

MOTHER CHUCKLE AND MS. SNIDE

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[Assignment: Our readings indicate that the ten years or so between the late teens and early-to-mid thirties are a crowded time that do not give one much opportunity for reflection about fundamental questions such as ultimate concerns. Respond to these questions in an essay that addresses the question in general as it applies to undergraduate students. Say something about what you can do to become aware of your own extended set of values.]

(1) The story you are about to read is true; the names have been changed to protect the innocent.

(2) The thirties! Ah, those were the days! Sheehy talks about passages; we're talking about deep, dark passages and well-lighted tunnels. The thirties for me were littered with heights of glorious creativeness and depths of degradation. Chronic PMS, deaths, aging, and some serious operations caused me to look at life a little bit differently than I had in the past. My children were growing up and leaving me behind like a discarded toy from their early years. My father died, then my mother-in-law died, and suddenly I was faced with my own mortality.

(3) I could write volumes about my own "Catch Thirties," but then you wouldn't buy my autobiography when it comes out. So I have elected to share with you a few anecdotes about my life in the years between 1976 and 1986.

MOTHER CHUCKLE

(4) "Mom, I have something to show you that I got at school today,"--this was my oldest daughter talking as she walked through the door. She handed me a book with a picture of a young lady on the cover. "Read it carefully," she cautioned me, "and if you have any questions I'll be glad to answer them." The book was a pamphlet that she had received in health class dealing with subjects I had avoided talking over with her. She was still my little girl and there would be plenty of time to talk about this stuff in the future. I stole a long look at her. When had she started to fill out her sweaters? How could I not have noticed that she was the same height as I was? My little girl was making an old lady out of me.

(5) Later that night we carefully read the pamphlet together. "Do men and women really do that stuff?" she asked me, "Yes," I answered somewhat reluctantly. "Well, I know I am not going to do that stuff--why, that's positively gross," she replied.

(6) We laughed and talked about the pictures in the book and decided that the book was too advanced for her brother and little sister. But from that day forward, if she had any questions or her friends had any questions, they would come home and we would have a girl-talk session.

MS. SNIDE

(7) It was about this time I started developing a sinister side to my personality. If my children were late coming home from anywhere, I would go into hysterics. Often I would rant and rave about the dangers to young children and this would be followed by hostility laced with profanity. The more I ranted the worse it got. Thank God I never laid a hand on them because I probably would have killed them.

(8) Part of the problem was a little known disorder, PMS. The other part was the feeling of being left behind. When had I ceased to be the most important person in my children's lives? They were still the most important persons in my life. As I write this paper and recall those years, I am sickened by the words that I yelled at my children during that time.

THE OPERATION

(9) "Mrs. Walker," Dr. Ellis said, "you have cysts on your uterus and I think that is what has been causing you the pain you've been experiencing. We can watch it, or we can remove your uterus. The difference between having it done now or later is that something could happen making it an emergency situation. Also, you are still a young woman and you might like to have more children; the choice is yours."

(10) Never to have a period again! If he had given me a million dollars he would not have made me happier. "When can you do it?" I asked. (Of course I would have to drop my stock in Kotex and Tampax because without my business they would probably go broke.)

(11) "Don't you want to think about it and discuss this with your husband?" he asked me. "After all, he might want more children."

(12) "No," I replied, "I had a tubal-ligation and he married me because I could not have any more children, so I don't think he will be upset by my decision."

(13) He set the date, made arrangements for my pre-op exams, and I left the office happy as a pig in mud until reality set in. I could die; people do die from simple operations. By the time I got home, I had convinced myself that with my luck, I would be the "unexplained complication" that was an unfortunate circumstance that the doctor had not foreseen.

(14) I wrote a will. I wrote letters to each of my children and to my husband to be opened upon my death. I became the queen of nastiness. My children and husband tip-toed around me; the dog growled at me. I became the most miserable human being in the whole town of New Chicago. My friends quit calling.

(15) One day at work a woman who happened to frequent my bar said, "I hear you're going into the hospital for surgery." I nodded my assent; it really was none of her business. "Have you written your will yet? That's

one of the first things I did when I had to have surgery," she told me. We started comparing notes to see who could out-nasty the other and before long we were both laughing, something I had not done since I had decided to have the surgery. My boss, who had learned to side-step me, came out to see what was the matter. He wanted to buy her dinner because that was the first time in a week he had heard a civil word out of me.

SCHOOL AGAIN

(16) Someone should write a book about returning to school after thirty. If I had not decided--come hell or high water--I was going to school and take some classes for myself, I probably would have left without finishing registration. I was sent from one person to the next. All I wanted to do was to take some art classes for myself. No, I did not have a transcript of my grades, a math or English placement test, a SAT score, but I did have money and perseverance.

(17) I finally got into three classes only to discover that the children and husband who had long since forsaken me for better things suddenly needed me more than anything else in the world. When I had to study for an exam, that was the time that either my children found something of earth-shattering importance to tell me or my husband decided he needed some quality husband-wife togetherness. My husband's worst fear was that I would meet someone who was my intellectual equal and he would be left with the children while this figment of his imagination and I strolled off into the sunset. So after completing two semesters, I retired as a student and went back to being a mother and wife; it was easier than fighting about school.

(18) What do these things have to do with the Catch Thirties? After reading Sheehy's *Passages*, I can better understand a lot of what was happening to me psychologically. For years I had enjoyed being a mother. I did all the things that I thought good mothers did: Room Mother, Girl Scout leader, driver for field trips, baker of a thousand cupcakes, maker of the best costumes a kid could dream of. I had lived each day with the knowledge that one of the things I did best in life was being a mother. Now my children were growing up; I could not keep them small. I was no longer the center of their universe. The fact was they did not need me.

(19) In my well-planned life, I had not given thought to a time when I would not be needed. Now that time had come. I did not fit into the life I was living and could not return to the life I loved. I started drinking heavily and did some things I'm not too proud of, but I survived. And I decided to go back to school to take charge of my life again. At this point my husband and children thought they were losing me to something they did not understand. All of a sudden I did not care if there was yellow, waxy build-up on the floors. I said no to baking for school because I had homework.

(20) In conclusion, I would like to say that when I was the age of most of my classmates, if someone had asked me to read a book about crises in adult life and then asked me to write a paper about one specific crisis that I had or had not have gone through, I probably would have found the exercise pointless.