Contents

Preface xv

Introduction
Understanding the Family Lives of Older Adults

Older adults construct a sense of identity, build positive relationships, and pursue purposeful work within different sociohistorical contexts. 1

1 The Gathering
Lois Tschetter Hjelmstad

This poem celebrates family relationships that endure despite their struggles within and across generations. 12

PART I

Negotiating Ties With Young Adults

Connections with young adult children shape the experiences of parents throughout middle age and later life.

Parents rework relationships with their young adult children as these children make life choices about identity, long-term partnerships, and commitment to work. 13

2 Four Models of Adolescent Mother-Grandmother Relationships in Black Inner-City Families
Nancy H. Apfel and Victoria Seitz

Beliefs about whether parenting skills are learned shape African American women’s involvement with both their adolescent daughters and their grandchildren. 27

3 One Week Until College
Sandi Kahn Shelton

Tensions between a White middle-aged mother and her soon-to-be-adult daughter reflect a relationship on the threshold of change. 36
4  
The Good Daughter  
Caroline Hwang  
A Korean American woman enters adulthood in a world that in her mind bears little resemblance to the way her parents view it.  

5  
Forgotten Streams in the Family Life Course: Utilization of Qualitative Retrospective Interviews in the Analysis of Lifelong Single Women’s Family Careers  
Katherine R. Allen and Robert S. Pickett  
Women’s opportunities for marriage in young adulthood are shaped by the broader sociohistorical context and by the needs of the working-class families of which they remain a part.  

6  
Social Demography of Contemporary Families and Aging  
Christine L. Himes  
Changes throughout the 20th century in life expectancy, fertility, and the rates of marriage and divorce have implications for the family relationships of people in middle age and later life.  

7  
The Last Diamond of Summer  
B. K. Loren  
Memories of a mother and grandmother help bring a lesbian daughter and her middle-aged mother closer together.  

8  
Intergenerational Solidarity and the Structure of Adult Child-Parent Relationships in American Families  
Merril Silverstein and Vern L. Bengtson  
Although the family ties of women are stronger than those of men, relationships between parents and their adult children are variable in emotional closeness, attitude similarity, geographic proximity, frequency of contact, and the exchange of aid across the generations.  

PART II  
Connections Across the Generations in Midlife  
Caregiving, grandparenthood, and work are intergenerational themes in middle age.  
Although partnerships and parent-child relationships remain stable through time, key transitions that mark midlife alter the ways in which family members understand one another.
9 Dancing With Death
Camille Peri
Parents share the story of caring for their adult son, his death, and their continuing sorrow.

10 Historical Perspectives on Caregiving:
Documenting Women’s Experiences
Emily K. Abel
The history of women as caregivers provides background for the undervalued work of caregiving.

11 Only Daughter
Sandra Cisneros
Upon sharing her short story, a Mexican American daughter delights in recognition and approval from her father.

12 The Experience of Grandfatherhood
Sarah Cunningham-Burley
Middle-aged husbands and wives describe the meaning and significance of the grandfather role.

13 Father’s Sorrow, Father’s Joy
Darrell G. H. Schramm
New insights contribute to greater closeness between father and son in middle age.

14 Last Christmas Gift From a Mother
Lois F. Lyles
A dying African American mother helps her caregiving daughter develop a new sense of competence and identity.

15 Extended Kin Networks in Black Families
Peggye Dilworth-Anderson
The mutual aid system developed in African American families through time is threatened by contemporary challenges.

16 Looking After: A Son’s Memoir
John Daniel
Although caregiving is most often performed by women, men can and do provide personal care in loving and supportive ways.
PART III

The Centrality of Intimacy in Later Midlife
Intimate partnerships and extended kin ties are key features of late middle age.

Through diverse patterns and styles, intimate partnerships, grandparenthood, and sibling ties anchor the experiences of families in later midlife.

17  Marriage and Family Life of Blue-Collar Men
    David Halle
    The ideology of companionate marriage presents challenges for both blue-collar and white-collar husbands.

18  Breathing Lessons
    Anne Tyler
    Memories of a friend’s long-ago wedding evoke emotional connection and sexual intimacy between a wife and her husband.

19  Grandparenting Styles: Native American Perspectives
    Joan Weibel-Orlando
    The grandparenting styles of North American Indians are shaped by culture, gender, and social context.

20  Silent Dancing: A Partial Remembrance of a Puerto Rican Childhood
    Judith Ortiz Cofer
    As remembered by her granddaughter, a Puerto Rican grandmother makes critical decisions about her life course.

21  Closeness, Confiding, and Contact Among Siblings in Middle and Late Adulthood
    Ingrid Arnet Connidis and Lori D. Campbell
    Sisters maintain and enhance sibling connections throughout adulthood.

22  Shared Filial Responsibility: The Family as the Primary Caregiver
    Sarah H. Matthews and Tena Tarler Rosner
    Adult siblings, anchored by sisters, meet their aging parents’ needs.
23 What Remains
Marge Piercy

This poem is a poignant portrayal of a daughter’s love and longing for her deceased mother.

24 Marriage as Support or Strain? Marital Quality Following the Death of a Parent
Debra Umberson

The death of a parent can have deleterious effects on a child’s marriage when expectations for support are not met.

PART IV

Transitions at Work and at Home in Early Old Age
Negotiating work commitments and coping with relationship loss are challenging tasks for older adults.

Change in paid and unpaid work and the loss of a partner shape identities and family relationships in early old age.

25 Retirement and Marital Satisfaction
Robert C. Atchley

Retirement has little effect on how middle-class couples view their marriages.

26 U.S. Old-Age Policy and the Family
Madonna Harrington Meyer and Marcia L. Bellas

Although government programs were intended to ensure the well-being of older family members, in practice, women, the poor and working classes, and people of color experience financial hardships in old age.

27 Elderly Mexican American Men: Work and Family Patterns
Norma Williams

Without stable work histories, older Mexican American men face poverty and social isolation from their families.

28 Family Ties and Motherly Love
Arlie Russell Hochschild

White widows in low-income senior housing create strong peer relationships while maintaining close family ties.
29 Predictors and Outcomes of the End of Co-Resident Caregiving in Aging Families of Adults With Mental Retardation or Mental Illness
Marsha Mailick Seltzer, Jan S. Greenberg, Marty Wyngaarden Krauss, and Jinkuk Hong
When adult children have disabilities, mothers’ caregiving extends well into later life.

30 Gender and Control Among Spouses of the Cognitively Impaired: A Research Note
Baila Miller
Gender shapes the caregiving experiences of wives and husbands.

31 Two-Part Invention: The Story of a Marriage
Madeleine L’Engle
Shortly after her husband’s death, a grieving widow expresses feelings of vulnerability and draws comfort from their long, loving relationship.

32 Happiness in Cornwall
Raymond Carver
A widower learns that new love can happen at any age.

PART V
Challenges and Possibilities in Later Life
Amid a web of multigenerational family connections, oldest old adults focus their energies and attentions on their most significant social ties.
The quality of later life is influenced by connection to others, health status and mobility, and economic circumstances.

33 Final Rounds: A Father, a Son, the Golf Journey of a Lifetime
James Dodson
The centrality of the connection between a dying husband and his aging wife is fully evident to a middle-aged son.
34  Manon Reassures Her Lover
Martha Elizabeth
Neither the reassurance of love nor the desire for touch is lost in later life. 249

35  Starboys
Elissa Goldberg
Six years after the death of his wife, a widower maintains a strong connection to her, while his relationships with others are forever changed. 250

36  Divorced and Reconstituted Families: Effects on the Older Generation
Colleen L. Johnson
When younger family members delay marriage, divorce, or remarry, their demands on older family members may increase. 253

37  Understanding Elder Abuse and Neglect
Rosalie S. Wolf
Older people who are frail or cognitively impaired may be especially vulnerable. 258

38  Obasan in Suburbia
Susan Ito
A son and daughter-in-law’s wish to be fully American displaces his 80-year-old Japanese American mother but not her identity, her love for her son, or her commitment to paid work. 262

39  Selectivity Theory: Social Activity in Life-Span Context
Laura L. Carstensen
A sense that time is running out changes priorities so that people pay closest attention to their most valued social connections. 265
40  Wallace Nelson, 85, and Juanita Nelson, 70:  
Deerfield, Massachusetts  
Studs Terkel  

An old, poor, African American couple see themselves  
as well off because their lives reflect commitment to each other  
and to their beliefs.  

41  Letters From a Father  
Mona Van Duyn  

A gift opens up a new world for an older couple.  

Sources and Permissions  
References  
Author Index  
Subject Index