



# GRANDMOTHER POWER

*A Global Phenomenon*

PAOLA GIANTURCO

*This PDF is NOT the entire book*

# **Grandmother Power: A Global Phenomenon**

by **Paola Gianturco**

Published by



To be released: **October 2012**

This PDF of *Grandmother Power: A Global Phenomenon* is only a preview and an uncorrected proof.

Lifting images from mechanical files is strictly prohibited.  
To see the complete version, please contact Nina Ventura,  
Publicist: [nina@powerHouseBooks.com](mailto:nina@powerHouseBooks.com)



# Grandmother **POWER**

*A Global Phenomenon*



PAOLA GIANTURCO



**powerHouse Books**

Brooklyn, NY

# Grandmother Power: A Global Phenomenon

Text and photographs © 2012 Paola Gianturco

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any manner in any media, or transmitted by any means whatsoever, electronic or mechanical (including photocopy, film or video recording, Internet posting, or any other information storage and retrieval system), without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Published in the United States by powerHouse Books, a division of powerHouse Cultural Entertainment, Inc.

37 Main Street, Brooklyn, NY 11201-1021

telephone 212.604.9074, fax 212.366.5247

e-mail: grandmotherpower@powerhousebooks.com

website: www.powerhousebooks.com

First edition, 2012

Library of Congress Control Number: TK

ISBN 978-1-57687-611-4

Printing and binding by TK

Book design by Patricia Fabricant

A complete catalog of powerHouse Books and Limited Editions is available upon request; please call, write, or visit our website.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed and bound in China

# Contents

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>HIV/AIDS</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>CANADA:</b> Grandmothers caring for AIDS orphans in 15 African countries told Canadian grandmothers that they didn't want to be charity cases, but they did need "just enough." Grandmothers in 245 groups across Canada raised \$13 million over the last 6 years and sent "just enough" to those who asked.	<b>12</b>
<b>SWAZILAND:</b> Youngsters run to their grandmothers as soon as their parents' funerals are finished. All over Sub-Saharan Africa, grandmothers adopt these AIDS orphans, sometimes supporting as many as 12 or 15 at a time. Grandmothers in rural Swaziland run seed nurseries and community gardens so they can feed their many adopted boys and girls.	<b>24</b>
<b>SOUTH AFRICA:</b> In Khayelitsha, even harder than just caring for AIDS orphans, is to do so while HIV positive, as are some members of GAPA (Grandmothers Against Poverty and AIDS). Members run after-school-care programs for their orphaned youngsters, and teach each other craft skills to support their families. Asked how they're doing, they say, "I am strong!"	<b>36</b>
<b>CULTURAL PRESERVATION</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>PERU:</b> Traditional Inca weaving patterns and dying processes were lost. Woven artifacts had vanished; the ancestors had been betrayed. Little by little, a master weaver and local grandmothers recovered and recreated the art that was practiced five hundred years ago.	<b>48</b>
<b>UNITED ARAB EMIRATES:</b> Perhaps nowhere else in the world is there such tension between modern life and tradition as in Dubai, which helps explain why <i>Freej</i> , an animated 3-D comedy television show about 4 grandmothers, is a runaway hit.	<b>62</b>
<b>ENVIRONMENT</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>THAILAND:</b> A mining company is extracting gold from the Loei Mountains, using cyanide that is seeping into the local cotton fields and water. Grandmothers, who inherited indigo fields from their mothers, allocate a portion of their profits to help nearby villagers whose lives have been ruined—while they plan strategies to protect their own livelihoods, health, and families.	<b>74</b>
<b>HUMAN RIGHTS</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>GUATEMALA:</b> There is a village where fathers expect to be their daughters' first sexual partners, according to the grandmothers who run the child abuse hotline in Jalapa. It is grandmothers who have the time to hear about the assaults; the compassion to provide solace; the intelligence to suggest referrals and resources; the patience and conviction to teach good parenting practices.	<b>88</b>

**ISRAEL:** Too often, Israel Defense Forces abuse Palestinians at checkpoints. The soldiers' grandmothers are halting that abuse. "At 18, soldiers are too young to make the decisions we ask of them," one says. The grandmothers have monitored checkpoints throughout Israel and the West Bank since 2002, issuing daily reports to journalists, the Knesset, and on the Internet. **102**

## EDUCATION

**ARGENTINA:** Even in a world where people read on Kindles and iPads, many children are illiterate. Hoping to engage indigent children with books, grandmothers began reading to them and inspired so many to go to school and learn to read that the program has been duplicated throughout Latin America. **116**

## JUSTICE

**PHILIPPINES:** During World War II, the Japanese Army kidnapped a teenaged girl to provide sex to every 100 soldiers. Those girls, now *Lolas* (grandmothers), are determined their suffering will never be repeated. They have sued Japan for reparations, apology, and official acknowledgement. **130**

**ARGENTINA:** Military and police officers tortured and murdered thousands during the military dictatorship (1976-83) then stole their babies to raise. Ever since, the children's grandmothers have searched. They've reclaimed 105 children so far. **144**

## SPIRITUAL LIFE

**LAOS:** Lao grandmothers living in Luang Prabang, a world heritage town that has 30 Buddhist temples, become increasingly religious as they age. They spend their days serving their communities by folding leaves and flowers into offerings for the temples and decorations for weddings, and some become Buddhist nuns. **158**

**INDIGENOUS GRANDMOTHERS:** The world seems to be exploding with violence and environmental degradation. But an optimistic, shared prophecy connects indigenous tribes in Nepal, Mexico, Brazil, Tibet, Gabon, and the United States: women from the 4 directions will awaken the world. The International Council of Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers, all healers and shamans, perform ceremonies all over the world. **172**

## HEALTH

**SENEGAL:** When grandmothers learned from health workers that their daughters were dying in childbirth due to female genital mutilation, they organized to stop that practice as well as teen pregnancy and child marriage. They gained support from Imams, school principals, and village chiefs, then convened village meetings where old and young, men and women agreed to abandon these practices. **186**

**IRELAND:** Convenience and frozen foods, fast food restaurants, chemicals, and preservatives leech nutrition from meals. There is nothing as healthy as eating homegrown, home-cooked food. On Slow Food International Grandmother's Day, grandmothers teach grandchildren to plant vegetables and cook traditional dishes **202**

## POLITICS

**USA:** A complacent public results in a flaccid democracy, which is why the Raging Grannies don flowery hats and dowdy aprons, write witty songs to sing at demonstrations—and garner enough media coverage to enhance awareness of the political issues they care about. **216**

## ENERGY

**INDIA:** In dark villages, midwives cannot see to deliver babies at night; children get black lung disease studying by the light of kerosene lanterns. Hundreds of grandmothers learned solar engineering at the Barefoot College in Rajasthan, then brought light to their villages—and everything changed. The United Nations is sending grandmothers from Africa to learn from the Indian grandmothers. **228**

## GRANDMOTHER GROUPS

**244**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**246**

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

**248**

## INDEX

**253**



# Introduction

*Insurgent grandmothers are fighting the status quo, successfully seeding peace, justice, education, health, human rights, and a better world for grandchildren everywhere.*

While working in Kenya, Cameroon, Swaziland, and South Africa, I met so many grandmothers raising AIDS orphans that it seemed to me the future of that continent rests with its grandmothers. It was they who inspired this book.

They also inspired me to wonder what other grandmothers around the world are doing.

Grandmothers in India are learning solar engineering and bringing light to their villages.

In Argentina, grandmothers have searched out more than 100 grandchildren who were kidnapped during the military dictatorship, and returned them to their families. Their search continues.

Israeli grandmothers are monitoring military checkpoints to prevent human rights abuses of Palestinians.

In the Philippines, grandmothers who were forced into sex slavery during World War II are demanding a place in history books so their experience will never be repeated.

Irish grandmothers are teaching their grandchildren to plant and cook, encouraging good nutrition, and reducing child obesity.

These heroic stories cause me to ask:

\*If I were an illiterate grandmother, would I have the gumption and intellectual discipline to master solar engineering?

\*If I were HIV positive, would I have the energy and spirit to support a dozen AIDS-orphaned grandchildren while I grieved for their parents, my children?

\*Would I have the courage and moral clarity, as Israeli grandmothers do, to protect the human rights of the people whose land my country occupies?

\*Would I be tenacious enough to fight a foreign government after more than 60 years, as the Philippine grandmothers do?

Would you?



This is the first time in history that grandmothers have campaigned universally and vigorously for political, economic and social change.

Grandmothers all over the world are forming and joining groups, 17 of which are featured in *Grandmother Power*. As a grandmother myself, I suspect this activism is stimulated by our tightly-connected, troubled world, which impels us to improve the future for our grandchildren.

The grandmothers in this book are teaching important lessons about values and character. Canadian grandmothers are teaching generosity and collaboration. In the Philippines and Argentina, grandmothers exemplify patience, perseverance, and justice. The South African and Swaziland grandmothers are modeling resilience and mercy. In Ireland, Peru, Laos, Thailand, and the United Arab Emirates, grandmothers are sustaining traditions—while their sisters in India, Senegal, and the United States catalyze change. Indigenous and Israeli grandmothers are seeding hope and peace.



A worldwide grandmother movement is underway even though grandmother groups in different countries are not aware of each other.

The grandmother movement results, in part, from demographics. There are more grandmothers on the planet than at any other time in history. For thousands of years, there were none: people simply didn't live beyond the age of about 30.

Now, at least in the developed world, grandmothers are healthier, better off, and younger than ever before. And there are lots of them: in the United States in 2012, there were 38 million grandmothers. There will be 42 million by 2015.

One third of the entire U.S. population is grandparents, the majority of them between 45 and 64 years old. In 2011, Baby Boomers, aged 47 to 65, made up more than half of all grandparents in the country.

Everyday, 4,000 people in the United States become grandparents for the first time, and they can expect to be grandparents for the next 40 years. Thanks to quality healthcare and longer life expectancy, by 2030, five or six generations may be alive at the same time and the majority of children in the United States may have eight great-grandparents and four grandparents.



More than demographics drive the grandmother movement. It may be an expression of the Grandmother Hypotheses, an evolutionary biology theory that women live past their reproductive years to help their grandchildren.

Many grandmothers are raising their grandchildren. In the United States in 2008, close to two million children lived with grandmother caregivers, an arrangement that crossed ethnic and racial lines: 50% of those grandmothers were white; 27% African American; 18% Hispanic; and 3% Asian.



Even if they are not primary care givers, grandmothers often help care for their grandchildren, and they definitely care *about* them. In 2009 the Pew Research Center surveyed 1,300 U.S. grandparents about what they valued most in life. “Time with grandchildren” topped the list.



It should be no surprise that Baby Boomers (called Boomies in Canada and The Bulge in the U.K.) expect to make the world a better place; they are experienced at it.

In the 1960s, United States university students redefined civil rights for Blacks, Hispanics, Chicanos, gays, people with disabilities, and women. They lofted the environmental, population, and anti-nuclear movements.

In the U.S., Canada, England, France, Germany, and Italy, students catalyzed public opinion against the war in Vietnam. Students in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia rose up against Communist restrictions on free speech. French students participated in the largest general strike ever. Students demonstrated in Greece, Holland,

Japan, Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and more. Those students are grandmothers today and are not about to stop agitating for change.

Many individual grandmothers play highly visible roles in today's world. The 2011 Nobel Peace Prize Winner, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, grandmother of eight, is President of Liberia. Michelle Bachelet, grandmother of two, was President of Chile and now heads UN Women. Grandmothers Whoopi Goldberg, Mia Farrow, Jessica Lange, and Vanessa Redgrave are all UNICEF Goodwill Ambassadors. Jane Goodall, world expert on chimpanzees, says, “I am saving the world for my grandchildren.”



Grandmothers' impact lasts a long time. My Italian grandmother, Remigia, helped when her husband ran for parliament; she wrote his speeches, to his constituents, and letters to newspapers. My American grandmother Emma saved the sugary, sizzling doughnut holes for me, stocked a candy drawer with surprises, and let me play under her bushes where violets grew. Both women, born in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, live in me, in the 21<sup>st</sup>.



Similarly, our grandchildren will experience our impact for a long time. Laura Carstensen, Director of the Stanford Center on Longevity, anticipates that half—half!—of all girls born in the U.S. in the year 2000 will reach age 100, “the first centenarians to live into the 22<sup>nd</sup> century.”



The grandmothers I interviewed for this book are pragmatic problem solvers. They love their grandchildren in many ways. Their wisdom is expressed through vision, energy, creativity, and passion. Determined to improve the present and future, their lives have purpose and meaning. Since I am a grandmother, I met them as peers but they are also my heroes.

It was a surprise to meet those whom I had imagined would be most burdened. When I greeted the African grandmothers who are raising their AIDS-orphaned grandchildren, I asked, “How are you doing?” The response was: “I am strong!”

*Grandmother Power* tells the stories of 120 activist grandmothers, members of 17 groups in 15 countries on 5 continents. I hope you will feel, as you read each grandmother's words, that you are having an informal chat, just as I was lucky enough to have.

I visited the grandmothers between June 2009 and February 2011. Each chapter is a snapshot of the time I visited; by the time this book is published, the grandmothers will have more grandchildren and years than the text says.

Working with interpreters, I interviewed the grandmothers in their own languages and recorded our conversations, then later sent the chapter drafts back to the interpreters to fact check. Because the grandmothers were so engaged in helping create it, I consider this “our” book, even though my name is on the cover.

If you would like to join or support these grandmother groups, they are listed at the back of the book and on the project website, [www.globalgrandmotherpower.com](http://www.globalgrandmotherpower.com) where you will also discover an internet trove: videos; news updates; more photographs; audio interview excerpts; behind-the-scenes snapshots; resources for more information; recommendations about how you can take action.



One of the grandmother groups you will read about is Grandmothers and GrandOthers in Barrie, Ontario. They are among the 245 Canadian grandmother groups that are advocating for, and raising money for African grandmothers caring for AIDS orphans.

The Canadian grandmothers' philanthropy is part of an ambitious program coordinated by Toronto's Stephen Lewis Foundation, called the Grandmother to Grandmother Campaign. Two of their grantees are featured in the Swaziland and South Africa chapters.

You have already helped the Foundation's grantee grandmothers because 100% of my author royalties will go to the Stephen Lewis Foundation's Grandmother to Grandmother Campaign. I am grateful for your collaboration.

An additional way you can help is to give *Grandmother Power* as a present. It comes in both hardcover and e-book form. It's a great gift if you are a grandmother, know a grandmother, have a grandmother, have good memories of a grandmother, plan to become a grandmother someday or, as the Stephen Lewis Grandmothers would say, if you are a GrandOther.

My dream is that this book will inspire grand people to use their wisdom, experience, energy, and power on behalf of grandchildren everywhere, all of whom deserve to live in a better world.

I dedicate this book, with love, to my granddaughters, Alex and Avery, and to all grandchildren around the globe.

*Paola Giannone*