Ohio Communication Journal
Volume 60 – June 2022 pp. 79–90

My Grandmother, My Hero: Storytelling, Resilience, and Intergenerational Solidarity

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Storytelling is a means of deepening family connections across generations. Family stories tell of who we are and what we value, and they help us make sense of a family's experiences. Through autoethnography and poetry, I reflexively examine family stories about my grandmother's resilience and overlay them with similar circumstances in my own life. By reflecting on my own stories in counterpoint with those of my grandmother, I examine themes that emerge within our parallel stories. I then hold these themes up to Buzzanell's five processes for constructing resilience and provide amendments to three of the five processes. I argue that family storytelling can encourage intergenerational solidarity and sustain that sense of closeness long after family members have died.

Keywords: family storytelling, older women students, resilience, intergenerational solidarity, autoethnography

Introduction

> *I am 5 years old, and my grandmother has just arrived at our house from the Greyhound bus station in town. She will stay with us for three months, and during that time, she will take care of me while my mother goes to work. We will bake cookies, read books, and every day at 1:00 we will watch "As the World Turns," which my grandmother says is foolish but watches anyway. As we sit in the living room and my parents talk to Grandma about her trip, she reaches into her large vinyl purse and says, "Kari, I have something for you," and she pulls out a Kit Kat bar that is all mine. I feel like Charlie finding a Willy Wonka golden ticket.*

This is the grandmother I remember – the one who wore pantsuits on special occasions, canned peaches in the summer, and had the supper table set every day by 4 p.m. This grandmother is different from the one in my mother's stories. The grandmother I learned about through our family's stories is a woman who possessed incredible fortitude as she grew from a timid housewife to a successful teacher through her pursuit of education later in life. Through these stories, I have developed enormous admiration for my grandmother, and I have drawn on these narratives when facing similar situations in my own life. I, too, entered a career after years of staying home with my children and sought higher education as a nontraditional student to advance my career.

Much research has been done on family storytelling. Family stories tell us who we are and what is important to the families to which we belong (Byers, 1997; Koenig Kellas, 2005; Wyatt & Adams, 2014). "Family stories, or intergenerational narratives, create meaning that goes beyond the individual to provide a sense of self, through time, and in relation to family" (Driessnack, 2017, p. 439). Driessnack stated that this "intergenerational self" provides a context when dealing with life's challenges. Through the communication process of telling stories about events and experiences, families construct their collective history and identity (Huisman, 2014) while they create, express, and maintain small group culture (Langellier & Peterson, 2006). This communicative sensemaking process builds strength among families (Thompson & Schrodt, 2015). "Family stories illuminate the *content* (the details of 'what happened'), the *affect* (the 'how it felt'), as well as the *meaning* (the family's sense of 'why this happened')" (Kiser et al., 2010, p. 243).

Themes that emerge within family stories often focus on traumatic events that a family member endured and spotlight the strength of the person featured in the story (Byers, 1997). Similarly, Huisman (2014) found that family stories often focused on overcoming obstacles and challenges. These tales can

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underscore the values of the "American dream, the protestant work ethic, and bootstrapping" (Langellier & Peterson, 2006, p. 469). Langellier (2002) wrote that hard work was one of the themes that emerged as women remembered and mythologized their Franco American mothers and grandmothers. Indeed, stories that centered around family identity often idealized family members and intergenerational connections (Huisman, 2014).

Williams and Nussbaum (2001) pointed to intergenerational solidarity theory as an explanation for the enduring bond felt among children and their parents and grandparents. Bengtson and Roberts (1991) defined six essential components of intergenerational solidarity:

> (1) association (or contact); (2) affection (or emotional attachment); (3) consensus (or agreement); (4) function (or patterns of instrumental support or resource sharing); and (5) familism (norms or expectations of individual obligations to the family). The sixth element of solidarity, structure, refers to the "opportunity structure" for family interaction; the availability of members for interaction (p. 857).

Silverstein and Bengtson (1997) later narrowed the focus of this theory by boiling down these six components into three metacategories: affinity, or the "emotional closeness and perceived agreement between generations" (p. 433); opportunity structure, or how often generations come in contact; and functional exchange, described as the assistance generations provide each other. In other words, intergenerational solidarity depends on how much the generations like each other, how much time they spend together, and how much help they offer one another. I argue that family storytelling extends this effect beyond the lifetime of the family members. Stories increase one's affinity for previous generations, bring them into the present with each repeated telling of the stories, and serve the function of providing encouragement to younger generations.

Timonen et al. (2013) found that the formation of children had an enduring impact on intergenerational solidarity. The practices of how children are guided and formed are passed down and repeated by subsequent generations. Intergenerational solidarity is strengthened by generational intelligence, defined as "an ability to reflect and act, which draws on an understanding of one's own and others' life-course, family and social history, placed within its social and cultural context" (Biggs & Lowenstein, 2012, p. 2). It is through storytelling that younger generations come to understand the previous generations' life-course and history. Williams and Nussbaum (2001) argued that solidarity, which manifests in feelings of closeness and cohesion, is a communicative process, conducted through stories and everyday talk.

Resilience is a common theme in family stories, and Buzzanell (2010) contended that resilience is a collaborative process brought about through communication.

> Individuals and collectivities literally talk and enact five processes into existence: (a) crafting normalcy, (b) affirming identity anchors, (c) maintaining and using communication networks, (d) putting alternative logics to work, and (e) legitimizing negative feelings while foregrounding productive action. I offer these five processes as springboards for theory development and communicative interventions to foster resilience. (Buzzanell, 2010, p. 9)

In this paper, I examine Buzzanell's five processes of resilience as I seek to answer the following research question:

> **RQ:** How can family storytelling about resilience encourage intergenerational solidarity?

Method

To answer this research question, I employ autoethnography as I seek to gain empathic insight into my grandmother's views and experiences that have been related to me by my mother. As Tracy

(2020) stated, "Ethnographers in this tradition pay attention to how and why people talk their culture – their 'webs' into being," (p. 51). I examine this collection of family stories, reflecting on my grandmother's experiences and the context in which they occurred, while being mindful of my mother's role as both storyteller and active participant. I hold these stories up to my own experiences in counterpoint, as I self-reflexively explore how my own past serves as a filter through which I interpret these stories about my grandmother. It is my own experiences that guide my interpretation of the stories my mother shares about my grandmother, and our parallel experiences have given me a deeper sense of closeness to and solidarity with both my grandmother and my mother.

I chose autoethnography as a means of exploring this topic for several reasons, not the least of which was the opportunity to use an aesthetic quality that draws the reader in (Foster, 2014; Wyatt & Adams, 2014). As Ellis and Bochner (2006) put it, "I want to linger in the world of experience," (p. 431). Autoethnography is a way to dive deeply into a topic rather than skim the surface. Through stories that span more than 70 years, I compare my grandmother's experiences with my own. I share pivotal moments, or "epiphanies" as Ellis et al. (2011) called them. "When researchers do autoethnography, they retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity" (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 4).

Autoethnography allows me to combine elements of ethnography and autobiography as I reflect on my family stories. Adams and Manning (2015) pointed out that autoethnography is particularly well suited for doing family research for a number of reasons: first, it lets us see details of family situations to which we would not normally have access; second, it reveals everyday experiences; third, it allows the author to challenge misperceptions in previous research; and fourth, the storytelling style provides access to a broader audience. The use of accessible language and storytelling invites readers to step into the stories and compare them with similar experiences in their own lives (Berry & Patti, 2015; Wyatt & Adams, 2014). "Autoethnographic storytelling also often comes from and instigates moments of personal change and insight … Stories well told also create meaning that autoethnographers hope will be used by readers" (Berry & Patti, 2015, p. 266).

The use of poetic inquiry can take autoethnographic storytelling a step further, bridging the gap between art and social science (Faulkner, 2018; Owton, 2017). Poetry invites the reader into an embodied experience filled with description and emotion. Faulkner (2018) claimed that "writing reflective poems helps researchers ask more focused questions, and questions they may not have considered" (p. 214) while Owton (2017) stated that poetry can be part of the healing process as one attempts to let go of the past. In this paper, I have punctuated my stories with poems, knitting together my grandmother's and my similar experiences.

While research about family storytelling is plentiful, autoethnographic work about intergenerational solidarity and its relation to resilience is not. This is an area of opportunity that I willingly step into in order to extend research within the field of family storytelling. By looking at ways that family storytelling about resilience can encourage intergenerational solidarity, I show that family stories can have a profound effect on the recipient of those stories, providing encouragement and deepening connections across generations.

Our Stories

From Homemaker to Breadwinner: A New Identity

We have just finished our traditional Norwegian Christmas dinner, and a few meatballs and pieces of lefse remain. My mother and I linger at the table, and as always, the reenacting of these Christmas traditions stirs nostalgia, prompting her to tell me the story of a significant turning point in her childhood, when her family left the farm and moved to town. "I still remember so clearly the social worker sitting at our kitchen table during the summer of 1952 and saying to my mother, 'Mrs. Moe, there is nothing for you on this farm.' My father had died of a stroke when I was 9 years old. I was playing in

the living room when my dad walked in, and he just stood there with a glazed look on his face. That night was the last time I saw him alive.

"My older brother, Donald, was 18 when our dad died, and immediately the responsibility of running the farm fell to him because my mother couldn't raise five children and run the farm too. My sister Ellie was only 2 years old when our dad died. Curtis was 7, and Rachel was 13. Betty was 20 and was working as a teacher by that point. For four years, Donald milked the cows and harvested the tobacco, and when he got married, his wife, Myrna, lived with us, too. But then Donald and Myrna decided to move to her parents' farm, which was much bigger than ours.

"When Donald left us, it was like the sky had fallen. We had no income and no transportation because my mother didn't drive. She had taught school for a few years before she got married, so when the social worker came to our farm to assess the situation, she said to my mother, 'Mrs. Moe, you should return to teaching. You have some experience, and you could do that again. You would just need to enroll at the teacher's college that's about 30 miles away to get your certification."

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I am 30 years old, and I am standing in the public library, waiting while my two young sons look at picture books. I think about my latest difficult conversation with my husband. "Since you don't have a job, the boys would live with me," he had said the last time we stood at the edge of calling it quits. No, I can't lose the boys. I have spent the last eight years as a full-time homemaker, revolving my life around motherhood and wifedom.

I am just five credits shy of my bachelor's degree in communication. As a newlywed, I quit college to accompany my husband on what would be the first of five interstate moves in seven years. Now we are 800 miles away from that university and our families. Surely, I can find a way to finish my degree and get a job so I can provide for my children.

I see on the library's checkout counter a booklet that reads: "SUNY Brockport Summer Classes." I pick it up and thumb through the pages looking for communication courses. I know I need a public speaking course to finish my degree, plus a couple of other credits. I find "Persuasive Speaking" offered on Tuesdays and Thursdays at a university 40 miles from my home. It is my ticket out.

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Buzzanell (2010) talked about affirming identity anchors as an important component of constructing resilience. She described an "identity anchor as a relatively enduring cluster of identity discourses upon which individuals and their familial, collegial, and/or community members rely when explaining who they are for themselves and in relation to each other." I contend that in the case of my grandmother and myself, we went beyond affirming identity anchors to *crafting identity anchors* as we strove for resilience. We each went from striving to be an ideal mother (Hampsten, 2019) who was constantly available for our children, to preparing to enter the workforce. Older women students are motivated to seek higher education either for intrinsic interest (they simply want to learn and expand their horizons) or instrumental interest (they need a marketable skill) (Diness, 1981). In my grandmother's and my cases, we both looked to education as a means of supporting ourselves and our families. "The woman's level of economic need, especially the distress of having to assume a family's support, seems to be associated with degree of instrumental interest in the field's career opportunities" (Diness, 1981, p. 209). My grandmother knew a teaching certification would lead to a job in the post-World War II era while I pinned hopes of financial solvency and independence on finishing my bachelor's degree.

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We strike out
Taking a step without knowing if the ground
Will be there when our weight shifts
But the ground behind us is gone
So we step forward

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Home, Sweet Crappy Apartment: Foregrounding Productive Action

The dishes wait as my mother continues her story. "When I was a freshman in high school, we moved to town so that my mother could go to teacher's college. My sister Rachel had just graduated from high school and left for nurse's training, and Mother, Ellie and I moved into a tiny, one-bedroom apartment about the size of a thimble. We had to share a bathroom down the hall with other tenants, and we had a little two-burner stove in the kitchen. It was an upstairs apartment, and it would get stiflingly hot. I don't think we even had a fan. Mother and Ellie shared the bedroom – Ellie was just 6 at the time – and I slept on the pullout couch."

"What about Curtis?" I asked. "Where did he sleep?"

"There wasn't room for Curtis. He was starting seventh grade that year, and he went to live with Donald and Myrna. The evening after we had moved into that tiny apartment, Mother and Ellie and I were feeling pretty blue because we were missing our family – Donald, Myrna, Rachel, and Curtis – when we heard a knock at the door. We ran down the stairs to see that Donald and Curtis had come to visit us, and we were so happy to see them!"

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It's a cold Saturday in January when I move out of the four-bedroom, 2,500-square-foot spec home my soon-to-be-ex-husband and I had purchased just two years earlier. With his ample income, he can afford the $1,900-a-month mortgage. When I arrive at the two-bedroom townhome I've rented a few miles away, the landlord tells me that he will come back in a few weeks to fix the broken dishwasher and the half of the kitchen sink that drains onto the floor. "Be sure not to use that side, or the dishwasher," he tells me. "And I'll come by pretty soon and fix that burner that doesn't work on the stove."

"How about painting the place?" I ask. He shrugs, pretending not to notice the patches of spackle that hint at a paint job that someone started but never finished. The blue carpet on the stairs looks brown from a constant parade of dirty shoes.

After the landlord and the movers leave, my friends come to help. Jenny has put groceries in the fridge and is baking a pan of brownies, Val is unpacking box after box, and Leigh has dropped off an extra dresser I can use in the boys' room. Marlin cleans the carpet on the stairs, and when he finishes, he says to me, "You know, I think my wife and I looked at this very townhome when we first moved here a few years ago. But afterward she cried and said, 'I just can't live there!'"

The words hang like a bubble over his head as he realizes that he has implied what we all have so carefully avoided saying – my place is a dump. He quickly adds, "But it's much better now." I doubt it, but I am happy and relieved to be in my own space regardless of the condition.

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According to Buzzanell (2010), another process in constructing resilience "involves the deliberate foregrounding of productive action while simultaneously acknowledging that the circumstances perceived as detrimental could legitimately provoke anger and other potentially negative feelings" (p. 7). For both my grandmother and me, the move from the family home into a cheap apartment required sacrifices we were willing to make to move our lives forward. For my grandmother and mother, this move represented a separation from family members, including 12-year-old Curtis. For me, it meant moving into substandard housing. The negative tradeoffs are clearly acknowledged in both our stories, but missing Curtis or living with a broken kitchen and peeling paint were not the focus of our stories. Instead, we highlighted the fact that these moves brought both of us closer to our goals of completing our education and starting a career.

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We lay our sacrifices
On the altar of our futures.
What will we trade
For this new life?

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A Little Bit of Pay: Creative Reframing

"After Mother finished that year of teacher's college, we moved into a bigger apartment, and Curtis came to live with us. Mind you, the apartment wasn't *much* bigger, but at least its one bedroom was big enough to hold two beds – for Mother, Ellie and me, so Curtis could have the hide-a-bed. Mother got a job teaching in a one-room country school. She didn't drive, so she arranged for the town taxi to take her out to the school in the morning and pick her up in the afternoon. I think she split the fare with another teacher or two, so it wasn't very expensive. She couldn't afford much at that time because the country schools paid very little – only about $3,000 a year, which even in 1953 wasn't very much!"

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I am in the car, driving the 35 miles home from the first job interview I've had since finishing my bachelor's degree. The job is for an assistant editor position at a small publishing company. As I drive, I mentally calculate the pay that the owner offered. Let's see, $350 a week would be about … $18,000 a year. I gasp. That's nothing! Even with child support, will that be enough for me to raise the boys?

As I drive, I call my friend who is a writer. "They offered me $18,000 a year," I explain. "Is that in the ballpark of what I should expect?" hoping she'll say no.

"Yeah, that's pretty much what you're going to get starting out as a writer. It doesn't pay a lot," she says.

I take the job and start my career.

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A third process in constructing resilience involves "putting alternative logics or reframings to work" (Buzzanell, 2010, p. 6). By doing this, one can "incorporate seemingly contradictory ways of doing organizational work" (p. 6). I would take this process of constructing resilience a step further by including the process of putting *creative logistics* to work. My grandmother and I each started our careers with low-paying jobs. According to Dollartimes.com, $3,000 in 1953 is the equivalent of $19,550 in 2001, the year I started working at the publishing company. Essentially my grandmother and I were making the same amount of money as we started our careers nearly half a century apart. Even though our pay was low and our commutes were burdensome, we figured out how to make everything work. Arranging a taxi to take her out to a country school was certainly a creative logistic on my grandmother's part. For me, I eventually negotiated a shorter workday (Bowles et al., 2018) on the days my boys were with me and longer days when they were not, so I could be home when they got on and off the bus. These creative logistics were a critical part of our stories of resilience.

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Bit by bit
The new life comes together
We inch upward
Thankful for the bits we have

—

Facing Fears, Finding Friends: Communication Networks

My mother cuts a leftover piece of lefse in half and nibbles it as we continue to sit at the table while she reminisces. "The country schools didn't pay much, but if a teacher had her bachelor's degree, the district was required to pay her more. So, every summer, Mother would take classes and work toward her degree, little by little. It took her about seven years to finish it, I think."

"Wait, so how old was Grandma when she got her bachelor's degree?" I ask.

"Let's see. That was 1960, so she would have been 57."

"Grandma was 57 when she finished her bachelor's degree?! That's amazing!"

"It wasn't easy for my mother to go back to school; she was so shy. A professor told her she shouldn't speak so apologetically – that she needed to have more confidence. In fact, I remember her telling us that when she had to give her first speech, she stood at the podium in front of the class and cried. She couldn't do it, and she had to sit down. But the young women in her class were very kind to her, and they took her under their wing. She really enjoyed those friendships that she made, and she kept those friends for many years."

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It is the first day of my first class in the master's in communication program. I have decided that if I ever hope to advance in my career at the university, where I work as the campaign communications manager, I need to pursue an advanced degree. I am 49, and if I take just one class per semester (while working full time), I will graduate when I am 54. At this rate, I will finish the same year my daughter graduates from high school.

I look around the room and realize that most of the other students are younger than both my 26-year-old and 24-year-old sons. I feel so out of place. I am embarrassed by my age, and I am acutely aware of how different I am from the group. There is one other woman who looks like a nontraditional student, and even she is at least 10 years younger than I am.

Each week when I come to class, I remind myself, "Grandma was 57 years old when she finished her bachelor's degree. She was older than I am now. If she can do it, I can do it!"

A year later, as I begin my third graduate-level class, I still feel woefully lacking when I am teamed up with three PhD students for a qualitative research project. I don't know what "coding" means, I have never heard of IRB, and I certainly can't write roundabout sentences filled with academic jargon and five-dollar words. As I sit in the library with my groupmates, I jokingly warn them that I am not as experienced as they are, so they should not expect me to produce the same quality of work that I know they will be doing. Ben turns to me and says, "Kari, you are an intelligent, capable woman, and you need to stop selling yourself short. You can do this!"

A few weeks later, and as my husband and I are leaving a restaurant, I get a text.

"Hey, Kari! It's Ben. Tonight we're having our annual '12 Bars' … and I'm sure you can assume what that entails but if you're free, you should join us for a drink (or your beverage of choice) and celebrate our work on the paper! Emily and I were talking today and we really think it is such a strong paper and I know that I am personally grateful for everyone's work we have contributed. So thank you for that!"

My husband and I decide to join them. I am 50. I am bar hopping with college students. And I feel included.

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A fourth process in the construction of resilience is maintaining and using communication networks. Buzzanell (2010) wrote, "The process of building and utilizing social capital is essential to resilience" (p. 6). This network could mean family, friends, neighbors, or coworkers. A study by Orthner et al. (2004) showed that families constructed resilience through their "ability to pull together and

(depend) on each other when problems arose" (p. 165), while Taylor and Conger (2017) found that single mothers who felt supported by relatives felt better psychologically and thought their parenting improved. Communication networks for my grandmother and me included newly made friends as well as family, and the support of these friends was critical to both of us finding our way into our new life.

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We are out of place
We are both the new kid and the old lady
There is too much new
Too much to know
"You'll be fine," they say
And we start to believe them

—

Achieving Success: New Normalcy

My Uncle Curtis, now 80 years old, has also shared stories of my grandmother's life journey, including her stories of success. As I spoke with him on the phone one winter afternoon, he recalled a favorite story: "I know the retired superintendent of schools where Mother used to teach, and he's up almost into his 90s, and when he sees me, he'll say, 'Your mother was a good schoolteacher.' My mother worked for him when she was in the elementary system here, and he probably doesn't remember that he's told me that a hundred times, but he keeps telling me again, 'Your mother was a good teacher!'" I could hear him chuckling over the phone.

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I am standing in a banquet hall full of people celebrating our university raising more than $250 million in its multi-year fundraising campaign. It is more than double the last campaign, and for the past four years, I have kept busy writing copy, making videos, and redesigning our website. As I direct the photographer on what photos to capture of the VIPs in the crowd, I am approached by our vice chancellor of communications. "Kari, I want to tell you that my whole team and I are really glad that you were hired for this position," he says. "Everyone on my team says wonderful things about you."

"Thank you, Tom. You have a great group, and I love working with all of them."

"I mean it. You were the exact right person to take on this position because, pardon my French, you have your shit together."

I let the words ring in my ear, savoring the acknowledgment.

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The last process in the construction of resilience that I will address is crafting normalcy. Buzzanell (2010) wrote of her observations, "New normalcies were literally created through talk and through maintenance of family rituals." I argue that new normalcies are not only important in the immediate aftermath of trauma, but that they continue on as *updated legacies* long after the trauma has passed. My grandmother is not remembered as a timid older student but rather as a competent, influential teacher. Instead of being seen as a former homemaker who came late to her career, I am viewed with respect and affection by my colleagues. As time goes by, these new normalcies turn into revised legacies that eclipse the past. Although I have amended Buzzanell's processes of resilience construction, she and her colleagues admitted that, "As much as there is no right way to tell a story, there is no right way to be resilient" (Betts, Hintz, & Buzzanell, 2021).

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We have crossed a finish line
We have made it through the latest heat

Gasp for air, wipe our brow
It is our best time yet
For now
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Discussion

The stories that my mother, aunts, and uncles have shared about my grandmother focus on resilience, the value of education, and the payoffs of persistence. My grandmother and I both experienced significant growth, coming out on the other side of adversity with a greater sense of wellbeing than we had before (Scali et al., 2012). I agree with Buzzanell (2010) that "resilience is developed, sustained, and grown through discourse, interaction, and material considerations." The stories about my grandmother's resilience after the death of her husband, losing her livelihood on the farm, and being separated from her adolescent son have given me a model to develop my own resilience in response to tough situations.

As Buzzanell and Houston (2017) asserted, reactions to trauma and stress can shift from coping and adapting to thriving and transforming. Both my grandmother and I moved beyond simply enduring difficulties. We grew, took on new challenges, and found success. Like the mother-daughter stories in Kranstuber Horstman's (2019) research, my grandmother's and my parallel stories focused on acknowledging the struggle, taking action, seeking silver linings, and finding strength in others (Kranstuber Horstman, 2019).

Our parallel stories of returning to school echo a theme common to so many older women students: lack of confidence (Diness, 1981; Limbart, 1991). "Showing up at college is an act of courage for returning women. When they walk onto a college campus their aspirations are pressing against a strong current of negative images about adult learning and the place of adults in higher education" (Fairchild, 2017, p. 3). Like the women in Fairchild's research, my grandmother and I kept focused on our goals and "gradually claimed (our) right to be part of the college community" (p. 10). This shared experience, although separated by many decades, has bonded my grandmother and me and increased my sense of solidarity with her as well as with my mother and her siblings who shared these stories.

I have heard many, many stories about my grandmother and her incredible life. Some, like the one about her surviving a normally fatal case of tetanus, make her seem superhuman. In a way she is. My grandmother is my hero. Even though she died when I was 18, the stories that my mother and others have shared with me about her in the decades since have made me admire and appreciate her more than I did as a child grateful for my own Kit Kat. For my family and me, storytelling has encouraged intergenerational solidarity.

Limitations and Future Directions

While this autoethnography delved deeply into one family's experience of family storytelling, resilience, and intergenerational solidarity, the field would benefit from more autoethnographic studies in the same vein to determine if others share similar lifelong experiences. Research could also be advanced through a qualitative study of family storytelling and intergenerational solidarity using surveys, interviews, or family focus groups to elicit rich responses from a variety of participants. Although this autoethnography gave an in-depth look at one family, it is limited to a single family's experience. Because many of my family stories were shared with me after my grandmother died, this study did not benefit from direct communication between my grandmother and me. Further research could explore the role that middle generations play in enhancing solidarity between their older and younger counterparts.

In conclusion, this autoethnography has illustrated many specific ways my own bond with my grandmother has been enhanced through storytelling. By comparing our parallel experiences, I have shared specific moments of epiphany in both her life and mine. My mother's willingness to share stories about her younger life and the struggles my grandmother endured has resulted in a stockpile of stories

from which I have drawn encouragement when facing struggles in my own life. My mother not only gave me stories, she gave me a hero.

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