

Lois Rubin

“We Have Deeper Selves to Write From” *Motherhood and Writing*

Traditionally, motherhood has been considered an impediment to artistic creation, the two roles thought to be incompatible. Indeed, the artist hero, in nineteenth- and twentieth-century European and American fiction, has typically been portrayed as an ivory tower type who avoids all responsibilities, including the domestic, in order to develop “his true self and his consecration as artist” (Beebe, 1964: 6)—making him the polar opposite of the mother, commonly viewed as a selfless, nurturing figure.

A most eloquent spokesperson for the plight of the writing mother is Tillie Olsen in her book *Silences*. Echoing Virginia Woolf, she observes that “until very recently almost all distinguished achievement has come from childless women” (1978: 31). While she acknowledges that the increasing number of women who combined writing and motherhood in the 1950s and 60s suggests new possibilities for women, she remains fearful, believing that the basic conflict between the two roles still exists for women:

Motherhood means being instantly interruptible, responsive, responsible. Children need one now ... [and their needs have] primacy. It is distraction, not meditation, that becomes habitual; interruption, not continuity ... Work interrupted, deferred, postponed makes blockage—at best, lesser accomplishment. Unused capacities atrophy, cease to be. (Olsen, 1978: 32-33)

In her essay “Writing and Motherhood,” Susan Sulieman traces the history of oppositional discourse on writing and motherhood, the view that a woman can be either a writer or a mother—not both. Referring to Showalter’s study of Victorian women writers, she notes that women in that time period

were expected to give priority to domestic responsibilities and to postpone writing until their children were grown—not to try to do both at the same time (1994: 19). According to psychoanalysts like Helene Deutsch, artistic creation and motherhood come from the same source, so since creativity can be fulfilled in motherhood, mothers have no need for creative expression in art—until their children are grown (Sulieman, 1994: 19). Reversing the priorities, Nina Auerbach, for example, applauds novelists Austen and Eliot for having avoided motherhood and moved instead into a broader, more intellectual world (cited in Sulieman, 1994: 20).

Others articulate this conflict. Reviewing her own experience as mother and writer, Adrienne Rich describes the struggle she felt: “But to be a female human being trying to fulfill traditional female functions in a traditional way is in direct conflict with the subversive function of the imagination” (1979: 43). That this conflict persists is evidenced by the recent media attention to Sylvia Ann Hewlett’s *Creating a Life: Professional Women and the Quest for Children*, a work that explores the reverse situation—the plight of women who develop their professional lives at the expense of motherhood (St. John, 2002: A1).

Is this the only way to look at the relationship between motherhood and writing? Must the two inevitably be in conflict? Wondering if there might be an alternative view, Sulieman suggests asking today’s writing mothers themselves about what it is like to hold these two roles (1994: 20–21). The inquiry is timely, for we now have a larger number of writer-mothers than existed in earlier generations. (For example, Florence Howe observes in the introduction to *No More Masks!* that “unlike previous generations half of [the poets in Part II of the book] are mothers...” [1993: xxxvii] and Erica Jong observes, “Mine may be the first generation in which being a writer and a mother is not utterly impossible” [1995: 41]).

This essay describes a study that responds to this call for dialogue with writer-mothers. Following Sulieman’s suggestion, I sent questionnaires, in 2000 and 2001, to more than 150 women selected randomly from a list of 226 provided in “Writers Included, Volume 5: Supplement,” of *American Women Writers*. I had determined that these women were mothers by cross checking biographical information about them in *Contemporary Authors*. In the three-question questionnaire, writers were asked to describe the effects of motherhood on their writing and also to relate other obstacles and support they had experienced in their efforts to become writers. Fifty women responded, 45 answering my questions directly and five sending me published articles in which they had discussed the issues I was investigating. In contrast to books like *A Question of Balance: Artists and Writers on Motherhood*, in which 25 artist and writer mothers speak freely about their experiences, this study asks a common set of questions of a larger group of writer-mothers and analyzes their responses, looking for themes and patterns.

What follows is a profile of these 50 writer-mothers, describing first the complex mix of factors in their early lives and relationships that both enabled

and limited their development as writers—support from childhood families and teachers, gender-related obstacles in establishing their careers, support from husbands—and then culminating in their reports of a deeper, broader creativity that resulted from motherhood, in spite of its demands on their time and energy. All comments from the writers that are not otherwise cited have come from the responses on the questionnaires. Short biographies of the writer participants are provided in an appendix.

Supportive ties: Childhood family and education

More than half (27) of my respondents report support from their childhood families—most often parents, but on occasion, grandparents, aunts, and others—in their writing development. Indeed, of those who mention childhood families, more than 80 per cent find them supportive in comparison with 18 per cent who did not. For many, parents provided various kinds of enrichment that facilitated their literacy: buying them books and reading aloud to them (Nancy Willard, Helen Vendler), giving literary gifts for special occasions (Mitsuye Yamada received from her father on her “twelfth birthday ... a leather-bound, gilt-edged book of poems by Christina Rossetti” [16]) and taking them to literary events (Sandra Gilbert’s father took her to poetry readings when [she] was in high school). Nine writers mention family members who themselves wrote (though not necessarily for publication), or were teachers or artists: Nancy Willard’s mother wrote stories and had been a high school English teacher, Helen Vendler’s mother and grandmother wrote poetry; Mitsuye Yamada’s father was a member of a poetry writing society, Jean Fritz’s mother was a former Latin teacher who was “always interested in words”; Linda Ty Casper’s mother wrote textbooks and essays for magazines and asked her daughter to do some of them, Nancy Mairs’ aunt was an actively writing poet who critiqued her niece’s writing; Jane Yolen’s father was a journalist, her mother a short story writer (though she had sold only one story), Nessa Rapoport’s grandmother wrote a column and grandfather wrote religious commentary.

Particularly striking are recollections of family support of their writing even in their earliest years: Lynne Sharon Schwartz describes her father, in the midst of shaving, stopping to listen to a story she had just written (1992: 8), Sandra Gilbert’s mother “would transcribe the verses [she] dictated practically from [her] crib,” Judith Rossner’s mother “encouraged [her] from before the time when [she] could write,” Ruth Jacobs’ aunts “admired [her] childish poems and encouraged [her] though they were uneducated women,” Nessa Rapoport’s mother cried in response to a story Nessa had written for a writing contest, and this reaction made her daughter decide then and there to become a writer.

More than a third (19) of my respondents also mention teachers who encouraged or supported their writing aspirations; of those who talk about teachers, the vast majority (86 per cent) describe them as encouraging; just a few

refer to teachers who were unsupportive. A few cite teachers in the early grades: Rebecca Goldstein describes being accorded the role of “school poet,” composer of poetry for special occasions; Naomi Shihab Nye recalls a second grade teacher who made poetry the center of the curriculum. A dozen or so refer explicitly to high school, college and graduate school teachers, either identifying particular teachers (sometimes naming them) or describing particular ways teachers had helped them (giving them advice about writing, getting their work published, getting jobs for them). Interestingly, seven cite supportive male teachers, for example, Rosellen Brown who says her “encouragers” were “teachers, mostly, and mostly male” who took her seriously and “prodded and praised at times when those were, jointly, exactly what I needed.”

As a group, my respondents were well-educated. All but one of the women in my study for whom information was available had attended college. Seventeen of them graduated from selective single-sex colleges, like Barnard, Smith, Mt. Holyoke, Radcliffe, Sara Lawrence, Wellesley, and Wheaton. Twelve others attended particularly well-respected liberal arts colleges or prestigious universities.

Obstacles in their paths: the constraints of gender

Yet even with that promising beginning, with the encouragement of family and teachers and a good education, the women in my study also met up with some difficulties as they pursued their writing ambitions. In particular, two thirds (thirty-three) of my respondents, across the age range, describe obstacles to their writing (other than motherhood) that have a gender dimension.

Most frequently mentioned—22 women refer to this—are what some feminist scholars call restricted gender “scripts” for women (Bem, 1993: 81), cultural expectations for them to hold traditional female roles, to be wives and mothers or, if they had to work, elementary school teachers—not professional writers. Again and again, the women talk about obstacles to their writing in these terms: “gender and expectation” (E. M. Broner), “cultural customs” (Lois Lowry), “expectations” (Joanne Greenberg), “women in my culture ... were discouraged from any form of life except stay-at-home marriage, spinster-daughter-living-under parental roof, or the convent” (Helen Vendler), “contrary to social expectation” (Nancy Mairs), “programmed to marry early” (Judy Blume [204]), “never brought up to think of myself as a professional” (Lynne Schwartz), “just had to be pretty, good, and quiet—nothing was expected” (Rebecca Goldstein). Linda Pastan expresses it well: “The world’s expectations (and my own) for the perfect ’50s wife kept me from writing for a very long time. I call it ‘the perfectly polished floor syndrome.’” In more specific terms, Sandra McPherson recalls, “My parents said I should not be leaving my daughter alone in order to write poems.”

A few experienced prejudice directly. Lois Gould recalls rejections from newspapers from Boston to New York: “Every city editor scoffed at the notion of a ‘girl reporter,’ despite my lucky name (superman’s girlfriend).” For Nancy

Willard, "The prejudice against women in the Ph.D. Program was so evident that when I sent out my work to the quarterlies, I used my initial and my last name, so that the reader could not tell the gender." In contrast to the supportive male mentors described earlier, a few had teachers who actively discouraged them: Alicia Ostriker recalls "A distinguished visiting poet who looked at her work and said 'you women poets are very graphic, aren't you ... with a slight shiver of disgust'" (1983: 126); and Maxine Kumin tells that after her instructor, a well-known male writer, made disparaging comments about her poems, she "put them aside for several years" (2000: 45). Several writers experienced resentment and jealousy from acquaintances and intimates.

Also detrimental, especially for the older women in my study, was the belief, articulated years ago by Virginia Woolf, that the subject matter women had access to, their life experience, was trivial or minor and not worth writing about (qtd. in Olsen, 29), or that their writing was necessarily inferior to that of male writers. Comments like Rosellen Brown's, "I think I've suffered a bit, as have most women writing, from the biases that have seen my subjects as domestic, therefore trivial..." are made by eight writers in the study.

In addition, eleven writers across the age ranges lament the lack of models, examples of successful women writers: "I didn't know any women role models until I became one myself," says Carolyn Kizer, born in 1925; "No woman I knew in my growing up years, in most of my college years was a professional writer.... No one ever expected a woman to be a professional writer," states E. M. Broner, born in 1930; Lisa Alther, born in 1944, comments on the "Lack of role models of women writers who also raised healthy, happy children"; Nessa Rapoport (born in 1953) observes that "No mothers had interesting jobs; they all stayed at home," and Joy Harjo, born in 1951, notes that "There weren't really role models" of Indian women writers. Seven comment on the lack of support and networking available to them, or, even worse, resentment or jealousy from acquaintances and intimates or general opposition from what both Ruth Stone and Jean Valentine characterize as "the male world."

Husbands: the unexpected resource

On the other hand, husbands, in my study, prove to be more enabling of their wives' writing than conventional wisdom would lead us to believe. In her survey of the female artist novel, Linda Huf observes that men, usually husbands, act as obstacles to women's creativity: "In every woman's *kunstlerroman* there is at least one man ... a would-be domestic dictator who through his strength or weakness prevents the artist from working" (1983: 9). Yet, the women in my study for the most part portray their husbands differently, as helpmeets and supporters. Almost half (23) of my 50 respondents refer to their husbands as sources of support for their writing. Only two women in my study describe their husbands as definite obstacles, calling them jealous, competitive, or indifferent. Two others who bring up difficulties related to their husbands still characterize them as helpful in some respects. The 23 who mention their

husbands as sources of support, refer to them with warmth, using sentiments like the following: “gave me the encouragement and support I so badly needed” (Linda Pastan), “an immensely supportive husband” (Rosellen Brown), “The best and most consistent encouragement I got was and is from my husband” (Joanne Greenberg); “It was my husband who cheered me on when the critics savaged my early plays” (Tina Howe).

In addition, the husbands of eleven women gave specific kinds of help. Six husbands helped with the actual writing, acting as readers and critics: “he literally for more than a decade read every word I wrote” (Adrienne Kennedy); “[he] was ‘first reader’ of every word I wrote” (Sandra Gilbert); “my first reader, he always says the same thing: ‘it’s wonderful, I can’t wait to read more.’ He’s my first encourager” (Nancy Mairs). A few spouses gave other kinds of career help—one encouraging his wife to take classes (Adrienne Kennedy) and another staying with the kids so she could attend a writing conference (Mary Jane Auch). Lois Gould’s husband urged her to submit essays to *New York Times*, and Natalie Babbitt’s husband wrote a story for her to illustrate to get her started in her career in children’s literature. Two husbands provided extra financial support and/or childcare to enable their wives’ writing: “I have a husband who took several jobs so I could spend time writing—not making money” (Patricia MacLachlan); “[my husband] does most of the cooking, shopping which allows me more time to write” (Maggie Stern). Perhaps the fact that the husbands of eight of my participants were themselves artists or writers enabled them to be supportive of their writing wives. As Mary Jane Auch puts it, “A graphic artist himself, [my husband] understood my need to pursue what often looked like a hopeless career choice.”

Motherhood: challenge and inspiration

Motherhood, the factor that Olsen, Woolf and others consider the greatest obstacle to women’s productivity as artists, turns out to have surprising benefits, for my respondents, which offset its challenges. In fact, of the 48 women in my study who describe the impact of motherhood on their writing, 43 (90 per cent) find that the benefits outweigh the drawbacks or that benefits and drawbacks are about even; only five women (ten per cent) mention more drawbacks than benefits.

This is not to say that difficulties do not exist. Indeed, two thirds (32) of the women in my study refer to one or more of the obstacle cited by Olsen.

What Olsen calls “foreground silences” (1978: 10) and other kinds of delays are described by some of my participants. Two women did not start till their mid-fifties when their children were grown and married (Theodora Kroeber, as reported by her daughter, Ursula Leguin and Ruth Jacobs); one stopped writing entirely after marrying and having children for about a dozen years and another for eight years (Edith Konecky, Nancy Mairs). Two did not begin serious writing until their children were in school or old enough to be cared for by sitters (Gloria Goldreich, Tina Howe). Six observe that mother-

hood slowed them down or interrupted their writing life.

Five speak of lack of time to write: "time is a casualty, an excruciating problem. It takes time to do serious work" (Nessa Rapoport) or of writing shorter works because of time constraints (Joy Harjo, Maxine Kumin). They describe squeezing writing into small, odd time periods: at night instead of in her preferred time of morning (Ursula LeGuin), at seven to nine in the morning when the kids were small (Joanne Greenberg), when the children were in school, not on weekends or in the summer (Natalie Babbitt), or in evenings or weekends because of need to maintain a job as well as to care for the child (Valerie Martin).

The "distraction" and "interruption" that characterize mothering, according to Olsen (1978: 19), are referred to by ten of my respondents: "[children] inevitably distracted me and took time" (Diane Johnson); "to have to stop in the middle of a paragraph to pick up a child from school is a major deterrent" (Maggie Stern) and "daily crises" (Sandra McPherson).

Some writers report experiencing physical or emotional strain from trying to combine the two roles. In Anne Tyler's words, "I felt drained; too much care and feeling were being drawn out of me" (2000: 7). For Lynne Schwartz, "the particular imaginative energy that goes to writing comes from the same place that rearing children comes from.... it was always a tremendous struggle." And, Alicia Ostriker comments, "Your time, energy, body, spirit and freedom are drained" (1983: 130). Other describe feeling frustrated and guilty: "I felt pulled apart" (Jean Valentine); "At times I was desperate and frustrated" (Rebecca Goldstein); and "For years I fluctuated between guilt toward my daughter when I was writing and resentment when I couldn't be writing" (Lisa Alther).

A few comment on financial strain: having to work overtime (Helen Vendler), "the pressure to make money [leading] to my doing a lot of writing that I would not have otherwise chosen to do" (Barbara Ehrenreich), "teaching four sections of freshman composition per semester" to support her daughter (Valerie Martin), and working at odd jobs to provide for her children (Joy Harjo).

However, in spite of the above challenges, almost all of the women (45 of the 50 women who answered the question) report at least one positive effect of motherhood—in content, focus or enrichment—on their writing.

In contrast to Olsen's observation that not many women writers in recent times (1950s and 1960s) "have directly used the material open to them out of motherhood as central source for their work" (1978: 32), half of the women in my study (25) report that motherhood and children are an important source of content in their work: [motherhood] "helped me define the kind of writing I wanted to do," (Jean Fritz), "provided me with subject matter" (Doris Grumbach), and "enriched [my writing] with subject matter" (Linda Pastan). "I drew on my own family experience as a resource" (Lois Lowry), and "I wrote about [my children's] lives," says Vanessa Ochs. For Barbara Ehrenreich, children were "a constant source of topics," and for Maxine Kumin "a sourcebook for my work."

A few offer more detailed explanations. For Valerie Martin, watching children grow up “allowed [her] to observe first-hand the enormous variety of human response to ordinary life, and this is the study of the writer.” Even more emphatically, Tina Howe says, “my plays are a response to my gender. I write about wives and mothers and daughters and sisters. If I didn’t have a family, I wouldn’t have a body of work.” And Lynne Schwartz comments, I think my writing was immensely enriched by having children. Being a mother and family life are such a central part of a lot of what I’ve written.”

Some speak in specific terms of their children’s influence on particular features of their writing. For example, “I listen to their use of language, and how they describe things, and that helps to shape the story and my characters,” says children’s writer Maggie Stern; “My daughter’s remarks inspired titles, always a difficulty with me,” observes Linda Ty-Casper. Their children’s lives, for some, inspired events in their books. “Even now I am working on a book which began with an observation by one of them,” says Patricia MacLachlan, a children’s writer. And “Occasionally, an incident with my children inspired a scene in one of my books” (Mary Jane Auch, children’s writer). Their children, for a few, appeared as or influenced the development of characters in their books: [they] found themselves as characters in my books (Patricia MacLachlan); “My Body Remembers Singing’ is claimed by both to be about them, exclusively” (Linda Ty-Casper); “She’s me and not me,” [her daughter] Adrienne said of one protagonist, “partly me and partly you” (Valerie Martin).

Six attribute particular works to the experience of motherhood: “poems about [my daughter] and myself in *The Spaces Between Birds*” (Sandra McPherson); “Dealing with your Descendants,” a chapter in a longer work (Harriet Jacobs); “My Body Remembers Singing” (Linda Ty-Casper); the novels, “Four Days” and “Mothers” (Gloria Goldreich); “a book about being a working mother when this juggling act was still a rarity” (Lois Gould) and “three of the first essays I wrote” (Nancy Mairs).

And a few attribute choice of genre to motherhood: short, light verse for Maxine Kumin because “A small poem is infinitely portable. The strictures of rhyme and meter could be sorted through in my head while doing the daily chores”; conversely, novels for Ursula Le Guin because “a novel has its own momentum, and you can put it away until tomorrow without losing it” (“Ursula K. Le Guin,” 1995: 247). For Helen Vendler, a college professor, the need to earn extra money to support her son stimulated her to take on “all the reviewing [she] could get,” and as a result she developed a reputation as a critic.

Some observe that motherhood made them better organized and focused: “It focused me, made time more valuable, and thus, more at my service” (Anne Bernays); “My time for writing was so precious; I never wasted a minute. There was not time for ‘writer’s block’” (Rebecca Goldstein). “What I had to do when my three children—who came along at more or less two-year intervals—were small was to learn to manage my time and prioritize” (Jane Yolen); and “being a mother taught me a good deal about managing my time” (Nancy Willard).

Particularly noteworthy, twenty-four women claim that motherhood enhanced their personal, emotional development, which in turn, they believe, benefited their creativity and writing. They describe their growth, using various kinds of imagery. Several speak of being broadened and expanded: motherhood "broadened my perspective" (Judith Rossner); "provided me with understanding of minds other than my own and a wider horizon than I would otherwise have seen" (Doris Grumbach); "enlarged my understanding of life, human history, etc." (Diane Johnson).

Many talk of becoming deeper. As Rebecca Goldstein puts it, "the feminine aspect of life (motherhood) opened me to a different, deeper creativity. I attended to the emotional and the unconscious—things you needed to be a novelist." Nessa Rapoport observes, "Having children deepened me as a human being; being a mother made me more human, gave me more to say, was humbling. I would have been a lesser writer and person without them." For Gloria Goldreich, "motherhood so deepened me on every level that it penetrated everything I wrote thereafter." Naomi Shihab Nye, recalling Anne Tyler, speaks of having "deeper selves to write from" as a result of motherhood.

Some tell of being enriched: "[my daughter] provided me with the heights of delight and depths of frustration, the experience of which has enriched my understanding of human nature and, no doubt, spilled over into my writing" (Lisa Alther); "[motherhood] also enriched my life to the point that I had something to say" (Katherine Paterson); "it enriched [my work] with both subject matter and emotional resonance" (Linda Pastan). Two refer to nourishment: "It fed me as a human being and so as a writer" (Jean Valentine); it "fed my work and connected me with parts of my own experience that might never [have] been awakened if I had not had a child" (Nancy Willard).

A few describe other kinds of benefits. Kim Chernin observes, "The birth itself opened a creative vein that hasn't closed since." Helen Vendler reports, "My emotional life has contributed, I am sure, to my capacity as a reader of poetry; and motherhood has been a crucial (and rewarding) component of that emotional life. It also develops irony and humor—useful qualities in a writer and teacher." And Sandra Gilbert reports being "energized by maternity" to write more and more "ambitiously."

As an extra boon, for about a dozen writers, their children contributed to or shared in their mothers' writing process. Some children took an interest in their mothers' writing; for instance, Jean Fritz's daughter "shared my interest and involvement with each book, and Adrienne Kennedy's children "were such engaging companions and my writing interested them." A few children were readers and critics of their mothers' work: "my children read and commented on my work," (Patricia MacLachlan); "[they are] useful in-house critics ... often the first people I'll show a draft to" (Barbara Ehrenreich); "[I now have] two terrific critics" (Rosellen Brown); and "I test my stories on my kids" (Maggie Stern). Some children acted as supporters: "it was my children who urged me to write the next one because they had such a blast sitting in the

theater, waiting for the lights to go down” (Tina Howe), and “my children were the ones who were the most encouraging of my writing” (Rebecca Goldstein).

Conclusion

And so, putting it all together, the experience of contemporary writer-mothers has been complex: a good deal of encouragement from family and teachers in their early years, frequent discouragement from the general culture as they moved to adulthood, support and concrete help from spouses, and benefits—as well as challenges—from motherhood, both in content and in emotional depth, and the bonus of offspring who contribute to characterization and plot and act as readers and supporters.

In contrast to Olsen’s pessimistic portrayal of decreased accomplishment for writer-mothers, the women in my survey give a more optimistic account, indicating that motherhood has enhanced, if not the quantity of their writing, its quality. While admitting its challenges in time and energy, they are even more eloquent about its benefits, for their development and for the writing itself. My respondents appear to have found the way, called for by Adrienne Rich, of “[uniting] the energy of creation and the energy of relation” (1979: 43). Given the many women who report on using motherhood as a source of their content, and the greater number of mother-writers in this generation, we should also be seeing in literature more numerous and richer pictures of mothering, children, and family life than before.

Finally, in contrast to the ivory-tower male artist described by Beebe, my respondents, in describing motherhood’s enhancement for writing, seem to represent a different model of artist, one in which writing comes from and is nourished by relationships and community, in which a rich and deep emotional life facilitates, rather than impedes, the creation of art. In her essay on female *kunstlerromane* by women writers, Rachel Du Plessis defines such a new form of creative accomplishment: one in which the fictional art work “has its source in human ties and its end in human change ... can only be made with an immersion in personal vulnerability” (1985: 103). And Ursula LeGuin observes, “To me, an art grows organically out of its society at its best, so you don’t cut the connection ... An artist who is working in grand isolation doesn’t know anything about [relationships], is aloof from it, and this may impoverish the novel” (“Ursula K. Le Guin,” 1995: 245, 249). The comments of the women in my study provide abundant evidence of these kinds of connections—with parents, husbands, and children—and the enrichment they yield both for their own development and for their creative work.

Biographies

(information taken from *Contemporary Authors Online*, The Gale Group, 2002)

Lisa Alther, born in 1944, has one child and is a novelist and short story writer. Her five novels—including her best-selling first novel *Kinflicks* whose

hero is described as a "female Holden Caulfield"—present a satiric view of American life.

Mary Jane Auch is mother of two and writer of children's books. She also conducts teaching sessions for aspiring writers.

Natalie Babbitt, born in 1932 and mother of three, is a children's book writer and illustrator. In award-winning books like *Goody Hall* and *The Devil's Storybook*, she presents challenging themes in an entertaining way.

Anne Bernays, born in 1930 and mother of three daughters, is the writer of seven novels. Her books, like *The New York Ride* and *Professor Romeo*, are marked by a witty tone, are set in collegiate surroundings and often feature female protagonists.

Judy Blume, born in 1938 and mother of two, is a prolific writer (she's written eighteen juvenile novels) of award-winning children's and young adult fiction. Books like *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing* and *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* deal openly with sensitive issues—like divorce, religion and sexuality.

Esther Masserman Broner, born in 1930 and mother of three, writes novels, stories, plays and articles. A Jewish feminist, she focuses on women's spirituality, in fictional (*A Weave of Women*) and non-fictional (*Bring Home the Light*) formats.

Rosellen Brown, born in 1939 and mother of two daughters, writes novels, stories, plays and poetry. Works like *Tender Mercies* and *Civil Wars* feature female protagonists and depict family relationships and social issues.

Kim Chernin—poet, novelist, essayist and therapist—was born in 1940 and has one daughter. Her works often focus on what it means to be a woman in the contemporary western world—the search for identity, relations with one's parents, sexuality and eating disorders.

Barbara Ehrenreich, well known journalist and social critic, was born in 1941 has two children. In mostly non-fiction books (like the recent *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*, she describes the struggles of women, the poor and other disadvantaged groups.

Jean Fritz, born in China to missionary parents in 1915, is mother of two. Award winning writer of historical biographies for young people, she brings her subjects to life in all their complexities, providing accurate and interesting accounts.

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Sandra M. Gilbert, born in 1936, is the mother of three. Poet, literary critic, academic and feminist, she received acclaim for groundbreaking studies like *Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*.

Gloria Goldreich, born in 1934 and mother of three, is well-known for novels that dramatize aspects of Jewish-American history, like *Leah's Journey* and *That Year of Our War*. She has also written numerous short stories and articles, mostly on Jewish themes.

Rebecca Goldstein, born in 1950, has two daughters. A professor of philosophy for ten years, she then became a novelist whose works (*The Mind Body Problem*, *Mazel*) dramatize philosophical questions, the struggles of gifted women, and issues of Jewish identity.

Lois Gould, born in 1932, and mother of two sons, died in May 2002. Journalist and writer, she wrote many books exploring the female viewpoint and the creation of gender roles, but also composed adult fairy tales and writings about political and social issues.

Joanne Greenberg, born in 1932, is the mother of two sons, professor of anthropology, medical technician and writer. In her novels and short stories, the best known one of which is *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*, Greenberg frequently depicts the lives of the less fortunate.

Doris Grumbach, born in 1918 and mother of four, has had a varied career as literary critic, editor, professor and novelist. Her books, like her biography of Mary McCarthy, are frequently based on the lives of real people, and she has also written several memoirs.

Virginia Hamilton, mother of two, was born in 1936 and died in 2002. Prize-winning author of children's fiction, she blends black history, folklore and realistic elements in her stories; she also wrote biographies of W. W. B. Du Bois and Paul Robeson.

Joy Harjo, born in 1951 and mother of two, is an acclaimed poet of Muskogee-Creek background. Her works incorporate Native American myth and values, description of the southwest, feminist and social concerns and autobiographical elements.

Tina Howe, born in 1937 and mother of two, is a well-known playwright. In plays like *Coastal Disturbances*, she depicts women's roles and relationships and sets the action in unlikely locations and circumstances.

Ruth Harriet Jacobs, born in 1924 and mother of two, has been a journalist, sociology professor, consultant on gerontology and writer. Interested in women's development, she has focused on the aging process in books like *Be an Outrageous Older Woman*.

Diane Johnson, born in 1934 and mother of four, has been a professor of English and writer of novels, plays biographies and screen plays. While much of her work features female protagonists, she also wrote a biography of Dashiell Hammett and co-wrote the screenplay for *The Shining*.

Erica Jong, born in 1942 and mother of a daughter, is probably most known for her best-selling novel *Fear of Flying* in 1973. She has also written poetry and produced fiction set in other times and places. In all her work, she writes honestly about women's experience, exploring in particular their sexuality.

Adrienne Kennedy, born in 1931 and mother of two sons, is a playwright and screenwriter. She presents the experiences of black characters symbolically, revealing their interior lives, rather than following a straightforward narrative mode.

Carolyn Kizer, born in 1925 and mother of three, is a poet, teacher, translator and critic. Her Pulitzer Prize winning collection, *Yin: New Poems*, focuses on female perceptions, but in her other poetry she addresses a wide range of topics, including politics.

Edith Konecky, born in 1922 and mother of two sons, writes stories and novels. Her novels, somewhat autobiographical in nature, deal with women's issues at different points in the life cycle: *Allegra Maud Goldman*, describing a young Jewish girl's coming of age and *A Place at the Table* portraying the issues of midlife.

Maxine Kumin, born in 1925 and mother of three, is a teacher and writer of poetry, novels and children's fiction. Her poetry, for which she has won a Pulitzer Prize, takes as its subject the pastoral life of her New Hampshire home and describes humans and animals in nature.

Ursula Le Guin, acclaimed writer of science fiction, children's fiction, poetry and literary criticism, was born in 1929 and is the mother of three. Best known for science fiction, for example, *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed*, her books contain complex levels of plot and social-political themes.

Lois Lowry, born in 1937 and mother of four, is an acclaimed writer of children's literature. Her works often address serious topics, like Newbery Medal winner *Number the Stars*, which portrayed the shuttling of Jews by Danes

Lois Rubin

to Sweden during World War II.

Patricia MacLachlan, born in 1938 and mother of three, writes picture books and novels for children. As in her Newbery Medal winning *Sarah, Plain and Tall*, her books often contain elements of personal experience and present realistic characters and situations.

Nancy Mairs, born in 1943, is the mother of three. In her poetry, essays and memoirs—for instance the well-received *Plaintext*—she describes aspects of her life, in particular the difficulties of suffering from multiple sclerosis.

Valerie Martin, born in 1948 and the mother of one daughter, has held various English faculty positions. Her Poe-like stories and novels—in particular *Mary Reilly*, which was turned into a film—present the dark side of life and people in extreme states.

Sandra McPherson, born in 1943 and mother of one daughter, is a poet and educator. Her poetry describes the physical world, folk art and elements in her own life. The collection *Spaces Between Birds* is a duet of mother/daughter poems.

Naomi Shihab Nye, born in 1952 and mother of one son, is an award-winning poet and writer of children's fiction. Drawing on her Palestinian background and life among Mexican-Americans, she describes ordinary events and people of diverse cultures.

Vanessa Ochs, born in 1953 and mother of two daughters, has written one book and numerous stories and articles. In *Words on Fire: One Woman's Journey in the Sacred*, she explores the spiritual development of a number of Jewish women in Israel.

Alicia Ostriker, born in 1937 and mother of three, is an English professor, literary critic and award-winning poet. In her nine books of poetry, some of which depict women's experience, she is noted for pushing the boundaries and dealing with challenging topics.

Linda Pastan, born in 1932 and mother of three, is award-winning creator of twelve books of poetry. Her poetry—which focuses on daily life, love and death—is simple and clear, yet metaphoric and elegant.

Katherine Paterson, born of missionary parents in China in 1932 and mother of four, is an acclaimed writer of children's fiction. In the Newbery Award winning *Bridge to Terabithia*, as in most of her fiction, lonely young people face crises and grow from them.

Nessa Rapoport, born in 1953 and a mother of three, is a writer and editor. Her novel, *Preparing for Sabbath*, short stories and essays often portray the inner life and spiritual struggle of Jewish women.

Judith Rossner, born in 1935 and mother of two, is the author of nine novels that deal for the most part with aspects of women's experience—childrearing, love, friendship, sex. Her best known novel, *Looking for Mr. Goodbar*, was made into a film in 1977.

Lynne Sharon Schwartz, born in 1939 and mother of two, writes novels, short stories, non-fiction and children's literature. Her fiction (for example, *Disturbances in the Field*) features intelligent female protagonists and gives a detailed view of human relationships.

Maggie Stern, born in 1954, is the mother of four sons and a writer of children's books, five of which have been published. In her books, which draw on personal experience, nature plays an important role.

Ruth Stone, born 1915, has written eight books of poetry and is professor of English at SUNY Binghamton. Her poems deal with ordinary life and sometimes reflect the difficulties she experienced in her own life, as a widow raising three young children.

Linda Ty-Casper, mother of two daughters, was born in the Philippines in 1931. Believing that a country's literature is important to its understanding of itself, she writes mostly historical novels, set in important periods in Philippine history.

Anne Tyler, born in 1941 and mother of two, is has written fourteen novels, best known of which are Pulitzer prize winning *Breathing Lessons* and *Accidental Tourist* (filmed by Warner Brothers). Depicting the daily actions of ordinary, even odd, characters, her works illuminate truths about life.

Jean Valentine, born in 1934 and mother of two, is a poet. In her prize-winning *Dream Barker and Other Poems* and eight other collections, she writes in what's been described as a suggestive, dreamy and compressed style.

Helen Vendler, born in 1933 and mother of a son, is a highly regarded literary critic. Professor of English at Harvard, she has written many scholarly articles, reviews and full-length works on poets like Keats, Yeats, Wallace Stevens and Seamus Heaney.

Nancy Willard, born in 1936 and mother of a son, is a prolific and versatile writer of children's fiction, poetry for children and adults and two adult novels.

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Her many (sixty) and award-winning children's books are described as magical and inventive.

Mitsuye Yamada, born in 1923 of Japanese parents and mother of four, is an associate professor at Cypress College and poet. Her poems have evolved from personal to political as she has come to understand her identity as Asian American and woman.

Jane Yolen, born in 1939 and mother of three, is an award-winning and prolific writer of literature for children and young adults, frequently in the science fiction and fantasy genres. Particularly well known are *Dragon's Blood: a Fantasy*, first volume of the Pit Dragon Series, and *The Devil's Arithmetic*, a time travel story in a Holocaust setting.

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