THE CONVERSATION BEGINS

Mothers and Daughters Talk About Living Feminism

CHRISTINA LOOPER BAKER
AND
CHRISTINA BAKER KLINE

The Conversation Begins

Mothers and Daughters Talk About Living Feminism

Christina Looper Baker
and
Christina Baker Kline

Bantam Books
New York Toronto London Sydney Auckland

The Conversation Begins: Mothers and Daughters
Talk About Living Feminism

A Bantam Book
PUBLISHING HISTORY
Bantam hardcover edition / May 1996
Bantam trade paperback edition / April 1997

All rights reserved.
Copyright © 1996 by Christina Looper Baker and
Christina Baker Kline. Except for text pages 282–292
copyright © 1996 by Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estés, and text
pages 293–298 copyright © 1996 by Tiaja Kaplinski
Pinkola de Dimas Villagomez.
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 96-4777
No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or
by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or
by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing
from the publisher.
For information address: Bantam Books.

ISBN 0-553-37524-5

Published simultaneously in the United States and Canada

Bantam Books are published by Bantam Books, a division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc. Its trademark, consisting of the words "Bantam Books" and the portrayal of a rooster, is Registered in U.S. Patent and Trademark Office and in other countries. Marca Registrada. Bantam Books, 1540 Broadway, New York New York 10036.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
BVG 0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Praise for

The Conversation Begins

"A revealing yet comforting overview of the generational passage of feminism that discloses as much about elemental family conflicts as about the future of the women's movement . . . As a collection of discrete stories of a social movement and of the eternal bond of mother and child, this is an impressive book."
—*Kirkus Reviews*

"Compelling . . . Through individual stories, the reader begins to see, in subtle and not-so-subtle ways, how each mother's politics caused ruptures in the daughter's world."
—*New York Newsday*

"A provocative series of narratives . . . [These] stories are ripe with challenges, frustrations, rage and love."
—*The Kansas City Star*

"A unique and intimate examination of the mother-daughter bond."
—*Lawrence Journal-World*

"A reflective and hopeful dialogue about the past, the present and the future of feminism."
—*Bangor Daily News*

To Cynthia, Clara, and Catherine—
the other voices in our conversation

试读结束，需要全本PDF请购买 www.ertongbook.com

I say this conflict is hard for me. You say it is hard for you. I say there is respect between us, you say so too, that we stand here on our own two feet, alone in a room together, and that only then can we begin to name the tempest, the dissent, only then are we prepared to risk mother's love, to coexist without a cord to bind us, to risk the persuasion of safety and take our chances. I say you hurt me. You say I scorned you. We say we care. It begins. The conversation begins.

—Louise Bernikow
from *Among Women*

Contents

Acknowledgments•*xi*
Introduction•*xiii*
1. Christina Looper Baker•Christina Baker Kline•*1*
2. Tillie Olsen•Julie Olsen Edwards•*17*
3. Elizabeth Martínez•Tessa Koning-Martínez•*31*
4. Patsy Mink•Wendy Mink•*47*
5. Helen Rodriguez-Trias•Jo Ellen Brainin-Rodriguez•Laura Brainin-Rodriguez•*63*
6. Alix Kates Shulman•Polly Shulman•*87*
7. Evelyn Torton Beck•Nina Rachel Beck•*103*
8. Barbara Seaman•Elana Seaman•Shira Seaman•*119*
9. Deborah Wolf•Naomi Wolf•*141*
10. Roxanne Dunbar•Michelle Callarman•*155*
11. Letty Cottin Pogrebin•Abigail Pogrebin•Robin Pogrebin•*171*
12. Eleanor Smeal•Lori Smeal•*191*
13. Paula Gunn Allen•Lauralee Brown•*205*
14. Marie Wilson•Kirsten Wilson•*221*
15. Maryann Napoli•Lisa Napoli•*237*
16. Barbara Ehrenreich•Rosa Ehrenreich•*251*
17. Carol Jenkins•Elizabeth Hines•*267*
18. Clarissa Pinkola Estés•Tiaja Kaplinski Pinkola de Dimas Villagomez•*283*
19. Yolanda Moses•Shana Moses Bawek•*301*
20. Shamita Das Dasgupta•Sayantani Dasgupta•*317*
21. Miriam Ching Yoon Louie•Nguyen Louie•*333*
22. Nkenge Toure•Trina Stevens•Kianga Stroud•*349*
23. Joy Harjo•Rainy Dawn Ortiz•*371*
Appendix•*384*

Acknowledgments

This book could not have become a reality without the wise counsel and generous support of many people. Our agent, Beth Vesel, was the first to hear our idea in the spring of 1992. She believed in the project from the beginning and helped us give it form. Anita Kurth, Deborah Rogers, and Bernardine Connelly read the proposal and made helpful suggestions, challenging us to sharpen our focus. At the 1993 National Women's Studies Conference in Washington, D.C., Judith Arcana and Arlene Fong Craig brainstormed with us to develop as broad and inclusive a list of participants as possible. Kay Trimberger suggested others. Several of the women they mentioned, whom we might never have found without their help, ended up in the book. Gail Hasey contributed her wisdom and insight at crucial times along the way.

In the spring and summer of 1993, a research grant from the University of Maine and writer-in-residence fellowships to the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts (VCCA) enabled us to work on the book together for concentrated periods. Using the grant, we traveled across the country from New York to Washington, D.C., to New Mexico to San Francisco, interviewing participants at every stop. The five weeks we spent at the VCCA in Sweetbriar, Virginia, gave us a chance to make sense of the thousands of pages of transcripts we'd amassed; by the time we left, the book had begun to take shape. We are grateful to the director, Bill Smart, and administrators Sheila and Craig Pleasants, who fit us in at late notice and even extended our stay.

Special thanks go to Leslie Meredith, our original editor at Bantam, who saw the book's promise and conveyed to us her enthusiasm about it, and to Linda Gross, who took over the project when Leslie left and shepherded it through to completion with skill and intelligence and good humor. Her assistant, Samantha Howley, kept track of end-

less details and patiently assembled all of the disparate pieces of the manuscript into a coherent whole.

Throughout this project, Bill Baker and David Kline provided many kinds of support, literal and figurative. Without their help, our work would have been harder and much less fun. Perhaps their most tangible contribution was in reading and commenting upon drafts of the proposal and the introduction to the book. Peggy Danielson, Jerry Nadelhaft, and Sandra Haggard also generously critiqued the introduction. Clara Baker and Kim Holman were invaluable transcribers and critics. Cynthia and Catherine Baker joined us for some interviews, read material, and offered advice. In the middle of it all, Marcia Mower organized our files, created labels, and generally kept chaos at bay.

Finally, we would like to thank the many women we interviewed for their willingness to let us into their lives. They met us at sidewalk cafés and noisy restaurants, welcomed us into their offices and homes and apartments, provided us with directions and transportation, fed us meals and even offered lodging. Most important, they opened up to us about personal and sometimes painful material. We made mistakes; we weren't always as tactful or as sensitive as we could have been; we sometimes pushed too far or asked too much. But almost always they were willing to give us the benefit of the doubt. It is a testament to the strength and fortitude of the women we spoke with that most of them appear in these pages. We are proud to present such a strong and diverse array of voices from across the country—voices that reflect, examine, and critique the personal and political implications of being a woman in America today. If not for their honesty, openness, and insight, this book would not exist.

Like the women we interviewed, we the authors have laughed and cried and gotten angry with each other. We have also loved each other intensely, grateful for the privilege of working together in conversation with these women who have so generously shared the stories of their mother-daughter relationships against the backdrop of their lives.

Introduction

As the bus lurched around a busy Manhattan corner, Christina leaned over to Tina and said, "If we're going to do this project together, we'll need to have money for therapy built into the contract." It seemed a reasonable proposal for such a risky venture. Was it wise, we wondered aloud, for a mother and daughter to attempt to coauthor a book about feminist mothers and daughters? Could we negotiate the twists and turns of our own relationship as we explored the dynamics of others'? Pausing under the weight of these questions, we sat together in silence until the bus came to a stop. Outside in the warm sunshine on a spring day that seemed filled with possibility, Tina turned to Christina and said, "Why not? It will be an adventure."

This was not the first of such conversations, nor would it be the last. The idea for this book germinated from two separate experiences in the spring of 1992. While teaching at the University of Maine, Tina was helping to create a feminist oral history project designed to retrieve the early experiences of second-wave feminists—founders of the modern women's movement. Meanwhile, in New York City, where she teaches and writes, Christina attended a one-day colloquium, "Women Tell the Truth," featuring Anita Hill as the keynote speaker and introducing a new group calling itself Third Wave: younger feminists—movement daughters—intent on designing an identity of their own. "Why don't we put the two ideas together?" Christina suggested.

Initially we planned to interview symbolic mothers and daughters—those who shaped the modern women's movement and the younger activists who are their heirs. From the older generation we would learn what it was like to have been on the cutting edge of contemporary feminism; from the younger we would ascertain the variety of ways they are reshaping feminism for their own purposes. Along the way, however, we discovered that many prominent second-wave

women have daughters of their own. By interviewing real-life mothers and daughters, we could examine whether and how the feminist legacy is passed from one generation to the next and, at the same time, explore the ways women have combined motherhood with a passionate commitment to a broader life. This approach promised to make the project twice as interesting—and doubly complex.

The movement toward equality for women has been a continuing struggle—a struggle discussed often in the United States in terms of cresting and receding waves. What is now referred to as the first wave, began around 1830 as part of the attempt to abolish slavery and heightened by Elizabeth Cady Stanton's call to women to convene at Seneca Falls in 1848, culminated in the winning of the vote in 1920 and Alice Paul's introduction of the Equal Rights Amendment in 1923. During the Depression the first wave began to ebb as women turned their attention away from individual advancement to the struggle for survival. Although in World War II they demonstrated their competence in the workforce by filling jobs vacated by men, in the war's aftermath most women retired to the private sphere of the home.

In 1963 Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique,* encouraging women to reach beyond the "comfortable concentration camp" of the home to find added fulfillment in careers, marked the genesis of feminism's second wave. Subsequently, young women, fresh from the civil rights and antiwar movements and freed for the first time in history from compulsory childbearing by the birth control pill, began calling for equality in the workplace and in the home. Images of protesters at the 1968 Miss America Pageant, waving signs declaring "I'm a woman—not a toy, pet, or mascot" and unfurling a banner announcing "Women's Liberation," were beamed across America, introducing an entire nation to the feminist movement. With the publication of three landmark books in the early 1970s—*Sexual Politics* (Kate Millett), *Sisterhood Is Powerful* (Robin Morgan), and *The Female Eunuch* (Germaine Greer)—second-wave feminism gathered momentum. Focusing on sisterhood and the politics of personal liberation, the movement encouraged women to postpone or avoid pregnancy, experiment with their sexuality, and establish careers.

During the next decades, women mobilized to transform America. New organizations and publications, such as the National Women's Political Caucus, the National Organization for Women, and *Ms.* magazine, pushed women's concerns to the forefront. The Supreme Court

试读结束，需要全本PDF请购买 www.ertongbook.com

legalized abortion, Congress passed the Equal Rights Amendment (as yet unratified), and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission mandated equity in the workplace. Ushering in a new era of political and personal freedom, contemporary feminism changed forever the way women think about themselves.

Yet in this fundamental re-visioning of women's role in society, many second-wave feminists saw little room for motherhood. Reacting to a not-so-distant past when women were valued primarily for their reproductive role, feminist leaders frequently devalued motherhood and sometimes actually opposed it. Some saw childbearing as a heavy yoke inhibiting women's pursuit of equality; in an extreme example, Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970) called for artificial wombs to free women from the restrictions of childbearing. To these feminists, having children represented collaboration with the patriarchal system they were trying to change. Given the movement's ambivalence toward the subject, a discussion of motherhood, wrote Letty Pogrebin in 1973, would "shake sisterhood to its roots." Small wonder, then, that motherhood was relegated to the margins of feminism. In *Of Women Born,* published in 1976, Adrienne Rich cited motherhood as "a crucial, still relatively unexplored, area for feminist theory." And so it remains.

Feminist motherhood has been a topic deferred because it complicates the role of the emancipated woman. "Feminism is infinitely easier when you take motherhood out," says Arlie Hochschild, a feminist sociologist and author of *The Second Shift,* "but then it speaks to fewer women." Bearing and nurturing children remains a fact of life for most women; eighty-five percent of American women and over 90 percent of women worldwide give birth. At best, the second wave's antinatalism has been shortsighted; at worst, the movement's "radical bias against making babies," as journalist Gina Maranto phrased it in a 1995 *Atlantic Monthly* article, excluded millions of women. "Women's Liberation makes me feel defensive about being a mother," said a young mother in a 1973 *Ms.* interview. "I think feminists are looking at me and thinking: Is that all she can do?"

Even today, the women's movement has a hard time reconciling motherhood with sisterhood. According to Joan Walsh in a 1993 *Vogue* article entitled "The Mother Mystique," ambivalence about motherhood remains at the heart of today's feminism: "The feminist daughters of Friedan's desperate housewives have been hard put to reckon with motherhood—the institution that imprisoned their own moth-

ers—either personally or politically, to agree on its proper place in a woman's life." The 1995 edition of Sheila Ruth's widely used women's studies text *Issues in Feminism,* for example, allots only a handful of its 536 pages to issues surrounding motherhood. Many feminists now acknowledge that until it addresses the ambiguities involved in reconciling one's work and one's personal life, the women's movement will never succeed on a larger scale.

The 1990s have seen a renewed commitment to exploring issues of particular concern to women. The Senate Judiciary Committee's treatment of Anita Hill, the issues surrounding child care raised by the Zoë Baird and Kimba Wood confirmation debates, the sexual harassment exposed by the Tailhook scandal, a series of abortion-clinic murders, and the graphic depiction of domestic abuse that appeared in the O.J. Simpson trial outraged millions of women. Faced with the erosion of civil rights and abortion rights, a new generation is emerging, bringing energy and focus to the women's movement.

In rejuvenating the very cause once advanced by their mothers, young feminists are in a unique position to critique it. Aware of the gains their mothers made and determined to extend those gains into the twenty-first century, these daughters also know the costs and the pitfalls. Having witnessed firsthand the conflict between a woman's following her own path and being present for her child, they themselves must now grapple with the question of whether and how to combine motherhood with dedication to career and social issues. Several recent books, including *Mother-Daughter Revolution* (Elizabeth Debold, Marie Wilson, and Idelisse Malavé) and *Daughters of Feminists* (Rose L. Glickman), have begun the process of linking motherhood and sisterhood by focusing jointly on feminist mothers and daughters. *The Conversation Begins* introduces the mother-daughter relationship itself into the discourse by exploring the dynamic interaction between the two.

In inviting real-life mothers and daughters to tell the story of their relationship to feminism and to each other, we sought to explore how women who have profoundly affected their own generation have influenced the next at this most personal level. The main criterion for participants in our study was that either the mother or the daughter (or both) has made a public contribution to the contemporary women's movement. Some involved at the national level have widespread name recognition; those working at the grassroots level are known mainly in

local communities. Initially we planned to interview eight to ten mother-daughter pairs, but early participants suggested others ("Have you contacted so-and-so? You can't do the book without her"), and our list gradually expanded to include a more broadly representative group of American feminists. All told, we interviewed nearly thirty sets of mothers and daughters, nearly half of whom identify themselves not only as Americans but also by their Native American, African, Latin American, Asian, or East European ethnic heritage. Countless other mothers and daughters qualify for this project, but time and space have limited the number we could include.

Though their language and work are congruent with feminist beliefs and attitudes, not all of our participants call themselves feminists. Some, younger women especially, are reluctant to use the label because of its perceived negative connotations. Others, particularly working-class and minority women, feel out of place in and emotionally disconnected from a movement that does not always speak for them. African-American women's advocate Nkenge Toure describes feminism as a middle-class white women's organization indifferent to her concerns. Instead of calling herself feminist, she calls herself womanist. For many years Asian-American activist Miriam Louie was "actively not a feminist." Now, she says, she and her coworkers are adapting feminism to their community's specific needs. A number of our participants end up saying they are feminists by their own definition.

Most of the women we asked agreed to participate. Of those who declined, some cited time constraints. A few saw their stories as commodities they wished to control; one said she wanted to remain "in charge of" her public persona. Another decided that her story should wait for her memoirs. A daughter of a prominent feminist who wanted to participate was simply "not interested in talking about my mother anymore." Of the women we interviewed, in several cases a mother or daughter had second thoughts about revealing personal information and withdrew from the project.

Reasoning that participants might speak more readily with someone of similar age or experience, we planned that Tina, in her mid-fifties, would interview the mothers and thirty-year-old Christina would interview the daughters. But after conducting interviews both separately and together, we realized that our cross-generational perspectives broadened the discussion. One of us might pursue a topic that the other was blind to, often with unexpected results. Sometimes Tina would ask a question and Christina would think, "My God, how

can she ask that?" and vice versa. Endeavoring to accord each participant her own dignity, complexity, and voice, on all but two occasions we interviewed mothers and daughters separately.

Life stories shift and evolve, especially with respect to interpersonal relationships. A twenty- or twenty-five-year-old daughter reflects differently upon her relationship to her mother than does a thirty- or thirty-five-year-old. Also, marriage, long-term relationships, work, and children are key identification points between daughters and mothers, and relationships often change when the status of one of them changes. Several older daughters we interviewed readily admit that in their twenties they would not have been ready to discuss their relationship with their mothers. The mother-daughter relationship is, by its nature, unevenly balanced. Daughters generally have only one mother, but nearly all the mothers we interviewed have more than one child. Mothers have, at least partially, established their identities before a daughter is born, whereas a daughter, in discussing her experiences, is reflecting on a relationship with a powerful figure against whom she has measured herself for her entire life.

At the same time, daughters have enormous power in the relationship—the power of judging. As one daughter confided, "My mother is so fearful of what I might say about her. Nothing I end up saying can be as terrible as what she fears." Another told us, "At first my mother didn't want to do the project because she was afraid that I would say things that contradicted things she said, and there we'd be in print, publicly disagreeing, which she doesn't even like to do in private." Whether or not they exchanged drafts of their narratives was left up to individual mothers and daughters. One mother waited days to open the envelope containing her daughter's story, only to experience relief that her daughter was less critical than she had imagined.

In preparation for the interviews, we sent each participant a list of questions intended not to limit the conversation but to serve as a guide (see Appendix). We tried to ensure balance by pairing evaluative questions with their opposites: "What did you do right as a mother?" was balanced with "What do you regret?" "Which of your mother's traits would you like to replicate as a mother?" was set against "What do you perceive as her weaknesses?" For many, the questions prompted painful discussions. One asked, "Have other women told you how much they cried while going through this process? My daughter and I cry every time we begin to talk about your questions."

Some daughters, either protective of their mothers' feelings or see-

ing their mothers' work as so vital that they had no right to complain, were reluctant to say anything critical. One daughter explains, "We have a generation of daughters who are not only dutiful but protective of their mothers to an utmost, devastating degree." Other daughters, momentarily estranged or attempting to establish separate identities, were in no mood to identify their mothers' strengths. Most, however, were eventually willing to identify a complex range of feelings. One said, "I want to be fair about my mother. It's easy to identify what I call weaknesses, and for that reason it has been good thinking about the strengths for this interview."

Over the course of eighteen months we interviewed sixty-five women in homes and offices, hotels and restaurants, Christina's New York apartment and a Washington congressional suite. Making contact with such busy women was no small feat. Some interviews took months to arrange; a few fell into place serendipitously. "I guess you'd better come over this evening," said one busy activist on the spur of the moment when we reached her by phone. Naomi Wolf, pausing between speeches for an interview in the Albuquerque airport, talked hurriedly into the tape recorder all the way to the gate and nearly missed her plane. Our own schedules added to the complexity. Because we both teach, most interviews had to be conducted during winter and spring breaks.

In the 1994 winter chill of New York City, we began interviewing in earnest. Most days we conducted two to four interviews; occasionally we did five. On one busy day Marie Wilson met us at the Ms. Foundation and took us, amid snow flurries, to the quiet space of her nearby apartment. Held up in traffic, we rushed from the taxi to meet anchorwoman Carol Jenkins and her daughter, Elizabeth Hines, at Carol's NBC office. That evening Maryann Napoli's husband served up delicious Italian fare while we interviewed Lisa and Kara and awaited Maryann's return from work. A few days later, in Washington, D.C., Eleanor Smeal met with us at the Fund for a Feminist Majority office before rushing off to a rally, and Nkenge Toure fit in an interview between phone calls at Potter's Vessel, where she works with AIDS-afflicted babies and mothers. In her Georgetown apartment, Evelyn Torton Beck lit candles to commemorate the occasion.

Between interviews—in taxicabs, in restaurants, sprawled out in hotel rooms—we turned on the tape recorder and talked about what we had just learned, lest we forget some significant point. When the work

went smoothly, we often forgot we were mother and daughter; we were just two colleagues working in sync. Faced with conflicts and anxieties, however, we sometimes reverted to our familial roles. From time to time we hit snags—business unfinished, issues unresolved, therapy required. Our styles, at best complementary, sometimes conflicted. During interviews, Tina was happy to linger over recollections of the past; Christina was usually eager to move the story along. Late one night we were interviewing Julie Olsen Edwards in her Soquel, California, home—our fifth interview of the day—when Christina suddenly said, "Mom, I hate it when you say that." As we exchanged glances, Julie turned both tape recorders around to face us. "Now, *this* is interesting!" she said with a laugh.

Once collected, hundreds of hours of taped interviews required transcription. Locating skilled transcribers took time (one work-study student persistently typed "Mel Brooks" for "bell hooks"), but eventually we found two: Clara Baker, daughter of Tina and sister of Christina, and Kim Holman, Tina's former student. Clara added a graduate student's perspective to the conversation; Kim contributed a single mother's point of view. In the margin of one transcript, we found Kim's scribbled note: "I'm a lesbian who grew up middle-class, moved into a working-class situation, tried being married to a very sexist man, became a single mother on welfare, got a college education, and now proudly call myself a feminist. I must have something to offer!"

Living at a distance made collaboration difficult, but we were fortunate during the summer of 1994 to spend five weeks together at the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, where we began crafting eight- to ten-page narratives from twenty- to sixty-page transcripts. Shaping the stories was like chipping sculpture from rock: The material was solid and the shape was there, but revealing and refining it required slow, meticulous work. Tina created the first drafts of the mothers' stories, Christina the daughters'; then we exchanged drafts and revised to create a second version, exchanging again for a third and sometimes a fourth round of revisions. During breaks we continued our running conversation.

We constructed each narrative in the first person, omitting questions with the goal of sculpting the material into a coherent essay—a form often referred to as "first-person biography." The use of "I" as a rhetorical device is designed to capture not the writing voice but the rich flavor and unique idiom of each woman's speaking voice. The genre is not without problems. Some participants, especially writers,

试读结束，需要全本PDF请购买 www.ertongbook.com