

Book Reviews

The Raging Grannies: Wild Hats, Cheeky Songs and Witty Actions for a Better World

Carole Roy
Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2004

Reviewed by M. Louise Ripley

As a crone, and the daughter of a lively, ninety-year-old crone, I approached the task of reviewing *The Raging Grannies* with particular relish, and anticipated the need to announce my bias in favour of Carole Roy's book. But there is no need for caution or apology. *The Raging Grannies* is a great book!

Roy begins with a history of the Raging Grannies, a group of women that originated in Victoria, British Columbia in 1987. "Dressed as old-fashioned conservative proper little old ladies," presented an Un-Valentine on Valentine's Day to the then local Member of Parliament, Chair of the Defence Committee hearing briefs on the issue of uranium mining. The women brought a laundry basketful of their own briefs—a clothesline full of women's underwear, in fact—into the British Columbia Legislature building to register their protest against the Chair's "lack of action and commitment on nuclear issues." They thought it would be a one-time protest, but something about the Grannies caught on in the minds of those who care about the environment and the future of the human race. The idea of dressing up in silly clothes, crazy hats, and parodying the stereotype of grandmothers (the Raging Grannies later staged a knit-in for peace) to convey a point proved enormously appealing to numbers

of women. The successful ploy enabled the Grannies to be heard—when less theatrical protests would have been squelched and when anyone but a grandmother might have been ill-treated. Needless to say, humour is an important tool in the Grannies' tool-kit, and they profit from the unwillingness of police, soldiers, or politicians to be seen harming “old women.”

Roy follows the history of the Grannies as they grew into a Canadian institution of protest, with “branches” located across Canada, the United States, Greece, and Australia. The Grannies are not easily described. In fact, they range in age from the nineties and to younger grannies-at-heart who are in their twenties and thirties. “A Granny isn't a grandmother; a Granny is a frame of mind. Attitude!” says Granny Betsy Carr of Toronto. The Grannies are, in Roy's own words, “cultural activists who use humour to highlight issues rather than to deny, dismiss, or pacify situations.” They use surprise and their own willingness to “make fools of themselves” to achieve awareness and empowerment.

The story of the Grannies, told in nine chapters, is interspersed with one-page biographies of many of the women interviewed for the book, dozens of quotes directly from the Grannies themselves, new Raging Granny words to familiar tunes, and numerous pictures. The Grannies protest against a variety of issues, including nuclear weapons, war, government cuts in welfare, spraying of poisons, genetic engineering, sweatshops, the closure of bank branches and libraries, and arming outer space. They also speak out in favour of many causes: peace, care for the environment, AIDS, strikes for better working conditions, drag queens, affordable housing, gay rights, health care, better treatment of the homeless, power and visibility for older women, and giving “credence to protests of the young.” I shared the shock that many of the Grannies expressed when they learned what kinds of issues truly frighten those in power. As one Granny put it, “when I realized that it's the very things that we stand for that seem to threaten people in authority so deeply, it was a shock, really it was a shock.”

My favourite chapter, “Raging Grannies in the Wide Web of Life,” brings together the various themes of the book, and its title is reminiscent of the seventh principle of the Unitarian Universalist denomination, of which several Grannies are members. It was especially delightful to discover that I personally knew more than one individual Granny, including one who is pictured in Roy's book.

Based on an academic thesis, Roy's book does a commendable job of including illustrative and clarifying references to other scholarly work in the field, in particular the work of Shelagh Wilkinson. At the same time, it is a highly readable text. The underlying thread of so many of the Grannies' stories—of finding their voices when dressing up in funny clothes and hats—is reminiscent of a major thrust of a recent thesis on crones by Gail McCabe: that after menopause, when they are no longer “worth” categorizing by men as either future wives or potential bearers of children, many women find them-

selves rediscovering the freedom of movement, thought, and action they knew as young girls. Roy's wonderful, warm, witty, outrageous, committed, caring Grannies show evidence of this same freedom.

If I can offer one criticism of this book it is that there is frequent repetition of themes across chapters. Repeatedly, readers learn about the World Trade Organization protests and the importance of "attitude," for example. But this fault does not detract from the sheer enjoyment of reading the book and getting to know the Grannies who inspire readers to get up from their armchairs and do something to save the world. As Carole Roy states near the close of *The Raging Grannies*: "To look at older women activists is an opportunity to contribute to scholarship on women's organizing and social movements as well as offer recognition and learn from a group of women who have actively and publicly engaged with the issues of their time." In this, *The Raging Grannies* succeeds admirably.

Intentional Grandparenting: A Boomer's Guide

Peggy Edwards and Mary Jane Sterne
Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2005

Reviewed by Susan Swanson

Being a grandparent is one of the most fulfilling stages in the life course. However, as Peggy Edwards and Mary Jane Sterne point out in this informative and entertaining book, grandparenting may be more complex in the twenty-first century than it was for previous generations. There have been many changes in marriage and parenting trends, including later age at marriage, increases in cohabitation, same sex unions, interracial and bicultural marriages, as well as divorce. Families are often mobile and live far distances apart. An ageing population means that grandparents are living longer and are often members of the "sandwich" or "club sandwich" generation, i.e. people who have frail older parents, adult children, and grandchildren – all with different needs and expectations.

Based on solid evidence from experts, combined with insightful and often poignant anecdotes from grandparents, parents, and grandchildren, *Intentional Grandparenting* provides readers with ten child-centred principles for effective grandparenting. At the heart of the book is the concept of being intentional—planning ahead and taking deliberate action to be the kind of grandparent one wants to be. Ten principles cover modern challenges such as step-grandparenting, distance grandparenting, and accepting and respecting one's adult children in