

Introduction

I'm the *Not Ready for Granny Panties* lady. At least that's how I've been described on more than one occasion. In fact, it's how I've sometimes described myself.

Which is okay, because it's true. Several years ago, after witnessing the demise of the newspapers for which I was writing and falling into an epic funk, I decided to start the blog, *Not Ready for Granny Panties*, because, well, I wasn't. Ready for granny panties, that is.

Chronologically, I most certainly was ready for granny panties, given that all of my kids were in their twenties and more than able to procreate. (They didn't, which back then was a good thing, but another story entirely.)

My aversion to granny panties had far less to do with my fears of being old enough to be a grandmother and far more to do with what I perceived as my gradual slide into irrelevance, oblivion, and boredom as I passed the half-century mark. (Yeesh, that still sounds awful.)

The sidelining of women over a certain age is nothing new. The pursuit of youth in our culture almost makes aging a sin, unless you're a guy and happen to look like George Clooney, in which case you're still astoundingly gorgeous and able to snag a spouse almost twenty years your junior. (Damn him. And her, too, now that I think of it.)

The dearth of great movie and television roles for older women is routinely bemoaned by the Hollywood glitterati, which is a shame for them, but even worse for those of us who never did and never will have a shot at that kind of platform to actually bemoan anything. We're expected to do what will make everyone around us comfortable and quietly fade into the background.

Well, um, no. Being quiet about anything has never been my strong suit, but when everything in my life started to go to hell around a decade ago, I got very quiet, because I didn't know what else to do.

That approach got me exactly nowhere, so I decided to start speaking up, on behalf of myself and on behalf of other women, both older and not so old. I wasn't sure if what I had to say would resonate, but it felt pretty good to write about my "stuff" and get things off my chest, and it was a lot cheaper than therapy.

It turned out that what I felt, and subsequently said, rang a lot more bells than I could have imagined.

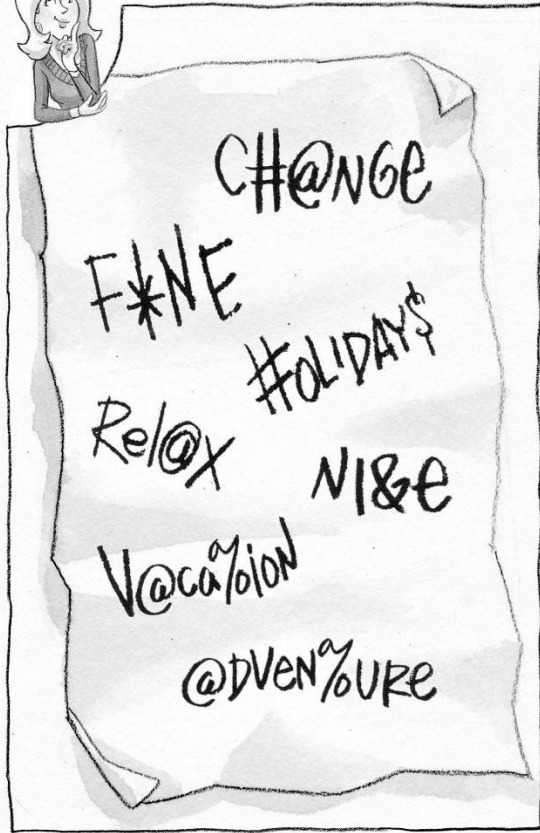
We women, regardless of where we are in life, all pretty much want the same things: love, peace, health, and security (lots of money doesn't hurt, either)—for ourselves and our families. The details of our lives might be different, but the larger stories are basically the same.

What I found, though, was that even though we all wanted the same things, when it came to getting them, we were often our own worst enemies. And a lot of it had to do with our self-talk, which often means getting ourselves out of granny panties—not the literal ones, the ones we wear in our heads that keep us from believing we can and should have what we want in life.

So through the *Not Ready for Granny Panties* platforms (blog, books, and other, variously placed musings), I've made it my business to reach out to women—all types and ages of women—to find out how we think and how we can tweak our inner lives to make our outer lives better. And I try to do it with laughter, because most days, you're a hair's breadth away from laughing or crying, so you might as well laugh.

Finally, I am a grandmother now, and it's not half as bad as I feared. In fact, it's pretty great, which just goes to prove that the reality of a situation might not be something to fear, but rather the exact opposite.

So here's to getting rid of your mental granny panties, no matter your age, and talking yourself into living a wonderful life!



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Chapter 1

What's in a Word?

We women like to talk.

We talk to the tune of around 20,000 words per day, if current science is to be believed. We talk to commune with our girlfriends, sisters and mothers, we talk to issue directives to our kids and families, we talk to share our feelings (ad nauseum, if you ask our husbands and partners), we talk at work, we talk at play, sometimes we even talk in our sleep.

Words are kind of our thing. We should be word experts. So why is it that certain words send us over the edge?

Why is it, that when lobbed in our direction in conversation, or sometimes even merely thought about, certain words make us crazy? Crazier, that is. Let's be honest, we gals are all a little off center to begin with.

Words are powerful instruments. Uniquely the province of humans, we rely on words to fuel most of our communication with the world (although the influence of a well-placed eye roll is not to be underestimated).

Generally, a word conveys a specific idea, an idea that is readily understood by those sharing the language of

the word. A dog is a four-legged domesticated animal that most often exists as a pet for humans. Easy enough.

Yet, over time, even the simplest, most obvious word can take on new meaning, as when a dog serves to describe the jerk of a guy who just broke your daughter's heart. There are other words to describe him as well, but let's stick to those acceptable in polite conversation.

Many words in the English language have multiple meanings, either by definition or connotation. Look at the word "run" in the following sentences:

Run and get the flashlight.

Tom is going to **run** for class president.

The Phillies scored a home **run**.

Don't **run** to your mother with every little complaint, you're supposed to be a grown-up, what's wrong with you?

Okay, that last one was a run-on. And a little hysterical. Sorry.

But you get the idea. Words can have multiple meanings, all of which are acceptable and recognizable to the general populace. The general populace not operating with the mind of a stressed-out, overwhelmed, timechallenged, can't-do-everything-myself woman, that is.

To us, any number of words, despite appearing innocent to men, children, and even some women as yet inexperienced in the ways of familial bliss (read: single women whose crazy is unrelated to raising a family), can

create profound anxiety, angst, worry, frustration, and even fear.

These words are not complex, and quite often, the aforementioned men, children, and single women react to them with eager anticipation and, dare I say, pleasure. But for other women, particularly mothers, it's a different story. For us, these words make comedian George Carlin's list of "Seven Words You Can Never Say on Television" read like a nursery rhyme.

Because of our position in the hierarchy of family life, which translates into the person in charge of everybody's everything, certain words come equipped with a negative charge that's hard for us to counteract. We hear them, and while everyone in the family around us may be smiling and dancing with anticipation at the future joy the word is sure to bring to one and all, we're gritting our teeth in dread.

We know the reality behind some words is not that simple.

However, there is some good news. Most of the dread we attach to words that everyone else likes is, to some degree, of our own making. As such, we can fix it. Well, maybe not fix it entirely, but at least quell the urge to run screaming into the street whenever a certain word crops up in conversation. Sometimes, that's got to be enough.

So let's take a look at some "Dirty Words." Those words that should make us happy but too often induce a panic attack. With any luck, the next time you hear one, you'll smile instead of bursting into tears.



Chapter 2

Vacation

Va·ca·tion

noun

1. a period of time when work, study, or other regular activity is suspended
2. time spent away from home in pursuit of travel, recreation, or rest
3. freedom from regular obligations, business, or school

Was there ever a word that got your eight-year-old juices flowing like the word vacation?

To your eight-year-old self, vacation was the lottery-winning jackpot of words. It either signaled the end of school and three months of goofing off, or holidays like Christmas and Thanksgiving, which also equaled presents —a double bonus.

It meant, as noted in the definition above, FREEDOM. Freedom from doing all of the stuff a kid hates to do, which at eight primarily involves anything connected with school. No more pencils, no more books, no more teachers' dirty looks—mainly because the people giving us dirty looks on vacation were our mothers.

For my childhood self, vacation also meant the beach, or rather, the one week each year when my family travelled for our vacation to the Jersey shore. During approximately eighty-six trips from house to car, we would stuff our station wagon to the bursting point with clothes for six people, sheets, towels, sun tan lotion (sunscreen wasn't even on the radar back then), beach chairs, a beach umbrella, toys, and of course, food. After the house rental was paid, there was usually enough left for one full meal out, with some treats sprinkled through the week. But the rest of the time, my mother cooked.

Once the car was packed, we'd pile in, my youngest brother relegated to the fold up seat far in the rear of the station wagon. (I'm pretty sure those seats are now illegal.) At least I think he was back there. There was so much stuff in the car, no one could see or hear him for the entire trip. But he's in the pictures and I kind of remember him hanging around, so I guess he was along for the ride.

When we arrived at our destination, after a threehour odyssey on the Atlantic City Expressway during which it was a crap shoot as to whether or not we'd join the parade of overheated vehicles on the side of the road, the unloading

commenced, necessitating another eighty-six trips into the rental house. At least every three minutes during this process, one of the four kids would plaintively ask, “Can we go to the beach after this?” at which point my mother or father would bark, “Can we just get this done first?” while handing the offender another bag or suitcase to carry inside.

Three hours later, when we did finally make our way to the beach, it was hard to tell that we left anything back at the house, so loaded down were we with the requisite beach gear. That is, my parents were loaded down. We kids were allowed to grab a sand bucket and run towards the water to escape the blistering sand, a calculated move by my parents: Make the kids carry stuff and listen to them cry when their feet burn or carry all the crap ourselves and have at least a few minutes peace? They let us run.

At week’s end, sunburned and happily exhausted, we reversed the entire process and made our way back to Philadelphia, the snarled traffic, oppressive heat and invisible little brother once again our travel companions.

Oh, how I loved those vacations. I could never quite understand why my parents didn’t.

Truth be told, my father enjoyed himself a little more than my mom. Once he delivered us safely to the destination and excepting the daily trudges to the beach and dips into his wallet, he was able to be off duty, at least for a while. (I’m sure the Jack Daniels helped significantly.)

My mother had no such respite. Mothers rarely do. My mother was still charged with feeding, clothing, washing, and overseeing four children in a “home” that wasn’t her own. Four children who, despite the fact that they were on vacation, were, by turns, tired, cranky, sunburned, hot, thirsty, and overwhelmed by “fun.”

I recall one summer when my mother was washing a glass, which broke and cut her hand. She had to go to the emergency room for stitches and was gone for hours. I, always neurotic, was certain she wasn’t coming back. Looking through my own “mom glasses” now, I imagine those few hours of peace and quiet in the E.R. were the highlight of her trip that year.

So you have you as your eight-year-old self on vacation. The beach, the boardwalk, the carefree days, the forbidden foods suddenly allowed and indulged in, the late bed times, the fun, fun, fun!

Now fast forward twenty or thirty years, to the you who is dragging kids on your family’s own annual vacation. Who do you see now? If you’re anything like me, you see your mother. With your face. That’s right; now, when you go on vacation, you are your mother, which, all by itself, is enough to send any woman over the edge. Add in several tired, cranky kids, a sub-par hotel or beach rental and seventeen suitcases, coolers, and bags full of clothes, food, toys, sheets, towels, medicine, flip-flops, beach chairs, etc., etc., etc., and, well...

Is it any wonder “vacation” is a dirty word for women?

It should get better as we, and our families, get older. After all, teens can carry more than a bucket and shovel to the beach. However, they can also carry surly teenaged attitudes about family vacations, frequently turning the entire adventure into a grumble fest about how they’re “too old for this stuff” and pushing everyone’s patience to the limit, while whining about how their friends got to go to Disney World or Aruba together for their vacation. Yeah, sign me up.

If you manage to get the family together once the kids have hit the college years and beyond, you’re then often presented with the issue of the “significant other,” who must be included in every family event, despite the permanence, or lack of permanence, of the relationship in your child’s life. Deny access and risk your own kid refusing to take part. Allow it and be forced to deal with the “Where is everyone sleeping?” question. What parent doesn’t want to think of their kid sleeping with a significant other on vacation, and on the sheets you provided? I mean, let’s add that image to the mental photo album. Or let’s not.

And you are still the one bringing the sheets, towels, food, toilet paper, paper towels, toothpaste, and other household supplies—you know, the stuff everyone thinks magically appears in the cabinets at home—but now you’re loading it into the car yourself, because the children you once forced to act as manual labor have jobs, or school, or other

commitments, ones that don't include loading—or unloading—the car.

Further, as the instigator, or perpetrator of the family vacation (and at times, it does feel like you're perpetrating a crime, let's face it), you're also usually responsible for the bulk of the trip financially, even if the kids are older. As such, use the rule of thumb for home repairs—whatever you figure it's gonna cost, double it.

Notice we haven't even touched on vacations involving airplanes, airports, countless security checks and body searches, hotels, lost reservations and luggage, passports, the movie *Taken*, and kids who insist they can find their way around a foreign country even though they can't find the hamper in their rooms at home.

Sounds like decades and decades of fun, doesn't it? Oh yes, vacation is not only a dirty word for women, sometimes it's downright filthy.

So, what's the solution, aside from emptying the vacation bank account and buying a one-way ticket to a really expensive spa in California?

First, and most important, **LOWER YOUR EXPECTATIONS.**

The annual vacation is the Holy Grail of family experiences. We look to the vacation to create memories meant to last a lifetime, to be recounted lovingly through the years as an example of how wonderful our togetherness was.

Except that it often isn't. The perfect family vacation simply doesn't exist, and the expectations we hold for it all but guarantee its failure. Think Chevy Chase and the trip to Wally World in *National Lampoon's Vacation*. Dead old lady strapped to the roof, anyone? Family vacations may have their wonderful moments, but if you're expecting perfection, what you're more likely to get is a big suitcase full of disappointment.

So relax, already. I mean, isn't that the point of a vacation anyway?

The most you should expect from a family vacation is the opportunity to spend some time together doing something different, somewhere different. And notice I didn't even say "quality" time. Because everyone's definition of that is different, and forcing your definition on everyone else is a recipe for disaster.

Time together, doing something different from the normal routine has all the potential necessary to become something else. Something better than the norm, especially if the experience is allowed to evolve into whatever it's going to be. Remember that most of the memories we hold dear come from experiences that just happened. They are

rarely entire events, but rather moments that came from within events or places and grew organically.

Which brings us to point number two: Leave the laminated and itemized vacation planner at home. We women lose our minds over vacation planning, whether it's about travel arrangements, sleeping arrangements, packing, food, itineraries, etc., etc. Some of it's necessary. I mean, if you don't want to sleep in your car or a bus station, you have to book a hotel, but much of our incessant planning isn't. Much of it is about our demented need to control everybody's everything, including dictating every moment of the one thing we're all supposed to be doing to get away from our tightly wound lives—a restful, relaxing vacation. (And yes, I was the one with the pages-long lists in Disney World, dictating everything from when we would get to the parks, to where we would eat, to which lines we should stand in for the rides. I think my family hated me and now, I kind of hate myself.)

Instead, have a few “musts”—with the option of ditching should you change your mind—and go with the flow. If you're flying everyone to Disney World, of course you need to plan, but don't OVER-plan. Make reservations for special meals once or twice, and then wing it. Decide which park you're going to visit, choose a few must-see attractions, and then give everyone the option of trying other things or heading back to the pool for an afternoon of splashing and lounging.

If you're beach-bound for a vacation, plan for plenty of time sitting on the sand, and not much else. Beaches offer their own built-in options; planning by obsessive women is unnecessary. Apply the same guidelines for meals—one or two special outings—and then just let whatever happens, happen. A week of pizza and ice cream isn't going to kill anyone.

Further, make sure you allow everyone an activity of their choice, in which everyone participates or they can indulge in themselves, if they're old enough. Giving everyone the option to choose an activity of their own can head off a mutiny when you present your "have to" vacation musts, as in, "Yes, you *have to* do this with us."

It's not a bad idea to work in some exercise time for yourself either, if you're so inclined. Running away, as long as you return, will clear your head, not to mention provide an outlet for the adrenaline build-up that will occasionally threaten to derail your vacation nirvana. And when you stop running, don't forget to whip out that trashy novel you hid in your bag, or the *People Magazine* you picked up at the convenience store. After all, what's a great vacation without mindless drivel filling your head?

Speaking of heads, don't forget headphones, which will attach to iPods, tablets or other electronic devices. Although your instinct may be to ban these entirely, they can be just the antidote to too much togetherness, the scorpion sting of many family vacations. Provided no one is glued to their devices the entire time, when you all just can't stand to

look at one another for one more minute, allow, no DEMAND, that everyone plug in and tune out for a while. It could be your salvation.

As could a little independence, especially before the vacation, in the form of everyone packing for themselves. Now before you dissolve into hysterical laughter, with images of no one bringing any underwear, know that making everyone responsible for their own packing is possible. And it's all in the list.

Every woman is a list-maker. From grocery lists, “to-do” lists, appointment lists, and so on, we're expert listmakers. So do what you do best. Make a list of what everyone should bring (DON'T OVER-PACK!), distribute said lists, have everyone lay out their clothing on their beds, inspect to see they've got what they need and stick it all in a suitcase. Voila. Your kids have autonomy over their wardrobe and you don't have to pack for everyone. (Just make sure you stop this practice before the kids graduate from high school. It's embarrassing when your 22-year-old son tells you he's not packed for the next day's trip because you never gave him his packing list.)

If someone forgets something, buy it or do without. Unless you're going to the Amazon Jungle, it's a safe bet you'll find a store that has t-shirts.

While we're on the subject of clothing, one more suggestion, which may go against every fiber of your being. Do the laundry while you're away.

Think about it. Is there anything that destroys the vacation Zen faster than a laundry room full of dirty clothes when you get home? If at all possible, the day before you leave, throw in at least a few loads of laundry, maybe while you're relaxing by the pool. Then, when you get back to reality, and your house, everyone puts away clean clothes and you aren't digging out from under a mountain of sandy, smelly shorts for a week.

Minimalism, in terms of expectations, packing, meals, and yes, even togetherness—though that's supposed to be the point of a family vacation—can be the saving grace of the entire experience. Don't expect too much, don't plan much, don't pack much, don't eat too much, and get the heck away from each other once in a while.

It's the recipe for a perfect vacation.

Try This!

Think about your last vacation. Write down three things that caused problems, tensions or arguments. Next to each item, write how the problem could have been solved, or better yet, avoided.

Next, write down three things that went well, helping to make wonderful vacation memories. Next to each, write how you could create similar moments on future vacations.

Finally, write down five things you would personally like to do on your next vacation. When your vacation comes around, DO THEM!

