

# The 3 Generation

## Life and Death Under One Roof

By *Cathy Myers*

When our first child was small, we lived thousands of miles from either set of grandparents, near Mexico City. We were paid in pesos, and when the peso began falling rapidly, our delight in this Mexican adventure faded. My parents urged us to come back to New Jersey and live in their walk-out basement while we regrouped, and we accepted their offer.

Our second child was born shortly after we moved in, and my parents relished the daily interaction with their grandchildren. When Grandma came home from work she would “yoo-hoo” as she opened the front door, and my son would run to greet her. She’d change into “play clothes” and the next hour or so was his. They had tea parties, played ball, and scooted cars across the floor. When the baby got fussy, Grandpa would scoop her up for a walk outside “to see the birdies.”

Meanwhile, my husband was changing careers and working long hours on top of a long commute. And I was struggling with the loneliness of being an at-home mother in the early 1980s in an outer suburb that I knew was a temporary place for us. When Fred found a position in the Washington, D.C. suburbs we were sad to be moving our children away from Grandma and Grandpa, but relieved to be financially independent again.

We settled into our new community, and my parents came to visit several times a year. As they approached retirement, we began to talk about sharing a house again. Their income was limited, and their house and yard required more upkeep than they could manage. We decided to find a house to share. As we searched, though, we found that the advertised “in-law suites” were often small, dark after-thoughts, and many of the neighborhoods with larger homes were too remote for our tastes. We began to think about renovating instead of moving. The children could keep their familiar routines, we would stay close to friends, and our location near shopping, a library, a recreation center, and public transportation would make it easier for Dad to live with his decision to stop driving when they moved down.

We drew up house plans, met with builders, and consulted an attorney for advice on the financial aspects of sharing a house. The attorney advised against co-ownership, but we didn’t have the resources to finance this project ourselves. So my parents gave us a loan and some cash which would be counted in the future as our part of their estate. They also agreed to pay us a monthly rent.

My  
daughter  
and  
my  
mother  
studying.



We planned a large bedroom, a handicapped-accessible bathroom, and a modest living room for my parents. We would share the kitchen, dining room, and laundry area, all on the same floor as their rooms. We moved out of the house and construction began. Four months later, we moved back in.

My parents were thrilled with their space, and we began integrating our daily routines. We cooked and ate together, Dad attended many of our son Scott’s baseball games, and our daughter Michelle often invited friends over to play cards with Grandma.

But then, one morning just nine months after moving in we heard my Mom shouting for help. My dad had suffered a major stroke. After several weeks in therapy, he came home. Though he could speak very little, I discovered he could sing along to familiar songs. We began to sing together every night after dinner, and were glad to be able to include him in the rhythm of family life. He and I went to watch Scott’s baseball games, singing “Take Me Out to the Ballgame” on the drive. When we couldn’t go, Scott would come in after the game and describe the action to Grandpa. Scott was by now 14, approaching six feet tall, and he would guide his grandfather to his place at the dinner table. After about a year, my father died.

My mother kept telling us how glad she was to be with us. She spent more time in the kitchen, telling us stories about herself I had never heard before. She enjoyed doing crafts with Michelle, and Scott would visit in her living room after school to talk about his day. She insisted she didn’t mind the volume of his guitar in the basement. Soon it was an entire rock band, and still she didn’t mind. She went off on a beach vacation with my brother, attended a reunion of high school friends, and spent weeks visiting in New Jersey and welcoming her sixth grandchild into the world. But within the year she was diagnosed with cancer, and after calling in hospice she died in our home, surrounded by her children and grandchildren.

So life with my parents in this house didn’t quite turn out as we expected. It was much too short. We have wonderful, comforting memories—and we also have unsettling worries about our financial future with this big house.

For now, we’ll use Grandma and Grandpa’s bedroom as a guest room. Perhaps another family member will share the space some day. One who can put up with a rock band.

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*Cathy Myers lives in Northern Virginia.*

# Household Lives!

## Two Times Three

By Lee Miller

**Y**eah, I know, it's tough to be a kid. Yeah, I also know it's tough to be a parent. Try being both at the same time, in the same household, sometimes in the same sentence.

"If your Grammy doesn't have anything planned for supper, we can stop at McD's on the way home from practice," I tell my son who's looking for his baseball gear. I'm trying to help before Grammy, who also lives at our house, provides us both with a lecture on the virtues of getting ready before the last minute.

As the result of my divorce, I live in a three-generational household that includes my mother, son, daughter, and two cats. My first experience at "three generationalism" was as a child living with my grandmother and mother.

My mother came to this country as a military bride. We lived with my father and his parents until my grandfather's death and father's desertion. Strangely enough, our family of three stayed together; Mom was the provider while her mother-in-law maintained the household and worked part-time. As a kid I learned the advantages of being the child of two mothers. With paternal discipline out of the way, it was easy to find a way to get

Chris Miller,  
Jeanine Miller,  
and  
Grammy.



what I wanted. Sometimes I got caught between two sets of expectations, but by and large the atmosphere was a relaxed one. If there were power struggles on high, they didn't affect me.

It's not so easy being the in-between generation. As the "in-betweener" I still get to be the kid—even when I don't want to be, even when I try to remind my mother that at 43 years of age you should be able to go out without leaving a minute-by-minute itinerary. And if I try to get away with something, I'm in double jeopardy from my mother *and* my kids, who take extraordinary and perverse pleasure in ratting on me. I also get to be a parent, a job I really enjoy but which can be hard when Grammy is intercepting my attempts at discipline or, conversely, blaming me for my children's failure to follow her particular standards of behavior. Try explaining to your daughter why "those shorts" are not appropriate for school as your mother interrupts to say, "you look like a 'frump' with your hair like that."

Still, there are advantages. Having another adult around to cook, chauffeur, and pitch in does make life easier. The extra money my mother contributes to the household makes a big difference in our standard of living and eliminates some of the harder choices I see other single mothers having to make. And though my mother may complain about my behavior or wardrobe from time to time, she is still my best supporter and biggest fan.

Despite the occasional rumble, my son and daughter enjoy having their grandparent around and benefiting from both her wisdom and care. They will always remember stories about her efforts as a child during World War II to aid the French Resistance by smuggling bullets to fighters in hollowed-out loaves of French bread. And if I embarrass them with the funny things they did as kids, they can always prompt Grammy into relating the one about their mom letting loose a jar full of stink bugs in the neighbor's dining room. My children enjoy their grandmother's ability to make their mom into a child like themselves. And maybe, just maybe, being a child in one relationship can make you a better parent in the other.

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*Lee Miller is the director of community resources for the Arlington Community Temporary Services, Inc.*

## Bring on the Elder Cottage

**T**ompkins County, New York, has recently launched an experiment that aims to make comfortable three-generation living possible even for lower-income families. The county will buy six small (28' x 24') modular one-story houses, which it will then make available to elderly individuals or couples at rents of between \$190 and \$354 per month, depending on income. The units, called "elder cottages," are moved to the rear or side yard of a relative's existing house and installed with shared utility hook-ups.

The idea is to have older persons living where they can easily interact with and be assisted by family members, while both households retain a degree of privacy, and without great expense. When the older person passes away or moves out, the unit is removed and rented to some other family. Because the placements are temporary, the county suspends zoning rules that would forbid a permanent installation. "When they're no longer needed, all traces of the cottages disappear," says David Leahy, director of the local non-profit that will administer the program.

The program will initially be funded by New York State. It is modeled on similar successful efforts in Australia, where an extensive private market for the buildings has grown up (most are privately owned and sold when no longer needed). New Jersey started the first U.S. elder cottage experiment, and if Tompkins County's test succeeds, the program will be expanded in New York.

—KZ

# Transcript

WORDS WORTH REPEATING

## GOVERNMENT IS AN ACCOMPLICE TO URBAN CRIME

By John J. DiIulio, Jr.

*Adapted from a recent Bradley Lecture delivered at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, D.C.*

A few years ago, Danny Boyle hit the streets as a 21-year-old rookie police officer in Philadelphia, where his father had been a cop before him. Alone on patrol one night on the north side, Danny approached the driver of a stolen car. The driver was one Edward Bracey, a drug-using, gun-toting, street-wise repeat felon. In a flash, Bracey fired numerous shots into the rookie patrolman's head. Danny's police radio chillingly captured the fatal shots and his final words. An entire city mourned.

But the mourning was mixed with confusion—and anger. For the man who murdered Danny Boyle in cold blood had been in and out of criminal custody for years. Not once but twice he had been released without bail after failing to show up for trial. He was among tens of thousands of dangerous defendants released from custody after a self-righteous federal judge named Norma Shapiro imposed an arbitrary population cap on the city's jails. In one 18-month-period alone, Philadelphia police rearrested 9,700 of these released criminals, charging them with 79 murders, 90 rapes, and thousands of other serious offenses. As with all predatory street crime, each offense involved a victim with a name, a face, and a family.

Edward Bracey was eventually convicted of murder, sentenced to death, and is now running out his appeals. His accomplice, however, remains at large. For the killer of Danny Boyle was aided and abetted by a justice system that invites known criminals to find fresh victims

while out on probation, parole, or pretrial release. A so-called justice system that:

- begins by immediately putting 63 percent of all violent felony defendants back on the streets during their trials
- delivers plea bargains in over 90 percent of all cases
- fails to incarcerate 47 percent of those felons who *are* convicted of a violent crime
- releases those violent convicts who *do* go to prison before they have served even half their sentence, on average.

In 1992, for example, there were 10.3 million violent crimes committed in the U.S. This led to 650,000 arrests, but only 165,000 convictions, and just 100,000 state prison sentences. Believe it

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or not, convicted murderers are now released after an average of just 5.9 years behind bars, or just 48 percent of their sentence. This so-called justice system operates as if it were designed to destroy

what's left of public order and civility on the streets of America's big cities, not to preserve these things.

Why have over 200,000 Americans been murdered since We the People celebrated the bicentennial of our Constitution in 1987? Why did our violent crime toll stand at 9.9 million victimizations in 1995, including over 20,000 murders, more than a million aggravated assaults, 1.1 million robberies, and 355,000 rapes? The overarching answer is that much violent crime is, in fact, a self-inflicted social wound—harm inflicted on individuals, families, neighborhoods, and entire cities by the routinized failure of our court and prison system to restrain known violent and repeat street criminals. Fully a third of the millions of violent crimes committed in this country each year, including in some jurisdictions a third of all the murders, are committed by criminals out on probation, parole, or pretrial release.

When we permit revolving-door justice we rob ourselves. For violent crime steals our Danny Boyles. It steals our poor, minority children. It steals economic vitality from our inner-city neighborhoods. It takes away our most basic freedom to walk the streets without fear.

If those who gave us our representative democracy could see the way persistent popular majorities now have their will ignored, distorted, and thwarted by minority factions within and outside of government, they would be disheartened. There are many areas of governance today where one can find a gulf between public policies and persistent majority preferences. On the subject of crime and punishment, the gap between public opinion and policy has become a Grand Canyon.

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