table she began to complain that her head hurt and their mother got them ready to go home. They took the two little girls and the baby boy from where they were playing under the arbor and cleaned them up before they started out. Their uncle, George Hulegy, would go with them and carry the biggest girl. The mother carried the other one while the boy struggled in the rear with the baby. Shirley followed morosely behind them all as they started down the road that lay white and pale under the rising moon.
She began to fall further behind and shuffled her bare feet into the warm underlayer of dust. The boy gave to his uncle the sleeping child he carried and took Shirley by the hand, surprised that it was so hot and limp.
“Come on, Shirley, come on. Mama, Shirley’s got a fever. Don’t walk so fast—we can’t keep up. Come on, Shirley,” he coaxed. “Hurry.”

They turned into their lane and followed it until they were on the little hill above the last stretch of road and started down its rocky slope to the sandy road below. Ahead, the house sat wanly under the stars, and Rey, the dog, came out to greet them, sniffing and wriggling his black body and tail.
George Hulegy and the mother were already on the porch as the boy led his sister into the yard. As they reached the porch they saw the lamp begin to glow orange in the window. Then Shirley took hold of the boy's arm and pointed weakly toward the back yard and the form of the storehouse.
"Look, Sonny! Over there, by the storehouse:" The boy froze with fear but he saw nothing. "They were three little men," she said vaguely and then she collapsed.
"Mama!" But as he screamed he saw a great yellow dog with large brown spots jump off the other end of the porch with a click of its heavy nails and disappear into the shadows that led to the creek. the boy could hear the rush rustle and a few pebbles scatter as it went. Rey only whined uneasily and did not even look to where the creature had gone.
"What is it? What's wrong?" The two older persons had come quickly onto the porch and the mother bent immediately to help her daughter.
"Oh, Shirley! George! Help me. Oh gosh! She's burning up. sonny, put back the covers of the big bed. Quick now"
They were inside now and the boy spoke.
40
"She saw dwarfs," he said solemnly and the mother looked at George Hulegy. "And there was a big yellow dog that Rey didn't even see."
"Oh, no, no," the mother wailed and leaned over Shirley who had begun to writhe and moan. "Hush, baby, hush. Mama's here. Hush, baby, your Mama's here." She began to sing softly a very old song while George Hulegy took a lantern from behind the store.
"I'm going to the creek and get some pebbles where the water still runs," he said. "I have to hurry." He closed the screen quietly behind him and the boy watched him as he disappeared with the swinging lantern through the brush and trees, down into the darkness to the ford. Behind him the mother still sang softly as Shirley's voice began to rise, high and thin like a very small child's. The boy shivered in the heat and sat down in the corner to wait helplessly as he tried not to look at the dark space of the window. He grew stiff and tired trying to control his trembling muscles as they began to jump.
Then George Hulegy came in with some pebbles that still were dripping and they left little wet spots of dark on the floor as he placed them above all the doors and windows throughout the house. Finally he placed three round ones at the foot of the bed where Shirley lay twisting an crying with pain and fever.
The mother had managed to start a small fire in the kitchen stove and told the boy to go out and bring in a few pieces of cook wood from the woodpile. He looked at her and couldn't move. He stood stiff and alert and heard George Hulegy, who was bending close over Shirley, muttering some words that he could not understand. He looked at the door but the sagging screen only reflected the yellow lamplight so that he couldn't see through into the darkness; he froze even tighter.
45
"Hurry, son!"
He looked at Shirley lying on the bed and moving from side to side.

"Sonny, I have to make Shirley some medicine!" His body shook from a spasm. The mother saw and turned to the door.
"I'll get them," she said.
"Mama!"
50
She stopped and he barged through the door and found the darkness envelop him. As he fixed his wide-open gaze on the woodpile that faintly reflected the starlight and that of the moon which had risen above the trees, he couldn't look to either side nor could he run. When he reached for the first piece of wood, the hysteria that was building inside him hardened into an aching bitter core. He squeezed the rough cool wood to his chest and felt the fibers press into his bare arms as he staggered toward the house and the two rectangles of light. The closer he came the higher the tension inside him stretched until he could scarcely breathe. Then he was inside again and he sat limply in the corner, light and drained of any support. He could feel nothing except that Shirley was lying in the big feather bed across the room, wailing with hurt nd a scalding fever.
His mother was hurrying from the kitchen with a tin cup of grass tea when Shirley began to scream, louder and louder until the boy thought that he would never hear another sound as he stood straight and hard, not leaning at all.
She stopped.
In the silence he saw his mother standing above and behind the lamp, casting a shadow on the ceiling, stopped with fear as they heard the other sound. The little girl had come into the room from their bedroom and were standing whimpering in their nightgowns by the door. The mother signaled and they became still and quiet, their mouths slightly open and their eyes wide. They heard nothing.
Then like a great, beating heart the sound rose steadily until they could smell the heat of a monstrous flesh, raw and hot. Steadily it grew to a gagging, stifling crescendo—then stopped. They heard the click of dog's nails on the porch's wooden planks, and afterwards, nothing. In the complete silence the air became cold for an instant and Shirley was quiet.

55
It was three days now since Shirley had begun to die and everyone knew now and had given up any hope. Even the white doctor could find nothing wrong and all the old Indians nodded their solemn heads when he went away saying that Shirley would be up in a few days, for now, to them, her manner of death was confirmed. He said to send for him if there was any "real" change. No need to move her—there was nothing wrong—nothing physically wrong, he had said. He could not even feel her raging fever. To him Shirley was only sleeping.
Everyone had accepted that Shirley was going to die and they were all afraid to go near her. "There is evil around her," they said. They even convinced the mother to put her in the back room and close off all light and only open it after three days. She would not die until the third day's night, nor would she live to see the fourth day's dawn. This they could know. A very old woman spoke these words to the mother and she could not disbelieve.
On this third day the boy sat and watched the flies as they crawled over the dirty floor, over the specks and splotches, the dust and crumbs They buzzed and droned about some

drops of water, rubbing their legs against themselves, nibbling, strutting, until the drops dried into meaningless little rings while the hot wind blew softly through the open window, stirring particles of dust from the torn screen. A droplet of sweat broke away from above his eyebrow and ran a crooked rivulet down his temple until he wiped it away In his emptiness the boy did not want his sister to die.
"Mama?"
"What is it, son?"
60
"Is Shirley going to die?"
"Yes, son."He watched her as she stood with her back to him. She moved the heavy skillet away from the direct heat and turned the damper so that the flames would begin to die. She moved automatically, as if faster movement would cause her to breathe in too much of the stifling heat. And as she moved the floor groaned under the shift in weight and her feet made whispering sounds against the sagging boards. The flies still flitted about, mindless and nasty, as the boy looked away from them to his mother.
"Does she have to, Mama?"
"Shirley is dying, son."
65
Again he saw how the flies went about, unaware of the heat, himself, his mother across the room or that Shirley lay in her silence in the back room. He splashed some more water from his glass and they knew he was there but immediately forgot and settled back to their patternless walking about. And even though the table was clean they walked jerkily among the dishes and inspected his tableware. The boy had lived all his life among these creatures, but now he could not stand their nature.
"Darn flies!"
"Well, we won't have to worry when cold weather gets here," she said. "Now go cal the kids and eat. I want to get some sewing done this afternoon."
He said nothing and watched her as she went into the other room. He went to the door and leaned out to call the small children. Then he slipped quietly into the back room and closed the door behind him, fastening the latch in the dark. The heat was almost choking and he blinked away the saltiness that stung his eyes. He stood by the door until he could see a little better. High above his head a crack in the shingles filtered down a star of daylight and he stepped to the bed that stood low against the rough planks of the wall. There were no flies in this room and there was no sound.
The boy sat down on a crate and watched the face of his sister emerge from the gloom where she lay. Straining his eyes, he finally saw the rough army blanket rise and fall, but so slight was the movement that when his eyes lost their focus he could not see it and he quickly put out his hand, but stopped. Air caught in his throat and he stifled a cough, still letting his hand hover over the motionless face. Then he touched the smooth forehead and jerked his hand away as if he had been burned.
70
He sat and watched his sister's well-formed profile and saw how the skin of the nose and forehead had become taut and dry and now gleamed pale and smooth like old ivory in the semi-darkness. A smell like that of hot wood filled the room, but underneath it the boy could smell the odor of something raw, something evil—something that was making Shirley die.

The boy sat on the empty crate in the darkness through the late afternoon and did not answer when his mother called him. He knew that she would not even try the door to this room. He waited patiently for his thoughts to come together, not moving in the lifeless heat, and let the sweat flow from his body. He smelled the raw smell, and when it became too strong he touched the smooth, round pebbles that had come from the creek where it still flowed, and the smell receded.

For many hours he sat, and then he got up and took down the heavy blanket that had covered the single window and let the moonlight fall across the face of his sister through the opening. He began to force his thoughts to remember, to relive every living moment of his life and every part that Shirley had lived in it with him. And then he spoke softly, saying what they had done, and how they would do again what they had done because he had not give up, for he was alive, and she was alive, and they had lived and would *still* live. And so he prayed to his will and forced his will out through his thoughts and spoke softly his words and was not afraid to look out through the window into the darkness through which came the coolness of the summer night. He smelled its scents and let them touch his flesh and come to rest around the “only sleeping” face of his sister. He stood, watching, listening, living.

Then they came, silently, dark-bellied clouds drifting up from the south, and the wind, increasing, swept in the heavy scent of the approaching storm. Lightning flashed over the low, distant hills and the clouds closed quietly around the moon as the thunder rumbled and the heavy drops began to fall, slowly at first, then irregularly, then increasing to a rhythmic rush of noise as the gusts of wind forced the rain in vertical waves across the shingled roof.

Much later, when the rain had moved ahead and the room became chilly when the water began to drip from the roof and the countless leaves, the boy slipped out of his worn denim pants and took off his shirt and lay down beside his sister. She felt him and woke up.

“You just not gettin’ to bed?” she asked. “It’s pretty late for that, ain’t it?”

“No, Shirley,” he said. “Go on back to sleep. It’ll be morning pretty soon, and when it gets light again we’ll go see how high the water’s risen in the creek.”

He pulled the cover over him and drew his bare arms beneath the blanket and pulled it over their shoulders as he turned onto his side. Lying thus, he could see in the darkness the even darker shapes of the trees and the storehouse his father had built.

---

[1]Hello.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

<sumh*>0.

1.

After reading this story through once, go back to the opening paragraph and explain how the images here predict the plot and conflict to come.

2.

Compare the personalities and attitudes of the brother and the sister in the beginning of this piece. As a child, which one were you most apt to be like?

3.

Analyze how the natural elements in this piece—the sun, the wind, the water, the landscape—contribute to the conflict and tension.
4.
Besides the obvious contrast in the brother and the sister, what other contrasts are present in this story? What purpose do these opposites serve?
5.
On a literary level, what might the young boy symbolize?
Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing
<sumh*>0.
1.
Describe in great detail an eerie or frightening moment from your own childhood. Focus on all the elements that might contribute to the tension of this moment.
2.
Compare and contrast how you once saw something as a child and how you see it now.
3.
Interview two people—a child and an older person—on any abstract concept of your choice (God, death, love, hate, jealousy, greed, marriage, war, hope) in order to contrast the way these two approach and talk about this topic with you.

JIMMY SANTIAGO BACA
Family Ties
Jimmy Santiago Baca (born in 1952, in Santa Fe, New Mexico) is an ex-convict who taught himself to read while in prison. He is also a highly acclaimed poet who won the American Book Award for poetry in 1988. He once sad that while he was in prison, he saw "all these Chicanos going out to the fields and being treated like animals. . . . The only way of transcending was through language and understanding. Had I not found the language, I would have been a guerrilla in the mountains. It was language that saved [me]." His first poems were published by poet and professor Denise Levertov, who was at the time the poetry editor for Mother Jones. Baca's first book of poetry, Immigrants in Our Own land, appeared in 1979. His first book of essays, Working in the Dark, was published in 1992. This poem is from Black mesa Poems (1986).
Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing
<prh*>0.

1.
Freewrite about a family reunion or gathering that typifies what your family members do when they get together. Explain how you fit in at these family functions.
2.
What would you say are the things you have most in common with other family members? In what ways are you different?

<mno>Mountain barbecue.
They arrive, young cousins singly,
older aunts and uncles in twos and threes,
like trees. I play with a new generation

5
of children, my hands in streambed silt
of their lives, a scuba diver’s hands, dusting
surface sand for buried treasure.
Freshly shaved and powdered faces
of uncles an aunts surround taco

10
and tamale tables. Mounted elk head on wall,
brass rearing horse cowboy clock
on fireplace mantle. sons and daughters
converse round beer and whiskey table.
Tempers ignite on land grant issues.

15
Children scurry round my legs.
Old bow-legged men toss horseshoes on lawn,
other farmhands from Mexico sit on a bench,
broken lives repaired for this occasion.
I feel no love or family tie here. I rise

20
to go hiking, to find abandoned rock cabins
in the mountains. We come to a grass clearing,
my wife rolls her jeans up past ankles,
wades ice cold stream, and I barefooted,
carry a son in each arm and follow.

25
We cannot afford a place like this.
At the party again, I eat bean and chile
burrito, and after my third glass of rum,
we climb in the car and my wife drives
us home. My sons sleep in the back,

30
dream of the open clearing,
they are chasing each other with cattails
in the sunlit pasture, giggling,
as I stare out the window
at no trespassing signs white flashing past.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

<sumh*>0.

1.
If you were t paint a cover for this poem, on what central image would you focus? Explain.

2.
Go back through the poem and list all of the contrasts in this piece. What is the purpose of these contrasts?
3.
Where in the poem do you sense unity and peace? How complete is the unity? How secure is the peace?
4.
In what way do the opening two words develop a new meaning based on the poem's last line? What, then, is the poet's message?
Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing
<sumh*>0.
1.
Using only adjectives and nouns, write a poem of your own that focuses on a particular family gathering that was significant to you.
2.
Write an essay that explains how "tied" you feel to your immediate family.
3.
Explain a "tie" you have to a culture that others in your class may not have experienced. Aim to write in such a way that outsiders will get a sense of what it means to belong to this culture.
———

TOPICS FOR MAKING CONNECTIONS: FAMILIES
<tmch*>0.
1.Referring to at least three of the selections in this chapter, write an essay comparing different approaches to parenting. As part of the comparison, evaluate these approaches and explain which you most admire.
2.What do children contribute to their parents' lives? Refer to at least three selections in this chapter as you respond to this question.
3.Are parents to blame for how children turn out? Write an essay that takes a stand on this issue. For support, use reference sources you have consulted, your own experience, and several selections from this chapter.
4.Analyze the inequalities and pressures that men and women experience at certain ages. Choose one specific age period (childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, middle age, old age). As you write on this topic, use reference sources (including interviews with people currently in the age group you chose), and in addition, refer to examples in this chapter.
5.Choose an author or a person described in one of the selections in this chapter. Write a letter from that individual's point of view to another author or person in another selection in this chapter. Based on the context of his or her piece, what advice, consolation, or observations might this person be able to offer another? (For example, what advice might Jesse Green give to parents in "Inside the Culture of Kids' Sports?)
6.What exactly is a family? Using at least three selections from this chapter for your support, analyze, by means of comparing and contrasting, the various structures of the modern American family, and create a definition that embraces them all.

JESSE GREEN

Orbiting the Son

Jesse Green (born in 1958, in Philadelphia) wrote only poetry while a student at Yale. After graduating, however, he became a freelance journalist and a novelist. His first novel, O Beautiful, *is about a gay set designer in New York who is obsessed with the external beauty of objects. His second book, a memoir,* The Velveteen Father: An Unexpected Journey to Parenthood *is about a gay 37-year-old man who stumbles into fatherhood by falling in love with a person who has an adopted son. This selection first appeared in the* New York Times Magazine *on August 8, 1999.*

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.
Describe all the "extended" family members in your own family: aunts, uncles, caretakers, cousins, close friends. In what ways have these people contributed to your life?

2.
In your opinion, what's the ideal family structure in terms of relationships between the adults and the children?

———

More literally than most newborns, he was no one's child: just "Baby Boy" in hospital records, the rest of his name obliterated. Erez, as he'd later be named, was tended at first by people who, however kind, would never be his: busy nurses, a foster mother. He only found—or created—a family when he came home, two weeks later, to us.

I say us, but I wasn't there yet. Erez was 14 months old when I met him, and by then he was no longer alone. There was Andy, of course, who had managed, despite being gay and well past 40, to adopt a newborn with surprising ease, perhaps because he did not care whether the child would be white, or perhaps just because he was stubborn and lucky. In any case, he was now as much the American dream of a father as anyone could hope for. To Erez, Andy was the star of the show, the excuse for the show in the first place. To Andy, Erez was the *deus ex machina,* arriving late in the creaky drama to undo the knots of human folly and retie them properly, permanently. Dressing the scene, a company of extras—a fussbudget, a gent, a showgirl or two—hovered upstage, but had no billing.

These "uncles" and "aunts" (actually a collection of Andy's orbiting exes and friends) took Erez to playgrounds and museums, spent several fortunes in toy trains and onesies, baby-sat free and thanked Andy for the pleasure. They were but one of Erez's shadow families. Another consisted of pseudo-grannies Andy collected: women left by their actual families to make the best of their inconvenient longevity. Then there was the network of adoring Haitian housekeepers who had helped Andy's mother through her last years and were now helping Erez through his first. No one in these shadow families made any claim upon the boy; he made his claim upon them.

And so, by the time I started dating his father, Erez seemed to love three dozen people. They made up a family of choice—but who chose whom? In traditional families we easily see how the preexisting structure incorporates the child, but in a family as unusual, as manufactured as this one, the opposite process is also evident. The child creates a structure to suit him. Getting to know Andy and Erez, I had the unfamiliar sensation of being auditioned, not by the father but by the son. He scrutinized me for my intentions, or

somehow forced me to do so myself. Would I be good for him? If I came into his life, would I stay there? Over time I began to see how people who were not susceptible to his charms, who were unwilling to be answerable to his needs, drifted away. Or were they pushed? In any case, the child succeeded in drawing to him exactly the adults who wanted him most.

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It may be that he had a more ductile field of candidates to draw from than children in more traditional circumstances. Not every baby lands, as Erez did, among people who feel they could love a child but have forgotten, been robbed of or traded away their human right to do so. For some of our nonreplicating friends, being part of Erez's shadow family has allowed them the moderate contact they seek: one of the "aunts" offers to take our family on vacation, not so much to be with the adults, we feel, as to be intensely, if briefly, maternal. For one of the "uncles," it's more complicated: he has delayed his own desired parenthood, in part because he does not want to disturb the shadow parenthood he already treasures.

In the past, when society was organized exclusively along bloodlines, paterfamilias down to rug rat, those who broke rank did so at the cost of permanent alienation from the march of generations. Now that social structures are more often radial, with a child at the center, the rebels have any number of chances to reattach themselves to the wheel. Confusing, perhaps—less a nuclear family than a nuclear explosion—but a lucky child may profit by it. He can draw into his circle all the strays, of whatever provenance and generation, our unleashed world puts in his path: the gay uncles, the career-track women, the stranded grannies, the loving if hired hands. Sometimes it seems as if we could not raise Erez (and now, as well, his little brother) without this parade of devotees; Andy and I are the chief adults in our sons' lives, but we have not perpetuated the familiar fiction that beyond us there can be no others. If our existence thus feels crowded, theirs just seems full. So be it; life is larger than our dinner table, and because we hope our sons will grow to love the world, we have no choice but to let it love them first.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1. In general, what do you think is the author's purpose in writing this piece? To whom might he be writing this, specifically?
2. Describe the overall structure and organization of this piece. How effective do you find it? What other options could the author have chosen?
3. How would you characterize Andy as a parent? What specific details lead you to this conclusion?
4. Under what circumstance might Andy have been able to adopt his child so quickly and easily?
5. What information has the author not included that you would find helpful?

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing

1.
Compare and contrast your own childhood family experiences with those of Erez's. Draw conclusions as to the benefits and drawbacks of these two experiences.
2.
Argue for or against the concept of "child-centered" families.
3.
Search out a credible article written from the child's point of view who has experienced a family situation similar to Erez's. Compare and contrast this article with Green's piece.
———

ANDREW FERGUSON
Inside the Culture of Kids' Sports
Andrew Ferguson is a conservative opinion columnist and senior editor of the Weekly Standard. *A collection of thirty-two of his essays for the* New Republic, *the* Wall Street Journal, *and other publications has been published as* Fools' Names, Fools' Faces *(1996). This selection first appeared in the July 12, 1999, issue of* Time *magazine, where his articles regularly appear.*
Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.
Freewrite about your own experiences or observations of young children and organized sports.
2.
If you were a parent, would you encourage your child to be involved in a sports team? If so, when would you get your child involved in sports? If not, why not?
———
Kelly Donnelly is bright and pretty and lives in Cranford, N.J. She is 13 years old, and she plays soccer. Boy, does she play soccer! Her sister Katie is 15. She plays soccer too. And their dad, Pat—well, Pat drives. He drives one girl or the other to soccer practice most every day, and to Virginia for the occasional soccer tournament, and even to Canada once in a while, for more soccer. Last week he drove the girls home from soccer camp in Pennsylvania. Not long ago, Pat logged 300 miles in his green 1994 Dodge Caravan so that Kelly could play in three games on Saturday. Katie had two games that day. Then they had five on Sunday.
And how was your weekend?
Pretty much the same, probably, if yours is among the growing number of American families that have succumbed to the mania of kids' athletics as they are conceived in the late 1990s: hyperorganized, hypercompetitive, all consuming and often expensive. Never before have America's soccer fields, baseball diamonds, hockey rinks and basketball courts been so aswarm with children kicking, swinging, checking and pick-and-rolling. Some estimates put the number of American youths participating in various organized sports at 40 million. According to the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association, the number of kids playing basketball now tops 12 million. Not to mention the nearly 7 million playing soccer. Or the 5 million playing baseball. Hockey, originally played on frozen ponds, is now a year-round sport involving more than half a million kids from Maine down through the Sunbelt. The Turcotte Stick-handling Hockey School, based in

Ormond Beach, Fla., of all places, expects 6,400 kids to take part in its clinics this summer, up from 2,600 in 1992.
5
But it is not just the number of kids playing an organized sport that's unprecedented. It's the way they're playing it—or, to be more precise, the way their parents are arranging for them to play it. Kelly Donnelly's team, the SMC Strikers, offers a good illustration of what is happening to kids' athletics. Not so long ago, games were weekly, teams were local and each sport had its own brief season. And now? "I played varsity soccer in high school and college," says Bob Seiple, a coach for Kelly's team. "During that time, I might have played a total of 50 games. Kelly might play 50 games in a single year."
The Strikers are a travel team—sometimes known as a select or club team—comprising kids who have risen through local soccer squads to be selected for more competitive play. They're drawn from a variety of mostly suburban neighborhoods and towns in a given region, and they will make single-day or weekend-long pilgrimages to meet other similarly skilled teams on distant soccer fields. Their coaches are not volunteer dads but traveling professionals, some of them imported from countries like Britain. Kelly's parents will pay roughly $3,000 a year for her soccer experience, including club dues (which cover the coaches' pay), private clinics, summer camps, travel and hotels. For the kids, the commitment sometimes seems almost total. Many have abandoned other organized sports—and sometimes even their school's team—to concentrate on the travel squad. "It's tough to play at this level if you don't do it year round," Seiple says.
To be sure, plenty of kids still participate in sports through lower-intensity recreational leagues. But kids' sports, like other American institutions circa 1999, have succumbed to a cycle of rising expectations. More and more parents and kids want better coaching, more of a challenge and the prestige that comes from playing with the best. All of which fuels the growth in travel teams. Says Judy Young, executive director of the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (a professional coaches' association) in Reston, Va.: "Nobody seems to want to play on a little neighborhood team for more than one season." Kids who want to make the big step up from "rec" sports to a travel team often take private instruction, at $70 an hour or more, or attend specialized summer sports camps and clinics, where attendance is booming. The governing body of Little League baseball, for example, has seen attendance more than double, to 2,900 kids, at its five summer-camp locations around the country. Kids' athletics today is not a pursuit for dilettantes—even among 13-year-olds, who used to be dilettantes by nature.
Coaches are recruiting talented children as young as eight, whose after-school hours, weekends and summer vacations are occupied by clinics, practices, tournaments and fight-to-the-death competition. The old childhood ideal of goofing off—what the grimmer parenting books term "nonstructured play"—isn't an option. As the kids get older, the more talented rise to ever more selective teams, perhaps representing an entire county, while their less gifted (or less committed) teammates drop away. Family holidays, including Christmas and Thanksgiving, dissolve into long treks to tournaments. Coaches can get caught in bidding wars—recruited and signed to contracts drawn up by team managers and parents, for annual salaries as high as $60,000. If they don't perform according to expectations, they can be dumped with a dispatch that would make George Steinbrenner smile.
10

And waiting at the end of the young competitor's rainbow is more than a trophy, more than the thrill of victory, more even than the molding of good character that has been the traditional purpose of children's sports. Now the goal might be a scholarship to defray the stratospheric costs of college, or at least a record of athletic accomplishment that could provide the edge in gaining admission. The dream might be a berth on an Olympic team, or even a career in professional sports.

If all this sounds familiar, it probably should. Throughout the cold war, complacent Americans watched with disdain as promising youngsters behind the Iron Curtain were plucked from home and hearth and sent to spend their childhood in athletic camps where they would be ruthlessly forged into international competitors, exemplars of the totalitarian ideal.

But that was years ago. Watching the crazy culture of kids' sports in America today, a cynic might marvel at how the world has changed. The good news is that the cold war is over. The bad news is that the East Germans won.

That's a harsh view, of course, and it is one not shared by many of the families who crowd the playing fields and gyms. Even in the most intense programs, the kids will tell you this is what they want: the sheer fun of the game, the tribal bond with teammates, the pride of being selected for a team, and the attention from busy parents who might not make as much of a fuss over a triumph in algebra or Spanish.

Any parent knows that few pleasures match the sight of a child who's flushed and beaming after a romp on a stretch of turf. Travel teams in particular can do much to melt away the inhibitions between parents and their teens. "On about the seventh hour of a road trip from western Pennsylvania," says lawyer Robert Luskin of Washington, "you tend to hear things you wouldn't otherwise."

On the practical side, a child busy with sports is less susceptible to the lure of drugs and gangs and the despair we've lately seen in places like Littleton, Colo. "It keeps kids out of trouble and away from the TV," says Leea Kielpinski, 28, a nurse in Oakland, Calif., whose nine-year-old daughter and seven-year-old son play competitive basketball. Most sports programs, despite their excesses, manage to promote the old virtues: self-confidence, personal responsibility, teamwork, persistence, the ability to win and lose with grace. "In an organized sport, Danny's got to learn a little teamwork, some structure and discipline," says Terrence Straub, a Washington steel executive and father of Daniel, 9, and two older sons.

The benefits can even be measured on the child's report card. "We know from a lot of research that kids who participate in sports tend to do better academically," says Mark Goldstein, a child clinical psychologist at Roosevelt University in Chicago. "It forces them to be more organized with their time and to prioritize a lot better."

Of course, the traditional virtues come wrapped in the garb of the less than traditional 1990s, when prosperity is at an all-time high and leisure at an all-time low. In the Glennon household in Lake Forest, Ill., parents John and Kathy and their three younger daughters have re-arranged family life around the hockey schedule of son Nick, 10. One week's lineup: Sunday: practice from 9 A.M. to 10 A.M. Monday: power skating from 7 P.M. to 8 P.M. Tuesday: game night. Friday: a fund-raising dinner dance for the team. Sunday: another game. And several days a week, Nick joins a group of kids who take an hour of private instruction from the former speed coach of the Chicago Blackhawks.

Beyond the expense in time, there is the expense of, well, expense. Hockey is easily the most costly of the team sports. Nick has been playing since he was five, and this year, says John, 46, an investment banker, the family will spend as much as $4,500 on the boy's hockey habit: for equipment, gas and hotel rooms, summer training camps and the membership fee to the local hockey association, which covers coaches' salaries and rink rentals: "It's worth it," says Nick's mom Kathy. "It provides exercise, discipline and camaraderie." Nick has a slightly different take. "I play to win," he says. "I don't play to play. If I find out I have a team that's going to be 0-8, I'll go with a different team."
Some parents hope their kids will win a college scholarship. Single mother, Mar Rodriguez of Orlando, for example, is a graduate student at the University of Central Florida. Money is tight. She shuttles her three kids—Virgil, 14; Eva, 13; and Sara, 10—to dozens of youth-basketball events every week, year round. In a recent month, Rodriguez counted only three days without a practice or a game.
20
Inspired by her idol, Rebecca Lobo of the Women's National Basketball Association, Eva plays on five teams at once. Meals are on the fly, and other social activities are rare. Mar can only pray that the sacrifice will pay off in college aid. "By the time I graduate, it's going to be almost time for the two eldest kids to go to college," she says. "I'll need all the help I can get to pay for their education."
The Saunders family, in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla., nurtures the same hope. Every morning at 4 o'clock, 13-year-old Barry rises groggily from bed, pulls on his sweat suit and heads out for a 30-min. run at a nearby golf course. Every afternoon he has two hours of track practice. Barry has followed the same routine five days a week since he was seven—all in hopes of winning a college scholarship and eventually a shot at the Olympics. It's not a far-fetched dream: already Barry holds the U.S. record for his age in the long jump and for 55 meter hurdles.
Barry's father, Stan, an Olympic alternate in track in 1976, coaches his son's club track team, the Roosevelt Express. Last year the club spent $60,000—most of it raised from local companies—to travel to tournaments as far away as Seattle and Antigua. Saunders estimates his out-of-pocket expenses last year at $12,000.
But it's worth it, he says. The kids on the team, many from underprivileged backgrounds, get to go places and meet people they otherwise would not. Also, college coaches are scouting the national competitions for recruits, even among kids as young as Barry. "We just feel very fortunate," Stan says, "that we're able to afford for him to compete at the next level. Because that's where the recruiters are."
For most kids, though, the odds of a scholarship are long. Robert Malina, director of the Institute for the Study of Youth Sports at Michigan State University, says most parents would be better off putting the money they spend on travel teams into a savings account. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, fewer than 1% of the kids participating in organized sports today will qualify for any sort of college athletic scholarship.
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Still, Mar Rodriguez knows parents who have hired private coaches for girls as young as 10. Andrew Roderick, who heads UK-Elite, the company that supplies British coaches for Kelly Donnelly's team, says such parents may be setting up their kids for

disappointment. “The big thing is fun,” he says. “If you’re not having fun with it, you shouldn’t be doing it.”

Ah, yes, fun. The primary importance of fun—of sport pursued for sheer exhilaration—is a credo repeated, and often honored, by coaches, kids and parents. At the same time, though, the pushy parent, redfaced and screaming from the sidelines or bleachers at a hapless preteen fumbling on the field, has become an American archetype and a symbol of the unmeasured costs of kids’ sports.

Violence is rare but not unheard of. Military police were called in to stop a parents’ brawl at a “tinymite” football game in Repton, Ala., last October. A T-ball coach in Wagoner, Okla., was sentenced to 12 days in jail for attacking a 15-year-old umpire. California recently passed a law making it a felony to assault a sports official in an amateur contest.

More common is the low-voltage ugliness of parents who just don’t know when to let up, or shut up. Hockey parents in suburban Washington are used to such sights as the dad who ran up to his son after an unexpected loss recently to rage at him, “I’m very, very disappointed.” The boy sighed, staring at his scuffed toes. “Yeah, Mom’s gonna chew me out too.”

Jay George, a Washington biochemist whose son Jason, 12, plays on Washington’s Little Caps team, had to summon a referee to remove some parents from the opposing team who were overheard telling their kids, “If you’re going to get a penalty, really hurt someone.” Then there was the time a Squirt-level tournament match ended in a tie and one of the opposing moms celebrated by clawing two of George’s son’s teammates as they filed off the ice.

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And if parents don’t spoil the fun, sometimes the coaches will. Bob Bradley, 41, of Chicago tried to suggest quietly to his daughter’s soccer instructor that his screaming at the players during a game was inhibiting their play. “Well, you’re the parent and I’m the coach,” came the reply, “and I’m the one who knows how to play this game.” Bradley walked away without mentioning that he had just coached the Chicago Fire to the championship of Major League Soccer.

Critics cite such unpleasantness to account for the 73% of kids who quit their childhood sports by age 13, according to studies. “They drop out because it ceases to be fun, and the pressures put on them by coaches and parents don’t make it worthwhile,” says Fred Engh of West Palm Beach, Fla. He’s a professional coach, father of seven and author of the book *Why Johnny Hates Sports.*

Too often, says Engh, “we take Johnny and Mary and push them into sports without knowing whether they’re physically or mentally ready. The travel teams, the all-stars, the championships—they’re what the parents want. There’s nothing wrong with competition. It makes people successful. But children under the age of 10 don’t necessarily want competition. What they want is to have fun, to go out and swing on a swing and go down a sliding board.”

Swings? Slides? How hopelessly retro. Nowadays, if a kid waits till she’s 10 to decide she wants to compete at an advanced level, the travel team will have already left the station. Her peers will be making deft one-touch passes while she’s still learning to dribble. That leaves as her only option the easygoing recreation league, where the coaching is desultory and players often go AWOL. While many parents of kids on “rec” teams equate “keeping it fun” with holding down the level of instruction and competition,

the kids often see things differently. Young, of the professional coaches' association, observes, "It's not fun for them when they don't get better."
You can take the testimony of the kids themselves. "It's my life," says Aidan Wolfe, 10, of Portland, Ore., who plays in a recreational league. "I love soccer. If my parents told me I couldn't play anymore, I'd be devastated." During the school year, hockey player Jason George wedges homework into recess and lunch breaks to make the grueling Little Caps schedule, but, he says, "if that's what it takes for me to be good at hockey, I'll do whatever I have to do." His sister Sara, 9, also loves travel hockey because, on the road trips, "I get to spend a lot of time with my mom."
35
But other youngsters buckle under the load: whether it's that of a single, demanding club sport or a whole basketful of scheduled activities. Stephanie Mazzamaro, 10, of Ridgefield, Conn., complained that in addition to homework, piano lessons, Girl Scouts and religion classes, she had Monday soccer practices and Saturday games. "Mom, I don't want to do all of this anymore," she sobbed. "I don't have time to be a kid." Her mother Janice, 40, could only agree. "When you live in an area like this, you get caught up in it," Janice says. "If you don't do each step, you feel like you're doing an injustice to your child."
The intensity of today's kids' sports seems to be contributing to an increase in injuries. The Consumer Products Safety Commission reports that roughly 4 million children between the ages of 6 and 16 end up in hospital emergency rooms for sports-related injuries each year. Eight million more are treated for some form of medical problem traceable to athletics: for example, shin splints and stress fractures. Some sports physicians point to specialization—a child playing a single sport year round, which many club teams encourage—as one culprit in sports injuries. Kids who alternate different activities at different seasons are less likely to overuse the same set of muscles and joints. "It's a very rare thing to see someone playing three sports in high school anymore because of the pressure these clubs put on kids to play in the off season," says Gary Thran, director of athletics at Harvard-Westlake School in Studio City, Calif. Gregg Heinzmann, associate director of the Youth Sports Research Council at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, N.J., observes that these players often have become "specialists who face all the stress of a pro." Why the pressure? According to Thran, college coaches are telling ever younger kids to limit themselves to one sport year round, so they can make the élite traveling clubs.
The Darwinian struggle has gripped girls' sports with a special intensity. Some college recruiters are bypassing high schools and selecting players directly from the club teams. And some high school recruiters are moving even earlier. Charles Morris, 42, of Berkeley, Calif., a technician for Bay Area Rapid Transit, shakes his head as he recalls the coach who, after watching his daughter play basketball, asked what high school she plans to attend. To be sure, the girl, Casey, is a standout player. But she's eight years old.
If kids' sports is undergoing a kind of privatization, with the most talented kids foregoing high school play altogether in favor of the élite travel clubs, the future of high school athletics could be bleak indeed. Dean Crowley, commissioner of athletics at the California Interscholastic Federation, points to the precarious position that sports programs already hold in many cash-strapped schools. "Pretty soon they might say, 'Why do we need to spend all the money we do on sports? These kids are playing all year round

anyway.”' And then? “Then you don’t have high school athletics.” And then too, the best coaching and the most challenging opportunities would be limited to the kids whose parents can afford private club sports. Which is not what anyone had in mind.
40
We Americans are a competitive bunch. It was probably inevitable that the striving impulse would sooner or later reshape kids’ sports. But the trend has been abetted by other, less predictable changes in American life: the ascendancy of the automobile, the shrinking of open spaces, the ubiquity of the two-earner family and the pervasive fear of crime. Baby-boomer parents may look back wistfully at their own childhood, when playing sports was a matter of heading to the corner sandlot or the neighborhood park after school for a pick-up game. But the sandlot’s been filled in by a four-bedroom Cape Cod with a two-story atrium. To pay for the Cape Cod, Mom and Dad are both working, and with Mom and Dad both working, the kids are signed up for extended-day sessions at school. And by the time extended-day is over, it’s dusk. And even if Mom and Dad were home, they’d never let the kids wander alone to the neighborhood park. You never know who they’ll find at the neighborhood park.
So what’s a parent to do? We do what Americans have always done. This is, after all, a country that systematizes: we create seminars on how to make friends, teach classes in grieving and make pet walking a profession. In that light, Gregg Heinzmann’s praise of unstructured play seems almost un-American. Any activity, no matter how innocent or trivial or spontaneous, can become specialized in America. So if our children are to have sports, we will make leagues and teams, write schedules and rule books, publish box scores and rankings, hire coaches and refs, buy uniforms and equipment to the limit of our means. We will kiss our weekends goodbye—and maybe more than our weekends.
To most parents involved in kids’ sports, all the criticisms sound like the dreariest party-poopery. There are joys that can’t be organized, pleasures that resist the rigors of systematization. And these remain unextinguished, even in the overwrought world of kids’ sports today. In Morristown, N.J., at the Beard School gym, Kelly Donnelly is whiling away the last moments before a soccer clinic. Dad Pat has driven her there, of course. He watches as Kelly spends a minute or so keeping a soccer ball suspended by bouncing it lightly off her knees, in a kind of airborne dribble—a bit of magic that only the rarest adult could pull off.
“It’s quite a commitment from the parents as well as the kids,” Pat Donnelly is saying. Suddenly Kelly lets the ball fall to the polished wooden floor and with a deft kick sends it the length of the gym till it narrowly misses a basketball hoop at the far end. The kid’s good. Donnelly beams and says, “I think I enjoy it almost as much as she does.”
Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.
Comment on this article’s introduction. How effective do you find it to be? Explain why.
2.
In what places do you find the author’s opinion in this piece? Explain.
3.
In your opinion, what are the most effective examples and facts the author uses in this piece? Which ones do you find to be the least effective? Why?
4.

What reasons, either implied or stated, does the author offer to explain the rise of organized sports for kids today? What other reasons can you offer?

5.

What is the author implying when he writes at the end, “We will kiss our weekends goodbye—and maybe more than our weekends.” Regarding this implication, do you agree or disagree?

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing

1.

Examine the pros and cons of another activity in which children are involved today: video games, beauty pageants, Pokeman games, Wrestlemania, Odyssey of the Mind, skateboarding, and so on.

2.

Write an essay in which you examine other causes that might have contributed to the rise in children’s sports.

3.

Observe an organized sporting activity for kids—either a practice or an actual game. Write up a detailed report in which you examine the behavior of the adults as well as the children during this observation.

———

JOHN CLOUD

Tracking Down Mom

John Cloud is a writer for Time *magazine; this selection originally appeared in the February 22, 1999, issue. Previously he was a senior writer at the* Washington City Paper *in Washington, D.C., and also wrote for the* Wall Street Journal.

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.

What’s your first reaction: Should adopted children have the right to track down their birth parents even if the parents may not want them to?

2.

List all the people, the events, the experiences, and the factors that might go into making you who you are.

———

Cindy is shaking with fear. She tugs at her gold necklace, shifts in her seat, slams down cup after cup of black coffee. She gets this way when she has to tell a stranger why she can’t sleep at night, why she and her husband have been fighting, why she can’t choke down even half her meal when she goes to a nice restaurant. Two decades ago, when Cindy (a pseudonym) was in college, a man beat and raped her. Devastated and uncertain, she had the baby but surrendered the girl for adoption.

Last summer, after soul-searching, Cindy decided to find out what had become of her child. She gave the state where the girl was born permission to contact her if the daughter asked her whereabouts. The daughter already had, and the two began exchanging letters through the adoption agency. But Cindy held back her identity and location.

A wise move, she now says. After Cindy told her daughter about the rape, the young woman wrote, in her swirly cursive, an oddly jovial response, "Hi, how's everything going?" She said she was glad to learn "about my father's situation"—the only reference to the rape—and wanted to know how to find him. Cindy was horrified. Her daughter obviously hadn't grasped her pain, the nightmares—her whole life. The daughter, with the help of her adoptive mother, persisted in trying to find her father, a man Cindy had helped send to prison. Fearing he might find her and harm her again, Cindy terminated contact.

Cindy now lives in Oregon, where voters last fall approved a two-sentence initiative called Measure 58. If it goes into effect, it will radically change traditional adoption law by allowing adoptees the unfettered right to see their birth certificate when they turn 21. Today those papers are sealed. But since the biological mother's name appears on a birth certificate, the law would mean adoptees like Cindy's daughter could easily find Mom's real name—and perhaps track her down. A group of birth mothers has sued Oregon, arguing that state statutes promise them confidentiality and that breaking these promises would be unconstitutional. The measure is on hold while the suit is pending.

5

More than an hour south of Portland's suburbs, where Cindy has kids in school, lives another woman, Mary Inselman. Mary is angry about adoption law, but for another reason entirely. She turned 77 in December, and has never seen her birth certificate. While everyone else can see such a document without fuss, adoptees must petition a court for their records, and petitions cost money (Inselman is on a fixed income) and, more important, dignity.

Inselman, who says she didn't learn she was adopted until a relative told her just six years ago, feels she should be able to discover her true background, but she has a more urgent reason to seek her records She needs to find out whether any of her biological relatives has a kidney that would be suitable for her granddaughter, who is in need of a donor. Inselman has sent letters to a local judge explaining all this, but the judge has thus far refused to release the information, offering a polite recitation of the law. Other judges across the U.S. routinely overlook the law in such cases. Adoptees cite this capriciousness as a reason for opening all records.

Two women, Cindy and Mary; two lives in turmoil because of adoption laws written in another era. Before the late '60s, states thought they were doing birth mothers a favor by confining their identities to dusty registrars' books. At the time, only "bad" girls got pregnant out of wedlock, and they were cloistered with fake names until they gave birth. Today, of course, that attitude seems quaintly outmoded. What's more, we have become sensitized to the rights of adoptees, who as they grow up want to know what everyone else already knows: who they are. "We are besieged by ghosts," says Helen Hill, a sculptor, sheep farmer and newborn political impresario, who wrote Oregon's Measure 58 in her basement and has spent part of her inheritance getting it approved. "We are haunted by questions."

Several states have tried to devise workable new laws to help answer those questions without treading on the rights of mothers. It's a tricky legislative game. In 1996, for instance, Tennessee legislators gave adoptees—except those who were the product of rape or incest—access to their birth certificate while also allowing biological mothers to tell the state they never want contact with their kids. As in Oregon, birth mothers have

sued to overturn that law, saying they were promised nothing short of lifelong confidentiality (and wondering why, if adoptees can be prevented from contacting their mothers, they would have any use for the name alone). Just last month Delaware lawmakers said the state would give adoptees their birth certificate unless the birth mother explicitly asked to remain anonymous. Yet the moms have only 60 days to file such a request, and the state isn't planning to hunt them down to ensure that they know they can.

Predictably, the politics of adoption-law change gets very nasty very quickly. Conservative advocates of confidentiality warn that pregnant women faced with the prospect of having their records eventually opened will be more likely to choose abortion over adoption. While most adoption groups support some kind of compromise plan, the National Council for Adoption, a buttoned-up Washington coalition of agencies that arrange confidential adoptions, would require that extraordinary measures be taken by the state to find, counsel and get consent from birth parents before adoptees could even learn their names—to say nothing of meeting them. At the other extreme is the Internet-based Bastard Nation, which wants no exception whatsoever to open records and arouses activists' ire on its irreverent bastards.org website ("Rush for Our Records!" the site proclaims).

10

With such delicate positions to navigate, it's not surprising that the initiative process, which encourages simplistic laws like Oregon's Measure 58, has not provided a solution. It will take more careful legislation to let adoptees feel whole, even as the few Cindys of the nation feel safe.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1. The author includes two stories from both sides of the adoption issue. What difference does it make that he begins with the one about Cindy instead of the one about Mary?
2. What do you believe should be the main goal of any law: to protect the individual or to give the individual rights?
3. How would you characterize this essay: as one that aims to report information or one that aims to persuade an audience? Explain your answer.
4. Discuss other issues in which the law must often choose between two individuals' rights. On whose side does the law usually rest?
5. What reasons can you provide for the author's not mentioning either fathers or sons in this piece?
6. Overall, which side would you be on if you had to choose?

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing

1.

Research another present-day case that deals with conflicting rights of two individuals, and report on how that case was handled.
2.
Write about a time when your rights clashed with someone else's. Explain the ways in which this conflict affected you and how this conflict was resolved.
3.
From either the birth mother's or the adopted child's point of view, write an argument to a judge in order to convince him or her to allow or not allow your mother or child to contact you.
———

DURANGO MENDOZA
Summer Water and Shirley
Durango Mendoza was born in 1945 near Dustin, Oklahoma, to a Mexican American father and a Creek mother. He has written, "I was not accepted as being either Chicano or Indian, and of course certainly not as white. My situation was as an observer, not a joiner." He earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Missouri and wrote "Summer Water and Shirley" while still a student. This story was originally published in the literary journal Prairie Schooner *in 1966.*
Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.
Write about the fears you had in childhood, and highlight one of your scariest moments.
2.
Write about a belief you held during your childhood that has since changed or left you.
———
It was in the summer that had burned every stalk of corn and every blade of grass and dried up the creek until it only flowed in trickles across the ford below the house where in the pools the boy could scoop up fish in a dishpan.

The boy lived with his mother and his sister, Shirley, and the three smaller children eleven miles from Weleetka, and near Lthwathlee Indian church where it was Eighth Sunday meeting and everyone was there. The boy and his family stayed at the camp house of his dead father's people.
Shirley and her brother, who was two years older and twelve, had just escaped the deacon and were lying on the brown, sun-scorched grass behind the last camp house. They were out of breath and giggled as they peeped above the slope and saw the figure of the deacon, Hardy Eagle, walking slowly toward the church house.
"Boy, we sure out-fooled him, huh?" Shirley laughed lightly and jabbed her elbow in her brother's shaking side. "Whew!" She ran her slim hand over her eyes and squinted at the sky. They both lay back and watched the cloudless sky until the heat in their blood went down and their breath slowed to normal. They lay there on the hot grass until the sun became too much for them.
5
"Hey, let's go down to the branch and find a pool to wade in, okay?" She had rolled over suddenly and spoke directly into the boy's ear.

“I don’t think we better. Mama said to stay around the church grounds.”
“Aw, you’re just afraid.”
“No, it’s just that—”
“‘Mama said to stay around the church grounds!’ Fraidy-cat, I’ll go by myself then.” She sat up and looked at him. He didn’t move and she sighed. Then she nudged him. “Hey.” She nudged him again and assumed a stage whisper. “Looky there! See that old man coming out of the woods?”
10
The boy looked and saw the old man shuffling slowly through the high Johnson grass between the woods and the clearing for the church grounds. He was very old and still wore his hair in the old way.
“Who is he?” Shirley whispered. “Who is he?”
“I can’t tell yet. The heat makes everything blurry.” The boy was looking intently at the old man who was moving slowly in the sweltering heat through the swaying grass that moved with the sound of light tinsel in the dry wind.
“Let’s go sneak through the grass and scare him,” Shirley suggested. “I bet that’d make him even run.” She moved her arms as if she were galloping and broke down into giggles. “Come on,” she said, getting to one knee.
“Wait!” He pulled her back.
15
“What do you mean, ‘wait’? He’ll be out of the grass pretty soon and we won’t—” She broke off. “What’s the matter? What’re you doing?”
The boy had started to crawl away on his hands and knees and was motioning for her to follow. “Come on, Shirley,” he whispered. “That’s old Ansul Middlecreek!”
“Who’s *he?*”
“Don’t you remember? Mama said he’s the one that killed Haskell Day—with witchcraft. He’s a *stiginnee!*”
“A *stiginnee?* Aw, you don’t believe that, do you? Mama says you can tell them by the way they never have to go to the toilet, and that’s where he’s been. Look down there.” She pointed to the little unpainted house that stood among the trees.
20
“I don’t care *where* he’s been! Come on, Shirley! Look! Oh my gosh! He saw you pointing!”
“I’m coming,” she said and followed him quickly around the corner of the camp house. They sat on the porch. Almost everyone was in for the afternoon service and they felt alone. The wind was hot and it blew from the southwest. It blew past them across the dry fields of yellow weeds that spread before them up to the low hills that wavered in the heat and distance. They could smell the dry harshness of the grass and they felt the porch boards hot underneath them. Shirley bent over and wiped her face with the skirt of her dress.
“Come on,” she said. “Let’s go down to the creek branch before that deacon comes back.” She pulled at his sleeve and they stood up.
“Okay,” he said and they skirted the outer camp houses and followed the dusty road to the bridge, stepping from tuft to tuft of scorched grass.
25

Toward evening and suppertime they climbed out of the dry bed of the branch, over the huge boulders to the road and started for the camp grounds. The sun was in their eyes as they trudged up the steep road from the bridge. They had found no water in the branch so they had gone on down to the creek. For the most part it was too dry.
Suddenly they saw a shadow move into the dust before them. They looked up and saw old Ansul Middlecreek shuffling toward them. His cracked shoes raised little clouds of dust that rose around his ankles and made whispering sounds as he moved along.
"Don't look when you go by," the boy whispered intently, and he pushed her behind him. But as they passed by, Shirley looked up.
"Hey, Ansul Middlecreek," she said cheerfully. "*Henkschay!*"[1] Then with a swish of her skirt she grabbed her brother and they ran. The old man stopped and the puffs of dust around his feet moved ahead as he grumbled, his face still in shadow because he did not turn around. The two didn't stop until they had reached the first gate. Then they slowed down and the boy scolded his sister all the way to their camp. And all through supper he looked at the dark opening of the door and then at Shirley who sat beside him, helping herself with childish appetite to the heavy, greasy food that was set before her.
"You better eat some," she told her brother. "Next meetin's not 'til next month."
30
Soon after they had left the table she began to complain that her head hurt and their mother got them ready to go home. They took the two little girls and the baby boy from where they were playing under the arbor and cleaned them up before they started out. Their uncle, George Hulegy, would go with them and carry the biggest girl. The mother carried the other one while the boy struggled in the rear with the baby. Shirley followed morosely behind them all as they started down the road that lay white and pale under the rising moon.
She began to fall further behind and shuffled her bare feet into the warm underlayer of dust. The boy gave to his uncle the sleeping child he carried and took Shirley by the hand, surprised that it was so hot and limp.
"Come on, Shirley, come on. Mama, Shirley's got a fever. Don't walk so fast—we can't keep up. Come on, Shirley," he coaxed. "Hurry."
They turned into their lane and followed it until they were on the little hill above the last stretch of road and started down its rocky slope to the sandy road below. Ahead, the house sat wanly under the stars, and Rey, the dog, came out to greet them, sniffing and wriggling his black body and tail.
George Hulegy and the mother were already on the porch as the boy led his sister into the yard. As they reached the porch they saw the lamp begin to glow orange in the window. Then Shirley took hold of the boy's arm and pointed weakly toward the back yard and the form of the storehouse.
35
"Look, Sonny! Over there, by the storehouse:" The boy froze with fear but he saw nothing. "They were three little men," she said vaguely and then she collapsed.
"Mama!" But as he screamed he saw a great yellow dog with large brown spots jump off the other end of the porch with a click of its heavy nails and disappear into the shadows that led to the creek. The boy could hear the brush rustle and a few pebbles scatter as it went. Rey only whined uneasily and did not even look to where the creature had gone.

“What is it? What’s wrong?” The two older persons had come quickly onto the porch and the mother bent immediately to help her daughter.
“Oh, Shirley! George! Help me. Oh gosh! She’s burning up. Sonny, put back the covers of the big bed. Quick now!”
They were inside now and the boy spoke.
40
“She saw dwarfs,” he said solemnly and the mother looked at George Hulegy. “And there was a big yellow dog that Rey didn’t even see.”
“Oh, no, no,” the mother wailed and leaned over Shirley who had begun to writhe and moan. “Hush, baby, hush. Mama’s here. Hush, baby, your Mama’s here.” She began to sing softly a very old song while George Hulegy took a lantern from behind the stove.
“I’m going to the creek and get some pebbles where the water still runs,” he said. “I have to hurry.” He closed the screen quietly behind him and the boy watched him as he disappeared with the swinging lantern through the brush and trees, down into the darkness to the ford. Behind him the mother still sang softly as Shirley’s voice began to rise, high and thin like a very small child’s. The boy shivered in the heat and sat down in the corner to wait helplessly as he tried not to look at the dark space of the window. He grew stiff and tired trying to control his trembling muscles as they began to jump.
Then George Hulegy came in with some pebbles that still were dripping and they left little wet spots of dark on the floor as he placed them above all the doors and windows throughout the house. Finally he placed three round ones at the foot of the bed where Shirley lay twisting and crying with pain and fever.
The mother had managed to start a small fire in the kitchen stove and told the boy to go out and bring in a few pieces of cook wood from the woodpile. He looked at her and couldn’t move. He stood stiff and alert and heard George Hulegy, who was bending close over Shirley, muttering some words that he could not understand. He looked at the door but the sagging screen only reflected the yellow lamplight so that he couldn’t see through into the darkness; he froze even tighter.
45
“Hurry, son!”
He looked at Shirley lying on the bed and moving from side to side.
“Sonny, I have to make Shirley some medicine!” His body shook from a spasm. The mother saw and turned to the door.
“I’ll get them,” she said.
“Mama!”
50
She stopped and he barged through the door and found the darkness envelop him. As he fixed his wide-open gaze on the woodpile that faintly reflected the starlight and that of the moon which had risen above the trees, he couldn’t look to either side nor could he run. When he reached for the first piece of wood, the hysteria that was building inside him hardened into an aching bitter core. He squeezed the rough cool wood to his chest and felt the fibers press into his bare arms as he staggered toward the house and the two rectangles of light. The closer he came the higher the tension inside him stretched until he could scarcely breathe. Then he was inside again and he sat limply in the corner, light and drained of any support. He could feel nothing except that Shirley was lying in the big feather bed across the room, wailing with hurt and a scalding fever.

His mother was hurrying from the kitchen with a tin cup of grass tea when Shirley began to scream, louder and louder until the boy thought that he would never hear another sound as he stood straight and hard, not leaning at all.
She stopped.
In the silence he saw his mother standing above and behind the lamp, casting a shadow on the ceiling, stopped with fear as they heard the other sound. The little girls had come into the room from their bedroom and were standing whimpering in their nightgowns by the door. The mother signaled and they became still and quiet, their mouths slightly open and their eyes wide. They heard nothing.
Then like a great, beating heart the sound rose steadily until they could smell the heat of a monstrous flesh, raw and hot. Steadily it grew to a gagging, stifling crescendo—then stopped. They heard the click of dog's nails on the porch's wooden planks, and afterwards, nothing. In the complete silence the air became cold for an instant and Shirley was quiet.
55

It was three days now since Shirley had begun to die and everyone knew now and had given up any hope. Even the white doctor could find nothing wrong and all the old Indians nodded their solemn heads when he went away saying that Shirley would be up in a few days, for now, to them, her manner of death was confirmed. He said to send for him if there was any "real" change. No need to move her—there was nothing wrong—nothing physically wrong, he had said. He could not even feel her raging fever. To him Shirley was only sleeping.
Everyone had accepted that Shirley was going to die and they were all afraid to go near her. "There is evil around her," they said. They even convinced the mother to put her in the back room and close off all light and only open it after three days. She would not die until the third day's night, nor would she live to see the fourth day's dawn. This they could know. A very old woman spoke these words to the mother and she could not disbelieve.
On this third day the boy sat and watched the flies as they crawled over the dirty floor, over the specks and splotches, the dust and crumbs. They buzzed and droned about some drops of water, rubbing their legs against themselves, nibbling, strutting, until the drops dried into meaningless little rings while the hot wind blew softly through the open window, stirring particles of dust from the torn screen. A droplet of sweat broke away from above his eyebrow and ran a crooked rivulet down his temple until he wiped it away. In his emptiness the boy did not want his sister to die.
"Mama?"
"What is it, son?"
60
"Is Shirley going to die?"
"Yes, son."
He watched her as she stood with her back to him. She moved the heavy skillet away from the direct heat and turned the damper so that the flames would begin to die. She moved automatically, as if faster movement would cause her to breathe in too much of the stifling heat. And as she moved the floor groaned under the shift in weight and her

feet made whispering sounds against the sagging boards. The flies still flitted about, mindless and nasty, as the boy looked away from them to his mother.
“Does she have to, Mama?”
“Shirley is dying, son.”
65
Again he saw how the flies went about, unaware of the heat, himself, his mother across the room or that Shirley lay in her silence in the back room. He splashed some more water from his glass and they knew he was there but immediately forgot and settled back to their patternless walking about. And even though the table was clean they walked jerkily among the dishes and inspected his tableware. The boy had lived all his life among these creatures, but now he could not stand their nature.
“Darn flies!”
“Well, we won’t have to worry when cold weather gets here,” she said. “Now go call the kids and eat. I want to get some sewing done this afternoon.”
He said nothing and watched her as she went into the other room. He went to the door and leaned out to call the small children. Then he slipped quietly into the back room and closed the door behind him, fastening the latch in the dark. The heat was almost choking and he blinked away the saltiness that stung his eyes. He stood by the door until he could see a little better. High above his head a crack in the shingles filtered down a star of daylight and he stepped to the bed that stood low against the rough planks of the wall. There were no flies in this room and there was no sound.
The boy sat down on a crate and watched the face of his sister emerge from the gloom where she lay. Straining his eyes, he finally saw the rough army blanket rise and fall, but so slight was the movement that when his eyes lost their focus he could not see it and he quickly put out his hand, but stopped. Air caught in his throat and he stifled a cough, still letting his hand hover over the motionless face. Then he touched the smooth forehead and jerked his hand away as if he had been burned.
70
He sat and watched his sister’s well-formed profile and saw how the skin of the nose and forehead had become taut and dry and now gleamed pale and smooth like old ivory in the semi-darkness. A smell like that of hot wood filled the room, but underneath it the boy could smell the odor of something raw, something evil—something that was making Shirley die.
The boy sat on the empty crate in the darkness through the late afternoon and did not answer when his mother called him. He knew that she would not even try the door to this room. He waited patiently for his thoughts to come together, not moving in the lifeless heat, and let the sweat flow from his body. He smelled the raw smell, and when it became too strong he touched the smooth, round pebbles that had come from the creek where it still flowed, and the smell receded.
For many hours he sat, and then he got up and took down the heavy blanket that had covered the single window and let the moonlight fall across the face of his sister through the opening. He began to force his thoughts to remember, to relive every living moment of his life and every part that Shirley had lived in it with him. And then he spoke softly, saying what they had done, and how they would do again what they had done because he had not given up, for he was alive, and she was alive, and they had lived and would *still* live. And so he prayed to his will and forced his will out through his thoughts and spoke

softly his words and was not afraid to look out through the window into the darkness through which came the coolness of the summer night. He smelled its scents and let them touch his flesh and come to rest around the "only sleeping" face of his sister. He stood, watching, listening, living.

Then they came, silently, dark-bellied clouds drifting up from the south, and the wind, increasing, swept in the heavy scent of the approaching storm. Lightning flashed over the low, distant hills and the clouds closed quietly around the moon as the thunder rumbled and the heavy drops began to fall, slowly at first, then irregularly, then increasing to a rhythmic rush of noise as the gusts of wind forced the rain in vertical waves across the shingled roof.

Much later, when the rain had moved ahead and the room became chilly when the water began to drip from the roof and the countless leaves, the boy slipped out of his worn denim pants and took off his shirt and lay down beside his sister. She felt him and woke up.

75

"You just not gettin' to bed?" she asked. "It's pretty late for that, ain't it?"

"No, Shirley," he said. "Go on back to sleep. It'll be morning pretty soon, and when it gets light again we'll go see how high the water's risen in the creek."

He pulled the cover over him and drew his bare arms beneath the blanket and pulled it over their shoulders as he turned onto his side. Lying thus, he could see in the darkness the even darker shapes of the trees and the storehouse his father had built.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.
After reading this story through once, go back to the opening paragraph and explain how the images here predict the plot and conflict to come.

2.
Compare the personalities and attitudes of the brother and the sister in the beginning of this piece. As a child, which one were you more apt to be like?

3.
Analyze how the natural elements in this piece—the sun, the wind, the water, the landscape—contribute to the conflict and tension.

4.
Besides the obvious contrast in the brother and the sister, what other contrasts are present in this story? What purpose do these opposites serve?

5.
On a literary level, what might the young boy symbolize?

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing

1.
Describe in great detail an eerie or frightening moment from your own childhood. Focus on all the elements that might contribute to the tension of this moment.

2.
Compare and contrast how you once saw something as a child and how you see it now.

3.

Interview two people—a child and an older person—on any abstract concept of your choice (God, death, love, hate, jealousy, greed, marriage, war, hope) in order to contrast the way these two approach and talk about this topic with you.

———

JIMMY SANTIAGO BACA

Family Ties

Jimmy Santiago Baca (born in 1952, in Santa Fe, New Mexico) is an ex-convict who taught himself to read while in prison. He is also a highly acclaimed poet who won the American Book Award for poetry in 1988. He once said that while he was in prison, he saw "all these Chicanos going out to the fields and being treated like animals. . . . The only way of transcending was through language and understanding. Had I not found the language, I would have been a guerrilla in the mountains. It was language that saved [me]." His first poems were published by poet and professor Denise Levertov, who was at the time the poetry editor for Mother Jones. *Baca's first book of poetry,* Immigrants in Our Own Land, *appeared in 1979. His first book of essays,* Working in the Dark, *was published in 1992. This poem is from* Black Mesa Poems *(1986).*

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.
Freewrite about a family reunion or gathering that typifies what your family members do when they get together. Explain how you fit in at these family functions.

2.
What would you say are the things you have most in common with other family members? In what ways are you different?

———

Mountain barbecue.
They arrive, young cousins singly,
older aunts and uncles in twos and threes,
like trees. I play with a new generation
of children, my hands in streambed silt

of their lives, a scuba diver's hands, dusting
surface sand for buried treasure.
Freshly shaved and powdered faces
of uncles and aunts surround taco
and tamale tables. Mounted elk head on wall,

brass rearing horse cowboy clock
on fireplace mantle. Sons and daughters
converse round beer and whiskey table.
Tempers ignite on land grant issues.
Children scurry round my legs.

Old bow-legged men toss horseshoes on lawn,
other farmhands from Mexico sit on a bench,

broken lives repaired for this occasion.
I feel no love or family tie here. I rise
to go hiking, to find abandoned rock cabins

in the mountains. We come to a grass clearing,
my wife rolls her jeans up past ankles,
wades ice cold stream, and I barefooted,
carry a son in each arm and follow.
We cannot afford a place like this.

At the party again, I eat bean and chile
burrito, and after my third glass of rum,
we climb in the car and my wife drives
us home. My sons sleep in the back,
dream of the open clearing,

they are chasing each other with cattails
in the sunlit pasture, giggling,
as I stare out the window
at no trespassing signs white flashing past.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.
If you were to paint a cover for this poem, on what central image would you focus? Explain.
2.
Go back through the poem and list all of the contrasts in this piece. What is the purpose of these contrasts?
3.
Where in the poem do you sense unity and peace? How complete is the unity? How secure is the peace?
4.
In what way do the opening two words develop a new meaning based on the poem's last line? What, then, is the poet's message?

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing

1.
Using only adjectives and nouns, write a poem of your own that focuses on a particular family gathering that was significant to you.
2.
Write an essay that explains how "tied" you feel to your immediate family.
3.
Explain a "tie" you have to a culture that others in your class may not have experienced. Aim to write in such a way that outsiders will get a sense of what it means to belong to this culture.

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TOPICS FOR MAKING CONNECTIONS: FAMILIES

1.Referring to at least three of the selections in this chapter, write an essay comparing different approaches to parenting. As part of the comparison, evaluate these approaches and explain which you most admire.

2.What do children contribute to their parents' lives? Refer to at least three selections in this chapter as you respond to this question.

3.Are parents to blame for how children turn out? Write an essay that takes a stand on this issue. For support, use reference sources you have consulted, your own experience, and several selections from this chapter.

4.Analyze the inequalities and pressures that men and women experience at certain ages. Choose one specific age period (childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, middle age, old age). As you write on this topic, use reference sources (including interviews with people currently in the age group you chose), and in addition, refer to examples in this chapter.

5.Choose an author or a person described in one of the selections in this chapter. Write a letter from that individual's point of view to another author or person in another selection in this chapter. Based on the context of his or her piece, what advice, consolation, or observations might this person be able to offer another? (For example, what advice might Jesse Green give to parents in "Inside the Culture of Kids' Sports"?)

6.What exactly is a family? Using at least three selections from this chapter for your support, analyze, by means of comparing and contrasting, the various structures of the modern American family, and create a definition that embraces them all.

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[1]Hello.

Write a brief dialogue for each of these pictures. Then discuss ways in which these dialogues suggest issues related to family relationships.