

A Host, a Guest, and our Lifetime Relationship: Another Hour with Grandma Havitz

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This autoethnographic narrative explores my evolving personal relationship with my paternal grandmother. Written from a feminist perspective, I explore issues related to gender, life course, leisure and family, recognizing that virtually our entire shared lives occurred in contexts wherein I was on vacation and she was not. Our relationship was also influenced by the spatial context of the central Wisconsin dairy farm where she worked and lived through most of her adult life, and generational nuances specific to her time. The preface is intended to provide scholarly context for the personal issues discussed in the body of text. After reading this preface, readers can proceed to www.ahs.uwaterloo.ca/~mhavitz/grandma/presentation.html for the full text.

Keywords autoethnography, family vacations, family leisure, rural leisure, feminist critique

The Scholarly Underpinnings of this Autoethnography

My friend and colleague Diane Samdahl (1994, 2000) has occasionally criticized the extant body of leisure research for its conservative ontological, epistemological and methodological perspective. As I often find myself challenged by Diane's insight, the present issue of *Leisure Sciences* affords a unique opportunity to break from tradition. I have chosen this opportunity to tell a story. Although it is possible to cite stories well-told that illuminate the depth and breadth of leisure experience (e.g., Dustin, 2006; Reichwien & Fox, 2002), this mode of introspection and information dissemination has not received widespread systematic attention in the leisure literature. Originally defined as the cultural study of one's own people, autoethnography now commonly refers to a "form of writing that seeks to unite ethnographic (i.e., looking outward at a world beyond one's own) and autobiographical (i.e., gazing inward for a story of one's self) intentions" (Schwandt, 2001, p. 13). In perhaps the first example of autoethnography published in a mainline leisure journal, Botterill (2004) conducted a career-long academic critique in which he explored the evolution of his thought within diverse scholarly, spatial and temporal milieu. My autoethnography was written to examine my evolving relationship with my paternal grandmother within the social, spatial and temporal contexts of our shared lives.

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Creating the Text

Bouchner (2000) stated that ethnographic inquiries are usually “narratives of the self. To a large extent... self-narratives involve looking back at the past through the lens of the present” (p. 270). How are we to evaluate such text? The Personal Narratives Group (1989) argued:

Not surprisingly, when talking about their lives, people lie sometimes, forget a lot, exaggerate, become confused, and get things wrong. Yet they *are* revealing truths. These truths don't reveal the past as it actually was, aspiring to a standard of objectivity. They give us instead the truth of our experiences (p. 261, original emphasis; cited in Glover, 2004, p. 149).

Because over a half dozen family members were involved with this text's creation and it was vetted by two dozen others over the past two years, I am confident the pertinent “facts” (e.g., dates, places) are accurately presented. Nevertheless, this story is filtered through my personal 2004–2006 lens. Richardson (1997) argued that “whoever writes for/about/of whatever is using authority and privilege” (p. 58). Other people writing about the same sequence of events might reach a variety of similar or individually disparate conclusions. She argued further:

representation is always partial, local and situational and that our self is always present, no matter how much we try to suppress it – but only partially present, for in our writing we repress parts of ourselves too. Working from that premise, we are freed to write material in a variety of ways: to tell and retell. There is no such thing as ‘getting it right’; only ‘getting it’ differently contoured and nuanced (p. 91)

This story is the third narrative of a four-part series I have undertaken to describe my relationships with my grandparents. Relative to the others, each is or will be unique in format, theme and presentation. However, this story is the first to assume a scholarly bearing. I would like to emphasize that this is *my* story. Although the narrative focuses on Grandma and my evolving relationship with her (for a photo, see Figure 1), *she* had no direct input into this project. Her words appear nowhere within. I didn't begin to develop this paper until some five years after she was institutionalized in the face of rapidly advancing dementia, and well after she ceased to recognize me, her other grandchildren and most other people central to her life. Although the process has been both uplifting and exhilarating, it was initially a difficult narrative to write that consumed on-again and (mostly) off-again attention over a period of ten years.

I knew from the outset that the Grandma Havitz narrative would be much different from my first story that focused on Grandpa Havitz's life and was primarily based on humorous anecdotes. Henderson and Rannells' (1988) work on Wisconsin farm women provided some initial momentum for making this an academic endeavor when I began writing in 1995. The work and work/leisure interface themes dominated from the outset as together they represented my primary impression of Grandma throughout our shared lives. I initially included some quotes from Henderson and Rannells' paper as the women interviewed therein spoke of the same topics and in much the same manner as I recall Grandma speaking. I later decided to drop that material, but kept other voices such as those of several classmates, which I had discovered in her high school yearbook a few years earlier. The creative breakthrough that led to its eventual completion occurred when I attended



FIGURE 1 Mark and Alma Havitz, Junction City, Wisconsin, August 1985. Photo by Graham P. Brown.

Reichwien and Fox's (2002) audio-visual presentation on the life of Margaret Fleming at CCLR 10 in Edmonton. As I began integrating photos, maps and building narrative around them, words and sub-themes flowed at a prolific rate. In developing the Michigan-Wisconsin vacation maps, the holiday-dominated milieu of Grandma's and my lifetime interactions became readily apparent. Although my father and Aunt Rosemary were important initial information sources, I did not systematically seek input from siblings, cousins, aunts and uncles until fairly late in the creative process. The present narrative reached a state of relative fruition nearly four years after Grandma's death and has continued to evolve over the two years since its private debut at my father's 75th birthday party and its public debut days later at CCLR 11. It is, for me, a moving story. It sometimes moves me to smile and other times to weep (see Figure 2).

As noted, a traditional member check was not possible in the sense that Grandma had no opportunity to present alternative interpretations of the events and episodes, though others close to her did. Paradoxically, this narrative represents my sincere attempt to make visible a group of people whose story has only begun to unfold: farm women of 20th century North America. "Giving voice" would be the wrong phrase in this context because her direct voice is not included, nor would it be mine to give. What I really want to convey is that from my perspective Grandma's story matters. Her impact on my life and those of many others was anything but inconsequential or trivial. Although the present study does not represent a traditional narrative inquiry, Glover's (2004) observation that "narrative explanation means that one person's voice, the writer's, speaks for others" (p. 160) is appropriate. The narrative is composed largely of *my* words and *my* interpretations of events. Some are recent and others not-so-recent. Biklen (2004) cautioned that personal memory is a complex problematic that must not be taken for granted or over-extended to account for the experience of others. Ellis (1999) noted "there's no such thing as orthodox reliability in autoethnographic research. However, we can do reliability checks" (p. 674). This story has been filtered through the lens of time, conversations with my father, sisters, aunts, uncles and cousins, and friends in the dairy industry through personal letters, fading photographs, old yearbooks, atlases,



FIGURE 2 Alma Albertine Buelow (2nd row, far left), State Normal School “*Iris 1927*.” Photo reprinted with permission from the University of Wisconsin Stevens Point.

business receipts and the emerging alternative presentation scholarship associated with the leisure studies discipline. Ellis added, “It’s amazing what you can recall, and for how long, if the event was emotionally evocative” (p. 674). In summary, I wholeheartedly concur with Ellis’s statements and have taken precautions to address concerns related to memory (see Figure 3).



FIGURE 3 The author's 8th birthday, February 1965, Escanaba, Michigan (clockwise from front center): Carol Havitz, Lynn Havitz, Pam Seavers, Virg Seavers, Mark Havitz, Ed Havitz Sr., Scott Seavers, Kari Havitz, Rosemary Seavers, Alma Havitz). Photo by Ed Havitz Jr.

Richardson (1997) stated:

[I]n traditionally staged research we valorize "triangulation" . . . but in postmodernist mixed genre texts, the writers do not triangulate; they *crystallize*. There are far more than "three sides" by which to approach the world . . . Crystals grow, change, alter but are not amorphous. Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves. (p. 92, emphases in original)

Though some closure was necessary with respect to the publication deadline, the reality is that I am still working on this text and probably will be for the remainder of my life. Richardson's expressed paradox is particularly germane. To paraphrase her concluding comments in the piece, I know more and yet, at times, doubt what I know.

Given these considerations, I have not been surprised that although all individuals view life events from unique perspectives, suggested changes to the manuscript from family members, though openly and repeatedly solicited, have been minimal. At times I have included comments to that effect directly in the narrative, but other examples exist. For example, in the recorded version of the narrative, I refer to a photo of Grandma seated outdoors in a lawn chair. My text states that "I wasn't with them that day and I don't know who took the picture, but I suspect someone had to *coerce* her to attend the parade and I'm convinced someone *insisted* she take that seat." Months after that passage was written, a cousin viewed the presentation and confirmed that she took the photo and that someone else (i.e., Grandpa) had, indeed, insisted that Grandma take the seat (see Figure 4). Given this new information, I chose to let that section of the narrative stand as originally presented because the central point of the story remained intact.

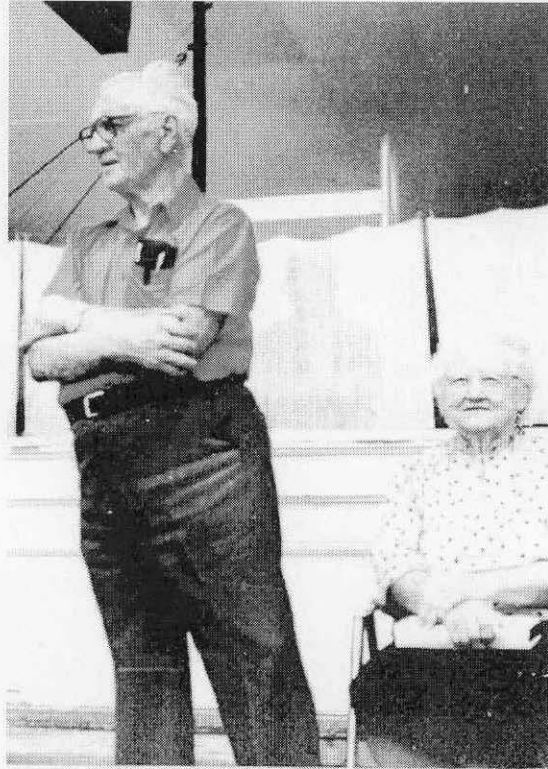


FIGURE 4 Grandpa and Grandma Havitz, Independence Day 1988, Junction City, Wisconsin. Photo by Pam (Seavers) Thomson.

Contextualizing the Text

To the extent that issues of gender and power represent reoccurring themes, I have endeavored to develop a feminist analysis of our mutual interaction and of our familial relationships within the broader context of rural North American society during various periods within the 20th century. My approach is characteristic of what Henderson (1994) described as gender scholarship in that I recognize both Grandma's and my broader lives and personal interactions were largely framed by gender and that we responded to those roles with some degree of individual autonomy. I believe the narrative also contains multiple elements of what Denzin (2000) termed "a politics of hope" whereby texts "criticize how things are and [...] imagine how they could be different" (p. 262). Parry (2004) added:

The type of scholar committed to a "politics of hope"—someone who interrogates cultural, sexist, and racial stereotypes, uses dialogue and an ethics of personal responsibility, implements an emancipatory agenda, and is a spokesperson for a moral community—suggests the importance of relationships between the researcher and the researched (p. 54).

I note early in the narrative that the experiences of me and my sisters were probably different from those of our cousins because of the spatial reality of our long-distance separation from our grandparents. The North American literature suggests that our experiences were likely not unique in this regard, however. Multi-generation households defined as

households in which at least three generations including grandparents, parents and grandchildren are present, currently comprise less than 5% of Canadian households (Che-Alford & Hamm, 1999; Milan & Hamm, 2003). Just over 3% of grandchildren live with their grandparents; the majority of those in multi-generational households and a distinct minority in skip-generation households comprised solely of some combination of grandchildren and grandparents. Laslett (1972) noted that large patriarchal and small patriarchal families were long prevalent through much of the world and have only in the past two centuries been superseded by smaller democratic family structures. McDaniel (1995) argued "the extended family household is becoming a thing of the past" (p. 331), although such arrangements remain more common among sub-cultural groups such as the Old Order Mennonite community and among North American immigrants from various Asian countries. Milan and Hamm also noted, "Among historical demographers, there is considerable controversy whether this [multigenerational] family form was ever very prevalent and, despite the nostalgic perceptions, desired" (p. 4). With respect to the former point Pryor (1972), examined U.S. census data for Rhode Island and noted that, even in 1875, multigenerational families accounted for only 8% of all families. Although common for one or more grandparent to live with adult children and their families, these arrangements often did not last long given the early mortality rates of the time.

Mobility increased throughout the 20th century and new technology notwithstanding, intergenerational contact remains spatially mitigated because "personal visits over greater distances require more time, money and motivation" (Townsend-Batten, 2002, p.10). Taken together, the above studies suggest contemporary grandparents and grandchildren, especially those living in separate communities, may have relatively little face-to-face interaction at certain times of their lives or even over the entire course of their lives. Consistent with Botterill's (2004) call for more emphasis on the meaning of tourism, I argue that this shared time, when it does occur, is potentially of huge importance but is often contextually driven because one or more of the parties involved is often on holiday or vacation or at least experiencing some broadly defined leisure setting.

Family holidays and the meanings implicit have received little attention in the leisure literature. Existing data suggest that roles vary and workloads associated with family holidays are unevenly distributed among various family members (Bella, 1992; Henderson, Bialeschki, Shaw, & Freysinger, 1996; Shaw, Havitz, & Delamere, 2002). My interactions with Grandma generally occurred within such milieu, and were further contextualized by my grandparents' dairy farm, which afforded vocational, spatial and temporal intricacies that greatly influenced their and, especially, my grandmother's perceptions of leisure, work and family (e.g., Henderson & Rannells, 1988; Shortall, 1999). As such, I argue it is largely accurate to characterize the context of our mutual interaction throughout our shared life courses in the following manner: I was on vacation and she was not (see Figure 5).

Family farms have been romanticized as North American agriculture becomes increasingly corporatized, which results in increased levels of production on fewer but larger farms. However, Shortall (1999) argued that the term family farming has been itself contentious because it misrepresents the ownership structures underlying many farm households. Shortall's insightful work integrated discussion regarding sources of social power (e.g., Mann, 1993; Marx, 1971; Parsons, 1960; Weber, 1978) with how power is identified and exercised (e.g., Bachrach & Baratz, 1962; Foucault, 1980; Lukes, 1974) along with specific case analyses to support an argument that power remains unequally distributed among men and women in North American and European agricultural contexts. Evidence suggests that as the 21st century unfolds, farm ownership remains disproportionately passed among male members of the family (de Haan, 1994), women are more likely to "marry into" farming

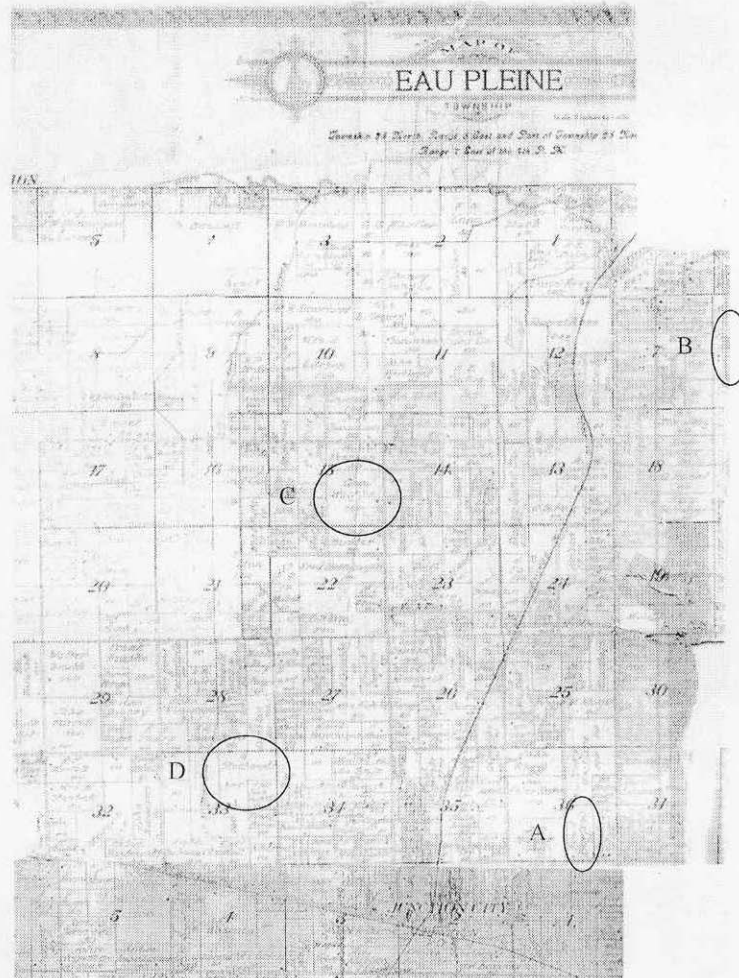


FIGURE 5 Havitz farm, Town of Eau Pleine, Portage County, Wisconsin, winter 1949. Photo by Jack Havitz.

than are men, (Trussell & Shaw, in press), women's farm work tends to be invisible (Sachs, 1983), women have had much less access to agricultural training in comparison to men, farm women are more socially isolated than are farm men, and farm women are often economically marginalized. The latter two conclusions may be premature as women have increasingly taken paid off-the-farm work to supplement family income (Trussell & Shaw, in press) and because agricultural education in North America is widely available to both men and women. With respect to most of these issues, Grandma's life followed the dominant 20th century pattern. She did not inherit any of the three farms with which she had childhood ties. Instead, she married into the family that owned the farm where she spent her adult life. Though educated, she did not study agriculture. Her daily work patterns were dominated by household activity such as laundry, gardening, cooking and canning for family consumption. Most of what she did resulted in no direct income. She did not play a major role in the production of field crops but did have a substantial role in the dairy component of the farm and, consistent with her relatively high level of education, in the financial aspects of the operation (see Figure 6).

Conclusions

Grandma Havitz's life experiences were, in most respects, typical of many rural women of her generation. Social constraint and social construction were evident in, among other things, her career choices, volunteer activity, the limited spatial scope of her physical world in both daily life and with respect to vacation travel, and the clear integration of leisure and work in her daily routine. Her resistance to traditional roles was manifested in sport participation as a youth and pursuit of higher educational goals, both of which were largely suppressed, perhaps by way of personal choice during her adult life. Our personal relationship evolved over time to the extent that the Grandma of my youth bears little resemblance to the Grandma I knew as an adult.



- A) Fred Buelow Jr., her uncle*
 B) Gustave Borth Sr., her maternal grandfather
 C) George Wolfe Sr., her stepfather
 D) Andrew Stachowitz, her father-in-law**

* This farm was probably owned by her deceased father Carl or paternal grandfather Fred Buelow Sr. during the time, if any, that Grandma lived there.

** Title to this farm was acquired by her husband Edward John Havitz shortly after their wedding.

FIGURE 6 Ownership of four Wisconsin farms central to Grandma's life. From the *Standard Atlas of Portage County, Wisconsin*. (1915). Chicago: Geo. A. Ogle & Co.

Framed within the commonly used tourism term "visiting friends and relatives (VFR)," this story of our lifelong relationship was written to point out both the power and limitations of family leisure and the common, but often taken for granted VFR context of the touristic experience. I consider myself blessed that over time I got to know her quite well, but I remain frustrated with the relatively small amount of time we really spent together. The emotional and intellectual energy expended in developing and refining this paper afforded me the opportunity to find an elusive "extra hour" with Grandma Havitz. It is now my pleasure to introduce you to my grandmother. The narrative is available at www.ahs.uwaterloo.ca/~mhavitz/grandma/presentation.html. I recommend that you block out about an hour and 15 minutes as the story is best heard as a single unit.

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